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Cover Story

500 Million Ways to Make Money from Facebook

With the largest social network now exceeding half a billion users, Web businesses have an enormous opportunity to monetize their marketing efforts.



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With Peter Prestipino



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Inside the Online World

In 2005, at ad:tech New York, *Website Magazine* officially launched. In the five years since then we have come to be known worldwide as a respected and reliable resource for Web professionals; helping well over 100,000 websites become more successful. We are, after all, "The Magazine for Web Success."

The best part of *Website Magazine*, however, is our audience. By sharing your insights, questions and criticisms along the way, this publication has become more valuable than we ever thought possible.

Thank you. The future is bright and we know the next five years will be even better than the first. Our November 2010 issue is a testament to the quality of insights, techniques, commentary and tactics we continue to bring our readers each month.

The feature story in our inaugural issue was "Yahoo! vs. Google" and highlighted some of the key differences between those two search engines. The Web has changed dramatically since then, however, and while Google and Yahoo! still deserve their share of attention and respect, there are new players in the power struggle for users' attention.

If there's one hot trend on the Web these days, it's social networking, specifically Facebook. And if our readers want to know one thing about Facebook, it's how to make money using it. Contributor Jay Feitlinger shares his insights into how to make that happen with 500 Million Ways to Make Money From Facebook.

In addition to this article, our regular monthly contributors Tim Ash, Heather Lutze and Dante Monteverde are joined by Mathew Poepsel, discussing browser performance, Darren Guarnaccia, addressing websites as a customer intelligence tool, Guillermo Cedillo on the Principles of Design, Jamie Fortunaso sharing insights on mobile marketing and returning contributor and *Website Magazine* reader favorite Mike Evans, on keyword research techniques.

Enjoy this issue of *Website Magazine* and share your stories of 'Net success online at WebsiteMagazine.com.

Best Web Wishes,

Pete Prestipino

Peter Prestipino — Editor-in-Chief, *Website Magazine*
Peter@WebsiteMagazine.com



Website Magazine On Your iPad

Website Magazine is set to release an application for the iPad in the coming months. As one of the first print publications to put its content on this revolutionary new device, we'd like your feedback. To receive advance notification of the app's availability, visit websitemagazine.com/iPad.



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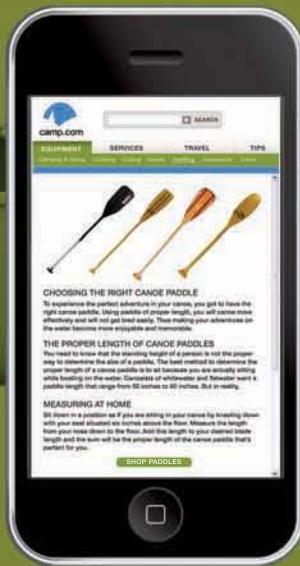
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The OAuth Debate



Twitter recently disabled the basic name and password authentication for its API, instead requiring that all third-party app developers use the OAuth protocol for user authentication. The move was not unexpected, having been first announced back in December, but it has still proved to be a divisive issue throughout the Twitter developer community. The question is one of security and whether OAuth authentication — which does not require the transfer of credentials to a third party — is, in fact, more secure than Basic authentication, which does require users to submit their names and passwords to a third-party service for authentication. The debate will undoubtedly rage indefinitely, but Twitter's decision is indicative of a larger movement on the social Web to do away with Basic authentication forever.

Yahoo's New Flavor



Facing increased competition from Gmail, Hotmail and social networks such as Facebook, Yahoo! is planning to revamp its Web-based e-mail service. Internally code-named "Minty", the new product is expected to arrive in the fall with a sleeker design, higher performance capabilities and better integration with social networking sites. Still the leading e-mail service in the U.S. with more users than Gmail and Hotmail combined, Yahoo! Mail saw its numbers drop from 107 million visitors in August 2009 to 97 million in August 2010. The outlook is worse overseas, where Yahoo! Mail users have fallen off by 7 percent while Gmail has grown 22 percent and Hotmail has grown by 3 percent in the past year.

INSTANT REACTION

Google's recent announcement of its new real-time search feature, Google Instant, has elicited a mixture of responses throughout the Web industry. Microsoft and Yahoo! both predictably downplayed the significance of streaming search results, citing their own previous experiments with the technology as indications that Instant is not nearly as revolutionary as Google claims. Regardless, search times of two to five seconds faster per query is what the world's most popular search engine has given us — and that alone changes the game. Now it is left to search marketers and website owners to react and adapt accordingly, as the industry — and Google — have conditioned us to do.



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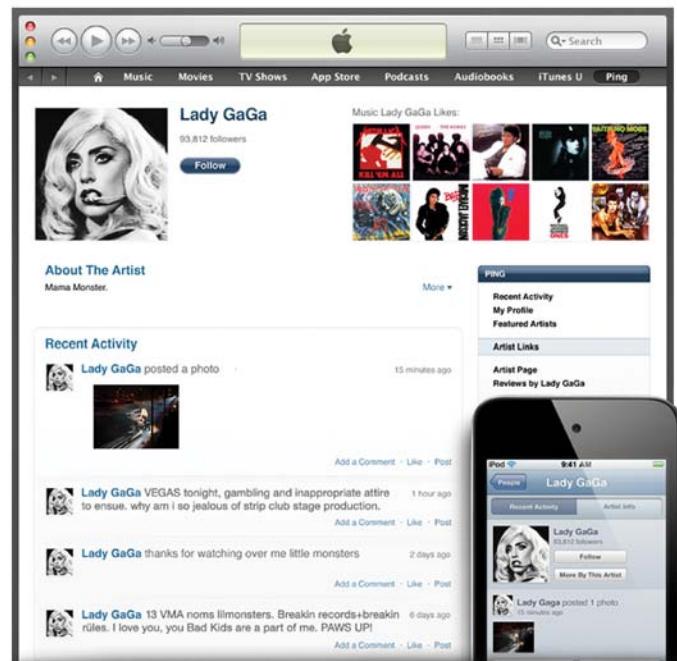


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Ping's Pains

Apple introduced its iTunes-based social network for music fans, Ping, in September, providing the usual fanfare for the highlighted feature of iTunes 10. The public seemed to embrace it with the same zeal it has for most Apple products, attracting more than 1 million registered users in just a couple of days.

Big-name artists such as Lady Gaga and Jack Johnson were quick to adopt the network, but the early stages of its development have not been without fault or criticism — also familiar trademarks of many Apple launches. A dispute with Facebook led to a lack of connectivity between the two networks, upsetting users of both sites; the inaccessibility of Ping by lesser-known independent artists has irked many more users, and the site was overrun by spam and phishing scams in its first week.



Borrell Associates is predicting that total online ad spending in the U.S. will grow nearly 14 percent in 2011, with the most significant growth to occur in local online advertising. That figure is expected to rise 18 percent from \$13.7 billion to \$16.1 billion next year, but the percentages for each market vary widely across the country. Borrell has, however, identified the three following markets that will lead the way for local online ad growth at 22 percent or higher: 1. Monroe, LA/El Dorado, AR; 2. Albany/Schenectady, NY, and 3. Des Moines/Ames, IA. Bringing up the rear at less than 14 percent growth are 1. Lafayette, IN; 2. Fairbanks, AK, and 3. Ft. Smith/Fayetteville/Springdale/Rogers, AR.

Geotargeting Gone Wrong

The late-summer launch of Facebook Places gave the location-based services vertical another shot in the arm, driving high numbers of traffic to competing check-in services such as Foursquare, Gowalla, Loopt and a host of others. Web marketers and e-commerce retailers are hard at work trying to devise the best strategies for leveraging these services into online sales conversions, but they are not the only ones looking to cash in on Internet users' location data. A home burglary ring in New England was initially suspected of being linked to the Facebook Places feature, in which users inadvertently alerted the bad guys that their homes were unoccupied while they checked in to various locations around town.



Move over, iPad

After months of enjoying virtual ownership of the tablet computer market, Apple will finally get to see how consumers react to the first legitimate competitors to the iPad. Samsung's Galaxy Tab was set for European release in mid-September, with the Android-powered mobile devices expected to land in the U.S. by the holidays. If Samsung reaches its goal of shipping 10 million units by the third quarter of 2011, it will give the Galaxy one-third of the worldwide tablet market now belonging solely to the iPad — with an array of new tablets scheduled for release throughout the next year. With an expected lower price point and rear- and front-facing cameras, the slightly smaller Galaxy may provide a viable alternative for users and add some intrigue to the mobile marketplace.



Taking Flight

The number of users accessing Twitter from their mobile devices has grown more than 60 percent since the middle of April, according to the network's own data. More than three out of four users still visit Twitter through the website, but the rate of mobile growth is significant. Twitter reported that 46 percent of its active users make regular use of the social network through their mobile devices, and 16 percent of all new users rely on their mobile devices exclusively. That number was a paltry 5 percent back in the spring, indicating a 62-percent increase in mobile traffic to Twitter in the few short months since the launch of its own branded mobile apps.



Your Ad Here

Much attention has been given to Gartner's and other recent forecasts that by 2014 the Android mobile operating system will have climbed all the way into a virtual tie with Symbian for the best-selling worldwide mobile OS.

A less-discussed set of data, but one that may hold stronger interest for Web marketers, breaks down the advertising click-through rates for each of the leading mobile operating systems.

In that category, Symbian remains the runaway leader through August 2010 while Android sits in a very distant last place. The data provided by mobile ad service Smaato indicates that Symbian users are by far the most likely to click on ads displayed on their smartphones, followed by users of regular mobile phones with Internet access, iPhones and iPads, Microsoft Windows devices, RIM devices and, finally, Android users.



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TESTING WEBSITE NAVIGATION

By Peter Prestipino, Editor-in-Chief

Of all the elements that can be tested on a website, few are more important than testing the efficiency of your navigation elements.

Navigation is an essential element of the Web, capable of providing a vastly improved experience for users and influencing several key performance indicators. While it may not be as exciting an element to test as pricing, it does carry major influence on creating a meaningful interaction for Web users and a profitable one for your Web enterprise.

Information portals and e-commerce sites are those that may benefit most from testing navigation. Groups or individuals focused exclusively on landing page optimization should certainly be concerned with and consider testing navigation, but when the notion of "conversion" rules the focus of every page, calls-to-action and other elements (e.g. imagery) that aid in the conversion process often take precedence. However, navigation should never be an afterthought, as it is an element that can undoubtedly move users closer to the end of the sales funnel, even from a very specific landing page.

Informed, Educated Testing

Depending on your website's audience, understand that the navigation menu experience will change dramatically from site to site. You may find with a younger, hipper audience that users will prefer rollover menus but detest auto-expanding menus. You may find with far older audiences that text-style menus outperform Flash and hyper-sensitive flyout menus. While you can certainly make some broad guesses as to what will perform best, only testing will ensure the best experience for your audience and, therefore, the best opportunities for conversion.

Commit to Testing

Users must be able to easily find their way through a website from every page, ultimately reaching the information they want or need quickly. It's hard to take a different point of view. When testing, both designers and site owners must understand users' expectations of their website navigation. Finding a way to provide easy access to what users want



(and with fewer clicks) when designing website navigation and structure will improve the information-seeking experience and make a positive impact on key performance indicators like time-on-site and bounce rate — important factors in everything from advertising metrics to SEO. The point is, even if you're not committed to running elaborate tests on navigation, do recognize the importance of helping users get what they want.

