



The B2B Marketer's Guide to Search Engine Optimization

Increase Visibility and Increase Profits

No one wants to be invisible - no company does either. In this era of search engine marketing, it's not only embarrassing to have no corporate presence on Google, Yahoo!, and relevant vertical search engines, it is a looming threat to the B2B marketer's job.

Enterprises that fail to show up in the "organic listings" on the key search engines run the risk of being considered irrelevant by their prospects and even raising questions of confidence among their existing clients.

Forward-looking B2B marketers have recognized the clear case for "balancing their portfolio" of Internet marketing investments by pairing paid search with search engine optimization (SEO). As industry studies show organic listings are 70-80% more likely to produce a click-through than a paid listing.¹ Acknowledging the cost-effectiveness and wider coverage associated with such approaches, marketers have invested in strategic and disciplined SEO programs that build on their particular business strengths and objectives.

They have gone beyond mere visibility to ensure that Internet search engines are a powerful marketing channel - one that can drive not only awareness and traffic, but qualified leads or sales as well. Smart marketers are now capitalizing on the growing potential of SEO to cultivate new clients and build profitable relationships.

Must Read Sections:

[The 3 Key Benefits of an SEO Program](#)

[Case in Point](#)

¹ Greenspan, Robyn, *ClickZ Stats*, "Searching for Balance," April 30, 2004.

Market Drivers: Paid and Organic Listings

While marketing expenditures in older media decelerates, online spending is expected to rise to \$2.9 billion this year, according to market research firm eMarketer.²

Consider this. More than 50% of Google's target advertisers are B2B. Nearly 38% of Yahoo's advertisers are defined as B2B. What is attracting them? Studies suggesting that nearly 64% of search engine users are searching for business information.³

US B2B Media Spending, 2005-2010 (millions, % increase over prior year and % share)

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total spending*	\$22,285	\$23,688	\$25,131	\$26,740	\$28,358	\$30,172
Online ad spending	\$1,537	\$1,951	\$2,431	\$2,912	\$3,410	\$3,939
Online ad spending growth	24.9%	26.9%	23.7%	20.7%	17.1%	15.5%
Online ad spending % of total	6.9%	8.2%	9.6%	10.9%	12.0%	13.1%

Note: *includes B2B magazines, trade shows and exhibitions, online advertising and online content & communities
 Source: Veronis Suhler Stevenson, PQ Media, AdScope, Agricom, American Business Media, BPA International, Center for Exhibition Research, IMS/TheAuditor, PERQ, SRDS, TNS Media Intelligence/CMR, Tradeshow Week, September 2006; eMarketer calculations, November 2006

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In search marketing, there are two types of presence on the search engines:

Paid listings - also referred to as Pay Per Click (PPC) or sponsored links - are obtained through bidding on ad placements for one's products, services or materials keywords on search engines.

Organic listings - also referred to as natural or free listings - that have been obtained due to favorable rankings by a particular search engine.

To grasp the growing importance of organic search in the B2B arena, it's worth considering several key trends now influencing the online marketing environment.

- **Paid Search Costs are Increasing.** The cost of customer acquisition continues to rise for companies investing in paid search - reaching levels that many marketers can no longer absorb.⁴ Why are the costs rising? Mainly due to competition. Recognizing the power of search engine marketing, companies are bidding aggressively for key search terms - driving costs up in the process.
- **Paid and Organic Listings are Reinforcing Each Other.** Research has demonstrated that paid listings are most effective when they are reinforced by related organic listings - and vice versa. When a prospective customer sees a range of ads or information about a particular business in a single place that individual is increasingly likely to click on the related links and explore the content.
- **Companies aren't Engaging Prospects at All Stages of the Buying Cycle through Current Search Engine Marketing Efforts.** B2B prospects tend to spend a great deal of time gathering information on the Web - conducting due diligence - especially during the consideration phase of the buy cycle. Research has shown that is increasingly important to have high visibility in the organic rankings during this phase because organic listings tend to get clicked on far more than paid listings. Given the relatively high stakes and high costs of a decision, they are unlikely to make a decision unilaterally. Typically, prospects must be touched multiple times in a buying cycle before a deal is consummated. This creates a need for visible placement in both paid and organic listings.

² Phillips, Lisa, eMarketer study, B2B Marketing Online: Trends and Tactics, 2007.

³ Zillmer, Nicole and Bill Furlong, Search Channel white paper, The Emerging Opportunity for Vertical Search, May 2006.

⁴ Search Engine Marketing Professional Association (SEMPO) survey, The State of Search Engine Marketing, April 25, 2006.

