

Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

Search engine marketing, or SEM is one of the most effective ways to grow your business in a competitive online marketplace. With numerous competitors vying for the same "eyeballs", it's very important to advertise online in an effective and cost efficient way. Search Engine Marketing is one of the most effective ways to promote your products and services while growing your business.

Moreover, Search engine marketing is the practice of marketing a business using paid advertisements that appear on search engine results pages or SERPs. Advertisers bid on keywords that users of search engines services such as Google or Bing might enter when they are searching for specific products or services. This gives the advertiser an opportunity for their ads to appear alongside organic results for a search query.

These ads, also referred to as "pay-per-click ads", come in several different formats. Some are small, text-based ads, while others, such as product listing ads (PLAs, also known as shopping ads) are more visual, product-based advertisements that show potential customers "at a glance", a product visual, price and/or a product review.

One of the biggest advantages to search engine marketing is that it offers advertisers the opportunity to put their ads in front of motivated customers who are ready to buy at the precise moment they're ready to make a purchase. No other advertising medium does this quite as well, which is in part why search engine marketing is so effective and such a powerful way to grow your business.

As with SEO, keyword are the foundation. As users enter keywords (as part of their search query) into search engines, such as Google or Bing, to find what they are looking for, results are then returned based on the keywords being utilized at the time. Keywords are the basis for both SEO and SEM and keyword research and analysis are an integral part of your site's ability to reach perspective customers.

Enumerated below are some of the best practices to use when seeking to implement a winning SEM strategy:

1. Deliver value across the decision journey
 - Initiation: Getting as much pertinent background information and buying landscape to become a more informed researcher.
 - Research: Exploring buying guides, recommendations and products that meet your basic criteria.

- Comparison: Comparing a handful of products that meet the customer's criteria, including ratings, reviews, features and cost.
- Transaction: Finding where to buy, then seeing pricing and promotions, availability and local sources.
- Experience: Getting customer service, asking maintenance questions, and making additional purchases.

2. Aligning your campaign and business Goals

- Brand awareness and perception: Bid competitively on your non-brand, brand and competitors keywords. Non-brand searches are the key to starting a journey. 72% of brand ad clicks had a non-brand or conquest term in the user journey preceding the brand click. Searchers were 30% more likely to conduct a branded search after being exposed to a brand ad on a generic search query or a competitor's branded query.
- Win new customers: Consumers rely on search to make informed purchase decisions. SEM can help with every stage of the decision making process. 49% of consumers use search engines (Google, Bing, etc.) to begin their search journey to find products they want.
- Drive Sales: Search's strength is driving conversions. It outperforms other marketing channels across devices in conversion rates.
- Enter new markets: The ubiquity of search allows you to activate a cross-border marketing strategy that drives foot traffic with local extensions, get more phone calls with call extensions and increase ad clicks with sitelink extension.

3. Expand your marketing funnel

- Search is a constant companion that follows us across devices (ie mobile, desktop, etc).
- Understanding how people search at different points on their purchase journeys opens the door to engage your brand with this new audience.
- Search engines provide insights, delivers influence throughout the five buying stages (initiation, research, comparison, transaction and experience).
- SEM helps to reinforce your conversion funnel and unifies disparate marketing activities.

4. Take audience targeting to the next level

- i. Build richer buyer personas that consider these factors:
 - Behavioral
 - Demographic
 - Contextual

ii. Choose keywords that align with the key stages and mindsets of your target customers:

- Initiation
- Research
- Comparison
- Transaction
- Experience

5. Lift other investments with paid search

- Search and social
- Search and tv
- Search and display
- Search and other channels

6. Fight and win the battle for paid search budget share

- Pick the right metrics to measure SEM impact
- Focus your reporting by identifying and tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) that reflect your business goals.
 - a. Acquiring new customers
 - b. Driving foot traffic
 - c. Getting more phone calls
 - d. Increasing ad clicks
 - e. Building your brand trust
 - f. Expanding cross-border strategy
- Separate SEM impacts from other channels
- Apply the same process to allocate budget between Adwords and Bing Ads