

- b. Use unique & descriptive title tags on every page
- c. Your primary domain page is the most critical page
 - i. Do not use a Flash “doorway” page to your primary domain
 - ii. Avoid search engine obstacles on the home page such as:
 - 1. Flash
 - 2. Frames
 - 3. Dynamic Content

2. Linking

- a. Google PageRank does matter
- b. Soliciting unpaid/reciprocal links
- c. Paying for links in high-ranked directory sites

3. Content (Still King)

- a. On-Site
 - i. Use static HTML content
 - ii. Unique, fresh content reigns supreme
 - iii. Volume does matter
 - iv. Get sites to link to your content to help PageRank

4. Paid Search

The biggest players in paid search are Google and Overture (Yahoo). Both offer keyword suggestion tools on their sites to help you determine keywords to bid on.

Top 14 Search Engine Marketing Mistakes To Avoid

Search engine marketing has proven to be an extremely successful and effective means of achieving online sales growth, but not all Internet marketers know how to properly execute their search engine marketing campaigns. Here are some of the most common mistakes to avoid:

1. **Having No Search Marketing Strategy** - This may seem obvious, but all too often companies barely have a specific budget line item for search engine marketing let alone a strategy. Is the strategy to target certain terms for high natural search engine rankings and to buy visibility for the others with pay-per-click listings? Or is it to identify

Thorough keyword research includes considering misspellings, odd spacing and product specific variations.

high-cost pay-per-click PPC terms and target those for SEO? What means of measuring ad-cost-to-sales will be implemented, and is this tool an end-to-end solution? And is there a realistic timeline associated with achieving these goals? Before spending time or money, put together a solid plan.

- 2. Not Doing a Thorough Job of Keyword Research (& Forgetting to Think Like A Searcher)** - For each keyword that you identify for search engine marketing initiatives, there are probably two or three others that can deliver better, more targeted traffic. Misspellings, odd spacing, and product feature-specific variations should also be considered. And while some experts espouse a “more-is-better” approach to keywords, we feel this is not always the case, especially when you’re paying for all that traffic. Thorough keyword research can save money and future disappointments.
- 3. Not Establishing Performance Expectations Ahead of Time** - Sure, everyone talks about return-on-investment (ROI), but the reality is that there are many metrics that go into successfully getting a ROI and not everyone has done the “back math” to know what is even realistic. And if you launch search engine marketing campaigns without establishing benchmarks (e.g., do you really know what your max CPC could be?) and performance expectations, how will you know if you can continue your current search engine marketing efforts?
- 4. Not Enough Testing** - Setting up keyword campaigns without a testing plan is likely to result in unnecessary ad spending and poorer sales conversions than could be attained. You should be testing multiple factors: search terms, ad copy, match type, landing page content, offers, calls-to-action, etc., and there are a variety of tools that allow you to do testing: ad groups or categories in search engines, unique landing pages, and page optimizer tools.
- 5. Not Utilizing Tracking** - The blessing and curse of the Internet is how much measurable data can be tracked and collected. For search marketing, treat this as a blessing and use tracking to optimize your efforts and get the most ROI

out of the money you spend. Most web site traffic analytic tools still can't put a price on the head of your average user, so you'll need more sophisticated methods. Shopping cart, affiliate management and conversion software are some solutions; so is third party ad servers. Choose the solution that gives you the most usable data for your needs.

6. Not Attempting to Reduce the Prequalification Cycle - The less qualified your search engine traffic, the less likely you'll be to make sales from that traffic. Instead of trying to optimize your site for broad terms which attract a lot of visitors but not targeted buyers, focus on terms and demographics that lead to sales. Apply the same strategy when buying PPC keyword listings, and use your ad copy to help weed out unqualified buyers.

7. The #1 Spot Isn't Always the Best Location - Not only does the #1 paid listing cost more, it doesn't always provide the best visibility. For example, in Google, the top two paid listings may be "bumped" above the natural listings and this location might be overlooked by the searcher suffering from "banner blindness" syndrome. Conversely, Yahoo lays out its paid listings from Overture quite differently -- the #5 paid listing is actually at the top of the small right-hand boxes. We suggest testing to see what placement yields the best results.

8. Establishing a Universal Max Bid - Yes, it's good to have a max bid based on established metrics, but don't unilaterally apply that max bid to all terms if certain terms are for products that yield you more net profit. Terms with greater profits can afford higher max bids, so adjust your campaign accordingly.

9. Not Setting Up Proper Match Types - It's easy to overlook setting up and finalizing the best match type for your PPC keywords - match types can be confusing, tedious, and seemingly unimportant. But they're not! They can make the difference between a huge ad spend and a modest one, and ROI figures that meet your benchmarks vs. ones that don't.

