



Book Marketing in the Age of Google

Your Online Strategy Is Your Business Strategy

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Recommendation

The more visitors come to your website, the more links it will have, the more people will look for it and the more sales you will achieve. The search is the consumer’s door to your site and search engine optimization (SEO) is the key. Some self-proclaimed SEO “experts” recommend using “link farms,” “spammy keywords” and verbose “nonsense” websites. These charlatans represent the dark side of the legitimate search strategy consulting offered by proven authorities like Vanessa Fox. A former Google executive, Fox explains how your company can create and implement an intelligent “search acquisition strategy.” The right approach calls for purposeful development of online content. You want searchers to click through to your website and find it relevant, so they buy your merchandise. *BooksInShort* recommends Fox’s book as a pivotal SEO guide for marketing managers, website content developers and online sales professionals.

Take-Aways

- Global internet users conduct 29 million online searches every minute.
- Your target buyers are online, searching for your product. You can help them find it.
- To understand who they are, develop “searcher personas.”
- Paying for priority search result positions is a poor investment because searchers trust organic results over paid searches and find them more relevant.
- You want to appear in the first few organic results with a great “title and description.”
- Carefully chosen keywords will bring searchers to your site, but they will abandon it quickly if they think it is not pertinent.
- An effective “search acquisition strategy” depends on defined business goals and compelling web content.
- Your site must contain a clear “call to action” that induces searchers to do what you want.
- Search engines provide free marketing data, but using it well requires good analytics.
- Don’t neglect the social media or “new search interfaces” in your online quest for customers.

Summary

Searching Every Day

People conduct 29 million searches every minute worldwide. Fifty percent of Americans carry out a daily internet search. Ninety percent do so monthly. These numbers will only continue to grow. Companies seeking sales growth must develop effective “search strategies” and mine the vast data that searches reveal to understand their customers. Many businesses employ services like Google AdWords for paid search – buying ads that accompany particular searches. However, greater opportunity resides in organic, nonpaid search, that is, “results that are algorithmically generated.” While companies spend 88% of their “online search dollars” on paid searches, 85% of searchers choose organic results.

“Your search strategy is your business strategy.”

Searches represent vast marketing research. Savvy companies can use search data to determine what their customers want and give it to them. To exploit the billions of daily internet searches, establish search metrics, coordinate your online and offline marketing, and create a “search acquisition strategy” that takes full advantage of potential customers’ “searching behavior.” Begin with organic search results. Searchers always click on the leading organic result, but only one out of two checks the

paid result above it. Fifty percent of searchers look at the “seventh organic listing,” but just 10% look at the “seventh paid listing.”

“Search is the new Yellow Pages, 800 number, Sunday circular, card catalog and cash register.”

Potential customers engage in searches purposefully and regard paid advertisements as an interruption. To exploit searching, provide online content that helps people search instead of irritating your prospects with ads. Search industry expert Danny Sullivan calls this “reverse advertising.” Companies determine what searchers seek and offer that information online. The idea is to be discovered by – and accessible to – web crawlers and to deliver easily “extractable information” that searchers find relevant.

“The search box has become our entry point to the Web.”

This is Volvo’s online strategy. Volvo uses search data to learn what new car information consumers are searching for online. Volvo’s webmasters add this specific content to its website, using the keywords and phrases that consumers type in during their searches. Volvo’s data then immediately comes up in response to searches. Search-savvy Volvo gives “information to the right people at the right time” by connecting with consumers who want to buy new cars precisely when they are shopping. Your company does not have to have a budget as big as Volvo’s to benefit from organic search; you need only the correct information.

Who Are Searchers and What Do They Want?

To set up a search acquisition strategy, you must know what your customers want. That means learning their behavior (how they search), their intent (why they search) and their “query volume” (what they seek). This involves relatively inexpensive online market research, yet it offers invaluable marketing intelligence regarding how your customers respond “in near-real time.” Conduct keyword studies to determine searchers’ favorite words, and then use those words to direct them to your website. Search research can also indicate upcoming trends. Thus, Google launched Google Insights, which forecasts “future search volume” for particular queries.

Search Engines

The more you know about search engines, the more evolved your search acquisition strategy becomes. Early search engines relied on “web spiders” (robots). They “crawled websites” and downloaded information according to their priorities, then loaded that information into indexes. In 1998, Google introduced the “PageRank” algorithm, which catalogs websites on the basis of their number of links. The number of links indicates the popularity of the website. PageRank is the primary method most major search engines use to grade websites and their searchable information. If your site is compelling, more websites will link to it and more buyers will find it.

“Searchers aren’t an isolated demographic from the rest of your target audience. Searchers are your target audience.”

The three categories of search engines are: “human-edited directories” (dmoz.org), “automated search engines” (Google) and “meta search engines” (dogpile.com). Automated search engines are the most popular, with Google the clear leader. Yahoo and Microsoft’s Bing are also major players. As search engines become increasingly sophisticated, search personalization becomes more pronounced. Search engines attempt to give individual searchers their most relevant information. Based on people’s previous searches, search engines infer what content they want to find in future searches and tailor the results accordingly. Search engines also routinely retrieve multimedia information, including text, photos and videos. Exploit this enhanced search feature by including appropriate multimedia elements in a “search-friendly way.”

“Nearly all of your potential customers are broadcasting exactly what they want through their searches.”

An effective search acquisition strategy depends on clear business goals. When you know precisely what you want to accomplish online, structure your website and construct its content to meet searchers’ needs. Develop a “seed list of words” searchers will use to find your product or service. Then enter your seed list into the Google AdWords Keyword Tool. Check “enable synonyms.” You can choose between words that match your keywords broadly or exactly. Export your list to Excel, where you can “sort...by volume, filter out the queries that don’t align with your business goals and target audience, and then categorize them.”

