

Search Engine Mania

By Robert Hopper

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Robert Hopper
Robert@theBestOfBreed.com

The Best of Breed <http://www.theBestOfBreed.com>

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The word coming out of the recent Search Engine Strategies 2001 Conference is that the major engines are experiencing a serious money squeeze. There's even debate about whether Altavista can survive much longer. With the recent demise of Go.com (InfoSeek) this doesn't bode well for those of us whose businesses live or die by the search engines. They drive more traffic than all other forms of advertising combined.

To address these problems you can expect more and more of the engines to adopt some form of a paid submission much like the directories. For example, Yahoo charges \$199 just to get a site review. LookSmart and others do the same.

It's not out of the question to expect the engines moving to some form of pay-per-click (PPC) strategy. Inktomi is already doing this with the large sites. Without more serious competition, it's only a matter of time before all the engines adopt this policy putting a real squeeze on the "little guy".

I've already experienced how "deep pockets" can make a small business like mine disappear. I have several listings on Goto.com, the most popular PPC engine. Three months ago I was paying \$0.20 per click for a fairly competitive search term. Today that same term has been bid up to almost \$4.00 per click. That's some serious bucks. Needless to say, I dropped out of the bidding a long time ago.

That said, you shouldn't be discouraged from using engines like Goto.com. If your's is a mature business with top positions in many of the major engines, PPC is probably not a strategy you need to consider. But if you're like me and still working your way up in the listings, PPC can make a lot of sense in your advertising strategy. You just need to be very

careful how you go about it.

Let's look at the search term "internet marketing". Last month on Goto.com that term was queried 60,610 times, and the person with the top listing was paying \$3.22 per click for the privilege. The #3 spot was going for \$1.19. Too rich for my blood.

On the other hand, "marketing internet" was queried 1,592 times with the top spot going for \$0.75. Big improvement, but still a little pricey.

A good method to overcoming this sticker shock is to do a little research. Find alternative, and less expensive variations on the highly competitive terms. Several listings at 10 to 20 cents each can get you some good traffic.

Goto.com has a couple of really good research tools. One is called the "Search Suggestion Tool". You enter a search term and it will return a list of variations and how many times each was queried the previous month.

The other tool is called "Get Current Bid". With this tool, you enter your term and it returns a list of what that term is costing at the various levels of ranking.

Ordinarily, these tools are available only to Goto customers, but I can help you out here. You can find the Search Suggestion Tool at:

<http://inventory.goto.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/>

And the Get Current Bid tool can be found at:

https://secure.goto.com/s/dtc/bidtool/bid_form.jhtml

These URL's change from time to time. I'll try to keep up with them and notify you when they change.

But don't get yourself locked into Goto.com. There are a number of other less popular, but up and coming PPC engines. You'll get some good traffic from them, and you'll pay much less.

For example, "internet consulting" will cost you \$0.97 to get into the top 3 at Goto.com. But you can get there at FindWhat.com for only \$0.13. Get the picture?

It's important to get into the top three. Goto has partnerships with many of the major engines and a top 3 will get you first page listings on some of the biggest engines. On some of them like Altavista and Lycos, you'll go right to the top as a "Featured Listing". The other top PPC engines are starting to do the same thing.

So, you can see how under certain circumstances, PPC can make a lot of sense.

Now, you're probably asking yourself "so which PPC engines should I use?" Glad you asked that, because I can help you out there.

The folks over at PromoMinder.com were kind enough to let me use some of the great information available at their members site. This is the site I mentioned in a previous issue. It's something you should really consider. It'll make your online life much easier. Take a look at it at:

<http://BestOfBreed.promominder.com/>

The following are the top 10 PPC search engines on the net today.

GoTo.com

This is the 1st and most prominent of the pay-per-click search engines. Here you can bid for rankings and also choose the description and title you want, and this can drive highly targeted traffic to your site. At GoTo you can control your bids at all times, and adjust them based on the quality of your results.

A handy tool to make the most of your GoTo submissions is the 'Keyword Bid Optimizer', which shows you how to save time and money with your keyword bidding strategy.

Advertiser Tips and Tricks gives helpful tips from GoTo.com's staff.

If you're in the top 10 at GoTo.com, your link appears when someone searches using the Dogpile meta search engine. If you're in the top six, you'll also appear in Metacrawler searches.

More people will click on your link if you use your keyphrase in the title and description phrase.

You'll probably receive more traffic from GoTo.com than from all the other pay-per-click engines combined. However, because they are less popular, buying highly targeted traffic is much cheaper than at GoTo.com

7Search

Services offered here include immediate email notification when you are outbid for the top ranking on your keywords and keyphrases. If you like, you can also submit your site here for free.

Bay9

A good one. Bay9.com generates a higher amount of traffic than most other pay-per-click search engines.

FindWhat

Currently this search engine is used for more than 10 million searches a day. An interesting feature here is that you can enter up to 1000 keywords at once.

In March 2000 FindWhat introduced new technology designed to read most simple plain English queries. You can buy search terms cheaper than at GoTo.com. In May, 2000, FindWhat said that more than 10 million searches a day were being made at the search engine.

You can enter up to 1000 keywords at once. FindWhat.com reviews every keyword in their system and verifies it's relevancy.

Sprinks

More than a search engine, Sprinks is the place to buy keywords and placement on more than 700 topic-specific About.com GuideSites. Good idea.

ePilot

Check it the very interesting approach at ePilot, which pays YOU for conducting a search.

NetFlip

NetFlip collects demographic details from members so advertisers can target their ads demographically.

Kanoodle

Get as many as 2500 targeted visitors here for only \$25.

Win4Win

Win4Win offers both a free service and 'Gold Service' which gives you unlimited search terms.

SearchCactus

Working with the search engine Google this pay-per-click search engine pays site visitors, then delivers demographic information about the people that click on your keywords.

So, there you have it. If you need to start getting highly targeted traffic to your site today, this is the way to do it. Just exercise some caution. The costs can add up quickly. With few exceptions, I would never bid over \$0.20 for a search term, and generally not over \$0.10.

Be prudent and you can drive lots of traffic to your site.

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Robert Hopper is the CEO of theBestOfBreed.com and the managing partner at JPR Marketing Group, LLC, a leading ecommerce software and marketing solutions provider.

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