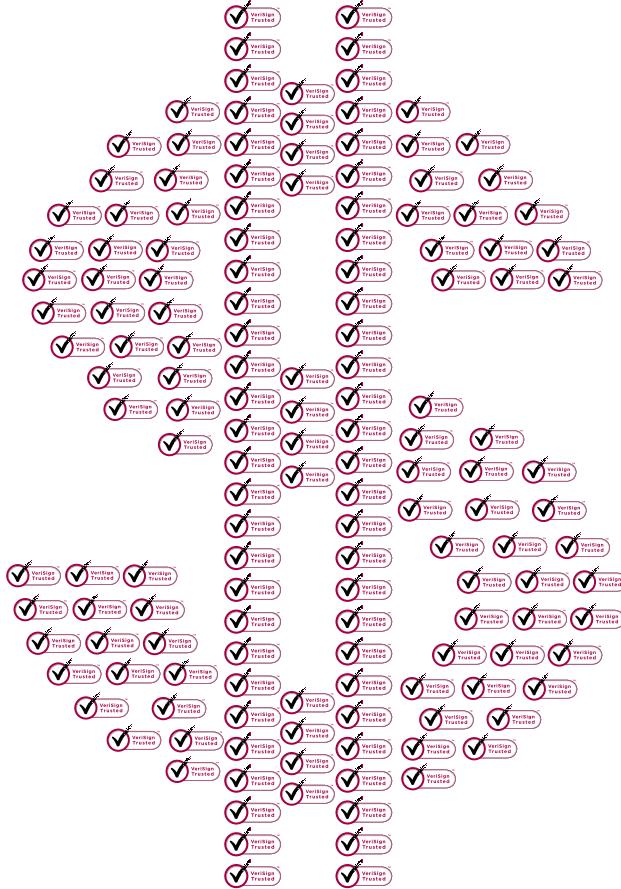
How to Test Website Navigation

If you are committed to testing navigation but have not yet selected a vendor (and don't want to run manual tests) know that there are a variety of site testing tools available.

Forrester's recently published report on online testing platforms reviewed the top nine players in the space which included Adobe Test & Target, Amadesa Customer Experience Suite, Autonomy Optimost, Google Website Optimizer, Maxymiser Content MVT, SiteSpect, Vertster Conversion Optimization Suite and Webtrends Optimize. Forrester indicated that Adobe Test & Target (formerly Omniture) and Autonomy Optimost were placed as the leaders — Adobe Test & Target excels in overall application usability, customer satisfaction and content support, while Autonomy stands out in administration, deployment options and breadth of testing techniques.

While free site testing tools such as Google Website Optimizer are attractive to many, other Web professionals demand more and these commercial vendors all provide competitive and effective solutions. Know in advance, however, that investing in any testing platform can be costly and time consuming. The cost of experimenting often depends on the amount of traffic pages receive, the complexity of experiments and, in some instances, the difference in conversion rates for your combinations. As such, know how these site testing vendors charge for their services and, based on your own needs, determine if using their services is necessary or warranted.

Continue on page 14



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SMALL BUSINESS LAB

Continue from page 12

With a little virtual elbow grease and some organization you can test navigation elements without these vendors, over time, to the same effect.

What to Test

Once it has been determined how you will test your website's navigation (manually or by using a testing service), it is time to decide what you will be testing. A few of the more meaningful options you can select from the start include location, descriptions and functionality.

Location — Web users are an impatient lot, and they will not spend time on your site if they can't find what they want. As such, navigation should be a prominent element of your design. But what is the optimal location for navigation? Only testing will reveal the answer.

The most common location for primary navigation is horizontally, across the top of the page. The advantage of using navigation elements in this location is that it provides additional room for content and other relevant information about

products and services. By not forcing visitors to scroll down to navigate further into your site, the result might ultimately be increased page views and time-on-site. Keep in mind that should you opt to use graphics in the header of the page, consider testing navigation above and below the primary graphic. Navigation design trends today often include primary navigation bundled with images and calls to action, but providing a simple navigation path should still be tested.

While horizontal navigation is quite common today, that has not always been the case — it used to be that left-of-page navigation was the most common location. As design has matured and evolved, navigation location has increasingly taken on new forms and should be audience-appropriate.

TEST THIS: When it comes to the location of navigation elements, consider testing new areas entirely (right-hand or left-hand navigation) or testing the presence of secondary navigation elements in various locations around the page (the footer, for example) to determine if the presence increases page views or sales.

Let Them Eat Breadcrumbs!

Breadcrumb navigation is a secondary navigation method (as opposed to primary navigation, which includes native navigation menus and site search) that provides users a single line of text to show a page's location in the site hierarchy. Breadcrumb navigation is very helpful for users as it provides one-click access to higher-level pages, preventing them from getting lost while reducing a website's bounce rate.

Breadcrumb navigation is definitely an element that can be tested. Not only can you test the presence and location of breadcrumb navigation, you can also test its formatting. For example, test the actual character separator. Instead of using a double forward arrow, test a long dash between sections. You could also test formatting in other ways. Take a look at the difference between how delicious.com and newegg.com present their breadcrumb navigation.

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Descriptions — A website's section names, particularly as labeled in the navigation, should clearly state what the user can expect after the click. General words like "resources" or "tools" are far too ambiguous and should be avoided. Using generic terminology tends to lead users to wander, and away from the conversion path we have set forth.

TEST THIS: Test reducing or increasing the amount of text in primary navigation. Depending on the makeup of the audience, they may need more or less descriptive text — you won't know unless you test. Best practice guidance teaches us to settle on four to six primary sections of your website (and thus silo-ing existing content under these channels) and to focus on the naming conventions (keyword-rich, of course) of those navigation links. This will offer users faster, more accurate access to the information they want.

Functionality — As important as where you place your navigation elements and the clarity of the text individual navigational links provide is the functionality of the navigation menu itself. Web designers have a variety of options available to them when it comes to navigation functionality — from mouseover effects to dropdowns, to nested menus and more. For some ideas, look into Javascript libraries such as jQuery, Mootools, prototype or script.aculo.us.

TEST THIS: Testing the functionality of your navigation will yield results. What should be tested is how certain effects impact key performance indicators, such as page views. Consider tracking how users interact with different navigation functionality by recording their visits — two services to consider include ClickTale.com and Mouseflow.com.

Start Testing Today

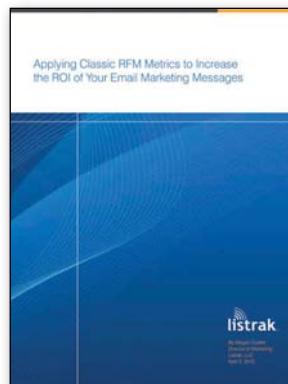
Designing for users is important. Web designers need to provide visiting audiences with what they expect in a clear and compelling manner. The battle line is navigation. While the attraction toward using elaborate or intricate navigation is understandable, the goal is always to provide users with access to the information the website provides. Users do not have the patience or time to learn more intricate navigation, so focus on creating an experience that is both instinctive and natural. Complicated and difficult-to-use navigation makes users feel uneasy and apprehensive about a website and will negatively influence conversion. So start testing navigation today and find out what works for your audience. ■



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The market for video is vast and online video usage continues its meteoric growth.

In mid-July, Nielsen reported that more than 10.2 billion videos were streamed in the U.S. alone in June 2010, a 1.3 percent increase over the number of streams year-over-year and a near 4 percent increase over the previous month (<http://wsm.co/blfnHl>). Video is big business and as users expect more from the 'Net experience, new demands will be placed on Web professionals.

The list of benefits that video marketing provides is long and the proof extensive. For instance, retail site visitors who view video stay two minutes longer, on average, and are 64 percent more likely to purchase than other site visitors (comScore, August 2010). When used in e-mail marketing, video has been shown to increase click-through rates by more than 96 percent. (Implix 2010 Email Marketing Trends Survey). Rich media ads containing video increase purchase intent by 1.16 percent and drive success more than four times that of Flash animation (DoubleClick, The Brand Value of Rich Media Ads, June 2009). If video impacts the e-commerce, e-mail and design industries, count on it impacting your industry vertical as well.

However, many questions about the efficacy of video marketing and development remain. Does [metacafe.com](#) (#5) offer a realistic portal for your video marketing ideas? What about user-generated video aggregators, such as [YouTube](#) (#1) or [MegaVideo](#) (#7), where users are consuming the majority of video content today?

This edition of *Website Magazine's* Top 50 offers a look at the leading destinations and vendors in the video space. You will find services that enable live broadcasting, like [Justin.tv](#) (#10) and [ustream.tv](#) (#8), right alongside emerging video destinations like [vodpod.com](#) (#16), and tools like [TwitVid](#) (#41).

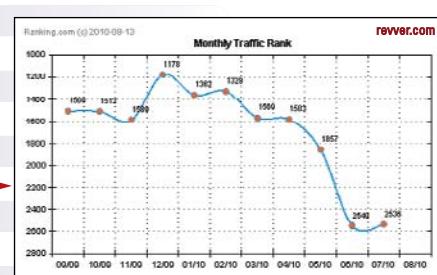
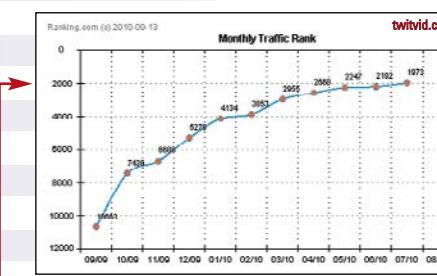
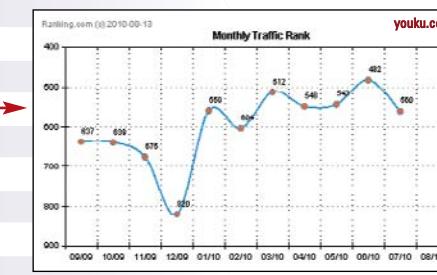
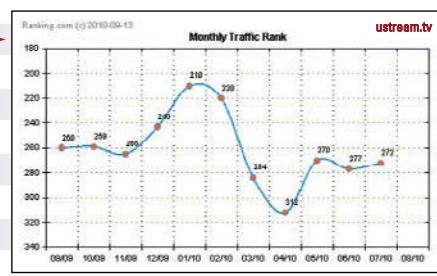
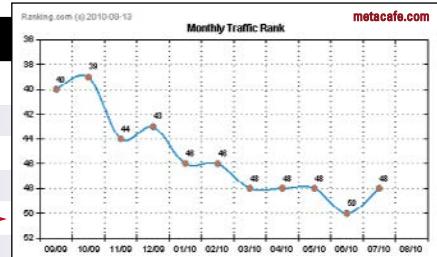
Are you considering adding video to your list of sales and marketing resources? Let this list be a starting point to finding the top tools, resources and destinations in the video landscape for your business. ■

ABOUT THIS RANKED DATA

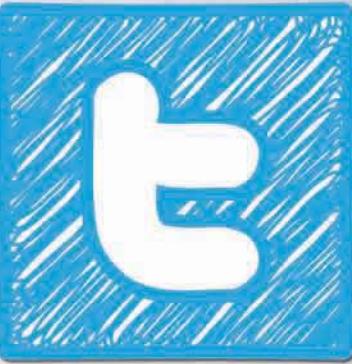
Website Magazine's Top 50 Rankings are measures of a website's popularity. Ranks are calculated using a proprietary method that focuses on average daily unique visitors and page views over a specified period of time, as reported by multiple data sources. The website with the highest combination of factors is ranked in the first position. Conducting research, making formal comparisons and talking to existing clients and users before making any purchase decision is always recommended.

