

Why Businesses Fear SEO

Where the fear stems from, who the bad guys really are, and how to succeed where others fail.

A special report by SLw3.com

The landscape of Search Marketing is as mysterious and seemingly treacherous to business owners as the farthest reaches of Tibet's Himalayan Mountains are to the everyday traveller.

However, more and more businesses are recognizing that – just as the Himalayas possess the most beautiful treasures in the world – so too may Search Marketing hold the most rewarding fortunes of internet marketing.

UNDERSTANDING SEARCH MARKETING

But what exactly is Search Marketing? Also known as Search Engine Optimization, and commonly referred to as SEO or SEM, Search Marketing is the practice of offering your product or service to your target audience while they are actively searching for exactly what you offer.

More specifically, SEO is a system for developing top listings on the front page of the world's most popular search engines, such as Google, Yahoo!, and MSN¹.

WHY YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS THE BENEFITS SEO PROVIDES

"SEO isn't easy. However, in an advertising world where very few things can be counted on, SEO is a reassuringly safe investment." ~ Tad Clarke, Editorial Director, Marketing Sherpa

¹ Search Marketing could also include pay-per-click, however for the purposes of this whitepaper, we will only discuss organic search engine optimization.

It may very well be that the more you feel you need SEO, the more distrusting you are of its ability to truly impact your bottom line.

But gone are the days when SEO stood on the sidelines, unproven and without substantial returns. In 2006, researchers discovered that SEO provided a far higher rate of return than any other marketing outreach, including email marketing, direct response, advertising, and public relations².

Search Marketing's ability to provide such high rates of return lies in its unique industry makeup.

ART MELTS WITH SCIENCE

SEO must target human individuals with their myriad emotions and short attention spans while also targeting inhuman search engines whose intricately complex algorithms call for specific (though constantly changing) data, forms of presentation, themes, and more.

The SEO professional must not only add all necessary elements to your website that the search engines desire – but he or she must also craft each element to engage, inform, and persuade your human visitors to purchase your product or take a specific action.

Because this double-faceted marketing approach is complex and ever-changing, few of your competitors will likely bother with it, allowing you to dominate your market online.

LISTINGS = SALES, BRANDING, PR, REPUTATION, & RELATIONSHIPS

Another reason experts believe SEO provides such a powerful return on investment is because each listing earns your business far more than just visibility.

SALES & LEADS

Obviously, the key area of return we aim for is in sales or hot leads. We want to increase our website traffic and inspire that traffic to take a specific action.

² *Search Marketing Benchmark Guide 2007, Marketing Sherpa*

Traditional marketing interrupts consumers (and executives, in the case of B-to-B marketing) and bombards them with marketing messages they have not asked for. Or they guess at when the consumer wishes to receive the marketing message and hope to hit their target.

SEO has the unique fortune to display your company's listing (which should, in essence, be your unique marketing proposition) at precisely the moment your audience is searching for your product, service, or information.

BRANDING

When optimizing your website for the search engines, you want to target those keywords and keyword phrases that your audience searches most often. The result?

Besides more traffic, you instantly brand your company as the leading resource for your audience's query. Because your keywords will naturally be thematically related, as the prospect continues her research and your website continues to pop up, you begin to build a powerful relationship in her mind between your company and the challenge, problem, or question she is researching.

That relationship is otherwise known as your brand.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

With the advent of the blogosphere and news aggregators like Google News and Yahoo! News, the consumer can now go anywhere for her current events.

Where in the past, press releases only targeted media outlets, now it is quite common for consumers to read press releases they find through the search engines.

Therefore, adding a bit of the search marketer's touch to your press releases, and crafting them to engage the consumer directly, will help get your company consistently in the front-page headlines.

REPUTATION

An integral part of search marketing is cultivating links from reputable, authoritative websites in your industry that point to your website.

Not only do these incoming links help your site rise in the search engine rankings, but your audience will see that other leaders in your industry are linking to you – which amounts to a vote of approval, or endorsing you as an expert.

