

Finding a Site

The search engines in greatest use today (and Google is still the 800-pound gorilla) are hierarchical. They search and connect web pages by relevance and affinity. The closer the keywords (meta-tags) on a page are to the ones typed in, and the more pages that page is linked to, the higher the ranking.

As a result, the online community now understands that the pages that are returned to them in organic search are likely to be the most relevant to them, because thousands, maybe millions (depending on the geography) of people like them found these pages to be relevant. Or at least that's the way it would work in a perfect world...

That's where an organic SEO expert comes in, and my main guy, Peter Grant, is one of the leading organic SEO guys on earth. As I said in a previous email, so good that both Google and MSN have tried to hire him!

Marty, if you do a good job on SEO, there is no need to do SEM/PPC. And you'll save a lot of money, too!

PPC never ends. You spend "X" dollars on it this year and "X" dollars on it next year, and the year after and the year after for as long as you or someone else can bear it. It's like Yellow Pages. (Which may be a reason why more questions weren't raised by you initially. You are very used to spending a lot of money on Yellow Pages...)

Worse, PPC is not an investment. It is, at least in its current configurations, a crap shoot. Here are the reasons why:

Statistics show that organic search engine optimization (or natural SEO) is a much better method of online advertising for an advertiser to generate traffic to their website:

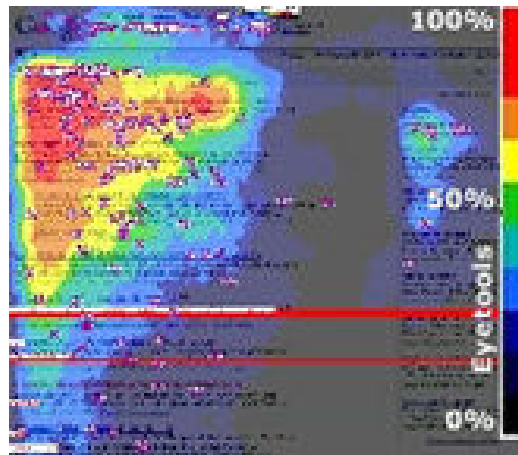
- 70% of search engine users report that they visit organic sites on a daily basis.
- 50% of search engine users choose a search result by scanning the top organic results first, according to eye tracking studies.
- 80% of search engine users report they **never** click on PPC results.
- 72% of search engine users feel Google's organic listings are more relevant than their paid results.
- The overall conversion rate for organic sites is three times larger than that of paid sites.

You can see the sourcing and other additional info for the above at:

<http://www.zeroonezero.com/services/organic-se-marketing.html>

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With regard to the second point above, take a look at this graphic:



What you are seeing is a “heat map” showing where people looked on this particular Google search page (which the Eye Tools folks found to be typical). The redder areas are high hits, the darker areas are low hits. As you can see, people look at the organic listings far, far more than the paid listings.

You can get the rest of this survey’s information, including the hit rate percentages, at:

http://www.eyetools.com/inpage/research_google_eyetracking_heatmap.htm

In addition to the eye tracking, they also tracked the click, which are indicated by little purple Xs. I’m sorry this is so fuzzy, but you can also see that the far greatest proportion of clicking goes to organic listings “above the fold,” meaning above the point at which one has to scroll. (Indicated by the red line on the graphic.)

Nielsen research indicates that 85% or more of the clicks on search portals are to organic listings (the white listings down the left sides of pages). Another 5% go to the paid ads at the top left, and the other 10% go to the pay per click ads down the right sides of pages. (They set up pages with tracking software, which you can also do, and then tracked the clicks.) Here is what they got:

Portal	% People Using	% of Clicks
Google	45%	87% Organic
Yahoo	28%	84% Organic
MSN	11%	91% Organic

In follow-up surveys, users felt that organic was more credible. The search engines ranked the sites and links based on objective relevant content. Organic listings are like word of mouth. Pay per click is like advertising. People trust word of mouth far more than they trust advertising.

This was further borne out when they looked at the conversion rates on clicks. In 2005 (2006 figures aren’t out yet), the actual conversion rate to inquiry (or to a sale on e-commerce sites) was 6.7% in 2005. PPC conversion was less than half that.

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For what it's worth, Peter Grant maintains a dozen of his own sites, with various domains and offers, all in order to continually monitor the effectiveness of different SEO/SEM schemes, and the offers themselves. He tells me that, on average, they get 1 click per day on Google paid placements, with their ads usually in the Top 5; but they get 60 to 100 clicks per day to their organic listings (which are also usually in the Top 5). That's a huge difference!

Marty, I think what you want to do, with any web site, is optimize for organic search, and that is what we have been doing for our customers right along. Your results may vary, but, for example, it took us less than three weeks to get Beckonings ranked as the top listing for Hunter Douglas blinds in Nashua. (Hunter Douglas is, by a factor of about 10, the most-used key phrase for home fashions and interior design searches.)

Oh, and with regard to key words, key phrases and meta-tags. It's not necessary to look at thousands of phrases to either optimize for them or use them for paid search. The universe of words and phrases that most people use for any given search is pretty small, and it's the phrases most people use that you want to tag – *even if you don't think that it's right for you!* (Again with Beckonings... We optimized for dining tables, even though they don't sell many, because that's the second-most used phrase in their general category, and they sell everything one would use *with* a dining table...)

So, you tell us what you think the keywords and phrases *will* be, and we'll tell you what they actually *are*. Then we spend most of our time and your money optimizing for the tags that will get you results, and waste no money on tags that are only getting a few hits. We spend 15 to 20 hours to give you a real deliverable result.

You should also know that wide-ranging keyword phrases *can* be matched by Search Engine Optimization. Any phrases can. But, for the reason suggested above, there is no reason to do it. Nobody optimizes for 20 or 30 searches a month. There is a reason to do it with SEM/PPC – it makes the companies administering it more money.

If the wide range is due to a perceived need to have all the different town names in the tags, that's not necessary, either. Fact is, you only need the names of big towns, and states. You don't need every little town. People don't search that way. If you have Nashua, Manchester, Lowell, Lawrence, Boston, NH and MA, you have it covered. Again, you tell us what you think the phrases will be, and we'll tell you what they really are.

Of course, we continue to tweak, and research. But the right initial SEO investment should return itself 5 to 10 times (and baseline SEO is built into all of our sites), and the second-year cost is usually less than 20% of the first year, and keeps going down.

Enough for Now...

I think that about covers it, Marty, but I am happy to answer any questions this memo may prompt for you. Peter Grant can answer even more of them than I can, and you are free to call him, at 603-715-5445. You can also call Sy, or the ladies at Beckonings, or any other client you'd like. And I will work according to the directions you give me.

Thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Casey Holt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with some loops and flourishes.