



Organic or Paid Marketing

Just like when a tree falls in the forest, and there is no one to hear it, the sound waves it generates simply dissipate before the sound can be heard. So how do you spread the word that your Web site is there and start attracting the right audience to your site? One approach is to market the site heavily by splashing your URL via ads all over the place (paid), and the other is to generate traffic organically.

Paid Web Site Market

Both paid Web site marketing efforts and efforts to generate organic traffic have their benefits, but leveraging the long-term benefits of organic traffic can mean the difference between a successful and unsuccessful Web site.

Paid Web site marketing has the advantage of driving traffic immediately to your Web site. This is great for launching a site, or for a special promotion. Popular paid options include (but are not limited to):

- Newspaper magazine and TV ads
- Purchasing of banner ads on other Web sites
- Launching a Search Engine Marketing (SEM) campaign, and
- Distributions of mass emails and press releases

A secondary benefit of paid Web site marketing is that when done properly, it can help lay the seeds of organically generated traffic.

Organic Traffic

Organic traffic, as the name implies, is traffic that comes to your Web site naturally and without being driven there by a specific marketing campaign. In essence, Web site visitors are there because they found the site and thought it had something they wanted. And like anything organic, organic traffic isn't there instantly; it takes time and nurturing to grow into something healthy and with longevity.

Organic traffic happens in the same way that you might browse the bookshelf at your local library or bookstore for something in a specific area of interest and find that little treasure that contains all the answers you're seeking. This is, more or less, what the Web was all about when it was first created. Sources of organic traffic include:



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- referrals from other Web sites (links)
- referrals from search engines, and
- URLs placed on letterhead, business cards, etc.

Organic or Paid: Which One Is Right for My Site?

The choice between organic or paid isn't a black-and-white issue. You need to examine your budget and the benefits you'll get for your effort. In essence, you need to work out your ROI. Even with a small budget, you can launch an SEM campaign and start driving traffic today. This is an especially wise option when you've launched an ecommerce site and want to start making sales immediately. Generally, for well under a dollar per click, you can purchase keyword-based ads through Overture or Google Adwords. By driving traffic immediately, you've started attracting eyeballs and that's a good thing. What you are really trying to do is buy time until organic traffic kicks in. If you already have some organic traffic, a paid campaign can give you an immediate boost as well.

One mistake that is commonly made is to rely solely on paid techniques and to ignore organic traffic. So while you have the attention of Web site visitors via your paid campaign, use this opportunity to extract the seeds for your organic operation. Start encouraging Web site visitors to link to you from their sites. Affiliate programs are a wonderful incentive to grow the number of links to your site.

By running an SEM campaign, you can also pull seeds from your Web site access logs. While you might have purchased some single keywords or two/three keyword combinations, 38% of all searches are of 3 or more words (Jupiter Media). This means that while you have purchased the phrase XY, the person who clicked on your ad actually searched on ABXY or BXYZ etc. By extracting these terms from the access logs, and correlating which actual phrases turned into a successful visit (sale/lead/other), you now know which terms to emphasize, and which ones to remove from the Web site, as part of optimizing the content for the search engines (an organic component).

Once you know your primary keywords and phrases (the seeds) and have started generating links to your site (the fertilizer), it's time make the seeds grow. You need to optimize your site for the search engines.

You'll need to review your Web page title tags and make sure they are unique and contain the appropriate keyword phrases. According to Barbara Coll, too many companies simply insert their company name in the title tag. That's fine if you're Coke, and yet don't you think Coke wants to be found even if people type "cola" in their favorite search engine?



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Next on your hit list is the description meta tag. All too often, we've discovered these missing or so poorly written that they may actually hinder ranking well in a search engine. While you're rewriting your title and description tags, don't forget the keywords meta tag. Very few (if any) of the major search engines continue to give any value to these variables, but it still doesn't hurt.

Now it's time to examine the content of your Web page. Are those keywords/phrases there in the content? Are they there in the text? If you've made a clever graphic of the words, it is merely a graphic; the bots that search engines send out to index sites are blind to graphics and ignore (or severely discount) image alt attribute values.

If you've used graphics for navigation, try replacing the same links as plain text at the bottom of your page. If you have graphics for section headings, delete the graphic and replace it with an H1 or H2 tag (search engines give great value to words contained in H1 or H2 tags). Of course, you'll need to set up an appropriate class in your cascading style sheet to emulate (or approximate) the existing look and feel.

If you've built your site entirely in Flash, there really isn't much you can do beyond the meta tags.

Now you're ready for the search engines to start crawling your site. Of course, you'll have to wait for your listing to start to appear higher and higher in search results. Just as a wheat field doesn't appear overnight, search engines may take as long as four months to start listing your site.

Once you're ranked well in the search engines, you can reap the benefits of the organic traffic. Some people tend to think of organic traffic as free traffic (versus paid traffic). As you can see, there is a lot of work involved in sowing the seeds of organic traffic and this work has a cost, but once the initial work is completed you'll be essentially receiving traffic for free. Don't let your garden go unattended for long; you'll need to monitor it periodically, watching for a drop-off in traffic, and continue to make small adjustments to keep the organic traffic growing.

If you can't wait upwards of four months for your listing to appear, many search engines like Yahoo offer paid inclusion. While this is a paid-for service, paid inclusion doesn't necessarily guarantee you a top ranking for the site. It simply gets you in the index quickly, usually within 72 hours, and comes with guaranteed revisit frequency (we'll re-index your site every 48 hours). The advantage of this is simple. You can continually tweak your site for better ranking. Another bit of good news (at least from Yahoo), is that if you decided not to renew your paid listing, you won't get dropped or banned from their listings, though this may not be true for all search engines.

So now you can help drive traffic to your site. Remember, simply building a site that no one sees has zero value for your organization (okay, it may be an ego thing), but a Web



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site that gets visitors and generates revenue or sales leads is a valuable tool that will garner more corporate attention, and presumably a larger budget.



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