RELATIONSHIPS

Though often overlooked, we believe that relationships are the most valuable return on investment your company can receive. Relationships are proven to translate into increased future sales through referrals, word-of-mouth buzz, repeat business, and testimonials or endorsements.

As consumers and executives grow ever more discerning in their research before purchase, the emotional buy becomes less of a reality. Our growing aim in marketing is to facilitate the informed and empowered purchase. And the right search marketing strategy compliments this goal beautifully.

Instead of trying to pop your marketing message up every place you think your target audience *might* be, SEO allows you to create the pathways yourself so you can subtly nudge your audience into your website from a variety of places.

For example, imagine that a prospect is researching red widgets on Google. On the first page of results, she sees the following:

1. Your website
2. A wikipedia article mentioning your website
3. A blog post reviewing your red widgets
4. An article on another website about red widgets, written by your company

Instantly, she gets the impression that your website is well known, well respected, and no matter which listing above she chooses to click on, all roads lead back to your website.

Of course, from then on, the quality of your relationship with this prospect will depend on your website content, customer service, product quality, etc.

However, you'll be hard pressed to think of a more powerful way for the two of you to be introduced.

Why Businesses Fear SEO

For many business owners and executives, fear or doubt in relation to SEO centers around one basic question:

Why is SEO so hard to understand?

We feel there are two answers to this question. This is because the mysterious haze that seems to surround search marketing is largely created by two factors: the search engines, and the unscrupulous, unethical tricksters who try to deceive them.

ANSWER ONE: THE SEARCH ENGINES NEVER SIT STILL

In this way, search marketing isn't so different from, say, quantum physics. The rate at which new discoveries are made, new technologies invented, and new methodologies and theories are created – it's dizzying, and almost impossible to keep up.

The reason it's hard to get a consistent answer from every search marketer when you ask, "So what exactly do you do to get rankings?" is because those strategies that work best will change literally every one-to-three months.

There are those principles of SEO that will likely never change, such as good, thematic content and links. However, it's the details that constantly shift. And yes, you guessed it – it's all in the details with SEO!

For example, whereas two-to-five years ago, reciprocal link exchanges worked well, and the search engines seemed to care more about quantity than theme or quality, now they've leapt to the other end of the spectrum. One-way links are the ticket now. Plus, a high volume of incoming links can harm your site's listings if they aren't thematically related, or worse, they come from a site the search engine deems unethical or in violation of webmaster rules.

When it comes to on-page or on-site optimization, we see even more variables to consider. Do you target long-tail keyword phrases or the shorter, more popular terms? Should your internal linking structure and content be organized into thematic silos or should all optimized content be hosted on a secondary website that links into your monetized site?

The questions go on and on. And their answers are always shifting and changing.

That's the excitement and the terror in dealing with search engines. They'll always keep you on your toes. And that means that only those companies who employ a long-term, maintained strategy will win the top rankings. Even latecomers can seize the top spots, because the winner can never take all in the world of search engines. Neither can he rest on his laurels.

ANSWER TWO: IT WAS THE "GET RICH QUICK" SCHEME THAT ACTUALLY WORKED

Unfortunately, the ones who first exposed the benefits of marketing directly to search engines, in order to reach the most qualified audience, were what we call the "Quicksters."

A quickster is an individual dedicated to getting rich the fast way – without building a traditional business or creating a valuable service or product.

The quicksters had found their ultimate goldmine, in varying forms, through tricking the search engines. Whether they made money as fly-by-night SEO companies or through affiliate programs or Google AdSense, what sets these quicksters apart from true SEO professionals is that they can only get results by breaking the rules. And that makes their results short-lived and ultimately fatal to any established company.

When someone breaks the rules in order to achieve top rankings, we call it "Black Hat SEO." This is because such techniques eventually result in getting blacklisted, preventing any page on your website's domain from ever showing up in the search results, even if someone types in your exact name or domain.

