

Your Website: Greater Visibility and Return of Investment through Search Engine Marketing

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the majority of the people find out the required websites information including virtual exhibitions through web search engines. The most commonly used search engines in the market are Google, Yahoo and MSN. This paper basically provides tips to the developers of virtual exhibition websites to make their sites more visible to the public. This is one of the marketing strategies of the web search engines are following to get best returns on their investment. This is a short paper based on the research work done at Canadian Heritage Information Network and their results are communicated in form of short paper.

Keywords: Return of Investment, website visibility, use of search engines for marketing.

According to some estimates in North America, 40 per cent of website visitors arrive from Google, Yahoo, MSN and other search engines. For some online exhibitions, the figure is as high as 80 per cent. Thankfully, you can use this trend to your advantage. It is simply easier to get potential visitors to click on a link than to have them type your web address into their browsers. The latter is commonly referred to as 'direct traffic', and in significant numbers it is usually the result of sophisticated, multi-platform marketing campaigns. If you need to maximize each dollar, then you will love online marketing and particularly search engine marketing (SEM).

SEM is the art and science of increasing the visibility of your web pages by boosting their ranking on search engine results. The SEM mix includes:

- (i) Search engine optimization (SEO): Optimising the visibility of web pages in the organic (free)

section of search engine result pages (see A in Fig. 1). Tactics includes friendly architecture, optimised content, link building, and social marketing optimisation (Web colonisation).

- (ii) Pay per click (PPC): Optimising your visibility in the sponsored section of the search engine result pages (see B in Fig. 1). Payment goes through only when browsers click on your ad, or when they complete a transaction on your website (cost per conversion).
- (iii) Search engine advertising: Banner ads or multimedia/interactive ads on search engines.

Getting started can be a bit intimidating, but through trial and error you will see how SEM drives highly targeted visitors to your online exhibitions. The following steps to a successful SEM plan are based on CHIN's (Canadian Heritage Information

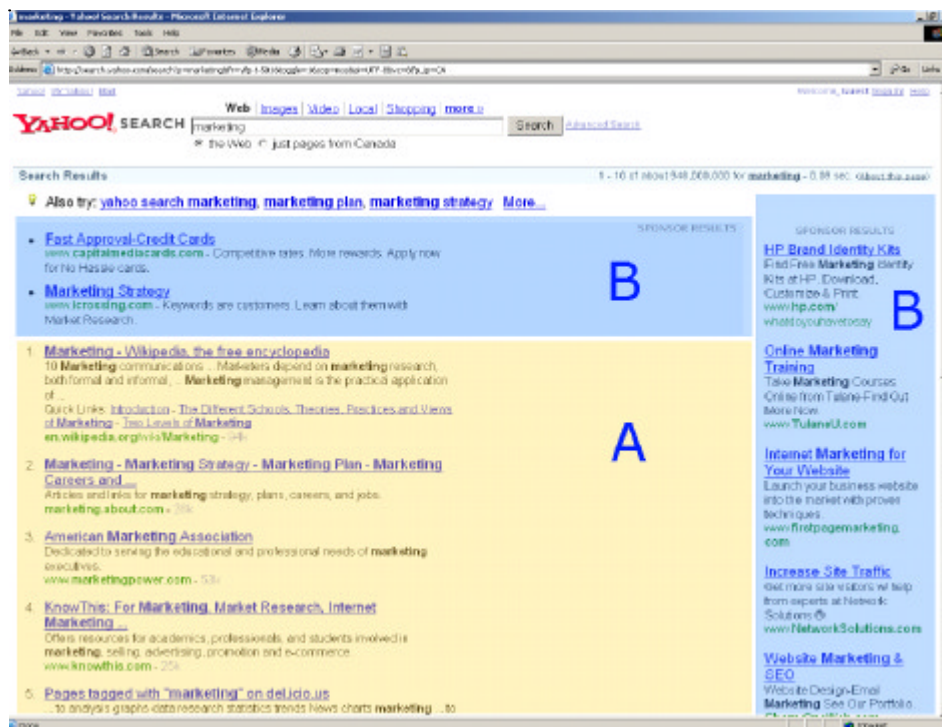


Figure 1. Yahoo search output.

Network) experience with the virtual museum of Canada portal (virtualmuseum.ca), and on recognised best practices from the industry.

- (i) Know your target audience: Who do you really want to reach? Define your target audiences, including their market size, profile, habits and needs. Remember: “general public” is not a target audience.
- (ii) Set your online goals and key performance indicators: What do you want visitors to do on your website? Think about the percentage of visitors who take a desired action (conversion rate), whether it be registrations, newsletter subscriptions, download publications, or just about any activity beyond simple browsing. Don't forget to establish proper metrics to track what visitors are doing.
- (iii) Build an initial list of important keywords: This is the foundation of your SEM plan. Spend some time to create list of keywords and key phrases for which you want to be retrieved by search engines. We recommend that you have

- (a) a list of keywords and key phrases that represent your mandate and your primary messages;

- (b) a list of keywords and key phrases that represent your current and most relevant content;

- (c) a list of keywords and key phrases that represent your potential content (content strategy).