Confronting Today's Search Engine Marketing Challenges

B2B Marketers that stand to gain from effective search engine marketing are often struggling with an array of key problems or challenges. Among them:

The Visibility Problem.

This problem emerges when a company has no presence in the search engines relative to important keyword terms and phrases. When an accounting software company does not appear after the search string "accounting software" or a digging equipment manufacturer is nowhere to be seen with the word "excavators," there may be a problem. Typically, this problem is going to be felt most severely by the B2B marketer when the CEO inevitably asks, "Where are we? Are we on the first page?"

While it may be embarrassing not to be ranked on the search engines, this visibility is also taxing in terms of brand awareness. If prospective clients don't see a company ranked, they may perceive that it is not a strong player in the relevant category. Like large industry trade shows that have long been part of the B2B marketing mix, one's absence in the search engines may undermine credibility with existing customers, particularly when other sellers do appear in a search involving a relevant product category.

Without visibility on the search engines, it's almost certain that opportunities are being lost. Sales conversions ultimately depend on both market awareness and a steady flow of traffic. Search engine invisibility means prospects with a problem are often unaware of a potential product or solution provider's existence. There are numerous examples of companies that have launched new businesses with the search engines as their only demand generation vehicle and built multi-million dollar businesses.

The Relevance Problem.

B2B customers tend to have extended buying cycles, and are engaged in complex and carefully considered decisions that typically involve multiple people. The challenge for B2B marketers revolves around serving up appropriate messaging and landing page content for the different stages of this cycle.

Prospects for the accounting software firm's products might begin their search with terms like "audit," "general ledger" or "Sarbanes-Oxley" - some immediate problem. Only later, when they are prepared to consider solutions, will they search "accounting software." The marketer's challenge is to attract attention at every key decision point.

The ROI Problem.

Due to the long sales (buying) cycle associated with B2B, it is difficult to show a clear cause and effect relationship between a particular search and particular deal. As discussed, prospects are liable to search multiple terms at different stages of the buying cycle as they first seek to better understand their own problem, and, then explore potential solutions. It is also necessary to nurture the relationship along the way, which may involve e-mailing and an inside sales team to follow the online inquiry forward.

Return on investment becomes a problem for B2B marketers if money is flying out the door for paid search and an insufficient number of deals can be attributed to those marketing expenses. They need cost effective means of increasing lead generation - and lead nurturing - if they are to successfully meet their objectives while they build out a framework for measuring their eventual lead closure rate.

What most companies in the B2B space have found is that organic listings are more likely than paid listings to attract prospects at the early stages of the buying cycle. Links to insightful content in the organic listings will encourage prospects to visit a company's Website - and even provide contact information in exchange for something of perceived value (such as a white paper, a research report or an event invitation).

In order to meet their objectives for measurable performance, B2B marketers will need to have a balanced portfolio of online investments - enabling them to cost effectively appear in both the paid and organic listings. The solution that will enable them to achieve high rankings and more relevant click-thrus to their website in organic search is *search engine optimization*.

Most Relevant Search Result (Determined by % of Search Engine Users)		
Property	Organic	Paid
Google	72.3%	27.7%
Yahoo	60.8%	39.2%
MSN	28.8%	71.2%
AOL	50%	50%
Source: iProspect, Survey Sampling International, WebSurveyor, and Stratagem Research		

THE 3 KEY BENEFITS OF AN SEO PROGRAM

Companies that engage in a strategic and disciplined approach to SEO are seeking three core benefits from such a program:

- **Increased Visibility.** B2B marketers have recognized the need to enhance their presence in the search engines - a core gateway to brand awareness, consideration, and, ultimately, lead generation. By ensuring one is effectively indexed by the key search engines, one can increase visibility and awareness in the organic, unpaid portion of the search engine listings.
- **Increased Qualified Traffic.** Visibility leads to traffic - by moving prospects from the search engines to a relevant Website or landing page, companies gain the opportunity to interact with them and turn them into qualified leads.
- **Increased Conversions.** Once prospects hit a Website, they are looking for sources of value. By providing relevant value at the right time, companies can generate a series of conversions. Whether the conversion is an opt-in registration for a white paper, a request for a demo, a sales inquiry, or an actual purchase online, marketing generates the activity that will load the sales funnel and drive profitable revenue.

With the customized use of a Web analytics tool, SEO programs can be tracked and measured. They lend themselves to clear measurement of marketing impact and return on investment through conversion analysis of traffic to leads to sales. Indeed, they enable B2B marketers to build a powerful pipeline, support the sales force and accelerate the revenue generation process.