WEBSITES

1. [youtube.com](#)
2. [ehow.com](#)
3. [dailymotion.com](#)
4. [hulu.com](#)
5. [metacafe.com](#)
6. [vimeo.com](#)
7. [megavideo.com](#)
8. [ustream.tv](#)
9. [veoh.com](#)
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11. [collegehumor.com](#)
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24. [crunchyroll.com](#)
25. [livestream.com](#)
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42. [vuze.com](#)
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44. [kontraband.com](#)
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48. [guba.com](#)
49. [slashcontrol.com](#)
50. [mevio.com](#)



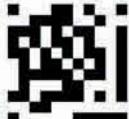
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LOCAL SEARCH PROFILE OPTIMIZATION



Dante A. Monteverde is a search strategist specializing in Search Engine Optimization.

He founded SpiderBait.com in 1996 and has more than 12 years of SEO experience. Contact Dante at dante@spiderbait.com.

Local search queries — those including a specific geographic location — are becoming immensely important in website marketing.

Not only are local listings gaining valuable real estate on the search results pages, locally focused websites are appearing with more frequency for non-specific search phrases as well, thanks in part to Google Instant and the real-time nature of today's Web. So what can you do to leverage this growth?

Hopefully you have already 1) claimed your business listing and/or submitted your website to online services like Google Places and Yelp.com, among the many others (listed here — <http://wsm.co/9EgJ6p>), 2) promoted your website and brand on social destinations like Facebook and Twitter, and 3) become involved with location-aware applications like Foursquare and Gowalla.

All of these channels present excellent ways of getting local search traffic to your website. But often overlooked are the factors that influence how profile pages from these Web services are returned to users. Actively optimizing local search profiles improves search engine rankings and the chances that your website will appear in the first few positions on local query results.

About Profile Optimization

While not technically a page on your website, claiming and validating local listings on Google, Bing and Yahoo! can drive high-quality, targeted traffic and help your site rank higher

within local search results. While unclaimed local listings can sometimes outrank claimed local listings, it is still vital to claim your profiles as it gives you complete control of what is displayed to users and prevents someone else from claiming your listings (and reputation).

Here are the major ranking factors to consider when building your local search engine pages:

Location (Address): Does your business address need to be in the actual city of the search query to rank? For the most part, yes, particularly if you are located in a large city. There are some exceptions for smaller towns — if there are not enough matches then the search engine may take results from neighboring towns. But your business' physical location is a major

ranking factor when it comes to local search. Make sure to include as much information as possible, including longitudinal and latitudinal data.

Business Category: Make sure your business is categorized correctly — if secondary category choices are available, select a few over time to see which ones positively influence your position and traffic.

Business Name: Consider your business name the <Title> Tag of your local profile listing. When you have a keyword(s) in your business name it will help improve ranking, but it is not necessary (or advised) to saturate the listings with keywords. For example, if you own a hamburger restaurant named Chuck's and your local listing displays only "Chuck's", consider changing the listing to "Chuck's Hamburger Restaurant". Many people will use the keywords "hamburger restaurant" to search for your business.

Citations: Citations are when your business is mentioned (but not necessarily linked to) elsewhere on the Web. Citations are like links, in that the more you have the better. Citations build trust with the search engines and give you a boost when it comes to ranking, especially with Google Maps. You can see your citations on your Google Places page under "What people are saying about". Check out the competition and make sure you make an attempt to get citations from the same or related sources.

Reviews and Ratings: Not only will good reviews and ratings have a positive effect on your local listing ranking, it will also help the click-through rate of your listing. Encourage existing clientele to submit reviews and ratings and reward them when they do.

Complete Profiles: Take time to fill out your local business profile pages completely. Add business hours, payment options and craft a well-written description of your business. Even add pictures and videos if you have them. Also, be sure that the information on your local listing pages is consistent across all directories.

Remember to claim and submit your website to the primary local providers (<http://wsm.co/9EgJ6p>) and test different profile information combinations to see what influences return list position and website traffic. While often tedious to complete and validate (and for some, to create unique landing pages for each business location), these efforts will more than pay for themselves in the form of quality local traffic. ■

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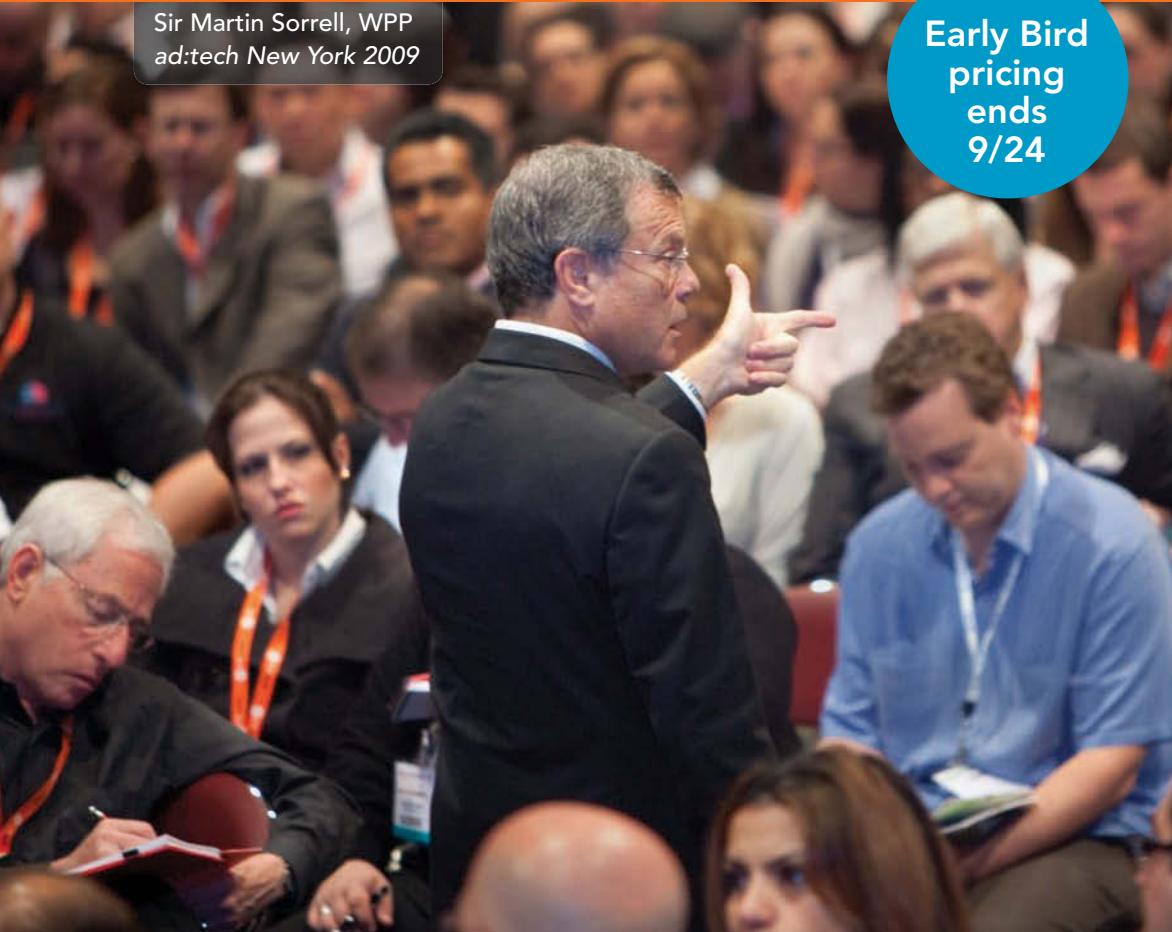
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The Four Pillars of Building Instant Trust Online



Tim Ash is CEO of SiteTuners.com, a landing page optimization firm that offers conversion consulting, full-service guaranteed-improvement tests, and tools to improve conversion. SiteTuners' interactive Express Reviews of a landing page can quickly identify major conversion issues. Ash is a frequent speaker at Internet marketing conferences. He is a contributing columnist to several industry publications and websites, and is also the author of the best-selling book "Landing Page Optimization."

Human beings are social creatures that seek out companionship and relationships. We crave trust.

Without trust, we would be consigned to a world where we examine everyone's actions with suspicion, and assume they are working only for their own purposes. But because of the sheer number of social interactions we have with complete strangers, we must at least extend some trust on a regular basis. Otherwise, many acts, both small and momentous, simply could not happen.

Even with total strangers in the "real world", we at least have appearance and body language to discern some level of trust. Online, we are at a disadvantage. Almost anyone can quickly create a website or landing page and masquerade as a wide variety of businesses. Additionally, we are often barraged in the media about various scams perpetrated online. So, we already have our guard up.

As an online marketer, your job is very difficult compared to your bricks-and-mortar counterparts. You must not only overcome anxieties, but do so in the most challenging of circumstances.

Online trust must be developed without face-to-face contact, and it must be created instantly in the few precious seconds it takes a website visitor to evaluate your value proposition.

So how can you build instant trust online?

Appearance

First impressions matter. Recent research indicates that people will form an initial impression of your landing page or website within 50 milliseconds. This is almost as fast as visual processing happens in the brain, and can be considered as an instantaneous and automatic response. This initial reaction then extends to a more considered review of the page and will impact our likelihood of taking the desired conversion action.

Don't get disqualified based solely on your site's appearance

We prefer well-dressed and groomed job candidates. We try to put our best foot forward on first dates. The same should be done online.

- **Professionalism of design:** Regardless of the intended audience or your business purpose, the visual design of your website should be professionally executed. It must hang together and function as a unified whole. Fonts, colors, and graphical elements must combine into a single visual "look."

- **Sparseness and neatness:** Clutter can be your worst enemy — whether it is visual embellishments, or dense, longwinded text. Less is more. Ruthlessly edit everything on the page until it is pared to its essence and has a natural and unforced feel. Give your page room to breathe.
- **Organization & clarity:** Too many choices on the page can be paralyzing. Similarly, a disorganized page increases the visitor's cognitive load and forces them to spend time simply trying to figure out how they should digest the information that you have presented. As the title of Steve Krug's excellent book on Web usability so elegantly puts it, "Don't Make Me Think".

Transactional Assurances

Will we be spammed if we enter our e-mail into a form? Will the goods promised ever be delivered after we order from an online catalog? Will our identity be stolen? Such questions are always in the background when we navigate around the Web.

Relieve point-of-action anxieties before they arise

The mechanics of the conversion action matter. Whether you are trying to collect an e-mail for an online newsletter or have someone purchase an expensive item, reassurances are needed about the transaction.

- **Forms of payment and delivery:** Many e-commerce catalogs only show acceptable forms of payment and return policies after the checkout process has been started. In fact, they must be seen before they are needed and prominently displayed above the fold on every page. The same is true of well-known delivery and shipping methods.
- **Data security and privacy:** The website must be certified as "safe" by outside experts in terms of its ability to protect data. Having privacy policies and computer security trustmarks from well-known vendors will instantly show someone that you have safeguarded their data properly.
- **Policies and guarantees:** Often, the transaction is not at issue. It is what happens afterwards that concerns people. By prominently featuring warranties, return policies and guarantees, you can assuage these anxieties. A visual seal can be created to draw the eye to these important elements.

Experts & Media

Your visitors are not likely to have heard of your brand. Unless you represent a truly world-class consumer company, people are unlikely to know your brand promise. They do not know what you stand for.

First impressions matter. Recent research indicates that people will form an initial impression of your landing page or website within 50 milliseconds. This is almost as fast as visual processing happens in the brain, and can be considered as an instantaneous and automatic response.

Borrow trust from better-known brands

- **Reviews and awards:** Many services and products have won awards or at least been reviewed by relevant industry publications. Using the award seals or “reviewed by” language can be very effective.
- **Paid endorsements and spokespeople:** Paid endorsements can convey trust or at least transfer the celebrity of the spokesperson to the product or service in question.
- **Marquee clients:** Using client logos with permission or at least prominently featuring a written list of clients (unless specifically prohibited by contract language) will create powerful visual proof of your legitimacy. They confer an implicit halo effect — if you have worked with large companies, you can handle smaller “regular” ones.
- **Media Mentions:** Media companies are experts at self-promotion. Any association with them confers a sense of notoriety to your landing page. Often, media outlets can be broadly defined as bloggers or authoritative voices in your specific niche.