If you've ever received a cold call from a high-pressure salesman pitching the benefits of SEO and promising you top ten listings, you can almost guarantee you're speaking with a Quickster or Black Hatter.

If you've ever received a random email making the same promises of guaranteed top ten listings on all the major search engines, again chances are it's a less than reputable firm.

Why? Well let's look at these two red flags a bit closer:

FIRST RED FLAG: THEY CONTACT YOU OUT OF THE BLUE

Cold calling and pursuing cold prospects is the least effective marketing strategy out there in terms of return on resource investment. It takes a lot of time and a lot of manpower.

Because reputable SEO is extremely time-intensive, and it also takes a lot of manpower, established SEO firms and professionals don't have the time or resources to pursue cold leads.

Companies that cold call you most likely have 90%-95% of their human resource in the sales department, with only 3% to 5% in their programming or SEO implementation department. This is because they employ automated software and other quick tricks to get listings (however these automated techniques leave "fingerprints" that alert search engines to their use, resulting in blacklisting).

SECOND RED FLAG: THEY GUARANTEE YOU A SPECIFIC AMOUNT OF TOP TEN LISTINGS

Reputable SEO professionals know better than to guarantee clients a certain amount of top ten listings. More importantly, we know that such a promise is meaningless.

If you get ten number one listings for ten keywords no one searches, that won't result in traffic for you. Additionally, what are the parameters? How quickly are those rankings going to come, and for how long will they last?

Unfortunately, it's impossible to know unless you're using dubious and short-lived techniques. Therefore, such a guarantee is meaningless.

HOW TO OVERCOME THE FEAR

When we see that most of the fear and doubt towards SEO is from its ever-changing practices and some dubious practitioners who have given it a bad name, we see that to overcome much of this is simply a matter of education.

By grasping the fundamentals of SEO, which will likely never change, and knowing which methods to always steer clear of, you can ensure that your investment into SEO will not result in the many horror stories you've surely heard.

On our website, we discuss **the illegal SEO techniques** you should always steer clear of. We also discuss **the fundamental SEO strategies** required for any effective web placement strategy. These two resources should do the trick as far as informing you and protecting you against working with an unethical Quickster.

Once you've chosen an SEO professional or firm to work with, your next step in allaying any fears is to set clear campaign parameters, goals, and metrics. Know when your business should start seeing results (traditionally six months out from the beginning of your SEO campaign), what quantifiable traffic targets you'd like to hit, and what determines ROI. Also identify any secondary results you're looking for, like increased brand awareness or improved reputation.

At this juncture, it's also important to note that Search Marketing should be an integrated facet of your overall marketing methodology and practice.

And, as with any other lead generator, your bottom line depends on your ability to convert the traffic. Different leads react differently, depending on where they came from. So don't be discouraged if you have to rework portions of your website to accommodate the web searcher.

However, a good SEO professional will consult with you prior to campaign launch to ensure that your website can convert traffic.

WHO THE BAD GUYS REALLY ARE

We already talked about the Quicksters, or “Black Hatters.” But they are just high pressure con artists like those that exist in any other industry. And like any other area of life, the truth is no different in SEO.

The real bad guys aren’t the ones who try to con us out of our hard earned dollars. The real dangers are our own psychological triggers and emotional mechanisms that cause us to make hasty decisions without entirely thinking it through.

See, any Quickster will know your influence pressure-points and will use every single one of them to close the sale and get you chanting your credit card number.

Yet, it is our feeling that any consultant or service provider worth his weight would never feel the need to pressure you to make an immediate decision. If he has the best to offer, then he should feel confident that you’ll come to the conclusion to work with him in your own good time.

But, just to be safe, and to help ensure you can detect an unethical SEO professional from a reputable one³, let’s highlight some of our own internal “bad guys” that will get the better of us once in a while if we’re not careful.

WEAPONS OF INFLUENCE

The following three devices are tale-tell signs that the person you’re speaking with is attempting to influence your decision by attacking your psychological triggers.

