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Conference/Training Summary

Search Engine Strategies (San Jose 08/2005)

By: David Brown

Date: September 2005

About These Summaries

With everyone's busy schedules it is not always possible to get out to all the tradeshows, conferences, seminars and other training sessions that might be of importance.

We understand that and to help we provide summaries for the events we attend.

These summaries are not intended to be all-inclusive and are focused on specific, actionable items that directly impact one or more of our clients.

- **Technologies & Companies To Watch**
- **Industry Trends**
- **Action Items**
- **Key Contacts**
- **Links To Do Your Own Research**

The Search Engine Strategies Conference & Expo was focused on technologies and services available to help generate website traffic and turn that traffic into revenue.

Marketing is changing and understanding the basic nuances of website marketing is something that can benefit almost any company. As the web continues to add millions of pages of content every day it becomes more and more unlikely that someone going to Yahoo! or Google to search for something they need will find your website.

This conference was dedicated 100% to companies, technologies, services and strategies that can be used to improve your chances of being found on the web.

Search Engine
STRATEGIES
CONFERENCE & EXPO

San Jose, CA Convention Center

August 7-10, 2005

<http://www.searchenginestrategies.com/>

On the following pages I've summarized some of the key companies I ran across along with how they might be integrated into your web marketing strategy.

Please feel free to e-mail or call me for more information.

A Hands-On Approach

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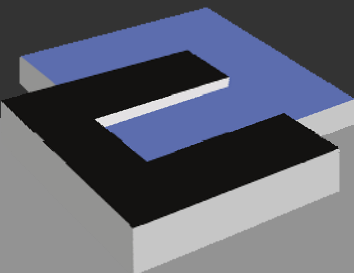
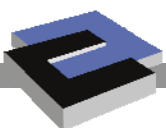


Table of Contents

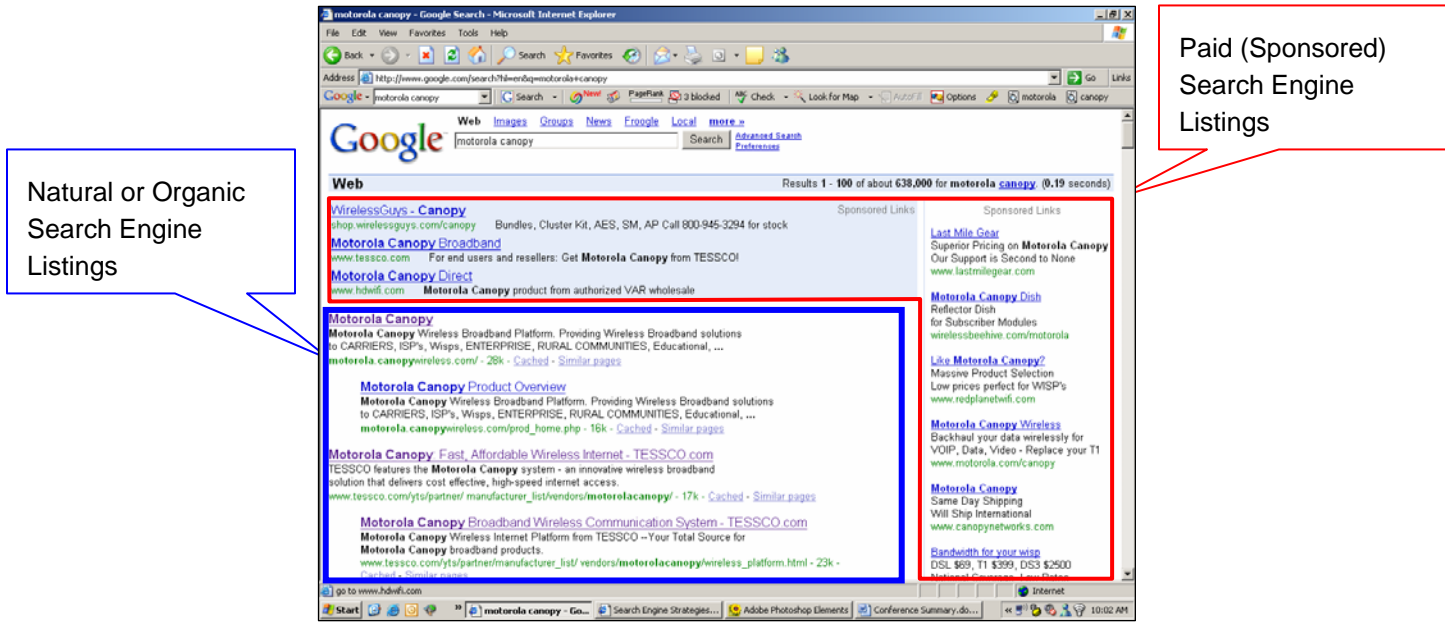
Table of Contents.....	2
Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	2
Basics of How Search Engines Work.....	3
Quality Content Is King.....	4
Basic Things Search Engines Look For	4
Companies & Services to Help With Your Web Strategy.....	7
The Cost of SEO Services.....	7
Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Companies.....	8
OneUpWeb	9
Elixir Systems	9
Bruce Clay, Inc.	10
Paid Search (PPC).....	10
Content Development & Linking Strategies	11
InfoSearch Media	11
PR Web	12
Link Connector	13
Tracking Results	13
Summary.....	14