Web Analytics

Use web analytics data as part of your research. Google Analytics lets you research the search queries that brought users to your site by choosing “Traffic Sources > Keywords > Unpaid.” You may also want to use search queries to track conversions, which is when visitors do something on your website that you want them to do, like fill out and submit a form. Relevant programs include: Compete, which examines keywords; SpyFu, which creates “organic and paid search data” for websites; Google Trends for Websites, which compares traffic at different sites; and Alexa, which provides “trends data, comparative information and keyword data.”

“Sixty-two percent of searchers click a result on the first page of results and 90% click within the first three pages.”

To develop a good search acquisition strategy, consider how people search. Vast data exists on this subject, since search engines routinely monitor search behavior and examine searchers to discover their intent. Most searches are brief, no more than one to three words. Search engines sort online searches as “navigational” (“one word queries” with an unambiguous meaning), “commercial, informational, prepurchase research” and “action.” Google further categorizes searches into “dominant interpretations, common interpretations [and] minor interpretations.”

“Through organic search, you can reach potential customers at the very moment they are considering a purchase and provide them information exactly when they are looking for it.”

Search engines attempt to refine the search as a searcher enters his or her query. For example, if someone types “cars” in the search box, Google immediately adds the options: “sports cars, old cars, used cars and cars for sale.” It also offers the searcher information on “related searches.” Yahoo and Bing work in a similar fashion.

“Search data may...be more honest than survey data, since people are searching for what they actually want, not telling a surveyor what they think they should want.”

While a number-one ranking is good, showing up in the first few organic results can be even better if you post the strongest “title and description.” Eye-tracking research indicates that searchers primarily view the “left half of” a title. Visitors can evaluate a website in 50 milliseconds. If they don’t see what they want, they move on, so make sure your website speaks immediately to searchers’ needs. Post content that captivates their interest. To convert visitors to customers, make your website’s “call to action” prominent. Once you learn which searches are most important to your business, develop content that draws them.

“Searcher Personas”

Your search acquisition strategy should include using search data to build your business, focusing on an audience that will convert to customers, determining which search queries fit your business profile and are sufficient to warrant a marketing component, developing website content that closely matches targeted search queries, incorporating a clear call to action on your website and setting up metrics to evaluate your strategy.

“Using the language of your customer can help you engage with them better.”

To understand the people who search for information online, develop searcher personas, detailed reports regarding the types of individuals who will buy what you sell. Focus on the “‘differences that make a difference’ in the ways target customers search for and find the things you are offering.” Prioritize organic search in your “brand awareness strategy.” Create “searcher conversion workflows” with these elements:

- **Identity** – Who do your searcher personas represent?
- **“Rank”** – Your website must match queries consistently to gain higher rankings.
- **“SERP (Search Engine Results Page) Display”** – This shows your search engine results and indicates whether searchers found your results compelling enough to go to your website.
- **“Page content”** – The web page the searcher lands on must be relevant to his or her search.
- **“Conversion”** – This requires a powerful call to action. Make it easy for your searcher to follow through by buying something or doing something on your page site. If your website does not spur action, all your work enticing the searcher to visit is for naught.

Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO) focuses on organizing your website to attract searchers. SEO involves employing search data to develop a “product and content strategy,” using searcher personas to maximize website conversions, tying organic search into every aspect of your marketing activities and including your customers’ search language in your online content. Your SEO strategy’s bedrock purpose is to make the most of the search box as the entry point for the “customer acquisition funnel.”

“Focus on the searchers, what they are looking for, how you can meet their needs and how you can compel them to meet your business goals.”

Put the “most important keywords in the far left of the title,” and qualify all product descriptions. For example, use “Canon X54T Digital Camera with Zoom,” not “X54T.” Your website should answer searchers’ questions. Phrase things the way searchers would, “How Do I Set Up a Relational Database with Rails,” not “How to Set Up a Relational Database with Rails.” Your website’s “technical architecture” must fully support search engine crawling and indexing. To help search engines search your website efficiently, take the following steps (if these seem confusing or too technical, turn to your web developer or hire an expert to implement them):

- Include an extensible markup language (XML) site map on your website.
- Incorporate fast “server response times” and “page load times.”
- Make your “uniform resource locators” (URLs) fully accessible to search engines.
- Use robots.txt to “block content you don’t want indexed.”
- Enable “‘compression and if-modified-since’ on the server.”
- Improve indexability by ensuring that redirects are properly implemented.
- Be sure that “each page’s title element, meta description, tag and H1 contain the vital keywords for the page and include them in a way that is compelling to visitors.”

“The bottom line...is to understand your customers and what they are looking for and to provide exactly that.”

“Actionable analytics” provide insight about how effectively your website meets your company’s business goals. You need “accurate, actionable data” to make informed decisions. You also need an expert who understands the data and can interpret it meaningfully. He or she must be familiar with “testing and usability and surveys and site visits and field studies.”

Additional Channels You Can Exploit

Social media is a significant development on the internet. Use market research to find the places online where your customers and other interested people talk about your firm. Listen to them. Create a blog so you can converse with them. Write smartly. Maintain your social media interactions. Other significant online initiatives include “new search interfaces,” such as Shazam, an iPhone application that enables users to identify even a fragment of music by holding the phone up to a speaker. As mobile devices become more ubiquitous, their “search capabilities” will be more immediately available. Technology will mutate, as ever. “But one question will remain relevant: How well does your site provide what searchers seek?”

About the Author

Consultant and speaker **Vanessa Fox**, an expert on search engine strategy, served as Google’s spokesperson to website owners on how its search algorithm works.