Natural SEO or Pay-per-click – which one to choose?

When you put the name of your product or service into the Google or Yahoo or AOL search boxes have you noticed the companies on the first result pages don't include you? Have you noticed you don't even make page six - and then you lose the will to live and give up looking?

It's becoming increasingly difficult to get your website high in the search engine results without using search engine optimisation (SEO) or paying the search engines (pay per click or PPC) to display your site to appear on the first result page. And unfortunately it's now becoming more difficult to get the ratings even **with** SEO or PPC because everyone's now starting to do it!

SEO and PPC are now becoming an essential part of business marketing; a website alone is no longer enough, and many businesses are losing potential customers and revenue streams to their competitors. **You cannot afford to be left behind!**

So, what is natural SEO, what is PPC, how do they work, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

What is 'Organic' or 'Natural' SEO?

Natural search engine optimisation works by enhancing your website's position or 'ranking' in the naturally occurring search engine results screens. It's achieved by making your website more search engine friendly, i.e. making sure that the major search engines understand what text and other content exists on your pages, what you have marked as of particular importance on your pages, making the search engines' 'web crawlers' (i.e. the 'robots' that trawl the web looking for information to index) notice you, and ensuring that they like your site better than other web pages with the same information.

To do this you need to ensure that:

1. Your website content is in good shape, with carefully chosen and targeted keywords whose use, location and frequency within the web page is designed for maximum effect.

2. Your content changes regularly, not just on your homepage but on other targeted pages too.

3. You encourage inbound links to your website from other sites (this is your 'link popularity'). It's not enough to just have a website, you need to have a popular one too!

How much management does it take?

A good web developer can help you with natural SEO by building it into your website as they create your site. They should edit your text to help make it more interesting and understandable to the search engines.

If you have an existing site, it may be necessary or desirable to re-build or re-populate parts of the site to make it more search engine friendly. When this is done, it's important not to lose the existing visibility that may have been built up over a significant period.

Management of your website for SEO will include regular updating of relevant and appropriate directories and other reference sites to help build your link popularity, making regular changes to the content on your site, and checking for changes in keyword popularity and relevance.

When to use it

Natural SEO and pay-per-click work together, rather than being an either / or option. Natural SEO is something every website should have as it constantly builds the credibility and ranking of your site. It's an on-going process; if you stop, your website will quickly start to fall in the rankings.

The disadvantage of natural SEO is that **it can take up to three months for the search engines to discover a new website** or to take full account of changes and improvements you have made. However if you are updating an existing website it with a completely new makeover there are methods of helping the search engines to find your new site more quickly.

Natural SEO is more often used for websites which don't offer specific products, but the optimum blend of SEO and pay-per-click depends on the needs of each individual business and its marketing goals and target audiences.

What is 'Pay-per-click'?

Pay-per-click allows you preferential positioning in the search engine results by bidding (paying) for the keywords relating to your product or service. Unlike paper-based advertising where you pay a set rate for your advert's position, with pay-per-click you are bidding against your competitors for the best spot! Running a pay-per-click campaign means setting an overall monthly budget plus a limit on how much you are prepared to pay for your search result position.

Search engine users enter a keyword or phrase for their search. You pay a fixed rate for every visitor who types in the keyword and then follows the search engine's link to your website. The more popular the keyword, the more you have to bid for a top position in the rankings for that word.

Of course, not every visitor to come through the search engine route is going to be interested in what you have to offer; the trick with an effective SEO campaign is to target exactly the right keywords, and to ensure that when the visitors arrive at your site they can immediately see that you offer what they want! It's not just about an instant auction; it's about a well-designed, integrated campaign with an effective website at the other end!

How much management does it take?

Pay-per-click is more management intensive than natural SEO, and to be effective should be a daily or even an hourly activity.

Pay-per-click campaigns also need to run for at least three months to optimise their true value, and during that time the analysis of detailed campaign statistics and feedback is necessary to ensure that the keywords being employed are getting the maximum positive results for the amount of money being paid for the adverts.

When is a good time to use it?

- The launch of a new website, to help the search engines find the new site quickly.

- When your website has had a makeover with a new structure and new pages.

- The launch of a new product or service, or a new advertising campaign.

Regular pay-per-click campaigns are often used by websites that sell specific products because they have a very good idea of what the product is worth and how much they need to get back from the advertising to make it worthwhile.

Unless you proceed with caution and full knowledge of how the system operates, it can be very easy to run a pay-per-click campaign and have no idea whether it's a marketing budget well spent or not!

Common mistakes:

So you've done your SEO and / or pay-per-click campaign, and the number of people visiting your website seems very impressive; but where's the increased business?

Part of the difficulty with website user statistics is they include everyone and every thing which visits your website. These visits could be from a web-bot, a person landing on your site by mistake, your competition, someone mildly interested just surfing to see what's out there, someone who just wants a quick look, and the smallest group of all – someone who wants a bit more information because they may buy your product or service, or visit your venue.

Two common mistakes with SEO and PPC are; to think that every user session is an interested customer, and to have a website which doesn't back up your campaign with a strong message and an effective call to action. It's not enough to get people to visit your website; you need to get the right people to your site and guide them to take the action that you want them to take!

Careful keyword analysis as part of your SEO will help with the first, and using good web designers with marketing skills and technical awareness will help you with the second.

For more information and quotes for search engine optimisation, pay-per-click campaigns, and target audience and marketing-led website design, development and makeovers please contact:

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