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Driving Search Traffic to
Your Company's Website

Third Edition

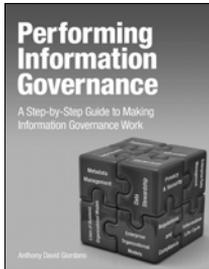
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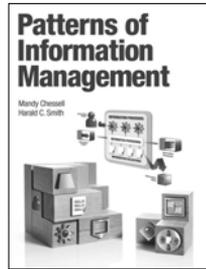
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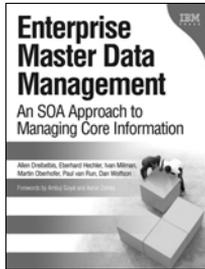
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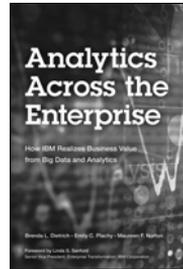
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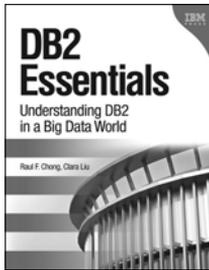
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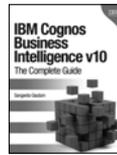
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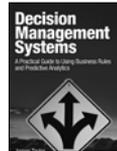
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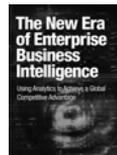
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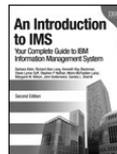
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**Driving Search Traffic to Your
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**Mike Moran
Bill Hunt**

IBM Press

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*To my wife, Linda, and my children, David, Madeline, Marcella, and Dwight,
with great appreciation for their support for me.*

—Mike Moran

*To my wonderful wife, Motoko, and my children, Mariko and William,
for their tremendous patience, encouragement, and support.*

—Bill Hunt

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Preface

Search marketing demands a curious mix of business, writing, and technical skills. No matter which skills you have, you probably have *some* of the skills needed to succeed, but not *all* of them. This book will fill those gaps.

If you possess marketing skills, or you have a sales or other business background, you will quickly see the ways that search marketing draws on your previous experience, but you will also learn how it is different. Like any form of marketing, you will focus on the target markets you want to reach—in this case, searchers looking for certain words. You will segment those markets. You will realize that your web pages are your marketing communications materials. You might see parallels to direct marketing as you relentlessly measure your success, or perhaps you will see the possibilities for search marketing to burnish your brand image. Regardless, like all marketing, you will learn to design your search marketing program to meet your company's larger goals. Unlike other forms of marketing, search marketing is not designed to interrupt people with an advertising message. Successful search marketing meets people at their point of need. When searchers want something, you must be ready to satisfy them with what they want, even if you would prefer to sell them something else.

As critical as marketers are to success, search marketing is, at its core, a writer's medium. Like direct marketing, a well-crafted message is critical to enticing a searcher to click your page. Once at your site, the words on your page also influence whether the prospective customer buys your product or abandons your site. But search marketing relies on skilled writing to an even greater extent than that, because the search engines choose the pages they show based on words. You will learn how to write the words that your customers and the search engines are looking for. If you are a writer, you will find search marketing a challenge like none you have ever seen, but one that can reward your company richly.

If you have technical skills, you are needed, too. Search marketing depends on your website's design and operation. Many commonly used web technologies stop search marketing cold. You will find that search marketing is similar to other technical projects; you must understand the requirements so that you can develop the solution. You need to develop a business case to see the

value so the work can be prioritized and funded for your busy IT team. You will need a project plan to execute on schedule. You will have standards and operational procedures that keep the system running smoothly. If you are a webmaster, a web developer, or any kind of technologist, your skills are vital to search marketing success.

If you are looking for a book about the secrets of search marketing, this book does have a few. However, they might be secrets of a surprising kind. Some people think of search marketing as an arcane pursuit where you need to know the “tricks” to get search engines to show your site. But those tricks are *not* the secrets of search marketing; you do not need tricks to succeed. What you really need is a firm understanding of how search marketing works, a methodology to plan your search marketing program, and the information required to execute it. The biggest secret of search marketing is that knowledge, hard work, and flawless execution are all you need. This book shows you how to get all three.

Part I covers the basics of search marketing: how search marketing works, how searchers work, and how search itself works, operationally. Marketers and writers will learn more about search technology. Technologists will be exposed to the opportunity search marketing offers your company. You will learn how to segment searchers based on their behavior, so you will know what they want from your site. Part I will teach you all the background you need to formulate a custom search marketing program for your company—which is what you will do in Part II.

Part II takes you step by step through developing a proposal for your own search marketing program. You will learn how to identify the goals of your website and measure your current success in meeting them. You will learn how well you are doing at search marketing today and how much it is worth to do better. We show you how to estimate your costs, choose your strategy, and get your proposed program approved by your executives and by all the folks in your company who you need on your side. Because search marketing demands cooperation from so many people in your company, we show you proven ways to get each kind of person to work hard on your program.

Part III explores all the details you need to execute your program. Every website poses different challenges to a search marketing program. You will learn how to diagnose problems on your site and correct them. We teach you methodologies for every part of the search marketing process that you can apply to your own business. And we explain how to measure everything in your program so that you can improve the operation of your program every day.



Throughout the book, you will see icons that signify special material on two important subjects. The first, shown at the left, is the *spam alert* icon, which warns you about overly clever tricks that pose a real danger to your search marketing campaign. You are probably familiar with email spam, when you get unwanted messages in your inbox, but search marketing has its own meaning for spam: any technique that is designed mainly to fool the search engines to gain an untoward advantage. That is an overly broad definition, but we explain exactly where the ethical lines are drawn every time you see this icon. Spam can be hazardous to the health of your search marketing program, because search engines have rules to control search marketing behavior.

When you break the rules, the search engines might take action to hide your content from the search results. Whenever you see this icon, you will know that there is a line that you cross at your own peril.



You will also see, shown at the left, the *global tip* icon, which alerts you about techniques that are especially relevant to international search marketing campaigns. Most of the advice in this book is pitched to an audience of U.S. companies and companies using Google and other English-language worldwide search engines. You will learn, however, that searchers in many countries use search engines specific to that country, and that your non-English content sometimes has special issues that must be addressed. We highlight those areas in the book for you. Whether your website serves international visitors now, or you are considering doing so in the future, these tips are important for you.

New for our third edition, we've created a companion website at SEMincBook.com, containing tools and deeper information requiring faster update than we can do with a published book. Throughout the book, we provide references to the website that you can follow for more information.

No matter what your background, you are already partially prepared to become a search marketer. In this book, you will learn why it is so important to form a team of skills outside your own. Marketers, writers, technologists, and folks from other fields must collaborate to make search marketing work. You will find out why it is that the larger your website, the harder that collaboration can be—but you will also learn how to pull it off. Your business can coordinate these diverse skills to create a successful search marketing program. You just need to know how.

Whether you have been turned off in the past by experts selling quick-fix voodoo or you have just found search marketing too complicated or too intimidating, put that behind you. This book explains everything you need to know in simple terms that you can understand no matter what your experience. If you can use a web browser, you can learn search marketing.

Every day, more and more business is done on the web. And, increasingly, people looking to do business start with a search. Remember, if they can't find you, they can't buy from you. Discover how your company can be found.

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments from Mike

Leading my list of people to thank is Bill Hunt, my co-author. When I first met Bill, I was an expert in search technology, but knew almost nothing about search marketing on the web. To me, if there was a problem with a search engine returning the wrong results, then we should dive in and tweak the ranking algorithm until it worked. Uh, right. Bill quickly showed me the rules of the search marketing road, and I started to learn search from the outside in—how to change our site to get what we want. In our work together at *ibm.com*, Bill helped me through every difficult problem and has made it fun. Since retiring from IBM, I have relied on Bill’s advice and help so often that I have lost count. Working on a book is never easy, but working with Bill made it as easy as possible.

I would like to thank my former IBM management team, including John Rosato and Lee Dierdorff, for their encouragement to complete the first edition of this book. (I want to stress that the opinions expressed in this book are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the IBM Corporation or IBM’s management.) I also want to thank Doug Maine, David Bradley, and Jeanine Cotter, other former managers at IBM, who were willing to take a chance on search marketing at IBM. This book is a compilation of what worked, but I want to thank them for riding out the things that did not work out as well. I want to thank Jeff Schaffer from my old IBM team, a good friend with a wonderful mind, who worked with me to develop many of the original ideas in what we called the “wheel of fortune” that the industry now calls the Buyer’s Journey. I’d also like to thank Rob Key, who has given me numerous opportunities to help clients of both Converseon and Revealed Context, thus developing even more of the ideas explained herein. (And I have always wanted to write the word *herein*.)

The team at IBM Press, especially our editor Bernard Goodwin, was very helpful, especially as we blew deadline after deadline on this third edition. Thanks to all of you for putting up with us. I hope it was worth the wait.

Great thanks are also due to our technical reviewers on this third edition, Hamlet Batista, Mona Ellesseily, Andreas Ramos, and Matt Van Wagner, who slogged through the entire manuscript and found numerous errors and suggested critical improvements. We're indebted to them. If you do spot any remaining errors, blame us, not them. They found the vast majority of the mistakes we made.

