Rob Stokes

eMarketing The Essential Guide to Online Marketing

Contribution:

O E R

Open Educational Resources
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eMarketing

the essential guide to online marketing

Rob Stokes

and the minds of Quirk

advance quotes about eMarketing:
the essential guide to online marketing

¨Quirk's eMarketing handbook covers all the most important concepts which are necessary for eMarketing excellence today. I would highly recommend it as both a study guide and a practitioner's reference manual. Congratulations to the QuirkStars on all the thought, research and work that has obviously gone into this.¨

Dave Duarte, founder and director of Nomadic Marketing, UCT Graduate School of Business

¨WOW! It is an inspiration to see such a well written and truly essential guide to online marketing being written by South Africans! *eMarketing: The Essential Guide to Online Marketing* should be read and referenced by every smart marketer who is dealing with the complicated world of eMarketing.¨

Bronwen Auret, Online Marketing Specialist, South African Tourism

¨The perfect starting point for anyone entering the world of online marketing.... truly impressive.¨

Stafford Masie, Country Manager, Google South Africa

¨I've known Quirk for many years and it's very exciting to see all their experience distilled into this textbook. Furthermore, their contribution to Open Education by licensing this book under Creative Commons is an initiative I strongly support. Read this book.¨

Scott Gray, Interactive Marketing, BMW South Africa

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preface

When I started Quirk almost 10 years ago, it was yet another one of my crazy entrepreneurial adventures. I had little idea back then of what Quirk would grow into today.

There are key moments that stand out for me as having shaped Quirk. I could count the joining of Craig Raw and Janine Carpenter and the experiences learned in building our first email application in the early days of Quirk as two of them. But there is one incident that started a journey for me personally; in 2001 a fantastic man named Colin Palmer invited me to give a talk on email marketing at a Direct Marketing Association breakfast. It was my first real public speaking experience and I was scared witless, but I had a lot of fun.

But it was Colin's next invitation when the education bug really bit me. He invited me to lecture to his third year Business Science Marketing students at the University of Cape Town I had been in that very class only two years before, so I began the lecture with mixture of nerves and excitement. Two things happened at the end of the lecture that changed me. The first was the questions from the students. Some were easy, but some really challenged me and I found myself having to think in ways I didn't expect. The second was a student who came up to me and thanked me for the lecture, and told me she had learned something valuable. That is still one of the greatest experiences I have ever had.

Sadly, Colin passed away a few years later, but I learned a huge amount from him in the time that I knew him and for that I am very grateful. He showed me how rewarding it is to give someone knowledge; it was enlightening. Thank you, Colin.

From that day on I was hooked. I am passionate about online marketing and I wanted to tell the world and have them share my passion. This has led me to all manner of teaching experiences, from awesome post graduate marketing schools like Red and Yellow in Cape Town, to conferences on the other side of the planet.

Over the years, Quirk has become a busy agency and unfortunately my time has become more and more scarce. This has meant I've been able to embrace fewer of the teaching and speaking opportunities than I would have wanted. Thankfully I seem to have infected many of the QuirkStars to carry the torch without me and Quirk has become a company where we are all passionate about sharing our knowledge.

Since Quirk's inception, we have been steadily building a huge amount of informative content around the various elements of online marketing. This turned into our eMarketing 101 series, almost a mini version of this book. When I read about the Open Education Declaration in September 2007, I knew exactly what Quirk should do. We needed to take all our knowledge, experience and educational content and create a textbook that we could share with the world by licensing it under Creative Commons. The Open Education Declaration was signed in Cape Town and it aims to accelerate efforts to promote open educational resources, technology and teaching practices. Quirk has always been an agency which is fanatical about Open Source technology, and this seemed a perfect fit. It's almost a culmination of everything we stand for as an organisation.

So here we are with a book that I'm terribly proud of. It's been much harder than we thought to put it together with many late nights and missed deadlines, but every minute has been worth it. In particular I should point out the tireless work of the lovely Sarah Blake. Without her this book could not have come together like it has. Not only did she write a huge amount of it, but she has been instrumental in ensuring that we can make this contribution to education with the confidence that we are doing something of the highest quality.

From the bottom of my heart I want to thank my team and everyone who has helped to make this idea a reality. I've been involved with many exciting clients and projects over the lifetime of Quirk, but I can honestly say this is the project I am most proud of. This book is a distillation of all of Quirk's knowledge and to be able to offer it to all without boundaries and limitations is a privilege. I can only hope that others follow across all spheres of education and understanding. I believe education is the one thing that can change the world and in particular my South Africa. It's up to those with knowledge to do what they can to put it in the hands of others.

Please enjoy our book and share it with others...

Rob Stokes

About the Open Education Declaration and the Creative Commons

The Cape Town Open Education Declaration is the product of a meeting in Cape Town of a coalition of educators, foundations, and Internet pioneers in September 2007. The meeting was organised by the Open Society Institute and the Shuttleworth Foundation. Linux entrepreneur Mark Shuttleworth said, "Open sourcing education doesn't just make learning more accessible, it makes it more collaborative, flexible and locally relevant." The Declaration's principles of openness in education and the sharing of knowledge resonate strongly with us.

To show our commitment to the Open Education Declaration, all of the contents of this textbook are freely available, as are supporting materials for lecturers and for students. We know how quickly things change when it comes to the Internet, so we are committed to regular updates of this resource. A free download of the textbook and further materials and resources are available at www.quirk.biz/emarketingtextbook.

For more information on the Open Education Declaration, and to add your name to the list of individuals committed to this cause, you can go to www.capetowndeclaration.org.

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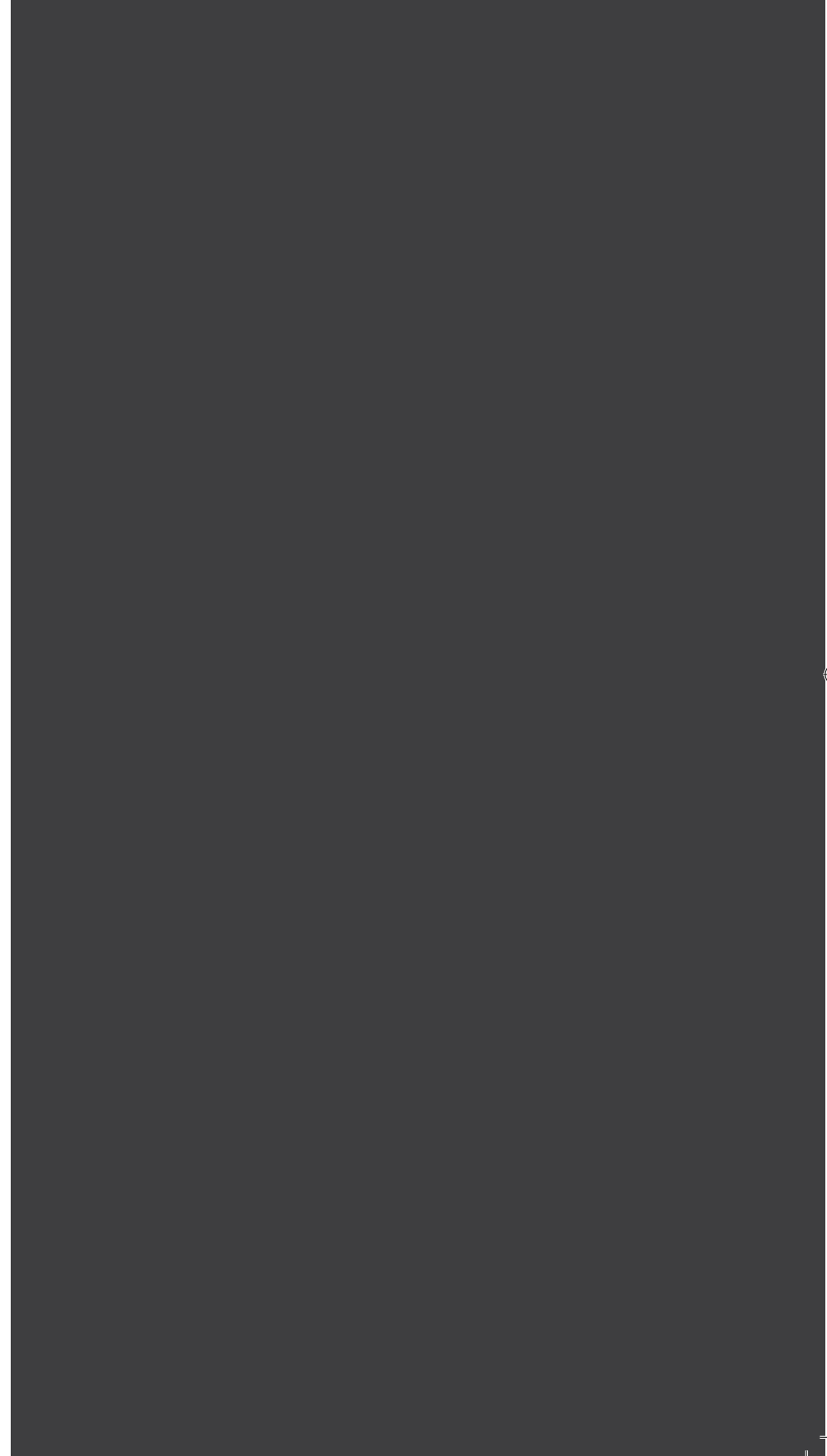For more information on the Creative Commons, please visit www.creativecommons.org.

contents

1. introduction to eMarketing

introduction

There is no doubt about it – the Internet has changed the world we live in. Never before has it been so easy to access information, communicate with people all over the globe and share articles, videos, photos and all manner of media.

The Internet has led to an increasingly connected environment, and the growth of Internet usage has resulted in declining distribution of traditional media: television, radio, newspapers and magazines. Marketing in this connected environment and using that connectivity to market is eMarketing.

eMarketing embraces a wide range of strategies, but what underpins successful eMarketing is a user-centric and cohesive approach to these strategies.

While the Internet and the World Wide Web have enabled what we call New Media, the theories that lead to the development of the Internet were being developed from the 1950s.

a brief timeline of Internet developments

1958	US ARPA (advanced research projects agency) established to lead science and military technological developments.
1961	MIT research paper of Packet Switching Theory.
1961-69	Ongoing research into inter-computer communications and networks.
1969	ARPANET, commissioned by US Defense Department, goes live.
	US universities connect up network facilities for the first time.
1971	Ray Tomlinson creates first network email application.
1973	Development of protocols to enable multi-network Internet opportunities.
	First international ARPANET connections made.
1976	HM Queen Elizabeth II sends an email.
1978	First spam email is recorded.
1980	Tim Berners-Lee develops rules for the World Wide Web and is credited as the Web Father.
	Alan Emtage develops the first search tool known as 'ARCHIE'.
1982	Standard network protocols are established: Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) and Internet Protocol (IP), commonly referred to as TCIP/IP.
1984	Joint Academic Network (JANET) is established, linking higher education institutions.
	Domain Name System (DNS) is introduced.
1985	A company named Symbolics becomes the first registered dot.com domain.
1987	National Science Foundation (US) is the catalyst for the surge in funded work into the Internet.
	Number of Internet hosts increases significantly in this period.
1988-90	28 countries sign up to hook up to the NSFNET, reinforcing international Internet potential.

1990	Senator Al Gore coins the term 'information superhighway'.
1991	Web Father, Tim Berners-Lee releases World Wide Web (www) with scientists from CERN.
1992	America Online (AOL) is launched and raises $23m in floatation.
	The term 'surfing the net' is introduced by Jean Armour Polly.
	The World Bank goes online.
1993	Mainstream media attention increases awareness of the Internet.
	First Internet publication. Wired, goes on sale.
	Mosaic introduces the first web browser with graphical interface and is the forerunner of Netscape Navigator.
	First online shopping malls and virtual banks emerge as does evidence of spam.
	First clickable banner advert is sold by Global Network Navigator to a law firm.
1995	Amazon is launched by Jeff Bezos.
	Trial dial up systems such as AOL and CompuServe launch.
	Charging is introduced for domain names.
	Search technology companies such as Alta Vista, Infoseek, Excite and Metacrawler rapidly appear.
1996	Yahoo! is launched on the stock exchange and shares are up nearly 300% on first day.
1997	MP3.com is founded.
	The term "search engine optimisation" is used for the first time in a forum.
1998	XML is released to enable compatibility between different computer systems.
	Google founded by Larry Page and Sergey Brin.
1999	Peter Merholz coins the word "blog".
2000	AOL and Time-Warner announce they are merging.
	Pay-per-Click campaigns are introduced for top ten search rankings.
	Google AdWords launches, charging for adverts on a CPM basis.
2002	UK online monthly consumer shopping breaks through the £1 billion barrier.
	Google AdWords charges on a PPC basis instead of CPM.
2003	eBay topples Amazon as the most visited UK web site.
2004	CD-WOW loses court case and rights to source cheaper CDs outside EU, undermining the global concept of the Internet.
2005	Iceland leads the world with broadband penetration: 26.7 inhabitants per 100 have broadband compared with 15.9 per 100 in the UK.
2006	Google buys YouTube for $1.6 billion.
	Facebook membership opens to anyone.
	Technorati notes that a blog is created every second of every day.
	Time Magazine names "You" as person of the year, due to online activity.
2008	Firefox 3.0 launches with over 8 million downloads in 24 hours.
	Internet usage tops 1,407,724,920 worldwide.

source: Gay (2007)

While the Internet was developed in order for academic and military institutions to share data, it has become a sharing tool for anyone with an Internet connection the world over.

it's all about being connected

In its simplest form, the Internet is a collection of connected documents or objects. Hyperlinks are what connect these documents.

A hyperlink is a virtual link from one document on the World Wide Web to another. It includes the URL of the linked-to document which describes where on the Internet a document is. It is what you enter in the address bar of the browser, because it is the address of that document on the Internet.

A URL provides information to both browsers and people. URLs include domain names which translate to IP addresses. Every web site corresponds to an IP address, which is a structured series of dots and numbers indicating where it is physically located. When you enter a URL into the address bar of a browser, the Domain Name System record indicates where the document is that you are linking to. Many domains can translate to the same IP address.

Confused? Look at the domain name and IP address for Quirk's web site:

Domain name: www.quirk.biz
IP address: 212.100.243.204

A domain name looks something like this:

www.domainname.com

But a lot more information can be included in this. Domain names can carry the following information:

subdomain.domain.tld/directory

- **Domain** - the registered domain name of the web site
- **Subdomain** - a domain that is part of a larger domain
- **tld** – the top level domain, uppermost in the hierarchy of domain names
- **Directory** – a folder to organise content

The tld can indicate the country in which a domain is registered, and can also give information about the nature of the domain.
- **.com** – is the most common tld
- **.co.za, .co.uk, .com.au** – these tlds give country information
- **.org** – used by non-profit organisations
- **.gov** – used by governments
- **.ac** – used by academic institutions

Domain names must be registered and there is a fee for doing so.

how do people access the Internet?

People connect to the Internet and access content in many different ways. When it comes to the physical connection to the Internet, the market presents a number of options:

- Dial-up
- 3G
- WiFi and WiMax
- Broadband
- ADSL

And that list goes on. The devices people use vary from mobile phones and handheld small devices to personal notebooks and desktop computers. The environment that people are in when they access the Internet also differs:

- At home
- At the office or place of work
- Libraries and education centres
- Internet cafes and coffee shops

Not only do these environmental factors affect how people use the Internet, but their reasons for using the Internet also have an effect on how they interact online.

For some people, it is primarily a communications channel, and their online activity is focused on their email inbox, while for others it may be a research channel, with search engines playing a large role in their online experience.

Having such a diverse audience means that there are many channels available to marketers when it comes to eMarketing.

what does this all have to do with marketing?

Marketing is about conversations, and the Internet has become a hub of conversations. The connected nature of the Internet allows us to follow and track these conversations, and provides entry points for all parties. What follows in this book are ways of conversing with potential and existing customers using the Internet.

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further reading

Tim Berners-Lee's Answers for Young People is a brief outline of how he invented the World Wide Web:
www.w3.org/People/Berners-Lee/Kids.
His book *Weaving the Web: The Original Design and Ultimate Destiny of the World Wide Web* covers this in far more depth.

sethgodin.typepad.com
– the blog from Seth Godin, best-selling author, entrepreneur and agent of change.

2. email marketing

What's inside: An **introduction** to email marketing, and a brief **history** of email, which predates the World Wide Web. Get started with **key terms and concepts** and then learn how it works with the difference between promotions and newsletters. Learn the **9 steps to executing an email campaign**, as well as the parts of an email. Get started with some basic **tools of the trade**, the **pros and cons** of email marketing, and a **chapter summary** and a look at **how it all fits together.**

introduction

At its core, email marketing is a tool for customer relationship management (CRM). Used effectively, this extension of permission based marketing can deliver one of the highest return on investment (ROI) of any eMarketing activity.

Simply put, email marketing is a form of direct marketing which utilises electronic means to deliver commercial messages to an audience. It is one of the oldest and yet still one of the most powerful of all eMarketing tactics. The power comes from the fact that it is:

- Extremely cost effective due to a low cost per contact
- Highly targeted
- Customisable on a mass scale
- Completely measurable

Furthermore, email marketing's main strength is that it takes advantage of a customer's most prolific touch point with the Internet... their inbox.

Email marketing is a tool for building relationships with both existing and potential customers. It should maximise the retention and value of these customers, which should ultimately lead to greater profitability.

history

Email is probably ubiquitous to you, but there was a time when there was no email!

Email actually predates the Internet, and was first used as a way for users of the same computer to leave messages for each other all the way back in 1961. Ray Tomlinson is credited with creating the first network email application in 1971. He initiated the use of the @ sign and the address structure that we use today (username@hostname) (Crocker). Email was used to send messages to computers on the same network, and is still used for this purpose today.

It was only in 1993 that large network service providers, such as America Online and Delphi, started to connect their proprietary email systems to the Internet. This began the large scale adoption of Internet email as a global standard. Coupled with standards that had been created in the preceding twenty years, the Internet allowed users on different networks to send each other messages.

The first email spam dates back to 1978. Spam is defined as unsolicited commercial or bulk email, and today is said to account for 80 to 85% of all email (Waters 2008)!

Direct marketing has long played an integral part in marketing campaigns, but the high cost meant that only large companies were able to pursue this. However, with the growth of the Internet, and the use of email to market directly to consumers, marketers have found these costs dropping, and the effectiveness increasing.

key terms and concepts

B2B Stands for Business to Business. When businesses sell products/services to other businesses and not to consumers.

B2C Stands for Business to consumers. When businesses sell products/services to consumers.

Call to action A CTA is a phrase written to motivate the reader to take action. (sign up for our newsletter, book car hire today etc.).

CAN-SPAM The U.S. law that regulates commercial email. It stands for "Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act of 2003."

CRM Customer Relationship Management.

Database In email marketing, the database is the list of prospects to whom emails are sent. It also contains additional information pertinent to the prospects.

DNS (Domain Name System) DNS converts a domain name into an IP address.

DomainKeys An email authentication system designed to verify the DNS domain of an email sender and the message integrity.

Double opt-in The act of getting subscribers to confirm their initial subscription via a follow up email asking them to validate their address and hence opt-in again.

Hard bounce The failed delivery of email communication due to an undeviating reason like a non-existent address.

House list An email database that a company generates itself without purchasing or renting names.

HTML HyperText Markup Language. HTML emails usually contain graphics and can be interactive.

IP Address The Internet Protocol (IP) address is a exclusive number, which is used to represent every single computer in a network.

ISP Internet Service Provider – this is the company that is providing you with access to the Internet e.g. MWEB, AOL, Yahoo! etc).

Open rate The percent of emails determined as opened out of the total number of emails sent.

Opt-in Give permission for emails to be sent to you.

Opt-out Also known as unsubscribe - The act of removing oneself from a list or lists so that specified information is no longer received via email.

Sender ID A method used by major ISPs to confirm that emails do originate from the domain from which it claims to have been sent.

SMTP Simple Mail Transfer Protocol is a protocol for sending messages from one server to another.

Soft bounce The failed delivery of an email due to a deviating reason like an overloaded mail box or a server failure.

Spam Email sent to someone who has not requested to receive it - EVIL!

SPF Sender policy framework is an extension of SMTP that stops email spammers from forging the "From" fields in an email.

Text Text emails or plain text emails do not contain graphics or any kind of markup.

Unique forwarders This refers to the number of individuals who forwarded a specific email on.

White list A list of accepted email addresses that an ISP, a subscriber or other email service provider allows to deliver messages regardless of spam filter settings.

how it works

If you consider marketing as communicating with current and potential customers, you will see that every email that is sent from your organisation should be considered as part of your email marketing plan.

Does that sound a little complicated? Consider an online retailer, www.zappos.com. Zappos is an online shoe retailer. What are the ways that, as a customer, you might receive emails from Zappos?

1. Transaction emails: when you place an order, there will be a number of emails that you receive, from confirmation of your order, to notice of shipping. Should you need to return an item, you will no doubt communicate with Zappos via email.
2. Newsletters: these are emails which are sent to provide information and keep customers informed. They do not necessarily carry an overt promotion, but instead ensure that a customer is in regular contact with the brand.
3. Promotion emails: should Zappos have a summer sale, they will send an email relating directly to that promotion.

There are other emails sent by Zappos, for example:

1. Emails to suppliers
2. Communication with affiliates

All of the communication sent out can be used to convey your marketing message. Every touchpoint will market the organisation. However, here we will focus on commercial emails.

There are two types of commercial emails:

Promotional emails: these are more direct and are geared at enticing the user to take an immediate action.

Retention based emails: also referred to as **newsletters**, these may include promotional messages but should be focussed on providing information of value to the user, geared at building a long term relationship with the user.

As with all eMarketing activities, careful planning is called for, as is careful testing and evaluating, so as to optimise your revenue. Email marketing may be highly cost effective, but the cost of getting it wrong can be very high indeed.

9 steps to executing an email campaign

9 steps to executing an email campaign

1. strategic planning

The first part of any email campaign should involve planning around the goals you will need to achieve. These will probably be in line with the goals of your web site, with email marketing being used as a tool to help you achieve those goals.

As discussed in the chapter on analytics and conversion optimisation, you will decide on the key performance indicators (KPIs) for your campaign as well.

Promotional emails will usually have an immediate goal:
• Users make a purchase
• Users download a whitepaper
• Users request further information

Newsletters tend to focus on longer term goals, and so your KPIs become more important here.

KPIs include:
- Open rate
- Click-through rate
- Number of emails forwarded
- ROI

A successful email campaign is most likely to be the one geared at retaining and creating a long term relationship with the reader.

Know your audience! They will dictate the interactions.

2. define list

Running a successful email campaign requires that a business has a genuine opt-in database. This database, the list of subscribers who have agreed to allow a company to send them emails with marketing messages, is the most valuable asset of an email campaign.

Permission must be explicitly given by all people to whom emails are sent. Companies that abuse this can put their reputation in jeopardy, and in some countries, legal action can be taken against companies that send unsolicited bulk email – spam.

Growing this database, while keeping it targeted, is a key factor in any email campaign.

The database needs only have one entry – the prospect's email – but the following should also be considered:
- First name, surname and title
- Date permission granted
- Source of permission
- Gender
- Country
- Telephone number
- Date of birth

Fields such as name, surname and title should be separated in your database. You should also gather date of birth as opposed to a prospect's age – it ensures your database can stay up to date!

However, don't be tempted to ask for more information than is required. The more information a marketer can gather, the better she can customise her marketing messages. However, the more information a prospect is required to give, the less likely he is to sign up. Further information can be requested over a period of time.

There are a myriad of ways to attract prospects to opt in to a database. Key is an email sign-up form on a company web site. Visitors to a web site have already expressed an interest in a company by clicking through to the web site – this is an opportunity to develop that interest further.

Sign-up forms best practice:
- Put the sign-up form where it can be seen – above the fold and on every page.
- State your anti-spam stance explicitly, and be clear about how you value subscribers' privacy.
- Use a clear call to action.
- Tell subscribers what they will get, and how often they will get it. Include a benefit statement.
- Ensure the email address is correct by checking the syntax.
- Test to see what works best!

Every interaction can be used to ask permission to send emails.
1. Offer something valuable for free, and ask if they would sign up to your newsletter at the same time (e.g. white paper, gift voucher, music track).
2. Add a subscribe box to the checkout process of your retail site.
3. Use interactions at trade shows to ask for email addresses.

3. creative execution

Emails can be created and viewed as HTML or as text emails. Bear in mind, though, that sometimes HTML emails are rendered as text emails.

Text emails are the plain ones – text only, as the name suggests. If you have a Windows computer, and you open up notepad and type there, you will be creating a text file. These emails are smaller, and plainer. As these are text only, the copy really counts here.

HTML emails are the emails with all the bells and whistles. These emails can contain images, different fonts and hyperlinks. It's probably what you've had in mind throughout this chapter when we have referred to email marketing.

parts of an email
header

This has the "to", "from" and "reply to" fields. These are also opportunities to build a relationship through creating a perception of familiarity. In other words, the reader needs to perceive that the newsletter is somewhat unique for them and sent personally by the publisher. Using a personalised company email address (e.g. trevor@companyname.com) for the "reply" field creates familiarity and builds trust with the reader. The "from" address should also include the organisation's name. A meaningless "from" address which the reader cannot identify only serves to confuse the origin of the newsletter.

subject line

The subject line could be the most important part of an email! Subject lines aid the reader in identifying the email, and also entice the reader to open it. The subject line is also scrutinised by spam filters, and so should avoid words like "free", "win" and "buy now". Consistent subject lines, using the name of the company and the newsletter edition, can build familiarity and help readers to sort their inbox. As with everything online, testing different subject lines will lead marketers to the formula that works for them.

personalised greeting

With a database that has entries for readers' names, it is possible to personalise the greeting of the email. "Hi Kim Morgan" can elicit far better responses than "Dear Valued Customer", but it is possible to create a greeting with personality without personalising it. Occasionally, the subject line can be personalised as well to boost responses.

body

This is where the content of the email goes. Don't be tempted to use too many images: it can increase the size of the email, and it can obscure text when images do not load. Be sure that text is not on the image, but rather can be read without an image being loaded.

footer

A standard footer for emails helps to build consistency, and is the customary place to keep the contact details of the company sending the email. At the very least, this should include the name and contact email of the company. It can also include the privacy policy of the sender. One way to grow the email list is add a "forward to a friend" link in the footer. The most important part of the footer is a clear unsubscribe link.

unsubscribe link

It is mandatory to have an unsubscribe link on all commercial emails.

Interactive emails are best constructed with lightweight HTML capability allowing the email to open quickly. This helps to capture the user's attention before he/she moves on. The structure must allow readers to scan and navigate the email easily. The length of paragraphs, emphasis through bolding and colours as well as sectioning information with bullets and borders all contribute to a well-structured email.

create content

Email content that is relevant and something that readers will value, is vital to ensuring the success of an email marketing campaign. Valuable content is informative and should address the problems and needs of readers. It is important to realise that the reader determines the value of the content, not the publisher.

HTML email with mentioned elements shown

Successful email campaigns provide value to their readers. This value can vary from campaign to campaign. Newsletters can offer:

- Humour
- Research
- Information
- Promotions

However, avoid being marked as spam by staying away from words like "free", "buy now" and "discount".

test for display and deliverability

The email should be scored to see that it will pass spam filters, and the design should be tested to ensure that it renders clearly in as many clients as possible. Make sure that images line up, that copy is clear and that all the links work.

Emails can be tested for platform compatibility at www.sitevista.com/email.asp.

An email's spam score can be checked at spamassassin.apache.org.

4. integrate campaign with other channels

Whilst email marketing can operate as a stand alone marketing campaign, integrating it with other channels, both online and offline, will serve to both reinforce a brand's message and increase responses.

There should never be a disparity between the content, tone or design of an email when compared to the rest of a company's offerings. In-store promotions can be reinforced and promoted to an email database, or web site information can be summarised for email.

Custom landing pages, as required, should be created for any promotions being communicated in an email communication.

5. personalise the message

The technology of email marketing allows for mass customisation – it is one to one marketing on a macro scale. Even simple personalisation can see improved results.

Customisation starts at using the recipient's name and sending either HTML or text emails based on preference, to sophisticated measurement of a recipient's preferences and tailoring content to suit them.

Segmenting a database can allow for customisation across demographics or purchase history. Being able to reconcile browsing activity to an email recipient can give further opportunities for customisation.

note

An email client is the software or programme that a person uses to access their email. Some of these are web-based, like GoogleMail and Hotmail, and there are also plenty of software clients. As well as many versions of Outlook, there is also Thunderbird, Eudora, Lotus to mention just a few. And yes, your email could look different on each one of those.

6. deployment

By creating valuable content, establishing the correct frequency, and testing an email for display and deliverability, an email marketer should be able to ensure an excellent delivery rate. Consistency in deploying newsletters also aids in fostering trust and fulfilling expectation. Emails should be delivered at consistent times, but the best time for best results should be tested.

Email reputation, which can determine whether or not your message is regarded as spam, is the general opinion of the ISPs, the anti-spam community, and then subscribers towards a sender's IP address, sending domain, or both. This opinion is a reputation score created by an ISP or a third party provider. If the sender's score falls within the ISP's thresholds, a sender's messages will be delivered to the inbox. If not, the sender's emails may arrive in the bulk folder, be quarantined, or be bounced back to the sender.

Becoming an effective email marketer requires constant list cleansing and hygiene. In fact, most lists shrink by 30% each year due to subscribers changing email addresses. Make sure you are diligent about maintaining a current opt-in list to achieve maximum deliverability via reputation.

Tips to help reputation score:

- ISPs offer various sender's authentication standards such as Sender ID, SPF, and DomainKeys. Use these.
- Out with the old, in with the new – keep your database clean.
- Remove hard bounces after 3 deliveries (ISPs don't like e-mail broadcasters who have a high bounce rate).
- Remember that a huge but inaccurate and outdated database is far less use to an email marketer than a tightly-maintained, smaller database. Strive to boost your database, but don't forget to clean behind you as you go.
- Ensure email broadcast rates are not too high.
- Respond to complaints and unsubscribe requests – if someone requests to be unsubscribed, do so.
- Educate users about white lists.

note

An email white list is a list of contacts that the user deems are acceptable to receive email from and should not be sent to the trash folder

When to send mails:

Common sense tells you not on Monday morning or Friday afternoon, but it varies by audience. Testing will guide you.

If the recipient has given permission to be sent marketing messages by email, then it is not spam. Users give permission when they tick a box that says "Yes, please send me offers from your company by email." The email address can only be provided to another company if the user ticks a box that says "Yes, please send me offers from third parties selected by you by email."

note

When is email an email, and when is it spam? Spam is unsolicited bulk email – it means that the recipient never gave permission to be sent that email.

Permission must be explicitly given to the company to be allowed to market to that user. Trying to gain explicit permission in a sneaky way will only annoy your users, and might result in your emails being marked as spam.

7. interaction handling

As well as the emails strategically planned as part of a campaign (promotional emails and newsletters) every interaction via email should be considered as part of a company's email marketing practice.

Automated emails such as order confirmations and even out of office replies are all opportunities to engage with customers. If a company has a particular tone or content style, this can be reinforced in these interactions.

These emails can also be an opportunity to cross-advertise other promotions that a company is offering.

8. generate reports

As with all things eMarketing, tracking, analysing and optimising is key to growth. Email tracking systems produce statistics in a user-friendly manner.

Key measurables for understanding of the performance of email campaigns:
- Number of **emails delivered**.
- Number of **bounces** (and this should be separated into hard bounces and soft bounces).
- Number of unique **emails opened**: an email can be delivered, but not opened.
- **Unsubscribes**: significant or consistent loss in subscribers is a key indication that you are not meeting the needs of your subscribers
- **Pass on rate**: high pass on rate (forwards) indicates that your list values the content enough to constantly share with others. Putting an easy "forward to a friend" link in every email can increase this. Adding a sign-up link to forwarded emails will organically grow the opt-in list.
- **Click-through rates and conversion**: This measures the effectiveness of an email via the links placed in the content. When a reader clicks through to a webpage, these can be easily measured as a percentage against number of delivered, opened or sent emails. It reveals which content or promotion was the most enticing for the reader.

9. analyse results

Once the reports have been generated, it is time to work out what the numbers are revealing, and to use this information to improve the next email sent out.

With email marketing, split testing across a host of factors will enable campaign optimisation. Some factors to test include:
- Open rates across different subject lines and delivery times

discussion

Open rate does not necessarily indicate whether or not an email has been read. How do you think a marketer can determine if emails are being read?

- Optimal number of links in an email for click through rates and conversions
- Different copy styles and copy length
- The effect of video on delivery rates, open rates and conversions

tools of the trade

First up, an email campaign needs a database. A plan for growing this database needs to be put in place. Most email service providers will also provide tools for managing this database.

All emails need to be tested for email client compatibility as well as for any potential spam problems.

Email client compatibility can be reviewed at:
www.sitevista.com/email.asp

An email's spam score can be checked at:
spamassassin.apache.org

Once an email has been sent, results need to be analysed to pinpoint areas for growth for the next campaign.

pros and cons

Permission based email marketing can give the highest return on investment of any marketing activities. Technology allows mass customisation, allowing personalisation across a large list of subscribers.

When used to foster relationships with a customer base, email marketing can go a long way to increasing the lifetime value of that customer.

Email marketing is highly measurable, and databases are highly segmentable.

However, with the increasing numbers of companies and individuals using email marketing, many consumers are email fatigued. It requires ingenuity, focus and dedication to maintain an email database and consistently deliver useful quality emails that will be read.

It does not take much for email to be marked as spam, and it can be difficult to recover from being branded as a spammer by the ISPs.

summary

Email marketing is a form of direct marketing that can render the best ROI of any eMarketing tactic. It is:

- Highly targeted and customisable
- Cost effective

Gaining explicit permission to send email marketing to a person is a prerequisite for successful email marketing, however all emails sent by an organisation and the individuals in that organisation can be seen as marketing opportunities.

Successful email marketing requires careful planning and testing. HTML emails need to be tested across a range of email clients, and should be tested for a spam score, before being deployed.

All email sent to a list of subscribers needs to provide an easy and accessible unsubscribe link in the email.
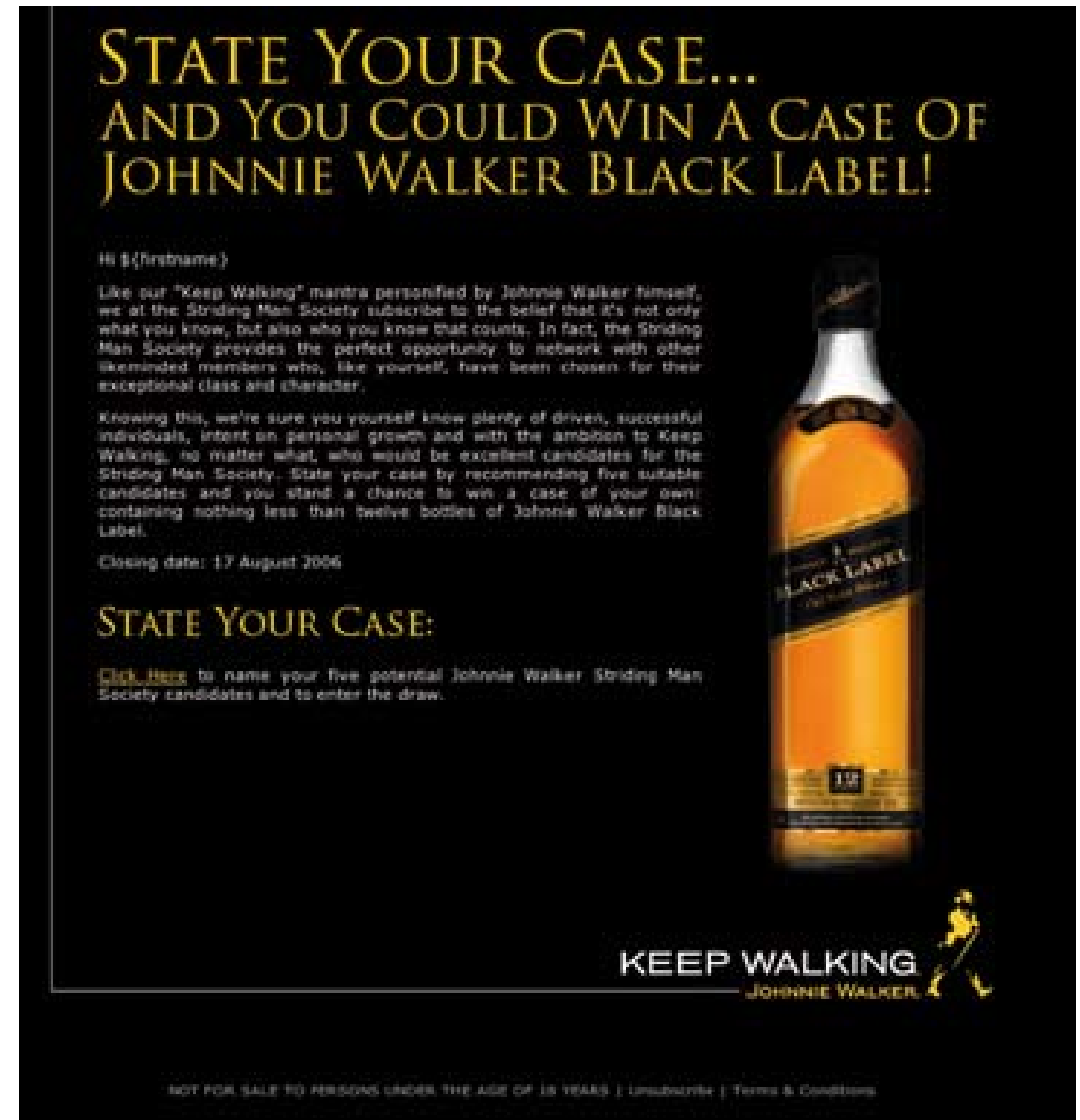
case study: Johnnie Walker

Johnnie Walker South Africa was looking to increase a specific segment of consumers on its email database. The proposed target group was mainly comprised of South African black male consumers, 18 – 30 years of age with disposable income. The use of viral email campaign/ refer a friend style tactic was chosen as the necessary medium. Although an email campaign is a well used tactic within viral marketing, agency teams and client felt confident due to the beginner to intermediate user level of the list. Connectivity is an issue in South Africa and most on the database would not have been heavily exposed to these types of campaigns.

The creative approach was primarily to appeal to the target market's connectivity by finding something which would fit into their social value system. Research of the group told us that they were highly social but also aspired towards older, affluent males of the same culture who had made a success of their lives in the new South Africa. This older affluent group was also regarded as Johnnie Walker Black drinkers.

The central idea of "State a case for yourself" was proposed in order to invite the target market to assess if they are worthy of being part of the Johnnie Walker Striding Man Society. The prize was in itself a "case" (12 bottles) of Johnnie Walker Black which further reinforced the concept of "State a case for yourself". Send to a friend technology was used so that prospects could state a case for themselves by nominating five friends worthy of the Striding Man Society. Pages specific to the campaign were created for click-throughs and data capturing.

The email was sent to a list of carefully chosen members of the Johnnie Walker Black / Striding Man Society database who fit the required profile. Reminder emails were configured to go out one week after the first email.

No other form of marketing was used and there weren't any links to the Johnnie Walker web site or any other web sites. No search engine marketing, banner ads or offline media were used to promote this campaign. Its success was purely driven by people forwarding the email to others.

The email campaign was very successful - 2630 new subscriptions were captured within the first week! Over 25 000 emails were sent to unique addresses in the duration of the campaign, and it saw over 200% growth in subscribers to Johnnie Walkers' Striding Man Society. The campaign achieved a conversion rate of about 29% - 29% of prospects who received the viral email from the original list of subscribers, submitted their details, and agreed to become part of Johnnie Walkers' Striding Man Society. Reminder emails added a 10% increase in unique click through activity against the viral email.

case study questions

1. Why was email an ideal medium to reach this target market?
2. Why does a brand like Johnny Walker collect email addresses?
3. How important was personalisation in this campaign?

chapter questions

1. What is meant by "mass customisation" and why is this so beneficial?
2. What are the key differences between direct marketing by email and direct marketing by post?
3. Why is it important for permission to be gained before marketing by email to a prospect?
4. Emails that are expected and recognised are more likely to be read. How can a marketer use this knowledge to increase the readership of emails?

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further reading

www.marketingsherpa.com
– MarketingSherpa provides regular case studies, charts and how tos. Essential reading for any eMarketer.

www.email-marketing-reports.com/blogs.htm
- this one-stop resource provides guidelines, regular articles and links to other excellent blogs in the email marketing industry.

www.campaignmonitor.com/blog/
- this blog from Campaign Monitor, a leading email newsletter software provider, keeps abreast of industry trends and best practices.

www.email-standards.org
– the Email Standards project is aimed ensuring that emails can be rendered correctly across all clients. It also regularly tests how email clients are performing on compatibility.

What's inside: We begin with an **introduction** to online advertising with a brief **history** of banner advertising. What follows are the **key terms and concepts** required, and then a breakdown of **how it works**. We look at how to show your message, and of course how to pay for it. There is an overview of **ad servers** and **advertising networks** and the move towards **ad exchanges**. Putting it all together helps you to **plan a campaign**, and we look at **emerging technologies** when it comes to advertising online. **Pros and cons** are outlined in the good and the bad, followed by a **summary** and the bigger picture.

introduction

– show and sell

Simply put, online advertising is advertising on the Internet. Online advertising encompasses adverts on search engine results pages (covered in the chapter on PPC advertising), adverts placed in emails and other ways in which advertisers use the Internet. However, this chapter focuses on display advertising or rich media advertising.

Whether online or off, the main objective of advertising is to increase sales. As well as this, advertising aims to increase brand awareness. Advertising is based on the simple economics of supply and demand. Advertisers aim to stimulate a consumer need and then satisfy that need.

One of the greatest benefits of online display advertising is that the messages are not restricted by geography or time. Online advertisements are also much more interactive than offline advertising. While both online and offline advertising can be disruptive, interactive online advertising can be designed to be perceived as less so.

Online display advertising began as simple hyperlinked images shown on a web site and has since progressed to include video, sound and many other modern technologies. Today, messages and interactions can be contained within the advertising display, without ever taking consumers to a landing page.

Although the Internet provides new scope for creative approaches to advertising, we see its true advantage when we realise how trackable, and therefore measurable, Internet advertising is. Or, to take it from Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google cited by Lieb (2002): "The Internet will transform advertising because of its trackability, not its beauty."

history

Online advertising rapidly followed the developing Internet. And, as consumers are increasingly spending more time online, and hours spent on the Internet start to eclipse hours spent watching TV, the medium becomes increasingly important to any advertiser.

According to Wikipedia, the first clickable banner advert was sold to a law firm in 1993 by Global Network Navigator. HotWired, an early web magazine, was the first to sell advertising space in large quantities to a number of advertisers. One of the very first advertisers was AT&T (a US telecoms company), which went online in October 1994.

An early banner ad for AT&T
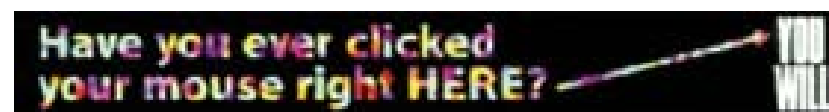
This was part of a campaign that AT&T was running to promote the Internet to consumers, and included television and outdoor advertising. Believe it or not, but this was cutting edge back in '94!

As web technology has developed, so has the technology that is used to create and serve advertising online.

key terms and concepts

Ad Space The allotted space on web pages available for online advertising.

Animated GIF A GIF which supports animations and allows a separate palette of 256 colours for each frame. *See GIF*.

Banner An online advertisement in the form of a graphic image that appears on a webpage.

Banner Exchange A symbiotic advertising initiative whereby businesses involved promote each other's services and web sites on an exchange rather than paid basis. Also known as link exchange.

Call To Action A phrase written to motivate the reader to take action. (sign up for our newsletter, book car hire today etc.).

Click Through A click on a link that leads to another web site.

Click Tracking Using scripts to track clicks into and out of a web site. Can also be used to shield a link from being picked up as a back link to another site.

Click-through Rate The number and percentage of recipients who clicked on a particular URL included in an email, a webpage etc.

Cookie A small text file that is stored on an end-user's computer that allow web sites to identify the user, and allow the web site owner to construct a profile of that user.

CPA Cost Per Action. Refers to the cost of acquiring a new customer. The advertiser only pays when a desired action is achieved (sometimes called cost per acquisition).

CPC Cost Per Click. Refers to when an advertiser only pays when their ad is clicked upon, giving them a visitor to their site - typically from a search engine in Pay Per Click search marketing.

CPM Cost Per Mille. Refers to Cost per 1000 ad impressions. An advertiser pays each time 1000 impressions of their ad are shown.

GIF Abbreviation of Graphics Interchange Format, a GIF is an 8-bit-per-pixel bitmap image format using a palette of up to 256 distinct colours. GIFs allow images to be compressed for faster display time.

Impression Fraud The act of deliberately generating impressions of an advert without the intention of clicking on the advert. The result is a reduction in click through rate which can affect Quality Score in PPC advertising and the ROI of a banner campaign.

Impressions The number of times a webpage or ad is viewed.

IP Address Used to uniquely identify a computer and/or system on the Internet.

Landing Page The page a user reaches when clicking on a paid or organic search engine listing. The pages that have the most success are those that match up as closely as possible with the users search query.

Popup Unrequested window that opens on top of the currently viewed window.

ROI Short for return on investment.

Traffic This refers to the visitors that visit a web site.

how it works

Advertising, whether online or offline, has a number of objectives:

- Building brand awareness
- Creating consumer demand
- Informing consumers of the advertiser's ability to satisfy that demand
- Driving response and sales

building brand awareness

Making people aware of a brand or product is an important long-term goal for any marketer. Once customers know about the brand, the marketer has taken the first step towards gaining the customer's trust and patronage. The better known a brand is the more business they can do. And the ultimate goal is to do more business and sell more of the product.

Online, creative advertising or banner advertising is largely visual, making it an ideal channel for promoting brand collateral.

creating consumer demand

Consumers can't want what they don't know about. Advertising needs to convince consumers about what they should want and why they should want it. Modern online advertising provides a great way to communicate the USPs (unique selling points) of a product, thereby helping stimulate demand.

satisfying consumer demand

Once the consumer is aware of and desires a product, they need to find out how to satisfy that desire. If brand building has been effective, they will know that a particular brand exists. At this point, it is important for the marketer to show the consumer how their particular brand or product will best meet that need.

driving response and sales

All forms of online marketing need to drive traffic and sales in the long term. However, the immediacy of online advertising also drives traffic and sales in the short and medium terms. Unlike traditional media advertising, online advertising can turn the potential customer into an actual customer right there and then. What's more, it is possible to measure accurately how effectively the online advertising campaign does this.

the key differentiator

Online advertising is able to drive instant sales and conversions. Unlike offline advertising mediums, the consumer can go from advert to merchant in one easy click. Because of the connected nature of the Internet, online activities are highly trackable and measurable, which makes it possible to target adverts and to accurately track and gauge the effectiveness of the advertising. Each display advert can be tracked for success.

how to show your message:
types of display advertising

There are many different ways to display messages online, and as technology develops, so does online advertising. Here are some of the most common.

interstitial banners

These are banners that are shown between pages on a web site. As you click from one page to another, you are shown this advert before the next page is shown. Sometimes, you are able to close the advert.

pop-ups and pop-unders

As the name suggests, these are adverts that pop up, or under, the web page being viewed. They open in a new, smaller window. You will see a pop-up straight away, but will probably only become aware of a pop-under after you close your browser window.

These were very prominent in the early days of online advertising, but audience annoyance means that there are now "pop-up blockers" built into most good web browsers. This can be problematic as sometimes a web site will legitimately use a pop-up to display information to the user.

map advert

This is advertising placed within the online mapping solutions available, such as Google Maps.

Google Map showing an advert (Holiday Inn)

floating advert

This advert appears in a layer over the content, but is not in a separate window. Usually, the user can close this advert. These are sometimes referred to as Shoshkeles, a proprietary technology. Floating adverts are created with DHTML or Flash, and float in a layer above a site's content for a few seconds. Often, the animation ends by disappearing into a banner ad on the page.
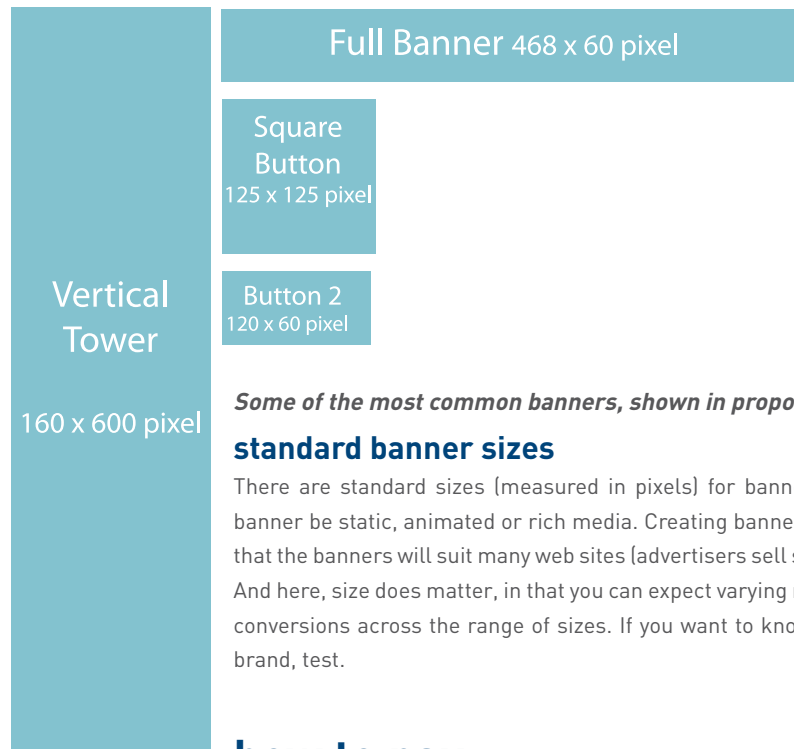
wallpaper advert

This advert changes the background of the webpage being viewed. Usually, it is not possible to click through this advert.

banner advert

A graphic image or animation displayed on a web site for advertising purposes. Static banners are GIFs or JPEGS, but banners can also employ rich media such as Flash, video, JavaScript and other interactive technologies. Interactive technology allows the viewer to interact and transact within the banner. Banners are not limited to the space that they occupy; some banners expand on mouseover or when clicked on.

discussion

When online, adverts can be interactive. How do you think this can be used to increase the effectiveness of advertising?

Full Banner 468 x 60 pixel

Square Button 125 x 125 pixel

Button 2 120 x 60 pixel

Vertical Tower 160 x 600 pixel

Some of the most common banners, shown in proportion.

standard banner sizes

There are standard sizes (measured in pixels) for banner advertising, whether the banner be static, animated or rich media. Creating banners to suit these sizes means that the banners will suit many web sites (advertisers sell space in these sizes as well). And here, size does matter, in that you can expect varying results in click throughs and conversions across the range of sizes. If you want to know what works best for your brand, test.

how to pay:
payment models for display advertising

As well as a variety of mediums, there are also a number of different payment models for display advertising.

CPI or CPM

CPI stands for Cost Per Impression. This means the advertiser pays each time the advert appears on the publisher's page. The most common way of referring to this model is CPM or Cost Per Thousand impressions (the letter M is the Roman numeral for a thousand). This is how a campaign is normally priced when brand awareness or exposure is the primary goal.

