

# Search Engine Marketing, Inc.

The background of the cover is a photograph of several cars driving on a road, heavily blurred to create a sense of motion. The cars are in various shades of blue and white, and the road surface is light-colored. The overall color palette is dominated by blues and whites.

Driving Search Traffic to  
Your Company's Web Site

**Second Edition**

Includes Value-Packed DVD with  
Over Two Hours of Video and More

Mike Moran and Bill Hunt

Foreword by David Meerman Scott,  
Bestselling author of *The New Rules of Marketing and PR*

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Manufacturing Buyer: Dan Uhrig

Published by Pearson plc

Publishing as IBM Press

IBM Press offers excellent discounts on this book when ordered in quantity for bulk purchases or special sales, which may include electronic versions and/or custom covers and content particular to your business, training goals, marketing focus, and branding interests. For more information, please contact:

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Moran, Mike, 1958-

Search Engine Marketing, Inc. : driving search traffic to your company's web site / Mike Moran and Bill Hunt. -- 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-13-606868-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Internet marketing. 2. Internet advertising. 3. Electronic commerce. I. Hunt, Bill. II. Title.

HF5415.1265.M665 2009

658.872--dc22

2008026522

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Pearson Education, Inc

Rights and Contracts Department

501 Boylston Street, Suite 900

Boston, MA 02116

Fax (617) 671 3447

ISBN-13: 978-0-13-606868-6

ISBN-10: 0-13-606868-5

Text printed in the United States on recycled paper at Edwards Brothers in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Third printing January 2010

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# Foreword

Whenever I begin a speech, I pose four questions to the audience and ask them to raise their hands if the answer to a question is “yes.” How would you answer?

*In your personal or professional life in the past two months, when trying to fix a problem or to research or buy a product, have you*

- 1. responded to a direct mail advertisement?*
- 2. consulted magazines, newspapers, TV, or radio?*
- 3. used Google or another search engine?*
- 4. electronically contacted a friend, colleague, or family member who responded with a Web URL that you then visited?*

Over the course of a year, in front of more than ten thousand people from many dozens of groups including college students, marketing professionals, and executives at Fortune 500 companies, the answers were surprisingly consistent. Between 5 percent and 20 percent of people answer each of the first two questions affirmatively. These answers mean that the ways most companies have historically reached people—advertising, direct mail, and pleas to the mainstream media for coverage—are only effective in reaching a small portion of potential customers. However, between 80 percent and 100 percent of people raise their hands to indicate that they have used a search engine to find a solution to a problem or to research a product or that they have checked out a Web site suggested by a friend, colleague, or family member. Clearly, creating effective Web sites that are indexed by search engines is critical for any business.

Unlike nontargeted, in-your-face, interruption-based advertising, search engine results are content that people actually *want* to see. How cool is that? Rather than forcing you to convince people to pay attention to your products and services by dreaming up messages and ad campaigns, search engines deliver interested buyers right to your company’s virtual doorstep. This is a marketer’s dream-come-true.

However, most marketers don't know how to harness this exciting form of marketing. Their most common mistake is to spend way too much time worrying about the keywords and phrases they want to optimize for and not enough time creating great content on their site—content that search engines will reward with lots of traffic and that visitors will find useful. And nearly all organizations are terrible at building an effective landing page, the place people end up when they click on a search hit. Too often, buyers arrive at a site only to wonder what they're supposed to do now. It's like the outdoor part of a Hollywood movie set. Sure it's a beautiful facade, but if you actually went through the front door, you'd find nothing there.

Okay, so that's the bad news. The good news is that these common problems are easily solved. *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.* shows you how, with a step-by-step process and in an engaging and approachable style. Mike and Bill understand that search engine marketing calls for a delicate blend of art and science, and they'll help you incorporate both aspects into your own search strategies.

My copy of the first edition of *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.* is ratty and dog-eared from extensive use. It's full of coffee stains and my own scribbled notes. Because it so effectively demystifies search engine marketing and provides such practical advice for success, I turn to it again and again and recommend it to audiences worldwide. This book is not academic blather or geeky techno-speak; it's an approachable and digestible guide chock-full of real-life examples.

I've been eagerly awaiting this new edition, particularly the new material on social media. I know Mike's and Bill's ideas will continue to generate business for me, and they'll do the same for you. If you follow the ideas in *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.* you'll drive more traffic to your site and convert more visitors into customers.

—David Meerman Scott  
Bestselling author of *The New Rules of Marketing and PR*

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# Preface

Search marketing demands a curious mix of business, writing, and technical skills. No matter what skills you have, you probably have *some* of the skills needed to succeed, but not *all* of them. This book will fill the gaps.

If you possess marketing skills, or you have a sales or other business background, you will quickly see the ways that search marketing draws on your previous experience, but you will also learn how it is different. Like any form of marketing, you will focus on the target markets you want to reach—in this case, searchers looking for certain words. You will segment those markets. You will realize that your Web pages are your marketing communications materials. You might see parallels to direct marketing as we relentlessly measure our success, or perhaps you will see the possibilities for search marketing to burnish your brand image. Regardless, like all marketing, you will learn to design your search marketing program to meet your company's larger goals. Unlike other forms of marketing, search marketing is not designed to interrupt people with an advertising message. Successful search marketing meets people at their point of need. When searchers want something, you must be ready to satisfy them with what they want, even if you would prefer to sell them something else.

As critical as marketers are to success, search marketing is, at its core, a writer's medium. Like direct marketing, a well-crafted message is critical to enticing a searcher to click your page. Once at your site, the words on your page also influence whether the prospective customer buys your product or abandons your site. But search marketing relies on skilled writing to an even greater extent, because the search engines choose the pages they show based on *words*. You will learn how to write the words that your customers *and* the search engines are looking for. If you are a writer, you will find search marketing a challenge like none you have ever seen, but one that can reward your company richly.

If you have technical skills, you are needed, too. Search marketing depends on your Web site's design and operation. Many commonly used Web technologies stop search marketing cold. You will find that search marketing is similar to other technical projects—you must understand the requirements so that you can develop the solution. You need to develop a business case to see the value so the work can be prioritized and funded for your busy IT team. You will need a project plan to execute on schedule. You will have standards and operational procedures that keep the system running smoothly. If you are a Webmaster, a Web developer, or any kind of technologist, your skills are vital to search marketing success.

If you are looking for a book about the secrets of search marketing, this book does have a few. However, they might be secrets of a surprising kind. Some people think of search marketing as an arcane pursuit where you need to know the “tricks” to get search engines to show your site. But those tricks are not the secrets of search marketing—you do not need tricks to succeed. What you really need is a firm understanding of how search marketing works, a methodology to plan your search marketing program, and the information required to execute it. The biggest secret of search marketing is that knowledge, hard work, and flawless execution are all you need. This book shows you how to get all three.

In Part 1, we cover the basics of search marketing. What is search marketing? Why is it so difficult? How do search engines and search marketing work? And what are searchers looking for anyway? Marketers and writers will learn more about search technology. Technologists will be exposed to the opportunity search marketing offers your company. You will all learn how to segment searchers based on their behavior, so you will know what they want from your site. Part 1 will teach you all the background you need to formulate a custom search marketing program for your company—which is what you will do in Part 2.

Part 2 takes you step by step through developing a proposal for your own search marketing program. You will learn how to identify the goals of your Web site and measure your current success in meeting them. You will learn how well you are doing at search marketing today and how much it is worth to do better. We show you how to estimate your costs, choose your strategy, and get your proposed program approved by your executives and by all the folks in your company who you need on your side. Because search marketing demands cooperation from so many people in your company, we show you proven ways to get each kind of person to work hard on your program.

