



Movin’ on Up...In the Search Engines

6 Tips to Get Your Business Moving in the Right Direction Online

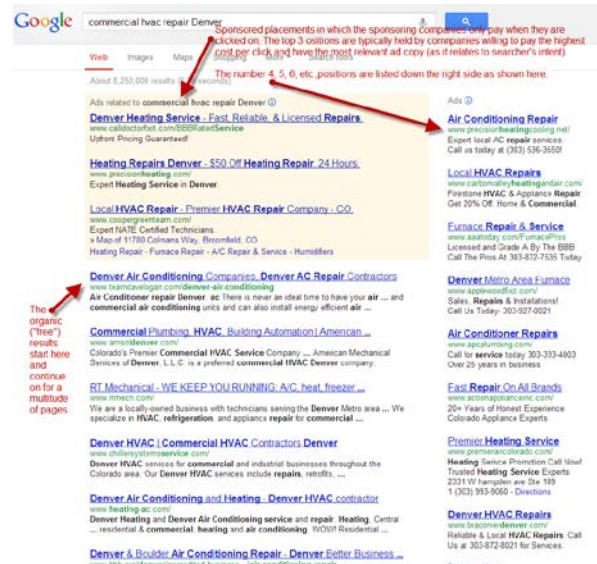
By Tom Kennedy

Let’s be honest: How often do you click past the first page of search results in Google or Bing? In this era of short attention spans and immediate gratification, most of us either find what we’re looking for in the first few entries – whether it be a sponsored ad (paid link) or an organic link (unpaid) – and click through to the information we seek. If it’s immediately evident that the results aren’t tracking with our original intent, it’s likely that we will modify the search string entered and try again. It’s unlikely that we will spend an inordinate amount of time sifting through pages of results for a particular search string entered.

Therefore, showing up near the top of search engine rankings for your prime keyword phrases – those words most likely to be strung together by your prospects as they hunt for a solution – is a little like having a superior trade show exhibit at the front and only entrance of an exhibit hall hosting your industry’s annual, must-attend conference...except for the fact that you don’t pay for your booth space unless a prospect stops by to get more information. A corollary to not showing up in the first couple pages of a Google search might be akin to exhibiting at the aforementioned conference and having a booth in the darkest deepest recesses of the conference hall.

It’s important to note that the trade show analogy applies to pay per click advertising, not necessarily organic search results. With organic, you never have to pay for the online visits although you may hire a firm specializing in Search Engine Optimization to ensure your company is showing up as high as possible in results.

In the example illustrated here with a screen capture, you can see that I searched for “commercial HVAC repair Denver.” The sponsored links show up at the top of the page and all the way down the right-side column. It means that the companies showing up here will pay for this level of visibility only when someone clicks on their ad. The organic results that start with the listing for “Denver Air Conditioning Companies...” are the “free” results. Getting listed this high in the results (consider there are more than 8 million results the Google robot fetched based on this search string) means these companies have what Google considers to be highly relevant web sites.





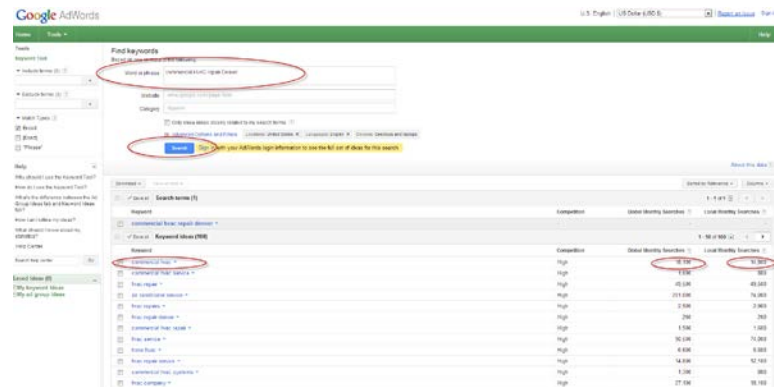
Google, after all, is in the business of providing searchers with the most relevant information possible based on the understood intent of the searcher. This is important to realize for some of the reasons I will elaborate on further down in this article.

So, where should you start? Here’s a checklist to consider:

1) **Target Audience Persona.** It is critical to have your target audience in mind as you embark on your Internet marketing strategy. We advise clients to create a persona, basically a detailed description of who they are they and what they care most about in their professional roles. As an example, your target might be commercial property managers in the city and county of Denver. Do they care most about purchasing a quality product at a fair price? Do they care about vendor responsiveness? Or do they care most about regulatory compliance? Is it about finding and recommending a solution to the person they report to? So, identify your audience, including the title and job responsibility, typical pain points and paint a picture of their ideal solution.

