

Marketing online? Time to think Christmas!

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Marketing online? Time to think Christmas!

By Rob Sullivan

For many retailers now is the time to think Christmas. This is because at least in terms of search engines now is the time to make changes so that they have registered in the organic index. But what does one have to do in order to prepare for their Christmas time online marketing campaign? In this article, I give some pointers on how to prepare your organic optimization strategy.

It seems that every year I have to remind my e-tail clients to prepare for the upcoming season because while it's still sunny and warm out, they aren't thinking Christmas (conversely, they aren't thinking summertime in the middle of February either).

But from a search engine perspective one must prepare a few months in advance of the season to ensure they reach their full potential.

All too often business has to be turned away because an online retailer comes to my company in November hoping to compete organically for the Christmas market. When you tell them that they won't even begin to rank until January they get very upset.

But this is the reality of today's search engines. It can (and usually does) take 2 months or more for changes to be registered and begin competing. In competitive markets it can take even longer. While in the most competitive markets it can take years to establish oneself as an authority figure.

So at the very least, now is the time to get your campaign in order.

That means researching keywords, re-optimizing if necessary and ensuring your site is found in all the major search engines and directories. So let's look at the steps necessary:

Step one - research the keywords your customers will use

As I mentioned in a previous article, you first need to know who your customers are. Only then can you perform a proper keyword analysis.

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And I suggest that you do have to perform such an analysis, even if you know what keywords were used last year. This is because trends change, and people's search habits change as well.

Last year your customers may have been new to the whole online shopping experience. But this year, they are much more experienced and are likely more able to search and find what they are looking for.

Also, search engines have changed from what they were a year ago. Not only is MSN a new engine, but Yahoo! and Google have also changed their ranking algorithms somewhat in the past year.

That doesn't mean that you should totally forget about last year's referrals however. No, I'd use them, but use them as a starting point.

Now since you are going to be researching for future traffic, you can't really use existing tools such as Yahoo!'s keyword suggestion tool or Google's AdWords sandbox as effectively because they report on historical search trends.

They can help you create a larger keyword basket, however. One that you can then use to help refine your keyword choices and pick phrases which should drive traffic to your site.

Therefore you also can not rely on the search volumes provided by such services. You should have a pretty good idea (again based on last years traffic) what types of phrases will drive visitors to your site. In this case it is safe to rely on your gut and judgment as there is nothing else to help guide you.

Optimizing existing content Once you've created your list of phrases it is time to re-optimize some pages for those terms you think will drive the most traffic in a few months. Remember, you are doing a little forward thinking here, trying to anticipate what your future customers will do.

Be sure to follow the optimization guidelines provided in the article I mentioned earlier. You can also follow the guidelines set forth by Google as they generally apply to all engines.

However you do it, try to optimize pages that perhaps aren't performing as well as other pages. You don't want to harm existing traffic, you only want to increase the potential of future traffic.

To be sure you don't harm existing traffic, take a look at your analytics to find out what phrase are currently driving traffic, and which pages people are landing on. These are the pages you don't want to change unless you absolutely have to. Instead, look for those pages which may apply to your new phrases and optimize those pages for the phrases.

Create new content

Chances are you won't be able to do too much to the existing site without harming current rankings. Therefore it may be time to create new content suited to the new keywords you've chosen.

Try to create useful pages, however. Don't make them too promotional and be sure to link them to other pages within your site, such as product pages, or pages with more information. Don't just copy

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an existing page and re-word it either. It's best to create fresh new content and work it into the existing site.

Plan a PPC budget

I can almost guarantee you there will be more websites this year than last year competing for that online market space. As more and more retailers find out just how inexpensive online marketing is compared to other forms of marketing they will begin to invest heavily in a web presence. This makes it harder for everyone else to rank competitively. After all, there is only so much screen space to go around.

If this happens to you and you find someone like Walmart or Sears moving into your space, it might be worthwhile to invest in a PPC campaign, at least through the Christmas season.

Consider starting just after Thanksgiving, and watch when you get the most clicks (and sales) through the campaign. Then as the weeks go on you can modify the campaign advertising only when you get

the most exposure. This will help you keep costs down as you won't be paying for clicks at off peak times which drive little sales to your site.

This type of bidding, often referred to as day parting, is an effective way to maximize your cost per click, and return on investment.

Also, be sure to end your campaign before the last day you can promise shipping. In other words, if you know that it takes 5 days to ship your product to your customer, then quit your PPC campaign on the 18th or 19th. This way you don't have upset customers who can't get their gifts by the 24th. This will also save you some money as in some cases the last few days before Christmas become the most active PPC spendings days.

Hope for the best but prepare for the worst

As with any online venture, there is the potential for failure. Your web server could fail, or your site could go down just at a crucial crawling period. While these types of things rarely do happen, they none-the-less do occur from time to time.

Therefore you shouldn't focus just on the holiday season. You must also try and prepare for the times after Christmas when you will still get customers. That is why I said earlier not to mess too much with existing rankings or keywords. Why shoot yourself in the foot?

It's best to try and prepare for what's coming a few months down the road.

In the end, planning for Christmas shopping online isn't much different than what a store has to go through. They want to keep their Halloween product on the shelves until Halloween yet they have to balance that with the Christmas gifts they could be selling at the same time.

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Balance is required with your website as well, you don't want to alienate existing customers by focusing on Christmas sales, just like you don't want to lose Christmas sales preparing for boxing week.

So, as you move forward planning your Christmas online marketing campaign be cognizant of the other efforts you could be exploring, such as a PPC campaign for those phrases which you won't be able to compete for effectively. Because you never know what other potential lies out there waiting for you to discover it.

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<http://www.textlinkbrokers.com>

What Do You Want This Year?

By Angie Dixon

Christmas is all around us, and many people are making up wish lists. Those who aren't doing that are busy setting down their New Year's Resolutions already. But this is a good time to sit down and do some serious introspection.

What do you want from the holidays this year? Do you want to rush around, spend a lot of money you don't have, and yell at the kids for not playing with all twenty of the toys they asked for—at the same time? Is that really how you want to spend Christmas?

We talk about "Christmas spirit," and mostly we mean giving. Giving of ourselves, giving to people who need it. That's great, that's Christmas spirit.

But I think there's another aspect to "Christmas spirit." I think it's spiritual. And don't close your screen on me because I said spiritual. I didn't say religious, because it's not. I think it comes from our souls.

I think deep down, each of us has a spirit that wants to be expressed. And I think at Christmas, when we're naturally thinking of others, that spirit is more easily expressed. I think if you want to, you can have a spiritual Christmas. You can feel loving, caring, generous. You can feel like a kid at Christmas, just by opening up to your spirit.

So what do you want this year?

Angie Dixon helps small business owners get their acts together. She is a personal development coach specializing in helping people integrate their home and work lives so they feel less stretched and more balanced. Get her FREE EBOOK on balance at

<http://www.discoveringtruenorth.com>

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Christmas shopping online might or might not be for everyone. This article shows how doing it online, enhances your overall Christmas experience!

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