Part 3 explores all the details you need to execute your program. Every Web site poses different challenges to a search marketing program. You will learn how to diagnose problems on your site and correct them. We teach you methodologies for every part of the search marketing process that you can apply to your own business. And we explain how to measure everything in your program so that you can improve the operation of your program every day.

Because search marketing undergoes change each year, we've thoroughly updated every chapter in this second edition to reflect changes in the industry. But Part 4 also adds two entirely new chapters, with one covering multimedia and social media, and the other teaching you to apply your search skills to improve the search facility on your own Web site.



Throughout the book, you will see icons that signify special material on two important subjects. The first, shown at the left, is the **spam alert** icon, which warns you about overly clever tricks that pose a real danger to your search marketing campaign. You are probably familiar with e-mail spam, when you get unwanted messages in your inbox, but search marketing has its own meaning for spam—any technique that is designed mainly to fool the search engines to gain an untoward advantage. That is an overly broad definition, but we explain exactly where the ethical lines are drawn every time you see this icon. Spam can be hazardous to the health of your search marketing program, because search engines have rules to control search marketing behavior—when you break the rules, you will suffer the consequences. Whenever you see this icon, you will know that there is a line that you cross at your own peril.



You will also see, shown at the left, the **global tip** icon, which alerts you about techniques that are especially relevant to international search marketing campaigns. Most of the advice in this book is pitched to an audience of U.S. companies and companies using Google, Yahoo! Search, and other English-language worldwide search engines. You will learn, however, that searchers in many countries use search engines specific to that country, and that your non-English content sometimes has special issues that must be addressed. We highlight those areas in the book for you. Whether your Web site serves international visitors now, or you are considering doing so in the future, these tips are important for you.

No matter what your background, you are already partially prepared to become a **search marketer**. In this book, you will learn why it is so important to form a team of skills outside your own. Marketers, writers, technologists, and folks from other fields must collaborate to make search marketing work. You will find out why it is that the larger your Web site, the harder that collaboration can be—but you will also learn how to pull it off. Your business can coordinate these diverse skills to create a successful search marketing program. You just need to know how.

Whether you have been turned off in the past by experts selling quick-fix voodoo or you have just found search marketing too complicated or too intimidating, put that behind you. This book explains everything you need to know in simple terms that you can understand no matter what your experience. If you can use a Web browser, you can learn search marketing.

Every day, more and more business is done on the Web. And, increasingly, people looking to do business start with a search. Remember, if they can't find you, they can't buy from you. Discover how your company can be found.

# How Search Marketing Works

Now that you know how search engines work, it's time to learn how to work *them*. How do you get your site prominently shown? What are your options? What does it all cost? How fast can it start working? In this chapter, we show you what is on the search menu and help you decide what to order. This chapter covers the following topics:

- *Organic search.* Search engines find the most relevant match for the searcher's query. You, the search marketer, optimize your pages, wait for the spiders to come (or pay to send your content), and see your pages in the organic listings. Google is the best-known organic search engine, but many local and shopping search engines also provide results based on query relevance.
- *Directory listings.* A directory lists the Web sites it deems most closely related to a subject in its subject category list. You submit your site to human editors to be shown under the right subject category. Yahoo! Directory is the oldest and best-known directory, with Open Directory the main challenger.
- *Paid placement.* Search engines show listings from advertisers paying for their spot in the results. You bid against others to place your listing or advertisement at the top of the results. Yahoo! Sponsored Search and Google AdWords are the two most popular programs. Most search engines shows paid placement listings as "Sponsor Listings."

No matter what your budget is or what kind of site you have, you can create an effective search marketing program using these techniques. Let's dig into organic search first.



## Organic Search

**Organic search** refers to the way search engines find the most relevant match to a searcher's query. Organic search results are driven purely by the relevance of the matches to the query words that the searcher entered, and are *not* influenced by any payments made to the search engine by search marketers. Google provides organic search results, but so do many other search engines that you might not think of, including shopping search engines (such as Shopping.com) and specialty engines (such as Orbitz, the travel site, at [www.orbitz.com](http://www.orbitz.com)).

Search marketers use many techniques to improve their site's organic search results—these techniques are frequently referred to as **search engine optimization** (SEO). For some organizations, organic search is by far the least expensive of all search marketing techniques, but for others it can be frightfully expensive, demanding costly technology or content changes. Let's look at the basic steps for organic search:

1. *Get your pages in the search index.* Pages missing from the index cannot be found by searchers, so you need to get as many of your site's pages into the index as possible. To get your pages indexed, most search engines send spiders to your site, but most shopping search engines require that you send them your data in a trusted feed. If spiders are having trouble indexing your pages, you might need to make changes to your site so that they can succeed. No matter what it takes, you must get your content indexed.
2. *Choose the right keywords.* You must figure out what words searchers are typing in. Later in this book, we show you how you do that, but for now, you just need to understand that different searchers use different queries to try to find the same thing, and that they use different approaches in a shopping search engine than in Google. To discover the keywords that you should target, you can do the work yourself, hire a consultant to help you do it, or have the consultant do it for you.
3. *Optimize your content.* After you have deduced what people are looking for, you can tune your content to match. Again, we get into the details of how you do that later. Just remember that you have to update your content to match what searchers are looking for. To optimize your content, you can do it yourself, or you can hire a consultant to help you do it.

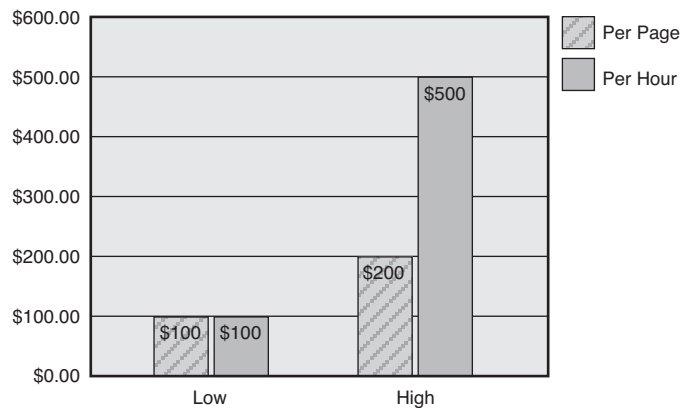
Sometimes these steps can be simple, but often there are so many approaches to improve organic search that decision-making can be difficult. Later in this book, we explore these approaches in depth so you can decide which ones are right for you. For now, let's just look at how different options have different price tags.

## What It Costs

Organic search is an interesting search marketing technique, because utilizing the technique can cost nothing, or it can be expensive, depending on the situation you are in and what you decide to do about it.

It is possible that your site might already be well represented in search indexes and might already rank well in organic search for many queries. If so, it might be inexpensive to improve your results even more, by choosing more keywords to sprinkle into your content, for example. If your site has few pages indexed and is missing in action in the search results, however, optimizing your content for organic search can be a daunting prospect—it can be complicated and expensive to make the changes required.

With organic search, you do not need to optimize every page on your site (although that is great to do)—you need only optimize the pages that you want returned for the keywords you are targeting. One reason you might shy away from optimizing every page is that it can be expensive to do. Figure 3-1 shows you the range of prices you should expect to pay to optimize your pages.



