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Online Marketing Consultant

By John Tanner

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Eliminate Guesswork and Increase Conversion

-- Part 1 --

Many companies hire a Search Engine Optimization (SEO) expert or firm simply to increase their monthly visitors without considering the quality of those visitors. The end result is decent rankings and traffic, but poor returns.

In this article, John Tanner of (POSITIVE POSITIONING) explains techniques to increase visitor conversion by improving the quality of site traffic and guiding prospects towards a desired action.

Key Phrases Influence Visitor Volume and Quality

Key phrases have a direct impact on the quantity and quality of visitors you can expect to your site. Optimizing your web site for the wrong key phrases will cost you time, money, and valuable leads/sales.

Visitor quality refers to how well visitors fit into your target audience, which significantly affects your Return On Investment (ROI).

Search Engine Optimization experts use a combination of client suggestions, software, resources, testing, and common sense to determine the most advantageous key phrases based on a client's particular goals.

Although extensive research goes into key phrase selection, it is highly educated guesswork at best and focuses mostly on visitor volume rather than quality. Many SEO experts will analyze popularity vs. competition, and use a short-term bidding strategy to test their selections. However, to measure quality we need conversion metrics to understand which phrases and referrers drive the most inquiries and/or sales.

Analysis Software and Services Tend to Fall Short

Log analysis software and similar products provide valuable information for SEO experts. Some of the most valuable information includes:

- Total visitor volume
- Unique visitors
- Average session duration
- Top entry pages
- Top exit pages
- Top referrers
- Search engines
- Top key phrases
- And more

Most of these products aggregate visitor data. They show us averages and treat all of our visitors as if they were part of a single group. While most analytical products and services give us insight into our visitor volume and where it originates, they generally do a poor job of informing us of visitor quality.

NetIQ deserves some credit for their WebTrends Reporting Series 6.1 (scheduled for release in July of 2003), which uses client-side scripting technology and a proprietary data file (they call it SmartSource) to get at conversion metrics. However, client-side scripting can cause problems, particularly dealing with relevancy scoring and browser compatibility. But NetIQ does a better job than most if you choose to go that route.

Log analysis software is a necessary component of any SEO campaign, but additional tools are needed when it comes to measuring and reporting visitor quality.

Focusing on "An Audience of One"

Believe it or not, visiting a web site is generally not a group event. To maximize quality traffic we need to treat our visitors as individuals.

If visitor quality refers to how likely visitor fits into our target audience and performs our desired action, then we need to focus on those visitors that take our desired action to improve overall visitor quality.

For the purpose of this article, let's say the goal of your web site is "Lead/Inquiry generation."

Therefore, the desired action is for visitors to fill out your online form(s), which enables you to persuade them to take the next step in your sales process.

You increase overall visitor quality by increasing traffic from the web site referrers, search engines, and key phrases that have a track record of delivering "target visitors." This means re-optimizing your SEO campaign for the key phrases and referrers utilized most often by the visitors that take your desired action.

Differentiating Target Visitors from General Visitors

To truly improve visitor quality, you have to track your visitors carefully and pay particular attention to target visitors.

Once a visitor fills out a form(s), you are able to categorize them as a "Target Visitor". A percentage of your target visitor population will be in the initial stages of their investigation process and not fill out your form(s). This is expected, and you won't be able to identify them as target visitors at this point. We aren't focusing on visitors likely to fill out our forms; we are focusing on those that take action.

It is acceptable to group all of your target visitor information together, but you don't want to combine target and general visitor data. We've covered some important background information, now lets take a look at how to track web site visitors. (End of Part 1 – 692 words including title)

--- Part 2 ---

How to Track Your Visitors

If you aren't opposed to many hours of tedious manual tracking, the most inexpensive method of analyzing visitor patterns at the individual level is to wade through the web site's log files.

Using the Log File method, you start from the bottom of the log file and work your way towards the top.

I recommend analyzing only a month of data at a time with this method.

Log File Method Step-by-Step (from the bottom of the file towards the top):

- 1.You begin scanning the log file for the URL of your form's confirmation page...once found, you know that a visitor as submitted your form. (Hint: Use wordpad or notepad's Find feature)
- 2.Write down the visitor's IP Address. Then write down all the pages (URLs) that were visited by this IP address (You may want to reorder them from first to last afterwards so you can see the path each target visitor took through your site from beginning to end.)
- 3.Write down the Entry page and Exit page (first and last page associated with the visitor's IP address)
- 4.The first entry may have referrer information (if your web server is set up to log this information). The referrer URL will tell you how the visitor found your web site (including search engine and keyword information.)
- 5.If the user came from a search engine, write down which search engine and which key phrases he/she used to find the site.
- 6.Repeat steps 1 through 5 for each target visitor

Issues with the Log File Method

The method above has a few flaws. The most notable is that the majority of visitors don't fill out a form on their first visit. While this doesn't sound like a big deal, it is important to capture the original referrer, search engine, and key phrases the visitor used. This can't be accomplished unless the visitor performs your desired action on their first visit (using the log file method).

Moreover, it is difficult to track a prospect's visit history since many Internet users get their IP Addresses assigned dynamically. So even if you go through several months of log files, you may not be able to locate a visitor's initial visit. The best option is to use cookies to track visit history.

However, there are more sophisticated options available, but generally come with a higher price than

\$0 like the log file method discussed above.

Is There a Better Alternative for Tracking Target Visitors Individually?

It may be worthwhile to review products such as WebTrends Reporting Series 6.1. Even if it doesn't meet your needs, similar products may start hitting the market soon.

You may also consider identifying a set of requirements and features that would provide maximum benefit for your organization (and/or clients), and having a professional development firm build your solution.