Though all good salespeople employ persuasion techniques, these three methods go beyond healthy persuasion to guide your decision against your better judgment – NOT through empowering or reinforcing your own judgment.

³ See the link on page 18 for our list of illegal SEO techniques to avoid.

THE TAKEAWAY OR SCARCITY

With SEO, most professionals and firms understand that to promote several clients in the same industry will only hurt everyone involved. Not every client can have a number one listing and they will be competing against each other.

Definitely not good for business.

But if a salesperson tells you that should you choose not to work with him, he'll go to your competitor and promote him instead – this is definitely a threat and by no means appropriate or ethical.

First of all, as we mentioned before, SEO is time-intensive and we don't have time to call business after business begging for work. So the possibility that you or your competitor would even receive such a call from someone who could actually help you is remote.

More importantly, this tactic is trying to play on your fear of scarcity and the "takeaway." They are in essence saying that if you don't decide right this moment to work with them, they'll take your opportunity away and give it to one of your competitors – giving them the added business you should have had.

But there is no monopoly on the search engines. If you don't work with one professional or firm, that doesn't stop you from working with another one. Plus, though we hate to admit it, such a high-pressure salesperson is probably doing you a favor by working with your competitor. Their site will get blacklisted instead of yours.

SOCIAL PROOF...

...without personal relevance.

Yes, you want to see what results an SEO professional has gotten for other clients. You want to know the basic elements of the type of campaign he would implement for your own company.

But if a firm or professional doesn't take the time to discuss your business and goals with you, nor do they submit a personalized proposal that specifically speaks to your company's objectives and considerations, then that means they're in the numbers game: spend as little time with each prospect as possible so you can talk to as many companies as possible.

This translates into little attention during the implementation process and probably zero customization to you and your company's unique needs.

No matter what anyone tells you, SEO is extremely personal. A good, long-lasting campaign cannot be templated or automated. That is because SEO has a dual target: search engines AND humans.

Therefore, considerations and customizations must be made to handle your particular industry, your audience's behaviors, the voice and style of your company and the type of information your audience is seeking.

ALL FOR NOTHING DOWN

As humans, we always seem to want instant gratification – and we want something for nothing.

Quicksters will play on this desire by telling you, "Put the cost of the campaign on your credit card!" Their methodology is that by the time your card payment is due, you'll have started to receive traffic and will have the additional cash flow to pay it off.

Though this may sound like a win-win situation, we know that someone in debt is someone who concentrates on the short-term instead of the long-term. As we say again and again, SEO is a long-term process.

Always budget for your SEO campaign and never put the cost on your credit card. Most professionals and firms won't even accept a credit card as payment.

If you can't afford an SEO campaign right now, but you know it's the right thing for your business, don't worry. Either work with your chosen SEO professional to produce a workable payment plan, or begin saving and plan to launch your campaign at a later date.

YOUR IMPENETRABLE ARMOUR

You may notice a trend in the above scenarios and tactics. Two trends actually. 1) Quicksters will play on your lack of time and busy schedule to pressure you into an immediate decision and 2) you're talking to a salesperson, NOT the actual person who will be optimizing your website.

So whether you're speaking with an excellent firm or professional, or you're questioning whether you're speaking with a Quickster, the best way to ensure you make the best decision for your business is to do the following:

- ① Take your time. Don't make an immediate decision and be sure to do your research.
- ② Ask to speak with someone who actually handles optimization so that you can discuss your particular business objectives. Never deal solely with a salesperson.

THE BOTTOM LINE

So now you have a solid concept of what Search Marketing (or SEO) is and what it can do for your company. You also know what to be wary of in pursuing a service provider.

We've demystified the fears that surround SEO and we've equipped you with enough knowledge to skirt those horrific SEO nightmares we've all heard about.

But as informative as all this may be, if we stopped right here, you'd be the smarter for reading this whitepaper, but you wouldn't have the actionable data you need to begin pursuing and implementing a winning SEO strategy that results in sales.

