



on: SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING

The phone book is dead. It's a sad truth phone directory publishers might not tell you, but we can't remember the last time we used a phone book for anything other than kindling for a fire or a booster seat.

If consumers recall traditional advertising, they no longer call or visit a business. Today's digitally conscious consumers are plugged in 24/7 and research shows they prefer to go online for research. Additionally, it is a fact that consumers are increasingly turned off by most forms of advertising – they despise being sold to, and see it as a monumental waste of time.

So how then, if traditional media such as phone books aren't working, do you make sure that people can find you or look you up? One of the most important and cost-effective ways is through Search Engine Marketing (SEM).

SEM is defined by Wikipedia.com (you didn't think I was going to pull Webster's dictionary off the shelf, did you?) as a set of marketing methods to increase the visibility of a Web site in search engine results pages (SERPs). In plain English, it's all the stuff you do to get to the top of search engines where people will see you.

Unfortunately, there's no magic bullet for conquering SEM. It's a complex process that has lots of complexities; however, conquering two main categories (or paying a professional to handle it) will get you started:

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the art of adjusting the makeup of your Web site so that it comes up high

in organic (unpaid) search listings. Much of this is done as the Web site is being built – in copy, page titles and meta tags. But increasingly, it's crucial to improve site navigation, name pages and images properly, and increase relevant outbound and inbound links. It's a constantly evolving process and usually requires monthly maintenance and tweaking by a professional to maintain high rankings.

Pay Per Click (PPC) Advertising can be wildly successful and very cost effective. It involves purchasing keywords and phrases that people use when searching online for your product or service so that you come up at the top and to the right of unpaid search listings. These are extremely effective because unlike traditional ads, these are directly related to the needs and wants of the consumer.

The challenge is determining which keywords and keyphrases are going to get you the best results for the money you're willing to spend. Through PPC advertising, you can achieve qualified leads, and you only pay if your ad entices someone to click through to your site. New technologies available to agencies like ours even allow us to target geographically and track phone calls from Web sites.

So next time you're preparing your yearly marketing budget, ask yourself whether you're taking advantage of this crucial new medium that's helping customers everywhere find exactly what they're seeking. If not, perhaps you should consider dumping some of those print ads and phone book listings and writing SEM into your plan. Get on the bus now, before your competitors beat you to it.

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