Keep in mind that there are several caveats to using expert and media logos. They must appear above the fold and be seen at the same time as the call to action (not below or after it) in order to provide context for the content on the page. On the other hand, they must be displayed subtly, as to not dominate the visual conversation. The logos are often expertly designed, distinctive and instantly recognizable in order to draw attention. So, you may need to actually de-emphasize their impact by reducing size, decreasing color saturation (possibly using grayscale) and decreasing contrast with the background color chosen to display the logos.

Consensus of Peers

We often follow the lead of people like ourselves. For example, if our circle of acquaintances turn us on to a new musical group, we are more likely to listen. Regardless of the actual cultural tribes that we belong to, our peers exert a very strong influence on us.

Support automatic compliance by demonstrating “social proof”

There are two important preconditions for social proof to be effective: 1) there must be many people who are taking a similar action and, 2) they must be as close to our own personas as possible.

- **Objective numbers:** “The many” can be demonstrated by showing how many people have bought, downloaded, or

started a free trial. Numbers should be cumulative, starting with the inception of the business or product. Spell out the digits of each number (e.g. “Over 1,000,000 downloads”), and use large fonts to draw additional attention.

- **Likeness:** Create affinity by demonstrating that the people taking action are similar to your website visitors. This can be done by picking appropriate colors, editorial tone and graphics to make your visitors feel at home. You can also have a large number of detailed testimonials that discuss common situations faced by similar people.

Trust is a critical factor to transactional success, particularly in an online environment. If you build on the four pillars of trust outlined herein, you should have a solid foundation for improved conversions. ■

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THE PERFECT DOMAIN?



Heather Lutze has spent the last 10 years helping business owners get their enterprises noticed on the Web by their target audiences. She is the author of "The Findability Formula: The Easy, Non-Technical Approach to Search Engine Marketing." Visit FindabilityFormula.com for tools and resources to increase your site's findability.

Should a business owner treat a domain name just as important as a physical business location or a carefully crafted logo?

position to purchase that perfect domain, left to wonder about the value it could bring to the business as a whole ... and how much it might cost.

In the throes of a website rebuild project of our own, we have been carefully considering buying such a domain. So, I turned to Sedo.com, a domain brokerage company, for some advice on how to approach this process.

"Many domain buyers, especially first-time buyers, settle for a domain either because it's inexpensive or because it's available to register on the spot — they often overlook how valuable a domain name is to the success of their online business and therefore they underestimate the importance of their online real estate," says Kathy Nielsen, director of North American sales, Sedo. "In fact, a domain is exactly like physical real estate, in that location is to be considered the most important factor in the investment process. Just like most shop owners would seek out Main Street for their business location, an online business investor should look to find a name that is easy for potential customers to find and short and descriptive enough for them to remember."

We see many companies attached to their legacy domains. These domains were not necessarily picked for great search findability or for its easy-to-remember value but rather an "ego domain" with their business name only. In many cases, a better domain could be a very real possibility.

A domain is, after all, a business' own piece of Internet real estate. It reflects the brand and can even affect the website's ultimate findability. Many business owners find themselves in a

Problem:

You are presented with an opportunity to buy what you think is the perfect domain to secure your brand and the ultimate findability for your company. What process should be taken to determine if the domain should be acquired (and for what price)?

Action Plan:

1. Source Search Data First

Check search volume for validity of exposure, at the same time checking your ego at the door. Use a trusted keyword tool such as Google's External Keyword Tool (<http://wsm.co/bREOyp>).

This tool is accessible through your Google Adwords account but available to all, not just AdWords account holders. Look at three key indicators after entering the proposed domain name words:

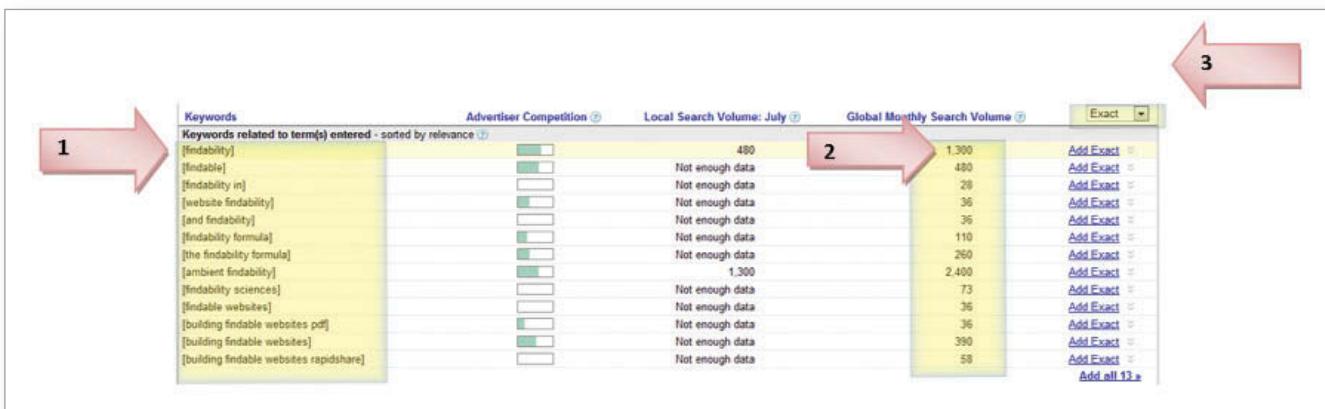
Keyword and Related Phrases: Is your domain the only keyword-driven domain that gets good search volume? Take a look at other options.

Global Monthly Search Volume: How many searches each month are actually conducted on that keyword phrase? Will this help SEO efforts at all?

Exact match searches: Make sure to look at Exact searches for that phrase, not Broad Match. If someone types in the proposed domain words exactly and it has high search volume, this may be a good investment in a domain name presence.

2. Get a Domain Name Appraisal

Run a domain appraisal report to know the current market value of the domain.



Sedo is one company that, for \$40.00, will return a non-biased report on the actual value of the domain. What factors are taken into consideration when valuing a domain name?

“Factors such as the popularity of the terms used in the domain, comparable sales, cost-per-click (CPC) keywords [included in the domain] and the length of the domain are all considered during an appraisal,” says Nielsen. “Of course, if a domain was previously being used by another business, the added value of established website traffic will also influence the pricing. Most importantly, an appraisal helps set a buyer’s expectations and allows them to better budget for the right domain.”

Other available tools for domain valuation include Valuate.com, EstiBot.com and SwiftAppraisal.com. Using several tools offers a good way to find an appropriate price range. Ultimately, however, a domain is as valuable as another party is willing to pay.

3. Check Your Risk Factors

Make sure you are not violating any trademark issues and exposing risk to your company — consider the consequences. You could spend time and resources defending your right to own the domain, and risk all of your work to build a brand to only give it away to the rightful trademark holder. Check out Domain Law at Sedo.com and USPTO.com to check if the domain name is already trademarked as a phrase.

Sedo Domain Law: <http://wsm.co/bVOMo7>

USPTO: <http://wsm.co/aZz2U7>

Also, be sure to check for any owners of the secondary extensions of the domain name — such as .org, .net, .edu or .mobi. Does this pose a risk to future growth over time?

4. Check Your Wallet

How fast will you recover your investment with the new bright and shiny domain? How much is too much to pay?

- How many sales, conversions or leads will you need to procure to make this investment worth the money, over time?
- Can you afford the money right now in cash without putting it on a credit card or financing the amount for the domain? If the answer is “no”, then you are probably not at a time in your business where it makes sense to purchase the domain.
- Does the domain name potentially become an asset of your company in the event that you sell at a later date? This may also bring inherent value to your overall business.
- Will the domain’s history (specifically, inbound links) aid in your marketing efforts with the new site to be created under that domain?

5. What is the Easiest User Experience?

Think about your current marketing efforts in offline areas such as print or radio. If you have a domain name with multiple keyword phrases or dashes, will this make it more difficult for the user/future searcher? Is the domain hard to remember or difficult to type?

Any domain worth purchasing should be easy to remember and simple in nature.

- Example: GoofOff.com or Goof-Off.com? If you see this domain on a billboard or a TV ad, will you remember to use the dash? What if you don’t own GoofOff.com? Searchers will likely be misled or confused.
- Does your domain have a keyword phrase or product description in the domain? GoofOffStainRemover.com and GoofOffSpotRemover.com are both longer domains but have a keyword imbedded into them. These domains point to a product as an industry leader. Both domains make a promise to the user as to what to expect on the site. GoofOff.com, however, could be anyone or anything, not necessarily a product.

Picking a domain can be as complicated (and stressful) as picking the name of your company. If you keep these five key factors in mind when hunting for your perfect domain, you will be able to not only weigh the hard numbers for search but also the long term emotional value of clean, elegant and high-valued domain name that will stand the test of time. ■



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WEB HOSTING

BEHIND THE SCENES

By Mike Phillips, Senior Editor

Unless you work in the industry, nothing seems to change from year to year when it comes to Web hosting. However, the past several years have ushered in a new era. No longer just a place to store websites, hosting now impacts Web business as a whole; including e-mail, e-commerce, communications, SEO and more.

Two hosting trends in particular — hosting in the cloud, and content delivery networks — have quickly become hot issues in the industry. They are, in no uncertain terms, two of the biggest developments the hosting industry has seen in years. Let's take a closer look at both of these issues. It will not only help in understanding the current environment, but prepare you for what to expect the next time your company wants to address Web hosting in the boardroom.

SaaS in the Cloud

When discussing “the cloud” in the hosting industry, inevitably the term Software as a Service (SaaS) will also come up. In fact, it is SaaS that brings the most value to website owners. In short, the cloud offers software on demand — eliminating the need to store large amounts of data on-site which, for small businesses, can often be expensive and resource intensive.

“The trend of cloud computing — that is, applications and infrastructure moving away from the desktop and a private data center and into the cloud — means that the playing field is being leveled and the barriers between these different service providers are being broken down,” says Seth Nesbitt, VP of marketing, Parallels, a hosting infrastructure provider.

So how exactly can a website benefit from SaaS and cloud hosting?

The services provided are numerous, and growing — from e-commerce functions such as shopping carts and SSL certification to business-class e-mail and full-blown Web conferencing. Using the cloud, Web hosts can offer a range of business-critical services not previously available to any but the largest of businesses. This has taken the Web hosting industry from an afterthought to the realm of an essential business partner.

Parallels provides back-end services to hosting providers. According to Nesbitt, they have seen tremendous growth in the communication services that they provide — specifically, e-mail and Web conferencing.

“We recently announced a new set of SaaS — one example is a Web conferencing service,” says Nesbitt. “Now, our Web hosts will be able to offer a very sophisticated Web and video conferencing service to their users.

“From your Web hosting vendor, you’re going to be able to portray your business as world-class — just like we’ve seen with the shopping cart and the shopping experience. This trend of cloud computing will arm small businesses with the tools to compete in a very competitive marketplace.”

Still, many consumers are wary of hosting their businesses in the cloud. But, for many others, the bundled services are just too good to pass up. Often, obtaining these services from one provider can mean a lower price point than purchasing them individually. But more significant is the ease of operation for Web professionals. Having several business-critical components in one place, under one operator, removes much of the hassle and worry. In the cloud, someone else is charged with updates, upgrades and system patches. What’s more, should something go awry, the business owner often has one contact point to get the problem fixed.

