

# Marketing trends click into oodles of Googles

Anna Chisholm

THE race to appear No. 1 in search engine results has pushed business owners to look further than traditional marketing techniques.

Search engine optimisation (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM) campaigns are the latest marketing tools for big business as well as the smaller players.

Recent research showed consumers were relying more on search engines when choosing a service or product.

Kirsty Keane marketing manager at Ciao Bella Travel began using a US-based SEO service four months after launching her online business in November 2006.

"We had no online marketing experience, limited time and staff... we wanted professional help for better results," she says.

"We began using Reload Media for SEM services 18 months ago. Initially the return on investment for ads placed in Google Adwords was \$4 per dollar spent and now it's \$10.

"Online marketing is a more powerful result because customers are more likely to purchase after seeing the ad on Google rather than radio."

Ms Keane says with SEM and paid ads you see results faster but SEO is a long-term investment.

"It took around six months for us to see great results through SEO and gain ranking in searches," she says.

"It's been very successful. We now have a conversion rate of 3.5 to 5 per cent - the amount of customers who book travel out of the number who enter the website. In the early days it was around the 1 per cent mark.

"There's no point driving traffic to a website if the content isn't relevant or easy to navigate through."

Reload Media managing director Llew Jury says a small business should start with Google to establish their online ranking, then Facebook, Twitter and other forms of online marketing.

"We track the time of day words are most searched to convert the best quality traffic to the website and make cost savings for our clients," he says.

"We have the flexibility to work with web designers to optimise the website to come up higher on the

## Google tips help build good site

Henning Dorstewitz

IF your pages contain useful information, you'll attract many visitors and entice webmasters to link to your site, and boost your site's reputation in our index.

Google's Webmaster Guidelines spell out best website practices, information on what can lead to a suspension from Google and post tips and strategies to Webmaster blogs.

Let the search engine optimisation agency show you what kind of track record they have and what they've done for other companies.

Hidden words or hidden links are not acceptable. White letters on white background are irrelevant to a user but influences the search engines or other websites.

Flooding copy with too many words may be good for the short term for appearing in the search but it may not be user friendly.

Henning Dorstewitz is Google Australia's spokesman

search result pages. For a small business you're looking at an average of between \$490-\$890 per month for SEO services depending on how many words or combined words you are targeting."

Google Australia spokesman Henning Dorstewitz recommends small businesses focus on content, accessibility and listing locally to be search-engine friendly.

"Having original, compelling content on your website is the best way to attract both visitors and search engines by including video, audio, pictures and user testimonials," he says.

Google Adwords product specialist Kate Conroy says a large portion of businesses haven't got themselves online because they're worried about doing something wrong.

"Online marketing campaigns are easy to adjust along the way and cost of change is low."

She says the first step for a small business to take part in SEO is to get listed on Google maps.



**BEST SELLER:** Kirsty Keane, of Ciao Bella Travel, says customers are more likely to purchase after seeing an ad on Google rather than hearing one on radio. Picture: Nathan Richter

"It's easy to create your own SEM campaign using Google Adwords. You can create an account online and list the key

words to recognise your website. It costs \$10 to open an account (and) after that you pay for each click."

## No need to be shy in chasing up payments

THERE are still difficult times in many sectors of the economy.

Every sale is hard earned and businesses are watching everything they spend. Surveys are still showing that many businesses are cautious in the short term and the interest rate rise on Melbourne Cup day will not do anything to boost confidence.

While it's important to manage your own costs and watch how you spend your cash, it is equally important that you manage the cash coming in the door - i.e. getting customers to pay on time.

The biggest thing I observe with my clients is their reluctance to chase up outstanding invoices.

My advice is simple - be more aggressive. If a large cash payment is overdue, get on the phone the

Jason Daniels

Straight talking

next day. Find out what's going on.

You still may not receive payment for a few weeks, but if people know you're serious you could rise up their payment list.

Make no mistake. Many businesses have priority accounts. I can tell you from experience that accountants are often low on that list for payment.

I appreciate it's not easy asking, especially if you have built up a relationship. That's why I suggest

to clients that they use someone who doesn't have a sales or supply relationship in this role.

There's a point where you start to withhold supplies or services until you get paid. As a rule of thumb I wouldn't supply anything once they hit their credit limit, or if they aren't at that point yet, after 90 days without a payment - but use your judgment.

Do you feel the customer is delaying payment because they don't have the money? If you think yes, then stop supplying them.

I also recommend to my clients that they consider accepting credit card payments. That way they can delay payment, and you get your money quicker. But factor in the cost because, on average,

you'll lose between 2 to 3 per cent.

Another option that works for repeat customers or subscribers with relatively low amounts is to set-up automatic direct systems that allow you to debit the client's account as services are provided.

This can be a very useful way to ensure that payments don't get behind.

You may like to offer an incentive for early payment. But, again, do the sums to make sure you aren't out of pocket.

Finally, you should invoice immediately services are provided or a shipment is made. Don't wait till the end of the month.

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## Dos

**DO** practice safe search engine optimisation. Avoid cheap offshore SEO providers - statistically they practice spamming, content masking and doorway pages.

**DO** be strategic. Work out which key words you want to rank for and make sure there is content on the website with these keywords.

**DO** get into blogging. A regularly updated blog enables a conversation between the reader and Google to take place.

**DO** take advantage of available tools. Use Google Analytics (a free tool) to track success of SEO - it enables you to analyse key word rankings, time spent on site and bounce rates.

## Don'ts

**DON'T** get into bed with an SEO business unless you know it well.

**DON'T** rush it. Quality SEO services take time. If a provider is promising superfast results, chances are they can't be trusted.

**DON'T** flood copy with key words. Include key words but don't overdo it - flooding web copy attracts penalties.

**DON'T** inflate inbound links. Avoid trying to artificially inflate links to your site too quickly.

**DON'T** fall for false claims. No one can guarantee the position of a keyword. Never use a company that guarantees you No.1 on Google.

Source: Reload Media / Llew Jury

## business owner

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