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

There are two main components of Search Engine Marketing. The first is the direct route through advertising on the search engines using Google Adwords or Overture (Yahoo Search Marketing) which covers about 80% of the market. The remaining 20% of the market for paid search advertising is broken up among hundreds of niche sites like Business.com. In all these cases you are paying for advertising, often on a Pay-Per-Click (PPC) basis to get traffic to your website.



The second approach is through optimizing your website so that the engines pick it up and rank it highly on their own. This is typically called “Natural” or “Organic” search engine listings. An example is shown below:

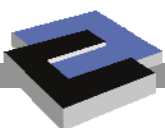


Basics of How Search Engines Work

Achieving good natural search engine rankings is challenging depending on how many competitors you have, how large the market is and what the habits of the potential customers looking for your services are. To understand how to achieve a good ranking let's take a look at the business of being a search engine. Their business model can be distilled down to the following:

Create an up-to-date list of web pages providing the best content relative to the keyword(s) their customer is looking for and rank this list in order of relevance. For natural search engine listings their customer is the user typing in “underground contractor” or “product xyz” into the search engine. With billions of web pages out there and millions being added daily the work of figuring this list out is left to computers that search the internet 24/7 and create these ranked lists based on proprietary formulas (algorithms) developed by the individual search engines.

These algorithms are constantly changing as the computer technology evolves and as website managers figure them out and do things to game the system. Remember that the search engine lives and dies by the quality of their lists so if someone figures out how to skew the results or of another search engine starts providing better lists they will lose business. There is no perfect,



one-size-fits-all answer and even if there were it would be outdated by the time you read this and implemented the strategy.

Quality Content Is King

Here's the basic thing – you will not be ranked on a list for long unless you have quality content on your site tailored around what people may be searching for.

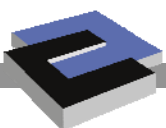
Let's take a look at what you are trying to achieve first. There is no magic in having a company called ABC Construction with a website of www.abccconstruction.com and a homepage that spends 5 paragraphs talking about yourself and your company, then going to Google and typing in “ABC Construction” and having it come up first. If someone already knows your company name they will find you, whether online, in the phonebook or just from calling around.

What you are trying to do is connect with the person who has a big job and types in “utility contractor” or the person who is looking to buy a specific product and types in a catalog number, manufacturer or product line. This is what Search Engine Marketing is all about; connecting with the customer who DOESN'T already know your name.

Basic Things Search Engines Look For

Like I said before there is no one-size-fits-all solution to search engine marketing and ranking. There are several companies listed later on that I ran into who specialize in search engine marketing. They are classified as SEO (Search Engine Optimization) companies because they help you optimize your website for the search engines. There are some basics to look at when designing a webpage that will make the search engine rank it highly. The list is in the basic order of importance.

1. **Keywords:** First of all you have to think like the potential customer trying to find you and figure out what keywords they might search on to find the products or services you offer. This is where it all starts; everything else flows from these few keywords or phrases. For discussion purposes we are going to use “Underground Contractor” as our key phrase.
2. **Content:** Create a page that is specific to a few keywords or phrases. Develop the content to be at least 300 words and have a several pictures that are relevant.
3. **Links To Site/Page:** This is the most important thing for search engine rankings – how many other QUALITY sites link to your site/page? This is the same as personal networking. Let's say you are looking for a quality contractor to hire.



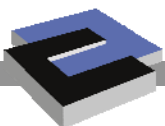
You start asking all your contacts and everyone you come across from the building inspectors to the suppliers to your employees you are likely going to find a short list of contractors whose names keep coming up over and over again. The more you trust and value the opinion of the person you are asking the more you weight their answer. This is very valid method of finding a quality contractor.