“We are very quickly approaching a tipping point,” says Nesbitt. “Let’s face it, it’s already here. Ten years from now, nobody is going to ask, ‘Should I host my own enterprise application?’ any more than you would ask, ‘Should I set up my own power generator?’”

Beyond Hosting

Hosting providers are well on their way to becoming full-blown website architects. 1&1, for example, now has solutions that offer standards such as e-mail (including Microsoft Exchange and mail exchange) but also includes full e-commerce packages. A starter package includes up to 50 products for \$4.99 per month, while an advanced package can include up to 20,000 products across 2,000 categories and even offer cross-selling capabilities. New to 1&1’s offerings are a full website design service and mobile hosting.

As users demand more than ever from the Web, the right hosting solution has become a critical component of Web success.



Changing the Reseller Game

Hosting reselling is a popular way for many businesses to earn extra revenue and offer extended services to clients. In essence, a reseller packages services from a hosting provider and offers them on their own, for a portion of the hosting fees. The new hosting environment has changed the game for resellers, too.

Seth Nesbitt suggests resellers differentiate themselves by focusing on their industry or a specific niche, rather than trying to compete on price against larger companies with bigger budgets. For example, some of Parallel's clients have become experts in the messaging and collaboration piece and become known for that.

One client targets small, women-owned businesses by shaping their persona to speak to them, including a successful blog that caters to their specific interests.

"Web hosts are really successful when they serve a target segment that is underserved," says Nesbitt.

Maximum Performance with Content Delivery Networks (CDNs)

While not new, CDNs are quickly becoming the go-to solutions in the hosting world — and that's mostly due to higher-than-ever expectations from today's Web users.

A September 2010 report by Equation Research titled "When Seconds Count" showed that nearly one-third (32 percent) of consumers will start abandoning websites if they don't load within one to five seconds of landing on the page. Worse, more than a third (37 percent) said they would not return to a slow site — 27 percent would likely jump to a competitor's site.

And, user expectations of fast load times is compounded by the fact that they expect resource-intensive content, such as streaming video and other interactive media. Add in the recent introduction of search upgrades such as Google's Caffeine index and the evolution of the real-time Web and it creates a perfect storm for website owners. It's more important than ever that our websites are available, fast and meeting the expectations of our users.

A CDN can have a tremendous impact on our online presences. Essentially, these systems deliver content on-demand through a network of hosting locations spread across locations (referred to as edge networks) to avoid bottlenecks of data being transmitted. The user gets a faster, better experience and the website owner can be assured of high availability and increased capacity for transfer.

For example, a website that hosts a gallery of hundreds of photographs can choose to upload the lot of them to their CDN. The images are then automatically uploaded to each of the CDNs locations. Then, when a user clicks to view photographs on the website, they are being delivered from the nearest point-of-presence (POP). So, a user in Manchester would be pulling images from a London POP, rather than one located in Las Vegas, for example. The end result is a more seamless experience for the user.

But it doesn't stop there.

"Servers can be uniquely tailored to fit certain solutions," says Josh Ewin, director of marketing, Dedicated Now. "The Web server, for instance might have RAID 1 redundancy, a mid-range spec, then your database server could have RAID 5 or RAID 6 for improved input/output. A lot of folks are breaking out their content, like streaming video, images and even their Web pages, Javascripts and CSS files onto CDNs."

In other words, CDNs allow for better allocation of resources appropriate to the task.

Not only does a strong hosting environment affect user experience, but it can also have a sizable impact on a website's ranking in the search engines. While Google's exact ranking algorithm remains a mystery, website performance is most definitely part of the equation, on several levels.

"If you're on a dedicated server, you need to at least be in that mindset to allocate funds in the near future to CDN," says Ewin. "It not only enhances your performance and user experience but it's also going to help with the SERPs. Your page load times will be lower."

"If you think purely on bounce rate, imagine if your page load time was 30 seconds as opposed to 5 seconds. Bounce rate is absolutely a key metric when it comes to usability and search engine ranking."

Unfortunately, CDNs are simply not feasible for all Web enterprises — it comes with a cost. Prices can vary but business owners should expect to pay at least \$200 per month, in addition to the cost of running a dedicated server. The good news is that dedicated server solutions are becoming more affordable. According to Ewin, an unmanaged dedicated solution can cost as little as \$50-\$65 per month. However, should you need a managed solution (if you are new to the hosting world) expect to pay around \$150 per month.

Expect More

Web hosting has come a long way in just the past few years. Web business owners should expect more from their hosting solutions. From extended software services to high availability and lightning-fast page load times, Web hosts are much more than a simple place to store data. Increasingly, the hosting environment is becoming a critical component of overall Web success. Users are expecting more from your website than ever before.

Whether starting a new website or looking for new solutions for an existing site, know that Web hosts have plenty to offer and are willing to work with you as a business partner, not just a service provider. Make sure you get what you need, and what you pay for. ■

500 MILLION WAYS TO MAKE MONEY FROM FACEBOOK

By Jay Feitlinger

With Facebook recently exceeding half a billion users, businesses of all types are realizing they have a big opportunity to monetize their efforts on the world's largest social network.

To put this into perspective, compare Facebook to the largest retailer in the world, Walmart: Roughly 20 million people visit Walmart on a daily basis, whereas 250 million people visit Facebook each day. There is no other online marketing channel that can deliver this kind of reach.

But before we look at some ways to actually drive revenue, it is important to understand that Facebook is not your traditional e-commerce channel and should not be used as a direct marketing tactic. The hundreds of millions of Facebook members have joined to share their personal stories through updates, images and videos within their social network — not to

buy products. That being said, utilizing the social network as a sales channel is not a bad thing but should be handled carefully, like meeting a neighbor's dog for the first time — approach with respect or risk being bitten. Aggressive behavior does not pay off.

Prior to engaging in Facebook as a business outlet you must develop a strategy for connecting with your customer base. Your strategy should be about quality not quantity of people that "like" your page. Taking the time to develop relationships with your fans, creating engaging content and measuring results are the three essential steps to an impressive return on investment.



20 MILLION
PEOPLE
VISIT WALMART
ON A DAILY BASIS, WHEREAS
250 MILLION
PEOPLE
VISIT FACEBOOK EACH DAY.
THERE IS NO OTHER
ONLINE
MARKETING CHANNEL
THAT CAN DELIVER THIS KIND OF
REACH.

STEP 1 – Engage With People That Like Your Page

Start with an interesting and compelling Facebook Page that differentiates your business from the competition. Apps are a good way for any business serious about marketing on Facebook to create a unique experience that helps you stand out. From sharing videos to contests, Facebook Apps are among the most used features on the platform. Add in the ability to share with friends and a strong Facebook App can have a huge impact on your ROI.

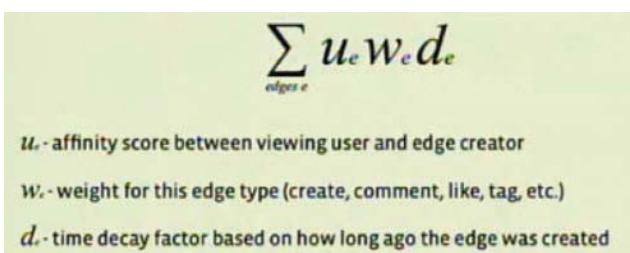
When we started working with e-commerce companies it was quickly realized that creating a separate tab that helps business owners showcase their products or services is the right approach. Constantly posting your products on your Facebook wall is considered bad etiquette and will turn people off, resulting in a sharp increase in the number of people “unliking” your page and, therefore, dismissing your brand. Creating a low-risk-high-reward option for your customer is important, so always put yourself in the customers’ shoes when implementing any new Facebook ideas.

There are thousands of amazing apps on Facebook and visiting the Facebook App Directory is a good place to start, as well as talking with other business owners about which Facebook Apps they have found to be beneficial.

STEP 2 – Create Engaging Content

A few months ago, I attended Facebook's f8 annual conference and was able to capture the news feed optimization formula Facebook uses to decide what content shows up in a user's top news feed. Showing this formula and how it is tied to Facebook's current news options (top news vs. most recent) was genius, as it really encourages you to do the right thing by your customer.

Facebook news feed optimization has become a new type of SEO. If you like or comment on updates from one particular Facebook page often, you are likely to see that business' status update in your top news feed (the default setting) on a regular basis. The formula (shown below), called EdgeRank, looks at affinity score (how often the user interacts with the page), weight (how many comments or likes a post has), and time decay (how recent that update was posted). In many respects, this is not unlike link building.



If you post content on your page that does not follow the above formula you are wasting your time, as updates will not be seen by your fans. Before you press the share button, reread the post and make sure you are asking for engagement. For example, if you are thinking of launching a new product, ask the opinion of your customers.

If you are just starting out and have very few people following your page, Facebook advertising is a great approach to reach

the right people at the right time. Advertisers can request that ads are served based on what your customers have said they liked in their profile. For example, a Phoenix-based Mexican restaurant could promote a new brand of tequila to people on their birthdays that are located in the Phoenix area, based on the information from those users' profiles. Before launch, Facebook will even show the number of estimated reach (see below) so as to not waste marketing dollars advertising to those less likely to engage.

2. Targeting [Ad Targeting FAQ](#)

Location

Country: **US** [Change](#)

Everywhere By State/Province [Change](#)

By City [Change](#)

Phoenix, AZ Include cities within 50 miles

Estimated Reach
11,360 people
• who live in the **United States**
• who live within 50 miles of **Phoenix, AZ**
• age 21 and older
• who like **tequila or mexican food**
• who are not already connected to **ShopTab**

Demographics

Age: **21** Require exact age match

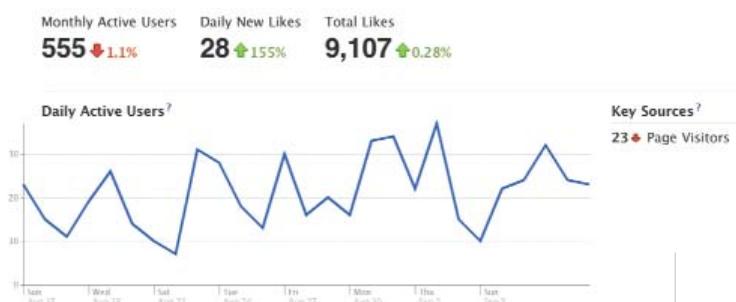
Sex: **All** Men Women

Likes & Interests

Tequila > Mexican Food

STEP 3 – Measure Performance

Used with your Facebook Page, Facebook Insights offers valuable customer information. After reviewing age, gender and country of residence you can enhance or change your current Facebook strategy. Using this data, you can decide which content works best, the audience you are currently reaching and where improvements can be made.



In the end, it's all about making social connections with your target audience. Too often, business leaders and owners think of their target audience as nameless, faceless people. Facebook brings the human touch to your relationships with your customers; faces, names and conversations. And that is how you monetize Facebook — by creating a living dialogue with your fans.

Jay Feitlinger is owner of StringCan Interactive (www.stringcaninteractive.com), a strategic online marketing and social media agency based out of Phoenix, Arizona, and co-founder of ShopTab (www.shoptab.net), the 1st Facebook App that showcases an eCommerce store on Facebook through a data feed. Connect with Jay on Twitter @jayfeitlinger, 602.740.6502 or jay@stringcaninteractive.com

OPTIMAL WEBSITE PERFORMANCE IN A MULTI-BROWSER WORLD

By Matthew Poepsel

Website visitors have one expectation: outstanding Web experiences. Increasingly, the most critical determinant in delivering these experiences is a user's browser — of which there are many with complex applications, add-ons and serving multiple devices, to boot.