CPC

CPC stands for Cost Per Click. This means that the advertiser only pays when their advert is clicked on by an interested party. CPC advertising is normally associated with paid search marketing, also called Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising. Banners can be priced this way when the aim is to drive traffic. It is also a payment method sometimes used in affiliate marketing, when the aim is to drive traffic to a new web site.

CPA

CPA refers to Cost Per Acquisition. This model means the advertiser only pays when an advert delivers an acquisition. Definitions of acquisitions vary from site to site and may be a user filling in a form, downloading a file or buying a product. CPA is the best way for an advertiser to pay because they only pay when the advertising has met its goal. For this reason it is also the worst type for the publisher as they are only rewarded if the advertising is successful. The publisher has to rely on the conversion rate of the advertiser's web site, something which the publisher cannot control. The CPA model is not commonly used for banner advertising and is generally associated with affiliate marketing.

flat rate

Sometimes, owners of lower-traffic sites choose to sell banner space at a flat rate i.e. at a fixed cost per month regardless of the amount of traffic or impressions. This would appeal to a media buyer who may be testing an online campaign that targets niche markets.

cost per engagement

This is an emerging technology in which advertisers pay for the rollover adverts, placed in videos or applications (such as Facebook applications), based on the interactions with that advert. "Engagement" is generally defined as a user-initiated rollover, or mouseover, action that results in a sustained advert expansion. Once expanded, an advert may contain a video, game, or other rich content. It happens without taking an Internet user away from her preferred web page, and marketers only pay when an individual completes an action.

CPM favours the publisher, while CPA favours the advertiser. Sometimes, a hybrid of the two payment models is pursued.

discussion

The word "engagement" implies a level of interaction and intent from the user. If you were using this type of advertising, how would you measure success?

The advertising network can also target adverts based on the business rules of the advertiser or based on the profiles of the users:

- **Geo-Targeting**: online advertising has the ability to target markets by country, province or city, and can even drill them down to something as specific as their IP address.
- **Network / Browser Type**: markets can further be targeted via networks or browser types such as Firefox, Internet Explorer, and Safari etc.
- **Connection Type**: users can be segmented and targeted according to their Internet connection type, e.g. whether they use broadband or dial up connections.
- **Day and Time**: advertisers can choose the time of day or day of the week when their adverts are shown. Advertisers can specify when their campaign should air, down to the minute. This usually depends on the client's objective for the campaign or the product itself.
- **Social Serving**: web sites gather personal data about users and then serve each user with targeted and relevant advertising. For example, Facebook will allow advertisers to select specific characteristics of users who will be shown an advert.
- **Behavioural Targeting**: the advertising network uses the profile of a user (built up over previous web sites visited) to determine which adverts to show during a given visit. Networks can base this profile on cookies or on IP addresses. For example, the network may choose to show adverts for pet insurance on a news page to a user who has visited the pets and animals section of a general media site previously.
- **Contextual Advertising**: the ad server infers the optimum adverts to serve, based on the content of the page. For example, on an article about mountain bike holidays in Europe, the network would serve adverts for new mountain bikes, or adverts from travel companies offering flights to Europe, or perhaps adverts for adventure travel insurance.

Contextual advertising can be humorous

advertising exchanges

Advertising networks are also creating advertising exchanges, where publishers can place unsold inventory for bidding. The inventory is sold to the highest bidding advertiser. Giving advertisers far more control, this type of advertising mimics a PPC based model of paid search bidding (Generalised Second Price auction) – but bids are for audience profiles and space rather than for keywords. It allows publishers to fill unsold inventory at the highest available price, and can give smaller advertisers access to this inventory.

putting it all together

Knowing the various types of display options and payment models available are all very well, but you might be wondering how to put this all together as you plan your campaign. The very first thing you need to determine when planning display advertising is the goal of your campaign. Are you embarking on a mainly branding campaign? Or is your main focus direct response?

Having determined the goals of your campaign, identify the KPIs (key performance indicators) that will let you know how you are succeeding.

Online advertising is an acquisition channel. It does not require that users actively seek an interaction, as PPC advertising and email marketing do. So, it is crucial that the adverts are placed in front of the audience that is most likely to convert.

Investigate your target audience: what web sites are they likely to be visiting? It is likely that the type of creative you may use and the payment model you follow will be largely determined by the web sites on which you wish to advertise.

Niche web sites with a smaller, but probably more targeted audience will most likely charge a flat rate for display advertising, or a CPA rate. They could probably be flexible in display options that they give you, but you will need to take into account their bandwidth costs if they serve the adverts.

High traffic web sites with a broad audience will most likely charge on a CPM basis. They will broker their advertising inventory through an advertising network, or even a number of advertising networks.

Knowing your goals, your target audience and the format of your adverts, it's time to brief your creative team to ensure that you have the optimum banners for your campaign.

Your online adverts will need to:

Attract attention

Convey a message

Entice action

Secondly, all advertising needs an appropriate landing page. Whether this involves creating a micro-site, or merely ensuring users are coming through to an existing page on the web site, ensure that click throughs are not being wasted. Generally, sending advertising traffic to your homepage is not a good idea as it leaves the user deciding where to go next.

Animation attracts attention, but be wary of being one of seven animated banners on a web site. Banners should not be considered in isolation, but rather in the context of the web site on which they will appear.

Web users respond well to being told what to do, and the content of an online advert should be concise and directional. Examples include:

- "Phone now for the best deals on insurance"
- "Click here for fast home delivery"
- "Donate now"

emerging technologies

While we have become used to the Internet as a free medium, where we can read and interact with any content we want, it is the fact that it is an advertiser's medium that keeps it free. And that means that as the way we interact with content changes as technologies evolve, so advertising follows.

It used to be that the level of interaction a web user has with a web site could be measured by the number of pages of that web site the user viewed. Now, technology such as AJAX and rich media such as video mean that the time spent on a web page can be more meaningful than the number of pages viewed. The key word here is "engagement", and technology and data analysis is working towards being able to determine how web sites can quantify the level of engagement with a viewer.

VideoEgg (www.videoegg.com), which specialises in adverts that appear in video clips and Facebook applications, introduced a Pay Per Engagement pricing model on its advertising network in February 2008. With time spent on site increasing, advertisers are able to utilise that to build more interactive, more time intensive adverts. VideoEgg defines the engagement here as "a user-initiated rollover action that results in a sustained ad expansion. Once expanded, an ad may contain a video, game, or other of rich content" (Rodgers, 2008). Part of VideoEgg's offering is to optimise the placement

of so-called "invitation ads" to guarantee the requested number of engagements in an advertiser's target demographic.
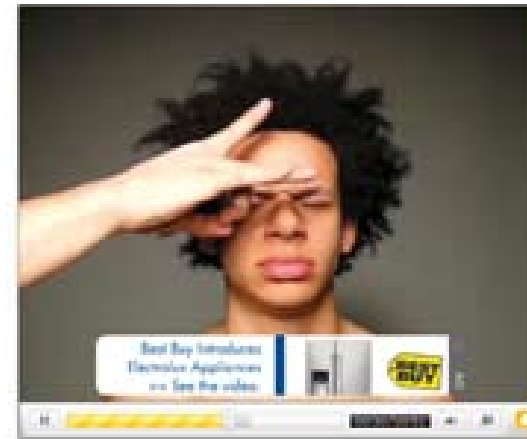
VideoEgg offers in video advertising. The banner will show a video within the video.

But isn't banner advertising dead?

A little research online will reveal plenty of commentary declaring the decline of display advertising. Increasingly, consumers are becoming both weary and wary of advertising. Click through rates on banners are dropping, so the effectiveness of display advertising is being questioned by some. With the focus in eMarketing on tracking and measuring response and engagement, should a company spend money less measurable activities such as "brand building", where they are paying on a CPM basis?

Consider this: anecdotal evidence shows that banner advertising can increase click through rates on contextual adverts by 249%. (Godin, 2006)

What does this tell us? Measurement should take place across all channels, and no channel should be utilised in isolation. The best results will be gained through an integrated and holistic approach to eMarketing.

the good and the bad
advantages of online advertising

banner ads and their similarity with traditional media

eMarketers regularly bemoan the fact that it's often difficult to educate the market about the value of Internet marketing techniques. Traditional buyers of advertising have been conditioned in a certain fashion and have come to understand advertising in a certain way.

Banner advertising goes a long way towards bridging the advertising divide. Ads have a set size, they can look very similar to print ads and they occupy a particular bit of real estate in a publication with a particular number of eyeballs looking at it. It's easy to understand and it does the things buyers are used to expecting advertising to do.

Bottom line - if done correctly, online advertising builds brand awareness and increases sales!

images - display can offer a rich brand building experience

Some campaigns are better suited to having images rather than the plain text of a PPC campaign (although recently PPC image and video ads have been introduced in the USA). Consider the following types of campaigns:
- Promoting travel packages: What stirs more emotion - an image of a tropical paradise or the words "tropical paradise"?
- Building a brand within a specific sphere: Use banner advertising to brand the web sites of every major player in that niche.
- Running a competition: Keep the target market's eye on the prize.
- Launching an exciting new sports car with a call to action: "Test drive it now" - or interactive rich media that highlight all the exciting new features as you mouse-over that part of the car on the image.
- Digital shadow: Using banner adverts that shadow the above the line activity to drive the message both on and offline.

interactivity

Since banners can contain rich media, they offer levels of interactivity that other forms of advertising cannot achieve. It allows your target market to not only see your banner, but to play with it too. Interaction builds a bond and improves the chances of the consumer remembering your brand tomorrow. Cognitive learning is a powerful outcome of interactive display advertising.

Animations, games, video, Flash – modern online advertising is able to bring together a number of other online marketing tactics:
- A few years ago, Flash micro-sites were all the rage - now the same functionality can exist right within the ad. This includes filling in a form or playing a game within the ad – no need to be taken to a separate page.
- Viral marketing: clever viral marketing games or "send to a friend" functionality from within the ad.
- Video - check out video previews or trailers from within the ad.

measurability and data gathering

Banner ads, like all eMarketing tactics, are measurable. Track click-through rates and you get an idea of exactly how many people are responding to your call to action. Some publishers even have the ability to do post-click tracking i.e. you can track the user all the way to a sale if that is the purpose of the advert.

An OPA (Online Publishers Association) study revealed that of the 80% of viewers that reported to have watched a video ad online, 52% have taken some sort of action, including: checking out a web site (31%), searching for more information (22%), going into a store (15%) or actually making a purchase (12%).

disadvantages of online advertising

technical obstacles
The nature of a lot of display advertising is intrusive, so pop-up blockers can often prevent ads from being served as they were intended by the advertisers.

connection speed
Bandwidth can also be an issue, although this is a shrinking problem. However, campaigns should be planned around demographics in determining the richness (and investment) of interaction. For example heart disease medication is likely to appeal to the elder community, with less money and slower connection speeds.

advertising fatigue
Consumers are suffering from advertising fatigue, so while new technologies can provide great results, as soon as the market moves mainstream, it can get saturated. Consumers are increasingly ignoring adverts.

ad blockers
As well as most browsers now blocking pop-ups, there are also extensions available for the Firefox browser, such as AdBlock plus, that will block advertising on web pages. Technologically savvy consumers are increasingly using these methods to limit the advertising that they see.

summary

Online advertising has two main objectives:
- Branding
- Direct response and sales

The Internet allows for highly targeted and highly trackable display advertising across a variety of online media.

Some ways that advertisers can use the Internet are:
- Interstitial banners
- Pop-ups and Pop-unders
- Map advert
- Floating advert
- Wallpaper advert
- Banner advert

Advertising can be charged for in a number of ways, including:

- CPI or CPM
- CPC
- CPA
- Flat rate
- Cost per engagement

Ad Servers and Ad Networks provide trafficking, tracking and reporting solutions to both advertisers and publishers. They allow advertisers to target display adverts based on parameters, including:

- User profile (location, OS, browser, connection type)
- Behaviour
- Frequency and sequencing
- Exclusivity
- Context of content

Emerging technology allows for an increased level of interaction within an advert, and for advertising tailored to engagement media such as online videos and social network applications.

the bigger picture:
how it all fits together

Offline advertising and marketing campaigns can be adapted for an online audience, so as to ensure maximum brand exposure. This can be very effective in enhancing offline marketing and advertising activity and in ensuring a wider reach.

As mentioned, online advertising can be used as an acquisition channel, reaching out to a new audience. It can be used to initiate a buying cycle and customer relationship, which then plays out across other online channels. Addressing advertising and other channels to complement each other will result in a consistent message, and optimum results. Online advertising can be used to reach a large audience, and then other eMarketing tactics can be used to further refine this audience.

Display advertising and affiliate marketing go hand in hand. Affiliate networks also act as advertising networks, allowing for advertising to be purchased on a performance basis.

When seeding new products and viral campaigns, display advertising can be used to reach a wide audience at a low cost. It can expose a campaign to many new users, and increase the chance that those who are most likely to pass on a message receive it in the first place.

case study: BMW South Africa

BMW South Africa has been innovative in its use of online campaigns to complement their offline activities. When it came to marketing the new BMW 1 Series, BMW knew that drivers of BMW 1 Series are generally slightly younger and at a different lifestyle age to the average BMW driver. So, BMW looked at new and innovative ways as well as traditional and tested methods to reach this target market. Over July and August 2007, they ran an online campaign aimed at raising awareness of the new 1 Series BMW, generating test drive bookings and, ultimately, driving sales leads.

The entire campaign was integrated, from print adverts to the Internet, and aimed at driving people to the web site bmw.co.za/1 where they were encouraged to engage with the campaign. Here, the campaign was an invitation to individuals to share their interpretation of "one" by creating a video or photo. As two different BMW 1 Series models were being promoted, a 2-door and a 4-door, the payoff line across all channels of the campaign hinged on the difficulty to focus on "just one".

BMW targeted individuals utilising a variety of different ad formats, both online and on mobile. These included standard banners as well as expanding banners that expanded over competitor images.

The target market was reached through motoring and lifestyle associations and adverts were placed in competitive environments on motoring web sites and on corporate blogs. As well as using mobizines, BMW partnered with Zoopy, a South African video sharing web site, to tap into an existing community to invite them to interact with the brand.

The digital media campaign reached over 450,000 individuals and drove just over 11% of the test drive bookings concluded on the BMW web site over the campaign period.

case study questions:

1. How do you think BMW benefited from adapting existing print advertising for the online campaign?
2. Describe the target audience of the new BMW 1 series. Why are they suited to an online campaign?
3. Consumers are unlikely to purchase a car online. How would you measure the success of this campaign?

chapter questions:

1. Online banner advertising and outdoor display advertising both use images to try to increase sales. In planning, both need to consider placement so as to be seen by their most likely audience. What are the key differences?
2. Why is display advertising an effective acquisition channel?
3. Go to www.wheels24.com and www.thetimes.co.za. What advertising can you find on the front page of these two web sites? What products are being advertised, and how are they being advertised? What can you infer about the target market for these products?

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further reading

www.adrants.com – Commentary on online advertising campaigns. US focused.

www.clickz.com – Industry leaders write regular articles.

www.nma.co.uk – UK industry focused advertising articles.

4. affiliate marketing

What's inside: An **introduction** to affiliate marketing, the **key terms and concepts** you need for this chapter and the **history** of affiliate marketing as it emerged from the murky depths of the adult industry. Looking at **how it works,** discover different **actions and rewards**, how **tracking** works (and cookies get involved). Uncover some of the ways that **affiliates promote merchants**, how **affiliate networks** fit into the scheme of things and some handy tools of the trade for affiliate marketing. There is an introduction to **setting up an affiliate campaign**, pros and cons of affiliate marketing and of course a **summary** of the chapter, and a look at **how it all fits together.**

introduction

If you recommend a restaurant to a friend, and that friend visits the restaurant because of your recommendation, the restaurant's revenue will have increased because of your referral. This is "word of mouth" marketing. But you, as the referrer, do not see any of the cash benefit that the restaurant does!

Imagine that the restaurant gave you 10% of the bill for every person that you referred to the restaurant. They would be paying you a finder's fee for new customers. There are a number of businesses that market this way offline. Brokers for insurance products are an example, but these referrals can be hard to track. Online, they are very easy to track. This system of reward where compensation is based on referral is called affiliate marketing, and is used to describe this type of marketing in an online environment.

Affiliate marketing is used widely to promote web sites, and affiliates are rewarded for every visitor, subscriber or customer provided through their efforts. Because of this, affiliates are sometimes viewed as an extended sales force for a web site. Affiliates are paid for performance, so affiliate marketing is also referred to as performance marketing.

history

Like many eMarketing innovations, the beginnings of affiliate marketing are to be found in the Adult industry. Cybererotica was probably the first to run an affiliate campaign with its CPC programme, where it would reward referrers for each click-through to its web site.

Affiliate marketing moved closer to the mainstream, with programmes offered by companies such as CDNow (its BuyWeb programme launched in 1994), PC Flowers & Gifts.com, AutoWeb.com and a handful of others. But the story that is most well known, and that ensured that affiliate marketing hit mainstream press articles, is that of the Amazon.com Associates Program.

Legend has it that Jeff Bezos (the CEO and founder of Amazon.com) was at a cocktail party, where a woman there told him that she wanted to sell books through her web site. She did not have the infrastructure to sell the books, but Jeff Bezos realised that she could send her targeted traffic to Amazon.com where users could buy books, and she could get paid for each successful referral. From this, Jeff Bezos launched Amazon Associates, the Amazon.com affiliate marketing programme. Referrers are rewarded for successful sales that occur as a result of their marketing efforts. The growth experienced by Amazon.com as a result of their affiliate programme is well documented, and probably accounts for about 40% of their revenue (according to information in Amazon.com discussion forums).

key terms and concepts

Action A specified task performed by a user, which results in the affiliate being awarded commission. Actions include purchasing a product, signing up for a newsletter or filling in a form.

Affiliate or Publisher* The Affiliate or Publisher markets the products of the Merchant.

Click Through A click on a link that leads to another website.

Commission The bounty paid by a merchant to an affiliate when the affiliate makes a successful referral.

Cookie Cookies are parcels of text sent by a server to a web browser and then sent back unchanged by the browser each time it accesses that server. Cookies are used for authenticating, tracking, and maintaining specific information about users, such as site preferences or the contents of their electronic shopping carts.

CPA Cost per Action. Paid when a certain action is performed by a user.

CPC Cost per Click. Paid when a link is clicked upon.

CPL Cost Per Lead. Commission structure where the affiliate earns a fixed fee for a lead sent to a merchant.

CPM Cost per Thousand (Mil). Amount paid for every 1000 views of an advertisement.

Merchant or Advertiser * This is the owner of the product that is being marketed or promoted.

Referrer The referrer is the URL of the web page that a user was at before reaching yours. The server's logs capture referral URLs and store them in their log files.

Revenue Share Commission structure where the affiliate earns a percentage of a sale.

ROI Short for return on investment.

Session The session of activity that a user with a unique cookie spends on a Web site during a specified period of time

Traffic This refers to the visitors that visit a website.

URL Short form for Universal Resource Locator. This is a unique address that identifies a website.

XML Short for eXtensible Markup Language, XML promises more standardized and organized delivery of data over the Internet. XHTML is the XML version of HTML.

* Why advertiser and publisher? Well, the merchant has goods that need to be advertised, and the affiliate has the medium to publish those adverts. The terms are interchangeable.

According to eConsultancy's Affiliate Marketing Networks Buyer's Guide (2006), total sales generated through affiliate networks in 2006 was £2.16 billion in the UK alone. And MarketingSherpa's research estimates that in 2006, affiliates worldwide earned $6.5 billion in bounty and commissions!

Affiliate networks, which act as intermediaries between affiliates and merchants, came onto the scene in 1996, with the launch of LinkShare and Be Free. Commission Junction, another big player, launched in 1998 and was bought by ValueClick (Nasdaq: VCLK) in 2003 for about $58 million.

how it works

The core of affiliate marketing is a simple process:
1. An affiliate refers potential customers to a merchant's web site.
2. Some of those customers perform a desired action.
3. The merchant rewards the affiliate for each desired action resulting from the affiliate's referral.
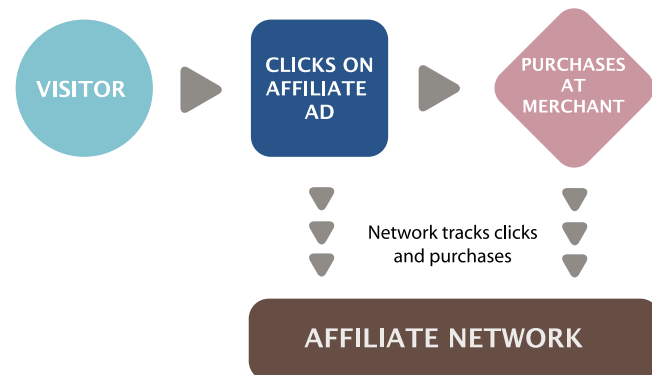
The affiliate marketing process.

However, there are many different ways an affiliate might market a merchant's offering, there are many different types of action that can be rewarded, and, most importantly, there needs to be some way of keeping track of the whole process.

We're going to take a look at the different types of action first of all, then discuss keeping track of it all, and lastly take a look at some of the many means that affiliates use to send merchants customers, and of course, to make themselves cash.

action and reward
(or horses for courses)

Affiliate marketing can be used to promote any type of web site – there just needs to be an agreed upon action that will result in an affiliate earning commission. Different

types of merchants will have different required actions. The actions and the type of commission can be summed up as:
• CPA (Cost Per Action) – a fixed commission for a particular action
• CPL (Cost Per Lead) – a fixed commission for a lead (i.e. a potential sale)
• Revenue Share (also CPS or Cost Per Sale) – an agreed percentage of the purchase amount is awarded
• CPC (Cost Per Click) – this forms a very small part of the affiliate marketing mix, and the merchant pays a fixed amount for each click through to their web site.

Let's look at an example of each of the first three actions above:

CPA
Here the action could be anything from downloading a white paper or some software to signing up to a newsletter.
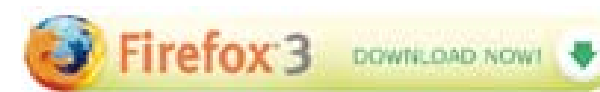
Firefox 3 runs an affiliate programme to promote the spread of Firefox.

CPL
Merchants that offer CPL commissions are usually those that need to convert a lead into a sale offline. This means that they will generally need to complete the transaction over the phone with the customer, or that the process is quite complicated. It is typically insurance companies and banking institutions that will offer this type of commission. Membership sites which offer a free trial period, such as online DVD rental, can also use this commission structure.

You might be wondering why merchants are willing to pay for a lead, instead of only for completed transactions.

Well, affiliates prefer this model, as they are not in control of the offline conversion process. It is the merchant's job to be able to complete the transaction. Some merchants may be wary that the leads will not be of a high enough quality. This is why they will usually have conversion targets that the leads generated need to comply with as a quality control.

Revenue Share
Revenue sharing is the ideal commission structure as both the merchant and the affiliate are rewarded for performance – the more sales, the more revenue generated for the merchant, and the more commission for the affiliate. Web sites where a sale can be performed instantly are ideal for revenue sharing. Online retailers and instant online travel agents are perfect examples of merchants who offer a revenue share commission. The affiliate earns a percentage of the sale.

question

Why do you think a merchant be willing to offer a bounty for each download?

question

How do you think companies can ensure that the leads they get are qualified?

Amazon Associates is a popular revenue share affiliate programme.

Merchants tend to structure their commission offering so that affiliates who perform better, earn a higher commission. For example, a merchant might offer the following tiers of commission:

- 1 – 10 sales: 10% commission
- 11 – 25 sales: 11% commission
- 26 – 50 sales: 12% commission
- 51 or more sales: 15 % commission

CPC

CPC commission is rarely used, and is primarily a way of driving large volumes of traffic, usually to a new site. An affiliate would be awarded commission for every click through to the merchant web site. Although this type of commission was prevalent in the very early days of affiliate marketing, it has been largely abandoned due to click fraud.

We have seen that there are different types of actions that can result in commission being awarded, and that these usually suit the web site that is being promoted. This means that any industry that is online can most likely be promoted through affiliate marketing.

Affiliates have so many options open to them to promote merchants' web sites. But before we get to that, we need to take a look at tracking – the thread that holds it all together.

tracking
(the lifeline of affiliate marketing)

The key to affiliate marketing is being able to track the whole process from potential customers being sent to a web site through to completed action, so that the merchant is able to award the correct affiliate with the correct commission. This really is the crux of affiliate marketing.

Specialised affiliate tracking software is used to track affiliate campaigns, and this is usually supplied and supported by the affiliate network. Often, the merchant and the affiliate will also use their own tracking software to make sure that there are no major discrepancies.

Affiliates send traffic to merchants through links or URLs, and the tracking software allows each affiliate to have a unique identifier in the URL. These links set a cookie on the customer's computer, which allows the software to track the sale.

For example, here is the URL of a product on a retailer's website:
http://www.firebox.com/product/1201

Here is the URL for the same product, but with affiliate tracking:
http://scripts.**affiliatefuture.com**/AFClick.asp?**affiliateID=238**&**merchantID=214**&**programmeID=3897**&**mediaID=0**&tracking=cube_world&url=http://www.firebox.com/index.html?dir=firebox&action=product&pid=1201

You can see some of the information being recorded. It has been shown in bold in the URL:
- The affiliate network – Affiliate Future
- The ID of the affiliate (238)
- The ID of the merchant (214)
- The ID of the programme (3897) (a merchant might have more than one programme on a network)
- The media used (0)
- The destination of the click

Can you spot the original URL in the one with the tracking?

When the customer completes the required action on the merchant's web site, the cookie will allow the tracking software to collect the information needed to award the commission. For example, if a customer were to use an affiliate link to purchase a gift from a merchant (using the same URL as before as an example), the following information would be collected:

- Referring URL and affiliate
- Total sale amount for commission
- Date and time of sale
- Unique order number of sale

All this information will allow the merchant to confirm that the sale is valid, as well as the amount of commission that is due, without ever releasing any of the customer's personal information.

Affiliate tracking software collects information even if no action is completed. This is vital to the affiliates and to the merchants to see where they can optimise their campaign.

Information collected includes:
- Impressions
- Clicks
- Conversions

All this information helps to build up data in order to strengthen the campaign.

creative type	impressions	clicks	conversions	EPC
banner1	867	42	4	$ 0.23
product feed	1150	203	5	$ 0.89
banner2	305	56	2	$ 0.21

Affiliates will use this information to determine the success of their marketing efforts. Remember that affiliates invest money into marketing various merchants, and they only get rewarded on commission. An affiliate will use the above information to determine whether or not to promote a merchant, and how much they should invest in promoting a particular merchant.

Merchants can use the information on their campaign to determine how best to optimise. For example, if a particular type of banner seems to be doing better than others, they could use that to improve other banners that they offer.

how long does a cookie last for?
If you follow the steps mentioned above to see what cookies have been set on your browser, you'll notice that there are a lot of different expiry periods for cookies. Cookies are not just used for affiliate marketing. They are also used to store information so that a web site "remembers" who you are next time you visit it. The domain owner gets to determine for how long a cookie should last. This is called the cookie period.

When it comes to affiliate marketing, it is up to the merchant to decide what the cookie period should be. The affiliate is only awarded commission should the desired action take place within the cookie period. Some merchants make the cookie last for the session only (i.e. if the user only purchases the following day, no commission is rewarded), whereas the standard cookie period for affiliate marketing is 30 to 60 days. Some merchants offer 999 day cookies, or even lifetime cookies.

There are merchants who offer what is called an affiliate lock-in. Here, the first affiliate to refer the customer earns commission on the lifetime of the customer: every purchase that the customer makes will earn the affiliate commission.

Affiliates tend to prefer a longer cookie period: it increases the likelihood of being awarded commission.

and when things go wrong...
Successful tracking is fundamental to any eMarketing campaign, and especially so to affiliate marketing. As affiliates are only paid for performance, should anything go wrong in the tracking process, it is the affiliates that suffer. The merchant will still get the desired sales, but the affiliates won't be rewarded.

So, it is good to bear in mind some of the problems that can be faced with tracking.

Multiple referrals, one sale – who gets the bounty?
With so many affiliates, it is not uncommon for a potential customer to visit a merchant's web site through the links of many different affiliates before finally making a purchase. Who do you think should receive the commission?

For example: A user sees a banner on a web site that he visits promoting a weekend in Paris, booked with Eurostar. The user clicks on that banner and checks out the deals on the Eurostar web site. A cookie is set, as the first web site is an affiliate of Eurostar.

He doesn't book right away, but after chatting to his girlfriend, they decide to book the trip. He goes to Google, searches for "Eurostar weekend in Paris", and clicks on one of the PPC adverts. This has also been placed by an affiliate, but a different one.

This time he books the trip. But, which affiliate should be rewarded the commission?

It has become standard practice that the most recent referral is awarded the commission, though there are some merchants who also offer compensation to other affiliates involved in sale process. In the example above, the affiliate who placed the PPC advert would get the commission for this sale.

Cookies getting a bad reputation
Consumers sometimes get anxious when they hear things like "tracking" and "collecting information", and so they delete cookies from their computer. If this happens, then the sale will never be attributed to the affiliate. This practice, however, does not seem to have a drastic effect on numbers, and so most affiliates will calculate this into their ROI.

Clashing cookies
Merchants will often use some kind of tracking so that they can better optimise their own marketing efforts. Or, a merchant may make some kind of technical change to their web site. It is crucial that any of these changes are tested first with the tracking software, to make sure that it does not create any conflict. It is generally accepted

practice that even if it is a merchant's marketing effort that is responsible for the final sale, the affiliate still gets the commission if it is within the affiliate's cookie period.

Placing an order by another method

If the customer completes the action, but does not do so online, the affiliate will not receive commission. So, if a customer visits an online retailer through an affiliate link, but places an order over the phone, the affiliate will miss out on commission.

how do affiliates promote merchants?

Affiliates are online marketers who are paid on a performance basis. Every type of marketing strategy will be found in the affiliate world, and affiliates can often be seen at the forefront of breaking technology and applying it to marketing strategies.

The basic aim of an affiliate is to send targeted traffic (that means customers who are very likely to perform the desired action) to a particular merchant's web site. Affiliates may promote as many merchants in as many industries with as many tactics as they wish, but usually affiliates will start to specialise.

Most of the tactics will be the same as those that the merchant employs, but will reach a different part of the Internet population. Effective tracking takes care of any overlap, and will help a merchant to adjust their spending for a most effective ROI.

The main types of affiliates can be broken up as:

- Personal web sites
- Content and niche sites
- Email lists
- Loyalty sites (points or cash back or charitable donations)
- Coupon and promotions sites
- Comparison shopping (see also PPC advertising)
- Search affiliates (search arbitrage)

Affiliate marketing came to the fore as a way for personal web sites to make money, though this now forms a small part of the marketing mix. Affiliate marketing does still provide some income for these web sites. However, we will focus on those endeavours which are created purely for affiliate marketing.

Content and niche sites are web sites created specifically around a topic, and any products promoted will carry affiliate tracking. For example, an affiliate might create a site dedicated to digital cameras, with tips and downloads to help you get the most out of your camera. It could review a number of different cameras, and offer links to purchase those cameras online. All of those links will be affiliate links.

Seasonality is also a key time for content sites. Web sites can be created specifically for Christmas, Mother's Day and many more key retail seasons.

Some affiliates run large opt-in email lists, and they market particular merchant offers through their email newsletters. Some renegade affiliates would use spam email to promote merchant offers, but as affiliate marketing has matured, there are usually terms and conditions to prevent such promotion.

As affiliates earn a percentage of a sale, some affiliates "split" this with the customer and create cash back or points based shopping sites. There are also some that donate a percentage of the commission to a charity.

GreasyPalm.co.uk is a cashback site that is an affiliate.

Some of the most successful affiliate marketers are those who promote various merchants through paid search: PPC advertising on search engines. As these affiliates seek to find the highest Earnings Per Click (EPC) for the lowest Cost Per Click (CPC), this is also referred to as search arbitrage.

Affiliates will find any means possible to promote offers. As new products and platforms become available, marketers and affiliate marketers find new ways to make them work. Some other examples of affiliates promoting merchants include:

- Toolbars and other browser extensions
- Social network applications

GoodSearch.com offers a toolbar. Proceeds from affiliate links are shared with charities.

All that is required is that the click-through to the merchant's web site is tracked.

affiliate networks

As well as the affiliate and the merchant, there is a generally a very important third party in the affiliate marketing mix – the affiliate network.

While some small affiliate programmes and some very large affiliate programmes (such as Amazon Associates) are run by the merchant, most merchants opt to use an affiliate network to provide most of the technical solutions required for an affiliate programme.

Affiliate networks provide tracking solutions, reporting on programmes to both affiliates and merchants, hosting of creative banners, commission payment options and support to both affiliates and merchants. Affiliate networks have many affiliates, and many merchants, signed up to them, so they are an ideal source for recruiting affiliates if you are a merchant, or for finding merchants to promote if you are an affiliate. To the merchants, they provide a one-payment solution, as the merchant will be invoiced for all the commission collectively owed, which is then dispersed to the affiliates.

How an affiliate program works
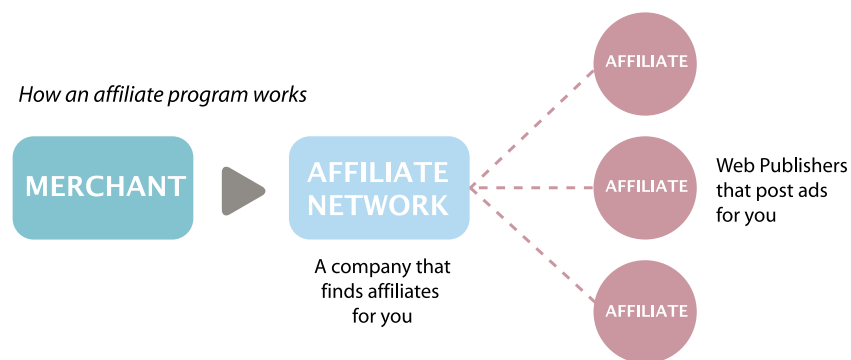
Affiliate networks act as a gateway between merchants and affiliates.

Affiliate networks usually charge the affiliates nothing to join. They can charge a merchant a set-up fee, which will cover the cost making sure that the tracking solution is successfully integrated, and can charge a monthly management fee, depending on

the level of support offered to the merchant. Affiliate networks usually charge the merchant a percentage of the commission earned by the affiliate (called a commission override), so that there are incentives for the networks if they perform well. As a rough guide, this is typically 30% of the commission rewarded to the affiliate.

Some leading affiliate networks are:

- Commission Junction – www.cj.com
- LinkShare - www.linkshare.com
- Affiliate Window – www.affiliatewindow.com
- TradeDoubler - www.tradedoubler.com

tools of the trade

Affiliate marketing today forms a fundamental part of most e-retailers' strategies. So, what tools does a merchant need to have a successful programme?

Any retailer should have a **product feed**, either XML or CSV. A product feed basically is a way of providing information about the products on a merchant's web site in a way that breaks up the information easily, and is standardised. A product feed will probably contain the following information for each product:

- Product name
- Product URL
- Product picture
- Product price
- Description
- Shipping price
- Stock status: in stock / out of stock

Affiliates, particularly search affiliates, can use this to promote individual products.

A product feed is made available on a simple URL, and displays content that affiliates can use in their campaigns. You can view a product feed by visiting www.prezzybox.com/affiliate/Data/awin.aspx

Merchants need to create a set of **banners and buttons** that can be placed on affiliate web sites. At a minimum, the following sizes should be available:

- 468 x 60 (banner)
- 125 x 125 (square)
- 120 x 60 (button)
- 120 x 600 (skyscraper)

Having interactive banners, such as gift wizards or product searches, mean that potential customers can interact with the brand before they even come through to the merchant's web site!

If the merchant or the affiliate network hosts the banners, these can be updated without the affiliates having to do anything. This means that the message can be kept current across all of the merchant campaigns.

Merchants need to consider who will be **keeping tabs and driving the success** of the affiliate campaign. Merchants might be able to run the programme in-house with current staffing resources, or can hire an affiliate manager. It is also possible to outsource the management of the affiliate programme to an agency that specialises in affiliate marketing.

Lastly, merchants need to **keep in touch** with their affiliates: the networks have channels for communicating with a large number of affiliates, but it is also worthwhile to interact on some of the affiliate marketing forums in order to keep informed.

What tools does an affiliate need?

Affiliates need to get to grips with **the spectrum of eMarketing tactics**, and choose what works best for them. Paid search affiliates will focus on PPC tactics, while affiliates running bespoke web sites will probably put a lot of energy into SEO. It depends on where their talent lies, and where they see a gap in the market.

For affiliates, keeping up to date with merchants, other affiliates and the industry is probably the key to growth. That, and finding the time to put it all into practice! **Joining forums** and keeping tabs with industry leaders will help to do just that.

Some notable affiliate marketing Forums:

- Webmasterworld: www.webmasterworld.com
- Affiliates4U forum: www.affiliates4u.com

setting up a campaign

Affiliate marketing is forming such an integral part of eMarketing – how would you go about setting up and launching a new campaign? Affiliate marketing should grow your business, and grow with your business, so it's important to plan and prepare for long lasting success.

First up, you need a clear idea of your business's identity, goals and Unique Selling Points. No doubt you will have competitors that affiliates already promote; you need to

be able to give affiliates compelling reasons why your programme is better.

With this in mind, you need to determine the goal of your affiliate marketing. If you are a new business, you might just want to build traffic and brand awareness. Depending on what industry you are in, your goal could be new customer leads, or it could be increased retail sales. Make sure you are clear on what you want, and that your web site reflects this.

Then, you need to decide whether you are going to run your own programme, from affiliate recruitment to tracking and paying, or whether you are going to use an affiliate network. If you are using an affiliate network, you'll need to do your homework on the best network or networks to join. Look at:
- Where your competitors are
- Who has the kind of affiliates you want
- What the joining fees and monthly fees are
- How much support they can offer you
- What countries the network is in

You'll also need to decide whether you will hire an affiliate manager to run your programme, whether you might outsource your programme management, or whether you already have the resources to run the programme yourself.

You need to do a full competitor analysis, focussing on your competitors' affiliate programmes. Look at:
- Commission tiers
- Cookie periods
- Creative offerings
- Which affiliates they work with
- Networks
- Incentives offered to affiliates

Prepare the basics that you'll need to start a programme:
- Product feed
- Banners and other creative offerings

Using your competitor research, decide on commission, commission tiers, cookie period and incentives.

Test the tracking software on your site, and make sure that it does not conflict with any other tracking you are using.

Recruit affiliates: use your competitor analysis to contact potential affiliates; promote your programme through affiliate forums; use your affiliate network contact channels to approach affiliates; approach sites that you think fit your user demographic.

And it doesn't all stop once you've launched! The key to successful affiliate marketing is ongoing communication with and marketing to your affiliates. You need to make sure you are on top of validating sales, so they get their commission. You need to ensure that you stay competitive with your commission offering. And, you need to keep your affiliates up to date with any information that could make them send more customers your way – more revenue for you and thus more cash for them!

pros and cons

While affiliate marketing certainly deserves increasing recognition for its key role in growth, it is still a young industry with all the growing pains that that involves.

What is holding people back?

1. There are seldom contracts in place between affiliates and merchants. For a merchant, this means that an affiliate could decide to stop promoting your programme, with no notice given. This could lead to a sudden traffic and sales drop, depending on how reliant the merchant had been on that affiliate. Similarly, merchants may decide to terminate a programme, meaning a loss of revenue for affiliates. Particularly if little notice is given, affiliates might have spent time and money setting up promotions, only to have the campaign pulled out from underneath. Most infamously, ASOS.com did this a couple of years ago.
2. There is still little to no industry regulation, though the majority of the industry does strive to best practices. While some affiliates have resorted to shady practices in the past (with adware and email spam), the majority have banded together to blacklist this kind of behaviour. The spectre still remains though.
3. Some merchants fear a loss of brand control.
4. Affiliate programmes are not easily scalable.

But, of course, there are so many benefits to affiliate marketing:

1. It's pay for performance marketing, so merchants are only paying for growth.
2. The merchant sales force just got bigger, as well as its branding potential.
3. There is a very low barrier to entry for both affiliates and merchants.

summary

Affiliate marketing is a key tool for any web site seeking growth. In this performance based marketing, merchants reward affiliates commission for successful referrals.

There are different types of commission, based on the merchant's industry:
*   CPL
*   CPA
*   Revenue Share
*   CPC

The most essential element to affiliate marketing is tracking. Tracking software places a cookie on a user's browser when that user clicks on an affiliate link. The cookie period is determined by the merchant. If the user performs the desired action within the cookie period, the affiliate is awarded commission.

Affiliate networks are often used as an intermediary between affiliates and merchants. Affiliate networks provide tracking solutions, reporting and support to both affiliates and merchants.

Affiliates use a number of means to promote merchants. These include:
*   Personal web sites
*   Content and niche sites
*   Email lists
*   Loyalty sites (points or cash back or charitable donations)
*   Coupon and promotions sites
*   Comparison shopping (see also PPC advertising)
*   Cearch affiliates (search arbitrage)

One of the keys to successful affiliate marketing is ongoing communication between merchants and affiliates. This can be thought of the merchant marketing the affiliate programme to affiliates, so that the affiliates in turn will market the merchant's offering.

the bigger picture

how it all fits together

As affiliates are marketing in an online environment, every one of the tactics in this book will be employed by affiliates. Some affiliates even run affiliate marketing campaigns for their own web sites!

But as a merchant, how does affiliate marketing fit into the overall marketing mix?

For starters, affiliate marketing can allow merchants to add elements to their eMarketing with a fixed CPA. As an example, a merchant might want to promote their products through PPC advertising, but lacks the expertise to run a campaign. Instead of paying an agency, the merchant can recruit search affiliates to run PPC advertising, and the merchant will only ever pay for performance.

Working closely with affiliates, merchants can get many more case studies for analysing and optimising their web sites, particularly when it comes to conversion. As affiliates are paid for performance, they will be more than willing to advise on ways to improve conversion rates.

Affiliate marketing can be used to complement other campaigns, whether they be offline or online. Making sure that there are banners to support these campaigns, the merchant can ensure a wider audience for their other marketing efforts.

Affiliate marketing allows for targeted traffic from niche web sites. While the merchant can focus on a broad spectrum of web sites, affiliate marketing allows for the targeting of niche traffic sources.

case study: Prezzybox.com

Prezzybox.com is a UK online retailer in a very competitive market: gifts and gadgets. With many other players in the market competing for the same customers, Prezzybox.com runs a successful affiliate programme that sees them leading the way in performance marketing.

Affiliate marketing has played a sizeable role in the growth of Prezzybox.com and now accounts for about 35% of sales. Affiliate marketing has contributed on two levels, namely brand growth and sales generation. In fact, Prezzybox.com has won several industry awards for its affiliate programme. In 2008, these awards included 'Best Use of Creative' and 'Best Merchant Innovation'.

A substantial element of affiliate marketing is managing relationships with affiliates. The Prezzybox.com affiliate programme and its affiliate managers have been voted best by affiliates, and its affiliate managers are regularly invited to speak at industry events and conferences. How have they achieved this?

Prezzybox.com has a wide affiliate base, and constantly recruits new affiliates via affiliate get-togethers, affiliate forums and blogs and through keyword searches on Google. Its super affiliates, those affiliates that drive the majority of affiliate sales, account for about 1% of all affiliates. Zak Edwards, Managing Director of Prezzybox. com, says, "We tend to offer all affiliates the same opportunities for promotion, but obviously focus a lot of our attention on our super affiliates."

Super affiliates can be given extra commission as an incentive, and the affiliate managers ensure that these affiliates are up to date with all of the latest offers, new products and promotions. Prezzybox.com communicates these details to all their affiliates as well. However, they use mass communication for all their affiliates and one on one communication, such as phone calls or instant messenger, with their super affiliates. One of the features of the affiliate programme is an affiliate resource centre, which has extensive support information for affiliates such as real time product bestseller reports.
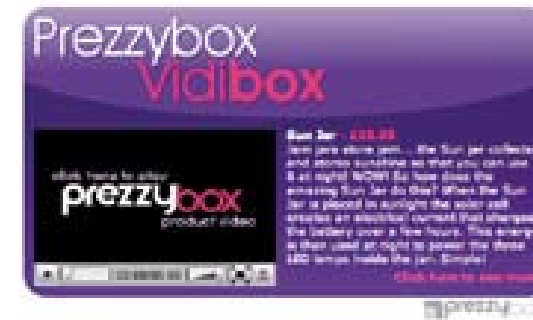
In 2007, Prezzybox.com launched a brand new content item for its affiliates: Vidibox. These are video content units – banners which contain a product video and a link to that product on the Prezzybox.com web site. These video content units were very successful because the content was unique in the affiliate arena and so had a large take up amongst affiliates. Being a more interesting way of displaying content, the Vidiboxes attracted a higher click-through rate, which again made them more appealing to affiliates.

Prezzybox.com's commitment to an innovative and successful affiliate programme has seen them earn immense respect in the affiliate arena, which is translating to ongoing healthy sales growth. In fact, Prezzybox.com has outgrown its offices twice in six years, and looks set to maintain this successful track record.

case study questions

1. Part of affiliate marketing involves marketing a company to affiliates. How has Prezzybox.com achieved this, and what are the effects of this?
2. Why does Prezzybox.com communicate differently to its super affiliates?
3. What made the Vidiboxes enticing to affiliates?
4. In a competitive market, how does affiliate marketing help build a company's success? Are there any additional considerations when a market is competitive?

chapter questions

1. What factors should be considered when determining what commissions should be when you are planning an affiliate campaign? How do these differ for revenue sharing campaigns and CPA campaigns?
2. What is the difference between a lifetime cookie and a lock-in cookie? How do you think lock-in cookies affect the commission levels offered by merchants?
3. Why do you think some affiliates run affiliate programmes for their own web sites?
4. How can a merchant try to ensure that their own marketing efforts do not overlap with affiliates'? Why would a merchant want to reduce overlap?

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further reading

www.AffiliateProgramAdvice.com
– affiliate advice from a team headed by Jess Luthi who has been in the affiliate marketing industry since its start in the UK.

blog.affiliatetip.com
– a blog from Shawn Collins, an affiliate since 1997 and founder of Affiliate Summit, the leading industry conference.

5. search engine marketing

What's inside: A look at the industry known as search and the different types of search results: organic results and paid results. We lay the foundation with key terms and concepts before looking at **the importance of search** to a marketer. The three-way r**elationship between search engines**, **users** and **webmasters** follows, and then a look at **how search engines work**. This leads to search engine marketing, made up of SEO and PPC, and **keywords**.

Every day, all around the world, millions of people use search engines to find content on the Internet. Search engines are web-based programmes that index the web and allow people to find what they are looking for. "Search" or "search marketing" is often used to refer to the industry that has built up around search engines.

Google, Yahoo! and Microsoft's Live are all well known international search engines. Google is by far the leading player in the market. A comScore study of worldwide search engine activity, release in October 2007, showed that Google has just over 60% of the global search engine market share. In Europe, almost 80% of searches are on Google.

Search Property	Searches (Billion)	Market Share
Worldwide	61,036	100%
Google Sites	37,094	61%
Yahoo! Sites	8,549	14%
Baidu.com Inc.	3,253	5%
Microsoft Sites	2,166	4%
NHN Corporation	2,044	3%
eBay	1,319	2%
Time Warner Network	1,212	2%
Ask Network	743	1%
Fox Interactive Media	683	1%
Lycos, Inc.	441	1%

Global search market share. Source: comScore 2007.

When we talk "search", we refer to two different kinds of results:

organic search results

Organic search results are the primary product of a search engine. These results are the listings generally found on the left hand side on the search engine results pages (SERPs). They are not influenced by financial payment and are therefore also called natural search results. Organic search results need to be consistently reliable to attract (and keep) users. Google's growth and success as a search engine can be directly linked to its superior search algorithm which returns highly relevant organic results.

paid search results

Paid search, also known as Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising, involves the displaying of sponsored results alongside the organic results. Advertisers bid for placement, and pay the search engine when their advert is clicked on. Paid search results must be distinguished from organic results since paid placement introduces bias. PPC adverts are usually displayed at the top and on the right side of the SERPs. Search engines attract and keep users through organic search, but they make most of their money from paid search.

key terms and concepts

Above the fold The content that can be seen on a screen without having to scroll down.

Algorithm When it comes to search, a search engine's algorithm is its set of rules for computing ranking.

Browser An application used to access the Internet. Popular browsers include Firefox, Internet Explorer and Safari.

Index The databases for keywords created by the search engines.

Keyword A word or words used by a searcher on a search engine. In SEO, keywords are the words that a web site is optimised to rank for, and in PPC, keywords are bid on by advertisers.

Keyword phrase More than one keyword can be referred to as a keyword phrase.

Organic search results The listings on a SERP resulting from the search engine's algorithm. These are not paid for.

Paid search results The listings on a SERP that are paid for.

PPC Pay Per Click is advertising on search engines where the advertiser pays only for each click on their advert.

Ranking In search, ranking is used to describe the relative position of a web page in the SERPs.

Search engine A tool for searching the Internet. Users of search engines enter keywords relevant to their search, and the search engine returns results from its databases.

SEM Search Engine Marketing refers to marketing that is related to search.

SEO Search Engine Optimisation is the practice that aims to improve a website's ranking in the search engines for specific keywords.

SERP Search Engine Results Page - the page that shows the results for a search on a search engine.

Spider An automated program that scans or crawls web pages to gather information for search engines.

Sponsored links The paid search results on a SERP.

URL Universal Resource Locator - the address of a web page on the Internet.

the importance of search
to a marketer

As search engines have become essential to a web user's Internet experience so has search become essential to a marketer. Search is important for a number of reasons:

Search is goal oriented: people use search to find the things they want and need.
The Internet is a highly competitive environment, with literally billions of pages in existence. So how does anyone find the page they're after? Web users find what they need primarily via search. Search drives targeted traffic (and therefore sales) to web sites. A web search is a signal of intent from a web user.

Search engines are the doorway to the Internet.
According to comScore, 95% of the global Internet population visited a search engine in August 2007.

The search industry is BIG.
The daily search volume numbers are in the hundred millions. According to ComScore figures, there were more than 10 billion searches in the US alone during January 2008! That's around 322 million per day.

To be found you must be visible.
If you want your web site to generate a significant amount of traffic, it needs to be listed on the major search engines and listed high up enough to be seen. Statistics show that users are not likely to view listings beyond the first 30 results, with the top 6 (above the fold) listings enjoying the lion's share of clicks (Eyetools).

Top of search equates to top of mind awareness.
Beyond traffic, a high ranking web site is valuable for brand perception. Web users often perceive search engine results as an indication of authority. Search visibility promotes brand recognition and research has shown that search engine listings can stimulate brand recall by 220% (Enquiro, 2007).

People trust organic search.
Research has shown the people find organic results more relevant and more trusted than paid search results (Enquiro, 2004)

Catch potential customers at every phase of the buying cycle.
Most purchases are subject to a buying cycle. At different points in that cycle, prospects are searching with different key phrases. Give them what they want at each phase, and they will keep coming back till they're ready to buy. In addition, they'll be ready to buy more quickly because information is the best way to shorten the buying cycle.

Many people have a search engine as their browser home page.
Often, the home page of a browser is set to a search engine. Many users enter URLs into the search engine instead of the address bar of the browser – meaning that even if they know the URL of a web site, they are finding it through search.

a three-way relationship
- search engines, webmasters and users

Search engines, Internet users and web site owners are involved in a symbiotic three-way relationship. Each party depends on the other two to get what they need.

