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Netting More In-Shop Sales With Internet Marketing

By Phil Sasso

Once upon a time, repair shop marketing was all about an easy-to-read sign on your shop, a box full of business cards and an ad in the local phone book. Today, the sign and business cards are still useful. But the phone book has gone the way of the dwell meter (actually a dwell meter is probably much more often used).

To market to repair shop customers today you need to do Online Marketing. If you're like a lot of shop owners and managers, the very thought of Online Marketing gives you hives. But it doesn't have to be as stressful or overwhelming as it sounds.

Online Marketing is a broad term encompassing everything from search engine marketing and optimization to email and mobile marketing to networking and social media.

Search Engine Marketing vs. Search Engine Optimization

To simplify things, I suggest you first focus on Search Engine Marketing (SEM) to bring in new customers. SEM is basically buying ads on Google, Bing or other search engines so your shop's Web site listing appears at the top (or side) of search results. If you have the skills to browse the Internet, you have the skills to build a basic SEM campaign for your shop.

As a quick aside, SEM is different from Search Engine Optimization (SEO). SEO is about getting your Web site ranked near the top of the search results "organically" (read "free"). Improving your ranking takes some work and time with no guarantee you'll ever end up on the first page. So, SEM is a useful strategy while working on your SEO.

For more on SEO, see my article in the April 2011 SSGM (<http://bit.ly/ssgm04-11>). Since I wrote that article, I've discovered the power of

another free SEO tactic: local visibility. See "Local Search" sidebar for a quick "how to" on improving your ranking in Google, Yahoo and Bing for relevant searches in your city or postal code.

SEO is great for free results. However, if you want quick results, SEM is the answer. The moment you launch an SEM campaign, your ads will begin to appear on that search engine. If you pay enough, you can buy your way to the top. For some shops in competitive markets that can be quite pricey. But you don't have to overspend to get good results.

Unlike traditional advertising, SEM is a pay-per-click model. You don't pay for people to see your SEM ad, you only pay when a prospect clicks on your ad and visits your Web site. Also, most SEM campaigns don't have graphics; your ad is just text, much like a classified ad. The good news is that everyone has the same limits so it's a level playing field.

For the sake of simplicity, I'll focus on using Google Adwords (adwords.google.com) since more people search with Google than all other search engines combined. The system I outline here can be just as easily used with Bing or elsewhere.

There are three parts of an Adword campaign: your keyword list, your ad and your budget.

Choosing Your Keywords

Your ad appears only when someone searches for a word or phrase on your keyword list. So, your goal is to guess what words or phrases your prospective customer will google. That means getting inside your customer's head. Is he looking for a "service station," "garage," or "repair shop?" Is she googling "winterize car," "fall tune-up" or "radiator flush?"

Google has a Keyword Tool to help you choose the right word for your

shop. It will show you how many people are searching for certain terms so you have an idea of how most customers are thinking. Since you're most interested in local business be sure to use your city or postal code in your Keyword research.

For example, I typed "auto repair Toronto" and "car repair Toronto," and found an interesting result: about a thousand more searchers chose the word "car" over "auto." So, if you chose the second phrase, you'll show up in more results. You might think it's best to choose both phrases and you'd get a chance at ads in front of both groups. And you'd be right. But you also have a budget to consider.

There's a checkbox under the Keyword Tool input box that let's you choose to "Only show ideas closely related to my search terms." I suggest you leave that unchecked the first time you use the tool and you'll be amazed at all the suggestions Google will give you.

I suggest you narrow your list down to the three or four most appropriate keyword phrases. You can always add more later. For now focus on your biggest new customer generators or your biggest profit centers.

Writing Your Ad

The hardest part of writing your ad will likely be fitting everything into a limited structure. Here's what you have to work with: twenty-five character headline, thirty-five characters per line for two lines of copy and a destination Web site address.

Headline: Make your headline interesting. What would make you stop you long enough to read an ad? Also try to repeat your keyword phrase in your headline if at all possible. So if you're trying to sell Transmission Service, put it in your headline.

Body Copy: Your body copy should

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continued from page 28

be interesting and make a simple clear offer. Why should a prospect click your link or visit your shop? Make your message engaging. Google your keywords and study what others are doing. Don't steal their copy, learn from them.

I suggest you develop two ads that you run in rotation. After about a week or two, see which ad is doing best. Keep the best ad and rewrite the other. After another month, do the same and keep improving your ad every month until you feel it's working for you.

