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SEM: how it really works...

Internet is great, internet is wonderful. With a minimum effort you can get your information in a jiffy to your target group. Just put it on your website, and done you are. Unfortunately, you are not the only player on the internet, putting your site at risk of getting lost in the crowd. So the key question is, how do you get your information to stand out among the rest? Or how do you best get your message across?

On average, 70% of the visitors of a website are coming from search engines like Google or Yahoo. Therefore, knowing how search engines work and how you can use that knowledge for marketing purposes gives you a head start. Search Engine Marketing (SEM) is a form of internet marketing. SEM helps you to create more visibility for your website and hereby increase the number of visitors. In large, SEM consists of two main tools: Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Search Engine Advertising (SEA). Knowledge of both tools (SEO and SEA) can be of great help to you when positioning your company on the internet.

SEO is more than just a list of the technical requirements for a website. It is a philosophy of web aesthetics and text which should work to increase your number of visitors. Search engine results are to be divided into two types of listings: those that are paid for, which are usually distinguished as “sponsored links”, and those that are free, usually distinguished as “organic, natural listings”.

Natural search engine listings are shown in the non-sponsored section of the search results. Reaching top positions on your most important keywords in the Search Engine Results Page (or SERP) will guarantee lots of traffic and best of all, it’s free! Of course, since it’s free, the competition is enormous. Since most search engine visitors are finding what they need within the top five results, it’s needless to say that fighting millions of other pages is very hard and sometimes even impossible, certainly on your most important key words.

A more exact science, however, is visibility via paid listings or via a search engine advertising programme. Basically, keyword buying is search advertising via a Pay-Per-Click (PPC) system. Listings are guaranteed to appear in response to particular search terms, with higher ranking typically obtained by paying more than other advertisers. However, you only pay for clicks on your ads, not for views. The greatest benefit of PPC campaigns is that you can determine exactly which keywords from your website you want to appear in the Search Engine Results Page (SERP).



SEA: no miracle solution

Although SEA seems to be only a matter of defining and buying the right keywords, one shouldn't underestimate its power. If implemented properly, you will notice a substantial increase in the number of qualitative visitors on your site. We emphasise here the quality of these visitors, not just their quantity. SEA has the unique ability to attract a well targeted audience to your website, at the lowest possible cost.

SEA: how to...

SEA is a marketing project as any other. Therefore, defining goals is the first step. Goals can be: increasing subscriptions to a newsletter, supplying information, selling a product, etc. Determining these goals is essential to setting up the marketing campaign, coming up with a budget and determining the time span of the campaign. In a next phase, it is necessary to create text variations and keywords for each landing page. A landing page is the first page that your visitors see after clicking on the advertisement. Normally there are several landing pages on a site, each referring to a specific subject and message. Defining the right combination of keyword/ad/landing pages is the key to success. After launching the campaign, monitoring its effectiveness is crucial. Where needed, keyword pricing should be adjusted. This process can save a lot of money since an optimal balance needs to be found between attracting a maximum amount of visitors and the position of your ads.

SEA doesn't stop when a visitor clicks on your ad. It goes further to make sure that your acquired visitors continue doing what you want them to do. This can be: buying a product, subscribing to a newsletter, printing out check lists, viewing an animation, etc. And even then, you are not quite finished. A continuous ad words follow-up is essential to keep achieving maximum results. During a campaign, there are endless chances to reach your target audience. By implementing permanent follow-up, you ensure that you don't miss out. Failure to adequately monitor your campaign can pollute your visitor quality and cause you to pay too much for your keywords or miss open goal opportunities.

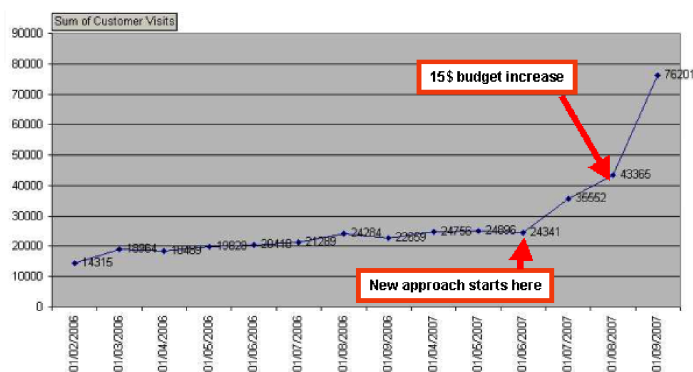
Conclusion

The World Wide Web is a great tool for marketers. It is inexpensive, available 24/7 and has a great and growing reach that can be measured. Nonetheless, thorough knowledge of its possibilities is necessary to ensure that you're not just another company with a website on the information highway.

Best practice example 1

Our client wanted to use his website to inform his target group about a new product. He supported the product launch with an Adwords campaign. The campaign had moderate success: the number of visitors increased slightly every month. However, at a given moment, he noticed that the number of visitors was no longer increasing and that the website wouldn't even reach 30 000 visitors during the month of June. That's when we at Across were called to help.

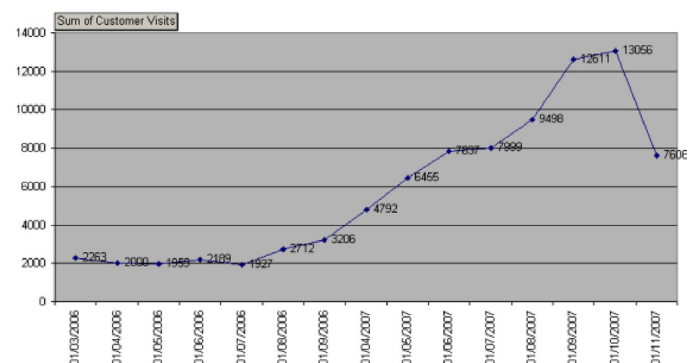
Across had a close look at the campaign and decided that we could do more with the daily budget. We noticed that our ads were extremely popular on some newly launched websites. Therefore, we were able to play with the maximum cost per click without losing visibility on the website. Due to this small intervention the number of visitors increased with almost 400% (from 24k to 76k). Furthermore, the number of subscriptions for the newsletter - a secondary goal, to be seen as a retention mechanism - mounted as well. Through accurate and intensive management of the positions and keyword quality on the content network, we were able to cut the budget and still reach the high quality target group.



Best practice example 2

Our client asked us to take over an existing Adwords campaign. The main goal of the campaign was to inform patients about a new treatment. However, the results of the campaign did not meet the client's expectations.

By intensively monitoring and steering the campaign, we were able to increase the number of visitors substantially with the same budget. The results were satisfactory, so we decided to increase the budget slightly which resulted in a mounting number of visitors. At the peak of the campaign, the number of visitors was six times as high as at the starting point. However, to maintain constant web traffic, you have to monitor the campaign closely and invest in keyword pricing. When the campaign optimisation was stopped, the number of visitors dropped with almost 50% due to the constantly changing competition.



Conclusion:

SEA and SEO are not one-time shots. Best practices have demonstrated that continuous Adwords follow-up is essential in order to continue achieving maximum results. When carried out properly, you'll see your customer visits expand overnight. During your campaign, there are always opportunities. Permanent follow-up of the account ensures that you don't miss out. As soon as you stop the follow-up, new opportunities will certainly be missed and the campaign will not reach its full potential.