POSITIVE POSITIONING hired a firm by the name of 360 IMPACT (a partner firm based in Europe) to build a Visitor Tracking System (VTS) for our needs. The system tracks each of our client's site visitors in real-time. As soon as a visitor hits one of our client's sites, the system recognizes the:

- Current and original referrer URL
 - Current and original Search engines used
 - Current and original key phrases the visitor used
 - Current and original path through the site
 - Visitor's IP address
 - Visitor type (General/Target Visitor)
 - Number of times they visited
-
- Original and current date and time of their session
 - Date and time of the original and current visit
 - Date and time of the visitor's last update
 - Conversion data (like inquiry or shopping cart details)
 - And more

The VTS attaches all of the above information to inquiry/checkout form results allowing our clients get these details in their email along with their form data.

The system we had built automatically distinguishes target visitors from general visitors and provides conversion reports showing us exactly where we should be focusing our SEO investment. What's more, it doesn't require programming, script, or include files in any of our client's pages.

When evaluating a potential system like this, be sure client-side code doesn't reduce performance, or otherwise hurt your SEO efforts.

Put this Information to Work and Watch Your Leads (and/or Sales) grow

You will need to track a minimum of 30 to 50 target visitors in order to see a real pattern emerging. Once you have a good amount of data, you will see which referrers are sending the most "Target Visitors", which key phrases your best prospects tend to use, the optimal path(s) through your site (that often ends in a visitor performing your desired action.)

Let me stress that while log analysis software and other reporting packages do a good job at reporting

general traffic patterns, total referrers and key phrases; our focus is on "Target Visitor" statistics exclusively.

Now you are able to re-optimize your SEO campaign to focus on "Target Visitor" attracting key phrases (and bids,) adjust your site to make the optimal path(s) easier to follow, and focus more attention on referring sites that generate leads and/or sales.

Tell Us How it Worked For You

Once you give this method a shot, you should see increased conversions within 60 days. Please send us an email to let us know how it improved your numbers, or share your thoughts. (End of Part 2 – 904 words including titles)

John Tanner is an Online Marketing Consultant at POSITIVE POSITIONING. John has worked in the Search Engine Marketing industry since 1996 and helped over 80 companies in multiple industries and markets. POSITIVE POSITIONING employs only ethical Search Engine Marketing practices that ensure lasting online success

17 Important Points To Consider Before You Hire A Law Marketing Consultant

By Trey Ryder

As we fast approach the new year, many firms are preparing to launch their 2006 marketing efforts. If you're thinking about hiring a marketing specialist, make sure you consider these 17 key points.

1. **Objective Advice.** Consultants who are paid fees are more likely to give you unbiased advice than consultants who earn commissions based on the amount of money you spend. If the consultant profits from ad agency commissions, he has an inherent conflict of interest because the more you spend, the more he makes.
2. **Experience.** Marketing is so specialized and complex that I recommend you hire someone who has provided marketing services for a minimum of 15 years. But, don't assume that because the person has been in business 15 years, he has the knowledge, skill, judgment and experience you need. Make sure you thoroughly interview all consultants you are considering.
3. **Workload.** Does the law marketing professional do the work for you? Or does the marketing person serve as a coach and simply tell you what you should be doing?
4. **Service.** Do you feel that the consultant wants to provide you with the help you need to make your program succeed? Or do you get the impression that he is looking for bigger fish to fry and that you're just a small fish in the ocean?
5. **Access.** Is the consultant hidden behind a wall of secretaries, account executives and administrative assistants? Or is he readily available to you by phone, fax, and e-mail?
6. **Stability.** Has the consultant been providing marketing services for some years? Or is he new to

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marketing — or new to lawyer marketing — and just waiting for the opportunity to move on to something else?

7. Marketing Focus. Is the consultant a full-time marketing professional? Or does he offer advice in other disciplines, such as management, human resources, training or finance?

8. Authority. Does the consultant have enough experience that he is a recognized authority in his field? Or is he still a relative unknown?

9. Size and Efficiency. Does the consultant have a large staff and/or a penthouse office that his clients pay for? Or when you write a check, are you paying for his high level of knowledge, skill, judgment and experience?

10. Markups. Does this consultant mark up outside services he hires on your behalf, such as graphic artists, printers, photographers, web site technicians, and so forth? Or does this consultant provide those services to you at cost?

11. Travel. Does the consultant travel around the country from one client to next, running up airline bills? Or does the consultant keep costs down by working efficiently with you by telephone, fax and e-mail?

12. Coverage. Does the consultant have a competent marketing specialist who covers for him when he travels? Or are you relegated to an account executive or administrative assistant who takes messages and tries to relay them to the consultant while he is on the road.

13. Attention. Does the consultant have so many clients he can't provide you with the personal care and attention you deserve? Or does he limit his services to a few select clients who receive the best he has to offer?

14. Work. Does the consultant himself perform the work on your behalf? Or does the consultant delegate your work to a junior associate?

15. Marketing Specialization. Is the consultant a marketing professional who works only with one type of marketing? Or does he try to be a "jack of all trades" so he can provide whatever marketing services you want to buy?

16. Writing Skills. In marketing, nothing is more important than for your consultant to have superior writing skills. And don't expect the consultant's writing to follow the rules of what you and I learned in school because marketing writing is different from academic writing. To sample your consultant's writing style, read published articles and marketing materials that your consultant wrote. You'll know right away whether they come across as warm and friendly — or if the writing seems cold and impersonal. The way the consultant writes for himself will be similar to the way he writes for you. So make sure the consultant you choose has a writing style you admire.

17. Testimonials. Does the marketing consultant have comments from other lawyers you can review?

The consultant you're considering should provide you with at least 30 or 40 testimonials from other lawyers. If he provides only a few, you may be reading comments from his in-laws.

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