Domain Link: Your domain or URL link should not go to your home page. Instead it should go to a special "landing page" that relates to your offer or sales message. For instance, if your ad is about brake jobs, then your landing page should be about brake jobs, preferably with a special brake job coupon so you can track your results.

Setting Your Budget

In my opinion, budgeting is the hardest part of the Adwords campaign. There are two components: setting your per click bid and setting your overall budget.

Per Click Bid: I suggest you start by focusing on what I call undervalued words. Those words tend to have a search volume somewhere in the middle and relatively low suggested bid. Once you get a hang of the process and refine your ad. You can start to bid

Five Steps to a Better Local Search Ranking

When prospective customers search online for a service station or mechanic in their neighborhood, they'll likely perform a "local search." That is, they'll type in a search term and their town or postal code, like "muffler shop M3C1V6."

When searching locally in Google, Yahoo or Bing, the first thing potential customers see is a list of businesses next to a local map. These "local search results," are where you want your business to appear for customers searching for your garage or service station locally.

Phil Rozek, founder of LocalVisibilitySystem.com, a resource for business owners who want to attract more local customers, offers these five steps to bump up your search engine visibility and local presence:

1.) Check your Web site. Does it include several keywords that people might use to search for your business? Find popular search terms by using Google keywords: goo.gl/RiypS (By the way, if you don't yet have a Web site, build one. It will help you rank higher locally.)

2.) Create or "claim" your local page. This establishes that you're the rightful business owner. Only create one listing for your business (though it's fine to have one in Google, one in Yahoo and one in Bing). Also, be sure to put a link to your Web site on your local page.

3.) Refine your listing. Here are three quick tips for what to do on your local business listing once you've created or "claimed" it:

Extend Your Title – Is your title or business name generic like "Fred's Automotive?" Add a few descriptive or promotional words like "Repair Service," "The European Import Experts," or "Mufflers & Brakes."

Select The Right "Categories" – Choose at least one category. Don't be afraid to select multiple categories — but only if they're relevant like "tire shop," "wheel alignment service" and "auto repair shop".

Create A Full Description – Use keywords and describe the unique features or benefits of your shop like "overnight drop off service" or "loaner cars." Also be sure to include any important information like your hours of operation.

4.) Get listed on Review/Resource sites. Look at CitySearch, Yelp and other major review sites. Don't see your business listed? Submit your information to each site for free. Be sure your address and phone are listed the exact same way as on your local pages.

5.) Use the free tool at CA.GetListed.org, which will instantly give you free, specific recommendations for how to improve your local visibility to Canadian customers in your neighborhood.

So, while you're working on your online marketing, don't forget to think local.

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on higher cost keywords. (Remember these are bids. You may not actually pay that price. Or someone might outbid you for the top spot.)

“A best practice in setting a maximum bid for an ad group is to start high and lower that bid as necessary,” suggests Online Marketing for Dummies. A higher bid will give you a better initial rank as a new advertiser. Google uses an algorithm that is based on your bid amount and the number of clicks your ads average. So the more revenue you generate for Google, the more often your ad will appear.

Daily Budget: Google asks you to set a daily budget. Once your budget is spent for the day, your ads will not show again until the next day. Let me warn you: don't bet your shop on an Adword budget you can't afford. There are no guarantees in advertising and a few cents a click may not seem overwhelming, but it can add up fast.

I just touched on the basics of Adwords here. For a more in-depth Adwords tutorial see RedFly's You-

Tube video at <http://bit.ly/redfly1>. (It's informative and Sinéad's Irish brogue is fun.)

Review, Revise, Repeat

One of the biggest benefits of SEM is that you can measure your results and adjust your campaign. I suggest you check your Adwords dashboard often. You also should ask every new customer where they heard about you and track that.

A good tracking technique is to have your Adword link go to a “secret” page with an exclusive coupon. Then you can count hits to that page and redemption of your coupons to count your results.

I hope I haven't overcomplicated or oversimplified the process. Running an Adwords campaign can be simple, but it's definitely not easy. So, I suggest you focus on the basics then expand your program as you gain confidence.

Still feel you need help putting together or managing your Adwords campaign? Google now offers free tele-

phone sign-up support (<http://google.com/adwords/phone-signup/>) to make the Adwords set-up process quicker and easier.

If you want someone to manage the whole process for you, a Google Adword Certified expert can help you for a fee (search for them at <https://adwords.google.com/professionals/search/>).

Whether you do it yourself or work with a professional, done right launching a Search Engine Marketing campaign can help you affordably attract new customers.

Sounds like a fairy-tale ending, eh?

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