I also want to thank my sister, Eileen Cosenza, who takes on every tough job at Mike Moran Group, so that I am free to do the things I am really good at. Without Eileen, I'd still be sending out invoices and updating my website, instead of working on this book.

Most of all, I want to thank my wife, Linda, and my children, David, Madeline, Marcella, and Dwight, who made so many sacrifices so "Daddy could write the book," being patient while I spent many hours writing on top of an already heavy workload from my day job. Without their love and support, I certainly could never have completed this book. I have read many acknowledgments of authors thanking their families for the heavy burdens they carried while the book was written, and I now understand what those other authors were saying. My family deserves every accolade for helping me complete this. I love them very much.

For this third edition, my daughters, Madeline and Marcella, also did a lot of legwork in helping to get the book whipped into shape. This book is better because of what they did.

But my wife, Linda, requires a special acknowledgment for her work on this book, because it goes so far beyond anything an author would ever expect of a spouse. Before this book ever went to the publisher, Linda proofread it. And copyedited it. And the publisher was very pleased with how clean it was (crediting Bill and me far too much). But even those exhausting tasks do not scratch the surface of what Linda put into this book.

Linda is herself a writer, thus bringing a level of professionalism and experience to the craft of writing that she painstakingly taught me throughout the writing of this, my first book. Moreover, Linda has worked as a programmer in a large company and has been the webmaster of three websites, so she is actually the perfect audience for this book. Her keen technical mind and corporate experience made her the ideal reader.

Even though this is the third edition of our book, it was a nearly complete rewrite that took as long to write as the first edition. Linda and I spent hours brainstorming ideas for the book, honing them until we agreed on the best way to explain them. As Bill and I "completed" each chapter, I would present it to Linda to see whether it made any sense to her, as someone who should understand it perfectly. And occasionally it did. But more often, Linda pointed out a critical flaw in terminology, a better organization for the same information, an improvement to an exhibit, or simply a technical error that we had overlooked. It sounds trite to say that this would not be the same book without Linda, but it is true. You would not believe how much harder to understand it would be. Linda did not just proofread or copyedit the words, she inspected the ideas. She judged the nomenclature, the style, the consistency, the flow; she worked over every thought and every word. Linda was truly our editor, in every sense of the word.

—Mike Moran

Acknowledgments from Bill

I would like to thank Mike Moran, my co-author on this book, for his encouragement, vast knowledge, and willingness to partner with me to write and rewrite the third edition this book while managing an already heavy workload.

Without Mike's encouragement, gentle nudges, constant pacing, occasional kick in the backside, and, of course, his sense of humor, I could never have started this book, let alone generate three editions. I am indebted to Mike for his writing style, which has given my rants a consistent voice to raise their value to the reader.

Furthermore, Mike continues to be my mentor, teaching me how to effectively navigate the complex maze of large companies to demonstrate search engine marketing as the ultimate marketing tool.

A very special thank you and debt of gratitude goes out to Linda Moran for her continued support of Mike and me on this book. Linda's assistance in reading and critically reviewing each iteration of this book was helpful beyond belief. In addition, thank you, Linda, for sacrificing your time with Mike to allow him to work with me on this demanding project and pick up the slack when I fell behind on my chapters. I would also like to thank the rest of the Moran family for their various efforts on the project.

I want to give special thanks to my wife, Motoko, and to my children, Mariko and William, for their tremendous support and encouragement for each of the versions of this book. I need to thank my son William for challenging the old man's knowledge as he grows in his own search career. I am indebted to my daughter Mariko for helping me understand the nuances of social media especially how to talk to creative types to get them to optimize as they create.

I need to offer a heartfelt thank you to Motoko, not only for her support on this book, but also for her dedication to my career, often at the sacrifice of her own, for the past 30 years. It is so true that behind every successful man is a strong woman, and Motoko is just that woman! Without her tremendous support, love, and understanding, this book and my overall success would not have been possible.

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—Bill Hunt

About the Authors

Mike Moran has worked on the web since its inception, in both marketing and technical roles, including eight years at IBM.com, IBM's customer-facing website. In 2008, Mike retired from IBM to pursue speaking, writing, and consulting at Mike Moran Group, and also serves as a senior strategist for both the social media consultancy Converseon, and its spin-off social analytics company, Revealed Context. He's twice been named one of the top 50 Internet marketers and regularly consults for Fortune 500 companies around the world.

Mike is also the author of *Do It Wrong Quickly: How the Web Changes the Old Marketing Rules*, perhaps the first book on agile marketing. He writes regular columns on digital marketing at WebProNews and Search Engine Guide, and is the founder and senior author at Biznology (www.biznology.com).

He's a Senior Fellow of the Society for New Communications Research and an Open Group Distinguished IT Specialist. Mike is a frequent keynote speaker on digital marketing at events around the world, serves as a Visiting Lecturer to the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business, works as an instructor for both Rutgers University and the University of California at Irvine, and holds an Advanced Certificate in Market Management Practice from the Royal UK Charter Institute of Marketing.

Mike also has a broad technical background, with over 30 years of experience in search technology, working at IBM Research, Lotus, and other IBM software units. He led the product team that developed the first commercial linguistic search engine in 1989 and has been granted 11 patents in search and retrieval technology. He led the integration of ibm.com's site search technologies as well as projects in content management, personalization, and web metrics. Mike led the adoption of search marketing at ibm.com back in 2001 and pioneered product search facilities that dramatically raised conversion rates. Mike was named an IBM Distinguished Engineer in 2005.

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Bill Hunt has been a pioneer in search marketing, first optimizing pages in 1994. He is considered the top thought leader on enterprise and global search engine marketing and is an internationally recognized search marketing expert who has spoken at conferences in over 30 countries.

Press, industry analysts, and corporate leaders frequently seek Bill's advice to help them effectively leverage enterprise and global search marketing. Bill is the CEO of Back Azimuth Consulting. Through Back Azimuth, Bill provides cutting-edge keyword data-mining models to identify missed opportunities and increase revenue based on understanding consumer needs. Bill is also responsible for Back Azimuth's search marketing thought leadership and for developing global search marketing strategic roadmaps for multinational corporations such as Absolut Vodka, Cisco, HP, MGM, and Pernod-Ricard.

Bill is a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, and he earned a B.A. in Asian Studies/Japanese from the University of Maryland, Tokyo Campus, and a B.S. in International Business from California State University, Los Angeles. Bill can be reached through his company website (www.back-azimuth.com) or his blog (www.whunt.com).

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How Search Marketing Works

Search marketing. Perhaps you've heard this term kicked around, but you don't know what it means. Or, if you do know, you don't know where to start. As with anything new, if you take it step by step, you can learn it. A systematic approach can lead to search marketing success in any organization.

When someone types a word into Google (or another search engine), sees a page listed from your site, and clicks through to visit your site, you have attracted a searcher. If you do nothing at all, searchers will still find your site—sometimes. To maximize the number of searchers coming to your site, however, you must take specific actions to attract visitors to your site from search sites. That's search engine marketing (or search marketing, for short). This book shows you how to become a search marketer. This chapter covers the following topics:

- **Why search marketing is important:** You are probably not reading this book as an academic exercise; instead, you want to know how to get more visitors to your website. You already spend your marketing budget on other ways to entice people to visit. This chapter explains why search marketing in many ways is the best kind of marketing there is. And some of it is free.
- **Why search marketing is difficult:** Attracting searchers to your site is appealing, but it's harder to do than you might think. As search marketing becomes more and more widespread, your competition is increasing. What's more, small companies have different challenges than big companies—and it isn't easy for either one. This chapter explains why so many websites struggle to attract search visitors. But don't worry. The rest of this book shows you how to overcome these challenges.
- **What search marketing is:** When a search site responds to a searcher, many types of search results show up on that screen. We explain where those results come from and how Google and Bing decide what to show.

- **How to get started in search marketing:** When a search site responds to a searcher, many types of search results show up on that screen. We explain where those results come from and how you, as a search marketer, can influence your content to show up on that result screen. You can get started today if you just know how to approach search marketing. And you'll learn more and more as you move deeper into this book.

Let's get started now! First up, we'll look at why search marketing is so important to any marketer with a website.

Why Search Marketing Is Important

Unless you've been under a rock since the late 1990s (and maybe even then), you know that search marketing is important, even if you might not have done much about it up until now. You know it's important because you likely use search yourself, probably every day, and you're not alone; 91% of online adults used search engines to find information on the web in 2012, up from 84% in 2004. But you might not be focusing on all of the reasons that search marketing can be critically important to your **marketing mix**.

Searchers Are Highly Qualified Prospects

You know that potential customers are out there that you want to reach and that search is one important way to do it. But it goes deeper than that.

Any form of marketing can reach potential customers; that's why marketing exists. Search marketing is unique among marketing techniques in that searchers are out there raising their hands saying, "Please sell to me now!" When searchers belly up to Google and type something into the search box, they are begging to receive marketing messages. Now, not every search revolves around a potential purchase, but many do, and your company can be in the middle of those sales possibilities.

