

Tips to win at digital marketing - Paid search and SEO

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Digital marketing's search engine marketing (SEM) can be summed up as a means to harness Google search for your business, as part of your business' marketing mix to increase product sales and/or brand awareness.



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SEM consists of search engine optimisation (SEO) and paid search (Google's AdWords) ads. Often businesses either invest in SEO or paid search ads but not both, or most likely not adequately investing in both. However, businesses should invest in SEM as a whole for various reasons.

Paid Search can break through clutter via innovation

Dunkin Donut's executed paid search in an innovative and powerful way. Be inspired by watching this [video](#).

SEO can piggyback off the latest tech to cut through clutter

McDonald's harnessed "OK Google" voice search through SEO. This [video](#) explains it all.

Keyword research

Organic search and paid search keyword conversion data should be shared freely amongst both the SEO and paid search teams. For example, a well-executed paid search campaign will reveal insightful keyword-related data. This is the case because, for example, such a paid search campaign will show which keywords are resulting in the highest conversions, which, in turn, can then be focused on by the SEO team. In this way, SEO and paid search ROI can be maximised through

focusing on the keywords that matter.

Alignment makes SEM cost-effective

This is quite obvious in highly competitive search categories, such as the financial industry. This is the case because paid search ads that target highly competitive keywords can be exorbitant. These expensive keywords would usually be popular non-brand-related search queries, keyword 'z' for argument's sake. Keyword 'z' costs many hundreds of rands per click, resulting in a massive monthly bill. Naturally, this source of business leads would also dry up as soon as you stopped paying for your ads, while SEO is ongoing and not as 'payment sensitive.'

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With SEO (assuming your website ranks #1 for keyword 'z') you will get a large amount of website traffic via keyword 'z', but you will only have to pay for SEO. What can end up happening is that paid search cost per conversions for keyword 'z' are much higher than SEO's cost per conversion for keyword 'z'. So, in this case, the paid search campaign was focused on brand-related keywords (less demand for them so they are affordable to target), where competitors' ads could potentially detract from the company's brand-related organic search listings.

These keywords perform better in terms paid search cost per conversion, while SEO focuses on the expensive keywords (in terms of paid search). Both SEO and paid search serve their purpose in a cost effective way.

'Owning' more of Google search

However, when budgets allow for it, paid search and SEO should always work in unison. When a company's website ranks #1 in organic search, and #1 as an AdWords ad (for the same search query), there is often a boost in the number of people clicking through to your website via both the respective ad and organic search website listings. This is due to your company 'owning' more SERP 'real estate', i.e. the bigger the surface area in Google search that your company occupies the more attention your website will receive, like a massive billboard versus a small one. Mediavive's independent research showed that the top performing ad gets roughly 10% of clicks for any given search query, while the #1 ranking organic search listing gets about 30% of clicks.

So your brand will 'own' approximately 40% of the search result page's clicks. One website I worked on showed an overall increase in click-through rate of over 35%, when its ad ranked first together with its number 1 ranking organic search listing. The reverse is true as well - your website could lose out on traffic if you don't have an ad above your number one ranking organic search listing. A competitor may syphon off clicks by ranking first as an ad, even if your website ranks first organically.

Ads can indirectly increase organic search traffic via the principle of attribution

I have also observed paid search behave as a stimulus for organic search traffic. In other words, paid search ads can

indirectly encourage people to click on organic search listings because of an increase in relevant brand awareness. I observed ads, which focused on keyword 'x', result in a monthly increase of over 100% in organic search-derived visits via keyword 'x' over the same period.

Targeting the purchase funnel via organic search and paid search ads

According to leading independent research by Razorfish, "our research showed at least half (53%) of conversions and revenue happening through paid search are preceded by organic search visits within the previous seven days." So, in this case organic search acted as an awareness tool, while paid search 'closed the deal' at the end of the purchase funnel.

That being said, the reverse is also true - by targeting specific keywords along the purchase funnel, organic search can be used to engage effectively with consumers at any stage of the purchase funnel. Regarding the pre-purchase and awareness part of the purchase funnel, broad, category-based keywords (and related words) would be the focus. The decision-making part of the purchase funnel would focus on product-specific keywords. I've observed a blue chip, financial services company's website receive over 80% of their leads via organic search (with an amazing overall conversion rate of 20%). This also led to the highest number of long-term clients too, eclipsing all other sources of website traffic (including paid search). This company's paid search campaign was limited.

So, depending on your budget and other variables like time, an ideal mix of organic search and paid search ads can be harnessed to achieve excellent business results.

Quality score

Another factor to consider is Google's Quality Score, which is an important element to consider when it comes to paid search. A Quality Score is a metric that is scored out of ten, which Google allocates to your prospective ad. A high Quality Score points out that your landing page (website page that your ad directs people to) is relevant to your paid search ad. Relevance refers to the contents of a landing page, which is where the strength of SEO lies.

I've seen high Quality Scores result in a lower cost per click (a cost metric relating to a company paying for each time a person clicks on its AdWords ad) and lower cost per conversion (the cost metric associated with receiving a specific business lead via the ad). Well-executed SEO on a landing page will result in a high Quality Score. Basically, the search phrases (what people Google search) you target with your ads should match the website's SEO-focused keywords. For example: A paid search campaign that targets keyword 'x' should be driven to a landing page which has been optimised for keyword 'x' too.

What should your digital agency do?

All of your brand's SEM efforts should be aligned by briefing the SEO and PPC teams at the same time regarding future marketing campaigns. The SEO team can create optimised landing pages and / or optimise existing pages to improve paid search campaign performance (indirectly via attribution and as direct landing pages). The SEO team should share SEO-related data (keywords with best CTRs and impressions etc.) with the paid search team and vice versa. Ensure paid search keywords are driven to optimised destination URLs (landing pages).

Googling things is more popular than ever

The future of SEM is bright. The consumer-related popularity of Google search within each of our client's industries is growing substantially by the day, across: mobile, tablet and desktop Google searches (in that order of significance).

There is therefore a solid business case to not only invest in SEM, as part of your company's marketing mix but also to ensure that you get it right.

ABOUT STEPHEN SANDMANN

I have a keen interest in innovative, digital marketing-lead advertising and search marketing (SEO and paid search), which I've developed through my award-winning agency and corporate career at Ogilvy, Quirk (now Mrum), Vodacom and now a specialist digital marketing consultant at Sandmann Digital.

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