CASE IN POINT:

Large Commercial Financial Services Organization

A large commercial finance lender vividly demonstrates the power of search engine optimization. This organization, sought assistance from ClearGauge to achieve improved non-paid (organic) listing rankings on search engines. The unit, which targets corporate executives and influencers seeking corporate financing and loans \$10 million in size or greater, was looking for a cost-effective way to enhance lead generation through search engine marketing.

Specifically, this client sought to effectively identify the keywords most salient to its business - optimizing its website structure and content to improve rankings on these critical terms.

Having conducted a thorough assessment of the website and researched keyword opportunities, ClearGauge determined the greatest potential for site traffic improvement in various specific areas, and designed and implemented a comprehensive search engine optimization program. The program included:

- Keyword List Creation and Assessment of Current Website Rankings
- Website Content & Structure Analysis
- Link Referral Assessment and Program
- Non Visible Website Element/Formatting and Hidden Code Assessment
- Paid Inclusion/XML/Trusted Feed Need Assessment
- Optimization Recommendations and Action Plan
- SEO Copywriting
- Registration with Search Engines & Directories

The results were clear and impressive. ClearGauge's alignment of relevant content, coding, and link referrals to high potential keywords significantly improved its client's performance. The program has resulted in a 333% increase of organic "first place" listings, a 287% increase of listings in the "top five", and a 355% increase of the listings in the "top 10". The increased visibility has resulted in a remarkable 750% lift in qualified website visitor traffic.

Still not convinced? Evaluate the Opportunity Cost

If you're still not sure if optimizing your website to be more relevant on the search engines is really going to have an impact on your revenue, calculate the opportunity cost. The example below, a software company is considering if it should invest in search engine optimization by examining two keyword phrases that are relevant to their target market segments. Using a combination of the Google Adwords tool to gauge the volume of searches per month on those terms, engine share, the organization's benchmark data (click-through rate, average conversion rate, and average transaction amount), and the equation below, you can quickly see the significant opportunity that can come from ranking well on those key products and services.

In this particular example, we chose a relatively low product price point. For many B2B marketers with much higher product or service price points, the opportunity lost from not ranking well on keyword terms and phrases is even greater.

# of people searching for your keywords per day	X	Engine Share (Google – 60%)	X	Expected Click-Through Rate*	X	Average Conversion Rate*	X	Average Transaction Amount
Example for "Emulator Mainframe"								
1,827 searches/month	X	60%	X	3%	X	10%	X	\$40K = \$131,544 opportunity/month
Example for "Terminal Emulator"								
15,078 searches/month	X	60%	X	3%	X	10%	X	\$178 = \$4,830 opportunity/month

* The examples feature assumptive numbers for these areas.

Success Criteria: What to Look for in a SEO Solution Provider

While some companies may decide to use internal resources to embark on their SEO programs, most companies will recognize the value of working with a specialized firm that is deeply experienced in the intricacies, opportunities, and pitfalls of search engine optimization. What criteria should B2B marketers look for in a search engine marketing provider?

- **Business Mindset.** Look for a solution provider that can build an SEO program within the context of your core business objectives. Your solution provider should take an analytical approach to value the pipeline and correlate this activity to downstream closures and sales.
- **Deep Expertise in B2B Marketing.** There are huge differences between B2B and B2C search marketing. Marketers need to ensure their SEO partners have specialized - and delivered results - in the B2B arena where decision cycles are extended and decisions are complex.
- **Deep Understanding of *Your* Business.** Ensure your solution provider will invest the time and resources to understand your business including its strategy and objectives, strengths and limitations.
- **Strong Client Successes.** The best way to ensure that your prospective solution provider is reputable and respected is through client references and testimonials.
- **Ethical SEO Practices.** Beware of nefarious or unethical practices that can harm your company's reputation. Examine the solution provider's client list to obtain relevant references that can provide confidence.

These are the success criteria that have enabled many B2B marketers to successfully leverage the capabilities of SEO solution providers. Take these criteria to heart and you will be in a position to identify and engage the right partner for your objectives.

About ClearGauge

ClearGauge helps companies continuously improve their websites to get better business results. As an online marketing services provider, ClearGauge's data-driven methodologies and approach help you take action to improve your customers' and prospects' website experience to deliver quantifiable, bottom line results. Whether you are seeking to grow your team's skills or have us manage it for you, ClearGauge offers you flexible options to work with us.

ClearGauge is recognized as a top interactive agency by B2B Magazine for its focused and disciplined approach to delivering ROI through strategic online marketing.

If you would like to discuss your company's SEO challenges and opportunities, contact one of our senior client specialists today at (312) 923-7604 or visit www.cleargauge.com .