So now we need to look at the actual planning and implementation process – how to ensure that your company’s SEO initiative succeeds in both increasing traffic AND improving your bottom line.

HOW TO SUCCEED WHERE OTHERS FAIL

As SEO becomes more mainstream and the search engines continue to seek and destroy the Quicksters, their kind will become far less of a concern. The real key to success here is how you implement your campaign, regardless who you work with.

So let’s look at why campaigns launched by well-meaning companies can still fail – and how to make sure you do not follow suit.

THE QUESTION OF IN-HOUSE VS. OUTSOURCING

As a safeguard, you may have considered hiring an in-house specialist to handle your Search Marketing campaign.

Companies that have kept their SEO in-house saw, on average, a 38% increase in site traffic within six months⁴. This is good news!

However, it’s a bit disappointing when you look at the further data: those companies that chose to outsource their SEO work to a consultant or firm saw a 110% lift in site traffic⁵.

There are several factors that contribute to the staggering gap in effectiveness between in-house and outsourced Search Marketing.

① There is a labor shortage of full-time SEO experts, so the success of your long-term campaign depends on keeping a dedicated resource, which is difficult to do in the current corporate climate.

⁴ *Search Marketing Benchmark Guide 2007, Marketing Sherpa*

⁵ *Ibid.*

2 Upper management delegates additional non-SEO tasks, preventing your in-house expert from concentrating on the many maintenance tasks required to maintain long-term rankings.

3 In-house employees rarely keep up with industry news, marketer forums, or keep close contact with professional colleagues. Since the search industry changes so rapidly (almost weekly), in-house experts often use outdated methods for rankings that still get results, but are far less effective.

4 Many SEO professionals forge relationships at industry seminars and events – these relationships come in handy for keeping abreast of latest industry happenings, sharing client case studies, and troubleshooting ranking issues. In-house experts often can't get the time off to attend these events and therefore largely miss out on this powerful resource.

5 9-5 employees tend to have a different perspective and work-ethic compared to consultants. As firings become more and more sensitive, many employees get comfortable with the fact that if they don't perform optimally, they will simply get reprimanded or reassigned.

On the other hand, a consultant or firm's lifeblood is its clients – who will easily stop payment and walk away if targeted results are not achieved.

Now none of this is to say that an in-house professional would be any less knowledgeable than a consultant, however the natural atmosphere and conditions of working in an office from 9-5 for a single company can often hinder a professional's results. You'd be surprised how often our experience with a client in one industry will provide the perfect solution for another client in a completely different industry.

HOW TO DESIGN A WINNING IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Whether you choose to work with an in-house expert or an outsourced firm or consultant, the most essential element to your success is your implementation plan.

If you're re-designing your website or launching a new website alongside your SEO efforts, you want to be sure that your web designers and programmers work very closely with your SEO professional during the entire design process. To make SEO an afterthought can cripple its effectiveness.

Similarly, if you already have a website, make sure your SEO professional goes through it with a fine-toothed comb to edit meta tags, source code, content, and linking structure.

EXAMPLE OF A WINNING IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Below is a brief example of what a winning implementation plan might look like. The key here is that you integrate your SEO efforts with your web team's objectives and your marketing team's overall implementations and efforts.

This keeps everyone on the same page and the same team – meaning that all departments are working towards a common goal that each team has bought into and adopted.

Additionally, as you'll see in the following plan example, it is vital that your SEO professional work with your copywriters and site designers to ensure that the proper conversion mechanisms are in place to inspire your new site visitors to purchase or provide their information⁶.

Oh, and one last note – we refer often to project meetings. Meetings can easily be conducted through phone conference bridges or internet chat.