But the cost of failing to optimize browser performance and meet users' expectations has never been higher with a recent survey* finding that:

- 67 percent of users encounter a slow website a few times a week or more;
- 46 percent say slow load times cause them to abandon sites very frequently or somewhat frequently; and
- Over a third say slowness makes them less likely to return to a site.

Clearly, optimal browser performance is a key to keeping users on a website and, therefore, closer to conversion goals. But what is causing performance problems for so many users? Let's explore a few Web trends to find some answers:

Increased Browser Market Fragmentation: Microsoft's Internet Explorer 8 (IE8) is a very popular browser but with just 24 percent of the browser market share, it lacks the dominance of earlier versions of IE. Those earlier versions and other, competing options include Firefox, Safari, Chrome and others. In total, these options account for more than three-quarters of all users.

Different browser platforms — as well as different versions of the same platform — perform and behave in different ways.

Consider connections per hostname: The greater the number of connections per hostname a browser can make, the faster a page loads. Currently there is an eight-second difference in response time between the fastest- and slowest-performing browsers. With such a wide variation, businesses must select performance optimization techniques suited to those browsers that drive the most traffic and revenue, on a global basis — an optimization technique that works well on one browser may cause an adverse effect on another.

Mobile Web Uptake: Today, businesses not only have to manage greater browser diversity on desktop computers but also contend with new complexity brought on by the mobile Web. With approximately 500 mobile browser/device combinations in use throughout the world, the prospect of managing performance across all (or even most) of them is seemingly impossible.

However, businesses that fail to optimize for the mobile Web experience could miss out on the sizable customer reach and revenue potential of this growing channel. For example, Morgan Stanley recently made a prediction that mobile users will outnumber desktop Internet users worldwide by 2014. Also consider the fact that AT&T has experienced a 50 percent increase in mobile data over the last three years. Despite this growth, users expect the mobile Web to load almost as quickly — if not faster — compared to the computer they use as home. Any business serious about the mobile Web must prioritize performance.

Feature-rich Applications Shift Responsibility to the Browser: Today's websites and applications have evolved to rich composites; comprising of content and services delivered from the datacenter as well as from other sources outside the



TODAY, WORLDWIDE TESTING NETWORKS OFFER BUSINESSES A FAST, EASY VIEW INTO WEBSITE AND APPLICATION PERFORMANCE ACROSS MORE THAN 500 BROWSERS AND BROWSER/DEVICE COMBINATIONS, FROM THE REAL USER PERSPECTIVE.

firewall — content delivery networks, advertising networks, video, shopping carts, Web analytics and ratings and review systems, for example. A recent study of 3,000 companies found that the average Web-based transaction involves 8.85 different third parties or hosts. The browser is responsible for assembling all of these components and presenting them to the user.

As applications grow richer (and by extension, heavier), technologies like AJAX, Flash and Flex help maintain application speed by enabling browsers to perform much of the application work. Other industry advances like HTML 5 place an even heavier burden on browsers by storing data on the client side, easing server demand. Browsers have evolved from a “rendering engine” to an “integration platform,” and are responsible for over 60 percent of overall processing time, in some cases. For this reason, front-end performance improvements for key browsers often yield the highest payback for the user experience.

Below are a set of best practices for delivering superior performance across browsers to take control of your site and your users’ experiences:

Implement a comprehensive monitoring approach, both pre- and post-deployment: Businesses must monitor real-time performance on all major browser types available to users. Visual and functional testing should be automated and conducted on a regular basis. This approach should include both operational or synthetic monitoring of websites and applications across top browsers as well as experiential or real-user monitoring to capture what users and customers actually experience.

Today, worldwide testing networks offer businesses a fast, easy view into website and application performance across more than 500 browsers and browser/device combinations, from the real user perspective. This is important because as an application leaves the datacenter it is supplemented by third-party services and passes through local ISPs and mobile carriers before ultimately being delivered to browsers and devices. Problems can occur at any point of this Web application delivery chain, and the user perspective is the key to identifying problems, determining if they are browser-related (or not) and implementing optimization techniques at the browser level.

Understand which browsers your visitors use, and monitor what matters: In an environment of limited resources, most businesses can’t test and optimize across all browsers, so they must focus on the issues that really matter. If a company’s major source of business comes from Asia, for example, it’s far more important to measure site performance on IE6 — the most popular browser in that region — than the more recent, yet less used IE7 and IE8. Businesses should not waste energy on “edge cases,” such as browser versions that represent insignificant portions of their audience. Instead, concentrate on monitoring browsers with the highest ROI poten-

tial for the business (the same rule applies to mobile browser/device combinations). Furthermore, businesses must concentrate on the parts of the website that matter most: The most popular content, highest revenue transactions and the most complex rich Internet applications.

Focus on front-end performance improvements: These efforts often deliver the most positive impact on user experience while requiring less time and money than back-end projects. Consider browser optimization techniques like domain charding, which entails “fooling” a user’s browser into thinking there’s more than one host. As a result, multiple connections can be made to a host server at the same time, enabling more objects to be downloaded simultaneously and thus creating faster downloads for little extra time or money.

However, domain charding is an example of an optimization technique that works well for some browsers but not others. It is ideal for older browsers that are typically capable of only two parallel connections at a time. In this scenario, if three hosts are detected, six objects (versus only two) can be downloaded at once. The technique is problematic for newer browsers like IE8 and Google Chrome that enable up to six parallel connections. For these browsers, three hosts detected translate into 18 images downloaded at once — which often overload servers and has the adverse effect of a Web performance slow-down.

Measure the impact of peak traffic: Since newer browsers offer greater connection parallelism, businesses must understand how this can impact overall site performance under heavy load. Only then can they truly understand if their infrastructure capacity is sufficient. The key is to combine load generated from the cloud with load generated from real user desktops — providing a sense of how users are actually experiencing a website or application at the edge of the Internet, from their very browser. Older load testing approaches (which entail leveraging one’s own datacenter-based servers to stimulate high traffic volumes) may miss the true impact of increased connection parallelism on the user’s Web experience.

Browsers exert a huge influence on the quality of a user’s Web experience. Ensuring performance across browsers and browser/device combinations is both essential and challenging. New approaches focused on the user’s experience combined with a hierarchical prioritization of browsers (based on page views coming into a website) are the keys to overcoming complexity and maximizing Web performance, time and resources in a multi-browser world. ■

Matthew Poepsel is VP of Performance Strategies of Gomez, the Web Performance Division of Compuware.

* “When Seconds Count”, conducted by Equation Research on behalf of Gomez and released in September, 2010.



Apps

Print

Web

Digital

iPhone

Android

› iPad

› Website Magazine App for iPad



- Access to entire print edition
- Special in-story slideshows
- Bonus interactive reports
- Live updates via daily blog



WebsiteMagazine.com/iPad
WebsiteMagazine.com/iPadAdvertising

TRANSFORM YOUR WEBSITE INTO A CUSTOMER INTELLIGENCE TOOL



By Darren Guarnaccia

Understanding customer behavior — truly understanding it — has never been more important for businesses and their marketing teams than it is today.

The economic downturn has forced companies to use their resources more efficiently and become much more targeted and timely with their efforts to connect with customers. Adding to the challenge, customers have become even more discerning about how and where they spend their time and money.

To create positive and meaningful connections with customers and earn their repeat business, today's businesses need deep insight into customer attitudes. To gain this knowledge, leading organizations are harnessing the power of the Web and turning their websites into customer intelligence tools. This critical transformation involves the following phased approach:

Creating different types of Web experiences: This means keeping your website fresh and engaging at all times, by experimenting with Web page designs, product offers and descriptions, dynamic features, and content order and flow. In short, give people a reason to visit your site, stay and explore, act on something (make a purchase, register for your site, or engage in your community) and then come back again later to see what's new.

Leveraging information about different target customer groups: Doing business successfully on the Web requires an increasingly personal website experience for your customers. That is, when they are

engaging with your site, they should feel like it's all about them, not about you or what your business can sell them. Customer groups are defined by profiles, geographic location or other target segments.

Tracking and measuring impact: Constantly track what happens with your website and the content you deliver, then compare the results against alternative options. Your website is a critical tool that can help connect the underlying dots with customer behavior; how a visitor first arrived at your site, what content he or she browsed (and in which order), and what difference a new or changed piece of content made.

By transforming your website into a customer intelligence tool, you can tap into your customers' attitudes and gain a 360-degree view of who they are, what they like, what they need and why they came to you. This knowledge is what will truly allow you to deliver a meaningful online experience to your customers and earn their loyalty.

The following are four essential tips for learning more about your customers' behavior to fulfill the previously described phases of customer intelligence:

1. Identify customer pain points

The way people behave in the Web world generally mirrors how they behave in the physical world. When shopping online for clothes, for example, they stop to browse items just as they would in a traditional retail store. As they browse, a great deal can be learned about their interests and preferences — from the colors they like to the styles that grab their attention.

When visitors come to your website, you need to be able to respond to their individual "pain points." These are the problems they must solve or the need they must fill, and to do so with the same degree of sensitivity and accuracy as you would in the physical world.

2. Understand when a prospect is ready to engage

It is likely that visitors to your website are already very knowledgeable about your business and brand, as well as the available alternatives, because they took time to carry out initial research on the Internet and maybe offline, too. They're smart, which means you need to be smarter — as well as relevant — and quickly establish yourself as an authority in their area of interest.

The website has become the first step in the customer engagement process. It can tell you what your customers want, and it also serves as a platform for you to interact with them intelligently. If a customer looks at the price of an item, for instance, this may be a buying signal and it shows that the individual is trying to qualify you in or out of their selection process.

3. Weigh and score your leads

Every piece of content on your website can reveal something about your customer; from what they care

about to where they are in the buying process. To gain this level of insight, all of your content needs to be allocated a score or weight. This enables "lead scoring" — the process of calculating a visitor's propensity and readiness to buy based on the total score produced by his or her behavior while spending time on your website.

Each time a customer reads a piece of content, or views a particular image, you are able to build a more complete picture of that individual's attitudes and interests. By tracking the user back to a Web forum, or using their Internet address to determine their location or their organization, you may be able to work out even more detail. And by tying all of this information together, you get a lead score that measures the level of the user's intent to purchase.

Another key benefit to tracking lead scores: It increases the possibility of creating agreement between marketing and sales teams about what constitutes a qualified lead. Not only will this help to smooth — and hopefully, strengthen — the relationship between marketing and sales, it will make a big impression on your customers. You can also provide your sales team with reams of valuable and timely data about customer interests and concerns.

4. Harness attitudinal data and track success

How visitors interact with your website — especially if they begin making repeat visits or take time to complete a profile form — can provide a wealth of knowledge about attitudes and behavior that must be shared with other databases, including customer relationship management (CRM) systems. Associating real-time customer interactions with other management data, such as call center data and other offline interactions typically held in your customer relationship databases, is also vital. By connecting Web insights with your other customer management systems, you can track lead-to-win-ratios, analyze interactions with successful outcomes and replicate that success.

Harvesting attitudinal data also allows you to start personalizing interactive experiences that build on the insights gained from customers' responses to Web content to deliver optimal business results. You should be able to fine-tune messages and content on your website for different customer groups, so you continually improve their online experience. And once you are armed with the information provided by what may evolve into your most important customer intelligence tool — your website — your organization can build more effective marketing campaigns and stronger customer relationships. ■

Darren Guarnaccia is the vice president of marketing for Sitecore. Sitecore provides Web content management software (CMS) and portal software for organizations to create compelling website experiences.



By transforming your website into a customer intelligence tool, you can tap into your customers' attitudes and gain a 360-degree view of who they are, what they like, what they need and why they came to you.



Easy and Effective Keyword Research

By Mike Evans

Imagine if someone were rifling through your Rolodex, calling all of your contacts. That would be illegal, of course, because your information is private.

