

64% of Search Advertisers Failing to Follow SEO Recommendations

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The most unique aspect of the Internet, the very thing that makes it different from every other communications medium is, in many cases, one of its least understood characteristics. Unlike print, audiotape or video recordings, the Net is an interactive medium requiring an ongoing investment of time, knowledge and capital. For those who make best use of it, the Net provides such a versatile communications environment; a virtual storefront can easily out-perform a traditional brick-and-mortar storefront.

In reality, most businesses doing commerce over the Web are not yet prepared to use the medium to its fullest potential. While most new and previously established businesses have some form of web presence, many don't have trained staff dedicated to maintaining it, much less enhancing or evolving it. From search marketing opportunities to cost cutting technologies such as VOIP to social and business networking tools, the Internet environment provides a virtually unlimited multi-leveled communications capacity at relatively reduced rates. Unfortunately, realizing the potential is far easier than adapting to take advantage of it.

That point was proven in a recent survey commissioned by Boston-based SEO firm [iProspect](#) that showed approximately 64% of businesses outsourcing search marketing, "... encounter obstacles that prevent them from implementing their vendor's SEO recommendations." ([click here](#) for an Adobe Acrobat version of the study)

Conducted by JupiterResearch in August 2005, the study surveyed 626 people involved in search marketing and 224 search marketing firms. Its findings attach tangible numbers to experiences shared by several professional SEOs. In short, SEOs have reason to feel a trifle under-appreciated. Their informed and often pre-paid advice is overlooked or neglected more often than not. At the same time, the survey also shows that the SEO industry itself needs to assume more responsibility around helping clients make informed decisions.

According to the results of the survey, the reasons most cited by search advertisers for not implementing outsourced SEO advice are; a lack of human resources, no budget set aside for outsourced IT services, and timing issues surrounding site or document updates. For many of the respondents, much of the responsibility rests with SEO vendors who seem to shy away from setting achievable goals and articulating realistic expectations.

The initial expectations set by the SEO or SEM vendor set the tone and thinking for the search advertising client. Quite often, respondents reported a key obstacle was their SEO vendor establishing unrealistic expectations as to "... how much time and effort will be involved in implementing the recommended SEO changes", based on the vendor's level of experience as opposed to the resources available to the client. In other words, SEO vendors often base time and cost estimates on their level of experience, not the client's.

Search advertising clients are generally less informed about the search medium than an established SEO is. SEO exists as an industry because professional search engine optimizers know how to work with

search engines. More importantly, good SEOs know how to work with any number of websites and are highly proficient webmasters. Chances are, the person speaking with the SEO vendor knows less about the fundamental architecture of their firm's website than the SEO does. That conclusion is as natural and logical as the one that states the client should know his or her business sector better than a third-party vendor does. When SEO vendors set unrealistic expectations for their clients, a chain of events unfolds.

Frequently, clients do not set aside sufficient time or financial resources to optimize and maintain their sites. While their SEO consultant or vendor has given them an estimate that says X# of hours are required for initial optimization and Y# of hours will be needed for maintenance, the estimate was based on how long it would take the SEO to do the work. Not only does the professional SEO have established work-habits that speed the job, they are likely able to spot and correct critical issues as they go along, thus saving even more time beyond that outlined in the estimate.

For larger firms that employ highly skilled IT staff, the initial experience working with a professional SEO firm can be a difficult one. From basic territory, overwrite and task-responsibility issues to the typical designed-by-committee corporate website, there can be numerous points for friction between SEOs and their clients' IT staffs. It should also be noted that most IT divisions have full workloads already. If their employer has outsourced organic search marketing to a good SEO firm, that workload often gets much larger very quickly with a new set of legacy tasks that need to be performed at least once per month.

The second reason many search advertisers neglect to implement outsourced SEO recommendations is they had no idea it could cost so much in staff time and resources. Even today, many advertisers see their website as a billboard for their brick-and-mortar business, even those running online stores. Billboards are an example of static media. Once set, billboard content doesn't change until another advertiser rents the space. Setting aside the valuable time of an already hard-working staff member for SEO work is often a lower priority than getting the daily jobs done.

There are a number of firms that outsource all aspects of the optimization process to a third party vendor. In these cases, the work gets implemented more often than not but nearly half, 48% of advertisers stated that they or their SEO firm underestimated the cost of optimization and the amount of time it would take to implement changes and see results. In some cases, the failure of the SEO firm to offer realistic goals and timelines was cited as the reason long-term SEO recommendations never got implemented.

The timing of site or document updates presents two problems for search advertising clients. The first is that all websites need to be redesigned periodically, especially if there is an upswing in traffic after an initial SEO project. An increase in traffic can point out previously unknown flaws, necessitating changes and can also spur increased interest from site owners, which can also necessitate site changes. When a site gets overhauled, the optimization is often thrown away with the old site. This happens because the site designers are often other third party vendors and generally not the ones who optimized the website.

Secondly, in order to maintain strong rankings, one of the tasks SEOs recommend is updating documents and generally adding fresh content to the site. For many search advertising clients, the added time commitment falls low on the list of daily tasks for the staff member charged with making those updates.

The results of this survey fall in line with stories heard by webmasters and SEOs in forums and from clients. The knowledge and skill gap between the professional SEO sector and advertising clients has not shrunk as much as SEOs might have previously expected. Though basic search engine optimization can be described as common sense web design, a number of critical knowledge factors remain that set SEOs



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aside from other webmasters, at least in relation to proficiency with search engines. The study does serve to support the thinking that outsourcing SEO is still the best way to achieve natural or organic placements quickly however this fact is small consolation for an SEO industry that obviously still needs to mature in order to represent itself and, in turn, be treated more professionally.

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