The search engines follow a similar process by analyzing links to your site/page. The best thing you can have is a website such as <http://www.utilitysafety.com/> have a link to your webpage and have the hyperlink text say “[Underground Contractor](#)” and link directly to your underground page. This is by far the most difficult part but it is also the most important part. Don’t fall into the trap of generic link exchanges. It won’t do you much good to have a link to your site on www.cartoons.com or something else totally irrelevant. Some good things for creating these links are:

- **Industry Associations:** Make sure your website is listed in their directory and see if you can get direct links to specific pages.
- **Industry Awards:** There will often be write-ups for these. Make sure you get your website included in the write-up.
- **PR:** Working out a good PR campaign is important. Try to make sure that each story gets published online and there is a link to your website.
- **Regular Columns:** There are a lot of industry resources both online and in print that may be interested in you writing a regular column for them. These can provide great links to your website. If writing scares you don’t worry, there are lots of ghost writers out there who would be happy to help.
- **Vendors, Subcontractors & Customers:** Try to get links to your website posted on their sites in exchange for listings on your site.

This seems like a lot of work but in all actuality a lot can be done in a day or two with just some dedicated focus and the results and be far better than a print ad. A “cheap” print ad, ¼ page run one time will likely cost you around \$1,000 or more between design and publishing and it will provide less of a return than spending that same \$1,000 on creating links back to your webpage. The more popular the web becomes the more this will matter.

To find out how many websites link to yours type the following into Google’s search box:

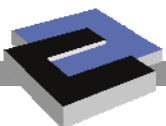


link:<http://www.yourwebsite.com>

4. **Keyword Density:** For your chosen keywords you will want to have at least 3% but not more than 5% keyword or phrase density. For instance if you want people searching for “Underground Construction” to find your website and you have a page with 550 words on it then you should have the phrase Underground Construction appearing at least 17 times on the site, within the content, not the title or meta data.

You can simply put the text of your website into Microsoft Word and use the Find command to do a manual calculation or you can buy a program that will help you out such as [Dynamic Submission](http://www.submission2000.com/) (<http://www.submission2000.com/>) which will highlight things for you and give you other suggestions.

5. **Pictures:** The computer technology at this time cannot analyze a picture but it does recognize them as quality content (a picture is worth a thousand words...). Having 2-3 pictures on your page definitely helps. There will be a way to insert alternative text for the picture when you design the page. Make sure you include one or more of your keywords or phrases in the alternate text.
6. **Keyword Placement/Formatting:** Place your keywords close to the beginning of the webpage and make sure at least a few of them are formatted to stand out – bold, large, different color, etc. Use them in paragraph titles, picture headings, etc. DON’T try to keyword stuff by creating content the same color as the background – that worked 5 years ago but the computers figured it out really quickly.
7. **Other Content Items:** Some things you will want to get right but are simple and carry less importance are the page title (that appears on top of the browser) and the meta data associated with the page including keywords and page description.
8. **KISS (Keep It Simple...):** Critical note, as of today the search engine computers cannot read the fancy things that graphic designers like on their websites like Flash, Shockwave, etc. These features look cool but don’t rank well and are depending on the business are often found far cooler to the owners of the business and the designer than the potential customer trying to use the website.
9. **Database Content:** The easiest page for the search engine computers to read is a basic HTML page. If your page has a lot of database-driven content it will be hard or impossible for the computer to read it or to even find it. Most likely your business can be broken down into a few key services/product lines. Make sure that these pages are clear, simple, easy to find and follow the basic rules, 1-7 above.



Companies & Services to Help With Your Web Strategy

The section above was provided just to give you an overview of the basics required for good search engine rankings. There are many more details and your particular business model will dictate the resources you should spend on SEO. Regardless of your business I'd recommend spending at least a little time going through your website and working on steps 1-9 above.

If your business depends more heavily on the web and search engine rankings there were some companies at the conference that could be very helpful. This is not an endorsement for the particular company or service, just a filtered list that I felt could provide value.

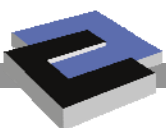
The Cost of SEO Services

Be aware – professional, full-service search engine optimization is not cheap. It is very labor intensive and tedious to follow steps 1-9 above for 3-5 pages on your website or hundred for a online retail business and then tweak that process for the 3-5 key search engines out there. On the low-side you are going to be looking at \$20-40K minimum for the first year. The results aren't instant as they are for Paid Search (PPC) so these companies are only recommended for businesses whose web strategy is central to their operations.