But it's even better than that.

Not only are many searchers potential customers, but the very words that they type into the search box reveal where they are in their purchase process. Someone who enters *hair loss remedy* is not ready to buy, but someone who enters *rogaine* might be. You'll want two very different marketing messages in response to these two different searches, with the first one focusing on alternative treatments for baldness and the second maybe offering a coupon. What other form of marketing is so tuned to the customer's readiness to buy?

That readiness to buy is one of the most basic reasons to spend your scarce marketing budget on search: 89% of those online use search engines to look for information about brands and products. Lest you think that not enough people are online for search marketing to be worth your while, note that total Internet users passed the seven billion mark worldwide in 2012. As simple as it sounds, your customers are online, and they use search to buy. Your site must be found by these searchers who are ready to buy.

Think about the new way that people purchase products. They no longer call your company to have you mail them a brochure. They “Google” your offering (*verizon wireless*). Or maybe they look for your competitor’s (*sprint*). Or they search for its generic name (*cell phone service*).

If your company’s website is not listed in the first few search results for these searches, you’re out! You are out of the customer’s **consideration set**—the group of companies that will be considered for the customer’s purchase. If you are not in the customer’s consideration set, you have no chance to make the sale to that customer.

Even if the goal of your website is not online purchase, your customers must find you to learn about your offerings, download information, or find the location of a retail store. Searchers are far more qualified visitors to your site than someone who clicks a banner ad, for example, so attracting search visitors is just good business.

And search volume is growing dramatically, due to the explosion in the use of mobile devices. If you stop to think about it, these small screens with ubiquitous wireless access to the web are tailor-made for a more search-centered user experience. There is no room to look at long web pages with lots of links to navigate; searching using the keyboard or voice recognition is much easier. There’s always enough room for a search box.

The main reason to make search part of your marketing mix is that that’s where your customers are, but there are other reasons.

Search Marketing Is Cost-Effective

Beyond your customers’ use of search, the case for including search in your marketing mix is compelling for another reason: Search marketing expenditures are a good value compared to other forms of marketing. We’ve already talked about how searchers are more qualified than others you market to, because the act of searching is an expression of interest. That alone saves money wasted in other forms of marketing. But there are more reasons that search is a good buy.

Some search tactics require no payment to the search engine for **traffic**, so it can be among the most cost-effective forms of marketing, especially if your website is already well designed with high-quality content. Even with the costs of search advertising, you pay only for the people who actually click through to your site, unlike other forms of advertising where you pay for each ad impression shown. Marketing software company HubSpot has found that search engine optimization (SEO) has the highest lead-to-customer close rate of any form of generation marketing at one-third lower cost than outbound marketing tactics, such as advertising and direct mail.

Why is this important? Because if you want to start spending money on search, you need to stop spending on something else. When you understand that search is the most effective way to spend your scarce marketing dollars, you should be able to easily reduce some existing budgets (direct mail, perhaps?) to find the money for your new search expenditures. An Advertising.com survey found over 35% of marketers indicated paid search is their most cost-effective lead generation method, nearly twice as effective as other forms of marketing.

Search Marketing Is Big Business

You can tell a new marketing technique is taking off by noticing the number of consultants who hang out their shingles to help you do it! Several kinds of firms are involved in search marketing:

- **Search consultants:** A brand new kind of consultancy has sprung up in the past several years; these new firms handle search marketing and nothing else.
- **Traditional advertising agencies:** At the other end of the spectrum are the old-line advertising agencies that have been around for years. Just as firms such as Young & Rubicam and Ogilvy & Mather handle TV, radio, and print advertising, in recent years they have taken on web advertising. Starting with banner ads, they have now moved into search marketing, too.
- **Interactive advertising agencies:** In between the two extremes, interactive agencies handle anything online, ranging from search marketing to social media to email campaigns. Sometimes these agencies are subsidiaries of the traditional ad agencies, whereas others are smaller, independent firms.

All of these firms are competing for your growing interactive marketing budget. Your organization might already work with one of these companies, or might be looking for a search marketing partner. What is most important at this point is your interest in allocating part of your marketing budget to search, because you will soon see that achieving success is rather challenging.

Why Search Marketing Is Difficult

Because you bought this book, you probably were already convinced that search is a big marketing opportunity, but it's time for a reality check: Search marketing is *not* easy to do.

Although every company differs, large and small companies typically face different challenges in search marketing. (If your organization is medium sized, you might have some problems of each.) Because these are generalizations, your company might have some differences from its stereotype, but understanding what can go wrong can help you analyze your own situation.

Normally, large organizations have the advantage in marketing, but small companies sometimes have the upper hand in *search* marketing. Big companies still have some advantages, but it is a much more level playing field than with other areas of marketing. Let's investigate the success factors for search marketing and see how they relate to company size.

You Need Flexibility

Smaller companies are generally "light on their feet"—more flexible than their larger counterparts. This flexibility provides small companies with fundamental advantages in search marketing, starting with a basic willingness to pursue search marketing in the first place.

Large companies are often “stuck in their ways”: They execute the same kind of marketing programs year after year, and it can take them a long time to even try search marketing. Some corporate types are risk-averse, not wanting to go out on a limb for the new thing. Small companies are often more willing to take a chance on an unproven approach and are more likely to raise investment in search marketing quickly when they see it is working.

Large companies are often slower than small ones, which hurts search marketing in several ways. First, search marketing inevitably requires changes to your website. The faster you can make those changes, the faster your search success can begin. Moreover, continuing success depends on frequent fine-tuning. Smaller companies tend to be able to make changes with more speed and less bureaucratic wrangling.

You Need Coordination

As you’ll learn, search marketing requires many little things to be done properly in order to succeed. For small companies, this isn’t that hard; sometimes everything can be done by a handful of people, or even one individual. But large companies usually have daunting coordination challenges that can hamstring their search marketing programs. At large companies, you often hear some telltale conversations about splitting up the web team or even dividing the website into multiple parts, which makes search marketing a lot tougher:

- **We need multiple teams of specialists:** “The copy writers and the HTML coders really should be in different departments....”
- **We need multiple product sites:** “Each product line should really run its own separate website....”
- **We need multiple audiences:** “We should really have different user experiences for consumers than for our business customers....”
- **We need multiple countries:** “It is really easier for everyone if the Canada and the U.S. sites are separate....”
- **We need multiple technologies:** “We decided to keep using the Apache server for the marketing information, but we are putting all of the commerce functions into WebSphere....”

Each time a large company starts separating itself in these ways, it makes the coordination for search marketing more difficult. In Chapter 10, “Make Search Marketing Operational,” we’ll offer some ways to help, but this need to work together across business units is more difficult for search marketers in large enterprises. And, the bigger the company, the harder it is.

You Need Name Recognition

Small companies often have the advantage in search marketing, but not here. Large companies have a big edge in publicity. Searchers know their names and the names of their products.

Searchers are more likely to include those names in searches, a big edge for the large companies that own those names.

But it does not end there. The bigger and more well-known the website, the more other websites will link to it and the more social media activity will mention that site—both of these are indicators to Google of a site’s importance. Big sites get links and social media activity for whatever they do without even asking. Because everything that big companies do seems newsworthy, they attract news coverage for every tiny product announcement (which means links from news organizations and other well-respected sources). Customers, suppliers, and resellers cozy up to large companies to bask in their reflected glory. Large corporations often have multiple sites that are interlinked, adding to their link advantage. The link popularity and social media activity that large sites enjoy helps their search rankings immeasurably.

Because of all of these factors, large brands have an advantage in search marketing. Studies show that content from large brands often outranks content from smaller brands that could be of higher quality. You can think of this as a “trust factor.” Just as a traveler might be more likely to stay at a name brand motel chain rather than the locally owned inn, and just as someone passing through a new neighborhood might opt to eat at McDonald’s (a known quantity) rather than the unknown local burger joint, search engines have shown a bias to large brand content, other things being equal.

On the flip side, these large brand names can be attacked in social media by pressure groups, disgruntled employees and customers, and anyone with an axe to grind. Because social media is so important to search success, big brands are big targets that can make search marketing more difficult. On balance, however, search marketing is easier when you are well-known.

Small companies can sometimes attract the out-sized attention of big brands, but it takes a lot more work—and often a good bit of luck.

You Need Resources

Larger organizations typically have a huge edge in marketing resources, but they are often slow to devote them to something new, such as search marketing. So, although larger budgets can be an advantage, sometimes small companies spend more than big companies do.

In addition, the largesse of big companies sometimes gets in their own way. Small companies are much quicker to seek outside expertise, and might get better advice from consultants than corporations get from their less-experienced internal personnel who are not search marketing experts.

When it comes to money, more is better than less. But most big companies squander this advantage with the overly complex design of their websites. Search engines greatly prefer simple sites without expensive technical gimmickry that small companies typically cannot afford. There are often good reasons to use these fancy techniques, but when they are overused or used

incorrectly, they quash search marketing. Small companies tend to have simple, clean designs that search engines love.