Users want to find what they are looking for on the Internet.
They use search engines to lead them to web sites, and they favour search engines that deliver the most relevant and useful results.

Search engines want to make money from selling advertising.
The more users they have, the more advertising search engines can sell. Therefore, search engines must list their results according to relevance and importance in order to attract and keep users. In turn, search engines favour sites that are relevant and useful to users.

Web site owners, webmasters and online marketers want search engines to send traffic to their site.
Therefore, they need to make sure that their sites are relevant and important in both the eyes of the search engines and the users.

Page and Brin sum it up in their pre-Google paper *The Anatomy of a Large-Scale Hypertextual Web Search Engine:*

"The most important measure of a search engine is the quality of its search results."

what does a search engine do?

Search engines have four main functions:
- They crawl the web (via spiders).
- They index the web documents and pages they find.
- Search engines process user queries.
- Finally, they return ranked results from the index.

A search engine is made up of a number of parts all working together:
- A crawling **spider**, also known as a web crawler, **robot** or bot, is an automated indexing program. It goes from page to page, following links and indexing or recording what it finds.
- The **index** is what the spider creates. It is a "library" of pages on the Internet and it consists of tens of billions of pages! The search engine creates databases for keywords, so it knows where to go to when a user enters a query.
- The **engine** is the part that does the actual searching. Users input a search query by typing a keyword or phrase into the search bar. The engine then checks its index to find relevant pages and delivers them ordered from most relevant and important to least relevant and unimportant.
- The **SERP** (search engine results page) is the ordered listing of results for the user's query. A SERP contains a description and link to the result.

search engine marketing

Search engine marketing (SEM) has two arms: search engine optimisation (SEO) and pay per click (PPC) advertising. These correspond to the two types of search results.

SEO + PPC = SEM

SEM search engine marketing	
SEO search engine optimisation	**PPC** pay per click
PROS	**PROS**
- long term ROI	- quick low cost setup
- high volume	- highly measurable and trackable
- more exposure, branding and awareness	- minimal development time required, if at all
CONS	**CONS**
- tough to quantify	- can be more expensive
- lots of ongoing work	- CPC is climbing
- results can take a while to be seen	- constant monitoring required

SEO aims at improving a web site's ranking in the natural search results. PPC advertising involves bidding for placement in the paid search results section of the SERP.

Both SEO and PPC advertising are based around the same fundamental concept: **keywords.**

keywords – making sense of it all

Keywords, or key phrases, are what a user enters into a search engine query to find web sites. Both SEO and PPC advertising involve selecting the keywords that are relevant to a company's web site and are used by potential customers. SEO aims to have a web site rank in the natural results for its target keywords. In PPC advertising, the advertiser bids on desired keywords to achieve rankings in the paid results.

The following two chapters deal with the two arms of search engine marketing: search engine optimisation and pay per click advertising.

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6. search engine optimisation

What's inside: An **introduction** to SEO, and a brief **history** followed by the **key terms and concepts** you need. In **how it works**, we look at the five main areas of SEO, namely **web site structure**, **key phrase research**, **writing content**, **all important links** and **usage data**. When it comes to SEO, you also need to know **what not to do**. Following all this we have the **tools of the trade**, the **pros and cons** of SEO, and a look at **the bigger picture.**

introduction

With millions of people performing millions of searches each day to find content on the Internet, it makes sense that marketers want their products to be found by potential consumers. Search engines use closely guarded algorithms to determine the results that are displayed. However, determining what factors these algorithms take into account has lead to a growing practice known as search engine optimisation.

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is the practice of optimising a web site so as to achieve preferred ranking on the search engine results pages (SERPs). Someone who practices SEO professionally is also known as an SEO (search engine optimiser).

SEO can be split into two distinct camps: white hat SEO and black hat SEO (with, of course, some grey hat-wearers in between). Black hat SEO refers to trying to game the search engines. These SEOs use dubious means to achieve high rankings, and their web sites are occasionally black-listed by the search engines. White hat SEO, on the other hand, refers to working within the parameters set by search engines to optimise a web site for better user experience. Search engines want to send users to the web site that is most suited to their needs, so white hat SEO should ensure that users can find what they are looking for.

history

By the mid-90s, webmasters had begun to optimise their sites for search engines due to a growing awareness of the importance of being listed by the various engines. Initially, all a webmaster needed to do was submit the URL of a web page for it to be indexed. Search engines relied on the meta data, information that webmasters inserted in the code of a web page, to determine what a web page was about and to index it appropriately.

Industry analyst Danny Sullivan records that the earliest known use of the term "search engine optimization" was a spam message posted on Usenet, an online forum or message board, on July 26, 1997.

Realising the importance of being ranked highly in search results, webmasters began using the search engine's reliance on meta data to manipulate the ranking for their web sites. To combat this, search engines in turn have developed more complex algorithms including a number of other ranking factors.

While at Stanford University, Larry Page and Sergey Brin developed a search engine, called Backrub, that relied on a mathematical algorithm to rank web pages. They founded Google in 1998, which relied on PageRank, hyperlink analysis as well as on-page factors to determine the prominence of a web page. This enabled Google to avoid the same kind of manipulation of on-page factors to determine ranking.

key terms and concepts

Alt Text This refers to the "alt" attribute for the image HTML tag. It is used in HTML to attribute a text field to an image on a web page, normally with a descriptive function, telling a user what an image is about and displaying the text in instance where the image is unable to load.

Anchor Text The visible, clickable text in a link.

Backlink All the links on other pages that will take the user to a specific web page. Each link to that specific page is known as an inbound/backlink. The number of backlinks influences PageRank so the more backlinks the better - get linking!

Domain Name The name of a server that distinguishes it from other systems on the World Wide Web.

Heading Tags Heading tags (H1, H2, H3 etc) are standard elements used to define headings and subheadings on a web page. The number indicates the importance, so H1 tags are viewed by the spiders as being more important that the H3 tags. Using target key phrases in your H tags is essential for effective SEO.

Home Page The first page of any web site. The home page gives users a glimpse into what your site is about – very much like the index in a book, or a magazine.

HTML The abbreviation for HyperText Markup Language, read by web browsers. Certain HTML tags are used to structure the information and features within a web page.

Hyperlink A link in a document (electronic) that allows you, once you click on it, to follow the link to the relevant web page.

IP Address The Internet Protocol (IP) address is a exclusive number, which is used to represent every single computer in a network.

Keyword Frequency The number of times a keyword or key phrase appears on a web site.

Keyword Phrase Two or more words that are combined to form a search query - often referred to as keywords. It is usually better to optimise for a phrase rather than a single word.

Keyword Rankings This term refers to where the keywords/phrases targeted by SEO rank amongst the search engines - if your targeted terms do not appear on the first 3 pages, start worrying.

Landing Page The page a user reaches when clicking on a paid or organic search engine listing. The pages that have the most success are those that match up as closely as possible with the user's search query.

Link A link is a URL imbedded on a web page. If you click on the link you will be taken to that page.

Link Bait A technique for providing content that attracts links from other web pages.

Meta Tags Meta tags are there to tell the spiders exactly what the web pages are about. It's important that your Meta tags are optimised for the targeted key phrases. Meta tags are made up of meta titles, descriptions and keywords.

Referrer When a user clicks on a link from one site to another site the user left is the referrer. Most browsers log the referrer's URL in referrer strings. This information is vital to determining which queries are being used to find specific sites.

Robot.txt A file written and stored in the root directory of a web site that restricts the search engine spiders from indexing certain pages of the web site.

URL Uniform (or Universal) Resource Locator. This is a web page's address e.g. http://www.gottaquirk.com.

URL Rewriting Presenting search-friendly URLs without question marks, rewriting them on the server to their standard format suitable for use in querying dynamic content.

Usability Usability is a measure of how easy it is for a user to complete a desired task. Sites with excellent usability fare far better than those that are difficult to use.

From http://www.google.com/technology/:

˙PageRank relies on the uniquely democratic nature of the web by using its vast link structure as an indicator of an individual page's value. In essence, Google interprets a link from page A to page B as a vote, by page A, for page B. But, Google looks at more than the sheer volume of votes, or links a page receives; it also analyzes the page that casts the vote. Votes cast by pages that are themselves "important" weigh more heavily and help to make other pages "important."˙

PageRank was based on the practice of academic citations. The more times an academic paper is cited, the more likely it is an authority paper on the subject. Page and Brin used a similar theory for their search engine – the more times a web page or web site is linked to, the more likely it is that the community considers that page an authority.

However, ranking highly in search results is vital to web sites, so webmasters have adapted as search engines have updated their algorithms to avoid being "gamed". Today, Google says it uses more than 200 different factors in its algorithm to determine relevance and ranking. None of the major search engines disclose the elements they use to rank pages, but there are many SEO practitioners who spend time analysing patent applications to try to determine what these are.

how it works

Search engines need to help users find what they're looking for. To make sure they list the best results first, they look for signals of:

- • Relevance
- • Importance
- • Popularity
- • Trust
- • Authority

SEO, also called organic or natural optimisation, involves optimising web sites to achieve high rankings on the search engines for certain selected key phrases.

This is achieved by making changes to the HTML code, content and structure of a web site, making it more accessible for search engines, and by extension, easier to find by users. These are also known as **on page factors**. SEO also involves **off page factors** – these generally build links to the web site. Activities to increase links to a web site, including social media and WebPR, are considered off page SEO.

SEO is an extremely effective way of generating new business to a site. It is a continuous process and a way of thinking about how search engines see your web site and how users use search engines to find your web site. It's search psychology.

Search engine optimisation is a fairly technical practice but it can easily be broken down into five main areas:

1. A search engine friendly web site structure
2. A well researched list of key phrases
3. Content optimised to target those key phrases
4. Link popularity
5. Usage data

1. search engine friendly web site structure

Search engines encounter two kinds of obstacles:
- • Technical challenges that prevent the search engine spider from accessing content
- • A competitive marketing environment where everyone wants to rank highly

To ensure that search engines can access your content, you must remove technical barriers. Those who wish to achieve the best results must follow best practices. These best practices are outlined in the chapter on web development and design.

Rand Fishkin of SEOmoz.org says: "The key to ensuring that a site's contents are fully crawlable is to provide direct, HTML links to to each page you want the search engine spiders to index. Remember that if a page cannot be accessed from the home page (where most spiders are likely to start their crawl) it is likely that it will not be indexed by the search engines."

The chapter on web development and design delves more deeply into building a search engine friendly web site.

2. well researched key phrases

Key phrases are the very foundation of search. When a user enters a query on a search engine, she uses the words that she thinks are relevant to her search. The search engine then returns those pages it believes are most relevant to the words the searcher used.

Search engines have built a sophisticated understanding of semantics and the way we use language. So, if a user searches for "car rental" the search engine will look for pages that are relevant to "car rental" as well as possibly "car hire", "vehicle hire" and so forth. Search engines have also built up knowledge around common misspellings and synonyms and common related searches, so as to try to return the best results for a user.

> **note**
>
> **Keyword or key phrase? Key phrases are made up of keywords, but you can get away with referring to a key phrase as keywords.**

Because of this, it is crucial that web sites contain content that implements keywords that are likely to be used by their target audience. Web sites need to appear when their potential customers are searching for them.

As a web site owner, or the marketer for a web site, we need to build a list of some of the terms our potential customers are likely to use to find the things we are offering. A big part of keyword research is understanding search psychology. When we build our key phrase or keyword list, we are tapping into the mental process of searchers and putting together the right mix of keywords to target.

There are four things to consider when choosing a keyword:

• **Search volume**
How many searchers are using that phrase to find what they want? For example, there is an estimated monthly search volume of over 2 million for the keyword "hotel", but an estimated 385 searches for month for a keyword like "Cape Town waterfront hotel".

• **Competition**
How many other web sites out there are targeting that same phrase? For example, Google finds over 795,000,000 results for "hotel" but only 1,350 for "Cape Town Waterfront Hotel".

• **Propensity to convert**
What is the likelihood that the searcher using that key phrase is going to convert on your site? A conversion is a desired action taken by the visitor to your web site.

Related to propensity to convert, is the relevance of the selected term to what you are offering. If you are selling rooms at a hotel at the V&A Waterfront, which of the two terms ("hotel" and "Cape Town Waterfront hotel") do you think will lead to more conversions?

• **Value per lead**
What is the average value per prospect attracted by the keyword? Depending on the nature of your web site, the average value per lead varies. Using the hotel example again, consider these two terms:

"luxury Cape Town hotel" and "budget Cape Town hotel"

Both are terms used by someone looking to book a hotel in Cape Town, but it is likely that someone looking for a luxury hotel is intending to spend more. That means that particular lead has a higher value, particularly if you have a hotel booking web site that offers a range of accommodation.

keyword research

How do you know where to start on building your keyword list? It requires a little thought, and a fair amount of research using tools which are readily available to help you both grow and refine your list of keywords.

Brainstorm
Think about the words you would use to describe your business, and about the questions or needs of your customers that it fulfils. How would someone ask for what you are offering? Consider synonyms and misspellings as well.

Bear in mind that people might not ask for your services in the same way you describe them. You might sell "herbal infusions" whereas most people would ask for "herbal teas", although some might request a "tisane".

If you are selling Tamagotchis, remember that the spelling can be tough to recall, and you might need to consider common misspellings like "tumagochi" or "tamagochi".

Survey customers and look at your web site referral logs
Look to see what terms customers are already using to find you, and add those to your list. If they are already sending you some traffic, it is worth seeing if you can increase that traffic.

Use keyword research tools
There are several tools available for keyword discovery, and some of them are free! Some tools will scan your web site and suggest keywords based on your current content. Most will let you enter keywords, and will then return suggestions based on past research data with:
- Similar keywords
- Common keywords used with that keyword
- Common misspellings
- Frequency of the keywords in search queries
- Industry related keywords
- Keywords that are sending traffic to your competitors
- How many sites are targeting your keywords

See **Tools of the Trade** for some tools that you can use.

Bearing in mind the factors that make a good keyword, you need to aim for the right mix of keywords. Low volume terms, with low levels of competition may be a good way to get traffic in the short term, but don't be scared off by high-levels of competition in the high-value, high-volume areas. It might take longer to get there, but once there, the revenue can make it all worthwhile.

note
Misspellings are important, but when you are selling something, consider what the misspelling tells you about the traffic you are getting. With everything, analyse your traffic to assess for quality.

It is a good idea to create a spreadsheet of the list of keywords, where you can also store information relevant to that keyword.

Keyword or phrase	Search volume	Competition	Propensity to Convert	Value of Lead
Hotel	3,870	90%	2%	$18
Luxury hotels	345	80%	35%	$35

This will help you to choose the right keywords to target. These lists should be created for the whole web site, and then can be broken down for each page you want to optimise.

3. optimising content for key phrases

Once keywords and phrases are selected, we need to ensure that the site contains content to target those key phrases. We must ensure that the content is properly structured and that it sends signals of relevance. Content is the most important part of your web site. We must create relevant, targeted content aiming at our selected key phrases.

Content already has several roles to play on your site:

- It provides information to visitors.
- It must engage with them.
- It must convince them to do what you want.

Now it must also send signals of relevance to search engines. You need to use the keywords on the content page in a way that search engines will pick up, and users will understand.

Each web page should be optimised for two to three key phrases: the primary key phrase, the secondary and the tertiary. A page can be optimised for up to five key phrases, but it is better to have more niche pages than fewer unfocused pages.

Here are some guidelines:

1. **Title tag:** use the key phrase in the title, and as close to the beginning as possible.
2. **H1 header tag:** use the key phrase in the header tag, and as much as possible in the other H tags.
3. **Body content:** use the key phrase at least three times, more if there is a lot of content and it makes sense to. You should aim for about 350 words of content. But don't overdo it! That could look like spam to the search engines.
4. **Bold:** use <strong> tags around the keyword at least once.
5. **Alt tag for an image:** use it at least once to describe an image on the page.
6. **URL:** use a URL rewrite so that it appears in the URL of the page.
7. **Meta description:** use it at least once in the meta description of the page. It should entice users to click through to your site from the SERP.
8. **Meta tags:** use the keywords in the meta tags to provide context to the search engines.
9. **Link anchor text** to another page: don't use it when linking to another page on your site. The anchor text describes the page being linked to, and so could dilute the relevance of the page you are linking from.
10. **Domain name:** if possible, use the key phrase in your domain name.

optimising images

Images should also be optimised with the relevant keywords. Search engines cannot see images, so rely on the way that an image is described to determine what the image is about. Screen readers also read out the image descriptions, which can help visually impaired readers to make sense of a web site. Lastly, images are sometimes also shown on the SERPs, and of course one can also search images using most of the major search engines.

Just as an image can help emphasise the content on a page to a visitor to that page, they can also help search engines in ranking pages, provided they are labelled correctly.

Title: Handmade bags for quirky, one of a kind style

H1 Header tag: Customised Handmade Bags to Suit Your Style

Body Copy: Here, descriptive and compelling copy about how handmade bags will make anyone a style maven, what the benefits are to the community that make the bags, and how distinctive handmade bags will make the owner feel. Text should be written in a logical, easy to follow fashion. You could also highlight the designers of handmade bags, and how their personality shows in their work.

Alt Attribute for Photo: Distinctive Handmade Bags in Many Colours.

URL: http://www.domain.com/handmade-bags

Page targeting the phrase "handmade bags".

Here are some ways to optimise images with key phrases for SEO:
- • Use descriptive filenames.
- • Use specific ALT tags and Title attributes for the images.
- • Meta information can be supplied in the image file. Make sure this information is relevant.
- • Use descriptive captions, and keep relevant copy close to the relevant image.
- • Make sure the header tags and images are relevant to each other.

SEO is both a science and an art. Focussing on writing quality content while sticking to a few guidelines when it comes to tags and URLs is the best way to ensure results. Remember, you want search engines to rank you highly for your content, but you also want to ensure that the content is a pleasure to read.

Adding fresh content which carries brand values regularly to your site will also encourage the search engines to crawl your site more frequently.

Use your web site and its pages to establish and reinforce themes. Information can always be arranged in some kind of hierarchical structure. Just as a single page can have a heading and then get broken down into sub-headings, a large web site can have main themes that get broken down into sub-themes. Search engines will see these themes and recognise you as a web site with rich content.

4. link popularity

Links are a vital part of how the Internet works. The purpose of a link is to allow a user to go from one web page to another. Search engines, doing their best to mimic the behaviour of humans, also follow links.

Besides allowing search engine spiders to find web sites, links are also a way of validating relevance and indicating importance. When one page links to another, it is as if that page is voting or vouching for the destination page. Generally, the more votes a web site receives, the more trusted it becomes, the more important it is deemed, and the better it will rank on search engines.

Links help send signals of trust. Signals of trust can only come from a third party source. Few people will trust someone who says, "Don't worry you can trust me" unless someone else, who is already trusted says, "Don't worry, I know him well. You can trust him". It is the same with links and search engines. Trusted sites can transfer trust to unknown sites via links.

Links help to validate relevance. Text links, by their very nature, contain text (thank you, Captain Obvious). The text that makes up the link can help validate relevance. A link like "Cape Town hotel" sends the message that, "You can trust that the destination

site is relevant to the term 'Cape Town hotel'." If the destination web page has already used content to send a signal of relevance, the link simply validates that signal.

what does a link look like?
Here is the HTML code for a link:

Anchor Text

http://www.targeturl.com/targetpage.htm is the page that the link leads to.
Anchor Text is the text that forms the link.

The link sends a signal that the target URL is important for the subject used in the anchor text.

There is a lot more information that can be included in this anatomy, such as instructions telling the search engine not to follow the link, or instructions to the browser as to whether the link should open in a new window or not.

Anchor Text

rel="nofollow" can be included in links when you don't want to vouch for the target URL. Search engines do not count nofollow links for ranking purposes. It was introduced by Google to try to combat comment spam.

Not all links are created equal
Of course, not all links are equal. Some sites are more trusted than others. So if they are more trusted, then links from those sites are worth more. Likewise, some sites are more relevant than others to specific terms. The more relevant a site, the more value is transferred by the link. Well known and established news sites, government sites (.gov) and university domains (.ac) are examples of sites from which links can carry more weighting.

Search algorithms also consider relationships between linked sites. By analysing various things, the engines try to determine if the links are natural links, or if they are manipulative, artificial links created solely for ranking purposes. Manipulated links are worth very little compared to natural links and may lead to a drop in search engine rankings.

The search engine algorithm will also determine the relevancy of the referring web site to the site being linked to. The more relevant the sites are to each other, the better.

how does a web site get more links?
With links playing such a vital role in search engine rankings and traffic for a web site, everyone wants more of them. The more relevant the referring web site to your web

site, the better the link. There are certainly dubious means to generating links, most of which can actually result in being penalised by the search engines. However, here are some ways that ethical and honest web site owners and marketers (and that's what you are) go about increasing links to their web sites:

Writing excellent, valuable content that others want to read

If people find your site useful, they are more likely to link to it. It is not necessary, nor possible, to try to write content that will appeal to the whole Internet population. Focus on being the best in the industry you are in, and in providing value to the members of that community. Make sure that value content is themed around your key phrases.

Create tools and documents that others want to use

Interview experts in your field, and host those interviews on your web site. Think outside the box for quirky, relevant items that people will link to. Calculators are popular tools, and we don't just mean the ones that add two and two together. If you have a web site selling diet books, for example, create a tool that helps users calculate their BMI and target weight.

Games

Creating a game that people want to play is a great way to generate links. Make sure that the theme of the game is based on the key phrases for your web site, so that when others talk about and link to the game, they are using your key phrases!

Software and widgets

Widgets, browser extensions and other useful software that users love to use all help to generate links for a web site. Quirk, a South African eMarketing agency, has released a Firefox extension called SearchStatus that is exceptionally useful to the SEO community and is downloaded thousands of time each month. Each time someone mentions this SEO tool, they link to Quirk.

WebPR

In the chapter on WebPR you'll learn how taking PR online can provide valuable links to your content. This involves writing content relevant to your industry and then distributing that content.

Competitor analysis

Find out who is linking to your competitors, and which non-competing sites are ranking highly for your key phrases. Use this information to identify sites to target for link requests.

Using Yahoo! search, the following search operators can be used to find these links and web sites:

- Linkdomain:url.com
- Link:http://www.url.com/page.html

- Linkdomain:url.com word
- Linkdomain:url.com –term
- Linkdomain:url.com -site:url.com

With all link building tactics, make sure that you use your key phrases when communicating. You will be telling people how to link to you, and ensuring that search engines notice your authority.

5. usage data

Search engines want their results to be highly relevant to web users to make sure that web users keep returning to the search engine for future searches. And the best way to establish relevance to users – how they use web sites, of course!

Usage data is the most effective way of judging the true relevancy and value of a web site. For example, if users arrive on a web site and leave immediately, chances are it wasn't relevant to their query in the first place. However, if a user repeatedly visits a web site and spends a long time on the site, chances are it is extremely relevant. When it comes to search engines, relevant valuable sites get promoted, irrelevant sites get demoted.

how do search engines access this data?

Search engines use cookies to maintain a history of a user's search activity. This will include keywords used, and web sites visited from the search engine. Search engines gather data on the click through rate of results, and on bounce rates.

Most search engines also provide other services, all of which can be used to gather data relevant to search. For Google, some examples include:

- Google AdWords
- Google AdSense
- Google Analytics
- Google Website Optimizer
- Google Checkout
- Google Toolbar

As of 2008, this is a very new area of SEO. It no doubt plays a part in search engine rankings, and that contribution is set to grow.

So, what does this mean for SEO? When it comes to a web site, it must:

- Be valuable enough to attract both visitors and links naturally
- Retain visitors and make sure they return to the website
- Convert visitors

what not to do

Black hat SEO refers to practices which attempt to game the search engines. Should a search engine uncover a web site that is using unethical practices to achieve search engine rankings, it is likely to remove that web site from its index.

Google publishes guidelines for webmasters, available through Google's Webmaster Central (www.google.com/webmasters). As well as outlining best practice principles, Google has supplied the following list of don'ts:

- Avoid hidden text or hidden links.
- Don't use cloaking or sneaky redirects.
- Don't send automated queries to Google.
- Don't load pages with irrelevant keywords.
- Don't create multiple pages, subdomains, or domains with substantially duplicate content.
- Don't create pages with malicious behavior, such as phishing or installing viruses, trojans, or other badware.
- Avoid "doorway" pages created just for search engines, or other "cookie cutter" approaches such as affiliate programs with little or no original content.
- If your site participates in an affiliate program, make sure that your site adds value. Provide unique and relevant content that gives users a reason to visit your site first.

The bottom line: design web sites for users first and foremost, and don't try to trick the search engines.

tools of the trade

There are a number of tools available to assist with SEO. Some are made available by search engines, and some are developed by agencies and individuals who specialise in SEO. Most are available for free.

Google Webmaster Tools
URL: www.google.com/webmasters
Google provides guidelines to webmasters, and tools to help ensure your web site is being indexed.

Quirk SearchStatus
URL: www.quirk.biz/searchstatus
Quirk SearchStatus is a Firefox extension that allows you to view easily key SEO information related to the page you are visiting. As well as linking to Alexa and Compete rankings and a Whois look up, Quirk SearchStatus will highlight keywords on a page and allow you to easily access link reports from each of the major search engines.

Tools from SEOBook.com

URL: tools.seobook.com
SEOBook.com provides a number of tools that assist any SEO. For example, Rank Checker is a Firefox extension that allows you to save a number of keywords and to perform regular searches on them, giving you the ranking of your chosen URL for each keyword in the search engines selected. They also have tools to help with keyword discovery.

Keyword discovery tools

There are a number of tools available, some free and some paid for, to assist with keyword discovery. Some include:
Trellion's Keyword Discovery Tool – www.keyworddiscovery.com
Wordtracker – www.wordtracker.com

Online forums

Webmaster World (www.webmasterworld.com) is frequented by SEOs and webmasters aiming to stay current with latest trends and search engine updates.

pros and cons

Optimising a web site for search engines should entail optimising the web site for users. Done properly, it should result in a better user experience, while ensuring that search engines index and rank the web site well.

However, it can be tempting to focus on the technicalities of SEO while forgetting that both robots and humans need to read the same web site. One should not be sacrificed for the other.

Search engines update their algorithms regularly. Each update is an attempt to improve search results, but can result loss of rankings for some web sites, depending on the update. A contingency plan, such as a prepared PPC campaign, needs to be in place to cope with a sudden drop in rankings.

As with any eMarketing practice, SEO should not be the only focus of eMarketing efforts. It works best when part of a holistic eMarketing strategy.

summary

The average web site receives up to 90% of its traffic from search engines, highlighting the importance of SEO.

There are two types of search results:
- Organic or natural results
- Paid results

SEO aims to improve a web site's ranking in the organic results.

Search engines use algorithms to rank web pages for signs of:
- Relevance
- Importance
- Popularity
- Trust
- Authority

Search engine optimisation is a fairly technical practice but it can easily be broken down into five main areas:
1. A search engine friendly web site structure
2. A well-researched list of key phrases
3. Content optimised to target those key phrases
4. Link popularity
5. Usage data

the bigger picture

Search engine optimisation can be influenced and enhanced by most other eMarketing campaigns, and they should all be approached with this in mind.

For example:
PPC campaigns can provide valuable keyword research which can then be fed into the SEO strategy.

Social media marketing and viral marketing can both generate an enormous number of links to a web site. Social media such as blogs can be used to add fresh content regularly to a web site.

Emails sent as part of an email marketing campaign can also be published to web sites, creating fresh content for the site. Search engines love fresh content.

WebPR aims to generate links to a web site. Make sure that these are optimised for search engines.

case study: City Lofts

City Lofts (www.citylofts.co.uk) has been online for six years, but their web site was suffering from some common problems:
- Lack of visibility in search engines
- Which led to too little traffic
- Which meant that the web site was not producing a return on investment.

Planning a rebuild of their web site, City Lofts were made aware of the importance of search and SEO and so the design process was tackled from an SEO perspective. The current situation was analysed in terms of search engine traffic and barriers to search engines. The design mock-ups for the new web site were also analysed by an SEO strategist, to make sure that the new web site was built for SEO.

From this, an SEO document with instructions for the web designers and developers was written, so that the new web site would be built to be search engine friendly. Some of ways this was achieved were:
- Implementation of a robots.txt file
- Setting up 301 redirects of the URLs from the old web site to the content on the new web site
- Creating an XML sitemap for submission to search engines
- Improving naming conventions so that URLs are static and well named
- Using HTML tags that put emphasis on target keywords

Before the new web site was launched, keyword research found targeted keywords for which to optimise the new web site. The web site copy was then tweaked by an experienced SEO copywriter, and these were implemented in the meta data and HTML tags. Keyword rich anchor text was used for internal links. Along with this, a rigorous linking strategy was undertaken to build links to the new web site.

For the first three months after the web site was launched, the copy of further web pages was tweaked to target relevant keywords. Ongoing research revealed new keywords to target, and new content and web pages were created to target them. The link building strategy continued to investigate new link building tactics for City Lofts.

While initial SEO is usually regarded as a 6 month project, positive results were seen within 3 months. Possibly this was due to the domain's age and accumulated trust. Online marketing efforts were restricted to SEO, which means that the positive effects of SEO can be measured in isolation.

In summary, the SEO campaign yielded the following results:
- After 3 months, total traffic from the 3 major search engines was increased by 65.68%
- Total website referrals increased by 172.2% over the period
- Direct traffic to the site increased by 122.4%
- The number of visitors and repeat visitors showed an increase over the period

Visitors per month
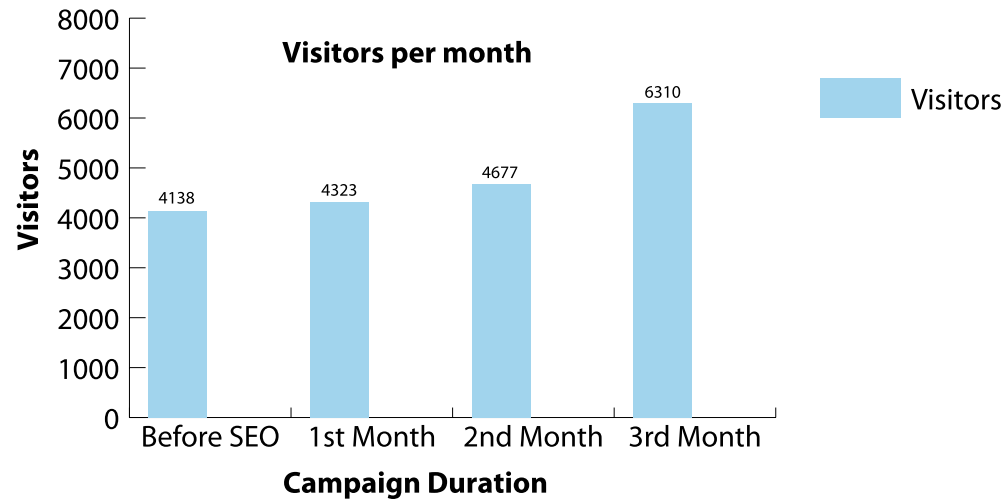
The considerable overall traffic increase can be attributed to the knock-on effect that SEO has for online brand awareness.

case study questions

1. Why do you need to use 301 redirects when launching a new web site?
2. Why were new web pages needed to target new content?
3. Why could SEO increase web site referrals and direct traffic?

chapter questions

1. Why do links send signals of trust to search engines?
2. Why is better to have more niche pages of content than fewer pages that cover a lot of content?
3. How can analysing the links to a competitor's web site help aid your own link building strategy?
4. Why is it important for search engines to keep updating their algorithms?
5. If meta data are no longer used for ranking purposes, why do they still have an important role in SEO?

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Image credit page 81 www.babazeka.com

further reading

www.seomoz.org
– SEOMoz.org provides regular articles, guides and blog posts covering all things SEO. As well as sharing insights from their own SEO efforts, there are also vibrant forums where you can learn from others.

www.seobook.com
– Aaron Wall's SEOBook.com provides training and tools for SEO, as well as regular articles and posts.

www.gottaquirk.com
– the blog from the minds of Quirk, who live, eat and breathe all things Internet.

www.webmasterworld.com
– a forum for webmasters, from beginners to those who've been around. A great resource for a budding SEO.

7. PPC advertising

What's inside: An **introduction**, the **key terms and concepts** that you will need, a **history** of paid search. Looking at **how it works**, we consider who does what and the difference between search and content networks. We look at what makes up a PPC advert, and all important keyword matching. We look into various aspects of PPC advertising, and of **course planning and setting up a campaign**. There is a brief overview of **online comparison engines**, the **tools of the trade**, and the **pros and cons** of setting up a campaign. There is a chapter **summary** and checking out how it all fits together.

introduction

Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising is an advertising system where the advertiser only pays for each click on their advert.

While it is most often used as an advertising system offered by search engines, such as Google and Yahoo!, it can also be used for banner advertising (where the advertiser pays for clicks on the advert as opposed to impressions). PPC is also the system on which many shopping engines and directories, such as NexTag and Shopping.com, are based. Sometimes PPC advertising on search engines is referred to as paid search.

PPC advertising revolutionised the online advertising industry, and today, advertising generates 99% of Google's revenue. Google's revenue for the quarter ended March 31, 2008 was $5.19 billion! And that figure continues to increase.

In this chapter, we'll use PPC to refer to paid search advertising, that is PPC advertising provided by search engines, but we will touch briefly on other advertising systems based on PPC.

PPC adverts on search engines are easy to spot – they're the results listed as "sponsored links". They can appear on the top of the results page, usually in a box, and also on the right hand side of the results page.

PPC advertising is keyword based – this means that it is based on the search term that a user enters into a search engine. A search term can have one word, or be made up of many words. Sometimes a multi-word search term is referred to as a "key phrase" or "keyword phrase". Advertisers target those keywords for which they want to appear.

For the advertiser, the beauty of PPC advertising on search engines is that their adverts are displayed when potential customers are already expressing intent – they are searching for a product or service. It allows advertisers to present their offering to a potential customer who is already in the buying cycle.

key terms and concepts

AdCenter MSN's PPC advertising system.

AdWords Google's PPC advertising system.

Click-through A click on a link that leads to another web site.

Conversion Rate Actions / Clicks %.

CPA Cost per Action. Paid when a certain action is performed by a user.

CPC Cost per Click. Paid when a link is clicked upon.

CPM Cost per Mil (1000). Amount paid for every 1000 views of an advertisement.

CSV file Comma Separated Values file. This can be used to send databases of information separated into specific column headings.

CTR Click Through Rate: Clicks / Impressions %.

Impression Each time the advert is shown.

Keyword This is a word found within a search query. For example, searching for "blue widgets" includes the keywords blue and widgets.

Key Phrase Just like keyword, this is simply a multi-word keyword.

Natural Results Search results as determined by the search engine's algorithm. The search engine does not get paid to list these.

Overture Formerly GoTo.com, bought by Yahoo! and provider of Yahoo!'s PPC advertising. Panama has replaced Overture as the platform that powers Yahoo! Search Marketing.

Panama The platform that powers Yahoo! Search Marketing.

PFI Short for Pay for Inclusion. Used by various search engines that guarantees that your site will be listed in a search engine database. Google is a notable exception that does not 'offer' such a service.

PPC Pay Per Click.

PPC Engine 'Search Engine' whose results are driven by PPC [paid per click] listings. Essentially all the search results are of CPC type.

Ranking This refers to the process by which search engines display web sites so that the most relevant web sites appear on the top. Search engine optimisation is a technique by which high rankings may be obtained.

ROI Short for return on investment.

Search Term Another way of saying search query.

SERP Short for Search Engine Results Page, SERPs are the actual results returned to the user based on their search query.

Sponsored Results Search engine results that are paid for by the advertiser.

Traffic This refers to the visitors that visit a web site.

Yahoo! Search Marketing Yahoo!'s PPC advertising, powered by the Panama platform.

XML eXtensible Markup Language.

history

You have learned that search engines display results to search queries based on proprietary algorithms. Each major search engine uses its own formula to determine what results to display for any term. All of this is available to web users for free! With about 80% of web users using search engines as a starting point (Jansen and Molino, 2006), that's a lot of traffic going through search engines each day. So, search engines require a way of generating revenue from all that traffic.

In 1996, the Open Text Index search engine began allowing web sites to pay for a preferred ranking in selected results pages, to mixed response from business owners and other search engines. However, this was pay for placement, not that different from paid inclusion, where advertisers were paying to appear in the search results, whether or not a user clicked through to their site.

In February 1998, GoTo.com launched. This was a new search engine that allowed web site owners to bid for placement in the search results pages for specific search terms. Results were ranked according to how much the web site owners were willing to bid, with the highest bid appearing at the top of the page. The web site owner would only pay for each click, as opposed to for appearing on the results page. By July 1998, advertisers were paying up to a dollar for each click! GoTo.com changed its name to Overture Services Inc in 2001, and was acquired by Yahoo! in 2003. GoTo.com partnered with portals Yahoo! and MSN to monetise their search queries.

Overture successfully patented their PPC mechanism for search engines ("System and method for influencing a position on a search result list generated by a computer network search engine" was patented in 2001), and has since then pursued, successfully, lawsuits against other PPC providers, including Google. Overture initiated infringement proceedings under this patent in 2002, and settled with Google after it had been acquired by Yahoo!. Google agreed to issue 2.7 million shares of common stock to Yahoo! in exchange for a perpetual license.

Google started search engine advertising in December 1999 and launched AdWords in October 2000. AdWords allowed advertisers to place keyword targeted listings, but charged advertisers on a CPM basis. Google launched PPC advertising in February 2002, and today, advertising counts for about 99% of Google's revenue.

how it works

Each of the three major search engines (Google, Yahoo!, MSN) has its own PPC advertising platform, namely AdWords, Yahoo! Search Marketing and adCenter. While the basic process remains the same for each one, there are some differences.

With PPC advertising, the advertiser:
- Creates the copy for an advertisement.
- Selects the keywords for which that advertisement should appear.
- Chooses the maximum amount they are willing to pay for a click on the advert, and this amount can be unique to each keyword they have selected for an advert.

The search engine algorithm:
- Checks the advert for compliance to editorial guidelines.
- Displays the advert for relevant search queries.
- Determines the rank of the advert based on the advertiser's maximum bid and the relevance of the advert (which includes factors such as CTR, and ad copy, keyword and landing page relevance to the search).

search and content networks

Advertisers can choose to have their adverts displayed on the search network only (which means on search engines), or they can select to have the adverts displayed on the content network.

The search network will include the search engine which owns the platform (so, Google for AdWords), as well as other search engines for which that platform provides paid results (for example, currently Ask.com uses the Adwords platform for paid results).

Search Engine	Type of Main Results	Provider of Main Results	Paid Results	Directory Results
AllTheWeb	Crawler	Yahoo!	Overture	None
AltaVista	Crawler	Yahoo!	Overture	Open Directory
AOL Search	Crawler	Google	Google	Open Directory
Ask Jeeves	Crawler	Teoma	Google	None
Gigablast	Crawler	Gigablast	None	None
Google	Crawler	Google	Google	Open Directory
MSN Search	Crawler	Yahoo!	Overture	None
Netscape	Crawler	Google	Google	Open Directory
Teoma	Crawler	Teoma	Google	None
Yahoo!	Crawler	Yahoo!	Overture	Yahoo!

Suppliers and search engines as of 2007. Source: Sullivan, 2007

The content network refers to web sites other than search engines which also display PPC adverts. For Google AdWords, these are the web sites and blogs which have joined Google AdSense, Google's publishers' platform. Google determines the content of the web site, and then displays appropriate PPC adverts. Typically, the CPC is lower than on the search network, but the CTR and conversion rate are also much lower.

The above site is running AdSense. Notice how the adverts correlate to the content of the article.

what makes up a PPC advert?

PPC adverts follow the same basic structure:

> Heading
> Two lines of advert copy,
> Which can be displayed on one line
> www.DisplayURL.com

The URL shown is not necessarily the URL that the user will click through to. When writing the copy, these are known as the display URL (what is shown on the advert) and the destination URL (what the actual URL of the page is). The display URL is sometimes also called a vanity URL. The aim should be to send users to a web page as specific to their search, and the PPC advert, as possible. This is known as deeplinking.

The display URL must be the same domain as the destination URL. Google will only show one advert per display URL.

So, an advert might look like this:

> Roses for Valentine's
> A dozen red roses for your love;
> Fast, free delivery in RSA.
> www.flowers.co.za/roses

The search engines limit the characters in each line. There are also restrictions on what you are allowed to write in an advert. Here are some of the editorial guidelines from Google AdWords:

- Heading: maximum 25 characters
- Line 1: maximum 35 characters
- Line 2: maximum 35 characters
- Display URL: maximum 35 characters
- No repeated exclamation marks
- No word may be written in capitals only
- No nonsense words may be used
- No claims of "best", "number one" or superlatives may be used unless they can be verified by a reliable 3rd party source
- Product numbers may be used

keywords and match types

We'll take a look at keyword selection when we go through the process of setting up a campaign, but first you need to know a little bit more about the different ways we can define keywords in a PPC campaign.

Each search engine requires the advertiser to enter the keywords for which their advert should appear. This list of keywords determines which the search queries for which the adverts could appear.

On www.google.com in the USA there were almost 200 million searches performed each day (comScore), and Google estimates that nearly 50% of all searches are unique (Hursh, 2006). It would be a tough, if not impossible, task to determine all the possible terms potential customers might use to find you. That is why there are different keyword match types for PPC advertising.

Google AdWords using the following match types:
- Broad
- Phrase
- Exact
- Negative

Broad match means that your advert will appear for the keywords you have entered, as well as search terms which contain your keywords and any other words in any order, as well as some variations of your keywords (misspellings and synonyms).

> Say you have chosen the following keywords, and this is set to broad match:
> *tennis shoes*
> Your advert could appear for all of the following searches:
> *tennis shoes*
> *red tennis shoes*
> *tennis sneaker*
> *history of tennis shoes*

Phrase match, which is denoted with quotation marks around the keywords ("phrase match") means that your advert will appear only for search terms which have your keywords in them, in the same order, though other words may also be in the search term.

If you changed the same keywords to phrase match, they would look like:

"tennis shoes"

Your advert would appear for:

tennis shoes

tennis shoes red

But your advert would not appear for:

smart shoes red

Exact match, denoted by square brackets ([exact match]), means that the advert will only appear for search terms exactly the same as the keywords selected.

Now change the keyword to exact match:

[tennis shoes]

Your advert will appear for searches for:

tennis shoes

It would not appear for any other searches.

Negative match, denoted by using a dash in front of the keywords (-negative), means that your advert will not appear in searches using that word, no matter what other words are used.

Use the broad match example, and include a negative match:

red shoes

-tennis

Your advert would appear for:

red shoes

smart shoes red

Your advert would not appear for:

red tennis shoes

	keyword		
search term	red shoes	"red shoes"	[red shoes]
red shoes	✔	✔	✔
buy red shoes	✔	✔	✗
red tennis shoes	✔	✔	✗
smart shoes red	✔	✗	✗

Advertisers can assign as many keywords as they wish to an advert, but only one advert for each URL will be shown. If two advertisers are bidding to show adverts for the same

domain, only one will be shown. Which advert will be shown is based on the bids being placed and on the quality of the adverts.
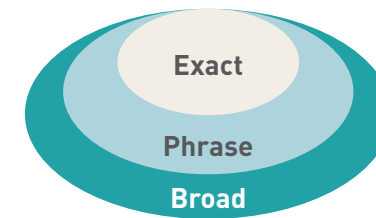
Depending on the match type, your advert can appear for more or less keywords.

languages and locations

You are able to target your adverts, so you know that the traffic you are getting is relevant to your product. This is known as geo-targeting.

You can choose the language of the search engine, and the location. For example, you might only want your advert to show to English searches in Asia, or to English searches in Johannesburg. Targeting your advert means that you won't pay for traffic you don't want.

bidding and ranking

Advertisers need to determine the maximum they are willing to pay for a click on their advert, and they need to decide this for each keyword they enter for an advert. This bid is the maximum CPC, or Max CPC, that the advertiser is willing to pay for the click.

However, this will not necessarily be the CPC that the advertiser must pay for a click. Every time a search query is entered, the search engine runs an auction to determine the placement of the adverts where advertisers have bid on that search term. This auction is known as a Generalised Second Price (GSP) auction, which is a variation on the Vickrey auction.

In the GSP auction, each advertiser will pay the bid of the advertiser below him, plus a standard increment (typically $0.01), for a click on their advert.

Say three advertisers, A1, A2 and A3, bid $2.50, $3.00 and $2.35 respectively on the same keyword. The search engine has set a minimum price of $2.05 on that same keyword. Here is how the adverts would be positioned, and what they would each pay for a click:

A Vickrey auction is an auction where bidders do not know what bids others have placed. It is a sealed auction. The Vickrey-Clarke-Groves mechanism is the generalisation of the Vickrey auction that holds that bidders will bid truthfully. In PPC advertising, this is not always the case. Bidders sometimes bid to push prices for their competition instead of to maximise their own revenue.

Advertiser	Bid price	CPC
A2	$3.00	$2.51
A1	$2.50	$2.36
A3	$2.35	$2.06

When it comes to ranking, of course, it's not quite as simplistic as that (it rarely is!). As well as the bid an advertiser places on a keyword, the search engine will take a number of other factors into account. In the case of Google AdWords, this is known as Quality Score.

The Quality Score is determined by, among other factors:
- The relevance of the keyword to the search term
- The relevance of the advert copy to the search term
- The relevance of the landing page to the search term
- The historic CTR of that advert

Search engines look at factors such as relevancy to try to ensure that it is not just having deep pockets that can land advertisers the top spot. Search engines need to ensure that users find the adverts relevant, otherwise they'll be less likely to click on them – and no click means no revenue for the search engine.

conversion rates and click-through rates
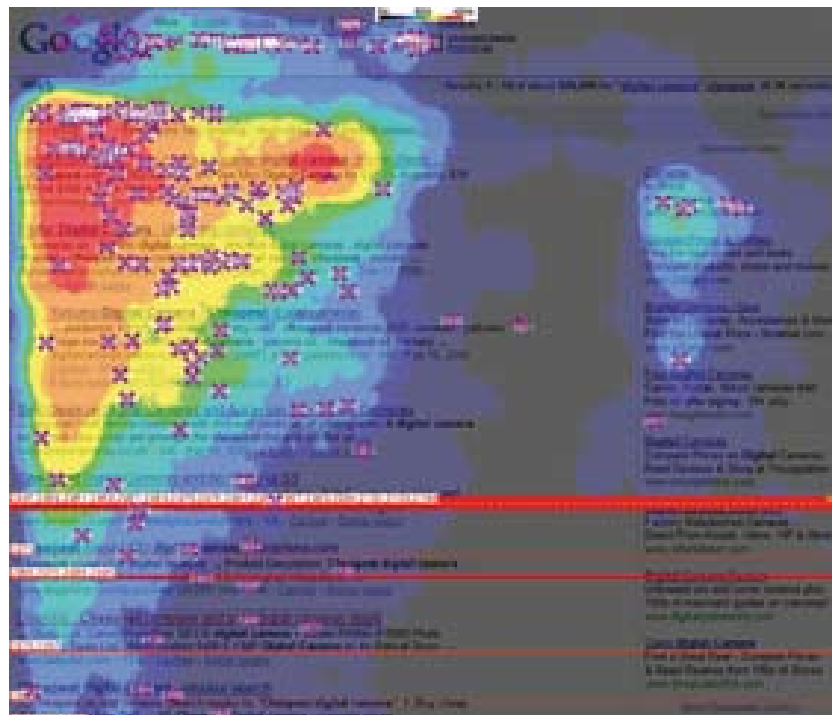
A heatmap from Eyetools.com that shows where users look on a SERP.

Studies repeatedly show that those adverts nearer the top of the page (so the best ranked) attract the highest CTRs. They get the most clicks. And, the clicks cost the advertisers more.

Looking at the heat map, you can see that getting in the blue box on Google will most likely generate even more clicks on an advert. You might think, the more clicks the better, but is this necessarily the case?

Being in the top position means you will pay more per click. Many clicks at a higher price may use up your budget quickly. Also, many people click on the top advert believing it to be the top organic search result – often without reading the advert text.

Advertisers need to consider what a user does after clicking through to the advertiser's web site from the search engine. When planning a PPC campaign, it is therefore crucial to set up the goals of the campaign, and make sure that these are being met. You can use your analytics package to set these up. With a goal set up, the advertiser can track how many of the users that click through to the web site follow through to that goal. This is called a conversion.

Goals can be:
- Buying a product
- Filling in a form
- Downloading a whitepaper
- Sending an enquiry
- Booking a flight

We know that the CTR of an advert is clicks / impressions %

The conversion rate of an advert is conversions / clicks %

As the advertiser, you also need to know the value of each conversion. You need to know this so that you don't pay too much for your clicks, and so that you bid to have the best CTR for maximum ROI.

	Impressions	Clicks	CPC	Total Cost	CTR	Conversions	Conversion Rate	CPA
A	1134	55	$ 0.89	$ 48.95	5%	5	9%	$ 9.79
B	1134	123	$ 1.36	$ 167.28	11%	11	9%	$ 15.21
C	2256	225	$ 0.89	$ 200.25	10%	11	5%	$ 18.20

The above table shows how you might adjust bidding strategies based on business principles.
- Example A: bid on a keyword with phrase match.
- Example B: bid on the same keyword with phrase match, but bid for a higher position. The conversion rate of the web site remains the same, but because of the higher CPC, the CPA increases, although there are more conversion.

- Example C: bid on the same keyword, but with broad match this time. Because the traffic is less targeted, the conversion rate on the web site is lower. This means that the CPA increases again.

The campaign needs to be run according to business rules. A PPC campaign can aim for maximum conversions, but this is usually at a higher CPA.

budgets

As well as deciding on your CPC bids for your keywords, you are able to determine the budgets for your campaign. You can set daily budgets, monthly budgets or no budget. Once your budget is reached, your adverts are paused, so you can be sure that you never overspend. If you are concerned about overspending, you can set a daily budget. However, this can mean that your adverts do not run as often as you would wish them to.

The different advertising platforms offer advanced bidding options, all aimed at helping you to run your advertising campaign better. You can bid for placement on the SERP, or you can bid based on how much you are willing to pay for click. You are able to bid for adverts during certain times of the day only.

which platform should I choose?

There is some theory that different platforms are better for different industries, for example, that Yahoo! fares better than Google on travel advertising. However, this is subjective, and most large advertisers will run PPC campaigns on a number of platforms. As with most things in eMarketing, it is all about testing.

There are some small differences with each platform in terms of editorial policy, and each system has a different user interface. Google AdWords is perhaps the most well known, allows users to transact in the currency of their choice, and also offers training programmes and certifications.

Google AdWords also currently has the best geo-targeting worldwide, although geo-targeting is offered by both MSN's adCenter and Yahoo! Search Marketing.

the long tail

Google has estimated that 50% of searches are unique. This means that the sum of searches which are unique is about the same as the sum of non-unique searches. Looking a little more closely at search terms will show a small number of high volume searches, and then a large number of lower volume searches stretching out to those unique searches.

