SEO vs. PPC?

Introduction

When making decisions about how to invest your time and online marketing dollars, there are a few important distinctions to consider, including the difference between PPC (pay-per-click) ads and SEO (search engine optimization) rankings.

Improvements to your SEO can help your ranking on Google Search by making your page more relevant to users. Search listings are free, and no one can pay for a better ranking, because Google is committed to keeping our search content useful and trustworthy. (Learn more about our search policy here.)

PPC ads like Google Ads are paid online advertisements which appear next to relevant searches and other content on the web. Running a Google Ads campaign does not help your SEO rankings, despite some myths and claims. However, PPC ads can be helpful in connecting with a wider audience online.

So which should your business use: SEO, or a PPC option like Google Ads? Let's explore how each works, and the benefits of both.

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What's the difference between SEO vs. PPC? Let's start with SEO.

SEO, or Search Engine Optimization, is the practice of including content on your site that has the potential to improve your site's visibility to search engines and their users – in other words, it can help your site show up more often in relevant searches.

There are a number of things to look for when trying to improve your site's SEO (or having an SEO expert guide you through the process). First, and most important, make sure the writing on your website is clear, helpful, and descriptive. Explain your topic in simple, easy-to-read language, and try to include words you think a user might search for when looking online for what you offer.

If you do include search terms in your site copy, make sure you're still talking to the people you hope will use your site, and not trying to talk to or trick the Google algorithm – cluttering your page with too many search terms (especially out of context) or putting up fake pages you don't intend users to see can lead to Google considering your pages deceptive and ignoring your site. Also, don't use text images for important titles, content, or links, since the Google bot doesn't recognize those. Just think about what will be easiest for a user to navigate and understand, and stick to that.

Having other sites link to yours (whether they're blogs reviewing your products or services, satisfied customers, business associates, listicles, or anything else) can also help your ranking, by showing Google that your

site is relevant to people's interests online.

There's no cost to appear in organic search results like Google's, and making small changes to your website with an eye to SEO can greatly impact your search rankings over time. You can learn more about how Google organic search works here and how your content is performing using Search Console.

What does "PPC" mean, and why might I need it?

Google Ads is Google's pay-per-click (PPC) advertising solution, which allows businesses and website owners like you to bid on the chance to show an ads next to searches on Google.com, right when people are looking for what you have to offer. You only pay when someone clicks on your ad to visit your site or call your business, and the ads give you the opportunity to be noticed by a wider audience online. Plus, you can tweak your ads anytime, to reach a specific group of people (by interest, geographical area, etc.) or promote a specific deal or product. This immediacy can be a great resource for small companies who who can't frequently update their SEO to reflect sales, promotions, or seasonal changes to their offerings.

Google Ads also gives you the option of promoting your business outside of Google Search, by showing ads on relevant websites in the Google Display Network (GDN). The GDN is made up of thousands of sites across the web, where you can connect with even more potential customers. You can pick specific sites from the network, or choose the types of people you'd like to reach, and let Google Ads create a list for you.

A PPC ad solution like Google Ads doesn't have the same results as SEO, and won't improve your organic search rankings. But, because of its flexibility, Google Ads can help businesses of every size grab attention from people online in the moments that matter – that is, the exact moment they're searching for a business like yours.

Why Won't Google Ads PPC marketing help my SEO?

Google's first responsibility is to provide Search users with the most relevant possible results. If businesses were able to pay for higher rankings in the search results, users wouldn't be getting the information they're looking for.

But can Google Ads tools be used for SEO purposes?

Google Ads comes with a suite of tools that you can use to figure out how to optimize your site. For example, the Keyword Tool can help you create a list

of terms related to your business that generate a lot of searches, which you could then integrate into your site's content. You can also use Google Ads tracking tools to measure whether changes to your site and ad campaign are leading to more visitors or conversions.

Google also offers non-Google Ads tools to small businesses for free. The Search Analytics report in Google Analytics, for example, can track which queries are bringing more visitors to your site even if you aren't currently using Google Ads.

So should I invest in SEO or PPC?

Ultimately, it's up to you which option is best for your business, but it's worth considering that both SEO and PPC ads can help in different ways. These days, many people look online first when they want restaurant recommendations, business reviews, or the answers to their burning questions – and both SEO and Google Ads can help you connect with them when they're looking for what you offer. SEO is a traditional cornerstone of successful online marketing, because it gives your business the best chance of being found – even if the optimization process takes awhile to get right. Google Ads lets you reach customers more immediately, no matter how large or small your business is, and also lets you customize your campaign on the fly, but it's worth considering that both SEO and PPC ads can help in different ways. These days, many people look online first when they want restaurant recommendations, business reviews, or the answers to their burning questions – and both SEO and Google Ads can help you connect with them when they're looking for what you offer. SEO is a traditional cornerstone of successful online marketing, because it gives your business the best chance of being found – even if the optimization process takes awhile to get right. Google Ads lets you reach customers more immediately, no matter how large or small your business is, and also lets you customize your campaign on the fly.

Using SEO and Google Ads together may give you the best chance of bringing traffic to your site in the short term, and enhancing your business's presence online for long-term success.

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