

The 7 Cardinal Sins of B2B Search Engine Marketing

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As a B2B lead generation tool, search engine marketing (SEM) is all the rage – everyone wants a piece of the pie. Unfortunately, countless companies lose time and money trying to cash in on the alluring promises of this marketing tool because they commit one or more critical SEM mistakes.

Executives need the simple, practical advice that follows to determine if vendors will succeed or fail. If you're thinking about making a go at search engine marketing, specifically pay-per-click advertising (PPC), familiarize yourself with the solutions for these pitfalls. If you've already launched a search marketing campaign, take a closer look to be sure you're not guilty of these seven all-too-common -- but infrequently discussed -- sins of B2B search marketing.

Sin #1 - Not Establishing a Clear and Realistic Goal

Just because pay-per-click advertising is somewhat new and mysterious to a lot of B2B executives, they tend to treat it differently than they would a traditional sales or marketing spend. Too often dollars are entrusted so someone can “dabble” or “test the waters” without goals, budgets or any definition of failure or success.

All businesses are different, but at the risk of oversimplifying things, I'd like to propose that every company adopt one of the following goal statements (you fill in the values that are right for you):

1. “It currently costs us an average of \$500 to generate a qualified sales opportunity. Our goal is to use pay-per-click advertising to equal or beat that, while at the same time freeing up our sales people.”

Or something like this:

2. “We can afford to pay up to \$ XXX for a qualified sales lead.”

Now, the trick here is to be realistic. It undermines your whole strategy and serves no one if you say you can afford to pay \$350 but it's currently costing you \$1,200. Don't underestimate your current cost of lead generation.

If it's difficult to come up with a goal similar to the ones outlined above, then, as a last resort, try something like this:

“Our least effective sales and marketing program last year cost us \$1,500 and produced zero leads.”

One of the great things about PPC, assuming you do it correctly, is that it gives CFOs and VPs of Sales a measurable and quantifiable baseline of what it actually costs to generate a sales opportunity. It's not uncommon for B2B

companies to first successfully adopt pay-per-click advertising and then begin using it as the standard by which all of their current and traditional programs are measured.

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Sin #2 - Viewing Search Engine Marketing as a Temporary Tactic

Too many companies treat SEM as a novelty tactic that they can put a little time and money into with hopes that it catches fire and works. While it's not uncommon to get a few early wins with a little luck, to take a short term approach is a critical mistake.

You'll find yourself consistently at a disadvantage, and steadily lagging behind your competition, if you don't add an effective - and evolving - search marketing channel to your business development mix. Am I saying it should take up the majority of your budget? Or that it will be your biggest producer of new business? No. But it should absolutely become a perennial part of your mix.

Sin #3 - Not Having Basic Fundamental Sales and Marketing Elements in Place

If your sales and marketing team doesn't have, or can't come up with, the basic elements of a successful direct marketing campaign - things like a clearly defined value proposition, good creative content, a compelling offer, etc. - DO NOT start pay-per-click advertising. You're just not ready.

One of my colleagues describes PPC as "the fastest way to accelerate and expose what's already true about your sales and marketing process (emphasizing the entire process)." This is incredibly insightful and CFOs and CEOs everywhere should stand up and take notice. Not only are you likely overpaying for sales opportunities, you're also missing the opportunity to pinpoint the weakest link in your marketing and prospecting process.

Sin # 4 - Not Performing Adequate Preliminary Research

Are you clear on all the different terms that people are actively using to find offerings like yours throughout the buying cycle? There are innumerable tools and data widely available to give you a general idea of what phrases you should be pursuing - and a general idea of what it will cost to play in that space.

As with any marketing program, a little research and strategy goes a long way toward success. Unfortunately, because it's so easy to get started with PPC, I find that many companies rush into it without doing their homework – then wonder why their campaign didn't succeed.

Sin #5 - Unwillingness to “Lose it All” In Order to “Know Without a Doubt”

Because it takes as little as \$5 to get started with pay-per-click, and no minimum budget, a lot of companies will ease into a campaign. But – this is the wrong way to go about it. You need to be willing to invest some money – and lose it – for your campaign to be successful.

As scary as this may sound, you should expect to invest about \$10,000 over a 90-day period to make a PPC campaign really worth your while. Granted, there are instances where this may not be appropriate or even possible. But, assuming you already have marketing strategies in place and you're already spending \$10,000, you should definitely challenge yourself to make PPC work for you. If you're not really comfortable spending this kind of money, and possibly losing it, stick with your current strategies. I've found that a lot of my clients are only spending \$250- \$500 in clicks, which is usually an indication they're under-optimizing PPC. Of course there are some instances, in highly niche markets, where there just isn't a whole lot of quality traffic to be bought.

The strategy for utilizing PPC should be to **learn about and prove that PPC will work for your business as soon as possible (give it at least 90 days)** so that you can embrace it or walk away. Either way, you win. Worst case, you'll have all kinds of great data as proactive and targeted people evaluate your best message and offer. The lessons learned and the research gained are worth many times what you will have paid for clicks.

Sin # 6 - Not Being Diligent about Testing and Refining

Unlike traditional outbound advertising and marketing programs, where you have to wait weeks and sometimes months to gauge results, PPC advertising is fast and furious. Data comes in at warp speed - in real time - and companies that don't respond quickly tend to pay higher costs with fewer results. In general, if you aren't monitoring and refining your process daily (several times a day in competitive markets), you're likely not putting in enough effort to see optimum results.

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Sin #7 - Not Putting the Experts On It

Pay-per-click advertising isn't rocket science. In fact, companies like Google and Yahoo make it as simple as absolutely possible for you to begin using and succeeding with their tools.

However, it does take a lot of time, and it takes a good bit of experience, wisdom and fiscal aptitude to make PPC work for you. It's not realistic to expect someone in your organization that is not trained or experienced to successfully run your campaign. And if they are working in a silo, with no perspective as to how other campaigns are performing, how would they know what true success (or failure) looked like? They may give up too early, or stay in the game too long.

Having an inexperienced person manage your paid search campaign is like putting a novice on the floor of the NASDAQ and expecting him or her to survive. It's not realistic given they are competing with better equipped, more experienced, and savvy people. If you're going to have a go at this internally, make sure your designated person has a good handle on the medium *before* handing over your budget. And of course, make sure you're measuring the number of opportunities/website conversions for the dollars spent. That way you've got a number you can try and beat either internally or with outside help.

Conclusion

Don't let wasted time and money be your penance for committing one – or all – these sins. While it's tempting to jump into a campaign, especially with all the hype about SEM, you should approach it with as much, if not more, consideration and thoughtfulness as any of your other sales and marketing spends. A little research can set you straight on the path to SEM heaven. No doubt, get in - but get in smart!



Author Bio

Todd Miechiels serves as an Internet marketing steward and consultant to several B2B companies and agencies. Todd uses a variety of tactics and strategies to measurably improve the volume and quality of sales opportunities generated from Internet marketing investments. His core competencies include search engine marketing, visitor conversion, online PR, automated lead nurturing, and Web analytics. He is a nationally recognized speaker and author, and B2B Internet marketing strategist. For more information about Todd Miechiels, visit www.miechiels.com or his blog, www.sowgro.com