Coffee
Coffee Beans
Medium Roast Coffee Beans
Vacuum Pack Coffee Beans
Medium Roast Coffee Beans Vacuum Pack
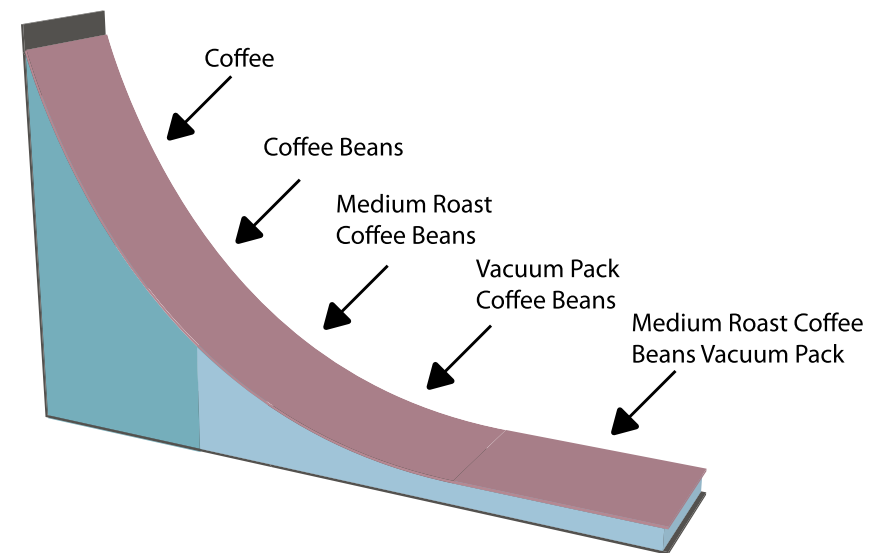
In the long tail, the sum of the low volume searches matches the high volume searches.

This is sometimes referred to as the long tail of search. Figuring out those low volume, niche search terms can do wonders for a PPC campaign. Generally there is not much competition for those search terms, and the search term itself is very targeted.

planning and setting up a campaign

1. Do your homework

For a successful campaign, you need a full online and an offline analysis of the business, customer demographics, the industry and competitors. While it is relatively quick to set up a campaign, pre-planning will show dividends later! You need a brand, an identity and a clear unique selling point. You only get 3 lines to advertise, you need to make sure you know what should be in there!

2. Define your goals

You need to know what you want to achieve with your PPC campaign. Branding campaigns, for example, are very different to campaigns that increase sales. What do you want users to do once they click on your advert?

3. Budget, CPA and targets

Determine how much you are willing to spend to achieve your goal – your target CPA. Decide how much budget you are going to allocate to your PPC campaign. If your goal is to increase revenue, your budget might be unlimited so long as revenue is increasing and you are within your target CPA.

note

AdWords offers an AdWords Starter Edition – sign up for an account to see how it works! You can sign up from adwords. google.com. Just choose "Starter edition" after you click to sign up.

4. Keyword research

You need to determine what keywords potential customers are likely to use when searching for the service that you offer. Along with that, you need to know:

- What common misspellings a customer might use
- What words would show that they are not likely to purchase from you (words like free and cheap)

As part of your keyword research, you need to look at expected volumes for your keywords, so you know how to bid on keywords. See Tools of the Trade for some suggestions.

There are also tools which will show you similar or related keywords, so you can expand your keyword list even further. Again, find suggestions in Tools of the Trade.

5. Write the adverts

Using your keyword research, write compelling adverts to promote your products. Adverts can be unique to a keyword, or you can group them and have a number of keywords for one advert.

Make sure you use an appropriate display URL, and that you target the landing page for each advert.

6. Place your bids

Based on your goals and keyword research, set the maximum bids for your keywords. Don't set these too high at this stage – you'll tweak the bids as you test your campaign.

7. Measure, analyse, test, optimise!

With conversion tracking in place, you can analyse your ROI down to a keyword level, and then focus on those keywords which are converting best.

Consider seeing how changing the text of your advert can increase the CTR, or perhaps better your conversion rate. Test different landing pages to see what converts better.

landing pages

PPC advertising is not just about creating adverts and bidding for keywords. The process continues once a user has clicked on your advert. The page that the user reaches by clicking on an advert is called a **landing page**.

Landing pages can make or break an advertising campaign. Poorly executed PPC campaigns will send all users to the home page of a web site. Campaigns that convert will make sure that users land on a page that is relevant to their search. The aim is to keep the user as focused on the goal – conversion – as possible. Sending the user to the home page gives him too many other options to choose from.

For example, if someone searched for "Canon EOS 450D", a poorly run campaign would send that user to www.canon.co.uk. A better campaign would have the user clicking through to www.canon.co.uk/For_Home/Product_Finder/Cameras/Digital_SLR/EOS_450D/index.asp

Landing pages also indicate relevance to the search engine, which can increase the Quality Score of the advert, and in turn lower the CPC of the keyword. Adding pages to the web site which are keyword rich can also carry SEO benefits.

PPC campaigns often have thousands of keywords, which can mean that there will be a lot of landing pages to be built! Creating dynamic landing pages means that with a simple script, unique keyword rich landing pages can be created for every search. The script will take the keyword that the searcher has used, and insert it in predefined places on the landing page. The user will then be landing on a page that is highly relevant to their search!

Dynamic landing pages can be created with a simple script that will allow for a landing page to be created for every keyword in the PPC campaign.

online comparison engines

As we mentioned, PPC does not only apply to search engine advertising. We have seen that adverts can be placed on content sites. PPC can also refer to banner advertising, where advertisers pay only for each click through to their site, as opposed to each impression of the banner. PPC is also used by many online comparison engines.

You have probably come across online comparison engines when searching for a particular product. Popular comparison engines include:

- NexTag (www.nextag.com)
- PriceRunner (www.pricerunner.com)
- Kelkoo (www.kelkoo.co.uk)
- Pangora (www.pangora.com)
- Jump (www.jump.co.za)

These engines contract with retailers. The retailers supply the engine with a product feed (XML or CSV) which contains the following information:

- Product name
- Product price
- Prodcut URL
- Product serial number

A shopping comparison engine will show offers from a number of retailers.

- Product image
- Product description
- Product keywords

When a user searches for a product on one of the comparison engines, the engine will list all retailers who offer that product. When the engines contract the retailers, they also agree on how much the retailer is willing to pay for each click from the comparison engine through to the retailer's web site. The minimum CPC will vary from category to category (consumer electronics, for example, could have a higher CPC than baby clothes).

When results are shown, priority is given to those retailers who are willing to pay a higher CPC. However, the user has the option of sorting results by price, alphabetically, etc.

Online comparison engines form an important part of the online marketing mix for an online retailer. As well as comparing products from different retailers, they also offer users the chance to review products, as well as retailers. Many users prefer to start their product search on a comparison engine, as they can see a variety of prices for the same product in one place.

So, what can you do to market your site more effectively through online comparison engines?

- Measure conversion from the clicks you get from the comparison engine. You're paying for the traffic; make sure it's worthwhile.
- Optimise the product feed you supply:
  - Make sure it's up to date!
  - Product names should be clear.
  - Each product must have a unique URL.
  - Make sure you are able to describe your product succinctly.
- Make sure your price is right:
  - o Don't overpay for clicks.
  - o Ensure your pricing and customer service are competitive: you don't have much space to entice the user to click through to you!

tools of the trade

The foundation of search marketing is keyword research, and there are a number of tools that will both aid you in growing your keyword list, and in determining keyword volumes. Some are free and some are paid for. Many keyword volume tools have relied on Overture, and as Yahoo! is no longer supporting this tool, the information is not necessarily accurate. All these tools should be used as guidelines only. Test the data with your own campaigns to determine what works best for you.

Google's Ad Preview Tool

Keyword volume tools:

www.freekeywords.wordtracker.com

www.yooter.com/keyword/overture.php

tools.seobook.com/general/keyword

Google Trends

Keyword suggestion tools:

adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal

www.keyworddiscovery.com/search.html

tools.seobook.com/keyword-list/generator.php

Google AdWords has an Ad Preview Tool, which allows you to see where your advert would appear on the page (without using the search engine and thus skewing data). This can be accessed at adwords.google.com/select/AdTargetingPreviewTool

Some paid services that aid with keyword research are:

www.wordtracker.com

www.keywordsecret.com

www.nichebot.com

Spreadsheets, such as Microsoft's Excel, are useful to aid you in building your keyword lists. Getting to grips with functions such as concatenation will be useful.

pros and cons
should I or shouldn't I

PPC campaigns are relatively quick to set-up, can provide high volumes of traffic, and are by nature highly trackable – what's not to love? But there are some pitfalls that you ought to be aware of.

1. Click fraud

Click fraud occurs when your advert is clicked on by someone who is not a legitimate potential customer. Because an advertiser has to pay for every click on his advert, sometimes unscrupulous competitors can click on the advert to force the payment. There are even automated bots that can click on adverts, costing advertisers millions!

The search engines, however, have taken measures to combat this. Advertisers can report suspected click fraud, and the search engines will refund invalid or fraudulent clicks after investigation.

What can you do? Keep an eye on your campaign. Any sudden leap in CTRs should be investigated, and you should pay particular attention to see if the conversion rate drops (which would indicate potential fraud) or stays the same. Pause the campaign if you suspect fraud, and alert the search engine.

note

Google said in February 2007 that click fraud accounts for only 0.02% of clicks. You can read more on their blog: adwords. blogspot.com/2007/02/ invalid-clicks-googles- overall-numbers.html

2. Bidding wars and climbing CPCs

High traffic keywords are expensive, and the battle to stay on top means that the CPC of these keywords is escalating. Convincing yourself that it's number one or nothing can result in burning through your campaign budget quickly, with nothing to show for it.

What can you do? Keep focused on your campaign goals and ROI, and keep investigating to find the (cheaper) niche keywords that work for you.

3. You gotta keep an eye on things

PPC campaigns require a lot of monitoring, and the bigger your campaign gets, the more time this takes. PPC advertising can provide a fantastic ROI, but you need to check in and tweak regularly to make sure that it continues to perform for you.

What can you do? Make sure that you have allocated the time required to run a successful campaign. There are also tools available that make managing large campaigns easier.

But remember, there are all the good reasons below (and many, many more!) why **PPC works for you:**

1. **No to low cost barrier**
   You only pay for traffic; there are no set-up fees involved.
2. **Tracking every cent**
   PPC advertising allows you to track your advertising spend down to a keyword level, so you can learn what works and what doesn't on a micro scale.
3. **Targeted advert placement**
   You can make your advertising relevant with the many filters available when selecting where to show your adverts.
4. **You're giving your customers what they want**
   PPC advertising lets you place your advert in front of people who are searching for your product. It lets you provide a solution, as opposed to creating an interruption. What more could you want?

summary

PPC advertising usually refers to the advertising system offered by search engines in which an advertiser pays for each click on his advert. Online comparison engines also run on a PPC basis, where advertisers provide a product feed for listings.

PPC advertising is keyword based. On search engines, the CPC is determined by an auction, known as a Generalised Second Price auction.

Search targeted advertising refers to PPC adverts displayed on the SERPs. These are listed above and alongside the organic search results, and are marked as Sponsored.

Content targeting refers to PPC adverts being displayed on content pages, such as blogs and other web sites.

The success of an advert may be determined by its CTR, but the success of a campaign will be determined by its conversion rate.

Click-through rate = clicks / impressions %

Conversion rate = conversions / clicks %

Elements for a successful campaign:
1. Research your industry
2. Define your goals
3. Allocate budgets and target CPAs
4. Keyword research
5. Relevant adcopy with clear call to action
6. Bidding so as to maximise ROI
7. Measure, analyse, test, optimise!

the bigger picture
how it all fits together

PPC advertising and SEO (search engine optimisation) should go hand in hand to create an effective SEM (search engine marketing) strategy.

PPC provides an excellent resource to research keyword volumes and conversion success. The knowledge can then be used to improve the SEO of a site, as you will already know the relevance of these keywords to your intended audience. In turn, improved SEO rankings can help to reduce the CPC of your PPC campaign, and together with your PPC campaign, can see improved CTRs throughout.

PPC advertising can also help to give your brand immediate search engine presence for your offline campaigns, when these might not yet be highly ranked in the natural search results. PPC advertising can also be used together with online reputation management. If a company is unable to combat negative search results through the natural rankings, they are always able to bid for PPC adverts that can present their view.

case study: Southern Sun

Southern Sun (www.southernsun.com) launched a new web site in May 2006. The changes included an updated look and feel, a greater quantity and quality of information, and better booking functionality. As often happens with a site re-launch, Southern Sun lost all of the previously good organic search engine rankings. A new web site needs time to climb up the search engine rankings, and it can take a minimum of three months before it starts receiving organic traffic. Southern Sun could potentially have lost out on bookings because of the decrease in organic traffic. Therefore, they required a way of ensuring that their site:
- Continued to receive a steady flow of bookings despite temporarily poor organic rankings
- Received enough traffic to analyse user behaviour and responses
- Received enough traffic to generate trust from search engines and climb up the SERPs as fast as possible

With the new site, Southern Sun hoped to increase the number of bookings made online, and to tap into the international tourist and business travel market. This meant they needed to migrate a significant amount of their offline promotions and special offers to their website in such a way as to attract a favourable online response.

Quirk eMarketing, the online agency for Southern Sun, set up a PPC campaign with the intention of:
- Sending traffic to the site
- Attracting international traffic
- Split-testing campaigns

Separate campaigns were built for:
- Local vs. international traffic
- Brand and hotel-specific vs. place-specific
- Special offers and campaigns vs. normal traffic

Quirk did an extensive keyword research exercise making sure to bid for high traffic generating keywords in order to get as much traffic as possible as well as niche long tail keywords for better cost per conversion. Keywords specific to Southern Sun's various customer groups were targeted, such as families, business travellers, couples and tourists.

Furthermore, adverts were set up which tested the best marketing message i.e. whether people responded best to:
- The Southern Sun brand
- A special offer
- A wide variety of hotels and brands
- Location and convenience
- Facilities

As a result, Quirk could assess whether different groups of people were influenced by different adverts, as keyword research had been done according to customer groups.

In order to determine whether people responded better to special offers and campaigns or just hotel and area

details, landing page split tests were conducted. Tracking for various different stages of the hotel buying process was implemented, including the hotel room quote and the final thank you for payment page so that it would become evident where any drop-offs occurred.

One of the great advantages of PPC is that it gets immediate results. As soon as the new site went live, so did the PPC campaign, which meant traffic from day one. The traffic generated by the PPC advertising ensured that the site was noticed by search engines and was trusted as a valid South African hotel site.

Split testing revealed some very interesting and useful behaviours and trends:

- The overall best response was to the adverts containing the Southern Sun brand particularly from the local South African market. This was very positive for Southern Sun and gave them a distinct PPC advantage with regard to Google's quality as it meant high click-through on competitive key phrases like "Cape Town hotels". It also showed that their brand was not as well recognised in the UK and USA.
- Search marketing is driven by meeting a need whereas offline marketing involves creating a need. Split testing picked up that the (very successful) offline marketing campaigns were not so successful when actively marketed through PPC, and that they do better when advertised from within the web site. The campaign had an average booking rate of 0.38%. The landing pages that supplied a list of hotels in an area or offering a service far outperformed this with an average booking rate of 3.45%.
- International traffic responded differently to various offers and hotel details compared to local traffic. In general, there was a better response locally with an ROI of 780% vs. 430%.

Running a PPC campaign when you launch or re-launch a site will:

- Attract enough traffic to ensure you don't lose business
- Test site structure and browser behaviour
- Allow you to assess where traffic comes from so you can test and optimise presentation of your product to your customers

case study questions

1. What information from the PPC campaign could be used to help to optimise the web site?
2. Why does a PPC campaign give instant traffic while SEO does not?
3. What is the importance of landing pages in a PPC campaign? What sort of different landing pages do you think would be used?

chapter questions

1. What is the difference between the display URL and the landing page URL, and what is the function of each?
2. How is the content network different to the search network? How do the differences affect the advertiser?
3. What is the importance of long tail keywords in a PPC campaign?
4. Both PPC advertising and SEO are based on keywords. How can PPC advertising and SEO be used to complement each other?

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further reading

www.ppchero.com
– including practical step by step guides to improving your PPC campaigns, PPC Hero provides regular posts on all things PPC

www.gordonchoi.com
– Gordon Choi's insightful comments on PPC and search come from a wealth of experience

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top 10 optimisation tips for advertising on google

1. **Make your core keyword list specific and relevant** Be specific and relevant to your business and specific offerings. Avoid general keywords – they generate ad impressions, but tend to be less relevant to any particular search. Use words that define your business, including products and technologies, brand names, taglines, industry jargon, and words searched for on your site.

2. **Expand your list by adding variations and related terms** Since more specific keywords produce fewer (though more relevant) impressions, increase your ad exposure – without sacrificing relevance – by adding alternate phrasings, spelling variations, plurals and singulars, and keywords similar or related to those on your core list. If available, mine keyword lists from related campaigns and leverage keyword generation tools.

3. **Refine your list by eliminating overbroad and ineffective keywords** Regional advertisers and niche businesses should avoid keywords so broad that they spill beyond the target. If you occupy a limited niche or serve a local audience, your keywords should reflect that. And some keywords – for instance, words that are very common or not industry-specific – are too general for any list.

4. **Target the geography you serve** Use geographic keywords to target a local or regional audience. If you sell tyres in Cape Town, replacing "tyres" with "tyres Cape Town" can avoid irrelevant pitches to search users in Johannesburg. You can also target your campaign by country and by language to help focus your message on your true audience.

5. **Target ad delivery with keyword matching options** Refine your targeting using keyword matching options. Broad match, the default, displays your ad when all the words in your keyword appear in the search query. Phrase match requires that the words appear in the same sequence; exact match requires exactly that. Negative keywords exclude searches for which your ad would be irrelevant and are useful in targeting ambiguous keywords: "mouse -computer" gives you the animal, not the peripheral. Identify high-impression untargeted phrases and make them negative keywords.

6. **Group your keywords intelligently** Grouping keywords according to content clarifies possibilities for keyword expansion, helps streamline campaign management, and lets you write specific, targeted ad creative for each group. Group keywords by category, by product, by offer – whatever categories make sense in the context of your campaign.

7. **Check your keywords on Google** Once you have a workable keyword list, give it a test drive on Google. The search results should be similar in subject matter and content to your own site. If not, you'll want to rework your keyword list to ensure that it brings your message to an audience that will find your site relevant.

8. **Convey the relevance of your site and give a clear reason to click** To encourage click-through, make your ad's relevance obvious by tailoring the creative to the keyword that triggers it – for instance, including the keyword prominently in the top line of the text. Make it clear to users why they should click.

9. **Make sure your destination page delivers on your ad's promise** Consciously choose the destination page on your site and fine-tune it to match the goal of the campaign. Incorporate any tracking mechanisms your metrics require. Above all, make the connection between your ad and its destination page clear. Customers should find whatever made them want to click – confident that they are in the right place and that it is relevant to their search.

10 **Ask the right questions – then test, test, and test some more** Step back and consider your keywords and creative in the context of your overall campaign. Are they consistent with the marketing objectives? Are they as specific and relevant as possible? Does the messaging map back to the goal? Then launch your campaign, gauge the results, and tune your keywords and creative for maximum effectiveness.

Top 10 Optimisation Tips for Advertising on Google kindly supplied by Google Inc. For more information, visit www.google.com/adwords.

8. social media

What's inside: An **introduction to social media** and a brief breakdown of the **history** of this phenomenon, followed by the **key terms and concepts** required. There's so much to learn in **how it works**, and it's broken up into social media for **bookmarking and aggregating**, for **creating and sharing content**, social networks for **connecting** and blogging and podcasting for **creating content and opinion**. We take at look at **marketing using social media** and how social media has **changed traditional media**. There's a little difference to the **tools of the trade**, and of course we end with the **pros and cons**, a **summary** and a look at **how it all fits together.**

introduction

Blogs, wikis, social bookmarks, tag clouds – new words for new things, and new ways to use words. You may be living in the world of social media, but to many it's a jumbled jungle with no clear structure.

The many facets of social media are also called Web 2.0, consumer generated media, citizen media and new media. In fact, comparing social media to traditional media is probably the most useful way of defining what exactly this means.

Most simply put, social media are media (from written to visual to audio to audio visual) that are designed to be shared. Sharing means that it is easy to comment on, that it is easy to send, and that there are no high costs associated with viewing the media. And, because of the connected nature of the Internet, it means that sharing, commenting and viewing can all be tracked and measured.

Traditional Media	Social Media
Fixed, unchangeable	Instantly updateable
Commentary limited and not real-time	Unlimited real-time commentary
Limited, time-delayed bestseller lists	Instant popularity gauge
Archives poorly accessible	Archives accessible
Limited media mix	All media can be mixed
Committee publishers	Individual publishers
Finite	Infinite
Sharing not encouraged	Sharing and participation encouraged
Control	Freedom

The Internet, and the software developed to run on it, has made it simple for anyone to publish and distribute. It has also made it simple for anyone to access the content that has been published.

The realm of social media is about collaboration, users generating content, sharing and, most of all, it is about connecting.

history

Blogs are probably the best known example of social media. One of the earliest online journals recorded was www.links.net, the online diary of Justin Hall, which he kept for 11 years from 1994 (Harmanci, 2005). From the very first days of the Internet, early adopters used the Internet to create personal content.

These online diaries were referred to as "weblogs", but in April or May of 1999, Peter Merholz unwittingly coined the term "blog" by adding the following to the sidebar of his web site peterme.com:

"For What It's Worth
I've decided to pronounce the word "weblog" as wee'- blog. Or "blog" for short."

Developers began creating tools that made it easier for anyone to start a blog. Blogger, a popular blogging platform, was launched in August 1999 and acquired by Google in 2003. In 2001, Wikipedia, probably the most well known wiki, was created.

Technorati, which tracks blogs and tagged social media, launched in 2002. As of April 2008, Technorati was tracking 112.8 million blogs and noted in 2007 that 1.4 new blogs were being created every second.

Social media is not just about blogging, though, and several platforms that made sharing other kinds of content easier have come to the fore. Flickr, the online photo sharing tool, launched in February 2004 and was bought by Yahoo! in June 2005.

By this stage, the social media buzzwords and neologisms were being picked up by the mainstream press, and in 2004, Merriam-Webster dictionary chose "blog" as the word of the year.

key terms and concepts

Blog A blog is a type of web site that allows users (bloggers) to post entries on different topics and often allows readers to comment on these posts.

Blogosphere The world of blogs, bloggers and blog posts.

Bookmarking Saving the web address of a web page or web site so that it may be easily referred to. Bookmarks can be managed with a browser, or with an online tool.

Crowdsourcing Harnessing the skills, talents and ideas of a broader community, usually through social media.

Flog A fake blog is known as a flog.

Folksonomy Categorisation or taxonomy based on social media tags.

Permalink A unique URL which points to the permanent location of a single blog post and its associated comments and TrackBacks.

Ping Packet Internet Groper - a utility that verifies a link or a connection to the Internet.

Social network In the online sense, this refers to a type of web site model where individual members become part of a broader virtual community.

Tag In social media, tags indicate or label what content is about.

Taxonomy Classification and division into ordered categories, usually hierarchical. In social media, taxonomy can refer to the categorization of content on the Internet.

TrackBack A mechanism used in a blog that shows a list of entries in other blogs that refer to a post on the first blog.

Vlog A video based blog, also called a video blog.

Wiki A simple web site that can be edited in real time by a number of users.

YouTube, the online video sharing web site, previewed in May 2005 and launched six months later. It was acquired by Google in November 2006 for $1.65 billion. Twitter, which allows for users to share 140 character tweets, launched in October 2006.

In 2006, Time Magazine named "You" as the Time Person of the Year for "the growth and influence of user-generated content on the internet."

how it works

Social media has changed the world we market in, and social media can be used as an integral part of an online marketing campaign. Social media is all about the ways that we create, connect and share online.

bookmarking and aggregating
– sharing things you like

If there are web sites that you visit often, or that you would like to keep as a reference to come back to, it is easy to use your browser to "bookmark" them. This means that you store the URL so that you can locate it again easily. It also gives you a personal library of web sites that you can store on your computer.

Social bookmarking sites, however, allow you store these links online, use tags to describe them and share these lists with other users. Some of these sites let you submit URLs that other users vote on, while others allow you to use the tags saved to browse through the lists and libraries that have been generated.

Web sites which want to encourage users to submit content to bookmarking and aggregating sites use chicklets. These are buttons placed around the content that make it easier to submit and share the article.

These services allow you to see what the community of web users finds useful, interesting or humorous. You are able to find other users with similar interests to yours, and explore the web sites that they have found that you might not have come across yet.

Social bookmarking allows like-minded people to share interesting and relevant content with one another easily. It can also be an excellent tool for members of a company or organisation to earmark relevant web sites and articles. Content submitted to a social bookmarking or aggregating site can dramatically increase traffic to a web site, and expose the site to many new eyeballs.

del.icio.us (del.icio.us) is a social bookmarking site which was created in 2003 by Joshua Schacter and today boasts over 3 million users (Arrington, 2007). It was designed to be a site which would help Internet users organise online media in a quick,

easy to access and user-friendly format. Now owned by Yahoo!, the primary function of del.icio.us is to allow you to store all of your bookmarks online and then to allow you to access those bookmarks from any computer anywhere in the world. del.icio.us is more of a community based tool in comparison to the other social bookmarking tools out there, as it allows others to see your bookmarks. Essentially it lets you identify other people whose interests and concerns parallel yours and grants you access to all of their bookmarks as well.

Check out del.icio.us/quirkemarketingtextbook to see some of the URLs we think are relevant to your eMarketing studies and career.

Digg (www.digg.com), **Muti** (www.muti.co.za) and **Reddit** (www.reddit.com) are sites where users submit content which other users can then vote on. Popularity, based on votes, moves the submitted content up and down lists which are available on these sites. Submitting and voting requires registration, but there are many, many people who visit these sites to get an overview of content that is "hot". In fact, in early 2008, Digg was at 170 in the Alexa rankings. Although its traffic is declining, it's still generating plenty of traffic each day.

Appearing on the top of these lists generates a huge increase in traffic for the content sites, so much so that servers can crash if the leap in visitors is unexpected. Getting into the top listings is a prize eyed by many a marketer, but any attempt to manipulate listings usually backfires and can generate plenty of community backlash.

The communities around these sites differ demographically, and this is reflected in the content. For example, Digg has been technology focused, while Reddit tends to have more general news.

Stumbleupon (www.stumbleupon.com) lets you explore the web through your interests, based on how other web users tag content. Users select categories of interest and bookmark URLs to those categories. You can then choose to "stumble" through the web using the category of your choice. The service will randomly show you a web site that has been submitted to that category.

Stumbleupon allows users to explore the web based on the taxonomy applied by other users. Instead of looking to search engines for relevance, users are instead appealing to the knowledge of a community.

Technorati (www.technorati.com) started life as a real-time blog search engine but has since evolved to incorporate other forms of user generated content including images and videos. According to technorati.com/about, Technorati finds itself tracking over 112 million blogs and 250 million pieces of tagged social media as of early 2008. Internationally it is THE blog aggregator and an essential tool for anyone who operates online.

> **note**
>
> **Alexa is a service that ranks the popularity of web sites. It is based on the Internet habits of users of the Alexa toolbar as well as the Quirk SearchStatus Firefox extension, so these rankings are based on a percentage of the global Internet population.**

> **note**
>
> **Some Internet commentators refer to this taxonomy as a folksonomy – a way of categorising content that the community creates, as opposed to a central body.**

Technorati's core is a tag-based index that allows users to conduct searches on topics that interest them. Contributors are able to tag their individual posts – the better tagged a post, the better chance it has of being picked up by a relevant search. Instead of contributors being separated into categories it is the content of each individual post that is indexed. Technorati doesn't just search the blogs of subscribed members though – it also operates as a normal search engine.

Technorati can also be used to keep tabs on Internet buzz, both to monitor online reputation and to see what trends are emerging.

bookmarking and aggregating as marketing tools

Seeing how users categorise your content will give you an idea of how your web site and company are perceived by your audience. It might be remarkably different to what you think they see you as. Look at what other web sites are tagged similarly. You might find new competitors, and possibly new ideas.

You can also use these services to share what other URLs your company finds interesting. This can be a useful resource to add to an online press room, as well as a utility that fanatics of your company would get really excited about.

To create link love and traffic, investigate what sort of content your target audience loves voting for, and get creating that content. A word of warning: never do the content submission and voting yourself. It's one sure-fire way to incur the wrath of these communities.

Organic growth is the only way to go here. It might take time as you build your reputation and worth amongst the community, but the end result can be very worthwhile.

As a content provider, make sure you have the appropriate chicklets added to your content to make it easier to share.

Chicklets can be standard, like on www.gottaquirk.com on the left, or can be adapted as www.timesonline.co.uk have done on the right.

content sharing – create and share

YouTube may be the first content sharing site that comes to mind, but users share images, audio and information as well as video. If it can be created, it can be shared. There are many sites that facilitate that sharing of videos, images and audio, and they are exceptionally popular. From Flickr to YouTube, they have all tapped into the fact that we love to create content for others to view.

The key word here is free: there are no fees for joining, whether you are uploading content or viewing content (although premium paid for memberships can allow you further features). This means that these sites attract an enormous audience. In fact, according to Alexa rankings, YouTube is the second most visited site in the world!

Many of these services also encourage distribution of their content. YouTube allows videos to be embedded easily into other web sites, and Flickr has generated a number of applications and widgets that allows the images to be shown all over the web (and even printed onto cards and stickers via www.moo.com).

Most of these web sites rely on advertising to support the free services they offer and some have a premium paid for membership version which is without adverts.

video sharing

YouTube (www.youtube.com) is essentially a web site which, by using Flash technology, allows users to upload, view and share videos with the rest of the connected world. These videos can range from music, movie and television clips to homemade amateur videos and vlogs. MyVideo (www.myvideo.co.za) and Zoopy (www.zoopy.com) are two South African companies offering a similar service.

YouTube has 60% of all online video viewers with up to 79 million viewers in an evening (Yen, 2008) and over 65,000 videos uploaded every day. This makes it both the premier online video site and social video sharing site online. This implies that most video consumption on the Web is already based on social media, and that there are over 130 million online viewers of video overall (ibid, 2008). YouTube was acquired by Google in 2006 for $1.65 billion.

YouTube is a complex site offering numerous features, yet it is simple to use. While it is possible for unregistered users to watch most of the publicly available videos, a quick, straightforward registration process allows members to upload an unlimited number of clips, comment on and add video responses to them and subscribe to content feeds that catch their attention and interest. Frequently enhanced functionality and clever features on YouTube continually push this site to deliver bigger and better services to its ever-increasing user base.

Many marketers have adopted the opportunities afforded by YouTube. There are two aspects of marketing through YouTube - self-promotion of people and products such as music videos, movie previews, interviews, video-advertisements, and sponsored adverts, supplied by Google AdWords.

YouTube has changed the way we view video adverts. Marketers, such as BMW, have shown that if an advert is good enough, many people will choose to watch it. BMW has created a BMW South Africa channel on YouTube, and has uploaded many of their adverts. One of them has been viewed over a million times since August 2006.

These are people who have chosen to watch this advert at a media cost of zero! Other advertisers have realised that far longer adverts can be created and uploaded. As long as the content is good, there will be viewers. Time constraints are not the same as they are for TV networks.

BMW South Africa's YouTube success.

Savvy marketers also realise the potential of watching for organic mentions of their brand, and then capitalising on this. An unknown teenage girl, with the YouTube account name Bowiechick, made a 75 second video clip about her break-up with a boyfriend. While making the clip she played with some of the effects on her new webcam, like putting ears on her head and a moustache on her face with its facial tracking software. Three days after uploading the video, 178,000 people had seen this video and 900 had commented on it. The comments had nothing to do with the break up but with the Logitech webcam she had used in the video. Following this, the camera broke into Amazon's Top 100 bestselling products list. Logitech were obviously listening and made the most of the opportunity by becoming YouTube's official partner (Sandoval, 2006).

The medium of online video sharing also means that conferences are able to generate a far greater audience than ever before. The companies that sponsor or run these conferences are able to engage with a larger audience by making freely available videos of the various sessions held. TED (www.ted.com) and Nokia's Nokia World are excellent examples of organisations that increase interest by making their remarkable presentations available for free.

knowledge sharing – the wiki

Howard G. "Ward" Cunningham, pioneer of the wiki, began programming the WikiWikiWeb software in 1994 and installed it on the web site of his software consultancy in 1995. Back then he described a wiki as "The simplest online database that could possibly work." 13 years later this is probably still the most accurate description.

Essentially, a wiki is a piece of software which users can create and edit online, using simple mark-up language via a web browser. They support hyperlinks and have a simple text syntax for creating new pages and links between internal pages. In its most basic form, a wiki is a web site that supports user collaboration through a variety of functions.

There are numerous types of wiki software available that share the following characteristics:

- **Create and update documents:** Wiki users have the ability to create and update documents easily.
- **Review versions:** Most wikis store each version of a document. This functionality makes it easy for users to view the various modifications that a document has undergone over time.
- **Community-oriented tools:** Most wikis provide users with an ability to engage in some form of discussion about the documents on which they are collaborating.

Wikis can be open to all, such as Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org) and Wikitravel (www.wikitravel.org); they can be open to or aimed at certain communities only, such as Geek Dinner attendees (geekdinner.pbwiki.com); or they can be private and open only to individuals within an organisation. Internal wikis are exceptionally useful for creating knowledge bases within organisations and companies.

A wiki can be edited by almost anyone who can access it!

Wikipedia: the most famous wiki of all

Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org) is a free, web-based, content encyclopaedia that is rated one of the top ten visited sites in the world. Originally created in 2001 by James Wales and Larry Sanger, this online encyclopaedia has received both praise and criticism. Roughly 15 times the size of Encyclopaedia Britannica, with more than 9 million articles in over 250 languages, this encyclopaedia is increasing in size at an exponential level (Wikipedia: About). However, with the increased adoption of this tool, criticism has also increased as to the validity of the definitions.

All definitions seen on Wikipedia are written by a collaborative team of volunteers from around the world. Anyone can submit a definition and these can then be edited by anyone who has access to the Internet. This combination of contributors leads to a democratic way of including the most up to date information. Since definitions are reviewed frequently, it should decrease the amount of bias and inaccuracy, while building a unique social network with people of similar interests contributing.

All Wikipedia definitions should also be referenced externally. Although anyone can contribute to Wikipedia, there is a permission ranking system which has been instituted to maintain the level of credibility that is associated with Wikipedia. Further measures include a discussion tab on most articles where academics can question the validity of the sources and its content.

Wikipedia articles tend to rank highly in the SERPs, so the allure of a link to your web site from a relevant article is tempting indeed. Wikipedia has instituted a policy that all external links are "no follow" links so as to combat spam.

Wikipedia is a useful research tool. With so much information on the Internet, many users are starting to look at a human edited (as opposed to search engine algorithm distilled) way to embark on research. For a company to be reachable via a link from this research base can very traffic and reputation worthy.

Companies should also take note of what is being written about them on Wikipedia, and make transparent efforts to correct information.

content creating and sharing as a marketing tool

Content sharing sites, from video to photos to music to knowledge, provide marketers with a snapshot of how users interact with and perceive their brand. Most of the sites have RSS feeds available, where marketers can keep a tab on mentions of their brand.

These sites and services allow marketers the opportunity to capitalise on the creativity of their consumers to further amplify their brand. By making content easily available, and removing restrictions on use of that content, companies can nurture creative interactions that are likely to spread.

Wikis can be used when creating an event with a network. Encouraging users to interact allows them greater connection and ownership of the outcome, and provides a means for ongoing communication.

connecting – social networking

Social networking refers to the forming and substantiating of online social networks for communities of people. The communities are people who share interests and activities, or are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. And to complete the definition of online social networking: the building of these social networks requires the use of software.

Social networking is all about using the tools of the Internet to connect and build relationships with others. Social networking sites such as Facebook (www.facebook.com), MySpace (www.myspace.com) and LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) allow users to create personal profiles and then interact with their connections through sharing media, sending messages and blogging. Not only do social networking sites allow you to interact with the members of your own virtual Rolodex, but they allow you to extend beyond your personal network.

Social networks have created new meaning for the term "friend" with many connections existing solely online. In the realm of social networking, it is unnecessary to have met someone in order to connect with them.

Personal profile pages remove much of the anonymity of the Internet. Users of social networks reveal a great deal of information about themselves, from basic demographics such as age, gender and location, to nuanced and detailed lists of likes and dislikes. Although explicitly made known to a user's connections, users are also divulging this information to the networks, and hence to the networks' advertisers. Users tend not to be aware of the data that is amassing regarding their online profile, and it takes features such as Facebook's Beacon to reveal just how much information users are making available.

Social networks can be general, such as Facebook, or niche, such as LinkedIn or Dopplr (www.dopplr.com). LinkedIn is a network for professionals. Members connect to others that they know professionally, and are able to recommend members that they have worked with. Dopplr is a social network for frequent travellers. Members can share their trips, and make plans to meet up when schedules overlap.

Many social networks, including Facebook, Orkut (www.orkut.com) and MySpace, have opened up their platform to outside developers, allowing the development of applications for the members of the social networks. Generally, use of an application requires a member to allow the application developer access to their personal information.

social networking as a tool for marketers

Social networks, free for their members, tend to rely on advertising for their revenue. Because of demographic information collected by the social networks, advertisers are able to target their adverts to a particular audience.

Applications are another way to market products. Creating a useful, and relevant to product, application can expose a whole new audience to a company's offering, as well as allow a company to collect detailed information on their users. However, although Facebook applications were the big marketing story of 2007, there are fewer success stories to emerge from the buzz. It's very much a developing market.

Profiles are not limited to people. Bands, for example, have found immense success with creating MySpace profiles for their band and using the profile as a means of connecting with their current and potential fan base.

On Facebook, Facebook Pages "provide a customized presence on Facebook for your band, brand, small business, and more." Quirk eMarketing has a page at www.facebook.com/pages/Quirk-eMarketing/6639858751.

Marketers can also use social networks to identify how users are perceiving or interacting with their brand, and open up new avenues of communication with them. For example, if you are marketing a bar, look to see how many people are using a social network to organise events at your bar. Find a way of rewarding those who are bringing you extra customers.

Social networks are also an avenue for members to voice frustrations and annoyances, and these should be closely watched by marketers to gauge sentiment.

creating content and opinion
– blogging and podcasting

Everyone has an opinion, and the Internet allows for everyone to share their opinion. Blogs and podcasts have emerged as social media that are being embraced across the Internet population.

blogging

A blog is a web site where entries (blog posts) are typically displayed in reverse chronological order. Technorati, a blog and social media tracking engine, defines a blog as a "regularly updated journal published on the web." Blogs usually allow for comments on blog posts. A typical blog will feature text, images and links to other blogs and web sites related to the topic of the blog.

Blogs range from the personal to the political and everything in between. They can

be written by one person or by a group of people. Some are aimed at the blogger's immediate family and friends, and others rival leading newspapers in terms of reach and readership. Blogs are mostly textual, but can comprise solely of images, videos, audio or a combination of any of these.

According to Technorati data, there are over 175,000 new blogs created and over 1.6 million posts updated every day (over 18 updates a second). That's a lot.

The power of blogs is that they allow anyone to publish and share ideas, and anyone can read and respond to these. They have given consumers and companies a voice and blogging has opened up a world of information sharing possibilities.

The basic elements of a blog post are:
- **Author** – the person who wrote the blog post.
- **Blog post title** – the title of the blog post, which is usually used to create a unique URL, or permalink, for the blog post.
- **Tag** – tags are the categories used to describe the blog post, and aid services such as Technorati in categorising blog posts.
- **Comment** – comments left by readers of the blog are shown with the blog post.
- **TrackBack** – a notification of other blogs linking to a post, often displayed below blog post.

Some other elements of a blog include:
- **RSS feed** – an RSS feed allows for readers to subscribe easily to the blog.
- **Categories** – blog posts can be allocated categories.
- **Blogroll** – a collection of links to other blogs or web sites commonly read or used by the blogger.
- **Archives** – previous posts remain available for visitors to search through. Archives are usually categorised by date.

RSS readers can be integrated with an email client, can work offline or can be online only. Some are free, and some are not. Look at your email client to see if you can set one up there, or try www.bloglines.com, www.google.com/reader or www.feeddemon.com. Find the one with the features that suit your needs.

RSS readers are a useful way to keep up to date with blogs as well, as most supply an RSS feed of their posts. Still confused? Take a look at commoncraft.com/rss_plain_english.]

Whether blogging as an individual or a company, there is plenty to be gained from the process. You can:
- Create an online identity.
- Create a voice for yourself or your company.
- Promote engagement with your audience
- Create a community.

blogging and SEO

Search engines value regular, fresh content, and by blogging you can create just that. The more you post, the more often search engines will spider your site, looking for additional, relevant content. Basing your blog on your keyword strategy created in the SEO process can also aid your web site in ranking for those key phrases. Blogs, by their social nature, can also increase the incoming links to your web site.

Using a blog platform that has been designed to be search engine friendly is crucial to harnessing the SEO power of blogging. Some features of SEO-friendly blogging software include:

- Each blog post should be assigned a unique page which can be easily accessed and indexed by the search engines. This is called a permalink.
- Pages should be able to be tagged with keywords relevant to your SEO strategy.
- Each post should be able to have its own unique meta data (title, description and key phrases).
- Social bookmarking functionality should be built in.

corporate blogging

Blogs can be very successful marketing tools. They're an excellent way to communicate with staff, investors, industry members, journalists and prospective customers. Blogging also helps to foster a community around a brand, and provides an opportunity to garner immediate feedback on developments. This is an audience made up of players key to the success of a company: that makes it important to get blogging right.

Generally the tasks that a blogger undertakes include:

- Writing posts.
- Replying to comments from readers.
- Monitoring other blogs within the industry.
- Keeping up to date with the latest industry news.
- Building relationships with other bloggers in the community.
- Commenting on other blogs

For corporate blogs, it is important to outline a strategy and establish guidelines before starting a blog, especially as there will most likely be a number of contributors. Transparency and honesty are important, but companies need also be aware of sensitive information being blogged. If there are "no go" areas they need to be clearly defined to the parties involved. While certain topics can be restricted, ultimately the bloggers should be granted the freedom to express both negative and positive points of view about the approved topics.

Positive claims are more believable if the blogger is able to express negative views as well. For example, Robert Scoble in his popular blog www.scobleizer.com admitted that the Firefox browser was better than Microsoft's Internet Explorer. Robert Scoble

was an employee of Microsoft at the time. This honesty gave him a credible voice, and so his positive views on Microsoft are respected by the community.

Corporate blog content should be:

- Industry relevant
- Appealing to your target market
- Transparent and honest
- Personal and entertaining
- Related to what's going on in the blogosphere
- Posted regularly

promoting blogs

While Technorati may be tracking 112.8 million blogs it doesn't mean that all of these blogs will still be active by the end of the year - in fact only 55% of blogs make it past the first three months (Sifry, 2006). Longevity rests in the hands of the blogger, but here are some tips to raise the profile of a blog:

- **List the blog in blog directories:** While they're not as popular as search engines many Internet users do in fact visit them while looking for information. Examples include: Google's Directory (www.google.com/dirhp)and BlogCatalog (www.blogcatalog.com).
- **Ping web services with updated content:** Sites like Ping-o-Matic (pingomatic.com) and Feed Shark (feedshark.brainbliss.com) offer a service whereby they ping multiple web services, blog directories and search engines to let them know that a blog has fresh content.
- **Use TrackBacks:** If a blogger writes a new entry commenting on, or referring to, an entry on your blog, and both blogging tools support the TrackBack protocol, then the commenting blogger can notify your blog with a "TrackBack ping"; the receiving blog will typically display summaries of, and links to, all the commenting entries below the original entry. This allows for conversations spanning several blogs that readers can easily follow.
- **Participate in the blogosphere:** You can't expect anyone to engage on your blog if you're not engaging on theirs. It's all about fostering a sense of community.
- **Make use of aggregators:** Examples of aggregators include Technorati, Amatomu and Afrigator.
- **Use traffic generating tools like MyBlogLog:** The MyBlogLog (www.mybloglog.com) widget allows you to see who in the MyBlogLog community has visited your site and they can see it if you have visited their site in return. Bloggers will more often than not click through to your site from this widget as they are interested in learning more about who is reading their blog. If they like what they see when they get there they may become regular readers.

microblogging

Microblogging is a form of blogging that allows a user to publish short text updates, usually limited to 200 characters that can be viewed by anyone or restricted to a specified community as specified by the micro-blogger. This can be accomplished using various communication tools such as Instant Messaging (IM), via the web, text messaging on your mobile phone, even a Facebook application. The most popular micro-blogging service is called Twitter (www.twitter.com), which was launched in July 2006. The main competitor to Twitter is Jaiku (www.jaiku.com). These posts are usually short thoughts or URLs to interesting articles. On Twitter, posts are called tweets and are limited to 140 characters. Despite frequent disruptions to Twitter's service, its users are fiercely loyal.

In early 2008, Twitter has become one of the most talked about social media platforms. Companies, such as Comcast in the USA, have started to use Twitter as a customer service tool. You can view their Twitter feed at www.twitter.com/comcast.

A Twitter feed, appearing at www.twitter.com/robstokes.

blogs as a marketing tool: listen and engage

Blogs are powerful because of their reach, their archives (information is seldom deleted and is thus available long after it has been posted) and the trust that other consumers place in them. For a marketer, they present opportunities to learn how others perceive your brand and to engage with your audience. Some brands get this right; some get it wrong.

Above are some guidelines for corporate blogging, but marketers do not need to be bloggers to use this tool. As with all other social media, blogs provide a snapshot of audience sentiment regarding a brand. Marketers can also listen to blog activity around competitors to gain market insights.

Although blogging is the best way to respond to engage with bloggers, companies can also interact with bloggers by commenting on relevant posts. Demonstrating the capacity to listen to bloggers and then respond using the same medium can reap tremendous benefits with this community.

podcasting

A podcast is a digital radio (or video) programme downloadable from the internet. Podcasting started to take off around 2004 and it zoomed from 'geekdom' to mainstream so quickly that 'podcast' was voted 2005 'word of the year' by the editors of the New Oxford American dictionary. Podcasts started as audio blogs. People then figured out a way of distributing them using the same RSS feeds that were being used to distribute blog post information. It was then possible to subscribe to a podcast as one would a blog. Suddenly you could listen to a whole range of programmes and voices whenever and wherever you wanted to. It was radio without a station telling what you could hear and when. Plus, just as blogs have allowed people to become writers without having to deal with a media channel controlled by someone else, podcasting has allowed anyone who fancies it to become a broadcaster.

With the right kind of 'podcatching' software on your computer the latest edition of any podcast you subscribe to is automatically downloaded every time you log on. Most people use iTunes. Go to http://www.apple.com/itunes/store/ for loads more information on podcasting and a huge list of available podcasts. You can listen on our computer or transfer the file to an iPod or any other kind of MP3 player. You don't have to have an iPod to listen, the name came from the fact that the iPod was taking off at the same time and the 'pod' (play on demand) part fitted this new medium. Podcasts are usually free.

Creating a podcast

Podcasts are usually recorded and edited using home equipment and done for the love of it. There is specialised podcasting software available like Apple's Garage Band or Quicktime Pro. These packages make it quite simple to record, mix and format the audio files correctly. Just like bloggers, though, many podcasters are trying to figure out ways of making money from their podcasts and turn listeners into revenue.

A lot of people are producing music podcasts. This has meant a huge move to circumvent traditional rights issues about downloading music from the Internet. There is now a large body of music that is classified 'podsafe'. This has either been composed especially for podcasts (as jingles etc) or the artist has specifically decided that they want their music to be available via the net for all who want to hear it.

Radio stations have realised that they have a whole new way of using their content. They began packaging their output so that fans could listen to their favourite shows whenever they wanted to (without the music). The BBC is awash with podcasts (www.bbc.co.uk/podcast). In South Africa, 5Fm was the first station to use them. Now nearly every radio station offers them – have a look at Classic FM, Talk Radio 702 and East Coast Radio.

Educators and teaching institutions have latched on to podcasting as a way of sharing content and providing tuition for learners who cannot be present at lectures or tutorials.

The corporate world is also realising that podcasting can add huge value to their communications mix. The term 'podcast' is increasingly being used to cover any audio or video that is embedded in an organisation's web site.

podcasts as a marketing tool

Podcasts offer an incredible opportunity for marketers. The bottom line is that you now have a way of getting content to your target markets without having to persuade a media channel to carry it or to pay huge advertising rates.
Podcasts are:

- **Targetable** – you can create highly relevant, niched content and then promote it to a specific target market.
- **Measurable** – you can see how exactly many downloads and subscribers you have.
- **Controllable** – it's your content.
- **Responsive** – set up a blog alongside your podcast, alter content according to the comments, you are actually having a conversation with your market.
- **Boundary free** – it's the Internet.
- Relatively **inexpensive**.

However, the content must be:

- **Excellent quality** – like anything on the Internet, it is just as easy to unsubscribe as it is to subscribe. Quality content is what keeps listeners coming back.
- **Real** – while there is value in having product or service information embedded in a web site, there is no point at all in producing an audio version of a company brochure as a regular podcast. Consumers are losing faith in the content of traditional media. Even if editorial is not actually paid for, a lot

of the time it has been influenced in some way by advertisers. Although there are podcasts that carry adverts, people can fast forward straight past them and the chance of real success lies in branded content.

This is not about advertising or even just product information. It is about coming up with ideas for real programmes that, through informing or entertaining, enhance your customers' experience of your brand.

social media and marketing:
rules of engagement

Social media implies a democratisation of information, and requires authenticity and openness from those who would deliberately use it for marketing. Relying on the connected Internet, it means that good stories as well as bad stories spread and stick around. Jeff Jarvis may have had problems with Dell in 2005, but you can easily find all relevant communication with a quick Google search.

Although engaging publicly with a wide audience, marketers need to remember that they are communicating with individuals. While marketers should engage in the conversation, and can lead it, they cannot control it.

marketing to content creators

The influence of bloggers means that they should form a part of any PR strategy (see the WebPR chapter for further details).

Supply content creators with the tools and resources so that they can easily talk about your product.

marketing to content consumers

Social media allows anyone to have a say, and the same tools that are available to individuals are available to companies. Company blogs allow a brand to build a personality and to interact with their target market. Entertainment created and spread via social media increases brand touch points. Using the same channels that are available to your consumer aids in understanding the consumer, and evens the plane of conversation.

When using social media to reach out to content consumers, go to where your consumers are. The media used is dictated by your users.

For example, a nightclub for students can create a Facebook group to advertise its weekly specials, and interact with fans, while Land Rover enthusiasts would probably be more comfortable with a forum.

With all interactions, marketing messages need to be labelled as marketing messages, with a disclaimer added if necessary. Trying to hide them as something else will only decrease authenticity.

marketing to content sharers

Content sharers are content consumers who also pass your message on, whether by using chat or email, or by sharing a link on a blog or submitting your content to a bookmarking or aggregating service. They are a crucial link in the chain that passes your message around. Make it as easy as possible for sharers to share by using chicklets and unique and easy to read URLs.

advertise on social media platforms

While marketers can use the tools of social media to convey their message, also important are characteristics that define a social media web site. Social media allows users to express themselves, and this means that demographic information can be compiled to allow for more useful and targeted advertising. This presents many opportunities for targeting advertising, and for finding creative ways to reach an advert fatigued demographic.

the benefits of social media
to marketers

- People are finding it easier to switch off or ignore traditional advertising, particularly through traditional media environments such as TV or radio. Social media gives brands the opportunity to **interact with customers through targeted communications** which customers can choose to engage with on their terms. For example a consumer may visit a branded YouTube channel as opposed to deliberately ignoring advert breaks on television.
- Social media's potential to **go viral** is one of its greatest benefits - if users like the content they will share it with their own communities.
- Social media allows you to **create an online community** for your brand and its supporters.
- Social media can tie in nicely with any of your other online marketing tactics - a **holistic eMarketing strategy** is always the best strategy.
- Social media allows you to engage with an online community and allows you to **connect your brand** to the appropriate audience.
- Social media has created a **forum for brand evangelists**. Companies should embrace as well as monitor this as users with negative opinions of your brand have access to the same forum.
- The various platforms allow you to **access a community** with similar interests to your own - networking without borders.
- The numerous interactions allow you to **garner feedback** from your communities.