**Figure 3-1** Organic search costs. Use these averages to estimate your costs to optimize some of your pages.

Source: *Marketing Sherpa* (October 2003)

The biggest costs for organic search come from hiring search marketing consultants, changing the content and technology of your site, and paying for inclusion of your pages in the search index.

### Search Marketing Consultants

If you need expert advice on choosing keywords, optimizing your content, or getting your pages indexed, it does not come cheap. If you want to start small, you might find some search marketing firms that will help you optimize a few pages for important keywords for between \$5,000 and \$20,000. Conversely, if you need a consultant to thoroughly address problems in a large site, expect to pay hundreds of thousands per year.

If your budget allows it, however, you can benefit greatly from hiring an expert to jumpstart your organic search marketing program. Your site's problems in search are lowering your

revenue, and every day they are not fixed is more money down the drain. It can be cost-effective to accelerate your efforts by using an expert who gets more visitors coming to your site quickly.

Under normal circumstances, however, it is not absolutely necessary to use consultants. You and your team can learn enough to do it yourself. Just keep in mind that it will take you considerably longer to move up the learning curve on your own, which may not be cost-effective based on your available budget and the business opportunities that you are losing each day. It is a big decision to hire (or decide not to hire) a search marketing consultant. Chapter 8, “Define Your Search Marketing Strategy,” walks you through the process.

### Content and Technology Changes

What you spend for your organization’s own resources to make content and technology changes to your site is usually your largest expense for organic search marketing. Figure 3-1 provides a rule of thumb for how much it costs, but it varies widely from Web site to Web site. Part 3 of this book is devoted to diagnosing search problems and helping you correct them.

Although you are unsure of exactly what it will cost, it does not have to be scary. You probably do not know how much it costs to update your site to introduce a new line of products, or to acquire another company, or to support a new advertising campaign, but these are business decisions that are made every day in every company. The Web team knows that it is part of its job to support these initiatives—whatever it takes is just a cost of doing business. Your biggest job will be to make search marketing just another part of the Web team’s job—just another everyday cost of running your Web site. Chapter 9, “Sell Your Search Marketing Proposal,” tackles how you convince the Web team to take that on. After you are successful, and the Web team makes search-related changes every day, you *still* will not know how much it costs, but at least it will be happening.

Organic search success usually requires fine-tuning to allow spiders to crawl your pages and to ensure your pages are found by the right search queries. If your site has a small number of HTML pages, updating the content is not pricey. If you have a huge dynamically generated site, however, it can be expensive to fix the technology so that spiders can see those dynamic pages. In addition to changes required by spiders, shopping search engines (and some others) depend on your data being sent to them, which forces you to write or buy a program that does that. On top of that, you always need to update your content to provide proper keyword prominence and density to get high rankings. All these content and technology changes cost money.

Content changes are typically less costly and easier to manage than technology changes. It is expected that content will be constantly updated, so if you can convince your Web team to write with search engines in mind, they will do that as a matter of course. It is not any more expensive to write a new page that includes mentions of the important search keywords for that page. Technology changes, however, are not so easy.

Many Web sites inadvertently make it difficult for spiders to index their pages. In Chapter 10, “Get Your Site Indexed,” we work through the most common site design problems and the technology changes required to correct them. Usually, they require some kind of technology change, for example:

- We must change the commerce URLs so that they do not have so many dynamic parameters.
- We have to update the content management system so that writers can modify the titles and descriptions for every page.
- We have to modify the metadata template for all HTML pages so that we do not block the spider from crawling each page.
- We need to change the menus in the left navigation bar so that they do not require JavaScript.
- We must remove session identifiers from the URLs.

Don't worry if you don't understand the list. That's the point, actually. Every item in that list is something that your technology folks might need to do to fix your site so that spiders can crawl your pages. (And we cover many more, too.)

It is possible that your site suffers from few or even none of these technology problems. If so, organic search optimization will likely be inexpensive. If your site suffers from some of these problems, however, it can be expensive to get them fixed. Technology projects can be costly, hard to manage, and slow to complete. It is not unheard of for a large company to spend millions of dollars over several years to eradicate all of these organic search problems.

## Inclusion Programs

Now that you know about how spiders can be blocked from seeing your site, thus freezing your pages out of search indexes, you might wonder if there is a way for you to guarantee that your pages be indexed. To fill that need, search engines pioneered **paid inclusion**, where search engines charged search marketers for that guaranteed indexing. But Microsoft ended its paid inclusion a few years back, with the last holdout, Yahoo!, ending its program in 2009.

Today, inclusion programs no longer guarantee that pages will be indexed, but the good news is that they are free, based on the Sitemap standard ([www.sitemaps.org](http://www.sitemaps.org)). That standard is honored by all of the major search engines, and provides numerous ways for you to tell the search engines about your pages.

While Sitemaps help your pages get into the search engines' indexes, it does nothing to help your pages rank higher in the search results. Pages indexed by crawling and those indexed through Sitemaps both have equal opportunities to be the #1 search result.

There is still one last bastion of paid inclusion—shopping search. Most shopping search engines require that you send a **trusted feed** to them that includes your entire product catalog, and that you pay them for the privilege. We cover all inclusion programs in detail in Chapter 10, but for now, just realize that inclusion programs provide one more way to get your pages indexed so that searchers can find them.

## The Benefits and Challenges

Despite the wide disparity in what an organic search marketing effort can cost, no search marketer can skip organic search. Organic search is critical to any search marketing program, even if you also use other search marketing techniques. But organic search offers a unique set of benefits and challenges.

### Highly Qualified Visitors Will Come to Your Site

Organic searchers who click your pages are **highly qualified** visitors to your site. They are much more likely to make a purchase than some other kinds of visitors you receive.

To understand why, think about the motivation of visitors reaching your site from a successful banner ad. Those visitors set out to find some information (possibly on a subject wholly unrelated to your site), and while reading that article, spot your ad. Intrigued, they click through to your site. These visitors are far less qualified than searchers because they did not start out with interest in your products. You can build the interest and still make the sale, but that is a lot harder to do than to sell to someone already interested.

In contrast, searchers initiate their search on a subject related to your organization's site. That's why the search engine shows *your* page in the results. Those searchers want to learn about what your site can tell them. You are far more likely to sell to search visitors than to someone who clicks a banner ad, simply because searchers might intend to buy whereas banner visitors were doing something else when you caught their eye. People using shopping search engines, as you might expect, are *especially* likely to buy.

Visitors clicking directory listings to your site fall somewhere in between banner ad visitors and searchers as to how qualified they are. Some might be as motivated as searchers, but others are just surfing around when your listing gets their attention.

Searchers who click paid placements are qualified, too, but searchers trust organic results more, and are more likely to act on them. As discussed in Chapter 4, "How Searchers Work," many searchers focus on organic results to the exclusion of the paid listings on the page. Your site must appear in organic results to attract those searchers. But this benefit of appearing in the organic results leads to a challenge, because it is not easy to get your page ranked #1 in organic results.

With paid placement, for example, anyone with a big enough budget can buy the #1 paid result, and they will get visitors to click through to their site. Organic search, in contrast, can require a lot of effort in modifying content and technology on your site, and no one can guarantee when (or if) it will pay off in higher-qualified visitors. That's the basic organic search challenge.

### You Can Do It on a Budget

Although scary problems exist that can make organic search a challenge for some Web sites, there are ways to succeed at organic search inexpensively. Your site probably has many pages in the search index already, and you can tune the content for these pages to rank higher and draw more traffic.

Moreover, the work that you do on organic search lasts. Paid placement success stops the minute you stop paying the search engines. After you optimize an organic page, however, you can continue to get high rankings with little work for a long time.

