

“Playing the Search-Engine Game”

Wall Street Journal Article Summary

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July 2003

INTRODUCTION. This tutorial is a summary of a June 16, 2003 *Wall Street Journal* article titled: **“Playing the Search-Engine Game”** by Mylene Mangalindan. This summary provides up-to-date information for small, minority- and women-owned businesses (M/WBEs) to help them more effectively have search engines – and potential customers – find their Web sites so they can sell their products and services to more customers.

BACKGROUND. More and more companies are reaching customers using their Web sites. There are several ways to get customers to come to your site such as using banner ads, direct mail, print promotions, and pop-up ads. However, the most effective way to get a customer to your Web site is to have them find you using an Internet search engine such as Google.com or Yahoo.com. The article notes customers are twice as likely to buy if they use a search engine.

SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING OPTIONS. There are essential three ways to get “top billing” with search engines. Costs and results vary. Below is brief description of each method.

1. Paid Listings. These are short text advertisements with links to the advertiser’s Web site. Examples are Google.com and Yahoo. Advertisers bid for top billing. Bids usually start at 5 cents a click and go up. Sometimes a click can cost as much as \$100, e.g., for a real estate listing.
2. Paid Inclusion. This involves an advertiser’s paying a search engine to put the entire content of its Web site – or selected pages – directly on the search engine’s database. Putting the advertiser’s content information directly into the search engine’s database can save weeks or months that it would normally take for a search engine to learn where to find their key word search matches.
3. Search-Engine Optimization. This involves selecting the right key words that customers or prospects use to find your particular product and/or service. Companies can do this themselves or use a paid service. Optimization service companies usually charge an up-front fee and a monthly fee to keep your site high on the search engine results status.

All the above methods work. This means companies need to use all three of the above approaches to maximize their results. However, they must ensure the costs are within their marketing budgets.

M/WBE LESSONS. Search engine marketing will become more important to M/WBEs for several reasons. First, more buyers will continue to use the Internet to find and/or check out your company before returning your call. Second, the article notes there are currently 3 billion Web sites. This makes it more important for a M/WBE to have an effective online marketing plan. Third, competitors will increase their online marketing spending, even if you don't. The Wall Street Journal notes spending on paid listings and paid inclusion in the United States were \$1.2 billion in 2002, compared to \$419 million in 2001. For 2003, the estimate is \$1.8 billion. Global spending was \$1.4 billion in 2002 and is estimated to be \$7 billion by 2007. These statistics indicate which way the market is moving and why M/WBEs need to be there.

WHAT M/WBEs CAN DO. Based on the author's experiences, below are some practical "take away" suggestions for M/WBE firms to help them more effectively market their Web sites:

- Key Words. Make sure you use common key words – not jargon – so buyers can easily find your site.
- Web Marketing Plan. Develop a marketing plan for your Web site that uses online (e-mail marketing) and offline (e.g., postcards) promotions. Budget money for online marketing.
- Differentiate. Make sure your Web site has a unique value proposition or niche focus. Remember it is competing for attention with over 3 billion other Web sites.
- Consultants. Find a consultant to help you with the above areas.

It is also a good idea to do a "site check" with your Web site host. This report shows how much traffic your site receives each month. You can also find more information at the site: www.SearchEngineWatch.com.

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