2) **Keywords.** Make a list of the search terms that your target audience is most likely to enter into Google or Bing. Using the customer persona you created above, think about what they are going to type into a search engine to find you. Start out by focusing on generic keywords, the obvious words prospects might use to find your product or service. Typically, long-tail keywords are preferable to shorter-tail words and

phrases. For instance, the term “commercial HVAC repair Denver” is likely to yield higher quality clicks to your site than the simple term “HVAC.” Your discovery process can be made easier by using [Google’s free keyword analysis tool](#).



This tool will provide you with hundreds of iterations of words and phrases related to one or two suggestions that you might enter. As shown in the accompanying screen shot, it will also provide an estimation of monthly traffic for each recommended keyword. “Global monthly searches” is just what it sounds like: it’s the amount of times on average that this particular term is searched on across the globe. “Local monthly” estimates searches within the U.S. It’s important to start your list with a dozen or so keywords and to prioritize them from top to bottom in order of importance (or in order of potential lead quality). Another tool, of course, is to ask your best customers what terms





- they used to find your services. Likely, this exercise will yield the most qualified list of words and phrases.
- 3) **Make your website more user-friendly.** Start first with the user in mind and architect a site that is clean, uncluttered, easy-to-navigate and clearly articulates the services you provide. Your website should provide immediate information about what you provide and why it's better than the alternatives. It should also have clear calls to action for the prospects that find it. Calls to action can include a white paper download, a contact form submission button, emails and phone numbers, service discounts or free demonstrations, or click-throughs to Facebook, Twitter or other social media sites where they may benefit from either information give-aways or discounted services or products. Providing a compelling call-to-action is critical.
 - 4) **Incorporate Search Engine Optimization (SEO) best practices.** Much of SEO is predicated on having good content. Keyword-rich content, whether you use the keywords in blogs, press releases, product pages, video testimonial transcripts, page titles and URLs, meta tags – or all of the above – will set you apart from the competition. This is where the list you developed in Step #2 above will come in handy as a cheat sheet.

Writing or re-writing your website content should be accomplished with two things in mind: a) Ensure your prospects are gaining a clear understanding of why your services or products are preferable to the alternative solution; and b) Take every opportunity to incorporate the primary keywords. For example, if you know that "commercial HVAC repair Denver" is your most valuable search phrase, be sure to use those words as close together as possible and as high up on appropriate pages as possible.

As an example, less optimized text might state: "We are the preferred HVAC servicing company in the area because of years of experienced and our highly qualified service people."

A more optimized statement would be: "Commercial HVAC repair in Denver is our core competency, underscored by our many years in the HVAC business and our highly qualified service people."

Backlinks are another important SEO aspect. In brief, backlinks are the hyperlinks from other websites that lead users (and search engine robots) to your site. They are important because search engines like Google use link quality as a key component of your search rankings. In very elementary terms, search engines look at links as a resume of credentials, popularity and trust. Google knows that trustworthy industry sites tend to link to other trusted (and thus highly relevant) industry sites.





Often, SEO is referred to as the “Holy Grail” of online marketing. Studies have shown that organic listings are far more effective in attracting visitors as paid search marketing, and that visitors who find sites organically are considerably more likely to “convert” into a customer. A great resource for SEO best practices and even some do-it-yourself tips is [SEOmoz](#).

Both of these elements – user friendliness and SEO best practices – trump expensive graphic design efforts, meaningless corporate rhetoric (i.e., most mission statements) and messages from the president. After all, it would be a shame to spend time – and potentially money with a third party – on search engine marketing initiatives contemplated in the next steps here and not be able capture qualified leads once the traffic starts coming. Be warned that qualified traffic will abandon your site due to poor architecture, an immediate lack of clarity, or poorly worded content.