However, because the Internet is open, you can now see every keyword that your competitors are using for both pay-per-click (PPC) and SEO. With this information, you can know exactly what is working for them, allowing you to simply copy and paste only their most successful keywords into your own campaigns.

I had a hard time believing it myself ... but it's true. And it works.

Let's start with the basics. Keyword research is the process of discovering the actual search terms people type into search engines when browsing online. People are generally doing one of two things on the Internet: looking for information about something, or seeking to buy something. As Internet marketers, it is those who are looking to buy goods or services that we want to connect with most.

Keywords that indicate a high level of interest in buying are called keywords with high commercial intent. To discover these keywords and phrases, a free tool is available from Microsoft at <http://wsm.co/ahwJw9>

For example, type in the phrase "Dodge Caravan", and the tool will tell you that there is a 95-percent chance that the user is looking to buy something. On the other hand, type in "blue clouds" and the result comes back with a 71-percent chance that the user is not looking to make a purchase.

Next is the long-tail keyword. This refers to a phrase made from very specific words. For example, "how to eliminate student loan debt," is a long-tail keyword.

Because there are more words, there is less search traffic for these keywords and thus fewer bids — making them cheaper to buy for PPC advertising.

Individually, long-tail keywords make up a small portion of Internet searches. But when taken as a whole, they can provide significant traffic to your site that is highly targeted. They also make you a subject-matter expert for the search engines, since the long-tail terms strengthen the theme created by broader phrases.

Conducting long-tail keyword research is important because these users are usually further along in the buying cycle, resulting in higher conversions.

Geographic Targeting

Depending on what you sell, it is important to include geographic locations in your keyword research. For example, "homes for rent Miami", "Chicago glass repair" and "Richmond Italian restaurants" all provide important qualifiers for local products and services.

Another important consideration is the ratio of keyword supply to keyword demand. Keyword demand is the number of times a keyword is searched by people in the most recent month. Keyword supply is the number of Web pages that contain that specific keyword or phrase.

"What you want to do is find keywords for your niche that have a high number of searches and a low number of pages with those search terms on them," says Gina Gaudio-Graves, president of Directions University and 30DayIMChallenge.com, an Internet marketing university for entrepreneurs. "For example, I recently found out that the term 'hypnosis CD' has over 40,000 searches a month, but only 20 organic website competitors there to meet the demand. This means that there's a huge opportunity in both pay-per-click and SEO for this term."

The keyword research tools currently available allow you to see your competitors' PPC ads as well as how long

they have been running. Most offer a limited free trial. In addition, you will get access to your competitors' SEO data. If you see that a competitor has been running the phrase, "DUI attorney Tucson" for the last six months, that can be a good indication that the keyword is converting profitably for that business. You can also discover and copy your top competitors' ad structure and keyword-ad and landing page-copy combinations.

Keyword research is broken down into three basic stages:

- Stage 1: Creating Your List
- Stage 2: Finalizing Your List
- Stage 3: Taking Action

Creating Your List

A common misconception about keywords is that you already know what terms a customer will use to find your site or PPC ad. By putting your proposed keywords into a keyword research tool, you will quickly discover how many users are conducting searches for that term on a daily basis, and how many of those searches are converting to sales. You will also discover synonyms of which you were not previously aware but could prove very valuable.

Knowing your competitors' data tells you how much effort you will need to invest in order to rank well for that term organically, or how much money you will need to spend to be successful in PPC.

There are two questions to ask when making these decisions:

- 1) How many other sites are competing for the same keyword?
- 2) How strong are those sites' rankings? Or, How many other sites link to those sites? and How many pages do they have indexed?

This information can be found for free by plugging your competitors' websites into the Yahoo! Site Explorer tool at: <http://wsm.co/d7XkST>. Knowing the answers to these questions will offer a good indication of the competitive nature of your selected keywords and phrases.

Finalizing Your List

Create a spreadsheet that allows you to easily see each word's conversion rate, search volume and competition rate, as provided by the keyword research tool you use. These three figures allow you to calculate how viable that term is for your SEO and/or PPC campaigns.

The first step in narrowing your list is to highlight the terms that most closely target the subject and theme of your website or advertisement. These are the terms that you want to keep. Delete all words that are not relevant to your site or that you do not have sufficient content to support. You can not optimize for words with no supporting content.

Create a mix of both long-tail and targeted keywords — you will need both to rank well for SEO and convert with PPC.

Taking Action

After compiling a final list of 20 to 30 highly focused keywords, it's time to prepare them for launch.

If you did your keyword research correctly, some of the words on your list should already appear in your site's content. Begin thinking about how many pages you will need

Below are three popular and valuable keyword research tools. Test them out to find which one works best for your business.

Google External Keyword Tool

(<https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>)

Google recently changed its free keyword research tool so that it now resides as part of the AdWords platform. While Google is the standard and has most of the search engine business on the Internet, this tool gives no competitive data. It's best to use one of the tools below for primary keyword research and use the Google tool to verify initial findings.

Wordstream

(www.WordStream.com)

This tool conducts keyword research and will build a complete ad campaign using its database and the keywords it helps you choose. It will also perform grouping and organization of keywords to help segment your list into an effective SEO-friendly structure for your site.

KeywordSpy*

(www.KeywordSpy.com)

This tool has the most data of any keyword tool on the Internet and an easy-to-use interface. The database of keywords is the largest outside of Google, and the interface allows you to plug keywords directly into the ad platforms of Google, Yahoo! and Bing.

SpyFu

(www.SpyFu.com)

SpyFu has many features, such as allowing you to compare two sites and giving a graphic representation of PPC ads and the changes that have been made to them over time. It also has an extensive history of the ads run by specific URLs that you can search by date.

to create to support new keywords, and how and where these keyword phrases will be used.

Current best practices for SEO recommend optimizing for three or four related keywords per page. Any more than that and you run the risk of diluting your page to the point where you will rank for nothing. Simply work the keywords into your pages naturally and avoid over-repetition, which can be interpreted as spamming. Your content should never sound forced.

Your on-page content isn't the only place where you can insert keywords, however. Keywords should also be used in several other elements on your site, such as title tags, meta description tags, headings, alt text, and anchor text/ navigational links.

Keyword research can be a fun project as you discover all of your competitors' top converting keywords and plug them directly into your own PPC or SEO campaigns. If you take your time and go through the tutorials that the keyword research sites offer, you may end up like my friend Sarkin who has the number one Google spot for 90,000 keywords. Of course, this success did not come without significant effort — he's been at it for 20 years. ■

*Mike Evans is Director of U.S. Sales and Marketing for KeywordSpy.com, a PPC and SEO research firm that tracks more than 127,000,000 keywords.



Mobile Marketing: Location, Location, Location

By Jamie Fortunaso

A 2010 study by comScore suggests that almost 46 million mobile phone users have smartphones — almost 20 percent of the market share of total mobile users.

Those numbers are enough for advertisers to start taking the mobile market very seriously. But what is the best way for advertisers and marketers to gain traction in this growing industry?

Increasingly, mobile content and applications are being targeted at a user's location. A study from the Mobile Marketing Association (MMA) states that more than 25 percent of adults in the U.S. have used maps, navigation or other mobile phone services that automatically determine location. The same study indicates that nearly half of those using mobile phones have taken action on mobile ads.

Increasing the localization of customer targeting means more qualified traffic and better opportunities for conversion. Utilizing localized advertising in combination with interactive advertising offers users the very services they are seeking.

That's a winning formula.

Ready, Aim, Advertise

The great strength of the mobile ad is that it allows for very specific targeting of users. Advertisers who take the time to get to know their target audience will be able to reach out to a large group of consumers who

are hungry for information about what is available in their immediate area.

At this point (and it should come as no surprise), the leader in location-based advertising is Google. Google has acquired a patent for using location for advertising, which sets it ahead of the competition. It allows users to bid on ad prices within a defined area and allows advertising from apps to directly correspond to a user's location.

Hook

Anyone with experience managing PPC campaigns will find themselves in familiar territory when launching mobile ad campaigns. Just like PPC, mobile advertising allows you to set up a section for specific campaigns and, within those campaigns, create accounts for different brands, as well as their relative keywords.

In addition to choosing to advertise in search results or through the content network is the ability to select a specific area — obviously of importance to mobile ad campaigns. Mobile ad platforms will allow you to target geographical locations based on country, region and specific city.

For more highly targeted ads, advertisers can target specific mobile network carriers, devices and even markup languages. This allows users to control who they are advertising to, which, allows them to meet the needs of a destination URL, depending on the technological capabilities of the targeted device.

Line

Limited to very few characters, the mobile call-to-action is a new art form. Mobile ad character limits on Google are 18 characters per line of text (two lines total), offering very few words to send your message.

With so few characters available, highly targeted copy is very important. There are ways to increase your character count, however. For example, using AdMob, there is an option to select an ad targeted at "iPhones and other mobile devices with full Internet browsers." This allows you to get a few more characters in both the title and body of your ad.

Sinker

You want your user to experience a feeling of success upon finding your landing page. Forget about the fact that users can zoom in on a mobile Web page. Create simple pages that display the information that benefits the user immediately upon landing.

Like any other form of Internet advertising, the mobile ad must reach multiple devices and screen sizes. With so many types of handsets, the ability to reach specific ones is absolutely imperative to a successful mobile marketing campaign. To market to more than just one of these groups, optimize multiple pages for each of the different styles.

A display on a Blackberry Curve is far different from that of an iPhone, for example. Phones have the ability to resize text but forcing users to take that extra step can be risky. Let your landing pages be as targeted to the users of specific devices as they are to the consumers you are trying to reach. A page that is not automatically readable or navigable with the information important to your consumers (delivering on the promise of the ad) could send users elsewhere.

Web developers can target specific phones to a certain degree by serving up different conditional CSS files. By checking the maximum width of the device's screen, they can create usable layouts specific for the device.

Test for Success

Like other advertising campaigns, having several versions of an ad and a landing page is paramount to success. Continue to test different tactics and don't be afraid to experiment.

Be aware that the ability to track mobile advertising campaigns is still somewhat limited. When checking an IP address for someone who visited your site with a Blackberry, for example, you will be seeing the Internet Gateway address, not the actual phone's IP address. In

addition, some phones don't support cookies and others clear the cache on a regular basis. However, there are analytics solutions to help track ROI. Affiliates who find ways to measure the effectiveness of their campaigns will be miles ahead when the technology catches up to the needs of advertisers. And, by making use of the ability to target specific locations, you have already narrowed the criteria for analysis.

Mobile advertising, especially in terms of affiliate marketing, is in the early stages of its growth. There will be obstacles to overcome. But those who get in early and manage to grow with the developing technology will have a head start on their competition. The technology is already advancing in leaps and bounds. If you start now, you'll be ready for the next development phases. ■

Jamie Fortunaso is the Digital Manager at Share Results and an early adopter of mobile marketing. He administers successful mobile marketing campaigns for merchants and affiliates and believes strongly in the power of location-based advertising. He can be reached at jamie@shareresults.com.

In addition to choosing to advertise in search results or through the content network is the ability to select a specific area — obviously of importance to mobile ad campaigns.

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PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

By Guillermo Cedillo

The four essential elements for creating captivating websites

The four principles of design are balance, rhythm, emphasis and unity. Each one of them is essential for bringing together the different visual elements that are necessary to achieving a strong design, which, in turn, is imperative for a website to succeed on any level. What follows is an examination of each principle, with insights about how to incorporate them into your own Web design for optimal results.

