

# SEM & SEO

*An Introduction & Outline*



[www.evolveSEM.co.uk](http://www.evolveSEM.co.uk)

## SEM Is An Acronym For 'Search Engine Marketing'

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This covers almost every area of web-related or online marketing. In an era where traditional marketing is getting continually more expensive yet less effective by the day, we need to look carefully at where the commercial marketplace is going.

Without a doubt, an on-line presence is now absolutely essential to every business that retails any kind of product or service. But simply having that on-line presence is not enough...



*Customers have to be able to find you - and find favourable information when they do.*

Picture a new retail premises opening up shop: They've spent a fortune on stock, fixtures, merchandising and systems. They open the doors; and suddenly discover they're in a tiny backstreet, 3 miles out of the city centre on the 4th floor, and the road outside is closed due to a diversion, plus they've done no advertising that tells anyone where they are... What kind of sales do you think they'll manage?

*This is exactly the scenario for 95% of ALL commercial web sites in existence.*

The internet has dramatically changed the shape of modern marketing. Ten years ago, as everyone was getting on the bandwagon, there was an idea that everyone needed a web site. Businesses scrambled to get themselves an online presence, often spending tens of thousands to create fancy graphical sites as web-designers happily lapped up the new business. Then everyone started to notice that they weren't getting any traffic to their site. There was a belief that if you built it, they would come. But unfortunately, this turned out to be completely false.



Modern internet marketing requires a fundamental shift in thinking from traditional marketing. A traditional marketing guru might tell you that your website is your online catalogue or advert of services, and that you will need to utilise all normal marketing channels (print, radio, TV, media etc.) to then drive customers to that site. Essentially working in the same way as they've always done: Produce the pretty brochure and then market every possible avenue to send that brochure to. This view is completely and utterly flawed in the internet economy.

The internet itself is not just a viewing portal. It is a completely interactive place where billions of people can research, investigate, discuss and choose services and products in the comfort of their own home. And because of Search Engines like Google, Bing, Yahoo and Ask etc. there are huge indexes of sites that can be easily found (from the customers perspective at least) to perform these tasks.

Think of the chaos involved if Business Yellow Pages wasn't in alphabetical order; how would you ever find what you wanted? The Search Engines solve this dilemma. But in doing so, they've radically changed the face of marketing forever. Because now, if you want to be found in the vast sea that is the internet, you have to have web pages indexed in those Search Engines.

And not only that, it's pretty pointless if you're number 4 on page 7 of the results. Studies have proved that the vast majority of traffic goes to the slots on page 1. By the time you get to page 5, you can forget it, unless you've got a very detail-oriented and persistent customer!

Because it was often so difficult to rank highly in competitive areas (and also because the Search Engines wanted more revenue), they introduced paid advertising with a unique spin – you only pay when someone actually chooses your advert (hence the name 'Pay-Per-Click'). This caused quite a storm when it happened, and was considered revolutionary. Essentially, you now only paid for someone who'd already decided they might be interested in your service or product. This is an incredibly targeted way of advertising, and done properly, can yield some exceptional results.



Unfortunately, PPC advertising has now become literally swamped with adverts in most fields. Costs per click have been heavily driven up (mostly by inexperienced marketers bidding too highly) to the point where now, we're seeing click prices that are so high, it can literally be unfeasible to make a profit, especially where large volumes of clicks are required to make a sale.

You need to consider the psychology of the customers doing the clicking as well; many of them will click the paid advert multiple times to return to your site - rather than bookmark the page - causing multiple charges. And it's a proven fact in many markets that a large percentage of clicks are merely for research or comparison - with no intention of ever buying. Many businesses find themselves in the situation where only 1 in 3-5 clicks have 'commercial intent', and if they've chosen the phrases they're bidding on unwisely, this can cause a further drop in the value of each individual click. This has caused a rebirth and

interest in Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) - as those in the know try to drive their sites up to the revered page 1.

As an exercise; if you go to Google, Bing or Yahoo RIGHT NOW and type in a few product or service keywords, does your site appear in the first few pages of results? Chances are it won't, unless you've already performed some SEO. Which puts you in the exact situation detailed above. And if your site is listed; is it appearing for phrases that your customers will actually enter? Obviously, you'd expect to be listed if someone searches for your brand/company name - and this search is very important from the Reputation Management standpoint, (which we'll come to later,) but SEO is about appearing for commercial search phrases that a consumer will enter to find you - along with your competitors.

Maybe you've already tried some PPC (Pay Per Click) advertising so you appear in the paid listings, and maybe you've achieved some success so far, but:

- Is your campaign properly managed?
- Are you getting the best return on your investment?
- Do you know what the most successful areas are - with accurate statistics to track and measure the quality of your campaigns?

Testing, measuring and split-testing are some of the most important factors with all PPC campaigns, and if you don't know what your stats are (and you're not regularly checking and managing them) then it's guaranteed you're not getting the best results for your money.

Many advertisers are also not aware of how important 'negative' keywords are - keywords that stop that search being bid upon - like 'free', 'cheap' and many others that are market specific. This stops you from paying for clicks where a consumer is looking for freebies or pure research.

But all this is virtually pointless - if your online reputation isn't equally great. The search-engines are generally the first port of call when a customer wants any information about your business. Most owners are quite astonished to discover just how often they're searched for; even if purely for basic details like address, telephone number, directions, opening hours, access, facilities, parking, services provided etc. And the social internet revolution has meant that everyone has a clear voice. If there's anything bad out there, or if you have a lack of good ratings, reviews or commentary, your customers will invariably go to a competitor who DOES have social 'proof' of quality & service.



