

Search applications exist as the “primary traffic drivers to Web sites” (which produces good Return on Investment for top-ranking companies) and to produce traffic to Web sites.¹ There are three main types of search apparatuses: “search engines, directories and portals.” Search engines and directories tend to consider a site’s ranking by: “quality, title, description, content, popularity and optimization.”¹ Since many times websites are designed primarily to be aesthetically pleasing, following search engine rules can get overlooked, which results in web sites not being found.¹

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) tries to increase a website’s ranking using three main components: Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Paid Search and Paid Inclusion. Based on specific keyword queries, SEO is the designing of a website so that it is more easily found in a search engine and indexed in the top 10 results of a search.² SEO has two categories: black-hat SEO and white-hat SEO. Black-hat SEO uses deceit to trick spiders into indexing a website. Two black-hat methods for misleading spiders are cloaking and using doorway pages.³

Cloaking “recognizes and re-directs indexing spiders to a site not seen by the searching public.” These sites are usually only pages of unclear text exclusively related to a website’s content so that Spiders can read them and then index them.⁴ Doorway Pages are web pages created:

“expressly in hopes of ranking well for a term in a search engine’s non-paid listings and which itself does not deliver much information to those viewing it.”⁴

White-hat SEO permits techniques such as:

“registering a long-term representative domain, accurate meta descriptions, useful and well organized site content and a properly constructed navigation schemes.”⁴

This can be done for free by utilizing natural (organic) methods, such as Link Popularity and Meta Keyword Tags. Link Popularity measures a page’s popularity by counting the number of

back links a page has.⁵ Meta Keywords Tags are used by authors to add text to a page to help with its rankings; however, “not all search engines use the tag.”⁵

Keyword targeting allows for the optimization of certain pages of a web site so that they will have a good rank in a search for particular keywords. This is an essential part of good SEO.⁶ Organic Listings are listings that aren’t sold by search engines but are nonetheless considered “editorially important for them to be included.”⁵ The Organic Listings counterpart, Paid Inclusion, is also often mistakenly viewed as ‘organic’ even though it is paid for because “content usually appears intermixed with unpaid organic results.”⁵

Paid Placement includes cost-per-click/pay-per-click and paid inclusion. Cost Per Click, also known as Paid Search, is the most popular form of Paid Placement and is an advertising payment system in which advertisers don’t pay for ad space, but instead pay every time someone clicks on a link that goes to their website.⁵ Pay Per Click (PPC) ads usually appear above and to the right of the organic search results on Google results pages.

PPC ads are selected through an auction system in which “advertisers develop text campaigns and place bids on certain keywords.”⁴ When a user does a search for a keyword on a search engine and clicks on a sponsored link on the results page, the advertiser is charged for the click. Google’s AdWords PPC advertising program makes up about 60% of the search engine market, while Yahoo’s Search Marketing makes up about 35% of the search engine market share.⁴ Google excels at “delivering the highest amount of search volume of any other engine”, while Yahoo “dominates Google in the number of website properties that it owns and manages.”⁴

Paid Inclusion is an advertising system in which an advertiser pays for pages to be guaranteed in a search engine’s index, “though no guarantee of ranking well is typically given.”⁵

The biggest risk with paid inclusion is that since the majority of searchers never look beyond the first 40 search results, you could pay a lot for guaranteed indexing and not even be ranked.⁵

As a result, when deciding whether or not to use paid inclusion, the cost is a very important consideration. Priced on an “annual or semi-annual flat fee” indexing not only gets a website in a search engine in a timely manner, but it also ensures that the website is regularly reviewed by indexing spiders.⁴ To bypass the lengthy indexing process, which can take months, ecommerce sites can rely on paid inclusion to get indexed fast and that spiders continue to index it frequently.⁴ In addition to fast indexing, the benefits of paid inclusion include: “drawing qualified visitors to relevant pages of a website,” drawing visitors directly to “specific information that will help drive conversion,” and being more “cost effective than paid (sponsored) search ads.”⁷

In 2004, Yahoo debuted its search engine with its “Yahoo Search Technology” for its websites. Like Google’s search engine, Yahoo’s search engine gathers listings by crawling the web. However, also like Google, Yahoo’s crawler isn’t able to gather all the pages from the websites it visits, it “may not revisit pages often” and it “may encounter problems when trying to gather pages delivered via databases and other dynamic delivery systems.”⁸

Partially as a solution to this and partially in an attempt to delve further into deep web indexing, shortly after its search engine release, Yahoo also revealed a new paid inclusion program to allow site owners to pay for guaranteed inclusion of their URLs and to get regular spider revisits. While some lauded this idea, it stirred up a controversy as well as drew stark lines between Google’s platform and itself.

Unlike Yahoo, Google believes that

“payment has no role to play in fixing its crawler problems and views payment links in its crawler-based results as ‘potentially tainting those results.’”⁸

Instead, Google encourages websites to create an account with it and notify Google of any changes made for free. This method also ensures that fresher search results will be indexed.⁹

Although most commercial sites compete for good rankings on both Google and Yahoo, Google doesn't earn money directly from its "editorial results." Instead, Simply put Google's ad serving program, AdSense "gives Google potentially as much incentive to skew results as does Yahoo's paid inclusion program."⁸

Sources

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