You Have Lots of Competition

Each of the preceding obstacles to search success is important, but the toughest roadblock to your success is your competitors. You are not the only person joining the search marketing game. So the good news is that you are catching the wave, but the bad news is there are a lot of other surfboards out there to contend with.

Not too many years ago, small companies had search marketing to themselves, because many large corporations were oblivious to the importance of search marketing, or had experimented and failed. Today, large organizations are becoming formidable search marketing competitors. They are using their superior resources to address the other weaknesses outlined earlier so that they can leverage their brand names for their natural advantages.

Big business is not the only source of new competition. As a search marketer, you might already be doing battle in global markets, and you see that competitors seem to be getting more sophisticated about search marketing, lessening your advantage. Or, worse, you do business in just a few local markets and you are starting to face competition from other regions or countries that could never do business in your territory before the Internet, but now they can.

Before the web, companies seeking to enter foreign markets used exporters, licensees, joint ventures, or wholly owned subsidiaries to create a local presence in each market. Although these techniques still have their place, the web allows businesses to sell directly to a customer, no matter what country each one is in. The rise of global search engines helps a business from across the world seem just as “local” as one a block away. It’s likely that your business will be competing with new entrants around the world, if it is not doing so already.

Even more competitors are out there, and they are right in your own backyard—local small businesses. Search engines can personalize results by location, so millions of local businesses whose ad budgets are spent on Yellow Pages advertising are now able to profitably engage in search marketing. If you work for a large company, such as Home Depot, you might have had search marketing to yourself, but will soon face increased competition from local hardware stores.

What happens as more and more marketers realize how well search marketing works? As changes in search marketing make it profitable for more and more businesses? The simple answers are that it makes it tougher to rank at the top of the organic search results, and it also makes paid search marketing more expensive because more companies are bidding the price up. So what do you do about that? That’s what the rest of this book is about.

Before leaving the topic of competition, we should point out that the changes leading to more competition offer opportunities, too. Just as your business might face competitors from new

places, your business can seek customers in new markets that were not cost-effective in the past. If you can become efficient enough, you can become a feared competitor in any market using search marketing and the web.

What Search Marketing Is

Search marketing is a form of digital marketing (or Internet marketing) that consists of a variety of tactics to promote your business by increasing visibility of your content to searchers. Search marketing usually begins when a searcher enters a **keyword** into a search engine, such as Google or Bing, and sees a **search engine results page (SERP)** that contains a series of **search results**.

Each country in the world has a set of search engines that attract the bulk of the searchers in that market. We talk mostly about Google Search and Microsoft's Bing search because they are by far the two most important search engines in the United States. (Yahoo! continues to operate a search site, but Microsoft technology engine powers Yahoo! results in most countries.)



If you engage in search marketing outside the United States, Google and Bing might still be the most important search engines to you in those countries, but you'll want to investigate their market shares to be sure. In the Nordic countries, for example, Google has nearly a 100% market share. In China, Baidu is the leading search engine. In Russia, it's Yandex. For some up-to-date information about which search engines matter in various country markets, check out our website (SEMincBook.com/country-search-engines).

You might never have paid attention to all the different kinds of search results on a page, but search marketers distinguish between two main kinds, **organic search** and **paid search**. Exhibit 1-1 shows which results on the screen are organic results and which are paid.

Organic search is also called **search engine optimization (SEO)** or, less commonly, **natural search**. Organic search results are typically on the left side of the page, often below a paid search ad or two. Organic search results consist of a title and a preview of the content—text from web pages and blog posts, or photos for images and videos.

Search engine marketing (SEM) is a broader term than SEO that encompasses any kind of search results (organic and paid). Some people, however, use the term *search engine marketing* to refer to paid search only, contrasting SEO with SEM, so you need to judge its meaning from context.

Paid search goes by other names, such as **pay per click (PPC)**, **cost per click (CPC)**, **paid placement**, or sometimes **search engine advertising**, but we stick with the name *paid search* in this book. Paid search results tend to be at the top and on the right side of search result pages, but you can find them at the bottom of the page sometimes, too. Paid search ads have traditionally consisted of a title and a description—all words—but search engines are beginning to experiment with bolder forms of advertising that include images.

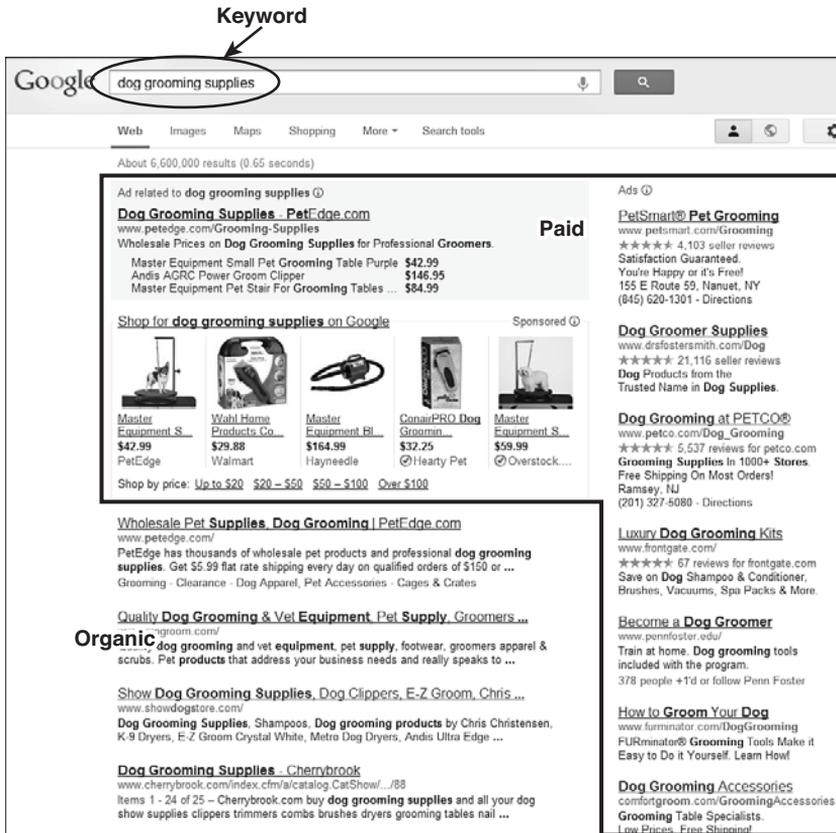


Exhibit 1-1 A search results page. Search engines show paid and organic results on the same page, but do identify the “sponsored results” as being paid for by advertisers.

Let’s look at a partial list of the different kinds of search results and where they come from, as shown in Exhibit 1-2. You can see a mixture of these result types on the page, and some have tabs that searchers can press to isolate to a specific type (all images, for example).

- **Web pages:** “Web pages” takes in a lot of ground, everything from eCommerce sites to message boards, blog posts, and anything that doesn’t fall into one of the other categories below. You’ll see them on the results page with a link to the web page (drawn from the **title** on the web page) and a **snippet** of text from the page that usually contains the search keywords, as shown in Exhibit 1-3.

Personalized result —  [Bill Hunt's Digital Marketing Rant's & Raves](#)

URL — [whunt.com/](#)

Author photo —  by Bill Hunt - in 1,744 Google+ circles - More by Bill Hunt
Digital Marketing commentary from a global marketing road warrior.

Title — [Mike Moran: Digital Marketing Writer, Speaker, and Consultant](#)

Snippet — [www.mikemoran.com/](#)
Prior to joining Converseon, **Mike** worked for IBM for 30 years, rising to the level of Distinguished Engineer. **Mike** has more than 20 years' experience in search ...

Short site links — [Speaking - Upcoming Events - Do It Wrong Quickly - Search Engine Marketing, Inc.](#)

Full site links — [Walmart.com: Save money. Live better.](#)
[www.walmart.com/](#)
Online shopping for the largest selection of electronics, home furnishings, video games, baby gear and more. Shop online and save money to live better, ...

Walmart.com - Store Finder ... Walmart.com - Always Low Prices! ... Find another store. Search by ...	Departments Shop Low Prices on All Departments. ... All Departments ...
Electronics Shop our selection of top electronic products and get the ...	Wal-Mart Stores Contact Us - Careers - Our Story - Suppliers - Investors - ...
Store Locator About Walmart.com Terms of Use Affiliate Program Sponsorship ...	Walmart Pharmacy Save on all your prescriptions, contact lenses, generic drugs ...

Link to site search — [More results from walmart.com »](#)

Exhibit 1-3 Organic search results. Organic search results usually contain a title, URL, and snippet, but can also include other items.

- **Ads:** Paid search results are ads that you create, consisting of a **headline** and a **description** that each provides details on the offer, as you can see in Exhibit 1-4.

