

Does Your Website Need Search Engine Placement?

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Introduction

For many, the value of their websites can be measured in visitors, for others it is the amount of revenue that the site generates. Regardless of how you measure the success of your website, you are going to have to bring visitors to it that are looking for the information, content and/or products that you are providing. So how do you do this?

For many businesses the yellow pages is a first choice for promotions and marketing. Generally this is due in large part to the fact that most of us grew up with the yellow pages being where we looked when we needed to find a business and so it is what we think of first. A standard yellow page ad runs for about \$1,200+/year for a smaller ad and serves only a local market. You further have to consider the cost of ad development, which can often run into the thousands of dollars as well.

While this may be an entirely profitable form of advertising for many businesses which serve only local areas, it is certainly not the only one.

On the Internet there are many forms of advertising that have and are being used to bring traffic to websites. From banner ads and sp@m email to PPC and natural search engines there are countless methods for promoting your website online. So how do you choose which marketing tactic to utilize?

One thing to consider is that over 80% of all Internet traffic comes from search engines with Google currently responsible for the vast majority of that. With such an overwhelming amount of traffic coming from a single identifiable source, it makes sense to put a lot of weight on it; considering what this source can mean for your website, and for your business.

In this article we will explore the difference between sites that should consider search engine placement as a viable choice in their marketing strategy, and those that would benefit little from top placements. As well we will look at ways to insure that you are maximizing the effect and potential return on investment of your search engine placement campaign, should you choose to go that route.

Who Should Consider Search Engine Placement

An ethical search engine placement firm will tell a client honestly if search engine optimization will benefit their website. Of course, not every company is ethical and further, how do you know until you have undergone search engine optimization, whether it will benefit your website? By this point you have paid the firm and they have done their job whether it helped you or not.

There are a few things you should consider before you apply search engine placement tactics to your website, or consider hiring a search engine placement firm.

Questions You Should Ask Yourself:

What do I stand to gain from higher search engine traffic? Conducting a search engine optimization has a built-in cost of time and resources should you choose to do it yourself, or through the direct cost of money should you hire a search engine placement firm. You have to insure that what you hope to accomplish will be at least equal to and preferably greater than the cost of time and money it will take to do successfully. For more information on this you will want to read the section below "So You're Going To Market Your Website On The Search Engines ... Now What?" for tips on establishing whether there is truly enough traffic to be had to make your efforts worthwhile.

Can I compete? The short answer to this question is generally always "yes", however, there are many factors to consider. While any site, with enough work can rank well, you do have to consider whether the effort will be worth it. For example, if you own a small computer store in Michigan that repairs computers and troubleshoots software issues, it is

theoretically possible for you to rank your website well for the term “Microsoft Windows”. To do so would require an ENORMOUS amount of both time and money. And so you have to consider, is it really worth investing years of time and money into this one ranking? The answer is “probably not” but that doesn’t mean that search engine placement would not be beneficial for you just that those keywords are not worth targeting. There are suggestions for choosing the right keywords below.

Do I make money from my website traffic? This question isn’t the end-all-be-all, however, it’s certainly relevant if you’re considering hiring a search engine placement firm to optimize your site. If you plan on “going it alone” you may want to put in the effort for no money in return simply for the “fun” of it, however if you’re planning on spending your hard earned money on a search engine placement firm you have to make sure that it is in your financial best interest to do so. This may be from either direct product/services sales or from the sale of advertising on your site.

If, after answering these questions to yourself you have determined that search engine placement is indeed a good choice for your marketing strategy, you will now have the task of determining exactly what tactics will produce the greatest Return On Investment (ROI) for your efforts.

So You Are Going To Market Your Website On The Search Engines ... Now What?

Now that you have determined that search engine placement is indeed an avenue of marketing that can produce beneficial results for your site and for your business, you have to decide on a “plan of attack”. Many SEO firms will “help” you determine keywords to target, and some will even build links for you from “valuable” sites. In many case they may be entirely truthful but how do you know?

