

Smart marketing for carpet cleaners

Using the Internet to fish for customers can be great for your company's profitability.

By **GARY ARNDTS**



Gary R. Arndts is a 25-year veteran marketing consultant who specializes in pay-per-click marketing for carpet cleaners. His website at www.FindYouFirst.com includes a complimentary 140-page e-book on Internet marketing for carpet cleaners.

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Last month, an estimated 747,566 people in the United States went online and typed "carpet cleaning" into a search engine.

In the New York City area alone, 43,108 people typed in these words.

In the Denver area, 7,336 searched for "carpet cleaning."

Many of your prospective customers get specific: For example, 21,333 searchers specified "carpet cleaning Chicago."

And people don't just search for routine cleaning services. The phrase, "water damage" received 72,253 searches.

Unique marketing opportunity

These figures are fairly consistent from month to

month.

People with dirty carpet regularly visit Google and Yahoo! to find a company with which to do business.

Search engines represent a unique marketing opportunity.

For decades, Yellow Pages directories have offered the advantage that only people actively searching for your service will see your ad.

Search engines offer that same advantage.

However, search engines offer many added benefits.

Prospects can click immediately to your website and get your entire marketing message.

They can e-mail you with a quote request, or schedule an appointment online.

They can print out your latest coupon offer.

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Does search engine marketing work?

It pays off wonderfully when done properly.

One Michigan carpet cleaner spent \$500 one month and received 56 phone calls, two e-mails and seven quote requests submitted directly from his website.

Advanced tracking showed that all of these leads originated from his pay-per-click ad.

He estimates that his pay-per-click ad consistently brings in \$2,500 to \$3,500 in new business each month, a 500 percent to 700 percent return on investment.

One Arizona carpet cleaner who has a killer Internet coupon offer consistently gets 50 to 70 calls every few weeks for his \$450 investment.

Of course, not all carpet cleaning campaigns work this well.

But any campaign can be profitable if you follow the three tips in the story.

— G.A.

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What really matters

Customers love it.

That's why they search online for carpet cleaners by the hundreds of thousands each month.

While Yellow Pages use is declining, Internet searching is exploding.

As a carpet cleaner, why spend money searching for customers when so many hot prospects are already searching for you?

Why not just be "easy-to-find" when they're searching?

There are two approaches to make sure searchers can find you.

Search engine optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of stuffing your website with the hottest keywords and soliciting links from other popular websites, to trick search engines into "naturally" displaying your website when someone searches.

There are experts out there to help you do this.

It's a constant battle. Other websites are also trying to get to the top of the pecking order on search engines.

And the search engines are constantly changing the formula they use to pick the winners.

Pay-per-click

The other way to be easy-to-find is called pay-per-click advertising.

These are those small ads (sponsored links) you see over on the right side of the page on Google.

In this case, advertisers are bidding on certain keywords and pay only when someone clicks on their ads and visits their websites.

Pay-per-click advertisers realize that being found on the search engines is going cost money, either by paying for visits directly, or by keeping an SEO firm busy.

However, for most marketers, pay-per-click is the only way to be consistently found when prospects are searching.

Invest enough to succeed

Pay-per-click search engine marketing is a horse race and it is important to give your horse plenty of hay.

Search engines limit your exposure so that you won't exceed your budget.

The amount you commit to your campaign will affect how high your ad places on the page and how often your ad appears.

It's smart to invest enough to appear most of the time during searches, and to be seen in the sweet spot near the top of the sponsored listings.

Your investment either pays off or it doesn't.

It's a useless exercise to appear way down the list or on page two or three. You will rarely be seen, so why bother?

Be consistent

Yellow Pages demand a 12-month commitment.

But search engines make it easy to get in or out any time you wish. Too easy.

With advanced tracking, you'll notice that you have good days and bad days in terms of response.

It's very easy to get discouraged after a day or two without a lead. However, the next day may bring five leads.

Don't try to judge a campaign in a day, a week or even in a month. Monitor your results and tweak your campaign, but hang in there for at least several months.

Make an offer

What works offline often works online as well.

People love discount coupons.

They like a complimentary bottle of spotter, or a free hallway cleaning when they pay for several rooms.

Put a good offer on your website. In fact, put it on your home page or landing page (the first page you send people to).

Don't make them hunt for your offer.

That point is worth repeating. Most people don't want to read page after page of carpet cleaning philosophy.

They want to quickly see that you are credible (testimonials and guarantees are the fastest way to create credibility), and that you have an Internet special.

Include all of these on your landing page.

If you focus on upscale markets, don't think that a coupon isn't important to your clients.

People who are willing to pay a premium for a really good cleaning job still look for the opportunity to save a few dollars.

Get online now.

That's where your customers are. *CM*