Headline

|

Display URL — [Dog Grooming at PETCO®](#)

Description — [www.petco.com/Dog_Grooming](#)
★★★★★ 5,537 reviews for petco.com — **User reviews**
Grooming Supplies In 1000+ Stores.
Free Shipping On Most Orders!
Ramsey, NJ — **Location**

Phone number — (201) 327-5080 - Directions

|

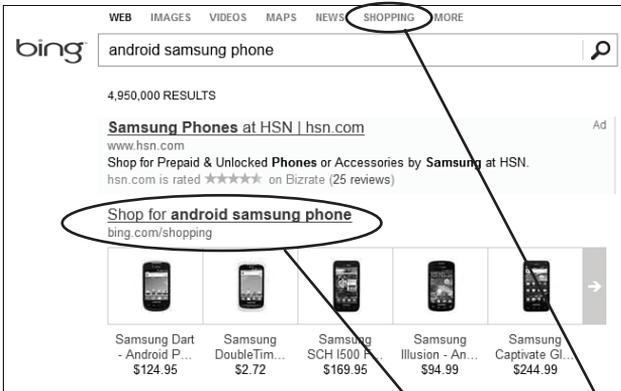
Link to site search

Exhibit 1-4 Paid search results. Paid search results include a headline, description, and display URL, but sometimes have more.

- **Products:** When the search is for a retail item, a picture and price of the item is displayed with a link to the store that sells it. These products are drawn from Google Product Search or Bing Shopping from product listings submitted by retailers; you can see an example of dog grooming supplies pictured in Exhibit 1-1.
- **News:** Some keywords match breaking news stories drawn from known news sources that have been approved by Google or Bing.
- **Local businesses:** If a search seems to be looking for a nearby location, such as a store, the search results include a map with “pins” for locations near the searcher, or a merely a text list of nearby places.
- **Images:** A search might include a gallery of photographs or other pictures, sometimes from image sites such as Flickr, but they can be drawn from any site on the web.
- **Videos:** More and more, search results include videos that can play right from the search result page. Google mostly shows videos from YouTube (which is owned by Google), while Bing shows videos from both YouTube and other video sites.
- **Social media:** Some people consider video and image content to be social media, but there is a lot more social content in the search results. Wikipedia, blog posts, and content from other social venues such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Pinterest have all begun showing up in search results.
- **Direct answers:** Some specialized searches produce results designed to provide the answer right on the search result page, obviating the need to click through to a new page to get the answer. You’ll see this for searches as varied as the weather, stock ticker symbols, airline flights, events, and anything famous enough for a Wikipedia entry. Google provides some direct answers through its Knowledge Graph, which it has been rolling out in multiple languages in recent years.

In recent years, both Google and Bing have aggressively integrated these different types of search results onto their main search result pages, referring to this approach as **blended** search (or in Google’s case, **Universal Search**). Some of these different kinds of search results can be isolated from the rest, as you can see in Exhibit 1-5.

It was once commonplace to use entirely separate search engines to look for these kinds of results. **Product search engines**, also known as **shopping search engines**, such as Shopzilla and NexTag allow searchers to shop for products across retailers, comparing prices and shipping times to make their purchase. **Internet Yellow Pages (IYP) sites**, such as Superpages and YellowPages.com allow you to find local businesses. Nowadays, many of these so-called **vertical search** sites are fading in importance, as Google and Bing invest in integrating these specialty types of searches into their own mainline search results. In fact, some verticals have very little independent competition these days; Google and Bing show the lion’s share of video and image searches, for example.



Search engines often provide multiple ways to navigate search results. Here, Bing offers two ways to drill down from the main search results screen to the same shopping search results.

Many search engines provide faceted search capabilities to allow deep drill-downs, but product search is all about faceted search. Choose the stores, price, brand, and much more to limit the products shown.

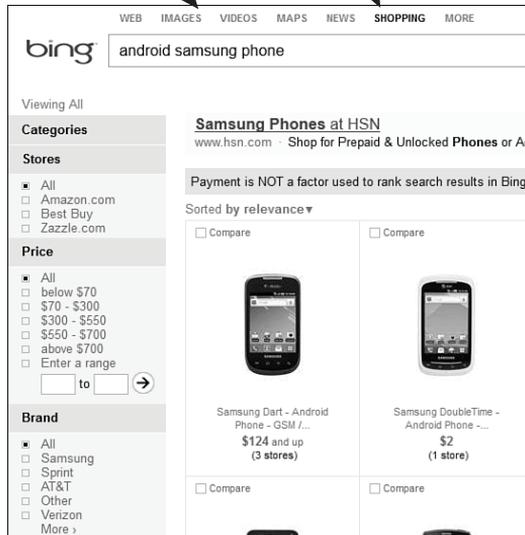


Exhibit 1-5 Search result navigation. Searchers can drill down to isolate results of a certain type in various ways.

Not all vertical search sites are fading. Travel sites, such as TripAdvisor, Kayak, and Expedia, still receive lots of traffic. Yelp provides reviews of local businesses. Some searchers head straight to these sites to do their searches, whereas others may stumble across them in the mainstream engines' search results. But clearly Google and Bing have such sites in their sights, so to speak, and they come under more pressure every year.

FACETED SEARCH: THE POWERFUL WAY TO NAVIGATE SEARCH RESULTS

When searchers don't find what they are looking for at the top of the search results, they typically won't page forward through more search results. Instead, they search again for something else. But what happens when what you are looking for can't be easily described using more search words?

Some call it **faceted search**, others **multifaceted search**, and still others **faceted browsing**. No matter what you call it, there's no denying that it is becoming an increasingly important way for searchers to drill down into search results to find what they are seeking more quickly and easily. Product search engines, such as Shopzilla, have been built on this capability, and Google Product Search employs faceted search. Exhibit 1-5 shows how Bing uses faceted search for products.

Product search is a natural application for the multifaceted search approach, because some products, such as digital cameras, are bought based on the facets (features) of the product. Shoppers care about price, brand, resolution, and other facets of a camera. As they choose the facets they want (such as "more than 16 megapixel resolution" or "between \$150 and \$250 in price," and so on), unwanted choices disappear, so shoppers never get a "not found." But it can be used in other places, as Bing shows with its video search; you should expect to see more uses of faceted search in the future, because searchers find it so easy to use.

If you've taken for granted that search marketing revolves around keywords, faceted search gives you some more ideas to think about. Yes, searchers continue to enter keywords to isolate products or videos, to name just two examples, but the facets that searchers drill down with are just as important in determining what they click on. For product search, you must be prepared to compete against other merchants on price, shipping speed, and reliability.

If shoppers are choosing between multiple cameras, for example, each camera might be listed in the search results (along with a picture, a short description or feature list, customer reviews, and the price range). As shoppers hone in on particular models of digital cameras, the websites (often called *stores*) that offer the camera are displayed in the search results. Each store might show its logo, merchant rating (voted on by its previous customers), price for the camera, and other distinguishing information to coax shoppers to click through to the store's site. When shoppers click results, they are taken to websites (stores) to complete their purchases.

Faceted search is prized by searchers because they can isolate products by features or price without knowing the exact prices or features names. Similarly, if you are looking for a short video or one from a particular source, faceted search does the job. You might call faceted search the *antisearch* because it's often used without entering any keywords at all. In actuality, however, faceted search technology is just a more powerful addition to traditional text searching that allows searchers to restrict the search results by responding to choices offered by the search engine. Peter Morville believes faceted search capability provides users the "illusion of getting started quickly," comparing that style with drivers who get in their car and start driving, only consulting a map when lost, just as we enter a few search words and then navigate from the search results page. Faceted search allows searchers to continually narrow down their results by clicking another constraint on their search.

Other specialty searches are under attack, too. Try searching for an airline flight and you might see flight choices displayed right on the search results page. You can still use travel search sites, such as Kayak, but Google and Bing will be happy to book your reservation for you with their own proprietary reservation facilities. A few years ago, the searcher might have been sent to Expedia or Priceline.

When the mainstream search engines have not been able to co-opt the search results of vertical search engines, they've bought them. Google owns YouTube, the largest video search facility. Microsoft owns Travelocity, the travel search and booking site.

Google has been under pressure lately from government regulators for favoring its own properties in its search results, but as of this writing, no changes have been forced. Google does favor its own video results from YouTube, for example, but that isn't any different from what Microsoft does with Travelocity results in Bing.

Social media items have become more prominent in the search results, including multimedia (images, audio, and video), social network conversations, and blog posts. Microsoft has a deal with Facebook to show results, and you'll sometimes see results from Twitter and LinkedIn. Google, of course, will show results from its Google+ social network when relevant. One of the most interesting aspects of social media results is that they are often **personalized**—not every searcher sees the same results.

Although many websites, led by Amazon, have personalized their user experience, until the last few years search engines have been decidedly retro. Different searchers, by and large, were getting the exact same results when they type the same keyword into a search engine.

A quick review of the history of search technology reveals that the vast majority of improvements have been based on the content: analyzing it better, understanding it more deeply, and assessing its quality. But what about applying the same kind of thought to the searcher? After all, what makes a successful search is the best match between the content and searcher, so why have search engines focused on analyzing the content so much and ignored the searcher?

In part, the maniacal focus on content stems from the fact that understanding the content is easier than understanding people. However, despite the inherent difficulty, search engines are increasingly emphasizing personalized search results based on several factors, including the following:

- **The searcher's location:** As we saw with **local search** results, search engines already try to show results from companies nearby, often by picking out place names within the keywords. The search engines also use the **IP address** of the searcher's device to approximate location. With the rise of GPS capabilities in mobile devices, search engines can sometimes pinpoint location with startling accuracy. When GPS data is less accurate or unavailable, WiFi hotspot locations can also help identify searcher locations.