This may sound like a lot of money but let's put it in perspective:

- **Classified Ad (Hiring):** Depending on your business a lot of people are searching for jobs on the web. A typical classified ad in a major newspaper costs around \$1,000 to run for a couple of days. If you run one ad per month this is a \$12,000 per year cost.
- **Print Ad Campaign:** A typical ad campaign for print running in a local magazine or newspaper on a monthly basis will cost at least \$1,000 each time it runs – or \$12,000 per year.
- **Direct Mail:** Average cost to create, process and mail - \$2/each on the low-side. A mailing campaign of 100 letters per week to reach potential new clients will cost you about \$10,000 per year.

Those three basic things are probably typical for any small business that is relatively proactive with marketing. That's a total of about \$34,000 per year and as the number of people looking for information on the web continues to grow you will be smarter to shift some of your budget to search engine optimization.



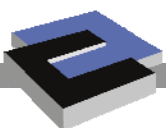
Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Companies

At the conference it seemed like every other booth was a company that was going to optimize your website. After talking to most of them I came up with three that I would look further into. I based this on the professionalism and openness of their people, how technically savvy they were at the conference, what types of clients they normally worked with, how they tracked the impact of their services on your website and whether they employed any tactics that are “gimmicky” such as doorway pages, ghost pages, keyword stuffing, setting up multiple websites, etc.

To learn more about some of these gimmicky techniques see the following:

<http://www.answers.com/topic/doorway-page>

<http://websearch.about.com/od/seononos/a/doorways.htm>



OneUpWeb

COMPANY TYPE:	Search Engine Optimization & Marketing
CONTACT INFORMATION	OneUpWeb Duncan White Director of Client Services www.oneupweb.com Duncan@oneupweb.com 7322 E. Duck Lake Road Lake Leelanau, MI 49653 (231) 256-9811 X103 PHONE (231) 256-9877 FAX

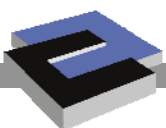
Of the people I talked to I was most impressed with Duncan. He had a phenomenal depth of knowledge and his company had some fantastic tools for measuring the ROI for their services. One of their clients was REI (Outdoor Retailer) and they have great tracking software for tying the full-range of web marketing including natural SEO and PPC to sales results.

Elixir Systems

COMPANY TYPE:	Search Engine Optimization & Marketing
CONTACT INFORMATION	Elixir Systems Fionn Downhill President/CEO www.elixirsystems.com fionn.downhill@elixirsystems.com 7845 East Redfield Road Suite 101 Scottsdale, AZ 85260 (480) 889-5393 PHONE (480) 889-5396 FAX

Their approach is one of experience and technical savvy. They offer a lot of free advice on their website regarding SEO, copywriting for SEO, etc. The basics of SEO as outlined above are the basics. If you have enough time you can do them yourself and achieve moderate to good results. The advantage to hiring a company to do it for you is that you can focus on other things and they have very specific experience working just on SEO; just like you have very specific expertise in your business.

Elixir Systems is definitely a company I'd look into if you are looking to market your website better.



Bruce Clay, Inc.

COMPANY TYPE:	Search Engine Optimization & Marketing
CONTACT INFORMATION	Bruce Clay, Inc. Matt Bobertz SEO Analyst www.bruceclay.com mbobertz@bruceclay.com 207 W. Los Angeles Avenue Suite 277 Moorpark, CA 93021 (805) 517-1900 PHONE (805) 517-1919 FAX

They have some do-it-yourself tools and also offer a lot of information and training. They look like they are more geared towards smaller websites and would be a good fit for those businesses with a smaller budget for SEO. They don't seem to have the deep analytic tools required for businesses doing a lot of online product sales and tying SEO to the POS systems to track return on investment.

I would definitely give these guys a call and see what they have to offer as a starting point. They could be part of a slow build-up strategy where you start with their toolkit and DIY training course, graduate up to some more of their services and if you start to see results from the web marketing efforts look towards allocating more of your budget for more comprehensive services from OneUpWeb or Elixir Systems.

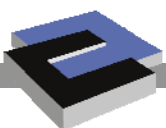
Paid Search (PPC)

Google (<http://www.google.com/adwords>) and Yahoo! (<http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com/>) are the major players but there are some additional PPC companies that may be worth taking a look at.

MSN will be entering the paid search market: <http://advertising.msn.com/sesreg>

Business.com focuses on nothing but business searches: www.business.com

Ask Jeeves has a loyal following of search customers and offers PPC: <http://sponsoredlistings.ask.com>



Content Development & Linking Strategies

There were several companies I came across that would be very helpful for development of content and help with linking strategies. Ranking highly in natural search listings is driven primarily from (1) having good content and (2) having people from around the web linking to that content.