Despite organic search's low cost in some situations, we cannot emphasize enough that some situations can make organic search an expensive proposition. Chapter 7, "Measure Your Search Marketing Success," shows you how to assess the situation in which you find yourself.

### What You Do Works Across Search Engines

Unlike paid placement, where an ad listed with Yahoo! does not appear in Google, most organic search techniques work across all search engines. Whatever you do to allow Google's spider to crawl your site will probably also help the Ask.com spider. Similarly, improving your keyword prominence and density helps your pages rank higher in all search engines. Just by its nature, organic search tends to require the same techniques for all search engines.

Beyond this natural tendency, currently only four organic search technologies are used by the major worldwide search engines, as shown in Table 3-1. That is a big change from a few years ago, when there were a dozen technologies around. With a dozen technologies, it was rarely worth pursuing any organic search technique that worked for only one technology. Now, with only four technologies in the game, it can be worthwhile to do things that affect only one technology, because numerous search engines use each technology.

**Table 3-1** Organic search technology. Ask.com, Google, Microsoft, and Yahoo! are the suppliers of organic search technology to all major organic search engines.

Search Technology	Syndication
Ask.com	Ask.com
	Excite
	Iwon
	Teoma
Google	AOL Search
	Google
Microsoft Bing	Bing
Yahoo! Search	Yahoo!
	AlltheWeb
	AltaVista

## How to Get Started

Organic search is probably the easiest search marketing technique to get started with, because you are *already* started. It is highly likely that spiders already crawl your site, placing your pages in their indexes. If you search for your company's name, your home page might already be shown high in the list.

So what does it really mean to get started with organic search? It goes back to the basic steps laid out earlier:

1. *Get your pages in the search index.* Nothing else you do will matter if your pages are not in the search index. Chapter 10 teaches you how to get them there.
2. *Choose the right keywords.* To get serious about organic search, you need to focus on the queries searchers use that should find your site. There are many ways to do that, all detailed in Chapter 11, "Choose Your Target Keywords."
3. *Optimize your content.* To rank well for popular queries, you need to ensure that your pages contain the words in the queries, and have them in the right numbers, sprinkled in the right places. Chapter 12, "Optimize Your Content," shows you how.

Organic search is critical to any search marketing plan. Because it requires a great deal of expertise to succeed, most of the rest of this book shows you how. However, there are also other techniques for you to learn, starting with directory listings.

## Directory Listings

**Directory listings** were the first of the paid vehicles within search and are commonly done at a site known as a **directory**—a site typically maintained by human editors who list Web sites by their subject. Figure 3-2 shows that someone looking for information can sometimes find things more easily by navigating directories than by searching. Searchers looking for "hospital whiteboard" might find nothing useful, but by following directory links find exactly what they are looking for.

Directory listings typically guarantee you a blurb about your Web site (or a part of your Web site), with no promise of where you will show up in the list (top? bottom? middle of the pack?) or how many people will click your link. The directory's editors decide what subject category to use for your site, although you can request a specific category. Most organizations get just one link from a single category to their site's home page, but medium-to-large companies that have Web pages on multiple subjects can get multiple directory listings.

Yahoo! was the original directory, and is still the most important. Although Yahoo! has expanded as a company into many other pursuits, ranging from organic search to e-mail to shopping, the Yahoo! Directory was how it all started. None of the other paid directories are critical for search marketers to target nowadays because they have plummeted in popularity.

Searching for “hospital whiteboards” yields poor results . . .

The screenshot shows the Yahoo! search interface. The search term "hospital whiteboard" is entered in the search box. The search results page displays two results, both from "WhiteBoard News". The first result is dated Monday, Apr 7, 2003, and the second is dated Friday, Dec 24, 1999. The search results are circled in red.

The screenshot shows the Yahoo! Small Business directory page. The "Business" category is selected and circled in red. A list of categories is displayed, including "Binding and Lamination (83)", "Briefcases and Accessories@", "Business Forms (151)", "Calculators (10)", "Calendars and Personal Organizers (115)", "Dry-Erase Boards (19)", "Envelopes (32)", and "Fax Machines@". The "Dry-Erase Boards (19)" category is circled in red.

. . . but choosing the Business directory link leads to the Office Supplies and Equipment link, which in turn leads to Dry-Erase Boards link . . .

. . . which shows a list of manufacturers that might sell a hospital whiteboard.

The screenshot shows the website for Flex A Chart Manufacturing. The website features a navigation menu with "Color Samples", "FAQ'S", and "Catalog". Below the navigation menu, there is a grid of product images and descriptions, including "Porcelain Magnetic Dry Erase Boards", "Dry Erase Conference Cabinets", "Rolling Easels", "Magnetic Board Planners", "Hospital White Boards", and "Restaurant ChalkBoards". The "Hospital White Boards" product is circled in red.

The screenshot shows a search results page for "Flex A Chart Manufacturing". The search results are displayed in a list format, with "Flex A Chart Manufacturing" circled in red. The search results include a description of the company and a list of products, including "Flex A Chart Manufacturing", "Teamboard, Inc.", "My Whiteboards.Com", and "DryEraseBoard.com".

Figure 3-2 Using directory listings. Sometimes people can find what they want using a directory when searching for the same thing would end in failure.



One free entrant, Open Directory ([www.dmoz.org](http://www.dmoz.org)), uses volunteers as editors and is the only competitor to Yahoo! Directory worth spending any time on. Open Directory is also referred to as ODP (Open Directory Project), but its most interesting alias is DMOZ (Directory Mozilla), so named because it is the open source directory counterpart to the open source Mozilla browser.

Directories frequently syndicate their results to many sites. Yahoo! shows its directory at several search sites, including Yahoo! itself, AlltheWeb ([www.alltheweb.com](http://www.alltheweb.com)), and AltaVista ([www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com)). Almost all search engines show Open Directory results, including Google (as its Google Directory) and AOL Search. Remember, however, that far fewer searchers use directories than use search queries.

Directories are an inexpensive way to get attention for your site, and they help your search result rankings, too, just as links from any well-respected sites do. Search marketers need to target Yahoo! Directory and Open Directory in their plans—in fact, getting a directory listing is often the first thing to do when starting out with search marketing. Let's take a closer look at how directories can be part of your search strategy.

## What It Costs

Open Directory is free. For the longest time, Yahoo! Directory was, too, but today Yahoo! offers free directory listings only for nonprofit organizations. Yahoo! charges an annual fee for every directory listing by a for-profit business.

Currently, Yahoo! charges \$299 for a site submission (\$600 for “adult” sites), which guarantees only that your site will be *reviewed*. That means Yahoo! charges you, and then it examines your site to decide whether it will be listed. If your site is rejected, the money is not refunded, even though your site is not listed.

When accepted as a Site Listing, your Web site is ranked in alphabetic order by your organization's name. The \$299 fee covers the review and a one-year listing. If you fail to renew your listing in 12 months, it is deleted.

If many people click your link, it might be added to a special Most Popular list that is shown above the alphabetic site listings. If your site is not popular, you might be able to upgrade a Site Listing to a Sponsor Listing that shows your site *above* the alphabetic list (in addition to its place in the alphabetic list) for between \$50 and \$300 per month, depending on the category. Yahoo! Directory limits the number of Sponsor Listings it accepts, so you might already be shut out by your competitors. In Figure 3-3, you can see an example of a company that upgraded to a Sponsor Listing.