The #1 spot isn't always the best location. The #5 paid listing on one search engine might be different on another.

All too often, companies become so obsessed with garnering top search engine rankings that they end up converting their website into something garish looking... The end result is that they may have great rankings and lousy sales.

- 10. Failing to Recognize the Importance of Dayparting** - For some advertisers, it's wiser to only run their campaigns at times of day or days of the week when their customers are more likely to be shopping. Doing so can help save money, improve conversions and cost less in customer acquisition. Daypart controls can be implemented using software tools so that it's not a manual process.
- 11. Expecting the Search Engine to Close Your Sale** - Sure, the search engine can send you traffic, but that doesn't mean that where you send them is going to close the sale. There are so many other factors that must come into play once you get the visitor to your site: the messaging on the landing page, the offer, the call(s)-to-action, the quality of the graphics, product pricing (especially when compared to other sites selling similar products), shipping & handling costs, etc. If you do your job too, search engine traffic will be much more likely to make you money.
- 12. Forgetting Second Tier PPC Engines** - You don't have to rely on only Google and Overture. There are multiple second tier PPC search engines that may also generate sales at affordable (oftentimes lower) PPCs. Don't overlook FindWhat, Kanoodle, A-Ha, Ask Jeeves, LookSmart, and others.
- 13. Giving SEO Precedence Over the User Experience** - All too often, companies become so obsessed with garnering top natural search engine rankings that they end up converting their web site into something garish-looking, with poor navigation or functionality, and with no clear marketing message. The end result is that they may have great rankings but lousy sales - don't make this mistake!
- 14. Not Considering Top Ranked Web Sites as Your Competition** - This is a crucial mistake. The fact is that top-ranked sites, be they in natural results or paid results, get more traffic than unranked sites. Just because you're a big brand company doesn't mean that at the moment of search, your potential customer knows that you sell what they're looking for or even that they'll remember you. They're going to go where the search engines direct them,

and therefore, those web sites are your competitor. Treat these competitors as you would your other competitors and get to know their strengths and weaknesses.

How to Track & Measure Online Marketing Initiatives

Your web site traffic stats can provide you with valuable information you can use to fine tune your site and generate more revenue per visitor. When you set up a direct response online ad campaign, you want to be able to measure its success. Success would be defined by the number of sales, leads or transactions that are completed on your site in comparison to what it cost you to garner those transactions. The ability to track the productivity of your marketing/ advertising spend is your ROI.

One way to measure online ROI is to implement conversion tracking tools. There are multiple software applications you can purchase and implement to help you track conversions, but when it comes to paid search campaigns, Google and Overture have their own conversion tracking tools that they currently offer for no cost. However, free may not necessarily be a good thing. You might want to review the pros and cons before leaping at a complimentary offer.

Google's Conversion Tracking Tool

To implement Google's conversion tracking system, you must already have an approved Google AdWords campaign running. Google's conversion tracking system only works with Google AdWords campaigns. Google not only offers basic conversion tracking to determine general conversions, but it also has more customizable options for advertisers who are tracking different measurements. There are four customizable tracking options called "Labels":

- 1. Purchases/Sales** - For commerce sites tracking purchases and sales to determine ROI.
- 2. Leads** - Appropriate for sales organizations interested in tracking lead generation, e.g. a request for a follow-up call.

Measuring ROI should include the use of a conversion tracking tool.

3. Sign-ups - Enables measurement of subscription sign-ups.

4. Page Views - Helps sites track how many pages an ad-generated visitor has viewed or the length of a visit.

Once you choose the label that suits you best, you install a Google-generated tracking image and JavaScript code on the page of the site where the desired sale or particular action is confirmed. The tracking image is called "Site Stats" and is visible to the user on the advertiser's site. The implementation process for Google's conversion tracking requires knowledge of basic HTML, so if that's not your competency, be prepared to involve your webmaster.

Google conversion tracking works by placing a cookie on a searcher's computer when s/he clicks on an ad. If the searcher makes it to the confirmation page containing the tracking image, the cookie sends a notification to Google's server that makes the connection between the ad click and the final transaction.

Overture's (Yahoo's) "Conversion Counter"

Overture's Conversion Counter is available only to Overture advertisers and like Google, Conversion Counter only works with Overture campaigns. Conversion Counter tracks overall conversions for your Overture campaign as well as for individual keywords and match types.

The set-up process works like Google's, though Overture doesn't offer the various tracking options that Google does and Overture only provides a line of HTML code to embed in the confirmation page. Overture's tracking then works in the same manner as Google's.

