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September 6, 2009

Search Engine Optimization: Strong Strategy for a Weak Economy

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As companies search for the most efficient ways to spend limited marketing resources in a weak economy, more and more are spending those dollars online. According to the Interactive Advertising Bureau, the third quarter of 2008 showed the second-highest growth period for Internet marketing revenues in the bureau's history. IAB predicts total online ad spending of nearly \$26 billion this year, and ZenithOptimedia likewise predicts that global Internet ad spending will surge by 28 percent in 2009.

Smart companies are turning to inbound marketing strategies: the kind where customers find the companies that are visible where they orbit, in cyberspace.

Why Internet marketing?

The Internet trumps traditional advertising in several ways. It's cheaper, more measurable, more flexible and better targets potential customers, especially those between the ages of 18 and 34.

The Internet lets businesses promote their brands and products without spending a fortune. It goes where those who are actively seeking goods or services can find detailed descriptions about a company and its offerings and can contact the seller when they're ready to buy.

Online advertising automatically measures "hits" (visits) and records what customers do at a site. Thus a company can calculate its advertising strategy and return on investment. And the Internet's fluidity means a business can quickly tweak its marketing strategy to improve performance.

Marketing mix for small business Web sites

Most companies use search engine optimization (SEO) and pay-per-click (PPC) to advertise on the Internet. With PPC advertising, a business usually pays the site that hosts its ad only when someone clicks on the ad. But bigger companies with more money can place their ads on more sites or on sites that accept ads from the highest bidder. Many businesses waste between 10 percent and 40 percent of their PPC budgets on nonproductive ads by not carefully monitoring and frequently auditing PPC spending and return on investment.

With SEO, you don't have to pay a host for every visit to your site because you're generating traffic through natural search engine results. Your only expense might be to hire a professional to show you the best ways to steer traffic to your Web site.

SEO advertising reaches more Internet users because six of seven people click on natural results rather than paid listings, according to a Jupiter Research study. Savvy Internet users recognize the difference between paid and natural listings and hold natural listings in higher regard.

For those who worry that the online search market is saturated, comScore Inc. reports that Google saw a healthy growth rate of 38.4 percent in search queries on its core U.S. search engine in January, 2009, outpacing the industry's overall 28.6 percent growth. This shows that even when things look bleak, business goes on and people continue to buy and sell.

For more information about search engine optimization, attend one of the many workshops around the state sponsored by WESST. Visit www.wesst.org for a schedule of classes.

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