

Latest Developments in Search Engine Marketing

Notes From a Small Business

Agenda

- Some background
- It used to be so simple! (1999-2002?)
- Coping with complexity (2003-2007?)
- Whatever next? (2008-?)
- Conclusion

Some Background

- Openroads.com founded in 1999
- Combination of travel guide, agent and tour operator
- Destinations in Britain, W. Europe and N. America
- Marketing in UK, Ireland and English-speaking long-haul markets
- Working to develop distinctive niche(s)
- Employs 8 staff
- PPC advertising managed in-house
- Latitude recently engaged to support SEO activity

It used to be so simple! (1999-2002?)

- On-site optimisation was enough to get good rankings
- PPC bids and positions were transparent
- Our big competitors were still saying “It’ll never catch on”!
- Contextual/Content advertising was generally a waste of money

It used to be so simple!

- On-site optimisation was enough to get good rankings
 - Keywords in metatags
 - Text stuffed with keywords
 - Hidden text undetected
 - Little or no account of links
 - Unsophisticated search engine algorithms

It used to be so simple!

- PPC bids and positions were transparent
 - Position determined solely on price
 - No choice of demographics, geo-targeting or day-parting
 - Simple bid management tools and reporting

It used to be so simple!

- Our big competitors were still saying “It’ll never catch on”!
 - The power of the brands had yet to arrive
 - Limited competition, even for popular search terms

It used to be so simple!

- Contextual/Content advertising was generally a waste of money
 - Inability to select or exclude specific sites
 - Poor monitoring of quality and/or fraud
 - Unsophisticated matching of ads to content

Coping with Complexity (2003-2007?)

- PPC goes opaque
- On-site optimisation needs matching links
- Contextual makes a comeback
- Broad matches go really broad
- Universal search means more than words
- Personalised search

Coping with Complexity

- PPC goes opaque
 - Quality, particularly CTR, has big impact on cost
 - Limited disclosure of ever-changing criteria
 - Competitors' use of demographics, geo-targeting and day-parting affects your position minute-to-minute
 - Bid management becomes more labour-intensive

Coping with Complexity

- On-site optimisation needs matching links
 - On site optimisation no longer enough on its own
 - Where do you get the links? – friend or foe?
 - Pagerank and trust
 - White, grey or black hat techniques?
 - Link-building is another labour-intensive activity

Coping with Complexity

- Contextual makes a comeback
 - More sophisticated matching of ads and sites
 - Lower cost traffic to compensate for increasing search costs
 - Cost-effective brand building
 - Search engines proactive in limiting click fraud
 - Much-improved targeting options

Coping with Complexity

- Broad matches go really broad
 - Ads can be matched to searches that don't include ANY of your keywords
 - Google will always select the most expensive option
 - Essential to use search query reports and apply negative keywords

Coping with Complexity

- Universal search means more than words
 - Carefully nurtured text-based rankings getting pushed down the page
 - New elements, however, can be an opportunity and are particularly relevant to travel
 - Images, video and maps are increasingly attractive to the spiders
 - News items and blogs appear to be given greater weight than previously

Coping with Complexity

- Personalised search
 - Limited current use, but likely to grow
 - Control moves from web site to user
 - Search engines' holy grail is to determine "intent"
e.g. purchase or research?, Paris Hilton or Paris Hilton?!

Whatever next? (2008-?)

- Mashups
- Maps, images and video
- Social Media
- PR & Blogs

Whatever next?

- Mashups
 - Sharing data (or $2+2=5!$)
 - Your content reaches beyond your web site
 - Google Maps and your database
 - Google Mapplets

Whatever next?

- Maps, images and video
 - Particularly relevant to travel sites
 - Google maps and Google Earth API
 - Properly-tagged images and videos

Whatever next?

- Social Media
 - Cannot ignore but need to be selective
 - Need to manage your reputation
 - Fine balance between engagement with a community and excessive commercialism
 - Facebook offering corporate pages
 - Google OpenSocial

Whatever next?

- PR & Blogs
 - Free tools available but needs commitment
 - Good stories can spread like wildfire
 - Blogger needs to be free to write without committee approval
 - News and blogs seem to act like an aphrodisiac to spiders

Conclusion

- More targeted opportunities, but more complexity to go with them
- More labour-intensive
- More likely to need specialist advice and support
- Need to be careful about hyped-up fads
- It will all look different, again, next year!

Oh yes, just one more thing –

Forget about beating Wikipedia
to the top until Google falls out
of love with them!

Thanks for listening