Although Open Directory is free, you might find that you pay for it in other ways—namely, your time. You need to be patient waiting for the editors to consider your site, and you might need to follow up several times to finally get their attention. For some, saving \$300 is not worth the aggravation.

The screenshot shows the Yahoo! Directory interface. At the top, there's a search bar with options for 'the Web', 'the Directory', and 'this category'. Below the search bar, the main heading is 'Internet Promotion Software'. A breadcrumb trail reads: 'Directory > Business and Economy > Business to Business > Marketing and Advertising > Internet > Promotion > Software'. There are links for 'Email this page', 'Suggest a Site', and 'Advanced Search'. A 'Save to My Web' button is also present. The page is divided into sections: 'CATEGORIES', 'SPONSOR LISTINGS', and 'SITE LISTINGS'. In the 'SPONSOR LISTINGS' section, the listing for 'Dynamic Submission' is circled in black. It describes a software package for automating site submissions. To the right, there are 'SPONSOR RESULTS' for 'Internet Marketing Software' and 'Direct Marketing Software'.

**Figure 3-3** High-visibility directory listings. You can upgrade to a Sponsor Listing in Yahoo! Directory to be displayed at the top of the heap.

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### The Benefits and Challenges

It is wise for a search marketer to pursue directory listings, both paid (Yahoo! Directory) and free (Open Directory) for several reasons, including the following:

- *Increased traffic.* Although Web users have gravitated more to full-text search the past few years, a sizable amount of traffic still pours in from directory listings. Web users still use directories in large numbers, and your site benefits from those extra visitors.

- *Improved search rankings.* As discussed in Chapter 2, “How Search Engines Work,” one of the ways search engines decide which pages to show first is by analyzing links to each matching page. Links to your site from a reputable directory are influential because your site passed a human editor’s quality test. Search engines weigh links from Yahoo! Directory and Open Directory heavily when ranking search results—we cover this topic in depth in Chapter 13, “Attract Links to Your Site.” It is possible that Sponsor Listings and Most Popular links, because they add extra links to your page, might help search rankings above what the alphabetic Site Listing link brings.
- *Simplicity.* Unlike many search marketing techniques, directory listings are simple. You can submit exactly the wording that you want to appear in your blurb—you have no pesky content or technology changes to make to your site—and no technical expertise is required.
- *Low cost.* For most businesses, \$300 is a small price to pay for the benefits that paid listings provide, and an Open Directory entry is free. Almost any other search marketing technique costs more, so this is often the best way to start your search marketing.

Although it is always a good idea for your Web site to get listed in directories, beware of a few pitfalls:

- *Lack of responsiveness.* Yahoo! Directory responds to paid submissions within seven days, but makes no promises for free (nonprofit) submissions. Likewise, Open Directory has no committed turnaround time for your submissions. To make matters worse, some companies have complained that when they have been listed under the wrong category, it took weeks to get Yahoo! to correct the error, and Open Directory is even slower.
- *Editorial changes.* Although you can submit under any subject category, and you can send in any words that you want used, sometimes directory editors wield their red pens. What shows up in the listing is what the editor put there, even though it might not be what you wanted (or might not even be accurate).
- *Limited exposure.* Whereas organic search can bring up any page on your site, directories link just to the home page of most businesses. Larger Web sites might be granted a dozen entries under different subject categories, and large, popular Web sites might have a hundred links, but that is about the limit. You cannot easily point someone deep within your site the way organic search can. Moreover, fewer visitors will come to your site from directories than from search engines.

Despite the challenges, paid directory listings are among the best investments you can make, and the steps to get them are simple.

### CASE STUDY: GETTING MULTIPLE DIRECTORY LISTINGS

If one directory listing for your company is good, wouldn't 20 be better? Yes, but the directories do not usually hand out so many. They are directories of *Web sites*, and typically list only the home page of a site under its appropriate category.

WebMD, the popular health information site ([www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)), believed it had a case for multiple directory entries because it has more than 100 disease and illness condition centers, each with hundreds of pages of information.

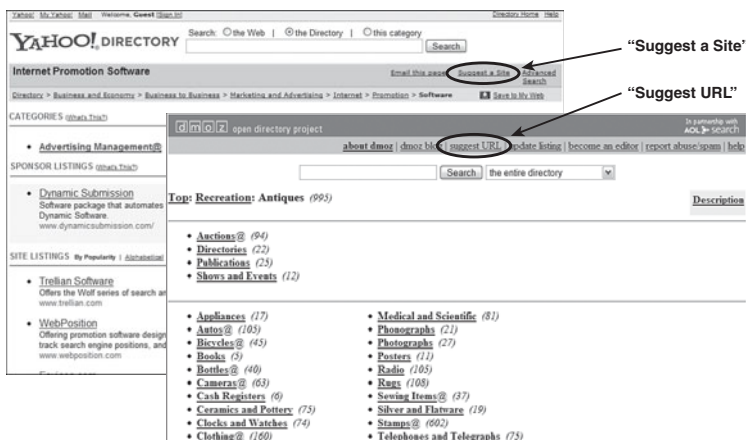
WebMD submitted 25 of its condition-center URLs to Yahoo! Directory (paying the fees) and was granted a directory listing for each one. But the Open Directory editors were tougher. Open Directory rarely provides a Web site with multiple listings. WebMD spent six months working with the editors in various categories in Open Directory, arguing that each condition center was equal in quality to the Web sites that were already listed in the categories.

Persistence paid off. Soon, WebMD had about 50 Open Directory listings.

### How to Get Started

There are three steps to get listed in a directory:

1. *You submit your site.* To submit to Open Directory or Yahoo! Directory, you navigate to the subject category that best describes your site, and then click the Suggest URL link (Open Directory) or Suggest a Site link (Yahoo! Directory), as shown in Figure 3-4.
2. *Editors review your site.* When the editors review your submission, they examine all of the information in your submission form and visit your live site.
3. *Editors list your site.* If your site checks out, it will be listed. The editors choose exactly which subject category your site is listed under, and they edit the words in your blurb.



**Figure 3-4** Submitting your site to a directory. You can “Suggest a Site” within Yahoo! Directory and “Suggest URL” within Open Directory to submit yours.

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Typically sites are accepted, but if your site does not clearly identify your company, cannot be viewed by all Web browsers, is under construction, or is not available all the time, it might be rejected for a listing. Yahoo! reserves the right to reject sites for other reasons, too, but it rarely does.

Whereas Yahoo! Directory promises turnaround to paid submissions within a week, Open Directory uses volunteer editors who review thousands of submissions each month. It usually takes months for an Open Directory submission to be accepted as a listing, but do not resubmit if you get impatient—that just moves you to the end of the line.