Balance — Different colors, shapes and sizes can create different degrees of what is called “visual interest” on a Web page. It is important that pages are designed to hold a user’s interest without overwhelming them or causing distraction away from the elements most important to conversion goals. As such, distribution of this interest needs to be controlled and balanced by considering each element in a layout and its “visual weight” — determined by its size, shade and thickness of lines.

Symmetrical balance is achieved by placing elements in the design evenly. If you place a large, heavy element on the right side, you will have a matching heavy element on the left. Centering is the easiest way to get a symmetrically balanced page. But be careful, as it can be difficult to create a centered design that doesn’t look flat. For symmetrically balanced design, it is better to create the balance with different elements — an image on the left and a large block of text to the right of it, for example.

Asymmetrical balance is an arrangement of unlike objects of equal weight on each side of the page. Color, value, size, shape and texture can be used as balancing elements. However, asymmetrically balanced pages can be more challenging to design, as elements are not matched across the centerline of the design.

For example, you might have a large element placed very close to the centerline of the design. To balance it asymmetrically, you could place a small element farther away from the centerline. If you think of your design as being on a teeter-totter or seesaw, a lighter element can balance a heavier one by being further away from the center of gravity. You can also use color or texture to balance an asymmetrical design.

Sometimes the purpose of the website itself makes an off-balance design the right choice. Designs that are off-balance suggest motion and action. They make people uncomfortable or uneasy. If the content of your design is also intended to be uncomfortable or make people think, a discordantly balanced design can work well.

Rhythm — Rhythm in design is also known as repetition — a pattern created by repeating elements that are varied, allowing your designs to develop an internal consistency that makes it easier for your customers to understand. Once the brain recognizes the pattern in the rhythm it can relax and understand the whole design.

Repetition (repeating similar elements in a consistent manner) and variation (a change in the form, size or position of the elements) are the keys to visual rhythm. Placing elements in a layout at regular intervals creates a smooth, even rhythm and calm, relaxing mood. Sudden changes in the size and spacing of elements creates a fast, lively rhythm and an exciting mood.

Gestalt is a general description for concepts that make unity and variety possible in design. The mind has the ability to see unified “wholes” from the sum of complex visual parts. Some principles of gestalt are proximity, similarity, continuation, closure, uniform connectedness and 1+1=3 effects.

Emphasis — Emphasis (or dominance) in design provides the focal point for the piece, enabling the most important design element to stand out. To draw the reader to the important part of the piece, every layout needs a focal point.

Generally, a focal point is created when one element is different from the rest. However, to maximize emphasis, it is necessary to avoid too many focal points, so as not to dilute the dominant effect. When all elements are given equal emphasis, it can make the piece appear busy, at best, or even boring and unappealing.

Emphasis can be achieved in the following ways:

- Using semantic markup to provide some emphasis, even without styles.
- Changing the size of fonts or images to emphasize or de-emphasize them in the design.
- Using bold, black type for headings and subheads and much lighter text for all other content. Placing a large picture next to a small bit of text.
- Using contrasting colors. For example, using a series of evenly spaced, square photographs next to an outlined photograph with an unusual shape.
- Placing an important piece of text on a curve or an angle while keeping all of the other type in straight columns.
- Using colored type or an unusual font for the most important information.

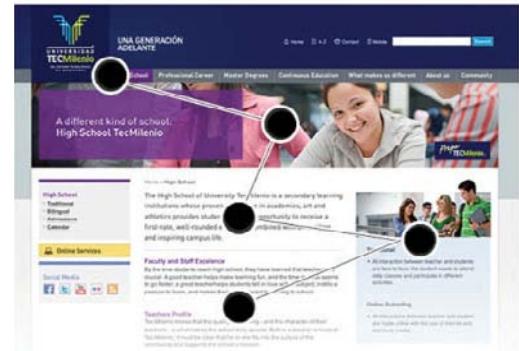
Unity — Unity (or proximity) helps all the elements look like they belong together. Readers need visual cues to let them know an article is one unit — the text, headline, photographs, graphic images and captions all go together. Elements that are positioned close to one another are related while elements that are farther apart are less so.

Unity can be accomplished through the following methods:

- Being consistent with the type font, sizes and styles for headings, subheads, captions, headers and footers throughout the website.
- Positioning elements so that those close to one another are related, while elements that are farther apart have less of a relationship.
- Using only one or two type styles and various size or weight for contrast throughout the site.
- Repeating a color, shape or texture in different areas throughout.
- Choosing visuals that share a similar color, theme or shape.

Web users rely heavily on visual clues when making decisions about a website — whether to click and explore, consider a purchase or sign up for a service. This is even more pronounced for first-time visitors when the decision to stay on-site or abandon is made in just a few seconds. Follow these four design principles and you can be sure that your users and new visitors will stay engaged with your website. ■

Guillermo Cedillo is responsible for the design and implementation of modifications of different Web, desktop and mobile applications as a User Interface Designer for Sieena. Sieena is a Nearshore software development firm specializing in Microsoft technologies, with operations in Los Angeles and Monterrey, Mexico.



BALANCE — Using balance by centering is the easiest way to get a symmetrically balanced page.



RHYTHM — Rhythm can be created by repeating a pattern of elements that are varied.



EMPHASIS — Using emphasis enables the most important design element to stand out.



UNITY — Unity helps ensure that all the elements look like they belong together.

No Comparison

By Linc Wonham, Associate Editor

For building brand awareness, shopping search engines are a retailer's best bet

As the online shopping experience becomes more social every day, it is important for retailers and their products to be seen in all the right places. High on the list of those destinations are comparison shopping search engines, on which consumers are increasingly relying to drive their purchasing decisions.

With more than 100 million shoppers utilizing comparison search engines each month, e-commerce merchants whose products are not listed on these sites are essentially passing up additional sales. But it is an opportunity that can be tapped into easily, and often with surprising results.

"We suddenly started to notice a lot of orders coming through Google Products," says Shannon Wu-Lebron, head of operations for Viking.com, an office supply retailer that relaunched its brand this year. "We were delighted. It's helped get the Viking name out there and brought us a lot of quality traffic and repeat customers. As we talk now about how to really build the business, we are definitely going to pursue more comparison shopping sites."

While there are hundreds to choose from on the Web today, Google Products is the most-used comparison shopping engine according to the July 2010 rankings by CPC Strategy, a firm that helps retailers sell through comparison sites. The other leaders include NexTag, PriceGrabber, TheFind, Shopping, Amazon Product Ads, Shopzilla, Bing/Yahoo Shopping, Pronto, Become and Smarter.

Some comparison sites are free while others charge retailers a cost-per-click fee to list their products. But the impact of being seen on comparison shopping engines can be felt in a variety of ways, giving merchants one of the best ROIs in the e-commerce industry today.

"If Google is Madison Avenue and Bing is Rodeo Drive, then BizRate, NexTag and the other comparison sites are every other street corner out there," says Sean Cook, CEO of e-commerce platform provider ShopVisible. "The goal for retailers is to be seen on every corner possible, and the next logical place to look after organic search is comparison shopping engines."

In addition to CPC Strategy, ShopVisible, Shopatron, Mercent and Channel Advisor are just some of the qualified e-commerce solutions providers that can guide merchants through their integrations with comparison sites. But there

"The completeness of product data is extremely important,"

says Sean Collier of Shopatron. "Make sure that it's not only accurate and 100-percent relevant to the product, but also descriptive enough that it will stand out."

are some basic guidelines to follow that will yield the best results whether you seek outside help or elect to do the footwork yourself. Below are some proven strategies for working with comparison shopping search engines.

Don't be timid

If this article prompts you to explore comparison shopping sites for the first time, that's a great first step. But you will be selling yourself short if you limit your participation to just one or two search engines. If your budget is a concern, try a handful of the free sites first and see how it goes.

"Just listing with one engine is not enough," says Greg Haslam of Become.com. "Some are better than others at accomplishing certain things for retailers, but a little research and a minimal investment can get your foot in the door somewhere. Then you'll have a data feed that you can send out to other sites, and there's no reason to stop at just one."

Carefully prepare your data

Make this the most thoughtful part of the process and be absolutely sure that you provide the best available product images, error-free product data, accurate titles with separate and detailed product descriptions, customer ratings and reviews, and unique product codes such as UPCs or manufacturer numbers that will map together in the search indexes.

Offer special promotions

Discount coupons and special-offer decals have a successful track record on comparison sites because they stand out from the crowd and invite consumers to engage with them. Many of the search engines now accept gift cards on their product listings and those have also been a profitable strategy for retailers.

Watch your stock closely

You wouldn't be the first retailer to be surprised by the success you are enjoying on comparison engines, only to run out of a hot-selling item. But don't — it's bad for business. Be sure not to list any products until you are certain they are not only in stock but plentiful, and always keep a watchful eye on your inventory.

Analyze and compare

Now it's the merchant's turn for some comparison and analysis. After your products have been listed for a while with a variety of search engines, identify what is selling and on which sites, what is not selling and where, and make the necessary adjustments. Many of the sites like Become.com not only have a full range of metrics to guide you in this process, but also dedicated customer service teams to help you get the most out of their services. ■



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The Big Advantage of Being a Small Business



In a way, a small business has a distinct burden when compared to its larger counterparts — every single customer is crucial to success. What's more, consumers know this and they expect that you do, too. It's the very reason they often choose small business — they want special treatment. But hidden within this burden lies a tremendous opportunity.

A Gallup poll from late July, 2010, shows that U.S. consumers have supreme confidence in small business. In fact, small business confidence absolutely dwarfs the same sentiment when it comes to big business. When asked, 66 percent of respondents replied that they have "a great deal/quite a lot" of confidence in small businesses, as opposed to 19 percent who said the same about big business. And it's growing — 59 percent expressed confidence in small business in the same poll in 2007.

The key word here is confidence — another way of saying "trust." As a small business, this is something we can provide with two little words: Customer Service.

Online retailer Zappos has a sterling reputation for great customer relations. Search for Zappos on Twitter and Facebook and you will find the same. I've witnessed this personally, on several occasions. My questions were answered promptly and thoroughly, and the company was not satisfied until I felt completely satisfied. Today, I shop Zappos before anywhere else — because I know that should an issue arise, it will be rectified. That confidence means everything to me, particularly online where I cannot typically get "face time" with a customer service representative.

On the other end, I recently had an experience with a major airline that left me speechless in disgust. Without

getting into the details, I was told that the issue was my fault and that there would be no solution offered, of any kind.

Why is it acceptable for this business to operate with such poor customer service? Traditionally, because of the lack of serious competition — a luxury that you, as a small business, do not enjoy.

However, as a small business, great customer service can be achieved relatively pain-free. Simply create touch points for your consumers (easy-to-find contact information, social media accounts, 1-800 numbers) and be sure to monitor them regularly and reply promptly, even if you do not yet have a solution. A simple response is enough for most consumers to remain patient while the problem is solved. Lack of a timely response, however, is reason enough for them to look elsewhere (and to tell all of their friends about it). Chances are your business does not have a massive consumer base that would make managing these inquiries a serious challenge anyway.

But keep your limitations as a small business in mind. For example, should you choose to employ live Web chat on your website, make sure someone is there to respond to a user-initiated session. Or, if you know that messages will not be returned immediately, set up an autoresponder or appropriate voicemail message.

It's true that some customers will never be satisfied no matter how hard we try, and that some issues simply cannot be solved within reason. In those cases, what's important is that the effort is put forth. Even an unsatisfied customer will hesitate to defame a company when an honest effort is made.

What's important to understand is that customer service transcends industries, products and marketing budgets. It is the one even ground on which every company — of every size — can compete. In fact, by its very nature, big business is freely giving the "little guys" a sizable advantage in this area. All you have to do is follow through. ■

The key word here is confidence — another way of saying "trust."
As a small business, this is something we can provide with two little words:
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