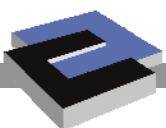
InfoSearch Media

COMPANY TYPE:	Content Development
CONTACT INFORMATION	InfoSearch Media Mary McKenzie Business Development www.infosearchmedia.com mary.mckenzie@infosearchmedia.com 4086 Marina Del Rey Avenue Marina Del Rey, CA 90292 (800) 388-1680 x7388 PHONE (310) 919-3072 FAX

Their specialty is developing content for landing pages that is designed for both your business and for the search engines. They do not focus on gimmicks such as doorway pages but rather on good, solid content that is search engine optimized.

Content is available for both 100% purchase and for lease per month. This is an excellent solution to use getting started with SEO if you don't have the in-house resources to develop your own content.

Remember that this only takes care of 1/2 of the equation. You will still need to get outside links back to your site and individual pages.



PR Web

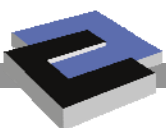
COMPANY TYPE:	Content Distribution
CONTACT INFORMATION	PR Web Mick Jolly Director Strategic Channels www.prweb.com mick@eMediaWire.com 2084 Alder Street PO Box 333 Ferndale, WA 98248 (360) 312-0892 PHONE (360) 380-9981 FAX

PR Web distributes press releases free daily to thousands of media outlets. A key part of optimizing your website will be getting links back to it from outside sources. Submitting regular press releases with hyperlinks to your website that have valuable enough content to get published should be part of your strategy.

Note: You can see how pages link back to your site (pages recognized by the search engines) by typing the following syntax into the Google search box. “link:yourdomain.com”



If you are paying someone for SEO or have an in-house webmaster or marketing person working on this you should use this as a key statistic to monitor their progress.



Link Connector

COMPANY TYPE:	Affiliate Marketing
CONTACT INFORMATION	Link Connector Tara McCommons Director or Sales www.linkconnector.com tara.mccommons@linkconnector.com 1135 Kildaire Farm Road Suite 200 Cary, NC 27511 (919) 468-5150 PHONE (919) 468-5585 FAX

There are various affiliate marketing companies out there which can provide incremental income to you for referring your visitors to other sites or will charge you a portion of your sales for a product sold through another website.

This is a very good strategy for growing commodity sales. Amazon.com has had phenomenal success with their program.

What makes LinkConnector special is that they have a technology called “Naked Link” which means that the link to your product page or website showing up on someone else’s website will count towards a direct link to your page and help your search engine rankings. This is a huge benefit because you are killing two birds with one stone. This is definitely worth looking at if your business sells any commodity products.

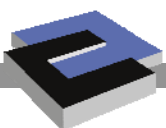
Tracking Results

You have spent a lot of money and time on your website, search engine optimization and any PPC campaigns you are running. There are some tools you should use to monitor the results.

Obviously the first thing you should be noticing is an increase in revenue – if your efforts are not driving additional revenue then you are wasting time and money. You should work hard to develop a clear link between website traffic and sales or sales leads.

Most of the PPC providers such as Google and Yahoo! offer detailed reports of which keywords are getting clicked on. This provides a basic level of information about how someone got to your site using PPC. Beyond that you will want to know:

- Where is your other traffic coming from?
- What navigation patterns do people follow when looking at your site?



- How many new versus return visitors do you get?
- What pages or types of pages are prompting people to buy or call?
- Is your traffic going up, down, staying the same?

WebTrends is one of the oldest standards for tracking this information and is available at a very reasonable cost considering how much you have spent on website development, PPC and SEO.

www.webtrends.com

Who's Clicking is a company that helps monitor click fraud which is when someone intentionally clicks on your paid advertisement over and over until your budget is eaten up for the day and your ad drops off.

www.whosclickingwho.com

As mentioned previously, one of the most critical aspects of search engine ranking is how many sites link back to your domain which you can find out on Google by typing the following syntax into the Google search box. "link:yourdomain.com"



Summary

There is a lot more information about marketing your website out there but be careful – a lot of it is focused on spam and other gimmicks that will only drive short term results. All of these techniques will fail in the long-term. The only way to guarantee long-term success on the web is the same way you guarantee long-term success in your business. Provide quality service (content) and getting your name out there; having as many people as possible talking about you (links back to your site). You have done this everyday in building your business and it has been successful. It was hard work. There were no shortcuts. You will have to do the same thing on the web.