## Paid Placement

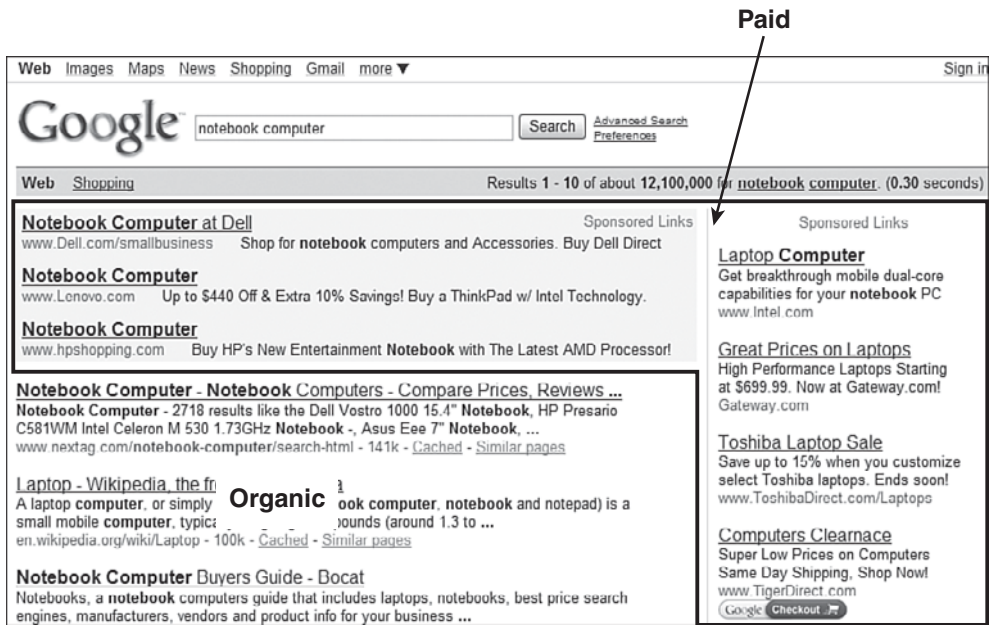
By now, you have gotten a taste for the difficulty of revamping your site to garner organic search traffic. Although it pays off handsomely, organic search success takes skill, effort, and time. Paid search seems far easier. Select a keyword, plunk down your credit card, and overnight you have the #1 search position! It *can* work that way—if you know what you are doing. Let's explore paid placement, the fast (and sometimes easier) method of paying your way to the top.

Paid placement is where the action is, generating nearly \$5 billion of ad revenue for search engines just in the United States. Google makes 95 percent of its revenue from paid advertising.

Paid placement has been described as a cross between day trading and direct marketing. Most paid placement requires bidding against other search marketers to win the top spot for your site. Bidding can be intense, changing every second as companies jockey for position. Every word in your listing matters—making the difference between an ad that gets clicked and one that does not.

Every search engine displays paid placement results differently, but most search engines distinguish paid placement ads from the organic results (usually calling them sponsored listings) and display them above and to the right of the organic results. Figure 3-5 shows how Google displays paid placement ads for a search for “notebook computers”—other search engines use a similar treatment.

Nearly every search engine displays paid placement ads, but most search marketers need to place ads with just three of them—Bing, Yahoo!, and Google. These three companies carry 97 percent of paid placement ads. (As we write this, Yahoo! still uses its own paid placement program, but has announced plans to move to the Microsoft adCenter paid placement engine in all countries over time, pending regulatory approval.) Table 3-2 shows a list of paid placement competitors. Each one has different fees and restrictions on the content it accepts, and each one has different search engines that display its results.



**Figure 3-5** Paid placement results. Google presents paid placement results at the top and right of its results page.

**Table 3-2** Paid placement programs. Google and Yahoo! are the leaders, but there are also other choices for paid placement.

Search Engine	Program	URL	Activation Fee	Content Restrictions	Syndication
Google	AdWords	adwords.google.com	\$5	Adult and gambling	Google AOL Ask.com Netscape
Yahoo!	Sponsored Search	searchmarketing.yahoo.com/srch	\$50	Adult and gambling	Yahoo! Alta Vista
Bing	Microsoft adCenter	adcenter.microsoft.com	\$5	Objectionable and illegal terms	Bing
MIVA	MIVA Pay-Per-Click	www.miva.com	\$50	Objectionable and illegal terms	CNET Search Search.com InfoSpace
Kanoodle	Keyword Target	www.kanoodle.com	\$50	Objectionable and illegal terms	USA Today MSNBC



As mentioned, Google and Yahoo! have by far the greatest traffic for paid placement, but other competitors are not giving up. Microsoft launched adCenter in the United States in 2006 and continues to expand to other countries. FindWhat and Espotting merged to form MIVA ([www.miva.com](http://www.miva.com)), combining Espotting's focus in Europe with FindWhat's strength in the United States. MIVA, however, remains a distant third to Google and Yahoo! in Europe. Except for the impending presence of Microsoft paid placement, there is no real competition to Google and Yahoo! in the Asian paid placement market.

Google, Microsoft, and Yahoo! also offer a variant of paid placement known as **contextual advertising**, where you bid to place ads on the pages of Web sites that have articles about subjects related to your ads. For example, if your company runs a hotel in Philadelphia, you might want to display an ad on a travel site's pages about Philadelphia tourist attractions. Contextual advertising, although appropriate for some search marketers, is not the first place for you to start, so we reserve that discussion until Chapter 14, "Optimize Your Paid Search Program," when we review advanced techniques in paid placement.

By far, the most money is spent on paid placement based on bidding, which is what we concentrate on here. Sophisticated search marketers also use a technique known as **fixed placement**, where you negotiate for a particular place on a page for a given search query, usually paying for impressions (the number of times your ad is shown), rather than for clicks. Specialty search engines are more likely to offer fixed placement than worldwide search engines. Fixed placement is *not* the way a rookie search marketer should break in—you need to know what you are doing before you negotiate a long-term, hard-to-change commitment. As you grow in your search marketing experience, however, you might find that some fixed-placement opportunities make sense as part of your overall search marketing plan.

## What It Costs

One of the best things about paid placement is that you can control the costs. You can buy as many or as few keywords as you want, and you decide how much you are willing to pay for each click. And you can adjust anything at a moment's notice, so you can control your budget.

As you embark on a paid placement program, here are the kinds of costs to keep your eye on:

- *Creative costs.* Whether you do it in-house or you hire a consultant or ad agency to do it for you, it costs money to create the titles and descriptions that display onscreen. Remember, the number of searchers who click through to your site depends completely on the killer title and description you write, so this is no place to skimp on the budget. Agencies can usually do three or four new ads an hour, charging anywhere from \$50 to \$200 an hour to do so.
- *Management costs.* Tracking and adjusting your bids can be a lot of work, but it is the key to maximizing the return on your paid placement investment—these campaigns do not run well on autopilot. You also need to keep track of your creative changes and

deadlines, reconcile your bills, and verify your clickthroughs. You can hire an ad agency or search consultant to manage your paid placement campaign for you. Conversely, if you manage it in-house, budget at least one full-time person to manage a large campaign consisting of more than a thousand keywords. In addition, you should invest in bid management software or services to automate a lot of manual work.

- *Per-impression fee.* Usually referred to as CPM (cost per thousand—M is the Roman numeral for 1,000), you pay each time your ad displays onscreen, whether a searcher clicks or not. Typically, CPM pricing is used only for fixed-placement advertising, not bid-based advertising, and it varies from \$10 to \$30 per thousand impressions (or about 1¢ to 3¢ per single impression).
- *Per-click fee.* Often called CPC (cost per click), it just means that each time a searcher clicks your advertisement, the search engine charges you a fee. Typically, you open an account for a set amount and start bidding for placement. Whenever a searcher clicks your ad, the current bid (per-click) fee is deducted from your account, with your ad disappearing if your account reaches zero. CPC prices range from about 10¢ (usually the lowest bid allowed) to \$30 or sometimes more, with the average around \$1.
- *Per-action fee.* Also known as CPA (cost per action), you pay only when the searcher takes “action”—typically a purchase of your product. In practice, CPA pricing is used mainly for fixed placement or shopping searches, not bid-based advertising, and runs anywhere from \$5 to \$50. Some paid placement engines, however, are beginning to experiment with CPA pricing, so you may someday have a choice between CPC and CPA pricing for your keywords. In addition, a new kind of action, a phone call, is also becoming a popular pricing model—it’s called pay-per-call pricing.