Look at your target audiences' blogs, chats, message boards, and websites to better understand their language, and draw from your internal documentation (e.g. fact sheets, surveys, press releases).

Added Tips

- Try to associate individual web pages in your online exhibitions with the most appropriate keyword(s) or key phrase(s).
- Work with key phrases of two and three words. This long tail approach leads to higher organic rankings, and is also less costly for paid campaigns since there is less competition.
- (iv) Validate your keywords: Test and refine your list with keyword selector tools such as Yahoo Keyword Selector, Google Keyword Selector, Google Trend and Keyword Discovery. It is important to measure your competition and the

popularity of your keywords and key phrases. Some keyword selector, such as Google, will isolate country specific keyword searches: searches for India only.

- (v) Check your current ranking: Type your keywords and key phrases into a search engine, and check your current performance. PPC campaigns should only be used for strategic keywords or key phrases that are not performing well organically. Plan to organically optimise the keywords and key phrases of your PPC campaign. Overall this will help to reduce your PPC investment while increasing your organic traffic gradually.

Added Tip

- Check your ranking in the most popular search engine in your country. For example, in North America, Google is the most important search engine with over 60 per cent of all searches. In India, Google (<http://www.google.co.in/>) is probably the most important one as well. It is also good to check on other search engines that you consider important based on your target audience: byindia.com might be more important for you if more representative of your target audience (step one).

(vi) Optimise the website:

- (a) Design and architecture: No matter how nice your pages look, if your online exhibition's architecture is weak, you won't be indexed by the search engines. Good practices include, but not limited to the creation of a search engine sitemap, proper HTML and CSS coding, and limited parameters.
- (b) Web page content: Optimisation follows the inverted pyramid structure, with important information at the top and details further down. Each Web page optimizes one key phrase following specific rules: title, header, proximity, density, prominence, thematic words, cross linking, anchor text and alt text.

Don't forget your multimedia content. As part of the emerging universal search approach, Google is mashing (merging) specialised results within general search engine results pages. As a result, optimised video and pictures can offer more entry points towards your online exhibition.

Added Tip

- Provide a Web writing/SEO workshop to your content contributors. This is helpful because the importance of user and SEO requirements is new for most editors.

- (vii) Pursue link building and partnerships: Inbound links to your online exhibition are a very important factor for most search engines. Quality sites that have agreed to link to your online exhibition pages will also send you relevant traffic. Build your inbound links by approaching reputable Web sites related to your strategic keywords and key phrases.

- (viii) Colonise the Web: The beauty of Web 2.0 is that you do not need to necessarily request a link; you just need to publish or circulate it. Populate Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia), blogs, and video and picture sites (e.g. Flickr and Youtube). Search engines will consider your popularity in these social networks, and you will also get direct traffic as a byproduct.

- (ix) Get in the news: Feed news aggregators such as Google News with RSS feeds containing valuable developments for your community.

- (x) Track and analyse your performance for better results: Install good tracking software to follow your SEO performance separately from your PPC performance. This way, you will be able to replace keywords that are not performing well, or create a web page that will better optimise them. You will also improve the quality of visitors coming from search engines, provide a better experience, increase loyalty and reduce your cost per visitor.

Added Tip

- Along with web trends, CHIN is currently experimenting with Google Analytics. This free service offered by Google generates detailed statistics about website visitors. The main benefit is the Google adword (PPC) campaign performance information that is provided.

At CHIN, we are continuously working to leverage the potential offered by SEO and PPC. In the last fiscal year, we were able to increase our visibility on the web, reduce our cost per visit, increase our visitor quality and better track our performance.

This initiative required the involvement of the marketing team, IT and product managers and efforts from our internal and external content contributors. You will achieve good results if you have the buy-in of your peers, and if you put in place the necessary educational support and guidelines.

This ten step recipe may not guarantee success, but it will surely contribute towards it. CHIN provides SEM seminars, participates in expert panels, and is currently working on complete SEM training package that will be available in the Knowledge Exchange at www.chin.gc.ca. Be sure to visit us often.

About the Authors



Thierry Arsenault, BBA, a certified member of l'Institut du Commerce Électronique du Québec (ICEQ), is an online marketing specialist for the CHIN, an agency of the Department of Canadian Heritage. He specialises in online marketing, in particular search engine marketing (SEM). Thierry has over 15 years of experience in marketing, sales and ebusiness. Prior to joining CHIN, Thierry successfully doubled Culture.ca's organic traffic, and considerably increased visits and Internet revenue at Bellzinc.ca and Bell Canada/Hong Kong Telecom. He has spoken at Museums and the Web, the Culture.mondo roundtable, and various other events.



Daniel Feeny manages the Marketing and Business Development unit at the Canadian Heritage Information Network. This agency of the Department of Canadian Heritage enables Canada's museums to engage audiences through the use of innovative technologies. Daniel develops and leads communications and partnership strategies that increase public participation in CHIN's two online platforms (virtualmuseum.ca and www.chin.gc.ca). Prior to joining CHIN, Daniel led advertising and promotions for a subsidiary of Vidéotron Ltd, an integrated communications company. He is a graduate of HEC Montréal, one of Canada's foremost business schools.