



How paid and organic search relate

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Chris Dawkins is founder and CEO of search engine optimization company Trace Media Marketing. *Hands-On: Search* recently asked Dawkins about best practices in blending organic search with pay-per-click search campaigns.

HOS: *You specialize in SEO, or "natural" search marketing. How can SEO be combined with paid, pay-per-click (PPC) search ads?*

Dawkins: As a general rule, marketers should dedicate half their budgets to SEO, or natural search, and the other half to their paid campaigns. For the short term, a paid search program has the benefit of delivering traffic almost right away, whereas SEO will likely take several months to deliver traffic.

[Also] testing various keywords and phrases with paid search can be beneficial to your SEO efforts. For example, you can figure out quickly which keywords convert to leads or sales. As your SEO campaign starts delivering traffic, you can back off a little from your paid campaign and focus more on SEO.

HOS: *PPC campaigns can become expensive, especially in a competitive market or industry, right?*

Dawkins: Yes, but you may not always want to bid on the most popular—and thus most expensive—keywords. You may want to take more of a long-tail approach and bid on niche or second-tier words. These aren't quite as expensive as the top 10 terms, but can be effective for a lot of small companies.

You can compare keywords and their potential cost by using SEO keyword research tools from Wordtracker or Google AdWords' keyword tool. The Google AdWords tool will give you an estimate of what it would cost to be on the first page of Google, as well as how much competition is out there for each keyword.

HOS: *But with second-tier words, wouldn't you get fewer click-throughs?*

Dawkins: You will get fewer hits, true. But the theory is that the hits you get will be of higher quality because their narrowness will attract the people who really are looking for what you have to sell.

So you should narrow your use of keywords, focusing on just the product you sell or your geographical location. You may just get more sales from 10 clicks off these keywords than from 100 clicks from more generic, and expensive, terms.

HOS: *How do landing pages fit into the equation?*

Dawkins: You can use landing pages very effectively with paid search because you control exactly where the visitor lands. You can also have several different landing pages, so you can match the keywords that customers use with a highly relevant landing page. Landing pages can be very powerful tools when combined with paid search and can easily be changed or replaced if needed, so they are great for A-B testing.

As far as the information included on landing pages, the theory is that the bigger commitment you're asking for, the more landing-page information you should offer. So, if your conversion goal is something simple, like trying to get people to download a white paper or sign up for a newsletter, you don't need a lot of supporting information. But if you're trying to get them to make a bigger commitment, like sign up for a year's worth of services, you probably want to include more information such as case

studies or testimonials.

HOS: *What about the role of SEO vs. PPC when it comes to landing pages?*

Dawkins: With paid search, the more focused the landing page is, the better. For example, a keyword-oriented landing page will typically perform better if it doesn't have any internal navigation. And ideally you should not link that landing page to the rest of the Web site, where people can look around for 10 minutes and lose impetus. Once they start clicking around, they might just click off the site entirely.

I recommend that, once a visitor takes the desired action, such as contacting you or downloading a white paper, then you can forward him to the full Web site to see testimonials and your other clients, and to be reassured that his initial decision was a good one.

HOS: *Are the rules different with SEO?*

Dawkins: With SEO, you don't have the same control over where users enter the Web site and, of course, you need to offer links to the rest of the site. This is where more advance techniques come into play. Building "silos" into your site, for example, involves using the internal link structure to create themed sections. When done properly, silos help improve ranking in search engines and help visitors navigate and make sense of your site.

Each silo has a main page and supporting pages. The supporting pages link to the main page of the silo, but do not link to supporting pages of other silos. In effect, you are telling search engines which pages of your site are most important and should be considered appropriate landing pages. This way, you can gain some control over where prospects initially land.



Chris Dawkins

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