- **The searcher’s device:** Closely related to location, search engines are increasingly showing search results differently on phones, tablets, and computers. Google in particular has been experimenting with a “tablet” interface that shows fewer ads—often at the bottom of the screen. Mobile searchers tend to click on fewer paid search ads than computer users, so expect the search engines to continue to try new approaches to appeal to mobile searchers.
- **The searcher’s interests:** Could search results be improved if search engines knew searchers’ interests? When searchers enter “jaguar,” are they looking for the car, the animal, the football team, or the Apple operating system? If search engines understood the searchers’ interests, they might be able to take a better guess. Google, especially, is mining information from searcher’s Gmail discussions and from where they navigate on the web to determine which sites might be of more interest than others. Data collected by Google Analytics and Google Wallet might someday allow Google to show results based on previous purchases.
- **The searcher’s friends:** As noted earlier, Bing sometimes personalizes results based on what a searcher’s Facebook friends like, as shown in Exhibit 1-6. Expect Google to do the same with its Google+ social network.

Now that you know more about what search marketing is, it’s time to begin exploring what you can do about it.

How to Get Started in Search Marketing

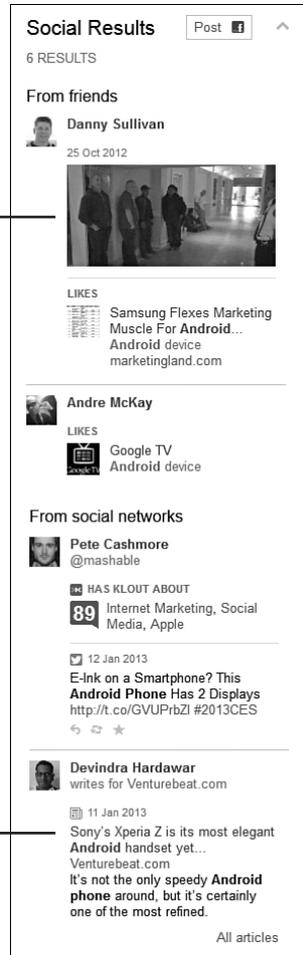
Wait, you aren’t learning about search engines as an academic exercise? Okay, then, let’s talk about the business of search—how you can get started in making your search program a success. We’ll look at organic search, paid search, and the steps for search success with both. Let’s dig into organic search first.

Getting Started with Organic Search

Organic search refers to the way search engines find the most relevant match to a searcher’s keyword. You can think of it as the librarian’s answer to the question. Organic search results are driven purely by the **relevance** of the matches to the keyword that the searcher entered, and are not influenced by any payments made to the search engine by search marketers.

In contrast with paid search, where you must pay the search engines whenever someone clicks on your ad, organic search is free—kind of. It’s free the way that public relations is free: You don’t have to pay the *New York Times* to print your story, but you might have to pay your PR person to get the newspaper to print your story. Similarly, although sometimes it is inexpensive to get your content shown in organic search, there are other situations where it is a lot of costly work.

Bing has a deal with Facebook that allows it to show results based on what your Facebook friends like.



Bing also shows results from blogs, social networks, Klout, Quora, and many other social media venues.

Exhibit 1-6 Social media search results. Social media can show up in the search results, sometimes personalized based on searchers' friends.

Search marketers use many techniques to improve their site's organic search results. As mentioned earlier, these techniques are often referred to as search engine optimization. Later in this book, we explore these approaches in depth so that you can decide which ones are right for you. For now, let's just look at how different options have different price tags.

Why It Works

Despite the wide range of cost, no search marketer can skip organic search. Organic search is critical to any search marketing program, even if you also use other search marketing techniques.

In recent years, organic search marketing is commonly part of a larger **content marketing** program. In content marketing, you use your web pages, blog posts, videos, and other content to solve your customer's problem. Your content might include do-it-yourself ideas, how-to instructions, or common customer problems and solutions. Often, content marketing begins as a social media campaign of some kind, such as the do-it-yourself videos that Home Depot uses to explain how to use the materials and tools sold there.

Organic search marketing is a critical part of any content marketing campaign. Here's why. When you invest the kind of time and money into creating great content, the way Home Depot has in our example, of course you'll use social media to promote it. Each time Home Depot creates a video, they post it to YouTube, they tweet it, they link to it from their Facebook fan page, they create a blog post around it, and any other way they can think of. With that social media attention, the content marketer hopes that others will also share the content so that even more people will be exposed to it. Even under the best of circumstances, it's hard to hope that social media will get exposure for your content for more than a few days. For the rest of the life of that content, its exposure hinges on organic search marketing.

For your content to rank highly in organic search, it must be perceived as being of high quality. Perhaps this is obvious, but the simplest way for your content to be perceived as high quality is to actually *be* of high quality. Search engines have different ways of ascertaining your content's quality, which we explain in detail in Chapter 9, "Prove Your Content's Quality."

Organic search marketing has several specific benefits for your overall marketing:

- **Highly qualified searchers discover your content:** Organic searchers who click your content from the search results are *highly qualified* as prospective customers. They are much more likely to make a purchase than people exposed to your content in social media or who might otherwise visit your website. To understand why, think about the motivation of visitors reaching your site from a successful banner ad. Those visitors set out to find some information (possibly on a subject wholly unrelated to your site), and while reading that article, spot your ad. Intrigued, they click through to your site. These visitors are far less qualified than searchers because they did not start out with interest in your products. You can build the interest and still make the sale, but that is a lot harder to do than to sell to someone already interested. In contrast, searchers initiate their search on a subject related to your business. That's why the search engine shows *your* content in the results. Those searchers want to learn. You are far more likely to sell to searchers than to someone who clicks a banner ad, simply because searchers might intend to buy, whereas banner visitors were doing something else when you caught their eye. People using product search engines, as you might expect, are *especially* likely to buy.
- **You can do it on a budget:** Although some websites suffer from expensive-to-fix problems (which we talk about in the next section), most websites find organic search to be a fairly inexpensive kind of marketing. Your site probably has many pages that already

show up in the search results, and you can tune your content to rank higher and draw more traffic—all without breaking the bank.

- **Your efforts work across all search engines:** Unlike paid search, where an ad listed with Microsoft does not appear in Google, most organic search techniques work across all search engines. Whatever you do to improve your results in Google will probably also help your content in Bing. Just by its nature, organic search success tends to require the same techniques for all search engines.
- **Your efforts can last for a long time:** In contrast to paid search, where the benefits end the moment you put away your credit card, organic search marketing efforts usually last much longer. For example, if you discover the techniques that cause a page to be found by and be persuasive to searchers, you can reap the benefits until a competitor discovers a better formula. Nothing lasts forever, but organic search success can continue even after you stop working on it.

This is an impressive list of benefits, but we wouldn't blame you if you want to know what you need to spend to get them. That's up next.

What It Costs

Organic search is an interesting search marketing technique, because utilizing the technique can cost next to nothing, or it can be expensive, depending on the situation you are in and what you decide to do about it.

It's possible that your site might already be well represented in search and might already rank well in organic search for many keywords. If so, it might be inexpensive to improve your results even more, by choosing more keywords to sprinkle into your content, for example. If your site is missing in action in the search results, however, optimizing your content for organic search can be a daunting prospect; it can be complicated and expensive to make the changes required.

The costs for organic search come from making changes to your content and to your website technology. At this point in your search marketing knowledge, it's natural for you to believe that you don't know enough to make these content and technology changes yourself. You might even think you'll never learn enough to tackle this work on your own.

Because a lot of marketers are in that same situation, they hire SEO consultants. If you need expert advice on choosing keywords, optimizing your content, or measuring your business results, it does not come cheap. If you want to start small, you might find some search marketing firms that will help you optimize a few pages for important keywords for between \$5,000 and \$20,000. Conversely, you should expect to pay hundreds of thousands per year for a consultant to thoroughly address problems in a large site.

If your budget allows it, you can benefit greatly from hiring an expert to jump-start your organic search marketing program. Your site's problems in search are lowering your revenue, and each day they are not fixed is more money down the drain. It can be cost-effective to accelerate

your efforts by using an expert who gets more visitors coming to your site quickly. It is a big decision to hire (or decide not to hire) a search marketing consultant. Chapter 5, “Create Your Search Marketing Program,” walks you through the process.

Happily, under normal circumstances it is not absolutely necessary to use consultants. You and your team can learn enough to do it yourself. Just keep in mind that it will take you considerably longer than a consultant to identify solutions for your problems, which might not be cost-effective based on your available budget and the business opportunities that you are losing each day.

Regardless of how you determine the solutions, you’ll find that the technology and content changes that you make to *implement* those solutions are your biggest organic search expense. Those costs vary widely from website to website, but Part III of this book is devoted to diagnosing search problems and helping you correct them.