- Feedback from social media sites helps drive both **future business** as well as marketing strategies.
- The range of media enables you to **learn more** about your audience's likes, dislikes, behaviour etc. Never before has this much information been available to marketers - market research just got a whole lot cheaper.
- **Niche targeting** just got a whole lot easier!

There are huge risks as well as opportunities. Social media facilitates a two-way conversation between customer and company. This necessitates that the company shifts approach from "deploy and watch" to one of constant involvement with the audience.

social media has changed
the traditional media landscape

To keep up with their audiences, traditional media have had to adapt. This has changed the way that they publish, both online and off, as well as how they can sell advertising.

For example, many newspapers now publish their content online as well as in their print publications. Online, they can allow for instant commentary on their articles. It allows an instant snapshot of what their readers think, which can then be used to make editorial decisions. Print stories can be supplemented online with video, and this has been embraced by many news organisations. Visit www.thetimes.co.za to see how one newspaper is using video online.

As mentioned, TV adverts can be placed online for free via channels such as YouTube. This opens adverts to a new audience, and allows for adverts that can be created without the restrictions of television. Adverts can be extended, and now additional footage can become as important as the advert. Quality adverts are voluntarily and deliberately viewed, as opposed to deliberately ignored.

tools of the trade

As a creator of content, there are a plethora of platforms for the budding social media enthusiast. Throughout the chapter, we have listed the URLs for some of the most popular services, most of which are free.

Instead of going back through the chapter, visit del.icio.us/quirkemarketingtextbook. Use the tags to navigate to the social media tools you need to get started.

pros and cons

Social media allows marketers insights into their demographic and the chance to engage with their audience in a channel selected, and preferred, by the audience.

It allows marketers to capitalise on the creativity of their consumers to spread their message further, often at very low costs.

Lastly, social media provide avenues for establishing direct, personal contact on a level not available to traditional marketing campaigns.

However, companies need also be aware that good messages spread as well as bad ones, and the connectedness that can prove so useful can also be a conduit for negative messages to be distributed.

This new landscape is one in which the customer really is king, and any attempt to dethrone the king can have dire consequences. Efforts to control the conversation in social media are soon found out, can backfire horribly.

Any company embarking on a social media strategy needs to be sure to monitor their reputation online. It is crucial to know what is being said in order to be able to respond and communicate in the social media sphere.

summary

Social media is also known as consumer generated media and it refers to the creation and sharing of content by consumers on the Internet. It has allowed a democratisation of the Internet, where all Internet users now also have the opportunity to be creators as well as consumers of content.

Social media refers to the online technology platforms that allow users to:
• Bookmark and aggregate content.
• Create and share content.
• Use other Internet users' preferences to find content.

Most social media services are free to all participators and rely on advertising for revenue. Social media provides targeted demographic information to advertisers looking to direct their advertising.

the bigger picture
how it all fits together

Social media can have SEO benefits for a web site, particularly when a company engages in the various social media. By using the services of social media, either to

create or share content, web sites can attract links, all helping to enhance search engine rankings. Companies can also use their SEO keyword strategy to focus their social media efforts.

Social media can provide a targeted network for online advertising, allowing detailed demographic information to play a role in media planning and buying. Companies can also make use of the increased engagement of consumers to create engaging advertising for these mediums, such as advertising within videos and social network applications, or merely making use of increased time on page metrics to create more intricate advertising.

Affiliates often use the new opportunities presented by social media to find new avenues for targeted traffic, resulting in revenue growth for the company being marketed this way.

Social media play a crucial role in viral marketing, due to the large, connected audience, in online reputation management (ORM), due to the way that users talk about brands, and in WebPR. Social media are used to express opinion, and so are the bedrock of ORM. Any company or brand that is hoping to communicate to this connected audience, needs to learn to listen to social media. ORM is all about the tools of listening, and using social media to guide the conversation.

Viral marketing, online reputation management and WebPR are expanded on in the following chapters.

case study: Stormhoek and social media

Stormhoek is a South African winery that has created a marketing phenomenon through its use of social media to engage with a global community.

When sold in supermarkets and in wine stores, wine is self-service retail. There is no opportunity for the producer to communicate with consumers who are faced with shelves of purchase decisions and it is difficult for a producer to create a personality for a wine brand, particularly through traditional media.

Stormhoek decided to try something different, and in April 2005, launched a blog: www.stormhoek.com. In September 2005, Hugh MacLeod of www.gapingvoid.com, one of the most popular blogs in the United Kingdom, partnered with Stormhoek. Stormhoek already had healthy sales in the UK, but the aim was to foster an engagement with their audience as well as increase sales through social media.

One of the first social media campaigns that Stormhoek ran was the "Blogger's Wine Freebie". For a three month period, any UK, Irish or French blogger who had been blogging for over a year, could ask for a free bottle of Stormhoek wine. There was no obligation to write about the wine, and if the blogger chose to blog about the

wine, there was no obligation to be positive. The results were astounding. Approximately 200 bottles of wine were distributed to bloggers who registered for the freebie, and over 75% of these bloggers posted something about the wine. Technorati registered that over 25% of online discussions regarding South African wine were about Stormhoek, and Stormhoek saw continued sales growth in the UK, despite a decrease in South African wine exports in 2006.

Appealing to bloggers, Stormhoek has gone on to sponsor many "geek" events, such as the popular Geek Dinners in the UK, USA and South Africa. These events are aimed at people who are likely to talk about them online.

Stormhoek has constantly sought to engage with its audience, opening up all areas of the winemaking and distributing process to its blog readers. Not only has Stormhoek removed some of the mystery and taboos surrounding wine, readers are invited to participate in the Stormhoek process, including providing suggestions for a label redesign. Stormhoek customers feel a part of the Stormhoek story.
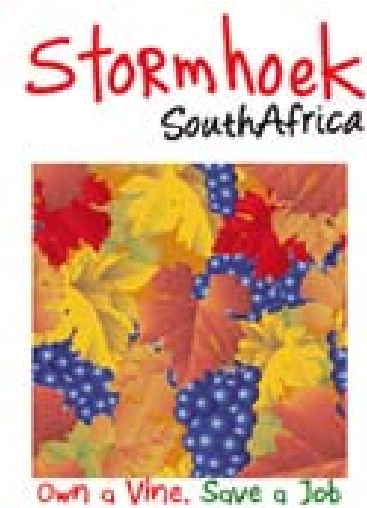
As well as all the positives, Stormhoek blogs about the trials it has had along the way. In late 2007, the UK distributor of Stormhoek wines, Orbital, ran into financial difficulty, which left the farm in South Africa and many suppliers integral to Stormhoek in a precarious financial position. Stormhoek highlighted to problem through their blog, and appealed to audience to help with an "Own a Vine, Save a Job" campaign. Stormhoek set up a benevolent fund that has ensured that the workers of the suppliers affected by Orbital's bankruptcy would be paid during this turbulent time, and two to four vines were sold per week for R2,000 each. This campaign continues.

Stormhoek's continuing success is in a large part due to the connection that its customers feel for the brand. They have created a story that people want to participate in and share with friends, all in the medium most suited to sharing.

note *At the time of writing, the Stormhoek brand in the UK and the South African winery are no longer working together. The UK brand's web site is at www.stormhoek.com, while the Stormhoek winery in South Africa, who is running the "Own a Vine, Save a Job" campaign, blogs at www.stormhoek.co.za.*

case study questions

1. What are the benefits of using social media to create a personality for a wine brand over traditional media?
2. Stormhoek's "Own a Vine, Save a Job" campaign is being run three years after they started blogging. How do you think that has contributed to the success of the campaign?
3. After Stormhoek's success with blogging and social media, many other wineries have started blogging. What effects is the increase in winery blogs likely to have?

chapter questions

1. Visit www.timesonline.co.uk. List the ways that this print publication is embracing social media.
2. Why is transparency so important to marketing using social media? Has this halted or accelerated the use of social media for marketing?
3. What is the difference between advertising using social media and marketing using social media? What are the benefits of social media to each, and what are the challenges?

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further reading

www.gottaquirk.com
– the blog from the minds of Quirk, filled with the latest in social media and eMarketing.

www.mashable.com
– a blog that covers social networking and social media.

9. viral marketing

What's inside: An **introduction** to viral marketing, and a **history** of the term followed by **key terms and concepts**. In **how it works** there a couple of short **case studies** to look at viral marketing in action, and we then look at the **steps required** when you are preparing to go viral. With a **viral campaign launched**, now what? shows you how to be prepared, and we look at astroturfing. There is a **summary** of the chapter, and the bigger picture shows how viral marketing fits into the marketing mix.

introduction

Word of mouth marketing is powerful. Edelman's 2008 Trust Barometer shows that 58% of respondents trust "a person like me" as a spokesperson. In the social media chapter, you learned some of the ways that marketers can tap into the media that promote this kind of trust. Messages passed on from "a person like me" is word of mouth marketing, and online that same message can be passed on through social media.

Viral marketing is a form of word of mouth marketing which aims to result in a message spreading exponentially. It takes its name from a virus, because of the similarities that marketers aim to emulate:

- It is easily passed on.
- The number of people who have been "infected" grows exponentially.

Viral marketing campaigns can have other similarities with a virus. Viruses often spread by masking their true intentions. Some viral marketing campaigns are similar – they hide their true message in an attempt to spread. Viruses rely on the connected nature of people to spread, and so do viral marketing campaigns.

If you're sitting in on a planning session, and someone says "let's try this and see what happens", they've probably got a viral campaign in mind.

history

The term "viral marketing" was probably first coined by Jeffrey Rayport in an article "The Virus of Marketing" in the December '96 issue of Fast Company. That's not to say that there weren't viral marketing campaigns before that, but as the Internet developed, so have the electronic tools for passing on information.

Word of mouth has existed as long as there have been words and mouths, but it is a fairly recent phenomenon in the current world of marketing. Positive word of mouth can have a tremendous impact on a brand, and can take up little to nothing of the marketing department's budget. However, planning for and measuring word of mouth can be tricky and unpredictable.

As the connected nature of the Internet has allowed for easier spreading and tracking of word of mouth information, it has become possible to see how this can be modelled on the spread of a virus in a population.

key terms and concepts

ARG Alternative Reality Game - a game that takes place in both the real world and in a fantasy world, and usually involves an online component.

Astroturfing Covert and manipulative use of word of mouth.

Brand awareness A measure of how quickly a brand is called to mind.

Buzz Online excitement and word of mouth is referred to as buzz.

Call to action Copy that encourages users to take a particular action.

Exponential growth If growth more than doubles with each iteration, it is exponential.

Mashup When content from two or more sources is combined.

Pass on To share content with another person.

Seed The process of initiating a viral campaign through strategic online placement.

Seed audience The initial audience from which viral growth starts.

Social currency A measure of a person's power and influence within a defined social group.

Word of mouse Word of mouth is sometimes referred to as word of mouse online.

Word of mouth Information that is passed between people, as opposed to messages from a company to people.

how it works

Viral growth occurs when a message is spread exponentially. Viral marketing campaigns work when a message is spread exponentially and it results in a desired outcome for a brand. Viral marketing utilises electronic means to spread messages. It harnesses the electronic connectivity of individuals to ensure marketing messages are referred from one person to another.

Viral marketing campaigns can be tricky and unpredictable. However, the lure of exponential growth, at a very low marginal cost, means that they are being attempted more often.

MSN Hotmail: from zero to 30 million

MSN Hotmail, the webmail service purchased by Microsoft, grew to 30 million members in just 2½ years from its launch in July 1996. A large part of its exponential growth is attributed to the sign-up link that was in the footer of every email sent with the service. When the company launched, every outgoing message from this platform contained an advertisement for Hotmail and a link to its web site at the bottom of the email. As people emailed their friends and colleagues, they were also advertising the service. Recipients could simply click on the link and sign themselves up, and as they continued to email friends from their new account, the message spread within existing social networks and was passed along with little effort from the company. Hotmail went from zero to 30 million users within the first 3 years and today has over 260 million users worldwide.

There are two types of viral marketing campaigns:
- Organic or in the wild campaigns
- Amplified or controlled campaigns

organic viral marketing

Organic or in the wild viral campaigns grow with little or no input from the marketer. Sometimes, a message is passed around in a viral nature without any intention from the marketer. Usually this happens with negative messages about a brand, but can also be a happy coincidence for a brand if the message is positive.

Organic word of mouth is credited with the sudden increase in the popularity of Hush Puppies shoes in the mid 1990s. Word of mouth increased sales from an all time low of 30,000 in 1994, to 430,000 in 1995 and four times that the following year.

This is an example of an organic viral campaign:
- It was not planned (though it was very welcomed!) by Hush Puppies
- Participants made an active choice to pass on the message

When successful, this type of campaign can build tremendous brand equity at a marginal cost. Because the communication takes place directly between consumers, the marketer has to be prepared to let go of their brand so that the message and flow of communications is not restricted. This is vital in ensuring the viral campaign is a success as people are more likely to try a new product or fulfil the campaign goal if their friend or trusted source referred them.

controlled viral marketing

Amplified or controlled campaigns have been strategically planned, have defined goals for the brand being marketed, and usually have a distinct method of passing on the message (that can be tracked and quantified by the marketer).

The Hotmail example above is a controlled campaign:
- The goal was to grow membership
- The emails being sent were automatically passing on the message

A viral campaign can be an important part of an eMarketing strategy. Viral marketing campaigns contribute in a number of ways:
- With correct planning, a viral campaign can providing plenty of link love for your SEO strategy. Campaigns should be built with that in mind. While there might be a microsite created for the viral campaign, ensure that it is easy to link to the main web site.
- It can be difficult to measure brand awareness, but this is usually the chief aim of any viral campaign. Bear that in mind, and make sure that the campaign is targeting the right demographic, and that branding is clear without detracting from the social nature of a viral campaign.

- Viral campaigns can also drive direct response, from newsletter sign-ups, to collaboration on consumer generated media, to purchases that can be directly correlated to the campaign.

Stormhoek and Threshers: a voucher frenzy

Threshers is a off-licence chain in the UK. Stormhoek, a South African winery, is one of the brands that they sell. In November 2006, Threshers put a voucher on its website offering 40% off all wines and champagnes between 30 November and 10 December. Stormhoek, who had a large following online through their blog www.stormhoek.com, asked if they could pass on the offer to their audience. Threshers' response: "Of course, it's just a blog." Stormhoek posted the voucher to their blog on Friday 24 November. Hugh MacLeod, a partner in the winery who was also working with Stormhoek on their online strategy, also posted the voucher to his popular blog, www.gapingvoid.com.

On Monday 27 November there were 37,000 downloads of the voucher, Tuesday saw 56,000 downloads, and on Friday 1 December, the day the promotion started, the voucher was downloaded 715,000 times.

By 5 December, the voucher had been downloaded 3.5 million times. BBC News reported on 1 December that "queues have formed at one store while the Threshers website has crashed under the strain of demand for the offer." And within the first five days of the offer, Threshers reported a 60% increase in weekend sales, with many stores selling one week's worth of wine in a single day, queues out of the door and stocks depleted by 80% in some shops.

The Threshers web site (www.threshergroup.com) saw 30,000 downloads of the voucher, about 1% of the total downloads. Stormhoek found that being at the centre of a viral marketing phenomenon saw branding and sales increase. As well as resulting in television and print press mentions, sales of Stormhoek wines increased at other stores as well and not just at Threshers. There was no promotion or discount at the other stores.

Stormhoek has won awards for its innovative use of social media to disrupt the wine market and increase wine sales, and Christmas 2006 saw that happen once again.

preparing to go viral

Viral campaigns are unpredictable. As the market becomes saturated with more campaigns competing for attention, it is increasingly difficult for marketers to ensure a hit. However, careful planning means that you are ready when your campaign takes off. Careful planning also means that you have given the campaign the best chance of success.

1. Define the aims of the campaign, and how you will measure success

A video created by your department and watched by millions of people on the Internet is certainly an attractive proposition, but if it does nothing to contribute towards your business goals, it is a fun but pointless exercise.

Determine if your campaign will be aimed at building brand awareness, driving traffic to your web site, growing anticipation for a new product, building lots of SEO links or making sure customers make a purchase right away. Viral campaigns should always build you links, whether or not that is main aim of the campaign – because of this you should try to influence the anchor text being used.

2. Plan a message or content that users want to share

On the Internet, there is a lot going on. For a campaign to be worthy of sending on, it has to stand out from the clutter.

- Make something scarce
- Make something free and abundant
- Be very funny
- Be very interesting
- Be very informative
- Be very educational
- Be very unusual
- Be a little cryptic
- Be the best
- Create something users want to copy
- Present the tools for a mashup

Burger King created the web site Subservient Chicken (www.subservientchicken.com), where anyone could tell a man dressed up in a chicken suit what to do. It is very funny, and quite bizarre. It got a lot of traffic. Hotmail made their email service available to anyone. Gmail, when launching, made it invite only, and ensured that the invites were scarce. People talked about both services a lot.

Using controversial or enticing names for viral content makes it more likely that your audience will want to investigate further. For videos, thumbnails are exceptionally important in enticing visitors to hit the play button.

3. Make your content easy to share

The easier a message is to pass on, the more likely it will be passed on. Emails should include "forward to a friend" links, and a "send to a friend" link can be added easily to any web page.

Viral marketers can make use of existing social media, both as an environment in which to host your message, and a means to share your message. Using a popular video hosting site, such as YouTube, for a viral video makes it easy for users to embed the video onto their own sites, for example.

Personalise emails automated by the sharing process for best response (with subject lines like: "Your friend Mark Hunter thought you'd find this amusing"). And for best SEO practice, tell users how to link to your content.

4. Make it as simple as possible for users to get involved

For campaigns that require interaction, it should be as easy as possible for users to sign-up and get interacting. Lengthy sign-up forms asking for lots of information will slow and can even halt your campaign.

5. Be authentic and transparent

It's a viral marketing campaign for a brand, and marketers who pretend otherwise can see the attempt blowing up in their faces. Studies have shown that branding does not have a significant detrimental effect to the contagious nature of a viral campaign.

6. Provide an incentive for sharing and interacting

The greatest incentive for users sharing your content is social currency: create something that they want to share. People like to be seen by their friends and colleagues as resourceful, caring or humorous, and the content you create should tie in with those values. Tailoring your content for your target market will give you even better results.

Incentive can be financial: a gift voucher for every 5 friends the campaign is sent to. Or, users could be entered into a competition for every 10 friends they refer. However, campaigns work best when the prize doesn't eclipse the content. Increasing social currency works for a brand too; it will increase their brand equity.

note

ARGs are often used successfully as viral marketing campaigns. One prominent successful campaign was I Love Bees for the launch of Halo 2. Do a quick search online – it's fascinating.

7. Make the message available

Sophisticated ARGs (alternative reality games) usually involve hiding messages and making them cryptic, but for the most part, marketers want their campaign to be very available. Research your target market, and make sure that they can access your campaign easily based on their usual online habits.

With any successful campaign, the spread of the message can usually be traced to several core influencers: those people responsible for the viral growth. Influencers tend to affect a large number of people, either by sending the message to lots of people, or causing lots of people to want to emulate them. However, influencers are difficult to identify prior to success, and so seeding a campaign should attract as large an audience as possible.

Be aware, as well, that editorial mentions in traditional media can also create a huge amount of traffic for a campaign, so press releases still need to be part of the seeding process.

Using forums and inciting blog comments can all help to get content out there.

8. Use a strong call to action

Be sure that the medium does not eclipse your message. If you have taken the time to create compelling and engaging content, make the most of the interaction you have with a potential customer. Be very clear about the action you want the user to take next:
- Send this video to a friend.
- Forward to a friend.
- Play now!

9. Track and analyse, and optimise

Monitor interactions with your brand from consumers, so you can see growth and response. Make sure you are aware of the many ways that users could be talking about you. The chapter on online reputation management provides guidelines for the process of listening online. If the campaign is growing, but the message is not as intended, there might need to be some adjustments made.

Analyse what elements of the campaign work, so that when the next one is launched, these can be optimised.

Tracking software ForwardTrack (forwardtrack.eyebeamresearch.org) shows the geographical spread of a campaign over time, and also lets participants see the spread of the campaign. This tracking solution can become a part of the marketing of the viral message.

TubeMogul (www.tubemogul.com) and VidMetrix (www.vidmetrix.com) both provide tracking and audience analysis for online videos.

10. Get lucky

Careful planning and great content with an enticing incentive should all result in a campaign that is successful. A little bit of luck is usually required for a campaign to fly .
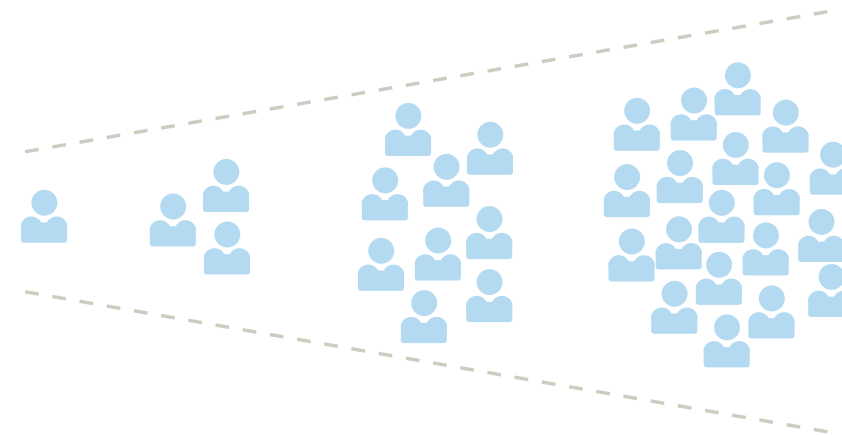
Viral Marketing uses communities to broadcast your message

now what?

With a viral campaign flying around the connected Internet, a company should be ready to capitalise on the benefits of the campaign.

be prepared for the traffic

Anticipate wild success and ensure that the server can cope with the additional traffic. Nothing will kill a campaign faster than it being unavailable, and this has happened countless times.

Ensure that all parties know about the viral marketing campaign, so that they can be prepared for any feedback that arises from this. If there is a cryptic element involved, or information that should not be released, ensure that all employees know about this.

If the campaign is to increase sales, be sure that there is sufficient stock in place.

start relationships

With millions of people being exposed to a brand, a company should plan to make the most of this first contact. As well providing all the tools to send a campaign on, a well planned campaign will also ask their audience permission to keep in touch with them. Build on the nature of the campaign, and ensure that future communications are not far removed from the viral campaign.

prepare a marketing success report

Consider the additional traffic and traction if the campaign becomes a case study, archived and accessed by marketers, journalists and other interested parties. Make the most of this additional latent traffic avenue by preparing useful case studies, screenshots and contact details. Even though the viral marketing campaign may be over, make sure it appears in online conversations and continues to generate traffic and links for your company.

If possible, keep relevant web sites up and running, and games still available once a campaign has finished.

getting it wrong: astroturfing

"Astroturfing" refers to parties trying to manipulate word of mouth, and comes from the term "grassroots campaigning". Sometimes referred to as "stealth marketing", it can also be a viral campaign killer.

Astroturfing usually occurs in the seeding period of a campaign. Employees may use fake names to try to seed a campaign on forums, in blog comments and through services such as Digg (www.digg.com). Communities are quick to pick up on false commentary, and this can be disastrous for a campaign. As with all social media interactions, transparency and authenticity can be far better for traction.

summary

Viral marketing uses people's electronic connectivity to increase the velocity of word of mouth. People with similar interests, needs and lifestyles tend to pass on and share interesting and entertaining content.

When sponsored by a brand, the message builds awareness of a product or service and can provide qualified prospects for the organisation to pursue.

Viral marketing campaigns can be unpredictable, but careful planning can go a long way to ensuring success.

1. Define the aims of the campaign and determine how success will be measured.
2. Create something that people want to share.
3. Use social media to ensure that content is easy to share.
4. Remove all barriers to participation.
5. Be authentic.
6. Provide incentives.
7. Make the message available.
8. Use a strong call to action.
9. Track, analyse and optimise.
10. Get a little lucky.

Campaigns that experience rapid exponential growth (go viral) can reach a large audience in a short space of time at a very low cost, making viral marketing very attractive.

the bigger picture

Successful viral marketing relies on a solid understanding of social media. Most viral marketing messages are hosted, shared and even created with the tools of social media.

Viral marketing campaigns can increase the links to a web site, and can therefore be a valuable SEO resource and tactic. Using SEO knowledge, the campaign can be created so as to maximise the value of those links.

Email marketing can be turned into potential viral marketing with the simple addition of a "forward to a friend" instruction and link in an email newsletter.

Viral campaigns can be seeded in a number of ways, including online advertising, to ensure maximum audience.

ORM provides plenty of tools for establishing the success and reach of viral campaigns.

case study: Firebox.com and Speedy Santa

Firebox.com, a leading UK gifts and gadgets etailer, briefed agency Inbox.co.uk to create the most popular Christmas viral of December 2004. The viral concept also needed drive traffic to the Firebox.com site to boost sales of toys and gadgets. Inbox.co.uk created an addictive game based on a simple idea: drag Santa around his Lapland track in the quickest time.

Players were given a global position at the end of each lap, and every player who completed a lap of the Firebox track won a £5 Firebox voucher.

The hook: a system of private leagues was devised where players could invite four friends or colleagues to join a leader board. Everyone in that league was emailed a personal URL and scores were updated real-time.

These leagues proved a big hit and created a lot of office buzz. Within four days, the game was number one in the FHM Top 100 games. The Speedy Santa game was played over 22 million times in the run-up to Christmas. On average, people played the game over 60 times each. 87% of people who played the Firebox Speedy Santa game clicked through to the Firebox.com site, at a cost to Firebox of under 4p per click-through. And they each had a £5 Firebox voucher to spend right before Christmas.

Christian Robinson, MD of Firebox.com, said, "It has definitely been one of the most successful promotions we have ever run, generated hundreds of thousands of pounds in revenue and bringing the Firebox brand to tens of thousands of new customers."

case study questions

1. Why do you think leader boards were an important contributing factor to the success of this campaign?
2. How did Firebox.com capitalise on the success of the game?
3. How was the game suited to its target audience and time of year?

chapter questions

1. Using the right medium to reach your audience is important. How does the Threshers voucher case study illustrate this?
2. Why is transparency so important in viral marketing?
3. Are viral campaigns better suited to a niche audience, or a mass audience?
4. Why is planning to important to viral marketing campaigns?

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further reading

www.gottaquirk.com
– the blog from Quirk eMarketing regularly posts the latest viral marketing buzz from the Internet.

www.adverblog.com
– Adverblog posts interactive marketing and other great advertising from around the world – great inspiration

10. online reputation management

What's inside: The **introduction** to ORM gives an insight into the topic and the **key terms and concepts** are outlined for this chapter, followed by an example of what can happen **when a company does not listen** and manage its online reputation. We discuss **how it works** outlining the significant steps of **listening, analysing and influencing**. The **10 rules to recover from an online brand attack** are a practical approach to ORM, followed by a **summary** and **the bigger picture.**

introduction

"If Dell were really smart, they'd hire me (yes, me) to come to them and teach them about blogs, about how their customers now have a voice; about how their customers are a community -- a community often in revolt; about how they could find out what their customers really think; about how they could fix their customers' problems before they become revolts; about how they could become a better company with the help of their customers.

If they'd only listen."

- Jeff Jarvis on his blog, Buzzmachine.com, in 2005.

Online conversations are taking place all the time: about politics, about Britney Spears, about a pet dog, about just about anything. People everywhere are engaging in and creating blogs, videos, mashups and more. It's called consumer generated media (CGM), and it's big news for any company or personality today.

We've learned about the tools of social media and the importance of word of mouth when it comes to viral marketing. Consumers trust each other, and search engines find that trust very relevant. Increasingly, CGM is showing up in the top results of the SERPs (search engine results pages).

The use of social media has equipped consumers with a voice and a platform, and the ability to amplify their views. The connected nature of the Internet makes these views easy to share, and the accessibility of social media tools makes it easy for other consumers to respond. Whether positive, negative or just slightly off-centre, consumers are making their views known.

Added to this, is the rising prevalence of CGM in search results. Entries that companies have no control over are ranking highly in brand search results. A Google search on "brand name + complaints" will display a whole lot more CGM.

A company's reputation can make a difference to its bottom line. Companies seen to engage with their customers; who appear honest and transparent and who listen to their consumers, benefit from a growing fan base of loyal customers who can then turn into passionate spokespeople. Companies who ignore the voices of their customers will see diminishing loyalty, and a growing resentment among the vocal online consumers.

Companies, and individuals, need to listen to what is being said about them, and learn how to respond to and engage with their consumers in this world of shifting power.

A search for "Macbook" shows that there are a lot of entries on the SERP that Apple does not control.

key terms and concepts

Alexa rank A number indicating how popular a web site is compared to other sites, based on information returned by the Alexa Toolbar and SearchStatus. The number is the index of a given site in long ordered list of popularity, the most popular site at index 1, the second most at index 2 and so on.

BrandsEye BrandsEye is Online Reputation Management (ORM) software, developed by Quirk eMarketing, which allows for real-time monitoring of a brand on the Web. BrandsEye combines human subjectivity with sophisticated technology, allowing the quantifying and benchmarking of online reputation.

Consumer generated media Information that is published online by individuals. This refers to videos, photos, blogs, audio and more. It is also referred to as social media.

Dell Hell The term used by Jeff Jarvis when his Dell computer malfunctioned, and he had a hard time getting appropriate customer service.

Feed reader An RSS aggregator that lets you view all your RSS feeds in one place.

Flog A fake blog.

Keyword In online reputation management, a keyword is a term that is used when searching the Internet for mentions.

Mentions In online reputation management, mentions refer to the instances when a selected brand, company or staff members are talked about online, usually by clients or consumers.

Online reputation The aggregation of sentiment from mentions of an entity online will give its online reputation.

ORM Online reputation management - understanding and influencing the perception of an entity online.

RSS Really Simple Syndication abbreviates all the content most web sites on the World Wide Web contain in order to provide you with specific content you want. RSS allows you to receive/ syndicate this information without requiring you to constantly open new pages in your browser. Also see RSS Reader.

SERP The search engine results page - what is seen on a search engine when a search is performed.

dell hell –
what can happen when a company does not listen

"Dell Hell" was a term coined by influential blogger Jeff Jarvis as he recounted the failure of his Dell computer and the failure of Dell customer service. His blog posts resonated with many readers who added their own comments of misery at the hands of Dell customer service. These posts caused the first popular study of the influence of blogs on brands, and have come to be definitive of the effects of a brand not listening.

The archives of all posts on Jeff Jarvis' blog related to this can be found by going to http://www.buzzmachine.com/archives/cat_dell.html.

The series of posts began on 21 June 2005, in a post that has elicited over 250 comments to date. The laptop Jeff Jarvis had just bought was clearly not functioning as it should. What irked him even further, though, was that he had "paid a fortune for the four-year, in-home service" yet he was told by Dell that if they sent someone to his home to assist him, the person would not have the parts necessary to fix his machine. The post ends:

"DELL SUCKS. DELL LIES. Put that in your Google and smoke it, Dell."

Jeff Jarvis catalogued the repeated failings of Dell customer service, from emails sent to him that used the wrong name, to many time inefficient diagnostic tests that Dell wanted him to carry out, and still after much to-ing and fro-ing he had a computer that did not work and a warranty that seemed useless. His posts continued to attract many comments, and he often spoke directly to Dell in his blog, exhorting them to listen and to respond.

Eventually, he worked out the email address of Dell's Chief Marketing Officer and Vice President for US Consumer Business and sent him an email detailing the ongoing saga that was not being resolved. Predictably, Jeff Jarvis received a phone call, and eventually the matter was resolved when he obtained a refund in early July 2005.

Analysts noted the influence of social media and a brand's online reputation, and this showed in the falling consumer confidence in Dell. It may not be directly related to one blogger, and Dell admitted to neglecting customer service for some time, but "*in the midst of this silicon opera, Dell's customer satisfaction rating, market share, and share price in the US all shrank.*" (Jarvis, 2005)

The stock price for Dell Inc shows a decline that seems to correspond with Jarvis' Dell Hell.

Today, Dell has come a long way. Dell has launched www.dellideastorm.com – Dell IdeaStorm – where Dell customers and enthusiasts can communicate with the company. Crucially, customers can, and do, tell Dell what features they want in a laptop, and Dell then feeds this into its product development.

how it works

Online reputation management uses the tools of the Internet to monitor and analyse a brand's reputation and to engage in conversation so as to influence its reputation.

On the web, reputation matters. Many communities have their own reputation management for members, such as eBay, Digg and Reddit. This is based on the feedback given by other community members, and affects the success of that member's ability to transact within the community. Generally, participation, engagement and response are all used to rate a member's reputation.

Web sites which place an emphasis on the reviews of the community, such as IMDB.com for movies or Amazon.com for books, have algorithms which determine their most trusted reviewers, and they base some of their rankings on the opinions of that part of their community.

When shifting to the greater community of the Internet, participation, engagement and response remain key factors in determining a company's reputation.

step 1:
listening – monitoring the buzz

Focus groups are not required for gauging customer sentiment on the Internet. It's all out there, connected via hyperlinks and crawled regularly by search engine spiders.

Keywords – the foundation to categorising and indexing the web – make it relatively simple (though possibly time-consuming) to listen to the chatter online. Customers are not using channels designated by a company to talk about that organisation, but the good news is that the Internet makes it easy for a company to use the channels that customers have selected.

ORM keywords
ORM allows a company to track mentions of itself, its staff, its products, its industry and its competitors. In fact, the tools allow for the tracking of anything; it just comes down to deciding what is relevant.

Company
- Brand name
- URL
- Key products
- Key personnel (names, job titles, etc)

Industry
- Conferences
- Patents
- News

Competitors
- Brand names
- Product launches
- Web site updates
- Job vacancies

For example, if Apple were to use these tools to monitor reputation, some keywords used might be:

Company
- Apple
- www.apple.com
- Macbook, iPod, Macbook Air, iTunes
- Steve Jobs

Industry
- Consumer Electronics Show Las Vegas
- CEBIT

Competitors
- Microsoft, Creative

It is also important to track common misspellings, all related companies and all related web sites.

Tracking the names of people key to a company can highlight potential brand attacks, or can demonstrate new areas of outreach for a company.

Brand names, employee names, product names and even competitor names are not unique. To avoid monitoring too much, identify keywords which will indicate that a post has nothing to do with your company, and negative match that keyword in your searches.

For example, "apple" could refer to a consumer electronics company, or it could appear in a post about the health benefits of fruit. Finding keywords that will indicate contextcan help to save time. So, you could negative match words like "fruit", "tasty" and"granny smith".

how to track: CGM and search

Thankfully, ORM does not entail hourly searches on your favourite search engine to see what is appearing on the SERPs. Although, being aware of your search space is vital as well. There are a number of search engines that allow for narrowing a search to particular media or industries. And RSS means that these results can be updated regularly and kept conveniently in one place.

Monitoring all mentions means that the following needs to be tracked:
- Blogs
- Twitter
- News
- Forums
- Comment boards
- Photos
- Videos
- Job listings
- Events
- Patents
- Web site changes
- And more!

There are a number of different tools that monitor these areas, and supply the results via email alerts or RSS feeds. Below are some free tools that are available.

Google has several bespoke search services, and periodically adds more to the list. With the services below, an RSS feed is available for the search (Google Alerts sends weekly or daily emails with updates), so that all updates can be available through a feed reader.
- Google Alerts: www.google.com/alerts
  - Google Alerts will send an email when the keyword is used in either a news item or a blog post.
- Google News: news.google.com
  - Google News searches all news items for mentions of a keyword.
- Google Blog Search: blogsearch.google.com
  - Google Blog Search searches all blog posts for mentions of a keyword.
- Google Patent Search: www.google.com/patents
  - Google Patent Search allows you to keep track of all filings related to an industry, and searches can be done to see if there are patent filings which might infringe on other patents.

- Google Video Search: video.google.com/videosearch
  - Video Search relies on the data that has been added to describe a video, and will return results based on keyword matches.

There are several search engines which focus solely on tracking blogs, news and other social media, and can provide trends for searches. As well as providing regular updates of new postings, these search engines can also provide an overview over a certain period of time.
- Blogpulse: www.blogpulse.com
  - Blogpulse tracks conversations and trends and supplies an RSS feed for updates.
- Technorati: www.technorati.com
  - Technorati tracks blogs and tagged social media.

Keeping track of blogposts is one thing, but mentions of a company can also appear in blog comments and on forum postings. The following two services assist in monitoring comments and forums.
- Boardtracker: www.boardtracker.com
  - Boardtracker monitors popular forums and provides alerts via SMS for keywords mentioned in a thread.
- Co.mments: co.mments.com
  - RSS alerts can be created for mentions of a keyword in the comments of blogposts.

Yahoo! has a number of social media companies under its umbrella, and most provide the opportunity to monitor mentions via RSS.
- Flickr: www.flickr.com/search
  - RSS updates for searches on a particular keyword will reveal when a brand name has been used in tagging a photo.
- Yahoo! Upcoming: upcoming.yahoo.com
  - Yahoo!'s Upcoming will alert you via RSS for any upcoming events related to the keyword you have selected.
- Del.icio.us: del.icio.us
  - An RSS feed can be created for URLs tagged with keywords, or for new bookmarking of a URL.
- Yahoo! Pipes: pipes.yahoo.com/pipes
  - Yahoo! Pipes allows anyone to set up a custom buzz monitoring tool with bespoke filters.

There might be web sites that a company would like to monitor for keyword mentions that do not offer RSS feeds. Using a service such as Rollyo (www.rollyo.com) allows the creation of a custom search engine which will search those specific sites only.

Listening is the first step to getting involved in the conversation surrounding a company. Using search tools and RSS feeds means that information can be accessed quickly and in one place, without the need to visit hundreds of web sites.

step 2:
analysing – what's being said by whom

As a marketer, the first step in looking at who is saying what is to take stock of the messages being sent by your own company. This includes: all web sites and domains owned by a company, all blogs maintained by employees (whether company blogs or personal blogs) and all blogs maintained by ex-employees. An audit should give an idea of the content that is available to the public and what that content is saying.

With regular RSS updates declaring that selected keywords have been used in some form of social media, a growing list is being created of mentions surrounding a brand. Now what?

Even in the democratised world of the Internet, not all mentions are equal. They vary in terms of positivity or negativity and influence. Not all mentions require action from a company. Some require drastic measures to be taken. But all, no matter how quiet or how loud, are an indication of consumer sentiment.

Whether a post is positive, negative or indifferent can be quickly assessed by reading it. Influence can be a little harder to establish.

Indicators such as traffic, links and subscriber numbers can all assist in assessing the influence of a blog. There are also services such as Blog Influence (www.bloginfluence.net) and Social Meter (www.socialmeter.com) which will show the audience and reach for an entered URL. However, statements, particularly inflammatory ones, should still be monitored as traffic can increase substantially and quickly online.

Influence can also assist in establishing the credibility of the author. Factors which can indicate credibility include the size of the blog's audience, the frequency of posts and the age of the blog.

The source should also be looked at: is the mention a news item or a tag on photo from someone's holiday?

To be able to monitor reputation over time, in can be a good idea to aggregate the information into a spreadsheet or database along with the factors mentioned above. It is necessary to determine what is important to the reputation of the company you are monitoring, and perhaps adapt factors accordingly.

note

BrandsEye uses the mentions to generate a reputation score. The reputation score is based on an algorithm that uses a number of factors, including the number and frequency of mentions, the sentiment of the mention and the influence of the mention.

Your database might look something like this:

URL of mention	Sentiment	Source	Credibility	Action
PositiveExample.com/123	3	Example News	6/10	Contact journalist
NegativeExample.com/abc	-2	Blog	4/10	Contact blogger

There are also a number of paid for services on the market that will assist in monitoring and aggregating this information.

BrandsEye (www.brandseye.com) is a tool launched in 2008 that does just that. Not only does it track mentions, but it allows the user to assign sentiment and importance to mentions, and provides a benchmark of a brand's reputation.Trackur (www.trackur.com) is another tool that monitors mentions, but does not provide further analysis.

step 3:
influencing – engaging in and leading the conversation

The best way to show that you are listening is by responding. Online, there are many channels available to companies to respond to the conversation and to become an active participant in it.

what if everything being said is nice?
A fantastic position to be in is that every possible mention that includes your company, its employees and products, is overwhelmingly positive. Well done. However, that does not mean that there is nothing to do. Consumers want to know that a company is listening; it needs to respond. Positive comments should be acknowledged.

All of these mentions can also indicate new avenues for marketing and growth.

what if everything being said is neutral?
Then it sounds like the company is very boring. As Seth Godin (www.sethgodin.com) puts it, "safe is risky". If a company is playing it so safe that no one can be bothered to either send praise or criticism its way, it's in danger of being forgotten. The next step is no one talking about the company at all.

what if negative things are being said?
Negative statements should be seen as an opportunity for growth. Negative statements can be complaints or criticisms, and both should be dealt with.

Complaints are from stakeholders who have had dealings with a company. By complaining, this customer is giving the company the opportunity to make things

right and is probably indicating where the company can improve. Usually, the skilled customer service department of a company should deal with these.

If a complaint is online, the resolution should be there as well, although you can try to have it taken offline first. Even though the customer service will likely take place either over email or by phone, posting a comment in a blog post, for example, will show the community that the company both listens and responds.

Criticism need not necessarily come from customers, but it is important to be aware of it. If a criticism includes false information, it should be corrected. And if the criticism is true, then it should be dealt with as such.

responding

Responding involves recognising that consumers dictate the channels of communication, and that a company needs to go to the consumer, not the other way around.

In South Africa, vodacom3G is the name of a Vodacom representative who monitors the forum mybroadband.co.za and resolves complaints and queries and offers assistance. Instead of directing customers to an FAQ section on a Vodacom site, Vodacom has followed their consumers to the channel that the consumers prefer.

Not only do Vodacom resolve questions on the forum, but they also use it to provide key information that consumers are wanting.

If you are responding to a blogpost, find the writer's contact details on the blog and email her directly. At a last resort, use the comments to make contact with the blogger.

When responding, be transparent and honest. Remember that emails can be reproduced on blogs. At all times, remember that you are engaged in conversation, not a dictation.

influencing

In the chapters on WebPR and social media there are guidelines for companies to lead the conversation using the tools of social media. Influencing and leading the conversation can also have the consequence of there being more results that are lead by your company in the SERPs.

Companies can also get proactive by purchasing negative name domains, such as www.companynamesucks.com, to prevent angry customers from buying these and having them hitting the SERPs.

Lastly, take a look at negative brand name searches on major search engines, and consider PPC advertising to offer the company's point of view.

10 rules to recover from an online brand attack

These 10 rules to recovery should provide a practical approach for brands facing an online threat.

1. humility
Before you can recover from an online brand attack, you have to be aware that your brand can be attacked - no matter how big it is or how untouchable it may seem.

2. listen
Once you have a clear understanding of the scope of the possible effects of an online attack and are committed to maintaining a good reputation online, you're half way there. Next you've got to understand how the process of consumer complaints has evolved. Use this understanding to guide your actions.

3. act immediately!
One of the easiest ways to solve the majority of brand attacks is to respond quickly. A brand that shows it is listening and does indeed care, will go far when it comes to ensuring a solid online reputation. A conscious reaction is the only way forward - acknowledging what has been said and reacting accordingly.

4. if what they're saying is false...
If the mention of your brand is factually incorrect, in a friendly tone, send the blogger (90% of the time it will be a blogger) evidence that they are wrong, ask for removal or retraction of the entry, and offer to keep them informed of future news. If no action is taken by the blog author, then add a comment.

5. if what they're saying is true...
If it is true, learn from the "Dell Hell" phenomenon. If the mention is negative but true then send your side of the story and try as hard as you can to take it offline.

6. keep the negative pages out of the search engines
Keeping more people from reading negative things about your brand is imperative. What you can do is knock them off the first page of the results with basic SEO topped with some social media page setups such as Squidoo and MySpace or forum posts. Keep adding pages and links until you've forced the offending pages out of sight.

7. maintain communication
If you aren't an active member of the online community, it tends to be a little harder to recover from an online attack. If your company doesn't have a blog, start one. Participate in industry forums and chat rooms. Build genuine credibility as a member of these conversations and you'll find that people will have more respect for you and your brand.

8. engage in the conversation

Keep your brand in the face of consumers by engaging in the conversation. This could be done by making use of blogs, communicating with customers and being as open and honest as possible. Engaging in, and leading, the conversation allows you to build an authentic voice. If a crisis hits, you will be well placed to respond in a way that is authentic.

9. care

If you truly care what your customers think then most of this will come naturally. That's all people want. They give you their money; they just want some good service and respect in return.

10. be prepared

No brand is immune to an online brand attack. The best brands have strategies in place to immediately identify a reputation crisis and respond to it quickly enough to stop the negative word of mouth spreading.

If all else fails, apologise and move on.

Bottom line - by making bloggers familiar with your voice, you will be better placed to respond to criticism. Consumers can spot last-minute corporate fire-fighting - they should know and trust your voice already.

summary

Conversations are taking place all the time on the Internet, and it is crucial for companies to be aware of what is being said about them. Customers are now dictating the channels of communication, and companies that cannot engage with their consumers in this way stand to lose them.

ORM is about using the tools of the Internet, the same tools that customers are using, to monitor, analyse and ultimately influence the conversation. Companies need to learn to listen and engage.

There are many free and paid for tools available for monitoring online conversations, and with most it is easy to set up custom RSS feeds that will update with any new mentions. Mentions need to be analysed for sentiment, credibility, influence and source, and appropriate action to be taken.

Responses should be swift, factual, transparent and honest. The best way for a company to influence the conversation is to be involved in it through the tools of social media.

ORM can help a company to gain an inherent understanding of how consumers perceive and interact with their brand, and thus can provide a platform for planning marketing campaigns.

the bigger picture

ORM should monitor all mentions of a brand and guide a brand in using social media to communicate. It can help to identify hotspots for viral word of mouth marketing, and should be used to ensure that that word of mouth is positive.

WebPR works hand in hand with ORM. ORM tools are used to listen, and WebPR helps a company to respond and engage.

ORM can also identify new sources for possible link growth for an SEO strategy. Every mention can be used to build links, and to report on the links obtained. ORM tools can help to identify what keywords and key phrases to target (and which are being targeted by a company's competitors).

ORM should also be used for determining the success of any marketing campaign that is not directly related to sales. It can show growing brand recognition as well as consumer sentiment.

case study: four South African banks

Using a tool to measure one company's reputation will give an indication of consumer sentiment, but it is far better to be able to compare that to competitors' reputations. Using the ORM monitoring and analysing tool BrandsEye, the online reputation of four prominent South African banks was measured for the period 26 November 2006 to 13 February 2007.

Banks, and particularly their customer service, generate a lot of conversation, both online and off. BrandsEye was used to monitor mentions of the banks, to filter out duplicate mentions, and to generate a daily reputation score for each bank that could then be measured over time.
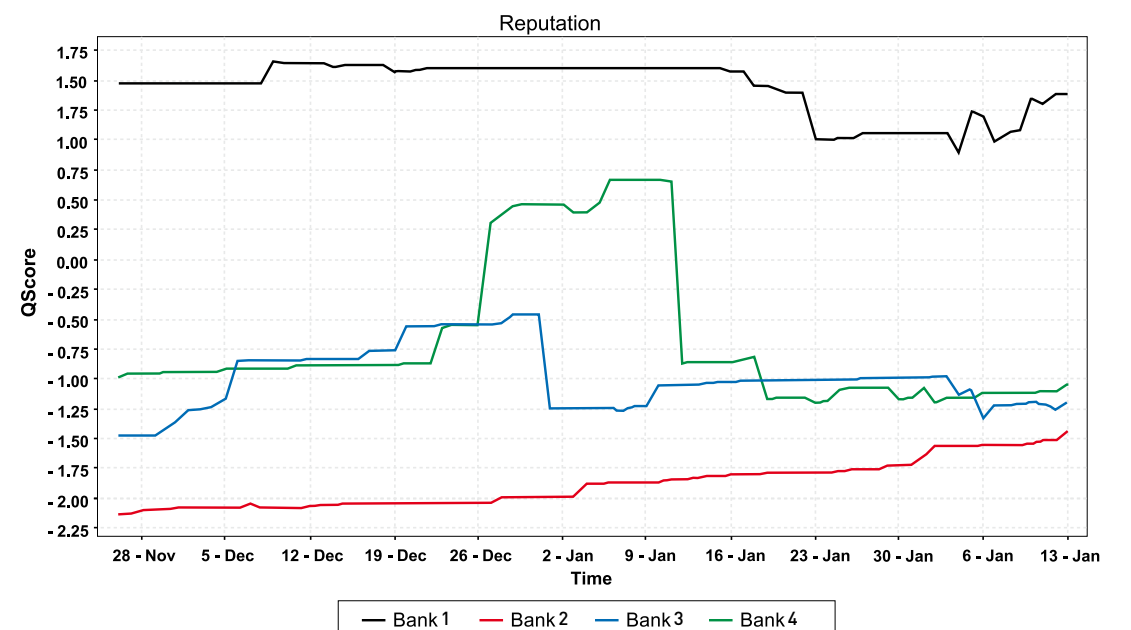
Changes in reputation, especially jumps such as for Bank 4 just after 26 December, can then be correlated to real world events.

Bank 1 has superior customer service levels, and this is shown in the reputation score. However, towards the end of January, Bank 1 experienced a backlash from local government when attempting to launch a public-service campaign. The offline media coverage was far reaching, loud and venomous, and within a short while the effects on the bank's reputation were expected to be seen online. On the contrary - what actually happened was quite surprising. While the ORM tool picked up a number of negative mentions, these were in fact directed at local government for seemingly coercing the bank into withdrawing their campaign.

With a temporary dip in reputation score, the result was that throughout February, Bank 1's online reputation grew stronger and stronger. Having their hand forced created a sense of empathy with the public, with the majority of criticism deflected away from the bank itself. Furthermore, when critics of the bank's withdrawal voiced their opinions, a number of respondents actually jumped to its defence. With an already high online reputation score, not only did Bank 1 survive what could have potentially been a major crisis, but their reputation thrived as a result.

Bank 2 on the other hand had the lowest reputation score throughout the investigation although tending to the positive towards the end of the test period. Their poor customer service levels, as perceived by their online customers, were negatively affecting their online reputation.

