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## Online marketing 101

Workshops are daily being bombarded with spam emails and phone calls promising a business bonanza if they just sign up with this online marketing guru. But how can anyone make a value assessment while they use a lingo that is foreign to most of us.

Even if you accept that a strong online presence is important in this day and age, where do you begin, and more importantly, who can you trust?

Even a basic awareness and understanding of this dynamic and ever-changing industry would be useful before you step into this strange world. It's time to de-mystify the jargon.

### What is SEO and SEM?

SEO stands for search engine optimisation and simply means optimising your website so that search engines (notably Google) can naturally find your business and elevate it to the top of the page for relevant searches. Many different tactics are used to continually ensure optimisation.

SEM stands for search engine marketing. You pay to have your listing or advertisement at the top of the page. Many years ago, it was known as 'pay per click' advertising, meaning that every time someone clicks on your listing or advertisement, you were charged a small fee.

### Why invest in online marketing over other traditional forms of marketing?

It's estimated that more than 75% of all transactions start with an online search. It is how people find businesses so it follows that if your workshop is not showing on search engine listings, you simply won't be found.

The other key reason is that it's much easier to measure the success of online marketing, providing confidence in your investment.

### **The first step in determining if you need to invest in a SEO or SEM campaign?**

Before investing in either campaign you need to understand how you rate against your competition in the effectiveness of key search terms. The best approach is to hire a professional to perform an initial analysis and deliver a ranking report. However, you could investigate yourself by pretending to be a car owner looking for a local workshop. Use search terms such as 'car service' or 'car repair' or 'mechanic' and see where you rank on the page, compared with your competition. If you specialise in a brand, by all means use the brand in your search words. If your business comes up in the top three for everything you might be satisfied. If your business is not on the first page that comes up, or if you are not happy with your ranking, it could be time to have a serious look at online marketing and seek out a professional.

### **Do you need to be ranked near the top of the first page?**

There are normally between 13 and 16 listings per internet page. Generally, the top three businesses listed will receive more than 50% of the traffic. The rest will share in the other 50%.

Do the maths – if your business ranked 10th on the page you might be getting as little as 5% of the clicks.

In summary, if you want to be found by prospective clients you will need to be listed towards the top of that first page. The higher up the list, the better the traffic to your website.

### **How to select a professional to run your online marketing campaign?**

Avoid people who spam or cold calls you. They generally promise the world but deliver very little after taking your money. Statements like 'guaranteed results' or 'will rank you number one' or 'guaranteed to rank on you on page 1 for 30 search terms' should send up a red flag. No reputable online marketing firm can guarantee what ranking the search engines will give you. All they can really guarantee is improvement. Ask around your business associates. Do your due diligence. Ask to see results for comparable clients.

### **Should you invest in a SEO or SEM campaign?**

It all depends on your individual circumstances and how quickly you are looking for a result.

The best analogy is to consider SEO as paying a mortgage and SEM as renting. With SEO you are building your asset base and investing in your future. It can take three to six months to start seeing results.

SEM on the other hand will give you an instant result and can be turned on and off to match your workflow. However, just like renting, once you stop paying you get kicked out.

### **Is ongoing investment in SEO important?**

If you're not continually updating your SEO, but your competition is, you can expect to see your ranking fall over time. Your business may be ranked number one today, but it doesn't mean you will still be number one in six month's time.

If you need more customers and you are not investing in any marketing, the first place to look for results is online marketing. This article may help you take the next step.

I would like to thank online marketing specialist James Smith, CEO of Smith Brothers Media for his help in preparing this summary of online marketing. Smith Brothers have industry experience through working with many workshops and are the endorsed Bosch Automotive Marketing Supplier.

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