Although you are unsure of exactly what it will cost, it doesn’t have to be scary. You probably do not know how much it costs to update your site to introduce a new line of products, or to acquire another company, or to support a new advertising campaign, but these are business decisions that are made every day in every company. The web team knows that it is part of its job to support these initiatives; whatever it takes is just a cost of doing business. Your biggest job will be to make search marketing just another part of the web team’s job—just another everyday cost of running your website. Chapter 5 tackles how you convince the web team to take that on. After you are successful, and the web team makes search-related changes every day, you *still* will not know how much it costs, but at least it will be happening.

Organic search success sometimes requires changes to your technology so that the search engines can discover your content. If your site has a small number of pages, updating the technology is probably not very pricey. If you have a huge technically complex site, however, it can be expensive to fix. Chapter 3, “How Search Works,” explains how search engines discover your content.

Many websites inadvertently make it difficult for spiders to index their pages. In Chapter 7, “Get Your Content Listed,” we work through the most common site design problems and the technology changes required to correct them. Usually, they require some kind of technology change, as the following examples demonstrate:

- We must change the commerce URLs so that they do not have so many dynamic parameters.
- We have to update the content management system so that writers can modify the titles and descriptions for every page.
- We have to modify the metadata template for all HTML pages so that we do not block the spider from crawling each page.
- We need to change the menus in the left navigation bar so that they do not require JavaScript.
- We must remove session identifiers from the URLs.

Don't worry if you don't understand the list. That's the point, actually. Every item in that list is something that your technology folks might need to do to fix your site so that search engines can discover the content on your website. (And we cover many more, too.)

If your site suffers from some of these problems, it can be expensive to get them fixed. Technology projects can be costly, hard to manage, and slow to complete. It is not unheard of for a large company to spend millions of dollars over several years to eradicate all of these organic search problems.

Content changes are typically less costly and easier to manage than technology changes. It is expected that content will be constantly created and updated, so if you can convince your web team to write with search engines in mind, they will do that as a matter of course. It is not any more expensive to write a new page that includes mentions of the important search keywords for that page. Technology changes, however, are not so easy.

You don't need to optimize every page on your site (although that is great to do); you need optimize only the pages that you want returned for the keywords you are targeting. One reason you might shy away from optimizing every page is that it can be expensive to do. Estimates vary, but some studies show that optimizing each web page costs between \$100 and \$200, on average. Most modern websites use templates so that optimizing one template can improve many pages at once, which greatly lowers the costs.

Organic search marketing is usually the least expensive form of digital marketing, despite these costs, which is why almost all websites depend on it. But paid search can bring great business results, too.

Getting Started with Paid Search

“Money is better than poverty, if only for financial reasons,” Woody Allen reminds us. So too, search marketers who are flush with cash have the advantage, but only if their money is spent wisely. We all know that a fool and his money are soon parted, but with paid search you might be shocked as to how quickly they are parted. Paid search is deceptively simple in concept, yet never mastered. The paid search programs are constantly changing, and your competition is always on the move. However, you can succeed in paid search if you learn some basic principles and stick to them.

Paid search has been described as a cross between day trading and direct marketing. Most paid search requires bidding against other search marketers to win the top spot for your site. Bidding can be intense, changing every second as companies jockey for position. Every word in your listing matters—making the difference between an ad that gets clicked and one that does not. Besides paid search ads, we've also talked about product search (shopping search), but paid search ads are the most popular form of paid search marketing.

One difference between paid and organic search is that you list your ad separately for each search engine. So, listing your ad in Google AdWords (the paid search program for Google's search engine) won't get your ad into Bing Ads (the corresponding program for Bing and Yahoo!). Despite that difficulty, paid search is still easier to get started with than organic search.

Google and Bing are the leaders, but you can get a more complete list of the more minor players at our website (SEMincBook.com/ppc-vendors).

By now, you have gotten a taste for the difficulty of revamping your site to garner organic search traffic. Although it pays off handsomely, organic search success takes skill, effort, and time. Paid search seems far easier. Select a keyword, plunk down your credit card, and overnight you have the #1 search position! It *can* work that way—if you know what you are doing. Let’s explore paid search, the fast (and sometimes easier) method of paying your way to the top.

Why It Works

Paid search offers a proven way to attract visitors to your website, but put that credit card away for a minute. For all of the benefits of paid search, you can quickly burn through your budget, getting few sales, if you are not careful. Managed well, paid search is an indispensable part of a search marketing plan for lots of reasons—if you know what you are doing.

Every search marketer ought to at least consider paid search opportunities. For some, paid search will not be cost-effective, but many search marketers find paid search to be more valuable than organic search. It all depends on your site and your situation. We will help you decide

CONTEXTUAL ADVERTISING: DISPLAY ADVERTISING MEETS SEARCH

Paid search vendors offer a form of marketing known as **contextual advertising**, where marketers bid to place ads on the pages of websites that have articles about subjects related to your ads. For example, if your company runs a hotel in Philadelphia, you might want to display an ad for your hotel on a travel site’s pages about Philadelphia tourist attractions.

In its most basic form, contextual advertising depends on the paid search vendor striking a deal with an information site to show ads on the information site’s pages. Any site that draws heavy traffic is a strong candidate to display contextual ads—think CNN or ESPN or weather.com or [CNET](http://cnet.com). Every article on these sites offers possibilities for contextual ads.

Paid search vendors already know how to display different ads depending on what the searcher enters, so why not apply that same technology to rapidly changing information sites? Google’s AdSense program was the first major example of contextual advertising, but Microsoft’s Content Ads have their own network of information sites to display ads.

Contextual ads rely on the search engine examining the words on a page in its ad network, and selecting ads related to that subject to be displayed alongside the story. Readers then click the ad to go to the advertiser’s URL, just as with paid search. The advertiser pays for the click and the search engine and the owner of the ad network site both take a cut. Each information site might place the ads in different spots on their pages, but they all attempt to drive qualified visitors to the advertiser’s site.

Contextual advertising programs work like any other paid search program in which you pay for each person who clicks your ad, but it isn’t really search marketing, because the person who clicks on the ad has not searched for anything. For that reason, we won’t spend any

whether paid search is right for you, and, if it is, how to make the most of it. Check out all the reasons paid search might be an important addition to your digital marketing mix:

- **Highly qualified visitors will come to your site:** Just as with organic search, paid search attracts visitors who are already interested in what your site does. If they weren't, they would not have been searching in the first place. So it makes sense that searchers who click paid search listings are more likely to buy than visitors arriving at your site from clicking a banner ad, for example. But paid search listings get lower clickthrough rates than organic search, and searchers say that they trust them less, so organic search might still have the edge in converting searchers into buyers.
- **You see immediate results:** As you have seen, organic search success requires painstaking attention to detail to get your site discovered and to optimize its content for both search engines and for visitors—all of which can take months. Paid search, conversely, can require up-front work on landing pages and with trusted feeds for shopping engines, but often it can be initiated in a few days with an instant impact on your site. The biggest difference between paid search advertising and organic search is that paid search offers

more time on it in this book, but we mention it because it is similar to paid search in every way except how well it works. Because the ads are not clicked by people searching for something, they are less qualified than actual searchers and tend to have much lower conversion rates.

Most contextual ad programs allow you to make separate (usually lower) bids from the paid search bids for those same keywords, reflecting their lower conversion rates. Some also give you some control over what kind of stories your ad can be placed next to—so that you won't be seen sponsoring content that might prove embarrassing to your brand image. Contextual ad programs also often allow you to bid higher for certain reader demographics.

One technique many successful search marketers use in conjunction with contextual ads is called **retargeting** (Google calls it **remarketing**), in which previous visitors to your website are shown your contextual ads when they visit other websites; you hope that they are reminded of what they almost purchased from you and that they reconsider.

To see whether contextual ads are cost-effective for your keywords, you can run a test with one campaign that uses your keywords in the traditional search paid search and a second campaign with the same keywords enabled for contextual placement only. The search engine vendor will report each campaign separately, and you can compare to see whether the contextual campaign delivers enough value to be worth your while. Some search marketers report that contextual advertising has been a gold mine, whereas others have been disappointed; so, test it for yourself. In spite of some challenges, contextual advertising continues to grow each year and might be appropriate for your digital marketing mix. But it isn't search marketing and you shouldn't treat it that way.

near instantaneous traffic to your site. You can launch a campaign immediately by paying your money, writing your ads, and bidding your way to the top of the paid results—all without changing a line of code on your website. Organic search, in contrast, takes much longer to kick in.