One of South Africa's most prolific online forums in fact had an established tradition of using Bank 2 as an example of what was wrong with the industry in general. A comment by one forum member went, "Bank 2 is evil! Evil! Evil! Evil!" The majority of Bank 2's negative mentions originated from this particular forum, and interestingly, where it was criticised, Bank 1 was offered as a suitable alternative.

case study questions

1. For Bank 1, media coverage regarding their public service campaign was negative, while social media coverage was supportive of the bank. How does each affect the bank's reputation?
2. How would you recommend that Bank 2 combats negative mentions on forums?
3. Bank 1 appears to be on the top of their game. What would you recommend to them to maintain and grow their reputation?

chapter questions

1. When dealing with complaints or criticism, why should a company try to take them offline first?
2. How do think a company can encourage customers to use established customer service channels as opposed to social media, and what are the benefits of doing so?
3. Choose a company, and use at least one of the services listed in the chapter to gain an overview of its online reputation. Find a positive mention, a neutral and a negative mention, and determine the influence of each. What action would you recommend to each?
4. Vodacom has a representative on the forum www.mybroadband.co.za. Visit the forum and consider the style the representative, vodacom3G, uses when posting. Does it sound corporate, or like an individual? What is the effect of the style that the poster uses?

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further reading

www.brandseye.com/blog
- the blog from Brandseye, Quirk's ORM tool

www.gottaquirk.com/blog/0/18
- posts from Quirk on ORM on their blog, Gottaquirk, highlighting real life ORM

www.marketingpilgrim.com/category/reputation-management
- insights from Andy Beal and others at Marketing Pilgrim on ORM, including how tos and tools

http://notetaker.typepad.com/cgm/
- Pete Blackshaw provides insights on ORM, social media and WebPR

11. web PR

What's inside: An **introduction** to WebPR, the **history** of PR as it has evolved online and the **key terms and concepts** needed. We look at **how its works**, and then outline various **WebPR tactics**, including **online article syndication**, **optimising press releases** and **social media tactics** such as the social media press release, blogging and on online press room. We have a brief look **tools of the trade**, and the **pros and cons** in WebPR: **should I or shouldn't I?** Lastly, there is a **summary** and a look at **the bigger picture** to put things in context.

introduction

"Public Relations is a set of management, supervisory, and technical functions that foster an organization's ability to strategically listen to, appreciate, and respond to those persons whose mutually beneficial relationships with the organization are necessary if it is to achieve its missions and values." (Heath, 2005)

Traditional PR (public relations) has focused on crafted press releases and company image. It has provided for a controlled release of information, and a communication process that relies on journalists and traditional media such as newspapers. This modus operandi has been enormously impacted by the spread and influence of the Internet.

Whilst the Internet provides excellent tools to the PR industry, the shift in communications afforded by the Internet has also caused a ruckus in the world of public relations. Information is freely available and accessible to a far greater audience, as opposed to being controlled through a select group of journalists. Communication is taking place in the realm where the consumer feels most comfortable, as opposed through the channels dictated by a company.

PR needs to follow this shift, especially as increasingly consumers are turning to a "person like me" for trusted advice, as opposed to mainstream media outlets (Edelman, 2006).

The Internet provides savvy PR professionals plenty of tools for listening to and engaging with a far wider community, and can have immense benefits for companies that are willing to be transparent in their communications. It also allows companies to engage in a more immediate form of communication.

WebPR collectively stands for the ways in which you can get your message out online. It is used to connect with customers and enhance brand awareness, exposure and SEO (search engine optimisation) efforts using various online channels like article directories, press release sites, industry related sites, online newsrooms, blogs, forums and social media.

"In a connected, digital world, PR isn't just about the press release; it's about connecting with customers." (Cohen, 2006)

history

As communication tools became available with the spread of the Internet, so they became available to the PR industry. It also revealed a wider audience for a company's stories, and developed new channels for promoting them. With the rise of social media, and especially the growing influence of bloggers, it became clear that PR officers needed to reach out to more than just journalists.

However, the road has been rocky, and traditional PR has in some instances struggled to cope with the new rules of engagement.

In February 2006, Tom Foremski wrote in his post "Die! Press release! Die! Die! Die!": "I've been telling the PR industry for some time now that things cannot go along as they are . . . business as usual while mainstream media goes to hell in a hand basket."

Chris Anderson, editor in chief of Wired and author of "The Long Tail", announced on his blog in October 2007 that he was blocking "Lazy flacks [who] send press releases to the Editor in Chief of Wired because they can't be bothered to find out who on my staff, if anyone, might actually be interested in what they're pitching."

However, a 2005 experiment showed that press releases can garner a better ROI than a PPC campaign (Carton, 2005). So it's worth ensuring you know how to be an effective practitioner in today's connected environment.

key terms and concepts

Backlink A link at another site, leading to your site and also called an incoming link. These are seen as indications of popularity by search engines.

Boilerplate Standard wording about an organisation that usually appears at the foot of a press release.

CGM Consumer generated media is another word for social media.

Key phrase Word or words being optimised for by a web site. Also used to refer to words that are used by users of search engines.

Online press room A part of a web site aimed at providing journalists with pertinent corporate information, such as PR contacts, images and press releases.

ORM Online reputation management - ensuring that you know what is being said about you online, and that you are leading the conversation.

Press release Also called a news release, this is an electronic or paper document issued to the media with the intention of gaining news coverage. It follows established layout guidelines.

RSS Real Simple Syndication is an easy way of syndicating content, and aggregating content. RSS allows for users to access the information on a web site without all the extra bumf.

SEO Search engine optimisation - making sure that you are achieving optimal rankings by the search engines.

Social media The media that is published, created and shared by individuals on the Internet, such as blogs, images, video and more.

Syndicate Making content available for distribution among selected clients.

Traditional media Newspapers, magazines, television and publishing houses are the realm of traditional media.

how it works

The most important component to successful PR is to listen to your customers. Not only are they telling you what they want, you will also be able to tell how well your message is being received. In the chapter on online reputation management (ORM), the tools used to listen online were discussed.

And if PR is about connecting with your customers, it should also be about responding to them by engaging with them in conversation, where that conversation is taking place.

Thirdly, WebPR allows you to build your own voice. Though you cannot control the message, you should lead the conversation through transparent communications.

listen to your customers

ORM will enable a company to listen to what is being said about them online. Particularly important is to regularly monitor all channels that a customer might use to contact or talk about a company. This includes forums and consumer action web sites, as well as keeping track of mentions on personal blogs.

Not only does this allow a trend to emerge of general sentiment related to the company, but it will also enable awareness of issues that need attention.

respond to others

ORM described the tools that can be used to find out what is being said about a company online. A key function of WebPR is to respond to those conversations with a consistent voice. Consumer generated media can and must be responded to. Being publicly available, and publicly searchable, means that consumer generated media forms part of the public perception of a company. As discussed in the chapter on ORM, search results often show consumer generated media – messages that a company cannot control.

Blogs and forums are key starting points for responding. Responding in these mediums ensures that company's response may be viewed along with the original message.

what to consider

Transparency and honesty is vital. Any semblance of "PR speak" or "spin" could see this worthy outreach backfiring. An authentic voice works best, as does a thick skin. Respond to the good and the bad – it shows that the company is listening to all conversations.

build your own voice

Whether or not a company has a web site, it most likely has a web presence. Not only are businesses listed in online directories, but are also mentioned in consumer generated media. However, companies need to pay attention to the voice that is presented by their online presence, and use the tools of the Internet to enhance that voice.

Establishing long-term, trusting consumer relationships through online article syndications, press releases and blogs aids a company to craft online credibility, placing it in a better position to respond to future criticism. These tools also help build links to a company's web site. And, of course, links increase traffic and have search engine optimisation (SEO) benefits.

While it used to be that messages were dispersed to journalists who would then broadcast them to a reading public, today that practice does not always exist to disseminate the information being transmitted. This provides tremendous opportunity for companies to be fully involved in engaging with their customers.

WebPR is not about throwing out the PR rulebook. It's about using the Internet to fully realise its communication potential.

note

Social media, ORM and WebPR are all intertwined – have you noticed? It's all about conversations, and how to listen to the chatter and how to get involved in it as well.

webPR tactics

online article syndication

Online article syndication is one of WebPR's principal and most successful tactics. It involves writing articles that are in no way a direct promotion of your site. These are not press releases; they are written to provide information and valuable content. Articles are submitted to online article directories, from where they are picked up and republished on other sites.

As the articles contain links and keywords relevant to your site, the benefits for search engine optimisation are excellent. But the strategy won't work unless people want your articles - so they need to be broad, informative and not just thinly disguised adverts. Remember, we're in the PR chapter here.

Each article will also have an About the Author section. This could contain up to three links to your site and many article directories will allow you to include a backlink in the body of the article as well. The aim: the article gets republished on many web and blog sites in the weeks after it is published. In order to ensure your site remains the search engine authority on the article's subject, the article should be published and indexed there first. Online article syndication not only allows you to introduce fresh, optimised content to your site but enables you to generate valuable SEO backlinks.

Articles containing relevant information are value-adding and therefore attract links naturally. And, if published on a third party site, should carry a link back to your own web site. This drives visitors to the site that are automatically predisposed to your brand, and are therefore are more likely to engage and buy the products on offer.

writing an article for online syndication
choose a topic

By looking at your web site's content themes and key phrases associated with them, you will be able to write targeted, key phrase rich articles. Listening to the conversations around your brand, and seeing what customers are saying, can also lead you to topics relevant to your web site and your customers. Refer to your SEO strategy, and the keywords you are targeting, to create articles that complement your SEO efforts.

Optimise the article and publish it to your own site

Using SEO and web copy guidelines, ensure that the content is optimised for search engines, as well as engaging for readers. Publish the article to your own web site first, to establish the authority of your web site. Doing this will:

• Allow you to reap the SEO benefits of fresh, optimised copy
• Enable your site to be regarded as the expert on that subject
• Avoid Google's strict duplicate content policies

Firstly, the article needs to be optimised for your web site. Implement all the tactics covered in the online copywriting chapter, such as correct meta data, optimised title and key phrases, optimal use of <h> tags and links. Once it is live, you will need to **wait for it to be indexed by the search engines:** if you type the article title into the search engine and it returns the page with your article on it as a result, it has been indexed and it's now ready to be submitted to the online article syndication sites/directories.

The article then needs to be edited for syndicating. Different directories have their own requirements and guidelines which need to be adhered to.

For example, some directories require that all links to your web site in the body of the text, bar one, would need to be removed, as well as all mentions of your company as a brand name. You will also need to create an "About the Author" section at the end of the article. This can tell readers more about your company, and the information they will have access to by visiting the site. You will be able to add two or three links in this section, depending on the directory. Send one link to the homepage and the other(s) to pages within the site.

Most directories allow the inclusion of keywords relevant to the article. Ensure these are relevant to the article and that the key phrases for which you have optimised the article are included. These key phrases will allow readers to find your articles, using the search function on the directories. This also called tagging your article.

Many directories also allow **a description**. This description will be displayed, along with the title of the article, when someone has searched the directory for a key phrase or category for which you have tagged your article. The description should entice the user to read your article, so it needs to be succinct and gripping.

Once you have done this, you will then need to **convert the article into HTML**. The HTML is very basic, and while the different directories have their own HTML guidelines which you will need to familiarise yourself with, the standards tags are as follows.

• To bold: phrase you wish to bold
• To italicise: phrase you wish to italicise
• To underline: <u>phrase you wish to underline</u>
• To list: lines you wish to list
• To create a paragraph: <p>paragraph here</p>
• To insert a line break:
• To insert a link: phrase you wish to link

For each directory, the submission guidelines will indicate requirements for the text.

Submit the article to directories

Publishing the articles to directories means they can be picked up and republished on other sites, which **contributes significantly to link building efforts**. There are hundreds of online article directories out there but you need to be selective when choosing which ones to submit to. The good article directories usually allow up to 4 links to be placed in each article.

Here is a list of 10 directories that you could publish your articles to:
1. www.ezinearticles.com
2. www.goarticles.com
3. www.postarticles.com
4. www.uberarticles.com
5. www.ezine-writer.com.au
6. www.article-hangout.com
7. www.articledashboard.com
8. www.simplysearchforit.com
9. www.amazines.com
10. www.newarticlesonline.com

These directories all allow **3 to 4 links**, they all give **statistics** on how the articles are doing and they all allow you to **preview the article** before you publish it – it is important to be able to preview it to ensure that no mistakes were made during the html conversion process.

All of the above article directories are free, though you will need to **register for an account**.

Once you have submitted the article it will undergo a review process – the directories do this to ensure that the articles are actually useful and relevant rather than simply advertorials. It will then be approved and available to read on the site. From here people who are interested in republishing the article on their own sites/blogs can do

so as long as they reproduce the content exactly as you have submitted it. If the article is well-written and informative it has the **capacity to go viral** which is the ultimate goal as the more times it is republished the more links you will acquire – and all **at no cost to you**.

Monitor its progress
A bit of basic **online reputation monitoring** will enable you to keep an eye on where your article is being republished and that it is being republished correctly - there's no use in sites republishing it if they're going to strip out all the links and the "About the Author" section which you included.

press releases: optimised for search and for social media

The press release is a stalwart of public relations. It is a standardised format for releasing information. Originally intended to provide information to journalists, increasingly press releases are being read without going through the journalists first. PR has also realised the tremendous impact of bloggers, and many PR professionals are using the same press releases in their communications with bloggers. And today, journalists are also bloggers, and bloggers are the new citizen journalists, so the lines are becoming even further blurred.

Newswires, like article directories, allow for online submission of press releases. In turn, these are syndicated via RSS, and so are picked up by the news engines, such as **Google News**, Yahoo! News, **MSN News**. Many people pick up their news via these online news engines, which aggregate news from a number of publications and newswires, and so the press release is becoming an ever more crucial means of reaching a growing audience.

As well as promoting conversation around your company and its products, online press releases should **drive traffic to your site**. To achieve this, press releases need to be **optimised** to contain related **key phrases** and **links**. Not only is this important for the press releases being picked up by news engines, but there are many journalists who will simply reproduce the copy of a well-written press release. Ensure that these reproductions positively impact your SEO efforts by optimising your press releases for key phrases and links.

Don't forget to **publish your press releases on your own site** before sending them to the release sites. You'll want to be considered as the "expert" in the search engine's eyes on the subject, and journalists also need to be able to find all of the information they need on a company web site.

Like articles, you will need to write a **description and allocate keywords** to the press release. You will need to ensure that all media contact information is listed. Each site will specify exactly what information is required. Very few of the press release sites allow you to convert your releases into html (especially the free release sites). Apart from the keywords, the **category** you select for your press release is extremely important so be sure to have a good look at the categories the site offers and make sure that you select the most appropriate one.

Most of the sites offer a **free option and a paid option**. The paid option provides a host of additional benefits, and it is worth considering paying for a membership to one of them.

benefits of online press releases

- Online press releases allow almost instant publishing of news online.
- A well written press release can garner top rankings in the news engines (Google News, Yahoo! News, MSN News etc). Adequate optimisation can also results in SERP rankings.
- Content is syndicated quickly via RSS.
- Links are built naturally and effectively from online publishing.
- Distribution is increased beyond your contact list.
- Reach is far greater than that of a traditional press release.
- Reach and distribution can be easily tracked online.

Here are some press release sites to consider
1. www.i-newswire.com
2. www.pr.com
3. www.pressexposure.com
4. www.1888pressrelease.com
5. www.sanepr.com
6. www.pressbuzz.com
7. www.pressbox.com
8. www.pressreleasepoint.com

social media press release

Blogs and other consumer generated media (CGM) are sometimes referred as citizen journalism. The reach and influence of CGM means that press releases are often finding their way to the inboxes of content creators. While many journalists are becoming disillusioned with the standard press release format, the press release can be seen as over hyped corporate speak by time sensitive and transparency focused bloggers.

Pitching to bloggers can be a sensitive task, and there are some guidelines outlined in

SHIFT communications

SOCIAL MEDIA PRESS RELEASE
TEMPLATE, VERSION 1.0

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Client contact	Spokesperson	Agency contact
Phone #/skype	Phone #/skype	Phone #/skype
Email	Email	Email
IM address	IM address	IM address
Web site	Blog/relevant post	Web site

NEWS RELEASE HEADLINE
Subhead

CORE NEWS FACTS
▪ Bullet-points preferable

LINK & RSS FEED TO PURPOSE-BUILT DEL.ICIO.US PAGE
The purpose-built del.icio.us page offers hyperlinks (*and PR annotation in "notes" fields*) to relevant historical, trend, market, product & competitive content sources, providing context as-needed, and, on-going updates.

PHOTO
e.g., product picture, exec headshot, etc.

MP3 FILE OR PODCAST LINK
e.g., sound bytes by various stakeholders

GRAPHIC
e.g., product schematic; market size graphs; logos

VIDEO
e.g., brief product demo by in-house expert

MORE MULTIMEDIA AVAILABLE BY REQUEST
e.g., "download white paper"

PRE-APPROVED QUOTES FROM CORPORATE EXECUTIVES, ANALYSTS, CUSTOMERS AND/OR PARTNERS
Recommendation: no more than 2 quotes per contact. The PR agency should have additional quotes at-the-ready, "upon request," for journalists who desire exclusive content. This provides opportunity for Agency to add further value to interested media.

LINKS TO RELEVANT COVERAGE TO-DATE (OPTIONAL)
This empowers journalist to "take a different angle," etc.
These links would also be cross-posted to the custom del.icio.us site.

BOILERPLATE STATEMENTS

RSS FEED TO CLIENT'S NEWS RELEASES

"ADD TO DEL.ICIO.US"
Allows readers to use the release as a standalone portal to this news

TECHNORATI TAGS/"DIGG THIS"

digg

this chapter, but PR firms such as Edelman and Shift Communications have created templates for a Social Media Press Release (SMPR), designed to communicate facts more clearly and concisely, and to use the tools provided by social media.

This is the outcome of an evolving conversation between PR companies and journalists and bloggers. It is a work in process, and there is plenty being said both for and against this approach, but it is an elegant example of PR firms listening to the conversation, engaging and responding.

blogging

Writing a blog is one of the best ways for a company to build its own voice in the new world of social media and citizen journalism. Not only do blogs play a role in SEO (with fresh content written with key phrases in mind), they also play a strategically important role in reaching out to customers.

Blogging takes a company right into the heart of the conversation, and demonstrates the company's comfort with this communication channel. A blog means that there is regular commentary, that is spoken in the voice of the company. Additionally, blogging teaches companies how to engage personally with their customers.

online press room

As the Internet increases the ease of access to information, an essential part of WebPR is ensuring that pertinent information is easy to access. Making sure that journalists, customers and investors are able to find all key company information quickly and easily means that you are able to slip into that conversation that much more easily.

A 2003 **Nielsen Norman** study found that when a journalist uses a corporate web site to find basic information, they were successful only 73% of the time (Nielsen, 2003). Journalists often work to tight deadlines, and having the required information on hand could make the difference to whether they are being written about and not. An online press room can ensure a company is able to meet journalists' needs.

An online press room must have:
• Company history
• Key executive biographies
• Pertinent background information
• Logos and images in a variety of sizes, resolutions (for web and for print) and formats
• All press releases
• Multimedia gallery (video, audio and visual)

- Contact information
  - PR representative
  - Company
- Search function
- RSS / email alerts
- Tagging capabilities
- Information in a variety of formats

Keeping the information accessible and accurate saves time for both the PR team and for the researcher, and shows an openness to communication. (see following page for diagram)

pitching to bloggers

Although many journalists are bloggers, bloggers are not journalists. They do not have to answer to their editor or publisher. They generally do not write to pay their bills; they tend to write about things that they are passionate about. They measure success in number of comments, trackbacks and traffic.

To pitch effectively to bloggers, you need to understand these subtleties. There are many useful blog posts by bloggers who get pitched to often, that outline guidelines for the PR industry. The effective PR hack will take note.

As with journalists, building a relationship is the best way to pitch to a blogger. Remember, journalist or blogger, you are reaching out to an individual.

- Read their blog, and engage.
- Make pitches personal and relevant.
- Provide accurate key information. Be descriptive but concise.
- Do not try to spin a story.
- Show you are aware of who is talking about you, and who is talking about their blog.
- Be transparent.
- Provide links to images, logos and press releases. Never send large attachments.

In the US, the beauty PR industry has been noticing the power of bloggers, and some of the cosmetics houses send samples and swag (an industry term for gifts) to bloggers as well as journalists (Schaefer 2008). There is a difference, however. Journalists are generally restricted in the value of the gift they are allowed to accept, and tend to reveal when reviewed products are free samples. The publishing houses need to maintain an unbiased reputation. Bloggers, however, are self publishers, and can make up their own rules as they go along. Some of them accept lavish gifts in return for coverage – coverage that can appear more authentic as it comes from a blogger and not a journalist.

tools of the trade

WebPR is about engaging in a conversation, so the essential tools that are required are:
- Tools for listening
- Tools for responding
- Tools for tracking success

RSS feeds tracking mentions of pertinent keywords are the best way to get an overview of mentions of a brand or company. These are outline in detail in the online reputation management chapter.

Responding can take place through the various social media channels such as:
- Blogs
- Twitter
- Forums

Online article directories and press release directories are also crucial to publishing and spreading information. Having a thorough and up to date online news room ensures that relevant information is available.

The most important tool: relationship building. Whether journalists, bloggers or consumers, transparent conversations are paving the way for effective public relations.

webPR:
should I or shouldn't I?

There is no question about it: the media landscape has changed, and those who need to broadcast messages in the new media need to adapt along with it.

The Internet allows for greater distribution and reach of all messages, but it does mean that companies can no longer control these messages in the ways that they used to. Public Relations on the web allows companies increased access to what their customers are saying, and a direct channel to respond to that.

So many new recipients of information does require more work from the PR team. As well as building relationships with journalists, bloggers and other generators of content need to be included. The rules of engagement are changing, and power is increasingly moving from the companies who create messages to those that they need to broadcast it for them.

summary

PR has moved into a new and exciting era - it has moved online. WebPR is used to enhance brand awareness, exposure and SEO efforts using various online channels like article directories, press release sites, industry related sites, online newsrooms, blogs, forums and social media sites.

Effective PR is about listening and responding, and the Internet has provided tools to enhance these activities.

Companies can listen to the conversation using ORM tools. Companies should respond by going to the customer conversation, whether that means commenting on blogs or forums or some other means of engagement.

Companies can use the Internet to build their own voice online. Tactics include:
- Online article syndication
- Press release directories
- Corporate blogging

WebPR uses the Internet to enhance and update established PR practice. Optimising press releases for both search engines and social media increases online reach, distribution and reputation. A resourceful, accessible and well-managed online press room is crucial.

The Internet means that companies no longer control the conversation. With WebPR, a company can engage in the conversation, and with transparency, influence it.

the bigger picture

Effective WebPR is a driving link building exercise in a holistic SEO strategy. Content optimised for search engines and then syndicated both creates authority for the originating site as well as backlinks to that site. Optimised press releases can have the same effect, and when picked up by established media publications, backlinks can carry a lot of weight.

PR and ORM go hand in hand; neither can be effective without the other. While ORM listens to the conversation, PR responds to and seeks to create conversation. Too much talking means that a brand can be perceived as an out-of-touch loudmouth. However, going to the other extreme and spending too much time listening, means that the conversation can go in the wrong direction. A balance needs to be achieved to make sure the conversation is moving forwards.

WebPR complements the social media strategy for a brand. Effective WebPR leverages social media to increase the reach of a company's marketing messages.

case study: Pilkington Self-Cleaning Glass

Writing articles for online syndication both provides useful information to potential customers and enhances SEO efforts. Quirk, the digital agency for Pilkington Self-Cleaning Glass (www.pilkingtonselfcleaningglass.co.uk), has been writing articles based on key phrases that are being promoted on the web site.

Once a key phrase (i.e. self-cleaning glass / conservatory glass) has been selected, research then reveals what information consumers are searching for. An informative article is then written, which is usually two pages in length around the selected key phrase.

The article is then submitted to 8 online article syndication sites. As each article contains 3 links and is submitted to 8 directories, 24 links are garnered as soon as the article is published.

Articles containing valuable content tend to attract links naturally and are republished on other sites. Over the last two years, 20 articles have been written and published for Pilkington Self-Cleaning Glass. Each has been republished approximately 10 times: That's approximately 54 new links pointing towards the web site from just one article. And that's about 1080 links overall.

The following article was written in January 2006 and was published to 8 directory sites from which it garnered 24 links and 4743 reads. What's more, it was republished on a wide array of sources: 339 sites were indexed for it on a Google search, which is a maximum 1017 quality links.

The Use of Glass in Architecture
By *Sarah Manners*

Acclaimed architect Bruno Taut said, "If we want our culture to rise to a higher level, we are obligated for better or for worse, to change our architecture. And this only becomes possible if we take away the closed character from the rooms in which we live. We can only do that by introducing glass architecture, which lets in the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars".

A New Architectural Era
Built in Hyde Park, London to house the Great Exhibition in 1851 the Crystal Palace is commonly considered as a significant turning point in architectural history. This magnificent structure built from steel and glass paved the way for further exploration of glass as an architectural element. The glass sail of the new Milan trade fair and Louvre pyramid are other stunning example of the use of glass as a structural as well as a design element. Other examples of glass architecture include the London Bridge, Agbar and Federazija Towers as well as the Tokyo International Forum.

*While the use of **glass in construction** was previously quite limited to grand designs and office buildings it is starting to become a core structural and design element in many homes. Glass facilitates natural light and opens up rooms allowing smaller spaces to look bigger as well as facilitating a natural indoor/outdoor flow which often enhances the tranquillity as well as the value of your home. Glass is also relatively inexpensive and fully recyclable, an important consideration in the current era of heightened environmental consciousness. Glass use in construction has increased dramatically due to the rapid changes in glass production and technology. Previously glass was thought to be quite a fragile building material and many steered away from it because of this. Modern glass, however, is not only spectacular to look through but it is safer, stronger and energy efficient.*

Glass in the home
*In the past glass was mainly utilized for windows to allow some air and light in to rooms. Today glass is utilized in the construction of several elements of exterior and interior architecture. **Exterior glass architecture** includes facades, display windows' skylights, skywalks, entrances, revolving doors, canopies, winter gardens and conservatories. All of which allow homes to be bathed in natural sunlight with gorgeous outdoor views. **Interior glass architecture** can be used for staircases, elevated walkways and even as traditional walls. There are some houses in which all of the walls are actually glass. Such high quantities of glass previously compromised other aspects such as the heating and cooling requirements. Often glass architecture would incur high heating costs in winter and cooling costs in summer. Fortunately such great progress has been made in the glass industry that we now have access a variety of different kinds of glass each with fantastic benefits. One such example is glass with spectrally-selective qualities, which allows light to stream into the house without being harmful or degenerative to occupants and their belongings.*

Caring for your Glass
*To keep your glass looking great and streak free you will need to ensure that it is cleaned often. Try a few different c**leaning solutions** before you decide which one to use, options vary from store bought to home made solutions. Many use products such as ammonia, vinegar, borax, alcohol or Epsom salts to clean glass. An important point to remember is that when using your own solutions never combine an acid and an alkaline, for example vinegar and ammonia, as they neutralise on another. After washing use a dry cotton towel rather than paper towels or newspaper as they tend to disintegrate and leave deposits on your glass. For a great shine a dry blackboard eraser can be used.*

To keep frost from accumulating on exterior windows during the winter, add two cups of antifreeze or rubbing alcohol to each gallon of wash water. For deposits of paint, resin or glue wet the surface and then scrape them off using a razor blade scraper. Take care to scrape in one direction only in order to avoid scratching the surface.

Another option, and a fantastic one at that, is the breakthrough technology that has brought us self-cleaning glass. An ultra-thin coating is applied to the glass during the manufacturing process; this coating has two highly beneficial effects on the glass. First organic residue on the glass broken down by the ultraviolet wavelengths in sunlight then when it rains the dirt is washed off. As the coating is hydrophilic when rain hits the glass, it doesn't form droplets and in turn eradicates streaking. Rain water flows down the glass in a sheet and washes the dirt away. If you don't have time to wait for the rain a simple garden hose will be just as effective. Self-cleaning glass is making the lives of homeowners far easier and is giving home owners absolutely no reason to hesitate to use of glass in the construction of their homes. What could be better than bright, open rooms with excellent outdoor views facilitated by huge sheets of glass, without having to spend your days cleaning them?

Modern day architectural trends have elevated the way we think about the use of glass in our own homes. It is no longer simply a material for windows and the occasional sliding door; it is a design component in its own right.

With each passing day glass becomes a more important element in architecture not only in grand public structures but also in the lives and homes of families across the world. The beauty of glass lies in its simplicity, it enables us to be enveloped by nature while living comfortably in doors.

About The Author
Many architects, designers and construction companies recommend Pilkington when it comes to glass. Having been in the glass industry for 179 years, Pilkington is recognised as the world's technological leader in glass. Out of all of their innovative products, Pilkington Activ™ - the world's first self-cleaning glass is one of their greatest products and is an ideal material in glass architecture.

case study questions

1. Why is it important to research what consumers look for once you have chosen your key phrases?

2. How is the article different from a press release?

3. What key phrase is being targeted, and how is it being used in the article?

chapter questions

1. What are the main differences between a traditional press release and a social media press release, and what are the similarities?

2. What is the difference between optimising a press release for search and optimising a press release for social media?

3. How do you think social media has changed the role of a public relations professional?

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further reading

www.pr-squared.com – the blog from Shift Communications, a PR firm that is leading the way in social media

www.edelman.com/speak_up/blog/ - a blog from Richard Edelman of Edelman PR – see how a large player in the industry tackles the changing world of PR

notetaker.typepad.com/cgm/ - Pete Blackshaw's thoughts on all things ORM, CGM and PR are essential reading for any online marketer

12. web site development and design

What's inside: The chapter begins with **introduction** to the concepts of web development and design, going right into **how it works**, with a break for **key terms and concepts**. We look at three crucial elements of web sites: **usability**, **search engine visibility**, and **aesthetic design**. **Landing pages** are touched on, followed by the **pros and cons**, a **summary** and the importance of web site development and design in the bigger picture of eMarketing.

introduction

Web development and design are at the heart of successful eMarketing, yet many marketers do not understand the importance of laying solid foundations here. Like building a house, solid foundations are key to stability, longevity and even scalability. Developing a web site involves more than choosing colours and header images.

While it is tempting to focus on the design aesthetics of web sites, and eye-catching web sites can be converting web sites, it is important to remember that a web site is a marketing tool which should be increasing revenue for the company. Web sites should be built to serve the needs of the user. A web site is not something that users stare at – navigation usually requires action and interaction from the web visitor. If the user's needs are served, the web site will be more likely to enable the company to achieve their goals.

While designers tend to talk about vision and can find conventions constraining, users of web sites like conventions. They like web sites that just work, without any thinking on their behalf.

how it works

Usability is the number one element that needs to be considered when developing a site. Search engine visibility is the second most important factor. No one can negate the importance that search engines play in online marketing – and if their spiders cannot find a site, it is almost certain that potential customers won't either. (Bear in mind that there are some web sites which are designed to be found in other ways – the importance of search traffic needs to be determined before the web site is built.) Aesthetic design is now the least important factor – but that certainly doesn't mean that sites need to be so ugly that they turn visitors into stone. It just means that design needs to be hinged on the usability and search engine visibility rather that those factors being hinged on the design. Web sites can still be gorgeous; they just need to fulfil other goals as well - the key here is usability and conversion orientated design.

While it is critical that a site is built for optimal crawling, indexing and ranking by search engines (its search engine visibility), the site also needs to be worthy of traffic. It needs to be built for users. It should be usable and accessible with great content and conversion oriented design. Fortunately, optimising a site for usability and accessibility usually enhances search engine friendliness.

note

"Design" can refer to the structural design of a web site – which is fundamental – or to the aesthetic presentation of a web site. We'll use design to refer to aesthetic presentation.

Design

Search Engine Visibility
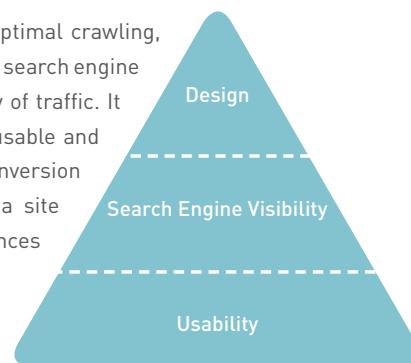
Usability

key terms and concepts

Above the fold all the content that can be seen on a screen without scrolling down.

Accessibility the degree to which a web site is available to users with disabilities or technical limitations.

Alt tag information that is displayed if an image cannot be displayed; used by search engines to determine what an image is.

Breadcrumb links links, usually on the top of the page, that indicate where a page is in the hierarchy of the web site.

Client-side transactions that take place before information is sent to the server.

CMS Content Management System - a system that is used for updating content of a web site.

Common page elements items which appear on every page of a web site.

CSS Cascading Style Sheets - an approach to web design that aims for lightweight code and standards compliant web sites.

DOM Document Object Model - a web standards approach to representing HTML and XML documents as objects.

Dynamic parameter the elements of a URL that are dynamically generated.

Flash a technology used to show video and animation; can be bandwidth heavy and unfriendly to search engine spiders.

HTML HyperText Markup Language - the code that is used to write most web sites.

Information architecture the layout and structure of a web site, which should be according to information hierarchy and categories.

Meta data information that can be entered about a web page and the elements on it that provide context and relevancy information to search engines; these used to be an important ranking factor.

Navigation how a web user moves through a web site, and the elements that assist the user.

Nofollow link nofollow is an attribute of a hyperlink, indicating to search engines that the link is not endorsed by the web site.

Open source unlike proprietary software, open source software makes the source code available so that other developers can build applications for the software, or even improve on the software.

Robots Exclusion Protocol a protocol used to indicate to search engine robots which pages should not be indexed.

SERP search engine results page - what you see when you use a search engine.

Server-side transactions that take place on the server.

Sitemap on a web site, a page that links to every other page in the web site, and displays these links organised according to the information hierarchy.

URL universal resource locator - the web address is unique to every page on the Internet.

Usability the measure of a web site's ability to accomplish the goals of the user.

W3C World Wide Web Consortium which oversees the Web Standards project.

XML eXtensible Markup Language - a standard used for creating structured documents.

usability

When Steve Krug wrote his excellent web usability book, he aptly called it "Don't Make Me Think!". Designing a site for best usability means that users don't have to figure out what to do; they are just able to do it.

Use **standard conventions**, such as links that are distinct (blue and underlined is standard), menus top or left and the logo in the top left hand corner. Search boxes should are usually on the top of the page, and should use standard wording such as "search" on buttons. Keeping important elements that are familiar to web users means that they know immediately where to look for or how to use them. Ensure as well that these elements (such as menus, logos, colours and layout) are kept consistent throughout the site. Important elements should be distinct, easy to find and consistent throughout the web site.

The **information architecture** of a site is crucial to usability. Topics and categorisation should flow from broad to narrow, and should be built around users' needs and not company structure. An intuitively designed structure will guide the user to their goals.

The **sitemap** should be available from every page, and should clearly show the information architecture of the web site. Dynamic sitemaps can be employed so that the sitemap is updated automatically as information is added to the web site.

As well as carefully thought out information architecture, the **navigation** should guide users easily through both top-level and deeper pages. Navigation should also let the user know where they are in the site (especially as not all users arrive via the homepage!). Breadcrumb links, clear page titles and URLs and menu changes all help to show the user where she is.
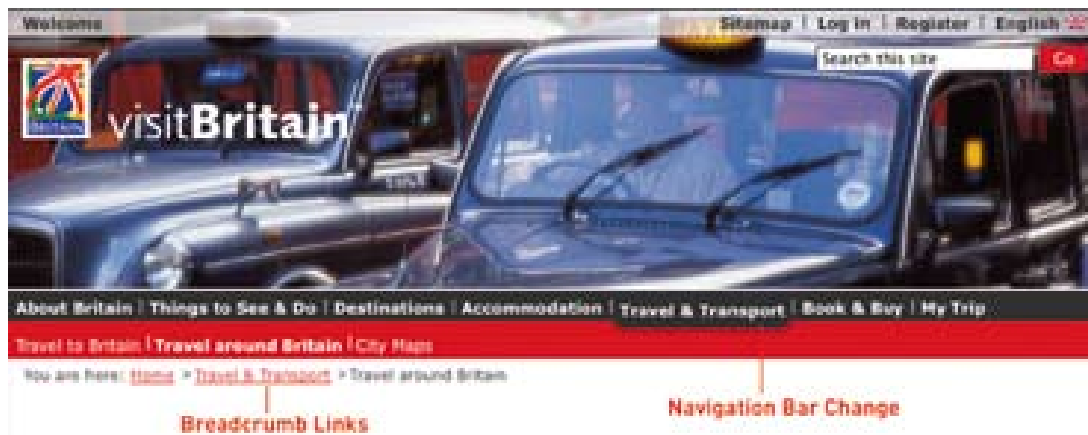
VisitBritain.com uses breadcrumb links and menu changes so that the user knows where they are in the web site.

note

Common page elements are those elements which are on every page of the web site. These can include main navigation, a search box, a link to the home page and sign up forms.

Accessibility makes web sites easy to use and easy to scale. In some countries, accessibility is a legal requirement of government web sites. Some key points of accessibility include the following:

- Ensuring that the web site and all its functions are compatible across a range of browsers, including text only and mobile browsers.
- Make sure that the web site is functional to users who might have a disability. Some ways of doing so include the easy increasing or decreasing of text size and using meaningful descriptive tags in the code for when the site is accessed through a screen reader.
- Not designing for high bandwidth users only, but instead making sure that low bandwidth users do not have to wait for heavy page loads to access your web site (unless you have a good marketing reason for keeping those users out!).
- Having a search box (which works!) available.

Content needs to be written so that users can grab the information they need in as little time as possible. Text can be made more easily readable by:

- Highlighting or making bold key phrases and words
- Using bulleted lists
- Using paragraphs to break up information
- Using descriptive and distinct headings

On the page, use an inverted pyramid style, or newspaper style, for your copy. The bulk of the information should be at the top of the page, to make for easy scanning.

There are some key "don'ts" when it comes to building a user-friendly web site:

- Never resize windows or launch the site in a pop-up.
- Don't use splash pages.
- Never build a site entirely in Flash – most search engine spiders cannot even crawl Flash sites.
- Don't distract users with "Christmas Trees" (blinking images, flashing lights, automatic sound, scrolling text, unusual fonts, etc).

Usability and accessibility guidelines are useful for checking that all elements have been dealt with. MIT Information Services and Technology provides a usability checklist online at: web.mit.edu/is/usability/usability-guidelines.html

On the next page is a copy of some of the items on the MIT checklist. Use it see how your favourite web site measures up.

note

Just like in Hansel and Gretel, breadcrumbs help to show the user the path they have taken in the web site. Unlike the fairy story, these ones shouldn't disappear as you navigate through the web site.

discussion

Scaling and scalability – why is it important that web sites can scale?

Navigation	Rating	Explanation for Rating
Current location within the site is shown clearly		
Link to the site's main page is clearly identified		
Major/important parts of the site are directly accessible from the main page		
Site map is provided for a large, complex site		
Easy to use search function is provided, as needed		
Language and Content	**Rating**	**Explanation for Rating**
Important information and tasks are given prominence		
Information of low relevance or rarely used information is not included		

Related information or tasks are grouped:
    - on the same page or menu
    - in the same area within a page		

Language is simple, without jargon		
Paragraphs are brief		
Links are concise, expressive, and visible--not buried in text		
Terms are defined		
Architectural and Visual Clarity	**Rating**	**Explanation for Rating**
Site is organized from the user's perspective		
Site is easily scannable for organization and meaning		
Site design and layout is straightforward and concise		
White space is sufficient; pages are not too dense		
Unnecessary animation is avoided		
Colors used for visited and unvisited links are easily seen and understood		

Some of the usability guidelines from the MIT checklist.

search engine visibility

Search engine traffic is vital to a web site; without it, chances are the site will never fulfil its marketing functions. It essential that the search engines can see the entire publicly visible web site, index it fully and consider it relevant for its chosen keywords.

Search engine optimisation has its own chapter in this textbook, but here are the key considerations when it comes to web development and design.

labelling things correctly: URLs, alt tags, title tags and meta data

URLs, alt tags, title tags and meta data all describe a web site and its pages to both search engine spiders and people. (And don't worry; these words are all described to you below!) Chances are, clear descriptive use of these elements will appeal to both.

URLs

URLs should be as brief and descriptive as possible. This may mean that URLs require server side rewriting so as to cope with dynamic parameters in URLs. Does that sound a little heavy? The examples below should make this clearer:

Comparison of URLs for Cube World, a toy for sale on both sites:

Firebox.com – www.firebox.com/index.html?dir=firebox&action=product&pid=1201

Gizoo.co.uk – www.gizoo.co.uk/Products/toysgames/Interactive/CubeWorld2.htm

The first example has dynamic parameters – these are shown by the question mark and the ampersand – and use categories that make sense to the database (e.g. pid=1201), but they make little sense to the user.

The second example is far more user friendly, and clearly indicates where in the site the user is. You even start getting a good idea of the architecture of the web site from just one URL!

More than two dynamic parameters in a URL increase the risk that the URL may not be spidered. The search engine would not even index the content on that page.

Lastly, well written URLs can make great anchor text. If another site is linking to yours and they use just the URL, the search engine will do a better job of knowing what the page is about if you have a descriptive URL.

Alt tags

Have you ever waited for a page to load, and seen little boxes of writing where the images should be? Sometimes they say things like "topimg.jpg", and sometimes they are much clearer and you have "Cocktails at sunset at Camps Bay".

Since search engines read text, not images, descriptive tags are the only way to tell them what the images are, but these are still essentially for users. Text readers for browsers will also read out these tags to tell the user what is there. Meaningful descriptions certainly sound a lot better than "image1", "image2", "image3".

note

Dynamic parameters are question marks (?) and ampersands (&).

Title attribute

Just as you can have the alt tag on an image html element, you can have a title attribute on almost any html element - most commonly on a link. This is the text that is seen when a user hovers over the element with their mouse pointer. It used to describe the element, or what the link is about. As this is text, it will also be read by search engine spiders.

Title tags

Title tags, what appears on the top bar of your browser, are used by search engines to determine the content of that page. They are also often used by search engines as the link text on the search engines results page, so targeted title tags help to drive click-through rates. Title tags should be clear and concise (it's a general rule of thumb that all tags be clear and concise, you'll find). Title tags are also used when bookmarking a web page.

The title tag appears in the browser and on the SERP, and the meta description can apper on th SERP.

Meta tags

Meta tags are where the developer can fill in information about a webpage. These tags are not normally seen by users. If you right click on a page in a browser and select "view source", you should see a list of entries for **<meta name=**

These are the meta data. In the past, the meta tags were used extensively by search engine spiders, but since so many people used this to try to manipulate search results, they are now less important. Meta data now act to provide context and relevancy rather than higher rankings. However, the meta tag called "description" often appears on the search engine results page (SERP) as the snippet of text to describe the web page being linked to. This is illustrated in the image above. If the description is accurate, well-written and relevant to the searcher's query, these descriptions are more likely to be used by the search engine. And if it meets all those criteria, it also means the link is more likely to be clicked on by the searcher.

search engine optimised copy

The chapters on online copywriting and search engine optimisation provide details on writing copy for online use and for SEO benefit. When it comes to web development, the copy that is shown on the web page needs to be kept separate from the code that tells the browser how to display the web page. This means that the search engine spider can discern easily between what is content to be read (and hence scanned by the spider) and what are instructions to the browser. CSS (cascading style sheets) can take care of that, and is covered further in this chapter.

The following text styles cannot be indexed by search engines:
- Text embedded in a Java Application or a Macromedia Flash File
- Text in an image file (that's why you need descriptive alt tags and title attributes)
- Text only accessible after submitting a form, logging in, etc.

If the search engine cannot see the text on the page, it means that they cannot spider and index that page.

information architecture

Well organised information is as vital for search engines as it is for users. An effective link structure will provide benefits to search rankings, and helps to ensure that a search engine indexes every page of your site.

Make use of a sitemap, linked to and from every other page in the site. The search engine spiders follow the links on a page, and this way they will be able to index the whole site. A well planned sitemap will also ensure that every page on the site is within a few clicks of the homepage.

> **note**
>
> If an XML file is used for the content in a Macromedia Flash File, then the content can be easily read by search engine spiders.

There are two sitemaps that can be used: an HTML sitemap which a visitor to the web site can see, use and make sense of and an XML sitemap which contains additional information for the search engine spiders. An XML sitemap can be submitted to search engines to promote full and regular indexing. Again, a dynamically generated sitemap will update automatically when content is added.

Using a category structure that flows from broad to narrow also indicates to search engines that your site is highly relevant, and covers a topic in-depth.

canonical issues: there can be only one

Have you noticed that sometimes several URLs can all give you the same webpage? For example:

> http://www.websitename.com
> http://websitename.com
> http://www.websitename.com/index.html

All the above can be used for the same homepage of a web site. However, search engines see these as three separate pages with duplicate content. Search engines look for unique documents and content, and when duplicates are encountered, a search engine will select one as canonical, and display that page in the SERPs. However, it will also dish out a lower rank to that page, and all its copies. Any value is diluted by having multiple versions.

Lazy webmasters sometimes forget to put any kind of redirect in place, meaning that http://websitename.com doesn't exist while http://www.websitename.com does. This is termed "Lame-Ass Syndrome" (LAS) by Quirk, a fitting moniker.

Having multiple pages with the same content, however that came about, hurts the web site's search engine rankings. There is a solution: 301 re-directs can be used to point all versions to a single, canonical version.

robots.txt

A robots.txt file restricts a search engine spider from crawling and indexing certain pages of a web site by giving instructions to the search engine spider, or bot. This is called the Robots Exclusion Protocol. So, if there are pages or directories on a web site that should not appear in the SERPs, the robots.txt file should be used to indicate this to search engines.

If a search engine robot wants to crawl a web site URL, e.g.
http://www.web sitename.com/welcome.html it will first check for
http://www.web sitename.com/robots.txt

Visiting the second URL will show a text file with:
```
User-agent: *
Disallow: /
```

Here, `User-agent: *` means that the instruction is for all bots. If the instruction is to specific bots, it should be identified here. The `Disallow: /` is an instruction that no pages of the web site should be indexed. If there are only certain pages or directories that should not be indexed, they should be included here.

For example, if there is both an HTML and a PDF version of the same content, the wise web master will instruct search engine bots to index only of the two to avoid being penalised for duplicate content.

The robots.txt file is publicly accessible, so although it does not show restricted content, it can give an idea of the content that a web site owner wants to keep private. A robots.txt file needs to be created for each subdomain.

Here is a robots.txt file with additional information:

```
User-agent: *
Disallow: *.mp3 , *.wmv , *.swf , *.rm ,
Request-rate: 1/5
Crawl-delay: 5
Visit-time: 0001-1300
```

Instructions to search engine robots can also be given in the meta tags. This means that instructions can still be given if you only have access to the meta tags and not to the robots.txt file.

make sure it's not broken

Make sure that both visitors to your web site and search engines can see it all by following these guidelines:

- Check for **broken links** – anything that you click that gives an error should be considered broken and in need of fixing.
- Validate your **HTML and CSS** in accordance with W3C guidelines.
- Make sure all **forms and applications** work as they ought to.
- Keep **file size** as small as possible and never greater than 150K for a page. It ensures a faster download speed for users, and means that the content can be fully cached by the search engines.

design

With the foundations of usability and search engine visibility in mind, it is time to turn to making it all presentable: the design of the web site.

Looks may not matter to search engines, but they go a long to assuring visitors of your credibility, and of turning them into customers.

Every web site needs to be designed with clear goals (or conversions) in mind. Conversions take many forms and may include the following:

- Sale – where the user purchases a product online using their credit card
- Lead – where the user submits contact details and asks for more information
- Sign up – where the user opts in for email marketing newsletters
- Download – where the user downloads a file from the site

Before designing a web site, research your audience and competitors to determine expectations and common elements to your industry. Mock up every layer of interaction. This means that before any coding begins, there is clear map of how the web site should work. It's all about foundations.

design to establish credibility

Here are some of the cues that visitors use to determine the credibility of a web site:

- Prominent phone numbers and addresses above the fold – it assures the visitor that there is a real person behind the web site, and that they are in easy reach.
- Informative, and personal, "about us" - your customers want to see the inner workings of a company and are especially interested in learning more about the head honchos. Include employee pictures and/or profiles. It puts a face to an organisation.
- Feature genuine testimonials on each page – this is a great way to show potential customers what your current customers have to say about your organisation. Trust is vital and this is one way to encourage it.
- Feature logos of associations / awards - if you belong to any relevant industry associations or have won any awards, feature them. Not only does this go a long way to establish your credibility, but it will show that you're at the top of your game, a notch above the competition.
- Link to credible third party references - this is a way to assert your credibility without tooting your own horn.
- Keep content fresh and updated.
- Ensure that your site is free of errors – spelling and grammar mistakes are exceptionally unprofessional and while the large majority of readers may not pick them up, the one or two who do will question your credibility.

Design also affects the accessibility of a web site. You need to take into account screen resolutions, as designing for the biggest screen available could leave many of your users scrolling across and down to see the web page. Subtle shading, background colours to text and fancy fonts can also mean that many users cannot even see your web site properly.

Date	Higher	1024x768	800x600	640x480	Unknown
Jan-08	38%	48%	8%	0%	6%
Jan-07	26%	54%	14%	0%	6%
Jan-06	17%	57%	20%	0%	6%
Jan-05	12%	53%	30%	0%	5%
Jan-04	10%	47%	37%	1%	5%
Jan-03	6%	40%	47%	2%	5%
Jan-02	6%	34%	52%	3%	5%
Jan-01	5%	29%	55%	6%	5%
Jan-00	4%	25%	56%	11%	4%

Figures show that screen resolution just keeps getting higher.
Source: www.w3schools.com

using CSS

CSS stands for Cascading Style Sheets, defined by W3C as "a simple mechanism for adding style (for example, fonts, colours, spacing) to web documents" (www.w3c.org/Style/css/).

In the early days of the web, designers tended to use tables to lay out content for a webpage, and many web sites still do so today. However, different browsers, and even different versions of browsers, all support code differently, resulting in web sites that only work on certain browsers, or bulky code to cope with all the different versions required.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) (www.w3.org) was created in 1994 and since then has been responsible for specifications and guidelines to promote the evolution of the web, while ensuring that web technologies work well together. The Web Standards Project (www.webstandards.org) launched in 1998 and labelled key guidelines as "web standards". Modern browsers should be built to support these standards, which should vastly reduce cross browser compatibility problems, such as web sites displaying differently in different browsers.

Web standards include:
• HTML (HyperText Markup Language)
• CSS (Cascading Style Sheets)
• XML (eXtensible Markup Language
• XHTML (eXtensible HyperText Markup Language)
• DOM (Document Object Model)

CSS is standard layout language. It controls colours, typography and the size and placement of elements on a webpage. Previously, web developers have had to create instructions for every page in a web site. With CSS, a single file can control the appearance of an entire site.

CSS allows designers and developers to separate presentation from content. This has several key benefits:
• Sites are easier to maintain and update, and are more accessible
• Content may be updated easily by someone who is not a web designer or developer
• Global changes can be applied quickly and easily

CSS can also
• Reduce bandwidth and page loading times
• Increase cross-browser compatibility

To see CSS in action, visit www.csszengarden.com where you can make a single HTML page look very different, depending on which one of the many designer-contributed style sheets you apply to it.

using a CMS

CMS stands for Content Management System. As the name implies, a CMS is used to manage the content of a web site. If a site is updated frequently and if people other than web developers need to update the content of a web site, a CMS is used. Today, many sites are built on a CMS. The CMS can also allow content of a web site to be updated from any location in the world.

A CMS can be built specifically for a web site, and many web development companies build their own CMS which can be used by their clients. A CMS can also be bought pre-built, and there are many open source pre-built CMS available, some of which are free.

A CMS should be selected with the goals and functions of the web site in mind. A CMS needs to be able to scale along with the web site and business that it supports, and not the other way round!