The choosing of the keywords to target is probably the most crucial step of the entire search engine optimization process. This will determine the success and/or failure of your promotions. It is important to keep in mind that top placements are not worthwhile if they produce zero results; either because you targeted placements with little traffic or irrelevant traffic. So how do you determine for yourself which keywords to target?

Without getting into anything too technical there are a couple of great resources out there to help you isolate the keywords that you should aim for.

[The Overture Search Term Suggestion Tool](#)

Advantages – The Overture Search Term Suggestion Tool is free and produces a large number of results for related searches.

Disadvantages – There are two main disadvantages to the Overture Search Term Suggestion Tool in determining your keywords. The first of these is that it puts everything in terms of the singular, and further, it will correct misspellings (misspellings, when discovered, can be goldmines). If you run a shopping site that sells gifts you will not be able to determine whether the main searched phrase was “gift” or “gifts”. The second major disadvantage to the Overture Search Term Suggestion Tool is that it doesn’t provide alternative related search phrases that you might not have thought to punch in (“presents” for example).

[WordTracker](#)

Advantages – WordTracker addresses all of the disadvantages noted about the Overture Search Term Suggestion Tool. It differentiates between singular and plural and will allow you to search for misspellings. Further, it searches a thesaurus and will make a number of suggestions for other terms you may not have thought of but which may be related to your industry. It will then analyze the variety of terms that you have searched and chosen and actually make recommendations on which keywords to target based on the number of competing pages and the specific search engine you are targeting. It will also give you a predicted number of searches per day for each phrase.

Disadvantages – The only real disadvantage to WordTracker is that it has a cost. There is a free trial on the site which you can use though the results it produces are far lower in numbers and it does not give you information on all of the major search engines. Certainly worth checking into even if you only try the demo mode (not a download – this is an online resource).

So you now have a list of possible keyword phrases ... now what? The next step is to determine whether you can compete with those currently holding the top positions and, more importantly, whether it will be economical to do so. The first place to look when you are trying to determine this is the search engines themselves. Let's assume for a second that you have determined that there are a good number of searches for your product and that the main keyword phrase you would like to target is "exercise equipment". The next step is to run a search for "exercise equipment". Most people are interested primarily in their Google rankings and so you would run that search on Google producing the following results: <http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&lr=&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&q=exercise+equipment>.

The site currently holding the #1 position is www.nellies.com. Take a look at the site. There are two major things that you will be looking for first:

Is this a large site with a lot of content related to the search phrase? In this case the answer is "yes"; they have a very large site and all of it is related to the topic the search was for.

How many incoming links do they have? You will now want to find out what sort of link popularity you will be competing with. Links are not the end-all-be-all of search engine optimization, in fact it is just one of a large number of deciding factors, however the links do help to determine your Google PageRank and this PageRank is a final multiplier in determining your position. Because the number of incoming links is easily determined, it is something you should look into. To determine the number of links simply enter into the Google search bar "link:www.domain-in-question.com". In this case the resulting page would be found at <http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&lr=&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&q=link%3Awww.nellies.com>. They do not have a large number of incoming links (as of Nov 19, only 11 links) and thus, this is not going to be a significant factor in determining their ranking. This is good news; now conduct the same research for the rest of the top 5 placing web sites so that you have a broad concept of the competition. This additional research is very important since there are occasions where a site will appear in the Top 5 for seemingly no reason (especially with Google these days).

Now You Can Make an Informed Decision

At this point you should have a pretty good idea whether search engine placement is a viable choice for your website promotions, which keywords you should target, and what competition you will be facing.

Assuming that your website needs to be optimized, you will now be faced with the choice of doing it yourself or hiring a search engine placement firm.

If you will be doing your own optimization I would highly recommend reading an article by the CEO of [StepForth Search Engine Placement](http://www.stepforth.com) entitled "[A 10 Minute Search Engine Optimization](http://www.stepforth.com/news/ten-minute-optimization.shtml)". It can be found on the StepForth website at <http://news.stepforth.com/2003-news/ten-minute-optimization.shtml>.

If you will be hiring on a search engine placement firm I would recommend first submitting your site for a free website review off of our homepage at <http://www.stepforth.com>. There is no obligation and it will give you a very good idea of what areas need to be addressed.