Pros of Google & Overture Tracking

By utilizing conversion tracking tools, an advertiser can truly get a better understanding of the impact of their campaign and ad spend. Using the data provided by conversion tracking, an advertiser can both determine what keywords to invest in for the best results and the overall ROI for its particular ad campaigns. If you are running an AdWords

campaign, for example, you will not only be able to see how many clicks you get on each keyword (data that's provided in the AdWords advertiser dashboard), but you will also be able to see how these keywords perform in terms of sales.

Just because you have a lot of clicks or a strong click-thru rate doesn't mean that you're making money or generating the desired end result from the clicks you're paying for. In fact, the very opposite might happen and without a means to measure your conversions, you wouldn't know. That's why, if you don't have your own means to do conversion tracking, considering these free options from Google and Overture might be a good idea.

If these tools are not right for you, there are always others, but in the words of department store tycoon, John Wanamaker, "Half my advertising is wasted, I just don't know which half." If conversion tracking was around then, he might have a better idea!

Email is Not Just About Building Newsletters

Despite the spam deluge, email is still the #1 activity people do online. How, even after receiving so much negative attention and the passage of federal legislation against spamming, could legitimate email marketing still be succeeding? Let's take a look:

- 1. Email directly improves sales.** Customers receive a promotional email, go to your site, and can instantly make a purchase. Well-managed email campaigns can only help build and reinforce the trust your customer has with you. Through a series of successful transactions such as these, you can build loyal, longstanding relationships.
- 2. Email results can be measured.** Nearly every aspect of an email marketing campaign can be tracked: click-thrus and sales by subscriber by campaign, who is looking at what, when they are doing so, and how they are doing it. Target geographic regions and past customers and by using email to sales conversion targeting, optimize your internal emailings to target subscribers by preferences or buying habits.

Nearly every aspect of an email marketing campaign can be tracked: click-thrus and sales by subscriber by campaign, know who is looking at what, when they are doing so and how they are doing it.

3. Email allows for a flow of communication. Your customers can easily contact you as well as receive responses in a timely manner. This is great for customer relations.

4. Email has competitive advantages over direct mail.

Reduced lead time; cuts in production, printing, and postage costs; and virtually immediate response rates are the capstones of successful email marketing campaigns. In-house lists compiled of past customers, buyer survey participants, and users requesting “more information” are the most cost effective and response-driven way of building successful email campaigns.

How to Make Email Marketing Work for You

Marketers shouldn't expect to simply build a list, throw together a message, send it out via email, and expect to succeed. “Marketers must manage their campaigns with skill to obtain the full benefits of online direct marketing,” advises Jupiter Media. Easier said than done. Here's a short list of ideas:

1. Always work to cultivate your email lists, the more advanced, the better. In addition to offering a means to sign up for email offers both on and offline, consider the ability to segment or “slice and dice” your email lists in numerous ways. The most sophisticated of email marketers know the sex, age, tastes, and response behaviors of their subscribers.

2. Personalization is key. Instead of sending mass boilerplate messages, personalize your emails with greetings (Dear Bob) and by merging other personalized fields that your list members entered while subscribing.

3. Create solid messages. Pay attention to the detail of the email content itself -- be precise, offer dramatic savings, create urgency, list contact information, and give concrete facts/figures/product detail.

4. Purge addresses that are blocked or do not exist. If your email list is full of blocked or non-existent addresses, don't spend money sending promotional emails to them.

Consider the ability to segment or “slice and dice” your email lists in numerable ways.

...messages sent Wednesday and Thursdays are shown to receive heightened interest.

Keep your email list fresh and responsive by updating it regularly.

5. Always try to improve your conversion rate. Conversion rates are the ratio of emails or clicks to selected conversions, such as sales or lead generations. No matter what the conversion rate is, you should incessantly look to increase it.

Testing the Success of Your Email

Test, test, test. There are many aspects of an opt-in email that can be tested; here are a few:

- **Subject Line** - The subject line is the headline of the email, test different subjects and their email open rates. Catch the interest of the user in the inbox.
- **Sender Field** - Who is the email from? Test open and response rates from personalized sender fields (a name) or by using the company name.
- **HTML vs. Text** - Both have their advantages and disadvantages, but when sending out both HTML and text emails (to subscribers that choose their preference) be sure to keep both formats in mind.
- **Type of Offer** - What works better for your audience? Promoting products? Discount coupons and offers? Sound information with affiliate links? If you are sending your email for commercial purposes, the type of offer is critical.
- **Call to Action** - So your readers are interested in your product or service. Now it's time to get them to act. Test different calls to action such as links, buttons, and clickable graphics. Furthermore, where does the call to action lead? Directly to the sales order page or to more onsite product information?
- **Day of Delivery** - Some days have been shown to get better email responses than others. Monday and Friday are believed to be off days for some, while messages sent on Wednesday and Thursday are shown to receive heightened interest. Test your readership behavior and response rates for various days and times, then settle on one schedule.