- **It's inexpensive to get started:** Unlike organic search, where your site might need expensive changes, paid search requires low up-front costs. For as little as \$50 and a credit card, you can open a paid search account. In addition, compared to organic search, paid search requires less expertise, so it is more likely that you can get started without engaging an expert consultant.
- **You pay only for visits to your site:** Many advertisers prefer paid search's fee structure—you typically pay only when searchers click your ad, not when they view your ad. With banner ads and other types of paid advertising, you are charged for impressions; you pay every time your ad is shown. If you design your site to efficiently persuade those paid searchers to buy, your return on your investment can be very profitable.
- **You can target your audience:** Whereas keyword planning enables you to target searchers by their interests (for both organic and paid search), paid search provides more pinpoint precision. Product search isolates transactional searchers ready to buy, and paid search ads can identify searchers by characteristics such as geographical location—both of which might be important to your business and well worth paying for.
- **Near-total message control:** Paid search provides near-total control over what your listing says, allowing you to further qualify searchers so that only the “right” ones click through. In organic search, although you can pick your page's title, the snippet that appears below the title is chosen by the search engine from the words that appear on your page. Paid search offers far more message control because the message can be directly targeted at searchers, with little concern about what the search engines want. Your ability to control your message is unmatched by any other advertising medium.
- **Unequaled adjustability:** You have learned how difficult it can be to make changes to your website to support organic search, especially if you have a medium to large site. If your inventory runs low on your best-selling product, your organic search results will keep pouring visitors into your site. If you reduce your product's price, it could take days for the organic search results to reflect it. Paid search, however, can adapt to these changes as they occur. You can stop buying the keyword for an out-of-stock item in paid search, and you can remove the item from product search. You can reflect price changes as they happen. You can ratchet up your investment during your busy season and taper it off at other times. What's more, you can constantly monitor the return on your investments and make changes each day to increase profitability. Paid search is probably the most flexible form of advertising available today.

- **Unlimited keyword targeting:** Organic search has a natural limit in the number of keywords that can be targeted. Although it is best to use existing pages on your site as search landing pages for both organic and paid search, inevitably you will find the need to add new landing pages as your keywords become more obscure. Because organic search landing pages must be deeply linked into the navigation of your site, there is a natural limit of how many landing pages (and therefore how many keywords) you can target. Because paid search landing pages need not be part of the site's navigation, you can target as many paid search keywords as you can justify the investment for.

Despite all these advantages, paid search is not for everyone. If you sell low-priced, low-margin products, you might find that the cost of advertising is more than you can justify in return. If you are unable to place any monetary value on visitors to your website, it will be hard to justify paid search spending. Many noncommercial and nonprofit sites find that paid search does not help them sustain their operations. For businesses, however, especially businesses that are trying to attract prospective customers to their site, paid search increasingly has a place in even the smallest marketing budgets.

What It Costs

One of the best things about paid search is that you can control the costs. You can buy as many or as few keywords as you want, and you decide how much you are willing to pay for each click. And you can adjust anything at a moment's notice, so you can control your budget.

As you embark on a paid search program, here are the kinds of costs to keep your eye on:

- **Creative costs:** Whether you do it in-house or you hire a consultant or ad agency to do it for you, it costs money to create the titles and descriptions that display onscreen. Remember, the number of searchers who click through to your site depends completely on the killer title and description you write, so this is no place to skimp on the budget. Agencies can usually do three or four new ads an hour, charging anywhere from \$50 to \$200 an hour to do so.
- **Management costs:** Tracking and adjusting your bids can be a lot of work, but it is the key to maximizing the return on your paid search investment; these campaigns do not run well on autopilot. You also need to keep track of your creative changes and deadlines, reconcile your bills, and verify your clickthroughs. You can hire an ad agency or search consultant to manage your paid search campaign for you. Conversely, if you manage it in-house, budget at least one full-time person to manage a highly competitive or large campaign (more than a thousand keywords).
- **Per-impression fee:** Usually referred to as CPM (cost per thousand—M is the Roman numeral for 1,000), you pay each time your ad displays onscreen, whether a searcher clicks or not. Typically, CPM pricing is used only for fixed-placement advertising, not

bid-based advertising, and it varies from \$10 to \$30 per thousand impressions (or about 1¢ to 3¢ per single impression). Some obscure search engines charge per impression, but mainstream search engines do not.

- **Per-click fee:** Often called CPC (cost per click), it refers to the fee charged by the search engine each time a searcher clicks your advertisement. Typically, you open an account for a set amount and start bidding for placement. Whenever a searcher clicks your ad, the current bid (per-click) fee is deducted from your account, with your ad disappearing if your account reaches zero. CPC prices range from about 10¢ (usually the lowest bid allowed) to \$30 or sometimes more, with the average around \$1. The vast majority of paid search ads are charged per click.
- **Per-action fee:** Also known as CPA (cost per action), you pay only when the searcher takes “action”—typically a purchase of your product. Some paid search engines are beginning to experiment with CPA pricing, so you might have a choice between CPC and CPA pricing for your keywords. In addition, a new kind of action, a phone call, is also becoming a popular pricing model; it’s called pay-per-call pricing.

KEYWORD BATTLES: HOW TO BLOW YOUR BUDGET IN ONE EASY LESSON

Because paid search has increased in popularity among search marketers, it is rare to find a popular keyword phrase without any bidders. It is also increasingly likely that bidders are using bid management software to control constant changes to their bids to maintain their place as #1, for example.

When two or more sites decide to be #1 for a particular keyword, a keyword battle ensues. Each time one site raises its bid, another increases its bid to leapfrog the original site. Unless one side eventually reaches its bid limit, the bidding can escalate dramatically. That’s good for the search engines, but not for search marketers.

Sometimes these battles are fought intentionally, with each side consciously raising its bids, but all too often the battle is a mistake. The typical keyword battle arises between two sites with bid management software instructed to always be #1 for that keyword. As you might expect, neither site’s software can succeed at being #1 for long—just the length of time in between bids. In this situation, the dueling software keeps bidding higher until one side exhausts its budget, usually within a couple of days.

It doesn’t have to be that way. When you set up your bid management software, you can still request that it be #1, but also set a limit of the highest bid you are willing to pay. That way, your bid management system stops escalating its bid when it reaches the limit you set, defusing the battle, and saving your budget for opportunities with higher return on your investment. Even better, you could base your bidding on something smarter than being #1, which we discuss in Chapter 8, “Optimize Your Content.”

CPM, CPC, and CPA fees are usually mutually exclusive; you pay only one of them on any particular ad. Exhibit 1-7 shows what a paid search campaign might cost when priced according to each method. Some advertisers prefer one method over another, but there is no surefire way to pay less on a consistent basis. It all depends on how many searches, clickthroughs, and purchases there are.

Method	Searches	Clicks	Actions	Rate	Total Cost
CPM	1,000,000			1¢ per impression	\$10,000
CPC		50,000		20¢ per click	\$10,000
CPA			1,000	\$10 per action	\$10,000

Exhibit 1-7 Comparing pricing formulas. What you pay depends on the activity multiplied by the rate, but no magical method will always save money.

Every pricing method has advantages and disadvantages. Chapter 8 reviews bidding strategies in more detail, and provides examples to help you choose the best option for your objectives.

The Steps to Search Success

Despite the differences between organic and paid search, the basic steps to success are the same:

1. **Choose your target market segments.** To get serious about search marketing, you need to focus on the keywords that searchers use that should find your site. Many of the keywords are the same between organic and paid search, but some marketers find that they can target more keywords for paid search or that some keywords are too expensive to be targeted outside organic search. We explore this step in detail in Chapter 6, “Choose Your Target Market Segments.”
2. **Get your content listed.** Nothing else you do will matter if you don’t even appear in the search results. For organic search, you must ensure that your content is discoverable by the search engines. For paid search, you must work with each search engine individually to get your ads listed for the keywords you have targeted. In Chapter 7, we examine the various techniques required to ensure your content is in the game.
3. **Optimize your content.** To rank well for popular keywords, you need to ensure that your paid search ads and your landing pages contain those words sprinkled in the right places. For paid search, you must also optimize your per-click bids to earn as much profit as possible. Chapter 8 walks you through what you need to know.

- 4. **Prove your content’s quality.** Search engines are demanding; they don’t show their searchers low-quality content. For your content to make the grade, you need to create content that searchers like. Search engines look at links to your content and social media activity for organic search, and they check your clickthrough rate and other factors. We look at all the ways that search engines judge your content’s quality in Chapter 9.

If it sounds a bit overwhelming, fear not! That’s what the rest of this book is for. We’ll take you step by step to a successful search marketing program.

Summary

You are on your way as a search marketer! You have learned the two basic techniques in search marketing: organic search and paid search. Each technique proves advantageous under the right circumstances, but each one must be handled with care to avoid the pitfalls. Exhibit 1-8 summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of each technique.

Search Marketing Technique	How Much Expertise Is Required?	How Many Keywords Can You Target?	How Quickly Do You See Results?	How Long Do Results Last?
Organic search	High	Moderate	Slow	Lengthy
Paid search	Moderate	High	Fast	While paying

Exhibit 1-8 Search marketing techniques comparison. Organic is hard to do but yields high reward, whereas paid happens quickly but requires higher investment.

Paying attention to searchers takes more work than you might expect. Large sites and small sites have different issues in search marketing, but those problems must be overcome to achieve search marketing success.

Since the rise of the web in the 1990s, more and more of your customers have turned to the web, and more specifically to web search, to find what they are looking for. What’s more, these searchers are among the most highly qualified visitors to arrive at your website. By focusing on searchers as part of your marketing plans, you *will* raise your sales.

In the next chapter, we examine why searchers behave the way they do—critical information for you, the search marketer. If you do not understand searchers, you cannot predict which keywords they will use, nor what content will strike their fancy. Let’s examine the research into searcher behavior in Chapter 2, “How Searchers Work.”

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