



Search Engine Optimization? Pay Per Click? Which is Best?

It can be confusing learning about Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Pay Per Click Advertising Programs (PPC). Many clients don't know which option to choose, or whether or not they might benefit from both. Below, Wright Consulting Firm describes advantages and disadvantages of each, and when they may be best for you. At the bottom, we also describe how some companies strategically use both together.

Search Engine Optimization

Analogies: Similar to public relations (for you marketing folks). Can be compared to "buying" search engine traffic.

Advantages

- We do work upfront, and then, for the most part, **we're done**. The changes we make today will probably still be driving traffic to your site a year from now.
- Over time, SEO is usually **less costly** than PPC. In fact, it can be free of charge after the upfront work is done if the clients monitor the campaign themselves.
- There's a **credibility factor**, since the site is listed in the engines' editorial results. This is a sort of third party endorsement - savvy searchers know that the site didn't buy their way in, so the ranking is viewed as "earned." Some of searchers skip over sponsored listings and only pay attention to editorial results.
- **Broad coverage** on all search engines worldwide. In theory, if you have an optimized site with links pointing to it on other sites, every search engine out there should be able to find and index your site. You may get traffic from search engines you've never heard of.

Disadvantages

- We must **make changes** to your web site. Normally, this is easy to do, and the changes are usually transparent to visitors. However, if you have invested heavily in a search engine-unfriendly site, you may not want to implement workarounds to make it more welcoming to engines. Or if your copy went through six rounds of committee and attorney approvals, changing it may not be an option.
- Results (rankings, traffic) sometimes **start slowly**, though they do build over time. Usually, within 3-4 months of submitting the site, rankings get about as high as they'll be.
- There's **no guarantee** as to results. We can't predict how many rankings we'll get for a particular search term or engine; nor can we predict how much traffic we'll get.
- We are **limited as to the number of search terms** we can target by the number of web pages we have to optimize, since we don't want to optimize any web page for more than one to three terms apiece.

Search engine optimization is probably your best bet if:

- You want to spend some time on search engine marketing upfront and have it **pay off in the future**, on conceivably every search engine there is around the world.
- You have a budget to do some work now, and want to **save money later on**.
- Your **site is fairly simple**, without a lot of complicated bells and whistles.
- You **can afford to wait** a month or two for results.
- You **don't want to have to closely manage** or maintain anything on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

Pay Per Click Advertising Programs

Analogies: Similar to advertising (in fact, it is a form of advertising). Can be compared to "leasing" search engine traffic.

Advantages

- Pay per click advertising programs are **fast to implement**. It usually takes four to six weeks for us to do our work, including time for you to approve everything along the way. Then, Google AdWords are up and running as soon as we place the campaign.
- We **don't have to change anything** on your web site.
- Although our standard packages include a limited number of search terms on each engine, in theory, **there is no limit to the number of terms** we can bid on.
- PPC is **good for promotions**, as we can turn the campaign on and off whenever we choose.
- We have very **tight control over the program**, as we dictate where the listing appears and what it says.
- Placement of PPC listings is usually **higher** on the search engines' results page for sponsored listings than for editorial listings.
- It's very **easy to test** different search terms, offers, descriptions, etc., and measure results.

Disadvantages

- **Clicks can be expensive**. Bidding wars often erupt. As more companies learn about PPC, more enter the fray and bids go up.
- You must **keep paying** for the clicks every month. If your budget is ever cut, your listings will disappear, along with your search engine traffic.
- **Some searchers ignore** sponsored listings, since they know they're ads, and skip right down to editorial listings.
- It **requires time** to monitor and adjust listings on a constant basis.
- Listings are subject to **editorial acceptance**. With SEO, we can say whatever we like on our site (which is where the engines pull our title and description). But with PPC, editors insist that all listings be factual and that we not compare your company with others. This means that even if you are the "largest" provider, we can't say that.
- Listings are displayed on the most-used engines in the US, but not many other places. Your **visibility is limited** (however, many believe that being limited to probably 90% of searches run in this country isn't very limited).

Pay per click advertising may be best for you if:

- You want to get up and running **quickly**.
- You have a promotion where you want to be able to **turn a campaign on and off**.
- You want to be **able to test** search terms, products or offers and quickly see results.
- Your **site is search engine-unfriendly** and you don't want to invest in changing it.
- You're only concerned with the **top 10 or so search engines** Americans are using.
- You're confident **you'll have the budget** to spend for the long haul, and **you have time** to maintain positions on a regular basis or have us manage the campaign for you.

Again, there's not always a need to choose between SEO and PPC. Many companies do both. There are a number of ways to skin this cat:

- **Run a quick PPC campaign first**, while the lengthier upfront work for SEO is being done.
- Similarly, **test search terms with PPC** and see which ones searchers seem to respond to most, before undertaking SEO.
- **Undertake SEO first**. If you're not happy with your rankings for some search terms, supplement with a limited PPC campaign.
- **Use both**, in an effort to be visible in as many places as possible. Even if you appear twice on the same search engine results page, lean back and grin, knowing that you're both high up on the page (PPC) for people moving quickly, and in the editorial results (SEO) for anyone who may skip over the ads.

**Need help optimizing your web site for the search engines?
Call Wright Consulting Firm**

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