- **Splitting Your List** - Not sure which email format or offer works best? Try splitting your list into test groups, testing the different email styles. Monitor opening rates and response rates for each group, then decide on the best email style to integrate into your entire list.

How to Use the Web to Enhance Public Relations Efforts

Press Releases

A press release is one of the most fundamental ways to send out your company news. The two most critical components are the headline and the first paragraph. Why? Because they will have the greatest impact on whether or not your press release is read and acted upon by a journalist or editor. Hundreds, potentially thousands of press releases and newswire items cross a journalist's desk every day -- you need to make yours stand out. The headline needs to grab attention, while the first paragraph needs to substantiate it and summarize the purpose all at once.

The Headline:

- Be as concise as possible (don't exceed more than 2 lines)
- Every word should help tell the story (avoid small, insignificant word like prepositions, articles and pronouns)
- Keep it in active tense ("XYZ Company Executed..." vs. "...was Executed by XYZ Company")
- Punch it up (with stats, humor, intrigue -- one of the greatest responses I ever got was from a press release with the headline: "How 10 Years of Stuffing My Face Led to Internet Enterprise")

First Paragraph:

- To summarize the facts for the journalist receiving your press release you'll want to answer the "5 essential W's + one H" of public relations -- Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How?

- Start by giving the geographical location of the news story source in parentheses (ex. Aberdeen, MD) -- that's the where.
- Then write a first sentence that really wows the reader (you want them to say in their minds, "Ok, you've caught my interest. Now I'm ready to read more.")
- For Internet purposes, be sure to include a hyperlink to your site or to a specific page of the site. And don't forget to use "http://" before your url. Not all email readers automatically translate urls into clickable links without it.

Second Paragraph:

- You might want to quote a top official involved in the news of your release. Get something substantial so it's worth reprinting.
- If there's nothing to quote, you can also try the industry statistics approach. Don't forget to include the source of your statistics so the reporter can double-check your facts.

Closing Paragraph:

- Write a standard blurb about your organization like what you do, how long you've existed, your purpose/mission, and other noteworthy points.

How to End a Press Release:

- Vestigial from days of old, characters or codes were inserted at the bottom of a press release to indicate that the reader had come to the end. These codes are still common practice today. Acceptable are three number signs in a row (###) or -30-.

What do you do with a press release after you write it? You can't simply wait around for someone to pick up the news and run with it. So how do you find these PR opportunities?

First, use the email PR notification services. These are subscription-based (some for a fee) services that send you emails about members of the press or freelancers looking to make contact with sources for their articles. The notification usually includes the name of the journalist, a description of what they're writing about and the kind of person they'd like

	<p>to talk to, and an email address to contact. Examples of such notification services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• XPress Press I-PR Newsletter (http://www.xpresspress.com/ipr.html)• Bacon's (http://www.bacons.com/)
<p>Another way to find out about PR opportunities is to participate in email discussion lists about your subject.</p>	<p>Another way to find out about PR opportunities is to participate in email discussion lists about the subject. Not only will you learn more about online PR, but you can also catch postings from members of the press who subscribe and post requests for stories they are writing. Some good discussion lists include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Young PR Pros (http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/youngprpros/)• The PR/Marketing Forum (http://www.cfnaonline.com/discus/board.html)• Progressive PR Professionals (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Progressive_PR_NYC/) <p>However, learning about PR opportunities doesn't automatically mean that you're going to get you some publicity. There's a certain amount of etiquette, experience, and appropriate fit that goes into garnering press exposure.</p> <p>In the case of the press notifications where you're gaining access to the opportunity and you have to contact the journalist to be accepted for their story, your initial email to them can make or break your bid for publicity. Here are a few tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write a compelling and matching subject header (a good example for this circumstance might be, "Responding to Your Press Request")• Get your facts together - always answer the 5 "W's": who, what, where, when, why (and how)• Be brief - get the above facts out in 2-3 sentences. No more than one paragraph.• Link to a web site - if you've got more to say or more information for the journalist, link them to your web site so they can learn more if they're interested.

- Do not harrass a journalist! If you do not hear back from a member of the press, it likely means that you did not have enough compelling information for them. Take it with a grain of salt and move on. Do NOT consider badgering these folks to be included in their story. It will likely only lead to you never being featured in anything they write.

About Immersion Active and WebAdvantage

Immersion Active is the interactive design and marketing firm for the 50+ market. WebAdvantage is an advertising agency specialized in online direct response marketing. Together Immersion Active and WebAdvantage build targeted emarketing campaigns that cross multiple channels and yeild the most cost effective results for our clients.

To read case studies from Immersion Active's work with WebAdvantage, visit:
www.immersionactive.com