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Ethical Search Engine Optimization Cost

One of the questions you have to ask yourself is; how does the cost of visibility on organic search engine listings compare with exposure through other, more traditional, media outlets?

Search Engine Optimization is far and away the most cost effective form of advertising. Its low cost-per-acquisition (CPA) and high return on investment (ROI) should make it appealing to anyone establishing budgets for media campaigns.

SEO is proactive: the "customer" is actively looking for the products and services you provide. Traditional advertising is passive: you are hoping to spark someone's interest and get them thinking about buying your products and services.

Compared with other forms of advertising/marketing, SEO is very inexpensive. Think about how much your business spends (or could potentially spend) on television, radio, newspaper, magazine, and even yellow page ads. If you were to break these costs down on a monthly basis, SEO would cost the least and still deliver dramatically better results.

To test this, we looked into advertising in a couple of national US magazines as well as newspapers, yellow pages and radio spots in some major cities. The following information represents the average cost per month for each.

*prices may vary by market in some cases

Advertising medium: Business magazines (US)

Audience reach: National

Size, type, frequency: 1/3 column, B/W, once a month

*Cost per month: \$1,200

Advertising medium: Radio

Audience reach: Local

Size, type, frequency: 30-second spot, 60 spots per month

*Cost per month: \$6,000

Advertising medium: Newspapers

Audience reach: Local

Size, type, frequency: Business card size, B/W, 4 times a month

*Cost per month: \$2,000-2,500

Advertising medium: Yellow pages

Audience reach: Local

Size, type, frequency: Business card size, B/W

*Cost per month: \$180-\$365

Advertising medium: SEO

Audience reach: World wide

Size, type, frequency: 10-20 keywords
*Cost per month: \$249-499

*Note: * Guidelines only as actual costs will vary depending on market conditions, geographical location and your own preferences.*

It is difficult to provide precise numbers because there are so many different variables that can come into play. What we tried to do was keep the variables as consistent as possible from one medium to the next. The ads in the business magazines were the most expensive, but they provided the greatest audience reach (next to SEO), and because the size of the ad was larger than the newspaper and yellow pages ad. Radio came in as the next most expensive. We asked to run a 30-second commercial that would be aired 60 times in a month (the recommended number of airings was 100). Newspapers came in third only because the frequency option we selected was one ad appearing once per week (Saturday issue) and because the size of the ad was fairly small. The yellow pages came in around the same cost as SEO, but what good is a yellow pages ad to an online business? SEO on the other hand, had one of the lowest costs, provided the greatest audience coverage, and with a 24x7 frequency.

It doesn't matter what form of advertising you are using - for online success, SEO really is the most cost effective and efficient way to promote your business. That's why SEO is gaining in popularity with everyone from small one-person operations to large, multi-national Fortune 500 companies.

SEO lets you target your message to the right people at exactly the right time - when they are looking to buy - at a fraction of the cost of other advertising media and a better ROI.

Obviously, this is a large consideration for most companies, but focusing too much on cost and not enough on results can hinder your chances for success. Some things to remember:

Search Engine Optimization is NOT a commodity product.

Unlike selecting a gas or electric company (where the quality of the product is largely the same regardless of vendor), your choice of search engine optimization partner will have a dramatic effect on the overall results

Prices are all over the board.

In this industry there are almost as many pricing models as there are approaches. Avoid long term contracts, sharing of your profits, keyword based fees, or paying for traffic in an organic results environment. If you are observant, you'll pay as much attention to the terms of payment as you do to the amount. If the SEO has a stake in your success (continuing to be paid), then you should have a level of comfort as to their level of commitment to your project.