- 5) Establish a Google Analytics Account. Creating a Google Analytics account is free and easy. It requires simply that you establish a Google user account, i.e., a Gmail account so that you can sign in and access the wide variety of free apps. By signing up for [Google Analytics](#), you will be able to monitor data on the visitor traffic, without paying an arm and a leg for one of the many expensive monthly packages available through other software vendors. A typical GA report will provide: the number of visitors who have hit your site in a given period, the percentage of new versus returning visitors, traffic sources (such as referring websites like LinkedIn, blog posts, news releases or Google searches), the percentage of hits coming from direct input (such as when somebody types in your company URL directly into a browser vs. how many found you via search engines), the length of time visitors are spending on your site, the pages they are visiting and the keywords they used to get to your site. This last one is particularly interesting because you can ascertain the length of time a visitor was on your site and the keywords they typed in to find you. In other words, you’ll start to get an idea of the keywords that are delivering the most qualified leads traffic. Once you’re armed with that information, it becomes pretty clear which keywords you should be optimizing your site for and potentially paying for in PPC campaigns. It’s also important to track these stats on a monthly, if not weekly basis so you have an idea of what’s working and what’s not. If the keywords you thought would be leading to the highest average time on your site are not performing as such, it’s time to tweak your content. Find out which words are leading to the highest engagement on your site or directly to conversions (i.e., a form submission, white paper download) and begin using them more frequently in your content and meta tags.





- 6) Depending on your near-term needs, it may not be necessary to use paid advertising campaigns. However, if you need more immediate lead-generation, then paid search is a good alternative. The good news with paid is that it's a success-driven cost model. In other words, you do not pay unless a searcher clicks on your ad and advances to your site from the search engine results page. You can also establish a cost ceiling on a per day, per week or per month basis. Once you hit your limit, your ad stops running. A step-by-step setup of Google Adwords:

<http://support.google.com/adwords/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=1704406>

Assuming you're comfortable with the initial keyword research you accomplished in the above steps, you can leverage that information here. Adwords will ask you where you want to target your ads. The two main avenues are Google's search network and its partner websites. We recommend sticking with Google's main search network and avoiding the "content network" simply because of the higher propensity for the first avenue to yield more qualified clicks.

It is also important to define the geographic locations where you want the ads to run. For instance, a Pittsburg based aluminum and stainless metal service center with a delivery territory along the main thoroughfares leading into Pittsburgh from other Pennsylvania cities, plus cities in Ohio, New Jersey, New York and Indiana, Maryland, Delaware, and West Virginia, will be served best by ads that run in those geographies. In our earlier HVAC service company example, Google ads could be set to run in Denver only.

Another key to Adwords efficiency is using the long-tail keywords talked about above and the use of "exact matching" (vs. broad matching). In our HVAC example, exact matches might be "commercial HVAC repair in Denver." Effectively, you are ensuring that you are only bidding on relevant keywords and your click-through rate (CTR) should be fairly high. CTR is an important factor in deciding the cost per click (CPC). The higher the CTR, the less you are likely to pay for that keyword.

Exact matching may decrease your number of impressions. If a searcher does not type in that string of keywords exactly, your ad will not show up in the results. Also, your impressions and traffic will be lower than a scenario in which you used broad keyword matching. The upside is that you will be generating more meaningful impressions and site visits while keeping your costs to a minimum.

In choosing your Adwords budget, we recommend starting low, to ensure you are generating the right clicks from the right people without breaking the bank. Once you accomplish a positive Return on Investment (ROI) on your startup Adwords program, you might consider raising your costs.





The text of your Adwords ads is an important element of click-through quality. Focus on the benefits of your service or product offerings. Whenever possible, include keywords in your ad headline or description because it increases your CTR while also improving your "quality score" according to Google. A high quality score means that your ad will show up higher in the search results than ads with lower scores and higher click bids.

Importantly, the Google Adwords program then reviews the quality of landing pages directed by your ad. It's more important than ever to ensure your destination URL is relevant to the keyword bid upon. It is also important to make sure that the user is directed to the webpage they expect to see, rather than being taken to the homepage and having to find the right page for themselves.

In summary, it is important for contractors to consistently measure the results from the aforementioned online marketing initiatives. Using Google Analytics and / or the Adwords dashboard, it's actually quite easy to measure your organic efforts and paid campaigns. The key to moving up in the search results is to make this check-up a normal part of your marketing routine each week.

Done correctly and measured often, all of these efforts – understanding your target audience, the keywords they are likely to use as they hunt for solutions like yours online, upgrading your website's content and user architecture, utilizing Google Analytics and possibly venturing into pay per click advertising – are likely to improve your ranking, increase lead generation and lower your overall marketing costs.

Conduct Your Own Self-Audit

- Do a search on the keywords that are likely to lead to a profitable, long-term customer.
- If your company doesn't show up on page one or page two of the search results, do you really think you have a shot of being found by the right prospect for your business?
- If you're not showing up very high in the search string you just tested, how does this affect your company and its potential for growth? Are your competitors showing up higher than your company?
- Is there someone at your company who is responsible for lead generation? If yes, are they taking advantage of the Internet in the best way possible? If not, do you feel like you're leaving money on the table by not showing up higher in search results?

