

Ask SCORE

I have a business that helps people trace their genealogy. Most of my clients find me via Web searches that direct them to my website, and I'd like to expand on that by doing some Internet advertising. What's the most effective way to do this?

Due to the ease and popularity of search engine technology, customers can search for information about products and services instantly. Internet search advertising is now one of the fastest-growing outlets for businesses of all sizes.

Businesses that want added visibility often invest in small, text-only ads that appear atop or alongside the search engine results. Such ads are ideal for small businesses, as they offer tremendous flexibility to control costs and can be tailored to specific search keywords such as geographic area or a specific product/service.

Internet ads also allow small business owners to test various marketing approaches almost instantly. For example, florists can quickly change from prom to wedding season or an air conditioning service can exploit an early heat wave. What's more, results from these types of ads can be tracked, and return on investment measured in tremendous detail never available with traditional print types of advertising.

If your business uses a website to sell or market products and services, online marketing will be critical to your success. Targeted ads attached to keyword search results are the clear winner among Web-based marketing methods. Their simplicity, low cost and popularity among small businesses have pushed flashy banners aside as the main method for connecting buyers and merchants online.

Best of all, Internet advertising is relatively simple to implement. In the two most popular search ad outlets—Google AdWords at www.google.com/ads and Yahoo! Search Marketing at <http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com>, you bid on the keywords or phrases for your campaigns. The higher the bid, the higher your ad will be listed in the paid results. You pay only when someone clicks your ad and visits your site. A prospect that reads your brief ad but doesn't click it costs you nothing. And you can establish a monthly not-to-exceed budget to manage your cost.

Both Google and Yahoo have built-in tools to help you monitor track the effectiveness of your Internet ad campaign. One important statistic is the "click-through rate"—how often the ad is clicked in proportion to how often it appears. Ads with high rates are obviously good; low-rated ads should probably be modified or deleted to maximize cost-effectiveness. In addition, Google also offers free "Google Analytics" that can help analyze your website statistics.

This column is brought to you by the Southern New Hampshire Chapter of SCORE, with more than 65 current and former business executives available to provide free, confidential, one-on-one business counseling and training workshops for area businesses. Call 603-666-7561 or visit www.score-manchester.org for information on counseling, upcoming workshops and volunteer opportunities. SCORE is a national, non-profit organization and a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration.

Have a question you'd like answered in this column? E-mail it to info@score-manchester.org, with "Ask SCORE" in the subject line.