Of course, the CMS selected should result in a web site that is search engine friendly.

Joomla! is an open source CMS. Above you can see how the CMS allows you to manage the articles on the web site.

Here are some key features to look out for when selecting or building a CMS:
• Meta and Title Tag customisation: the CMS should allow you to enter your own meta tags for each page, as well as allow full customisation of title tags for each page.
• HTML tag customisation: the CMS should allow for full customisation of title tags, such as nofollow links.
• URLs: instead of using dynamic parameters, the CMS should allow for server-side rewriting of URLs. It should allow for the creation of URLs that are:
    • static
    • rewritable
    • keyword rich
• Customisable navigation: a good CMS will allow flexibility when it comes to creating the information architecture for a web site. For the purposes of adding additional content for search engines, a CMS should not require that all content pages be linked to from the homepage navigation. This allows content to be added for SEO purposes, without adding it to the main navigation.
• 301 redirect functionality: it is imperative that a CMS offers the ability to put in place 301 redirects to prevent penalisation for duplicate content on different URLs.

note

See the chapter on search engine optimisation for an explanation of nofollow links.

- Customisable image naming and alt tags for images: a good CMS will allow you to create custom alt tags and title attributes.
- Robots.txt management: ensure you are able to customise the robots.txt to your needs, or that this can at least be managed using the meta tags.

Be aware when building clean, descriptive and dynamic URLs from CMS content. Should you use a news heading ("Storm" in this example) as part of your URL (http://www.web sitename.com/cape/storm) and someone changes the heading to "Tornado" (http://www.site.com/cape/tornado), this will alter the URL and the search engines will index this as a new page, but with the same content as the URL which had the old heading. Bear this in mind before adding dynamic parameters to your URLs.

Finally, using CMS system that supports standards compliant HTML and CSS is very important - as without it inconsistencies may be rendered across various browsers. It also ensures faster loading time and reduced bandwidth, makes mark-up easier to maintain, supports SEO efforts and ensures that every single visitor to a web site, no matter what browser they are using, will be able to see everything on the web site.

technical considerations

As a whole technology should only act as an enabler. It should never be a site's main focus. Here are some technical considerations vital to a good web site:

Proprietary vs. open source: an important consideration when building a new site, and all avenues should be explored. Open source software is fully customisable and benefits from a large developer community. Propriety software usually includes support in its price.

URL rewriting: it is vital that important URLs in your site are indexable by the search engines. Ensure that URL rewriting is enabled according to the guidelines in this chapter. URL rewriting should be able to handle extra dynamic parameters that might be added by search engines for tracking purposes.

GZIP compression: this helps to speed up download times of a webpage, improving user experience.

Server-side form validation: form validation is the process whereby the data entered into a form is verified in order to meet certain preset conditions (e.g. ensuring that the name and email address fields are filled in).

Client-side validation relies on JavaScript, which is not necessarily available to all visitors. Client-side validation can alert a visitor to an incorrectly filled in form most quickly, but server-side validation is the most accurate. It is also important to have a tool to collect all of the failed tests and present appropriate error messages neatly

above the form the user is trying to complete. This will ensure that all correctly entered data is not lost, but repopulated in the form to save time and reduce frustration.

International character support: the Internet has afforded the opportunity to conduct business globally, but this means that web sites need to make provision for non-English visitors. It is advisable to support international characters via UTF-8 encoding; both on the web site itself and in the form data submitted to it.

Search-friendly sessions: sessions can be used to recognise individual visitors on a web site, useful for click-path analysis. Cookies can be used to maintain sessions, but URL rewriting can be used to compensate for users who not have cookies activated. This means that as visitors move through a web site, their session information is stored in a dynamically generated web address.

Search engine spiders do not support cookies, so many web sites will attempt URL rewriting to maintain the session as the spider crawls the web site. However, these URLs are not liked by search engine spiders (as they appear to create a moving target for the robot) and can hinder crawling and indexing. The work-around: use technology to detect if a visitor to the site is a person or a robot, and do not rewrite URLs for the search engine robots.

Auto generated human readable and XML sitemaps: sitemaps are exceptionally important, both to visitors and to search engines. Technology can be implemented that automatically generates and updates both the human readable and XML sitemaps, ensuring spiders can find new content.

RSS feed generation: Really Simple Syndication (RSS) is an absolute necessity. With all the millions of web and blog sites in existence web users can no longer afford to spend time browsing their favourite sites to see if new content has been added. By enabling RSS feeds on certain sections on the site, especially those that are frequently updated, users will have the content delivered directly to them. Visitors should be able to pick and choose the sections they like to get updates from via a feed.

discussion

Why does URL rewriting create a moving target for a search engine spider?

landing pages: bespoke parts of the whole

A landing page is the page users are directed to from any campaign designed to drive traffic to a specific URL. The traffic to a landing page could be from a banner or PPC ad, an email, a print ad, TV or radio spot or from direct marketing. Users are being sent there for a very specific reason:

- Enter a competition (lead)
- Buy a product (sale)
- Subscribe to a newsletter (sign-up)

As far as landing pages go, first impressions really do count. They need to capture the user immediately and make them want to complete the desired action. Users who land on these pages make the decision to complete the desired action based on two criteria:

- Whether the page looks complicated or time consuming
- Whether it is relevant to their needs

Effective design and benefit statements can help users to make the decision to complete the desired action.

guidelines for successful landing pages

Focus the page on a single call to action. These are purpose built, purpose driven pages and extraneous information should be avoided.

The landing page does not need to carry the same navigation of the web site, and can look slightly different (though a large deviation in style is not advised). The aim is to keep users on a path to the goal.

Landing pages can detract from SEO efforts, as there might be many similar landing pages created. Use the robots.txt file to keep search engine spiders out.

pros and cons

There are no cons to designing a web site for your users first and foremost. It can require some creative thinking when it comes to ensuring that wacky ideas are accessible and usable, but the benefits of taking the time to ensure that web sites are coded according to best practice will show in the longevity of the web site.

Beautiful web sites do not need to be sacrificed for standards compliancy.

summary

While looks are important (and who ever said they weren't?), the foundations of a successful web site are:

- Usability and accessibility
- Search engine visibility

Web sites should be built for users first and foremost. The development and design of a web site should ensure that all necessary content can be accessed by search engines.

Web sites should be designed and developed for best use by both people and search engines.

Key considerations include:

- Well thought out information architecture and clear navigation
- Standards compliant HTML and functionality that works across all browsers
- Descriptive naming of elements so that web sites make sense without images and when accessed by text reading browsers

Design should enhance user experience and guide a visitor seamlessly through a web site, as opposed to distracting visitors from their goals.

the bigger picture

This chapter may be towards the end of the book, but web development and design can be seen as the thread that holds eMarketing together. After all, web sites are the first thing we think of when think of all things "Internet"!

Whatever campaign is being run, there is no doubt that it will involve a web site. The fundamentals of web site development and design – particularly designing for users first and foremost – should form the foundation of any campaign.

With the crucial role that search engines play in the way that people access the Internet and visit web sites, web development and design goes hand in hand with SEO. And of course, campaigns such as PPC campaigns, email marketing campaigns and even affiliate campaigns often require custom landing pages. That's the web design jumping into the mix again.

Web site owners want their web site to be talked about, and linked to, for all the right reasons. Sometimes the best way to know what parts of your web site are and are not working is to listen to the online chatter. That's ORM stepping into the mix.

Successful web site development and design is all about foundations, and the resulting web site usually forms the foundation of any eMarketing to follow. Make sure you understand your users' needs, and you're building on a strong base.

Almost all eMarketing is designed to get users to a web site where they convert into customers – so web development really is at the centre of all your eMarketing activities.

case study: Wicked Uncle

Wicked Uncle (www.wickeduncle.com) had just launched their new web site (and business), when they realised that their web site was not easy to use. The premise of their service is easy, and quick, gift buying of children's presents, and the layout of their web site was a hindrance. Even though they had just launched, a web site redevelopment was in order.

The aim of the redevelopment was to make a gift buyable in under a minute. As well as this, the new web site would also allow Wicked Uncle to build up a database of users so that they could start one to one marketing to a database of subscribers. The look and feel of the first web site was maintained, but the web site was restructured to be more usable, and to make the content more available to search engines.

The site was previously built to be 800 x 600, which is a resolution used by only 7% of the target market. The new web site was built in 1024 x 768, which not only allowed more room but is also much better suited to the target market. More than 92% of the target UK market has high resolution monitors.

On the product pages, all product images were increased in size, and more images were included so that web users could see the product from a variety of angles. Gifts for boys and gifts for girls were colour-coded to ensure easy navigation. The helpline was prominently displayed on each page, as was an easy add to cart button. Pertinent information showing whether the item is in stock, and how long it will take to ship, was also easily available.

A birthday reminder tool was implemented on the web site. When a user registers with Wicked Uncle and registers a child's age they get yearly birthday reminders of the birthday coming up. This has been very successful and has built up a database of email addresses – from zero to 15,000 in less than a year!

The shopping process is exceptionally smooth, with functionality being carefully thought out. Within the process, the user is able to register different children with their own delivery address. The colours used in the shopping cart complement the web site, but are unique to the cart, so it stands out. There is always a clear indication of what the next step in the check-out process is.

Lastly, for those shoppers in a hurry, the web site features a 1-Minute Gift Finder. With a new web site that is easy to use, Wicked Uncle was able to run campaigns to drive targeted traffic to the web site.
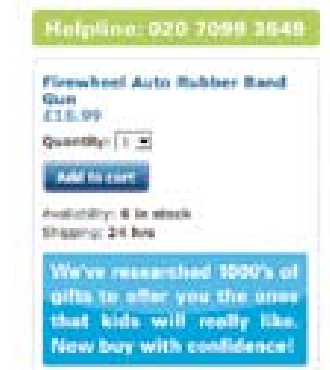
case study questions

1. Selling gifts online can be difficult as the shopper cannot see the actual product they are buying. What are some ways that the web site design aims to overcome this?
2. How does the navigation solve users' needs?
3. How is the web site able to be used for a number of eMarketing activities?

chapter questions

1. Why is it fundamental to build web sites for users' needs first? What are some ways that user requirements inform the web development and design process?
2. Visit a retail web site, such as www.amazon.com and a news web site, such as www.news.bbc.co.uk, and identify the common page elements of each. What elements are common to both web sites?
3. What are the differences between an HTML site map and an XML site map?
4. A picture may be worth a thousand words to web site visitors, but can be fairly meaningless to search engine spiders. How can this be combated by webmasters?

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further reading

Steve Krug's *Don't Make Me Think!* and Jeffrey Zeldman's *Designing with Web Standards* will make you look at web sites and web design in a completely different way, and both will give you a solid background in building web sites that work.

www.alistapart.com
– a web site for people that make web sites, A List Apart has regular articles from web designers and developers on building user friendly, standards compliant web sites

www.smashingmagazine.com
– Smashing Magazine posts regular in depth articles focused on design

13. online copywriting

What's inside: An **introduction** to online copywriting reveals that content is king, and gives you the **key terms and concepts** needed for this chapter. **How it works** discusses personas and the **importance of layout** and some **HTML basics**. Writing online, you will need to look at **short copy**, which includes the all important **call to action**, **features** and b**enefits,** and **writing PPC adverts**. **Long copy** still requires attention to the elements that make sure you are getting read, and we look at the all important **SEO copywriting**. The **Web is full of neologisms and buzz words**, but you'll keep on top of them with our **tools of the trade.**

introduction

When it comes to the Internet, content is king! The copy on a web page is a hardworking multi-tasker. It needs to provide information to visitors, engage with them and convince them to take a desired action as well as conveying brand ethos. It also needs to provide context and relevance to search engines. And it needs to achieve all this without appearing to be trying too hard.

Whatever your involvement with the Internet and eMarketing, copywriting is fundamental. Whether writing an email to a colleague or PPC adverts for a new product launch, learning how to write effective online copy will make you a better communicator.

Online copywriting involves everything from the copy of a web site, to the content of an email and all things in between. From 800 word WebPR articles to three line PPC adverts, if it's being read on a screen, it's online copy.

key terms and concepts

Above the fold The content that appears on a screen without a user having to scroll.

Active verb A word that conveys action or behaviour, and in a call to action, tells a prospect what to do.

Benefit The positive outcome for a user that a feature provides.

Call to action Also, CTA: words used to encourage a prospect to take a particular action.

Dynamic keyword insertion In paid search advertising, this allows keywords used in searches to be inserted automatically into advert copy.

Feature A prominent aspect of a product which is beneficial to users.

Mass customisation Tailoring content for many individuals.

Persona A character used to define a group of users to a web site.

PPC Pay Per Click usually refers to advertising on search engines.

Sender alias The name that is chosen to appear in the sender or from field of an email.

SEO Search engine optimisation - aiming to improve rankings in search engines.

SERP Search engine results page - what you see when you perform a search on a search engine.

USP Unique selling point - what makes your offering different to your competitors'.

---

how it works

When writing for the web, it does not mean that traditional approaches to copywriting need to be ditched. The foundations remain. The first step you need to take is to research your audience, understand their needs and **write copy that solves their problems** while engaging with them.

Knowing your audience will guide you in determining the topics that they want, and help you to organise information in a way that makes sense to your audience. It will direct the tone of your copy, as well as the content.

However, the Internet has lead to an audience of one (Price and Price, 2002). What does this mean? While your audience is not literally one person (and if it is, thank your mum for reading your web site, but spend some time on growing your readership), it is not a vast, vaguely defined crowd. Instead, online we have many niche audiences who are used to being addressed as individuals. Online, many of the individuals in our audience also exchange information via blogs, forums and other forms of social media.

Holly Buchanan of Future Now (www.futurenowinc.com) sums this up with three questions you should ask:
1. Who is my audience?
2. What actions do I want them to take?
3. What information do they need in order to feel confident taking action?

> **tip**
>
> Sometimes it helps to write for just one person. Pick out someone you know who fits your audience, or make someone up, and write for that person. In copywriting, this person who fits your audience is a persona.

personas

Personas are based on the profile of readers of your copy – the visitors to your web site. Creating a profile is all about considering the needs and desires of your web site visitors. For example: how do they make purchase decisions: do they compare lots of service providers before selecting one, do they make lists of questions and call in for assistance with decision making, or are they do they make purchase decisions spontaneously based on a special offer?

Web site copy can be structured in such a way that it caters for several personas, but you need to spend time understanding their needs before you are able to write copy that addresses these needs.

Understanding the profiles of your readers is an important process, and the best copy usually results from extensive time spent figuring out your audience.

copy that is easy to read

Online copy is judged at first glance by readers not just on its content, but first and foremost on its layout. It needs to appear to be easy to read before a user will choose to read it.

A good online copywriter will also be able to use basic HTML to layout copy, knowing that it is the appearance of the page that will get his words read. It should be easy for users to skip and skim the copy, and it should be easy for them to find the parts that are most relevant to them.

Online copy should be easy to scan. This means making use of:

- Bulleted and numbered lists
- Short paragraphs
- Clear and concise headings
- Bold and italics
- Descriptive links

It's easy to see this in practice.

Before	After
Tea has been drunk for thousands of years, and as people are growing more health conscious, tea sales are increasing. Personal preference plays an important role in making the perfect cup of tea. However, using fresh water ensures maximum oxygen in the tea, and warming the teapot first is standard practice. Tradition dictates one teabag per person, and one for the pot. Tea is served with milk, lemon, honey or sugar, according to taste.	Worldwide, **tea sales are increasing** as people are becoming more health conscious. Here are some tips on making the **perfect cup of tea:** • use fresh water (for maximum oxygen) • warm the teapot first • use one teabag per person, and one for the pot The perfect cup of tea is based on **personal preference and taste.** Tea can be served with: • milk or lemon • honey or sugar

Because visitors need to decide quickly whether or not to read a page, the most important information needs to be at the top of the page. Start with the summary or conclusion – the main idea of the article.
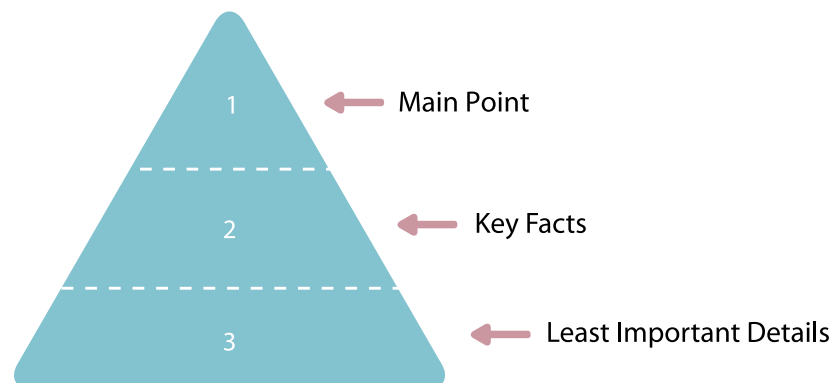
While clever word play in headings and titles can attract some attention, online these need to be written as descriptively as possible. The copy is multi-tasking: not only is it informing visitors of what to expect, it is also telling search engine spiders what the page is about.

learning to use HTML

HTML stands for HyperText Markup Language, and it's the foundation of documents on the Internet. HTML tags tell browsers how to present content. HTML tags are in the brackets that look like arrows: **< >**

When writing online copy, you can use an HTML editor, where you insert the tags yourself, or a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) editor which works in a similar way to a word processor.

Basic HTML is not hard to use, and will help you to layout your content. Here are some basic HTML tags:

- To bold: phrase you wish to bold
- To italicise: phrase you wish to italicise
- To underline: <u>phrase you wish to underline</u>
- To list :
lines you wish to list
- To create a paragraph: <p>paragraph text</p>
- To insert a line break:
- To insert a link: phrase you wish to link

The tags also help search engines to identify how the content has been laid out on the page.

The best way to get to grips with HTML is to start using it online, where you can see how the tags work.

short copy

Online copy often has only a small amount of space and short amount of time to get a message across to a visitor, and entice them to take action. This is especially true of banner advertising and PPC adverts on search engines, but also is important across all eMarketing disciplines. Probably the most important short copy is the call to action.

call to action – telling people what to do

A crucial element to online copywriting is the call to action (CTA). Users scan web pages and look for clues as to what to do. Tell them.

A call to action is a short, descriptive instruction that explicitly tells a web visitor what to do. Banner advertising usually involves a clear call to action, and they can also be used in paid search advertising. Call to action copy is not limited to short copy: email newsletters and promotions should also make use of call to action, and we even see them all over web pages.

Any time that there is an action that you want a web visitor to take, a call to action should instruct the visitor what to do. This means using active verbs when you write, and crafting hyperlinks to be clear instructions that resonate with your visitor at each step in the conversion process.

Passive sentence:
When your email has been received, an order number will be issued.

Active sentence:
Send us an email, and we will issue you with an order number!

A good call to action resonates with the action that the visitor needs to take, as opposed to the technical function that is performed. For example, if a user has entered an email address to sign up to your email newsletter, the action button should say "sign up" and not "submit".

Consider as well what actions mean offline. Again with email newsletters, "sign up" can have very different connotations to "subscribe". Further, "subscribe" is very different to "subscribe for free". Whereas subscriptions have connotations of costs, "sign up" does not carry the same burden. However, "subscribe for free" could imply greater value – something that would normally carry a cost is available to you for free.

There is only one way to know what call to action works best on a web page, in an email, on a banner or in an advert: test, test, test!

features and benefits
Writing compelling copy means conveying to readers why they should perform an action. While features may seem all important, you need to communicate the benefits of the features to the user.

- **Feature:** a prominent aspect of a product or service which can provide benefit to users. It describes what the product does.
- **Benefit:** the positive outcome for a user that a feature provides. It can be the emotional component of what the user gets out of the product.

Features and benefits are very different. Features are what are important to the company that provides the product or service. Benefits are what are important to those who decide to use the product or service.

For example, consider a home entertainment system. Features could include surround sound and a large flat screen television. The benefit: a cinema quality experience in your own home.

Persuasive writing makes use of features, benefits and active verbs to create appealing messages for your personas:

Enjoy cinema quality movie nights in your own home with a surround sound home entertainment system.

PPC adverts
PPC adverts have a very limited space, and very limited time, to get a message across, as well as plenty of competition for a user's attention. These four lines of copy need to work hard to ensure a top return on investment.

PPC adverts follow the same basic structure:

Heading
Two lines of advert copy,
Which can be displayed on one line
www.DisplayURL.com

When the copy of the advert matches the user's search term, those words are often displayed in bold in the advert. This makes the advert stand out more, and can improve click-through rates.

For example, if the search term used was "roses", an advert with "roses" in the copy might look like this:

Roses for Valentine's
A dozen red roses for your love;
Fast, free delivery in RSA.
www.flowers.co.za/roses

Using keywords in the advert copy can help to improve click-through rates. However, this can mean writing thousands of adverts – one for each keyword in the PPC campaign! The paid search advertising platforms have a neat tool to bypass this problem: **dynamic keyword insertion.**

Dynamic keyword insertion allows for the search term used to be inserted into the advert copy. This means that you can write one advert, and every time it appears for a different search term, that search term will be inserted into the advert. In the copy for the advert, it looks like this:
{keyword:alternative word}

The brackets indicate that this is where the dynamic keyword should go. The copywriter also needs to select an alternative keyword to show if the search term used does not fit into the space available.

Google's tutorial on dynamic keyword insertion has the following examples which explain this best.

Advert text created:

Brand New {KeyWord:Phones}
Huge selection of phones. Great prices.
{Keyword:phones} in stock. Free shipping!
www.BestDealer.com

Adverts as seen by searchers:

Ad 1 - Keyword: *nokia n90*

Brand New Nokia N90
Huge selection of phones. Great prices.
Nokia n90 in stock. Free shipping!
www.BestDealer.com

Ad 2 - Keyword: *samsung d500*

Brand New Samsung D500
Huge selection of phones. Great prices.
Samsung D500 in stock. Free shipping!
www.BestDealer.com

Ad 3 - Keyword: *motorola razor silver*

Brand New Phones
Huge selection of phones. Great prices.
Phones in stock. Free shipping!
www.BestDealer.com

With some limited word count available, it can seem a daunting task to communicate information that entices the right traffic to click-through, and differentiates you from your competition. Testing variations of copy is the best way to determine what works best for your campaign.

long copy

Online copywriting is not just about short, sharp call to action copy, however web users tend to scan pages quickly to determine whether or not they will read further. Even when writing longer copy, you need to take this into consideration.

Longer online copy allows you to foster a relationship with a reader, whether it is on a blog, through email communications or through articles and news releases. With more words and space available to use, you are able to build a voice and a personality into your writing.

getting read: titles and subject lines

Titles and subject lines are there for a very important reason: they inform a reader whether or not they are likely to want to read further. They are the gateway to your content.

Consider the following two titles:
- *Guide to online copywriting*
- *Ten steps to online copywriting that sells*

The second title conveys more information to the reader, information that helps the reader to make a decision to read further.

Subject lines are like titles for emails, and can make the difference between an email being deleted instantly and being opened and read. Subject lines also work hand in hand with the "from" field of an email. Both these fields usually appear side by side in an inbox, and are used to determine relevance, familiarity and trust.

Use a consistent and easy to recognise sender alias – the "from" field – so that readers can recognise your emails easily. With familiarity and trust established using this field, the subject line can be used more creatively.

As with a title, use the subject line to make clear what the email is about. For example, if there is a promotion in the email, consider putting it in the subject line as well.

Titles, headlines and subject lines need to be both persuasive and enticing. Consider what need your copy is meeting for your readers, and express that first.

copywriting for seo

As well as the copy on the web page, HTML tags and Meta data are also used by an SEO copywriter. In addition to assisting you with structuring your content, these tags indicate relevancy and context to search engines. Some of the tags are used by screenreaders, and so they assist visitors with disabilities to access your content. The

Meta description can also be used by search engines on the search engine results pages (SERPs).

A keyword refers to the word or words that are used in a search query. Multi word keywords are sometimes referred to as key phrases.

The first step in SEO copywriting is **keyword research**. Having identified the themes of your web site and web pages, keyword research should be used to identify what keywords your target audience uses when searching for you.

Each page should be optimised for a primary key phrase, and can be optimised for a secondary and tertiary key phrase as well. Usually a web page is optimised for three key phrases, but can be optimised for up to five (though only if the page is very long). Any more than that and you are better off creating new, niche web pages.

In the chapter on search engine optimisation, there is more detail on the process of keyword discovery and keyword selection.

Below are guidelines for using key phrases on a web page:

page URL
The main key phrase for the page should be used in the URL for the page. Often, the URL is generated from the page title, so using the key phrase in the page title should ensure that it is in the URL as well.

page title
The page title appears at the top of a user's browser and should be able to tell them (and the search engine spiders, of course) what the main theme of the page is. The page title is limited to 66 characters (including spaces). The key phrase should be used as close to the beginning of the title as possible.

meta description
The Meta description is a short paragraph describing the page content. This summary is usually shown on the SERPs if it contains the search term searched for, which means that it needs to entice users to click-through. The spiders use the Meta description to deduce the topic of the page and the use of targeted key phrases is important here. Copy is limited to no more than 166 characters (including spaces).

meta keywords
The Meta keywords are a list of the words and phrases that are important on a web page. The use of targeted key phrases is important here, but remember: no keyword stuffing. The meta keywords are limited to 200 characters (including spaces).

headings and sub-headings
Spiders assign more relevance to the text used in headings, so it is important to use your key phrases in the headings on your page. It also helps to structure your content.

Heading structures:
      <h1> Page heading
      <h2> Sub-headings
      <h3> Information under the sub-headings

Having a good heading hierarchy is important as spiders use it to move through your page. The hierarchy indicates what is more important and how the content is broken up.

page copy
The number of times you use the key phrases is entirely dependant on how long the page of copy is. You want to optimise the page for the key phrases without their use being overt.

For SEO effectiveness, a page of web copy should not be less than 250 words. On a 250 word page you could use the primary key phrase eight times (this includes use in Meta data, headings, title and body copy) and the secondary key phrase four times.

The page should not be so long that the user needs to scroll and scroll and scroll again to get to the end of it. If you find the page is getting exceptionally long, consider breaking it into different sections. This way you could add more pages of optimised copy focused on one theme, instead of one very long page.

links to your optimised page
The text used to link from one page to another is considered important by the search engine spiders, so try to ensure that your key phrase is used when linking to the optimised page. Anchor text of links should include the key phrase of the page being linked to, and not the page being linked from.

images: alt text and title tags
Alt text refers to the "alt" attribute for the IMG HTML tag: this is the text that appears in the caption. It is used in HTML to attribute a text field to an image on a web page, normally with a descriptive function, telling a user what an image is about and displaying the text in instances where the image is unable to load. While this is handy for readers we also do it for another reason: search engine spiders can't read images, but they can read the alt text. The image title tag is what shows when you hover with your mouse over an image and can also be read by the search engine spider.

neologisms and buzz words

Sometimes the World Wide Web is referred to as the Wild Wild Web as it can seem to be an environment where anything goes. The ever expanding numbers of social media participants play fast and loose with grammar.

With new services and products being developed daily, it can feel like the list of new words, and new ways to use words, is building faster than you can keep up with it. Dictionaries and reference guides celebrate this regularly with a "word of the year", usually one that has been in heavy use by the Internet audience for the three years preceding its entrance into a dictionary.

For example, in 2005, "podcast" was voted word of the year by the editors of the New Oxford American dictionary, while "blog" had its day in 2004 when it was declared word of the year by Merriam-Webster's Dictionary. The word "blog" was coined in 1999.

Online services can quickly become verbs in everyday language, so we talk of "Googling something" instead of "searching on Google" and of "Facebooking someone".

Always remember that you are writing for your users first and foremost. If your content is aimed at cutting-edge early-adopters, then litter it with the latest buzz words. If your audience does not know the difference between Firefox and Internet Explorer, then be cautious when using a word that did not exist the day before.

Users dictate your copy.

summary

Copywriting is fundamental to any eMarketing activity. The underpinning factor for copywriting success is to write for your users first and foremost.

The very first step to effective copywriting is to research your audience and understand their needs. Then you can write copy that engages with them and solves their problems. Profiling your audience involves creating personas that the copy may be addressed to.

Online copy needs to be easy to read, and so layout is important. Copy should be made easy to scan by effective use of paragraphs, bulleted lists and highlighting important words by making them bold.

One of the most important aspects of online copywriting is a strong call to action. Web users look for instructions and indications of what they should do. A call to action should tell them exactly what to do.

When it comes to long copy, compelling title and subject lines are important to make sure your content is read. Internet users have a deluge of information vying for their attention, so you need to make it easy for a user to choose to read your content. Titles and subject lines should be compelling, while providing clear information as to what the content is.

Copywriting for SEO involves optimising copy for select key phrases in order to give context to search engines. A page can be optimised for up to five key phrases, but it is usually optimised for three of them. SEO copywriting involves the meta data and title tags, as well as the copy that is read on a page.

The dynamic nature of the Internet means that new words are entering into a user's vocabulary every day. For best copywriting, know your audience and use the language that resonates most strongly with them.

tools of the trade

The SMOG (**Simple Measure of Gobbledygook**) formula from Harry McLaughlin can be used to calculate the reading level of copy that you have written. A SMOG calculator, and instructions for use, can be found on his web site: www.harrymclaughlin.com/SMOG.htm

Alternatively, flesh.sourceforge.net offers a Java application that produces the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and the Flesch Reading Ease Score of a document.

For an **online dictionary** and an **online thesaurus**, you can visit www.dictionary. reference.com and www.thesaurus.reference.com. These both source a number of reference sources.

Thinkmap's **Visual Thesaurus** at www.visualthesaurus.com is also a thesaurus, but with an interactive map that lets you explore words. It's easy to spend a lot more time on this web site than you originally planned!

When it comes to **keyword research**, there are a host of tools available. Some are listed below:

- SEO Book - tools.seobook.com/firefox/seo-for-firefox.html
- Wordtracker – www.wordtracker.com
- AdWords - adwords.google.com/select/Login
- Trellion's Keyword Discovery Tool – www.keyworddiscovery.com
- Hitwise Keyword Intelligence – www.keywordintelligence.com
- SEO Chat's Keyword Suggestions for Google - www.seochat.com/seo-tools/keyword-suggestions-google

chapter questions

1. When writing for the web, why are descriptive titles better than titles which play on words?
2. Why should users dictate your content? List some ways that users' needs determine content.
3. Why does web copy need to be easy to read?
4. For some real online copywriting practice, choose an article in a magazine or newspaper, and rewrite it for an Internet audience.

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further reading

To get started on writing for the Web, Hot Text – Web Writing That Works is an easy to read and thorough resource. The web site for the book is www.webwritingthatworks.com.

www.copyblogger.com
– regular articles and case studies on writing online copy that converts.

www.wordwise.typepad.com
- Dan Santow of Edelman posts regularly on his blog with practical tips for improving your writing, whether it be emails to colleagues, blog posts, news releases or articles, and includes updates on neologisms, web words and style.

FutureNow's GrokDotCom.com published Online Copywriting 101: The Ultimate Cheat Sheet over two posts, providing 101 links to the best online copywriting references on the Internet:
www.grokdotcom.com/2007/10/29/copywriting-101
www.grokdotcom.com/2007/11/13/copywriting-101-part-2

14. web analytics and conversion optimisation

What's inside: An **introduction** and **history**, and the **key terms and concepts** for web analytics and conversion optimisation. **How it works** focuses on the building block terms of web analytics, including **tracking** and the **analysing data**. **Tools of the trade** provides some useful analytics package providers, as well as online resources for analysing behaviour. **Pros and cons** highlight the importance of tracking and optimising, followed by a **summary** and **the bigger picture.**

introduction

Picture the scene: you've opened up a new fashion retail outlet in the trendiest shopping centre in town. You've spent a small fortune on advertising and branding. You've gone to great lengths to ensure that you're stocking all of the prestige brands. Come opening day your store is inundated with visitors and potential customers. **And yet, you are hardly making any sales.** Could it be because you have one cashier for every hundred customers? Or maybe it's the fact that the smell of your freshly painted walls is chasing customers away before they complete a purchase. While it can be difficult to isolate and track the factors affecting your revenue in this fictional store, move it online and you have a wealth of resources available to assist you with **tracking, analysing** and **optimising** your performance.

To a marketer, the connected Internet offers more than new avenues of creativity. By its very nature, the Internet allows you to track each click to your site and through your site. It takes the guesswork out of pinpointing the successful elements of a campaign, and can show you very quickly what's not working. It all comes down to knowing where to look, knowing what to look for, and knowing what to do with the information you find.

history

Testing, analysing and optimising are not new to marketing. Being able to gauge the success of any campaign is crucial to growth.

Early web analytics packages came to the fore in the mid 1990s, a couple of years after the first Mosaic browser launched. Early analysis reflected the nature of the early web, focussing only on hits with some very basic click stream analysis. With one page web sites being the norm, it was enough to know how many clicks came to the web site. Traffic meant you were doing well. You can still see hit counters on some web sites today. The web sites usually look as sophisticated as this tool.

However, as web sites became more complex, and as more people had access to the Internet, better analysis became more important. Measuring hits was, and is, not enough. In fact, measuring hits is a fairly meaningless task. Web analytics split into two types of tools: page tags and log files. Both continue to become more sophisticated, capturing information about visitors to a web site, and recording detailed information related to their time on a web site.

There are several log file analysis tools which cost nothing to use. Sophisticated page tag web analytics became available for free when Google bought Urchin in March 2005 and launched Google Analytics as a free service. Are you wondering what the difference is between page tag and log file analysis? Don't worry, it's coming!

key terms and concepts

A/B split test testing two variables for statistically significant influence.

Click path the clicks taken by a visitor to a web site in one visit.

Conversion a visitor completing a target action.

Conversion funnel a defined path that visitors should take to reach the final objective.

Count raw figures captured for analysis, these are the most basic web analytics metric.

Event a step a visitor takes in the conversion process.

Goal the defined action that visitors should perform on a web site or the purpose of the web site.

Heat map a data visualisation tool that shows levels of activity on a web page in different colours, reds and yellows showing the most activity and blues and violets the least.

Hit every request to the server is recorded as a hit, mistakenly used in web analytics as an indication of a successful web site.

JavaScript a popular scripting language that is also used in web analytics for page tagging.

Key performance indicator (KPI) a metric that indicates whether a web site is achieving its goals.

Log files text files created on the server each time a click takes place, capturing all activity on the web site.

Multivariate test testing many variables to determine statistically significant influences on outcomes.

Page tags JavaScript files embedded on a web page and executed by the browser.

Ratio an interpretation of data captured, a ratio can be between counts, ratios or a ratio and a count metric.

Referrer the URL that originally generated the request for the current page.

Segmentation filtering visitors into distinct groups based on characteristics so as to analyse visits.

Visitor an individual visiting a web site that is not a search engine spider or a script.

how it works

When it comes to web analytics and conversion optimisation, it is all about preparation. It is not just about collecting data, you need to know what data you are going to use. Once data has been collected, you need to analyse it and let the numbers inform your optimisation tasks.

goals, events and KPIs

The key to the success of any web site or online campaign is that it is designed with clearly defined goals in mind. These will be used to measure the success of the web site or campaign, and are crucial to maintaining focus within online activities.

The goal of a web site or campaign may depend on the type of industry, but usually it will be an action that results in revenue for the company. The goal of a web site is also intrinsically linked to the action that you want visitors to perform.

Although a web site has an ultimate goal, the process of achieving that goal can be broken down into several steps. These are called **events** or micro-conversions. Analysing each step in the process is called **funnel analysis** or path analysis and is critical to understanding where problems in the conversion process may lie. The clicks a visitor makes once landed on a site, whether they follow the desired steps or not, are referred to as a **click path**.

13,430 total vistors to the site

Persuasion

100% of visitors

75% of visitors

50% of visitors

Conversion

30% of visitors

7% of visitors

5%
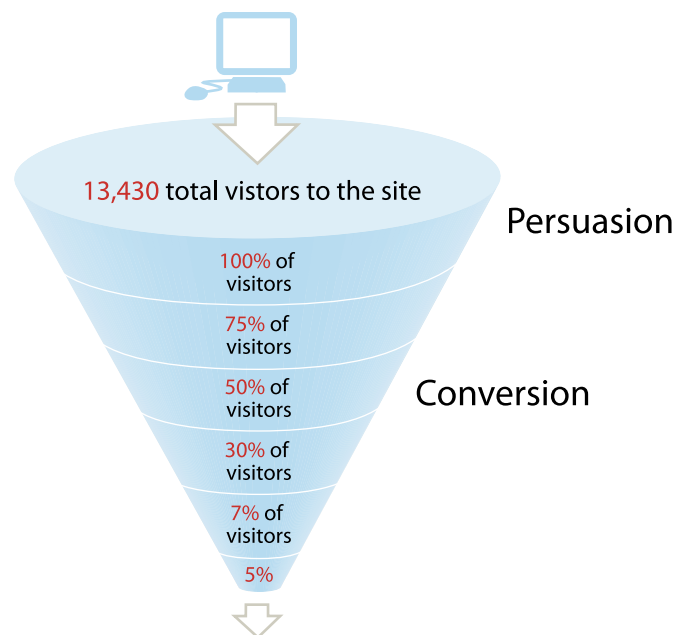
For example, on a hotel web site, the ultimate goal is that visitors to the site make a booking on the web site with a credit card.

Each step in the process is an event which can be analysed as a conversion point.

Event 1: perform a search for available dates for hotels in the desired area
Event 2: check prices and amenities for available hotels
Event 3: select a hotel and go to checkout
Event 4: enter personal and payment details and confirm booking (conversion)

One expects fewer users at each step that's why it's called a funnel. Increasing the number of visitors who progress from one step to the next will go a long way to improving the overall conversion rate of the site.

There are also other pointers, or indicators, that you are achieving your goals. These are factors that can be optimised to ensure that your ultimate goal is being met. In web analytics, these are referred to as key performance indicators (KPI). These need to be defined so you monitor the entire process to achieving your web site goal. They can also give clues as to what factors you need to work on so as to reach your goal.

Here are some example goals and KPIs for different web sites:

Hospitality ecommerce site, such as www.expedia.com
• Goal: increase bookings
• Goal: decrease marketing expenses

KPIs:
• Conversion rate
• Cost per visitor
• Average order value

News and content sites, such as www.news24.com
• Goal: increase readership and level of interest
• Goal: increase time visitors spend on web site

KPIs:
• Length of visit
• Average time spent on web site
• Percentage of returning visitors

KPIs help you to look at the factors that you can influence. For example, if your goal is to increase revenue, you could look at ways of increasing your conversion rate (that is the number of visitors who purchase something). One way of increasing conversion rate could be to offer a discount. So, you would have more sales, but probably a lower average order value. Or, you could look at ways of increasing the average order value, so the conversion rate would stay the same, but you increase the revenue from each conversion.

Once you have established your goals, events and your KPIs, you need to be able to track the data that will help you analyse how you are performing, and will indicate how you can optimise your web site or campaign.

KPIs and events break down the factors and steps that can be influences so as to achieve the goals of the web site. They allow you to see on a micro level what is affecting performance on a macro level.

tracking and collecting data

Currently, there are two main technology approaches for collecting web analytics data: **log file analysis** and **page tagging**.

Log file analysis software reads the records, called log files, on the web server, which record all clicks that take place on the server. Web servers have always stored all the clicks which take place in a log file, so the software interprets data which has always been available. A new line is written in a log file with each new request. For example, clicking on a link, an Ajax call or submitting a form will each result in a new line being written.

Page tagging, on the other hand, sends information to a third party server, where statistics can be generated. The browser executes JavaScript code which communicates with the tracking software.

Pixel tracking can be used to track email campaigns. Here, a tiny transparent 1 pixel by 1 pixel is placed in the email. When you load the images in the email, you will also load the tiny image that tracks your activity.

What you should know:

Log file analysis

- Log files are normally produced by web servers, so the raw data is readily available. Page tagging, however, requires changes to the web site.
- Log files are very accurate – they record every click. Page tagging can be less accurate. If a user's browser does not support JavaScript, for example, no information will be captured.
- Log files are in a standard format, so it is possible to switch vendors and still be able to analyse historical data. Page tagging is proprietary to each vendor, so switching can mean losing historical data.
- Log files record visits from search engine spiders – useful for search engine optimisation.
- Log files record failed requests, whereas page tagging only shows successful requests.

Page tagging

- JavaScript makes it easier to capture more information (for example: products purchased, or screen size of a user's browser). You can use log file analysis to capture this information, but it will involve modifying the URLs.
- Page tagging can report on events, such as interactions with a Flash movie, that log file analysis cannot.
- Page tagging can be used by companies that do not run their own web servers.

- Page tagging service providers usually offer a greater level of support. This is because it is a third party service, whereas log file analysis software is often managed in-house.

Because of the different methods of collecting data, the raw figures produced by the two services will differ. Sometimes, both are used to analyse a web site. However, raw figures not matching up should not be a problem. It is through interpreting these figures that you will be able to understand how effective your eMarketing efforts are.

Web site analytics packages can be used to measure most, if not all, eMarketing campaigns. Web site analysis should always account for the various campaigns being run. For example, generating high traffic volumes by employing various eMarketing tactics like SEO, PPC and email marketing can prove to be a pointless and costly exercise if the visitors are leaving your site without achieving one (or more) of your web site's goals. Conversion optimisation aims to convert as many of a web site's visitors as possible into active customers.

what information is captured

There are three types of web analytics metrics:

- **Count** – these are the raw figures captured that will be used for analysis
- **Ratio** – this is an interpretation of the data that is counted
- **KPI** – either a count or a ratio, these are the figures which help you to determine your success in reaching your goals

In analysis, metrics can be applied to three different universes:

- **Aggregate** – all traffic to the web site for a defined period of time
- **Segmented** – a subset of all traffic according to a specific filter, such as by campaign (PPC) or visitor type (new visitor vs. returning visitor)
- **Individual** – the activity of a single visitor for a defined period of time

Here are some of the key metrics you will need to get started on web site analytics:
Building block terms:

- **Hit** – a request to the server (and a fairly meaningless number on its own)
- **Page** – unit of content (so downloads and Flash files can be defined as a page)
- **Page views** – the number of times a page was successfully requested
- **Visit or session** – an interaction by an individual with a web site consisting of one or more page views within a specified period of time
- **Unique visitors** – the number of individual people visiting the web site one or more times within a period of time. Each individual is only counted once.
  - **new visitor** – a unique visitor who visits the web site for the first time ever in the period of time being analysed
  - **repeat visitor** – a unique visitor with two or more visits within the time period being analysed
  - **return visitor** – a unique visitor who is not a new visitor

These are the most basic web metrics. They tell you how much traffic your web site is receiving. Looking at repeat and returning visitors can tell you about how your web site creates loyalty. As well as growing overall visitor numbers, a web site needs to grow the number of visitors who come back. An exception might be a support web site – repeat visitors could indicate that the web site has not been successful in solving the visitor's problem. Each web site needs to be analysed based on its purpose.

Visit characterisation:
- **Entry page** – the first page of a visit
- **Landing page** – the page intended to identify the beginning of the user experience resulting from a defined marketing effort
- **Exit page** – the last page of a visit
- **Visit duration** – the length of time in a session
- **Referrer** – the URL that originally generated the request for the current page
  - **internal referrer** – a URL that is part of the same web site
  - **external referrer** – a URL that is outside of the web site
  - **search referrer** – the URL has been generated by a search function
  - **visit referrer** – the URL that originated a particular visit
  - **original referrer** – the URL that sent a new visitor to the web site
- **Click-through** – the number of times a link was clicked by a visitor
- **Click-through rate** – the number of times a link was clicked divided by the number of times it was seen (impressions)
- **Page views per visit** – the number of page views in a reporting period divided by the number of visits in that same period

These are the terms that tell you how visitors reach your web site, and how they move through the web site. The way that a visitor navigates a web site is called a click path. Looking at the referrers, both internal and internal, allows you to gauge a click path that visitors take.

Content characterization:
- **Page exit ratio** – number of exits from a page divided by total number of page views of that page
- **Single page visits** – visits that consist of one page, even if that page was viewed a number of times
- **Bounces** (single page view visits) – visits consisting of a single page view
- **Bounce rate** – single page view visits divided by entry pages

When a visitor views a page, they have two options: leave the web site, or view another page on the web site. These metrics tell you how visitors react to your content. Bounce rate can be one of the most important metrics that you measure! There are a few exceptions, but a high bounce rate usually means high dissatisfaction with a web page.

Conversion metrics:
- **Event** – a recorded action that has a specific time assigned to it by the browser or the server
- **Conversion** – a visitor completing a target action

Other metrics which apply to eMarketing tactics include:
- **Impression** – each time an advert or a page is served
- **Open** – each email that is deemed open. Usually if the images are loaded, an email is considered open

In order to test the success of your web site, you need to remember the TAO of conversion optimisation:

Track
Analyse
Optimise

Using your goals and KPIs, you'll know what metrics you will be tracking. You will then need to analyse these results, and then take appropriate actions. And the testing begins again!

analysing data

A number is just a number until you can interpret it. Typically, it is not the raw figures that you will be looking at, but what they can tell you about how your users are interacting with your web site.

how and what to test
Avinash Kaushik, author of "Web Analytics: An Hour A Day", recommends a three prong approach to web analytics:

- Analysing **behaviour** data that infers the intent of a web site's visitors
- Analysing **outcomes** metrics that shows how many visitors performed the goal actions on a web site
- Testing and analysing data that tells us about the **user experience**

Behaviour data: intent
Web users' behaviour can indicate a lot about their intent. Looking at referral URLs and search terms used to find the web site can tell you a great deal about what problems visitors are expecting your site to solve.

Click density analysis, segmentation, metrics that define the visit and content can all be used to gauge the intent of your visitors.

ClickStream
• Click Density Analysis
• Segmentation
• Key Metrics, Search
"Intent Inferences"

Behaviour

Actionable Insights & Metrics

Orders / Leads
• Revenue: How, Why
• Conversion Rates
• Problem Resolution
"Nuances of Outcomes"

Outcomes

Experience

Research
• Customer satisfaction
• A/B Testing
• Usability, FMH
"Voice of customer"
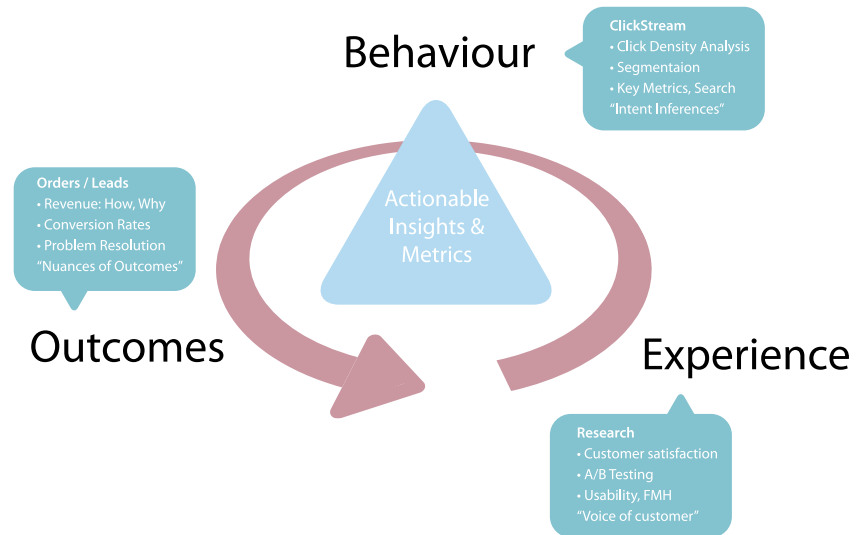
The trinity approach to analytics.

A crucial, and often overlooked, part of this analysis is that of internal search. Internal search refers to the searches that users perform on the web site, of the web site's content. While a great deal of time is spent analysing and optimising external search – using search engines to reach the web site in question – analysing internal search goes a long to way to determining how effectively a web site is in delivering solutions to visitors.

Internal and external search data is likely to be very different, and can go a long way to exposing weaknesses in site navigation and the internal search itself, and can expose gaps in inventory on which a web site can capitalise.

For example, consider the keywords a user might use when searching for a hotel web site, and keywords that might be used by a the user when on the web site.

Keywords to search for a hotel web site:
- Cape Town hotel
- Bed and breakfast Cape Town

Once on the web site, the user might use the site search function to find out further information. Keywords they might use include:
- Table Mountain
- Pets
- Babysitting service

Analytics tools can show what keywords users search for, what pages they visit after searching, and, of course, whether they search again with a variation of or different keywords.

Outcomes: meeting expectations
At the end of the day, you want people who visit your web site to perform an action that increases the web site's revenue. Analysis of goals and KPIs indicate where there is room for improvement. Look at user intent to establish how your web site meets the user's goals, and if they match with the web site goals. Look at user experience to determine how outcomes can be influenced.
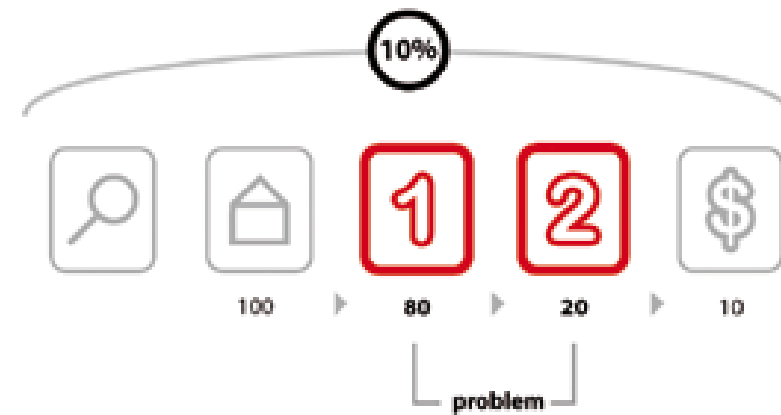
Analysing each step in the conversion process.

The above image shows how analysing each event can show where the web site is not meeting expectations.

After performing a search, 100 visitors land on the home page of a web site. From there, 80 visitors visit the first page towards the goal. This event has an 80% conversion rate. Twenty visitors take the next step. This event has a 25% conversion rate. Ten visitors convert into paying customers. This event has a 50% conversion rate. The conversion rate of all visitors who performed the search is 10%, but by breaking this up into events we can analyse and improve the conversion rate of each event.

Experience: why users acted the way they did, and how that can be influenced
Determining the factors that affect user experience involves testing to determine why users do what they do. Understanding why users behave in a certain way on your web site will show you how that behaviour can be influenced so as increase successful outcomes.

Testing can be performed in a number of ways:
- A/B split testing
- Multivariate testing
- Listening labs
- Single page heat maps

A/B split testing

A/B split testing measures one variable at a time to determine its effect on an outcome. Different versions are created for the variable you want to test. For example:

- Two email subject lines for the same email to see which produces a superior open rate
- Different placements of the "buy now" on a product page to see which results in increased sales
- Different copy styles on PPC adverts to see which gives a higher CTR

In these cases, only one variable is tested at a time, and all other elements on the web page, in the email or part of the PPC advert remain the same. You can test more than one version of the variable; it just means that you will need to test for longer.

Traffic is then randomly distributed to the different versions, and the outcomes are measured for each version of the variable. The results are then interpreted to see if there is a statistically significant difference between the variables. The version producing the best results can then be employed.

Remember studying statistics? It's going to come in handy here. You don't need to send huge amounts of traffic to a different version of a web page to determine success. In fact, it can be risky to do so.