CPM, CPC, and CPA fees are usually mutually exclusive—you pay only one of them on any particular deal. Table 3-3 shows what a paid search campaign might cost when priced according to each method. Some advertisers prefer one method over another, but there is no surefire way to pay less on a consistent basis—it all depends on how many searches, clickthroughs, and purchases there are.

**Table 3-3** Comparing pricing formulas. What you pay depends on the activity multiplied by the rate, but no magical method will always save money.

Method	Searches	Clicks	Actions	Rate	Total Cost
CPM	1,000,000			1¢ per impression	\$10,000
CPC		50,000		20¢ per click	\$10,000
CPA			1,000	\$10 per action	\$10,000



Every pricing method has advantages and disadvantages. Chapter 14 reviews paid search strategies in more detail, and provides examples to help you choose the best option for your objectives.

### MANAGING YOUR BIDS WITHOUT GOING CRAZY

As easy as it can seem to get started with paid placement, you will find that it takes some work to manage the bids in multiple search engines for hundreds (sometimes thousands) of keywords. If you do not carefully monitor your campaign, you will find that you are being outbid (and losing traffic) or that you are paying more than you need to. Unfortunately, monitoring your bids can be labor-intensive, especially in hyperactive markets where others are constantly monitoring and adjusting *their* bids.

In a high bidder auction, if you are willing to pay 45¢ per click, but you see that the high bidder is paying just 20¢ each, you can bid 21¢ and snag the top spot. Now you have the top spot, *and* you are paying well under your budgeted maximum. It is critically important that you continue to monitor, however, because your competitor (or someone else) could bid 22¢ and you will lose the top spot. If you are monitoring, you can keep raising your bid to stay #1 until you hit your limit of 45¢.

You might be able to remain at #1 without monitoring for quite a while if you just bid 45¢ right off the bat. But if the next bid is 20¢, you are wasting 24¢ on each click, because you would get the same #1 position for 21¢. That 24¢ is known as a **bid gap**. You want to eliminate bid gaps as soon as they appear.

Even paid placement engines that use hybrid auctions (clickthrough rate and bid), such as Google, require monitoring. While there are no bid gaps to close, you'll still find competitors raising their bids or increasing their clickthrough rates (by improving their ad copy, perhaps). When they do, their ads may pass yours in the ranking, so you might then want to make changes of your own.

You need to spend a lot of time monitoring your bids frequently to make sure that you maintain your position, do not exceed your limit, and eliminate bid gaps as soon as they appear. Or, you could use bid management software.

Every paid placement program provides a way to automate your bidding. You can set "caps" for your bids (45¢ in our example), set intervals for how frequently your position is assessed, choose the rules for how bids are modified—all without having to personally check constantly. If you use only one paid placement program, you can use the free bid management tool that is part of the program. (Figure 3-6 shows Google's.) If you use multiple programs, you might be better off paying for a bid management tool that can manage your campaigns across all of your paid placement programs. We examine some of the more popular bid management tools in Chapter 14.

## The Benefits and Challenges

Paid placement offers a proven way to attract visitors to your Web site, but put that credit card away for a minute. For all of the benefits of paid placement, you can quickly burn through your budget, getting few sales, if you are not careful. Managed well, paid placement is an indispensable part of a search marketing plan for lots of reasons—if you know what you are doing.

Campaign: OIT Tier 1 - Active | Pause campaign | Delete campaign  
 Budget: \$900.00 / day | Edit campaign settings | Optimize Campaign   
 Targeting: 1 language | 1 location   
 No campaign negative keywords: | No site or category exclusions:

1 - 21 of 21 Ad Groups

Today   
 Apr 1, 2008 - Apr 1, 2008

◆ New ad group ▾ View all ad groups

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ad Group Name	Status	Default Bid Max CPC	Clicks	Impr.	CTR	Avg. CPC	Cost ▼	Avg. Pos
<input type="checkbox"/>	NEDC Eval	Active	\$17.00	26	1,671	1.56%	\$13.70	\$356.24	2.1
<input type="checkbox"/>	Infrastructure Flexibility Eval	Ad Group Paused	\$17.00	15	1,490	1.01%	\$13.96	\$209.42	2.0
<input type="checkbox"/>	Virtualization Eval	Active	\$17.00	3	622	0.48%	\$13.40	\$40.21	3.8
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consolidation Info	Active	\$17.00	3	333	0.90%	\$10.06	\$30.19	2.2
<input type="checkbox"/>	Project Green Info	Active	\$17.00	5	992	0.50%	\$3.26	\$16.28	2.0
<input type="checkbox"/>	Virtualized Environment Eval	Active	\$17.00	1	55	1.82%	\$11.70	\$11.70	1.6

**Figure 3-6** Sample bid management tool. Google’s bid management tool offers many options for managing your paid placement bids.

## Highly Qualified Visitors Will Come to Your Site

Just as with organic search, paid placement attracts visitors who are already interested in what your site does. If they weren’t, they would not have been searching in the first place. So it makes sense that searchers who click paid placement listings are more likely to buy than visitors arriving at your site from clicking a banner ad or directory listing, for example. But paid placement listings get lower clickthrough than organic search, and searchers say that they trust them less, so organic search might still have the edge in converting searchers into buyers.

Paid placement provides near-total control over what your listing says, allowing you to further qualify searchers so that only the “right” ones click through. In organic search, although you can pick your page’s title, the snippet that appears below the title is chosen by the search engine from the words that appear on your page. Paid placement allows you to choose the exact words that appear—you can tune them again and again until you maximize clickthrough and sales.

Remember, however, that the search engines are only paid for clicks, so if you have a great ad that relatively few people click (but you are pleased with your sales), the search engines might not be happy. If your listings get few clicks, high bidder auction systems will stop showing them, whereas Google (and other hybrid auction engines) will lower your rankings. At that point, you must make changes to your ad to try to increase the clicks.

## You See Immediate Results

The biggest difference between paid placement advertising and organic search is that paid placements offer near instantaneous traffic to your site. You can launch a campaign immediately by paying your money, writing your ads, and bidding your way to the top of the paid results—all without changing a line of code on your Web site. And you can constantly fine-tune your ad copy and keyword purchases to further improve your clickthrough rate and sales. Organic search, in contrast, takes much longer to kick in, and much longer to fine-tune, because spiders take a while to revisit your site each time you make a change.

### CASE STUDY: THE RIGHT TITLES AND DESCRIPTIONS QUALIFY YOUR CUSTOMERS

A large insurance company launched a paid placement program to boost sales for discounted auto insurance that it marketed through a senior citizens organization. The campaign started simply enough, as they bought the typical keywords you would expect, such as *auto insurance* and *low-cost car insurance*.

As they analyzed the performance of the campaign, they found they were getting high clickthrough (yea!) and low sales (boo!)—the worst possible situation. They paid for every click but got next-to-no revenue in return. They wondered whether their experiment with paid placement would end in failure.

But just then, someone noticed what everyone else had overlooked. The auto insurance they were selling required customers to be 55 or older to apply. Quickly, they changed their ad copy to say, “Over 55? Looking for auto insurance? Apply now!”

The turnaround was immediate. The clickthrough rate dropped dramatically, but that was okay because nearly all of those clicking now were older than 55 and thus eligible to apply. And apply they did. Now that the right people were clicking, they were far more likely to apply.

