



Gerry McGoldrick

Gerry McGoldrick, VP, media services, for Insight Interactive Group, says search engines are a cost-effective and efficient means for a brand to interact with its target audience.

graphics and content, quickly comes under suspicion when monthly reports show little return for their investment. It's a frustrating scenario, to say the least.

Savvy marketers, wanting to get to the bottom of the problem, conduct their own research, going to a favorite search engine and entering the brand name or indication as a search term. At this point, frustration turns to anger when the site doesn't show up anywhere in the initial search results. Or, worse yet, a competitor's site is listed in the top 10.

By starting at a general search engine such as Google or AltaVista, the marketer was starting where more than 65% of consumers start when looking online for health information, according to a 2002 Harris Study.

Search engines have become an invaluable resource for consumers as they face the vast content available online. Harnessing the power of common search engines and using them to drive traffic to a site is what search-engine marketing is all about. Therein lies the marketing challenge.

Marketers looking to reach specific patient segments must key into clues offered by the way Internet users search for information. These interests can be used to target specific consumers and deliver appropriate messaging.

For example, a user reveals a specific interest when typing "type II diabetes in women" into a search engine. It is obvious that health issues relating to diabetes in specific and women in general are of importance to this user. Ensuring that a brand site is

For many pharmaceutical marketers, the excitement of launching a brand Website is short lived. Everything that seemed so perfect, from the creative concept to the

listed in the top search results and the message in those results is relevant to the query is an effective way for a brand to begin a relationship with the target audience.

UNDERSTANDING SEARCH ENGINES

A search engine is a classification of a broad range of search sites, ranging from human-built directories such as Yahoo and Looksmart to automated indexing sites such as Google or MSN. Each search engine reviews the content on a site, either through human

eyes or automated "spiders," and attempts to classify it in its database. Some only accept payment for advertising on the site, while others accept payment for priority listing or even simply to be listed. To make matters more confusing, the search results of some engines are syndicated to other search sites. Regardless, all offer some form of paid placement in addition to their search results.

Each search engine has its own method for reviewing and indexing Websites, which is kept confidential and changes routinely to improve the accuracy of the results.

There are four major areas that contribute to being listed in the search results:

Visible Content: This is the content that users see when they look at a Web page. The frequency of words, position on the page, and proximity to other words all are calculated in determining relevance.

Coded Content: In the source code to create the Web page, there are a number of areas for text. This text is reviewed for relevance, an area that can have a negative effect on a site's ranking. Unscrupulous Website coders have "loaded the code" with repetitions of keywords to appear higher in search result rankings. Search engines view this negatively and have developed rules that will result in far lower search rankings if words are repeated too frequently.

Harnessing the Power of **Search Engines**

CREATING AN EFFECTIVE SEARCH-ENGINE STRATEGY FOCUSES A COMPANY'S EFFORTS ON BEING VISIBLE TO THE TARGET AUDIENCE WITH THE RIGHT MESSAGE AT THE RIGHT TIME. MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF THESE MESSAGES ALLOWS LIFE-SCIENCES EXECUTIVES TO OPTIMIZE A SEARCH-ENGINE STRATEGY AND ACHIEVE THE BRAND'S BUSINESS OBJECTIVES.

Link Popularity: As search engines "spider" the Web, some keep track of which sites are linked most frequently. The theory is that the higher quality the site, the more often other sites will link to it.

Paid Listings: Companies such as Overture, formerly Goto, allow companies to bid on certain keywords, paying for each click through. While many may not have heard of Overture, most have probably seen their listings on sites such as Yahoo, Lycos, AltaVista, and others.

SEARCH-ENGINE STRATEGY

There are four major components to an effective search-engine strategy:

Keyword Selection: Researching and selecting the most relevant and appropriate keywords is the foundation for search-engine marketing. While the volume of traffic to the site typically measures a site's success, the most important success metric is the volume of qualified traffic, or number of users who see content and take the desired action. Keywords should be targeted not just on the drug name and class, but to indications and likely search terms of patients and caregivers. Marketers should take off their marketing hat and think about how a consumer would conduct a search on a specific disease or condition. For example, while marketers may look at their product to treat "stress urinary incontinence," consumers are more likely to search for "bladder problems."

A keyword may be too broad or popular to be useful. Once a master list of keywords has been created, the popularity of each term can be obtained through various tools offered by companies such as Overture. This will tell executives how many times that particular search term has been typed into the major search engines in a certain period. Obscure keywords or phrases should be eliminated from the list, and special consideration should be given to overly broad or popular keywords, such as pediatric or heart disease. Optimizing for these broad search results can be expensive to sustain and may result in too many unqualified visitors.

One useful resource for keywords is to look at the code of competitor's sites. Keep in mind, though, that the courts have taken a stance of not allowing firms to use trademarked terms of competitors simply to

Marketers looking to reach specific patient segments must key into clues offered by the way Internet users search for information. Studying users' search terms is critical.

drive traffic to a site unrelated to the trademarked term. The FDA has issued letters to companies on the improper use of keywords in the source code of a site.

Site/Link Optimization: Once the short list of search-engine keywords is developed, the site and related links need to be optimized based on this list. From the keyword to the link messaging to the site content, relevancy is the key to all successful search-engine marketing efforts. As described earlier, this entails changing not only the visible copy to ensure that the key phrases are used, but also the source code.

The use of the key phrases should be focused on the specifics of that page or section of the site. Each content area should have its own set of key phrases woven into the site, for example. Additionally, areas of the site focused on compliance may have different key phrases or a different order of those phrases when compared with a specific discussion about the drug.

Using the key phrases as a guide, pharma executives also should seek out the most popular sites related to the key phrases and strive to have their site linked. For some, this will simply be a listing in their links section, others may require a reciprocal link, and others may require some sort of grant or fee. Being linked from these popular destination sites will not only drive traffic to a site, but raise the importance of that site as measured by search engines when they calculate the link's popularity.

Paid Placement: When a user goes to a search engine and enters a term, search results are only part of the picture. There also are paid placements, which should be included in all search-engine strategies. Paid placement is a very cost-effective way to break out of the clutter of the competition and ensure the message is being

seen first. Where possible, the paid placement and site optimization should work together to own certain keywords and block competitors from any visibility.

Paid listings allow certain flexibility in messaging and guarantee visibility for certain key phrases. Combining site optimization and paid placements delivers a one-two punch that gets results.

Measurement and Optimization: The measurability of the Internet offers extremely valuable input into the effectiveness of a search-engine strategy. Key success metrics for the site should be established at the onset of the search campaign planning process. Each keyword/search engine combination can be measured to see what visitors view on the site. For example, if the goal is to have potential customers register to receive a newsletter, each keyword/site pair can be measured against not simply traffic to site, but also sign-ups for the newsletter.

This form of ongoing measurement is critical. As search engines change their optimization strategies or as competitors and related sites enter the scene, the value of certain messaging can be evaluated.

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PharmaVoice welcomes comments about this article. E-mail us at feedback@pharmavoices.com.