Multivariate testing

Multivariate testing allows you to test many variables at once, and still determine which version of each variable has a statistically significant effect on your outcomes. For web sites, there are a number of vendors who will host pages that are being tested in this way remotely, if you do not have the technology to do this in-house.

Multivariate testing allows you to test, for example:

- Subject lines and copy style for emails
- Colour, font size and image size for web sites

The combinations are endless, and because of that, it is easy to get stuck analysing every tiny detail. Successful testing relies on having clear objectives to begin with, and sufficient traffic to warrant such detail.

Listening labs

A listening lab could also be called a watching lab, as this involves watching users interact with your site and listening to their comments. Professional listening labs can be hired or, as Steve Krug points out in his book "Don't Make Me Think", they can be set up fairly easily in a quiet part of an office.

In a listening lab, a moderator asks a user to perform tasks on a web site, and asks

them to describe what they are thinking and doing. These exercises can provide important information that looking at data cannot.

Single page heat maps

Companies such as Crazy Egg (www.crazyegg.com) have software that can show you exactly where users click on a web page, regardless of whether they are clicking on links or not.
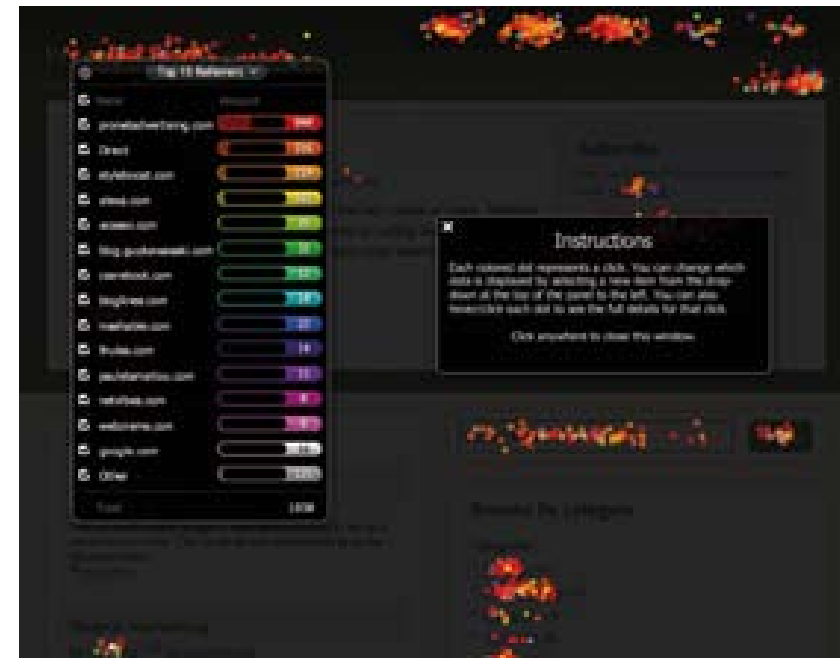
It produces information that helps you know what areas of a web site are clickable, but attract few or no clicks, and areas are not clickable but have users attempting to click there. This can show you what visual clues on your web page influence where your visitors click, and this can be used to optimise the click path of your visitors.

There are many factors that could be preventing your visitors from achieving specific end goals. From the tone of the copy to the colour of the page, everything on your web site may affect conversions. Possible factors are often so glaringly obvious that one tends to miss them, or so small that they are dismissed as trivial. Changing one factor may result in other unforeseen consequences and it is vital to ensure that we don't jump to the wrong conclusions.

There are many techniques that can be used to improve conversion rates, depending on which area is being improved. A better landing page, for example, can reduce the drop-off between a PPC click and adding a product to the shopping cart. And reducing

that drop-off can go a long way to improving the cost per acquisition (CPA). The table below shows how small changes in conversion rate can make a big difference to the CPA.

CPC	Clicks	Total Cost	Conversion Rate	Conversions	CPA
$5.00	100	$ 500.00	8%	8	$62.50
$5.00	100	$ 500.00	9%	9	$55.56
$5.00	100	$ 500.00	10%	10	$50.00
$5.00	100	$ 500.00	15%	15	$33.33
$5.00	100	$ 500.00	20%	20	$25.00

One of the most important aspects of conversion optimisation is keeping visitors focused on their goals. To do this, it is important to maintain a highly visible and influential click path from the landing page to the goal/action page that is as short as possible. The more links and irrelevant distractions that are present on a site, the less likely visitors are to remain focused on achieving your desired objectives.

Find out if people are looking for something specifically and whether it can be tied to a source. Don't take people to your home page by default if they're looking for specific keywords and are clicking through on designated links or (more importantly) are coming through a PPC campaign. Again, keep them focused on the defined goal - rather let them enter where they are most comfortable thereby keeping the path to conversion as short as possible.

segmentation
Every visitor to a web site is different, but there are some ways we can characterise groups of users, and analyse metrics for each group. This is called segmentation.

Some segments include:

Referral URL
Users who arrive at your site via search engines, those who type in the URL directly and those who come from a link in an online newspaper article are all likely to behave differently. As well as conversion rates, click path and exit pages are important metrics to consider. Consider the page on which these visitors land to enter your web site – can anything be done to improve their experience?

Landing pages
Users who enter your web site through different pages can behave very differently. What can you do to affect the page on which they are landing, or what elements of the landing page can be changed to influence outcomes?

Connection speed, operating system, browser
Consider the effects of technology on the behaviour of your users. High bounce rate for low bandwidth users, for example, could indicate that your site is taking too long to load. Visitors who use open source technology might expect different things from your web site to other visitors. Different browsers might show your web site differently – how does this affect these visitors?

Geographical location
Do users from different countries, provinces or towns behave differently on your web site? How can you optimise user experience for these different groups?

First time visitors
How is the click path of a first time visitor different to a returning visitor? What parts of the web site are more important to first time visitors?

tools of the trade

The very first thing you need when it comes to web analytics, is a web analytics tool for gathering data. Some are free and some are paid for. You will need to determine which package best serves your needs. Bear in mind that it is possible to switch vendors with log file analysis software without losing historical data, but it is not as easy to do so with page tagging software.

Below are some leading providers:

- Google Analytics (page tagging analysis) - www.google.com/analytics
- ClickTracks (log file and page tagging) www.clicktracks.com
- AWStats (log file analysis) - awstats.sourceforge.net
- Webalizer (log file analysis) - www.mrunix.net/webalizer

When it comes to running split tests, if you don't have the technical capacity to run these in-house, there are a number of third party services that can host these for you. Google's Web site Optimizer (www.google.com/web siteoptimizer) can help you do just that.

A basic split test calculator is available at www.usereffect.com/split-test-calculator.

Crazy Egg (www.crazyegg.com) is strange sounding name, but this tool can help you to see exactly where visitors are clicking on a web page.

pros and cons

Tracking, analysing and optimising is vital to the success of any marketing efforts, and even more so with online marketing efforts. eMarketing allows for easy and fast tracking, and the ability to optimise frequently.

However, it can be easy to become fixated on figures instead of using them to optimise campaign growth. Generally, macro, or global metrics should be looked at before starting to analyse micro elements of a web site.

Testing variables is vital to success. Results always need to be statistically analysed, and marketers should let these numbers make the decisions. Never assume the outcome – wait for the numbers to inform you.

summary

The trackability of the Internet allows for analysis at every level of an eMarketing campaign, which should lead to improved results over time.

The foundation of successful analysis and optimisation is to determine campaign and business goals upfront and use these to determine KPIs for that campaign. Analysing metrics which are not indicators of success will detract from timely optimisation.

Web analytics packages come in two flavours: log file analysis and page tagging analysis, although some packages combine both methods.

Metrics are either:
- Counts
- Ratios
- KPIs, which are either counts or ratios

Data can be analysed to infer user behaviour and intent, outcomes achieved and user experience. Testing to optimise user experience can demonstrate ways to influence user behaviour so that more successful outcomes are achieved.

Testing can be performed via:
- Listening labs
- A/B split testing
- Multivariate testing
- One page analytics

Segmenting the audience allows for analysis and optimising for specific groups of users.

the bigger picture

how it all fits together

Tracking, analysing and optimising are fundamental to any eMarketing activity. The Internet allows for sophisticated data gathering, so it is possible to track almost every detail of any campaign.

Most analytics packages can be used across all eMarketing activities, allowing for an integrated approach to determining the success of campaigns. While it is important to analyse each campaign on its own merits, the Internet allows for holistic approach to these activities. The savvy marketer will be able to see how campaigns affect and enhance each other.

The connected nature of the Internet has made it possible to reach out to far greater audiences, and for people around the world to interact, create and share. The same connected nature is what makes it possible for web site owners to track and analyse how users around the world interact with their web site, and to optimise it for those users.

case study: Firefox 3

Web sites with high volumes of traffic have the opportunity to test regularly and make sure that they are optimising conversions. Online retailers such as Amazon.com make frequent small changes, hardly noticed by their visitors, to ensure that they are converting as many visitors into buyers as possible. Likewise, the high volume of traffic to Google's home page allows them to test new features with a small percentage of visitors before rolling them out to all users.

Firefox is a free open-source browser that is currently used by about 15% of the market, and is gaining market share. When launching version 3 of the browser, Firefox 3, Firefox developer Mozilla (www.mozilla.org) aimed to enter the Guinness Book of Records for most software downloads in 24 hours starting 17 June 2008. The aim was 5 million downloads. Firefox 2.0 registered 1.6 million downloads on the first day it was made available on 24 October, 2006

Mozilla wanted visitors to the web site to perform one action: download Firefox. With a publicised record attempt, it was necessary to make the process as smooth as possible. The landing page for Firefox 2 was already successful. FutureNow Conversion Analyst Joshua Hay noted that: "Their Call to Action does so many things right. The non-standard shape stands out from the background of the page, and has been given a persuasive color that draws the eyes to it. They've even used it to reinforce their brand. Within the Call to Action, Firefox lists the benefit and tells the visitor exactly what he is getting."

So, with something that works, what can be done to make it work better?

With the new download page, the download button is in the same basic design, but with a few nuanced changes.

Firstly, the name and version of the browser has changed position on the page. It has moved from a large on-page heading and onto the actual download button. The text on the button has also changed, from ¨Download

Firefox – Free¨ to ¨Free Download¨. There is also a little image on the Firefox 3 download button that was not used on the Firefox 2 landing page – an arrow to indicate the download action. The information about the version of the browser has also been split over two lines in the Firefox 3 download button.

The download button and the placement of the Firefox logo (the fox around the globe) have had a subtle revision. The logo is now clearly integrated into the download button. On the Firefox 3 page, the hyperlinks are not underlined, emphasising the single purpose of the download buttone.

Did it work? Mozilla records that there were over 8 million downloads of Firefox 3 in its first 24 hours of release - over 5,500 downloads a minute! Mozilla's commitment to optimising the all important Firefox 3 landing page paid off.

case study questions

1. Why do web sites with high traffic volumes have the opportunity to test frequently?
2. The text on the download button was changed, as was the layout of the text. What do you think the effect was of each change?
3. What tests would you set up to decide how effective each change is? Describe how the tests would work.

chapter questions

1. What is the difference between goals, events and KPIs? Consider www.facebook.com and www.boingboing.net and list what you think the goals of each web site are, and what events and KPIs would be used to measure these.
2. How can site search data be used to optimise a web site?
3. Why is ¨hit¨ a meaningless measure of web site success?
4. Why should changes be tested with a small number of web visitors before being rolled out?

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further reading

Web Analytics: An Hour a Day by Avinash Kaushik
– if you are looking to get started in web analytics, you can't go wrong with this book from Avinash Kaushik

www.grokdotcom.com
– regular articles, blog posts and newsletters from the Future Now team on all things conversion and optimisation oriented.

www.kaushik.net/avinash
- Avinash Kaushik is an analytics evangelist, and his regular insights are essential reading for any eMarketer.

15. last words

last words

The Internet is a dynamic and exciting environment. It has changed the way we communicate and express ourselves, and it has forced companies and individuals to change the way they do business.

With this textbook, you have a solid guide to the tools and tactics of online marketing. Each of the tactics on their own can do wonders to boost your business, but the best eMarketing strategy comes from an integrated, customer-centric approach.

As marketing geeks the world over will tell you, markets are conversations. The Internet has given customers a platform for responding to the marketing and advertising messages that they are being exposed to, revealing opportunities for companies and brands to engage in two way conversations instead of one way broadcasts. It has revealed the declining effectiveness of one size fits all mass communication, but instead allows for cost effective mass customisation.

Due to the nature of the Internet, eMarketing campaigns are highly trackable and measurable, and can be targeted and customised. Response and awareness can be measured and monitored through online reputation management tools. Companies and customers can use the same social media platforms to express themselves and communicate with each other.

keeping up to date

With the Web being so dynamic, we can only ever hope to offer you the foundations for your eMarketing in a printed textbook. Every chapter includes some of the best resources we know of from industry experts that will help you to keep up to date with this exciting medium.

This book is also supported by an online resource centre at www.quirk.biz/emarketingtextbook. That's the first place to look for any updates, as well as more case studies showcasing the techniques outlined in this book.

For an updated list of resources and links, visit del.icio.us/quirkemarketingtextbook. We've included all the references and resources from the book, and plenty more to keep you informed during your eMarketing career.

The QuirkStars blog regularly on www.gottaquirk.com. We have regular tips from our eMarketing strategists, as well as round-ups of some the best Internet campaigns. And you should definitely sign up for the Quirk newsletter for a fortnightly fix of all the best that there is in the world of eMarketing: www.quirk.biz.

If you have feedback for us, some unanswered questions, or if you think there's anything we've missed, let us know! You can email us directly on textbook@quirk.biz.

further reading

www.cluetrain.com
– the web site for The Cluetrain Manifesto, where you can read the entire book for free. This seminal work shows how "markets are conversations."

del.icio.us/quirkemarketingtextbook
– all the links and resources from this book in one easy online spot.

www.gottaquirk.com
– the blog from the minds of Quirk.

16. glossary

A/B Split Test — Testing two variables for statistically significant influence.

Above The Fold — The content that can be seen on a screen without having to scroll down. In email marketing, this refers to the portion of an email that can be viewed in the preview pane.

Accessibility — The general term used to describe the degree to which a system is usable by as many people as possible without modification. In one context it refers specifically to people with disabilities and their use of assistive devices such as screen-reading web browsers.

Action — A specified task performed by a user, which results in an affiliate being awarded commission. Actions include purchasing a product, signing up for a newsletter or filling in a form.

Active Server Pages — ASP - It's the same abbreviation of Application Service Provider but definitely not the same thing. Active Server Pages are Microsoft's server-side technology for dynamically-generated web pages. ASP of this variety is marketed as an add-on to IIS.

Active verb — A word that conveys action or behaviour, and in a call to action, tells a prospect what to do.

Ad Space — The allotted space on web pages available for online advertising.

AdSense — Text and image advertisements by Google that appear on content web sites.

ADSL — Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line. A lot faster than ISDN, ADSL is a high speed method of accessing the Internet.

Advertiser — See "*Merchant*".

Affiliate — Affiliates market a merchant's products and earn revenue for successful referrals to the merchant's web site. Also called a publisher.

Affiliate Forum — An online community of affiliate enthusiasts where members can read or post topics on any topics linked to affiliate marketing.

Affiliate Marketing — An agreement between two sites in which one site - the affiliate, agrees to feature content or an advertisement designed to drive traffic to another site. In return the affiliate site receives a percentage of sales generated by traffic it sends towards this site.

AJAX — Abbreviation of Asynchronous JavaScript and XML, AJAX is a web development technique for creating interactive web applications. AJAX increases usability and speed by ensuring the web page doesn't have to reload each time a change is made by the user.

Alexa Rank — A number indicating how popular a web site is compared to other sites, based on information returned by the Alexa Toolbar and Quirk SearchStatus. The number is the index of a given site in long ordered list of popularity, the most popular site at index 1, the second most at index 2 and so on.

Algorithm — An algorithm is a mathematical, computational or statistical method that is pre-determined to take a number of variables into account and output a single, quantifiable number that is a function of all of the variables. A good example of a commonly used algorithm is the one used by Google to determine which pages should rank more highly on the SERPs. Another example is the algorithm used by BrandsEye to take into accounted tagged and weighted criteria, to calculate a single Reputation Score.

Alt Tag — See "*Alt Text*".

Alt Text — This refers to the "alt" attribute for the IMG HTML tag. It is used in HTML to attribute a text field to an image on a web page, normally with a descriptive function, telling a user what an image is about and displaying the text in instance where the image is unable to load. Also called Alt Tag.

Anchor Text — The visible, clickable text in a link.

Animated GIF — A GIF (type of image file) which supports animations and allows a separate palette of 256 colors for each frame.

Apache — An open source web server, Apache HTTP Server is the most popular web server in use today.

ARG — Alternative Reality Game - a game that takes place in both the real world and in a fantasy world, and usually involves an online component.

Ask.com — This search engine formally known as Ask Jeeves was founded by Garrett Gruener and David Warthen. Ask Jeeves allowed users to ask questions in everyday language and became an extremely popular engine. As Google, MSN and Yahoo! began indexing pages faster, Ask Jeeves suffered. Though its user base is still significantly smaller than those of the big three, Ask.com remains a popular engine.

ASP — Abbreviation of Application Service Provider, essentially a business that provides computer-based services to customers over a network.

Astroturfing — Covert and manipulative use of word of mouth.

Autoresponder — A nifty program designed to send an automated response to incoming emails.

B2B — Stands for Business to Business. When businesses sell products/services to other businesses and not to consumers.

B2C — Stands for Business to Consumers. When businesses sell products/services to consumers.

Back Button — This button, which is located at the top of a web browser, allows you to go back to a page you were on previously in a session.

Backlink — All the links on other pages that will take the user to a specific web page. Each link to that specific page is known as an inbound/backlink. The number of backlinks influences PageRank so the more relevant backlinks the better.

Bandwidth — The amount of data a connection is capable of moving, generally measured in bits per second.

Banner — An online advertisement in the form of a graphic image that appears on a web page.

Banner Exchange — A symbiotic advertising initiative whereby businesses involved promote each other's services and web sites on an exchange rather than paid basis. Also known as link exchange.

Benefit — The positive outcome for a user that a feature provides.

Black Hat — A term coined by the SEO industry to define the unethical techniques some search engine optimisers use to get their sites ranking at number 1. These practises include keyword stuffing, hidden text and duplication of content. The immediate results may be astounding but the long term results are detrimental as black hat SEO techniques are a no go with the search engines: employ these tactics at your own peril.

Blacklists	Blacklists are lists of IP addresses belonging to organizations that have been identified as spammers. The ISPs use these lists to filter out spam and block messages from these IP addresses from reaching their final destination.
Blog	A blog is a type of web site that allows users (bloggers) to post entries on different topics and can allow readers to comment on these posts.
Blog Comment	A facility whereby users can remark or provide feedback on a particular post. Due to the fact that some individuals or companies have abused this system by automatically spamming blog comments with links to their web sites, many comment systems are now moderated or by invitation only.
Blogosphere	The world of blogs, bloggers and blog posts.
Blogroll	A collection of links to other blogs. It is usually found on the home page of most blogs.
Boilerplate	Standard wording about an organisation that usually appears at the foot of a press release.
Bookmarking	Saving the web address of a web page or web site so that it may be easily referred to. Bookmarks can be managed with a browser, or with an online tool.
Bookmarks	The list of all web sites you have bookmarked are your bookmarks.
Bounce rate	Single page view visits divided by entry pages.
Bounces	The number of emails that were unable to reach their final destination due to a hard or soft bounce.
Bounces (single page view visits)	Visits that consist of one page, even if that page was viewed a number of times.
Brand Awareness	A measure of how quickly a brand is called to mind.
BrandsEye	BrandsEye is Online Reputation Management (ORM) software, developed by Quirk eMarketing, which allows for real-time monitoring of a brand on the Web. BrandsEye combines human subjectivity with sophisticated technology, allowing the quantifying and benchmarking of online reputation.
Breadcrumb Links	Links, usually at the top of the page, that indicate where a page is in the hierarchy of the web site.
Browser	An application used to access the Internet. Popular browsers include Firefox, Internet Explorer and Safari.
Buzz	Online excitement and word of mouth is referred to as buzz.
Cache	A cache is a temporary copy of a collection of data. If accessing the original data is proving to be resource heavy (read time-consuming), then users can access the cache thereby not having to reload the original data.
Call To Action	A CTA is a phrase written to motivate the reader to take action. (sign up for our newsletter, book car hire today etc.).
CAN-SPAM	The U.S. law that regulates commercial email. It stands for "Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act of 2003."

CAPTCHA	CAPTCHA stands for "Completely Automated Turing Test To Tell Computers and Humans Apart" and it does pretty much what it says. It is a program that asks a user to complete a simple test to prove the user is human and not a computer. The most common test is by typing in the content of a distorted image of numbers and text that a computer is unable to read.
CGM	Consumer generated media is another word for social media.
Click Fraud	The act of generating invalid clicks on an advert. Deliberate invalid clicks may be generated by competitors to waste the media budget of an advertiser or by site owners hosting the advert in order to increase profits from the clicks.
Click Path	The clicks taken by a visitor to a web site in one visit.
Click Tracking	Using scripts to track clicks into and out from a web site. Also can be used to shield a link from being picked up as a back link to another site.
Clicks and Mortar	A business that has both online trading capabilities and offline physical stores.
Click-through	The number of times a link was clicked by a visitor.
Click-through Rate	The total clicks on a link divided by the number of times that link was shown, expressed as a percentage.
Client-side	Transactions that take place before information is sent to the server.
CMS	Content Management System - A script or program for maintaining web sites, particularly the content.
Commission	The bounty paid by a merchant to an affiliate when the affiliate makes a successful referral.
Common Page Elements	Items which appear on every page of a web site.
Consumer Generated Media	Information that is published online by individuals. This refers to videos, photos, blogs, audio and more. It is also referred to as social media.
Contextual Advertising	Advertising on content web sites rather than on search sites where adverts are placed based on the content of the web site.
Conversion	A visitor completing a target action.
Conversion Funnel	A defined path that visitors should take to reach the final objective.
Conversion Optimisation	Two phase process which is made up of analysing the collaborative effect of your eMarketing efforts and optimising their effect in turning visitors into customers.
Conversion Rate	The percentage of visitors to a web site that perform a desired action, such as making a purchase or filling out a form. For example, if 30 visitors out of 100 subscribe to a newsletter for example the conversion rate is expressed as 30%.
Cookie	A small text file that is stored on an end-user's computer that allow web sites to identify the user, store unique variables, and allow the web site owner to construct a profile of that user.
Count	Raw figures captured for analysis, these are the most basic web analytics metric.
CPA	Cost Per Action. Refers to the cost of acquiring a new customer. The advertiser only pays when a desired action is achieved (sometimes called cost per acquisition).
CPC	Cost Per Click. Refers to when an advertiser only pays when their ad is clicked upon, giving them a visitor to their site - typically from a search engine in Pay Per Click search marketing.

CPL	Cost Per Lead. Commission structure where the affiliate earns a fixed fee for a lead sent to a merchant.
CPM	Cost per Mil (1000). Amount paid for every 1000 views of an advertisement.
CRM	Customer Relationship Management.
Cross Marketing	Marketing other products or services to an existing customer. Cross marketing enhances the ability for generating further sales. Also known as Cross Selling.
Cross Selling	See Cross Marketing.
Crowdsourcing	Harnessing the skills, talents and ideas of a broader community, usually through social media.
CSS	Cascading Style Sheets. This is a language used to describe how an HTML document should be formatted. Cascading Style Sheets provide the ability to separate the layout and styles of a web page from the data or information.
Customer Life Cycle	The progressive steps a customer goes through when purchasing, using or considering a product or service.
Cybersquatting	Cybersquatting occurs when a domain name that contains the name of a well-known brand/subject/trademark i.e. emarketing.com is purchased with no intent to be developed but rather sold off to the highest bidder.
Data Mining	The process of analyzing large amounts of data for patterns. This process can be used to predict buying habits, credit card purchases and cross sale capabilities.
Database	In email marketing, the database is the list of prospects to whom emails are sent. It also contains additional information pertinent to the prospects.
Dead Link	A link to a page that no longer exists: spiders check these types of links and eventually eliminate them from search engine results. Also see Link Rot.
Deep Linking	Jakob Nielsen's term for a user arriving at a site deep within its structure or where search engines index a mirrored copy of content normally inaccessible by search engine spiders.
Dell Hell	The term used by Jeff Jarvis when his Dell computer malfunctioned, and he had a hard time getting appropriate customer service.
Directory	Directory web sites provide an ordered listing of registered web sites in different categories. They are similar to an e-version of Yellow Pages. Yahoo! and Excite are the best known examples of directories.
DNS	Domain Name System - DNS resolves a domain name into an IP address.
DOM	Document Object Model - a web standards approach to representing HTML and XML documents as objects.
Domain Name	The name of a server that distinguishes it from other systems on the World Wide Web: our domain name is quirk.biz.
DomainKeys	An email authentication system designed to verify the DNS domain of an email sender and the message integrity.
Dotcom	An enterprise that only conducts business online. These enterprises do not have physical stores; the products/services they offer are sold online.
Double Opt-in	The act of getting subscribers to confirm their initial subscription via a follow up email asking them to validate their address and hence opt-in again.

Download	Transferring files from one computer to another. When you are online you are downloading files from a web site server to your PC.
Dynamic Keyword Insertion	In paid search advertising, this allows keywords used in searches to be inserted into advert copy.
Dynamic Parameter	The elements of a URL that are dynamically generated.
Dynamic Site	Content such as text, image and form fields on a web page that change according to user interactivity.
Electronic Payment	Payment and receipt of payment via the Internet.
Email	Also known as electronic mail, Email is essentially mail that is electronically transferred from PC to PC. Email allows you to send messages to anyone, anywhere in the world instantly.
Email Newsletter	Like a traditional print newsletter but delivered to your inbox rather than to your post box.
eMarketing	The process of marketing a brand using the Internet.
Encryption	Mathematical algorithms are used to encrypt data in order to protect it from unauthorized use.
Entry page	The first page of a visit.
EPC	Earnings Per Click taken from the total amount earned divided by the number of clicks.
Event	A recorded action that has a specific time assigned to it by the browser or the server. Also, a step a visitor takes in the conversion process.
Exit page	The last page of a visit.
Exponential Growth	If growth more than doubles with each iteration, it is exponential.
External referrer	A URL that is outside of the web site.
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions. It's always useful to have a section like this on your site to give users quick answers to questions they're likely to have.
Favicon	This small, nifty icon identifies a bookmarked site.
Feature	A prominent aspect of a product which is beneficial to users.
Feed	See RSS and RSS Reader.
Feed Reader	An RSS aggregator that lets you view all your RSS feeds in one place.
Flash	A technology used to show video and animation on a website; can be bandwidth heavy and unfriendly to search engine spiders.
Flog	A fake blog is known as a flog.
Folksonomy	Categorisation or taxonomy based on social media tags.
Forward Button	This button allows you to go forward again once you have used the back button.
Frames	An HTML technique used to combine two or more HTML documents within a single web browser screen. Frames can often cause accessibility and usability issues and their use is largely discouraged by good designers.
Frequency	This is the interval, at which email efforts such as newsletters are repeated, (weekly/monthly etc.).
Frequency Cap	Frequency caps are present to limit the number of times we are exposed to the same online advert.

FTP	File Transfer Protocol is a standardised method of moving files across the Internet.
Geographical Targeting	Also Geotargeting. Used to allow you to see where your visitors come from and to give them specific information that is relevant to them.
GIF	Abbreviation of Graphics Interchange Format, a GIF is an 8-bit-per-pixel bitmap image format using a palette of up to 256 distinct colors. GIF's allow images to be reduced without degrading their quality.
Goal	The defined action that visitors should perform on a web site or the purpose of the web site.
Google	The worlds best known search engine, Google offers access to billions of web pages in over 30 languages to searchers all over the world. Google began life as the research project of two graduate students, Sergey Brin and Larry Page.
Google AdSense	This program allows sites to display adverts from Google AdWords and earn revenue from the hits that generate traffic.
Google AdWords	Google's PPC program allows advertisers to display their adverts on relevant search results and across Google's content network via this program.
Googling	This is what you're doing when you enter a search query in Google.
Grey Hat	Grey Hat SEO is what occurs when white hats try and push the limits of what they can get away with. With the rapid evolution of search engines they don't tend to get away with it for very long. See Black Hat.
GZIP Compression	Software that compresses a web site in order to speed up download times.
Hard Bounce	The failed delivery of email communication due to an undeviating reason like a non-existent address.
Hardware	The body of your PC, hardware comprises all the physical components of a computer (monitors, keyboards, printers, drives etc).
Heading Tags	Heading tags (H1, H2, H3 etc) are standard HTML elements used to define headings and subheadings on a web page. The number indicates the importance, so H1 tags are viewed by the spiders as being more important that the H3 tags. Using targeting key phrases in your H tags is essential for effective SEO.
Heatmap	A data visualisation tool that shows levels of activity on a web page in different colours, with reds and yellows showing the most activity and blues and violets the least.
Hidden Text	A black hat technique where the keywords are invisible to the naked eye as they are the same colour as the page's background. Search engines are not fooled by this unethical technique and sites will be penalised for employing it.
Hit	A hit, though often mistaken for a measure of popularity, is a request from a user's browser to view a particular page or image.
Home Page	The first page of any web site. The home page gives users a glimpse into what your site is about – very much like the contents in a book, or a magazine.
House List	An email database that a company generates itself without purchasing or renting names.
HTML	The abbreviation for HyperText Markup Language, read by web browsers. Certain HTML "tags" are used to structure the information and features within a web page. As an example, HTML emails usually contain graphics and can be interactive.

Hyperlink	A link in a document (electronic) that allows you, once you click on it, to follow the link to the relevant web page.
IIS	Internet Information Services, a web server from Microsoft.
IM	Instant Messaging is a technology that allows its users to communicate in real-time. Essentially your IM system alerts you when a contact on your list is online; you can then initiate a chat session.
Impression Fraud	The act of deliberately generating impressions of an advert without the intention of clicking on the advert. The result is a reduction in click through rate which can affect Quality Score in PPC advertising.
Impressions	The number of times a web page or ad is viewed.
Inbound Link	See "*Backlink*".
Index	The searchable catalogue of documents and pages created by a search engine. Web spiders index web sites with the search engines by scanning or crawling them.
Information Architecture	The layout and structure of a web site, which should be according to information hierarchy and categories.
Internal referrer	A URL that is part of the same web site.
Internal Site Search	A search function specific to a web site.
Internet	A worldwide system of interconnected computer networks; the Internet connects millions of individuals from every corner of the globe.
Internet Explorer	IE – Microsoft's web browser.
Internet Press Release	An element of WebPR, an internet press release is exactly the same as a traditional press release but is released online rather than in print and can be optimised to form part of an SEO strategy.
IP Address	The Internet Protocol (IP) address is a exclusive number which is used to represent every single computer in a network.
ISP	Internet Service Provider – this is the company that is providing you access to the Internet e.g. MWEB, AOL, Yahoo! etc).
Java	A programming language which allows multifaceted and graphical customer applications to be written and then accessed from a web browser.
JavaScript	A popular scripting language that is used on web sites to perform client side actions without requiring full page refreshes. Examples include web analytics for page tagging and page animation.
Junkmail	See Spam.
KEI Analysis	Keyword Effectiveness Indicator. It is designed to measure and quantify the quality and worth of search terms.
Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	A metric that indicates whether a web site is achieving its goals.
Key Phrase	Word or words being optimised for by a web site. Also used to refer to words that are used by users of search engines.
Keyword	A word or words used by a searcher on a search engine. In SEO, keywords are the words that a web site is optimised to rank for, and in PPC, keywords are bid on by advertisers. In online reputation management, a keyword is a term that is used when searching the Internet for mentions.

Keyword Density — This relates to the number of times a keyword/key phrases appear on a web page. This divided by the total number of words that appear on a page gives you a percentage. The higher the better - but not too high - you don't want to be penalised for keyword stuffing.

Keyword Frequency — The number of times a keyword or key phrase appears on a web site.

Keyword Phrase — Two or more words that are combined to form a search term/query - often referred to as keywords. It is usually better to optimise for a phrase rather than a single word as more searches will search for a phrase rather a than word as they want more specific and relevant content.

Keyword Rankings — This term refers to where the keywords/phrases targeted by SEO rank amongst the search engines - if your targeted terms do not appear on the first 3 pages, start worrying.

Keyword Research — The process of researching what searchers are searching for, copy optimisation revolves around the selection of the best keywords/key phrases. There are a multitude of keyword research tools out there, which will help you discover the best possible keywords for which to optimise web sites.

Keyword Stuffing — Repeating keywords/phrases over and over ad nauseum, this is done in the hopes of improving the page's ranking. Search engines penalise sites heavily for keyword stuffing.

Lame-Ass Syndrome (LAS) — This unfortunate yet common syndrome results in sites that will not function without the WWW in the URL; it is caused by System Administrators presenting signs of severe DNS laziness.

Landing Page — The page a user reaches when clicking on a paid or organic search engine listing. The pages that have the most success are those that match up as closely as possible with the users search query.

Landing page — The page intended to identify the beginning of the user experience resulting from a defined marketing effort.

Link — A link is a URL embedded on a web page, if you click on the link you will be taken to that page.

Link Bait — A technique for providing content that attracts links from other web pages.

Link Checker — These tools are used to check your site for broken hyperlinks. Very useful.

Link Exchange — See Banner Exchange.

Link Popularity — A measure of the quantity and quality of other web pages that link to a web site.

Link Rot — When you click on a link and receive an error message or a notification that the web site has been moved. This highly frustrating phenomenon known as link rot is detrimental to SEO as spiders cannot keep up with the changes. This could be solved by a redirect link being inserted.

Linux — An open source operating system based on UNIX. Linux is used to run web servers and desktops.

Load Time — The length of time it takes for a page to open completely in the browser window.

Local Area Network — LAN. A network of workstations sharing a server within a relatively small geographic area, like in an office.

Log Analyser — Software that provides information about a site's visitors, activity statistics, accessed files, click-through paths and other analytical data based on the users behaviour.

Log Files — Text files created on the server each time a click takes place, capturing all activity on the web site.

Marketing Mix — The four elements businesses need to consider for the success of their marketing efforts: Product, Price, Place and Promotion. The focus that is placed on each one is entirely dependant on the goals of the marketing strategy.

Mashup — When content from two or more sources is combined.

Mass Customisation — Dynamically tailoring content for many individuals.

Mentions — In online reputation management, mentions refer to the instances when a selected brand, company or staff members are talked about online, usually by clients or consumers.

Merchant — This is the owner of the product that is being marketed or promoted. Also referred to as "Advertiser".

Meta Data — Information that can be entered about a web page and the elements on it that provide context and relevancy information to search engines; these used to be an important ranking factor.

Meta Description Tag — A short paragraph describing the page content. This summary is usually shown on the SERPs if it contains the search term searched for. The spiders use the meta tag description to determine the topic of the page and the use of targeted key phrases is important here.

Meta Keyword Tag — A list of the words and phrases that are important on a web page, the use of targeted key phrases is important here - but remember no keyword stuffing.

Meta Tags — Meta tags are there to tell the spiders what exactly the web pages are about. It's important that your Meta tags are optimised for the targeted key phrases. Meta tags are made up of meta titles, descriptions and keywords.

Meta-Search Engines — A search tool that will allow a user to conduct a search across two or more search engines and directories. Examples of meta-search engines include Clusty and Dogpile.

Mirror Sites — Duplicates of a site usually found on a different server. These sites are used to trick search engines and are usually considered a Black Hat tactic which the search engines will most often penalize by removing both the mirror and original sites from the index.

Moblog — A blend of the words mobile and weblog. A moblog, consists of content posted to the Internet from a mobile or portable device, such as a cellular phone or PDA. Moblogs generally involve technology which allows publishing from a mobile device.

MSN — MSN Search was developed by Microsoft and comprised a search engine, index, and web crawler. On September 12 2006 MSN Search evolved into MSN Live Search which offers users the ability to search for specific types of information using search tabs that include Web, news, images, music, desktop, local, and Microsoft Encarta.

Multivariate Test — A test used when testing many variables to determine statistically signicant influences on outcomes.

Natural Search	These are the listings generally found on the left hand side in search engines, and are not influenced by direct financial payments. Listings are results based on factors such as keyword relevancy within a web page: SEO is used to boost success. Also see Organic Search.
Navigation	How a web user moves through a web site, and the elements that assist the user.
Netiquette	Like etiquette but on the net, netiquette are the social rules that govern online interactions. An example of a net no-no would be IMing someone in caps (this means you're SHOUTING).
Netizen	A word derived from net and citizen. Unlike a newbie, a netizen is an experienced web user. Someone who has spent a significant (if not disproportionate) time on the web.
Network	A group of two or more computer systems linked together in a LAN or a WAN.
New visitor	A unique visitor who visits the web site for the first time ever in the period of time being analysed.
Newbie	Aka n00b. Fresh blood – someone who is new to the wonderful online world and are often unaware of netiquette. You have to start somewhere, right?
Newsgroup	An online discussion group.
Nofollow Link	Nofollow is an attribute of a hyperlink, indicating that the link is not necessarily endorsed by the web site and ignored by search engine spiders.
Online Press Release	Press release distributed over the Internet. It is aimed at a broader segment of reader including social media, consumers and journalists.
Online Press Room	A part of a web site aimed at providing journalists with pertinent corporate information, such as PR contacts, images and press releases.
Online Reputation	The aggregation of sentiment from mentions of an entity online will give its online reputation.
Open Rate	This is also referred to as the read rate. This is the number of emails that are opened in an email marketing campaign as a proportion of the total emails sent.
Open source	Unlike proprietary software, open source software makes the source code available so that other developers can build applications for the software, or even improve on the software.
OPML	A file containing a list of RSS URLs. Often used for sharing feeds amongst users.
Opt-in	Give permission for emails (or any other direct marketing) to be sent to you.
Opt-out	Also known as unsubscribe - The act of removing oneself from a list or lists so that specified information is no longer received via email.
Organic Search	These are the listings generally found on the left hand side in search engines, and are not influenced by direct financial payments. Listings are results based on factors such as keyword relevancy within a web page: SEO is used to boost success. Also see Natural Search.
Original Referrer	The URL that sent a new visitor to the web site.
ORM	Online reputation management - the understanding and influencing of the perception of an entity online. This entails ensuring that you know what is being said about you, and that you are leading the conversation.
Outbound links	These links will, once clicked on, take users to another site.

Page	Unit of content (so downloads and Flash files can be defined as a page).
Page Exit Ratio	Number of exits from a page divided by total number of page views of that page.
Page Tags	JavaScript files embedded on a web page and executed by the browser.
Page views	The number of times a page was successfully requested.
Page Views Per Visit	The number of page views in a reporting period divided by the number of visits in that same period.
PageRank	PageRank gives a ranking or score to every web page on the Internet based on the number and quality of the page's backlinks, this score is a number out of 10 with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest. Anything above 5 means your site is doing well!
Paid Search	Placing ads for products or services on search engines (listings appear at the top of the page and on the right hand side) and on content sites across the Internet. These ads are typically small snippets of text linked to merchandise pages. See PPC.
Pass on	To share content with another person.
Pass On Rate	The number of times a piece of information or content is forwarded to others.
Pay Per Click	Also PPC - Buying sponsored adverts on search engine results pages and content pages, while only paying for those ads on a performance basis. See Paid Search.
Pay Per Lead	Similar to Pay Per Click, PPL is an advertising payment model in which payment is made on leads not just clicks.
PC	Personal Computer.
Permalink	A unique URL which points to the permanent location of a single blog post and its associated comments and TrackBacks.
Persona	A character used to define a group of users to a web site.
Phishing	A criminal activity where "Phishers" attempt to fraudulently acquire sensitive information, such as passwords and credit card details. Often this is done by masquerading as a party the victim is likely to trust (another person or reputable business) via some form of electronic communication like email, IM or even telephone.
Ping	Packet Internet Groper - a utiltity that verifies a link or a connection to the Internet.
Plug-in	An extension that adds on to the capabilities of a major software package.
Podcasting	Publishing audio programs via the Internet, allowing users to subscribe to a feed of new files. Podcasting enables independent producers to create self-published, syndicated "radio shows". Listeners may subscribe to feeds using "podcatching" software (a type of aggregator), which periodically checks for and downloads new content automatically.
Pop-up	Unrequested window that opens ontop of the currently viewed window.
PPC	Pay Per Click is advertising on search engines where the advertiser pays only for each click on their advert.
Press Release	Also called a news release, this is an electronic or paper document issued to the media with the intention of gaining news coverage. It follows established layout guidelines.
Publisher	See "*Affiliate*".

Purity Point	The 'cleanliness' of a mailing list based on previous mailings. A Purity Point of 0 is the best while 1 is the poorest. This decimal number is based on the number of bounces and their type, compared to the amount of emails sent.
Quality Score	Quality Score is the basis for measuring the quality of keywords and determining minimum PPC bids. This score is calculated by measuring a keyword's click-through rate, ad text relevancy, the keyword's historical performance and the quality of the landing page.
Ranking	In search, ranking is used to describe the relative position of a web page in the SERPs.
Ratio	An interpretation of data captured, a ratio can be between counts, ratios or a ratio and a count metric.
Reach	The number of unique users who have viewed an online advertisement.
Reciprocal Link	This is when a site agrees to link to another site providing that the other site links back to it in return.
Referrer	The referrer is the URL of the web page that a user was at before reaching yours. The server's logs capture referral URLs and store them in their log files. Furthermore, if a user used a search engine to find your web site, the key phrases they used to find your site will be embedded in the referring URL. Intelligent log analyzers can then take this data to track how many visitors originate from each key phrase.
Referrer	The URL that originally generated the request for the current page.
Repeat Visitor	A unique visitor with two or more visits within the time period being analysed.
Reputation Score	This is the single, quantifiable number, generated by BrandsEye; Quirk's Online Reputation Management software. It is derived from an algorithm that takes into account all the relevant mentions of a brand, and the significance that the user has attached to them. This significance is ascertained through the process of tagging each mention to rank across a number of weighted criteria that include sentiment and credibility among others. This score provides a benchmark against the brand's reputation as it fluctuates over time, and also allows comparison between a brand and its competitors.
Return Visitor	A unique visitor who is not a new visitor.
Revenue Share	Commission structure where the affiliate earns a percentage of a sale.
ROAS	This stands for Return on Advertising Spend and indicates the amount of revenue garnered from each referrer. It is calculated by dividing the total amount of revenue garnered by the total amount of revenue spent on the advertising campaign.
Robot.txt	A file written and stored in the root directory of a web site that restricts the search engine spiders from indexing certain pages of the web site.
Robots Exclusion Protocol	A protocol used to indicate to search engine robots which pages should not be indexed.
ROI	Short for return on investment which is the ratio of cost to profit.
RSS	Really Simple Syndication. RSS allows you to receive/ syndicate this information without requiring you to constantly open new pages in your browser.
RSS Reader	This is how you read you RSS Feeds. These desktop news readers or aggregators display new content from the RSS feeds that you have signed up to. Also known as RSS Aggregator.

Scripting Language	A high level language used to control what the user sees on a site or to manipulate the data stored on a server.
Search	Searching is the process of finding information on the Internet using search engines.
Search Engine	A tool for searching the Internet. Users of search engines enter keywords relevant to their search, and the search engine returns results from its databases.
Search Engine Copywriting	The practice of writing content specifically designed for chosen key phrases. This enhances spiderability and results in higher rankings on search engines.
Search Engine Listing	The listing of pages in the results pages (SERPs) of a search engine in response to a search query.
Search Engine Optimisation	See "*SEO*".
Search Engine Submission	Supplying a URL to the search engines to make them aware that the web site and its pages actually exist and alerting them of updated content in the hopes of faster and more regular indexing.
Search Query	Same as Search Term.
Search referrer	The URL has been generated by a search function.
Search Term	Search terms are the words entered by the searcher. search engines will then look for these words in their index and return matching results. Also known as Search Query.
SearchStatus	An awesome toolbar extension for Firefox and Mozilla that allows you to see how any and every web site in the world is performing. Designed by QuirkStar Craig Raw, SearchStatus provides extensive search-related information about any site.
Security Protocols	An abstract or concrete protocol that performs a security-related function and applies cryptographic methods.
Seed	The process of initiating a viral campaign through strategic online placement.
Seed Audience	The initial audience from which viral growth starts.
Segmentation	Is used to filter visitors into distinct groups based on characteristics so as to analyse visits.
SEM	Search Engine Marketing refers to marketing that is related to search. It comprises SEO and PPC.
Sender Alias	The name that is chosen to appear in the sender or from field of an email.
Sender ID	A method used by major ISPs to confirm that emails do originate from the domain from which it claims to have been sent.
SEO	Search Engine Optimisation is the practice that aims to improve a web site's ranking in the search engines for specific keywords.
SERP	Search Engine Results Page - the page that shows the results for a search on a search engine.
Server	A computer that delivers information and software to other computers linked by a network.
Server-side	Transactions that take place on the server.
Session	A session is a lasting connection between the user and a web site.

Single Page Visits	Visits that consist of one page.
Site Architecture	The design and planning of web sites involving the technical, aesthetic and functional elements that combines to create a web site.
Site Refinement	Improving a web sites design and functionality. Also see Web Standards.
Sitemap	On a web site, a page that links to every other page in the web site, and displays these links organised according to the information hierarchy.
SMTP	Simple Mail Transfer Protocol - a protocol for sending messages from one server to another.
Social Bookmarking	A web based service to share Internet bookmarks. Del.icio.us and Digg are examples of social bookmarking services.
Social Currency	A measure of a person's power and influence within a defined social group.
Social media	The media that is published, created and shared by individuals on the Internet, such as blogs, images, video and more.
Social network	In the online sense, this refers to a type of web site model where individual members become part of a broader virtual community.
Soft bounce	The failed delivery of an email due to a deviating reason like an overloaded mail box or a server failure.
Solaris	The operating system used on Sun Systems known for its robustness and scalability.
Spam	Email sent to someone who has not requested to receive it - EVIL!
SPF	Sender policy framework - an extension of SMTP that stops email spammers from forging the "From" fields in an email.
Spider	An automated program that scans or crawls web pages to gather information for search engines.
Splash Page	This is a page, usually animated and containing some kind of variation of the phrase 'click here to enter this site'. These pages are considered detrimental to SEO.
Split Testing	Creating hypothesis and testing by randomly sending visitors to either option in a statistically equal manner, and measuring which has the best conversion rate.
Sponsored Advert	Also known as Pay Per Click (PPC).
Sponsored Links	The paid search results on a SERP.
Subject Line	The title of the email communication. As it is the first element of the communication that will be seen, it needs to be attract attention and entice the user to open the email.
Syndicate	Making content available for distribution among selected clients.
Tag	In social media, tags indicate or label what content is about.
Taxonomy	Classification and division into ordered categories, usually hierarchical. In social media, taxonomy can refer to the categorization of content on the Internet.
Text Emails	Text emails or plain text emails do not contain graphics or any kind of markup.
Third Party Cookie	Some web sites store information in a small text file on your computer called a cookie. A third party cookie either originates from, or is sent to, a web site different from the one you are currently visiting. These third-party cookies can either be persistent, meaning they remain on the system after your session, or temporary, meaning they are removed from your system.

Title Tags	The (preferably optimised) title text you select will appear in the top bar of a user's browser when they view the web page. Title tags should be a brief and accurate description of the page's content.
Touch Point	Every instance the consumer comes into contact with a brand.
TrackBack	A mechanism used in a blog that shows a list of entries in other blogs that refer to a post on the first blog.
Tracking	Measuring the effectiveness of a campaign by collecting and evaluating statistics.
Tracking Codes	A piece of code that tracks a user's interaction and movement through a web site.
Traditional Media	Newspapers, magazines, television and publishing houses are the realm of traditional media.
Traffic	This refers to the visitors that visit a web site.
Unique Forwarders	This refers to the number of individuals who forwarded a specific email on.
Unique Visitors	The number of individual people visiting the web site one or more times within a period of time. Each individual is only counted once.
Unix	The most common operating system for servers on the Internet.
URL	Uniform (or Universal) Resource Locator - the unique address of a web page on the Internet. For example, http://www.gottaquirk.com.
URL Rewriting	Presenting search-friendly URLs without question marks, and rewriting them on the server in their standard format suitable for use in querying dynamic content.
Usability	Usability is a measure of how easy it is for a user to complete a desired task. Sites with excellent usability fare far better than those that are difficult to use.
USP	Unique selling point (or proposition) - what makes your offering different to your competitors'.
Visit Duration	The length of time in a session.
Visit or Session	An interaction by an individual with a web site consisting of one or more page views within a specified period of time.
Visit referrer	The URL that originated a particular visit.
Visitor	An individual visiting a web site that is not a search engine spider or a script.
Vlog	A video based log, also called a video log.
W3C	World Wide Web Consortium, an organisation which oversees the Web Standards project. www.w3c.org.
Web Analytics	A software tool that collects data on web site users based on metrics to measure its performance.
Web Browser	This is what allows you to browse the World Wide Web – examples of browsers include Internet Explorer, Safari and Firefox (Quirk's number 1 browser).
Web Design	The layout and structure of a web page. Web design is not solely about making the page look pretty, it's also about functionality and usability.
Web Server	A remote third-party computer whose job it is to deal with requests coming from web browsers.
Web Standards	Best practices for building web sites. The web standards are issued by the W3C.

Web2.0	The network as a platform for content and functionality. This includes delivering and allowing multiple users access to dynamic web applications and content; online collaboration, generation and distribution of data and a richer interactive user-experience through web site applications that enhance value and ease-of-use. Web2.0 is often considered to include RIAs (Rich Internet Applications) built in AJAX, Flash, Java applets or ActiveX.
WebPR	Public relations on the web. Online press releases and article syndication promote brands as well as drive traffic to sites.
White Hat	A term coined by the SEO industry to describe ethical SEO tactics. See "*Grey Hat*" and "*Black Hat*".
White List	A list of accepted email addresses that an ISP, a subscriber or other email service provider allows to deliver messages regardless of spam filter settings.
Wide-Area Network	(WAN). A network of computers that are relatively far apart and are connected via telephone lines or radio waves.
Widget	A window or a text box for user interaction. An area on a page hosted by a third party, generally used for a small application or syndicated content.
Wiki	A wiki is an online collaborative tool that allows numerous users to access and edit web page content freely and creatively. It supports links to web sites, images and text and can be used for a host of functions, including project planning and document building.
Word of Mouse	Word of mouth is sometimes referred to as word of mouse online. Online gossip, spread through blogs, newsgroup postings, IMing and email.
Word of Mouth	Information that is passed between people, as opposed to messages from a company to people.
WordTracker	WordTracker is an online tool that helps web site owners and search engine marketers identify keywords and phrases that are relevant to their or their client's business and most likely to be used as queries by search engine visitors.
WWW	The World Wide Web is the complete collection of files written in various mark-up languages on the Internet.
XML	eXtensible Markup Language - a standard used for creating structured documents. XML promises more efficient and organized delivery of data over the internet. XHTML is the XML version of HTML.
Yahoo!	One of the most popular search engines on the net, Yahoo! began its life as the bookmark lists of two graduate students, David Filo and Jerry Yang. Their bookmark list just never seemed to stop growing, and today Yahoo! serves billions of page views worldwide.
Zone-file	In computer networking, a zone file is a database element of the domain name system (DNS) used by BIND and other DNS server software. A zone file typically contains information that defines mappings between domain names and IP addresses and can also contain reverse mappings which can resolve IP addresses into domain names.

17. contributors

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