The campaign that was almost cancelled went on to score a huge success, all because the changed ad copy drew clicks from only the most qualified customers.

### It Is Inexpensive to Get Started

Getting started in paid placement usually costs less than most other forms of search marketing. You do not have to make expensive changes to your site nor do you have to negotiate long-term deals with search engines. For as little as \$50 and a credit card, you can open a paid placement account.

But you need to get near the top of paid placement listings for popular queries to get heavy traffic. Only the top few ads are syndicated to the other partners—so top paid results in Google are shown in Ask.com, too, but lower-ranking ads are not. Typically, the top four ads are shown on the first results page, followed by the next set of four on each subsequent page until all the ads have been displayed. So every searcher sees the top ads, but only the few searchers that page forward see the others.

And, as you will see in Chapter 11, popular queries have a lot of competition. Although some keywords generate high traffic with low per-click fees, most high-traffic keywords require high-priced bids. You can easily burn through your budget if you are not careful. Blindly raising your bids to stay #1 can end up costing you more than the traffic is worth.

### You Pay Only for Visits to Your Site

Many advertisers prefer paid placement’s fee structure—you pay only when searchers click your ad, not when they view your ad. With banner ads and other types of paid advertising, you are charged for impressions—you pay every time your ad is shown.

But you must be on the alert for **click fraud**—someone clicking your link expressly to charge your account, but having no intention to buy. Although search engines have sophisticated tools to detect click fraud, unscrupulous competitors of yours could engage in this unethical activity.

### KEYWORD BATTLES: HOW TO BLOW YOUR BUDGET IN ONE EASY LESSON

Because paid placement has increased in popularity among search marketers, it is rare to find a popular keyword phrase without any bidders. It is also increasingly likely that bidders are using bid management software to control constant changes to their bids to maintain their place as #1, for example.

When two or more sites decide to be #1 for a particular keyword, a **keyword battle** ensues. Each time one site raises its bid, another increases *its* bid to leapfrog the original site. Unless one side eventually reaches its bid limit, the bidding can escalate dramatically. That's good for the search engines, but not for search marketers.

Sometimes these battles are fought intentionally, with each side consciously raising its bids, but all too often the battle is a mistake. The typical keyword battle arises between two sites with bid management software instructed to always be #1 for that keyword. As you might expect, neither site's software can succeed at being #1 for long—just the length of time in between bids. In this situation, the dueling software keeps bidding higher until one side exhausts its budget, usually within a couple of days.

It does not have to be that way. When you set up your bid management software, you can still request that it be #1, but also set a limit of the highest bid you are willing to pay. That way, your bid management system stops escalating its bid when it reaches the limit you set, defusing the battle, and saving your budget for opportunities with higher return on your investment.

Pay attention to any suspicious click patterns, such as clicks increasing dramatically for just a couple of queries, with no commensurate increase in sales. Monitor discussion boards to see whether competitors are encouraging readers to click your listing without any real interest. If you suspect click fraud on your account, contact the search engine immediately—they will provide free clicks to you to make up for it.

### You Can Target Your Audience

Because paid placement offers tight control over the keywords you buy and the exact wording of your listing, you can create highly targeted ads that cannot be duplicated in organic search campaigns. In organic search, the same page might be found for many different queries and might not be optimized for each kind of searcher—with paid placement, each ad can be chosen especially for searchers entering an exact query.

Paid placement also helps you reach large audiences, because ads are syndicated across many different search engines. However, sometimes this can be a problem. You might be happy with Google's policy, but you might be embarrassed over what content is on the same page as your listing on one of their syndication partner sites—they might have much looser policies on controversial content. You cannot control which partner sites might show your ads, except to opt out of syndication to *all* partners, which can cut your traffic substantially. (Many image-conscious companies *do* opt out, despite the loss of traffic.)

The newest way to target more granular audiences is through a technique called **local search**—displaying your ad to visitors from a particular city or region. Prior to the advent of local

search, businesses with natural geographic boundaries had no way to effectively use paid placement. Small businesses, such as plumbers, would be throwing money away to buy a keyword such as “stopped drain” because anyone in the world could be searching. But medium-to-large businesses suffered, too. A retail chain that dominates several states had no way of using paid search because it was not cost-efficient to pay for searchers throughout the United States.

Local search has changed all that. Slowly growing at about 15 percent a year, local search appeals to the same kinds of advertisers that currently buy printed Yellow Pages ads: doctors, lawyers, retailers, travel agents, contractors, and many others.

The major search engines and some traditional Yellow Pages publishers (Verizon and SBC) offer local search. Each local search engine has different capabilities, with most based on postal codes, cities, or other geographic information in queries. Yahoo! integrates its Yellow Pages and White Pages content into its mapping data to offer local results, and Ask.com partners with City-Search ([www.citysearch.com](http://www.citysearch.com)) for similar function. Some paid placement engines even analyze the location of a searcher’s computer on the Internet (its **IP address**) to guess where the searcher is physically located, to provide **geographic targeting** when searchers do not even tell the search engine their physical location.

Yahoo! ([local.yahoo.com](http://local.yahoo.com) and [yp.yahoo.com](http://yp.yahoo.com)) and Idearc’s SuperPages ([www.superpages.com](http://www.superpages.com)) are the current leaders in local search, with Yahoo! and Idearc properties both drawing over 20 percent of all Yellow Page searches. Superpages.com claims that more than 80 percent of its searchers contact an advertiser, and half say they are likely to make a purchase. We take a closer look at local search engines in Chapter 14.

## How to Get Started

There’s nothing tough about getting started in paid placement. Table 3-2 listed the URLs for you to visit to fill out your sign-up form—all you need is a credit card and an Excel file with your target keywords, your listings, and the URLs searchers should go to when they click your ad. Following a review by the search engine (lasting one to five days), your ads are approved and you can start bidding.

Occasionally, a listing is rejected after review. Each search engine sets its own policies, but most shy away from controversial content, which varies based on local laws and customs. (In Germany, for example, it is illegal to advertise any religious Web sites.)

Search engines are becoming more careful about the copy they allow in advertising. Although one of the great things about paid placement is the control you have over the wording of your listing, search engines must ensure that their searchers are not misled by exciting offers leading to less-than-scintillating Web pages. Reviewers are becoming sticklers for your offer matching what is on your Web page, so make sure that your ad is consistent with the URL on your site to which it leads. If you do not, your campaign might be delayed during your wrangling with the paid placement editors.

## Summary

You are on your way as a search marketer! You have learned the three basic techniques in search marketing: organic search, directory listings, and paid placement. Each technique proves advantageous under the right circumstances, but each one must be handled with care to avoid the pitfalls. Table 3-4 summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of each technique.

**Table 3-4** Search marketing techniques comparison. Organic is hard to do but yields high reward, whereas paid happens quickly but requires higher investment.

Search Marketing Technique	How Much Expertise Is Required?	How Much Traffic Can It Drive?	How Qualified Are the Visitors?	How Soon Do You See Results?
Organic search	High	High	High	Slow
Directory listings	Low	Low	Low	Moderate
Paid Placement	Moderate	High	High	Fast

Perhaps the best news of all is how complementary these techniques can be. Directory listings improve your organic search rankings. When your site is shown in *both* organic and paid results for a search, searchers click one of your listings more than 90 percent of the time.

Why do searchers behave this way? That is what is examined in the next chapter. Understanding why searchers do what they do is critical for you as a search marketer. If you do not understand searchers, you cannot predict which keywords they will use or what content will strike their fancy. Let's examine the research into searcher behavior in Chapter 4.

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