⁶ *Don't worry if you don't have a copywriter as many SEO professionals will prefer to write the copy themselves to ensure maximum optimization.*

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN: ORGANIC SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

- 1 Marketing Assessment
 - Set goals
 - Set benchmarks
 - Set metrics for measurement
 - Understand how SEO will impact other current marketing campaigns
 - Discuss which SEO strategies you'll likely pursue (may change after following assessments)

- 2 Website Assessment
 - Know current statistics (traffic, conversions, visitor behavior)
 - Know programming language(s) used and how they impact rankings
 - Review other site elements with SEO professional to be sure they can rank your site (dynamic sites, retail shopping sites, etc.)
 - Set overall objectives and purpose of your website. Determine whether you want it to be highly informational, interactive, retail, etc. as the SEO techniques used will depend on, and affect, these characteristics.

- 3 Team Building
 - Have all applicable team members meet to go over objectives for your SEO campaign and make sure that everyone's needs and expectations are addressed.
 - Designate a project leader and, if each team consists of three or more people, designate team leaders.
 - Make sure everyone understands that in order for SEO to be effective, the SEO professional will need as much access as possible to your website. If he must go through a programmer or designer for every little tweak, this will severely cripple effectiveness.

- 4 Keyword Assessment
 - Discuss which keywords you'd like to target
 - Review and approve SEO professional's keyword list (developed by researching ROI potential of your chosen keywords and thematically related terms)

- 5 Website Review
 - Review website content, on-site elements, existing links and linking structure
 - Develop site optimization task list for optimizing all on-site elements for target keywords

- 7 Settle on Additional SEO Strategies
 - Review all strategies your SEO professional provides
 - Discuss each strategy and how it will affect your ancillary goals, which may be branding, reputation, producing industry buzz or social word-of-mouth, etc.
 - Make sure your SEO professional and the rest of the project team understands exactly what strategies will be used (review our illegal methods

with your professional to make sure none of them are being used and that you have a solid understanding of what's being done)

8 Reporting Expectations

- Find out ahead of time what reports and detailed data your SEO professional plans to provide
- Discuss any additional data your company would like to receive
- Make sure your project team has discussed how to utilize this report data to produce actionable information

9 Begin On-Site Optimization and Additional SEO

- As you begin implementation, set review dates and project milestones for project team meetings to gauge progress and realign future tasks (if necessary)

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

We've done our best to demystify SEO and the reasons why business owners and executives seem to naturally fear it to some extent.

We've also discussed the true dangers in pursuing an SEO campaign (Quicksters and Blackhatters), but we've also established that SEO is a necessary component to any successful marketing outreach.

Lastly, we have provided you some excellent resources for ensuring that your SEO campaign is a successful one and that you don't fall into any common pitfalls.

Now it's time to take a hard look at your own company's unique objectives and challenges and to discuss a customized strategy for both increasing your site traffic and improving your site conversions.

STEP INTO THE NEXT LEVEL OF YOUR COMPANY'S SUCCESS

You've done the research. You've read this, and hopefully other whitepapers, case studies, or articles regarding SEO, how it works, and why it's effective.

Now it's time to explore whether SEO is particularly right for your company and what advantages and growth you can enjoy as a result.

We're not promising that a Search Marketing strategy will save your business or that it is the be-all, end-all for your internet marketing initiative.

But we are promising you that Search Marketing is a validated, integral element to your online presence and that we will work with you to answer any of your questions and to discuss more specifically what SEO can do for you.

This is of course at no obligation to you to work with us. We're simply happy to help.

So get in touch with us. You can contact us several ways:

- ① Email Steve Lean: steve@slw3.com
- ② Phone: +34 679 120 328
- ③ Complete our online [Contact Us](#) form and we will phone you in the next 24-48 hours.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Stephen Lean

[SLw3.com](http://www.SLw3.com)

QUICK-FIND RESOURCE REVIEW

We mentioned several additional resources in this whitepaper to help you in your overall research.

Rather than require you to thumb back through the past 18 pages, we've provided them here.

Illegal SEO Techniques

<http://www.slw3.com/illegal-seo.pdf>

Fundamental SEO Principles

<http://www.slw3.com/seo.html>

Link to our Main site

<http://www.SLw3.com>