And understand that public 'reputation' no longer functions in isolation of the internet, as it used to. 'Online' reputation IS offline/public reputation now - they're one and the same. Everyone has fast, free and easy access to a mountain of information, and you can guarantee that they'll use it to make any purchasing decision now; whether it's correct or not!

Think about that for a second; a completely incorrect and biased comment can affect the long-term success of a business - and it certainly will, if it exists without plenty of positive commentary to balance the equation.

Sales statistics are now clearly showing that both UK and worldwide commerce is undergoing a paradigm shift towards online sales and marketing. There is no other choice but to deal with it - and ensure you're taking full advantage of all the opportunities.



# SEO Is An Acronym For 'Search Engine Optimisation'

SEO is essentially a constantly evolving study of what factors the search engines take into account when they 'rank' you in their natural search listings.

'Natural' search listings are the main lists of results that come up when you search for something. These do not include the paid listings. In a typical Google or Bing search, you can see the paid listings in the right column and at the top (normally the top 3 listings).

The screenshot shows a Google search for "car insurance". The search bar at the top contains "car insurance" and the Google logo. Below the search bar, there are navigation tabs for "Web", "News", "Shopping", "Images", "Videos", "More", and "Search tools". The search results are displayed in two columns. The left column contains organic search results, and the right column contains sponsored ads. The organic results include "Direct Line Car Insurance - Directline.com", "GoCompare Car Insurance - GoCompare.com", "Cheap Car Insurance - Save £218 with Google" (Sponsored), "Compare Cheap Car Insurance Quotes at Gocompare.com™", "Compare Cheap Car Insurance Quotes - MoneySuperMarket", and "Car Insurance - Compare Cheap Quotes at Confused.com". The sponsored ads include "Churchill™ Car Insurance", "Car Insurance From £191", "John Lewis Car Insurance", "AXA Car Insurance", "Car Insurance Quotes", "Compare The Market™", and "Confused Car Insurance".

The 'natural' listings are straight from their main index of web-pages, and show sites listed in the order of importance & relevance - according to their algorithm.

Obviously, we want to be as high up the page(s) as possible. If we're the 7th listing on page 9 then we're hardly going to get prospects beating our door down! No-one knows all the factors that Search Engines (SE's) use to determine your rank, with Google claiming over

200 separate elements. The SE's really don't want anyone to know - so you can't manipulate or 'game' their system.

So, over the years a complete industry has grown up around this; on the one side you have SE's like Google deliberately filing technology patents in many different areas - causing mass confusion over which methods they use for ratings, and on the other side an SEO industry which uses empirical testing and measuring of various factors over a wide range of site-data to determine which ones are the most important.

There are two sides to SEO: 'On-Page' factors & 'Off-Page' factors. There are also 'off-web' factors such as demographic and geographic information - but we usually have no control over this area.

## 'On-Page' SEO

On-Page SEO is all about changes you can make directly to a site to make it more Search Engine 'friendly'. This is the easy part and involves correctly setting up internal-linking, using header & other tags, seeding keywords at a sensible density and in appropriate places, and to some lesser degree, using meta-tags. *If all that is complete double-dutch to you, then don't worry - you're not alone!*

The bottom-line though, is that while it is the easiest to control, it has the LEAST affect on your ranking. In fact, it is widely believed that it has very little effect at all anymore. Many years ago, you used to be able to dupe the SE's with lots of on-page factors - but that's been closed down now. Essentially, there isn't much you can do to improve your rankings in this way, but there are several things you need to do to stop your site from raising triggers, and to make it easy for the search-engines to index.



The only time that 'on-page' becomes important is when you have taken care of 'off-page' and have a lot of quality inbound 'links' to create some interest. At that point, careful tweaking of on-page factors and internal linking can yield extra results.

## 'Off-Page' SEO

Off-Page SEO is what's really important. Imagine it as a 'voting' system. If another site places a link to your site then that site has given you a vote of confidence. They're saying, *"Look at them - they've got something interesting to say..."*

The link to your site has two main parts - the actual URL or web address of the page they are pointing someone to, and the 'anchor text' or 'keyword phrase' that is highlighted on the web-page for you to click. This generates one 'vote' for a particular page on a web site

based on that anchor text phrase, i.e. one vote towards this site appearing higher up in the natural listings when we type in that phrase in the search box.

Now, it's nowhere near as simple as that (*of course...*) While the SE's use the anchor text phrase to help cast a vote for a page, they also use a mass of other factors as well, such as the relevance & quality of the surrounding content, and the quality and authority of the link-providing website. And doesn't that all make sense? Google wants to show results that provide the best value and relevance, and so they use all data available to try and anticipate and steer the final listings.

But all these factors massively affect how we perform SEO from a technical stand-point. We have to use the right content and keyword-phrases to guide the search algorithm, while at the same time providing enough variety and diversity so as to look completely natural and non-manipulated (and avoid any ranking associated penalties).

Picking the keyword phrases that you want to rank for is an art in itself, (*and you should perform a lot of keyword and competitor research before putting any strategy into place*), but the bottom line is this:

### **What would potential customers type in order to find your product or service?**

*...The answers to this question essentially supply your ideal anchor text keyword-phrases.*

But these keyword phrases can't just be randomly chosen without thought, investigation and testing. It's so often the case that the phrase people expect is NOT what produces the most results. Human beings are odd creatures and we all have our own ideas of how to find what we want. One person looking for a good night's sleep might type in "Orthopaedic beds" or "New Mattress", whereas another person may type in "I can't sleep" or "mattress for back pain". And we're also probably not interested in phrases that don't indicate any commercial intent; as we're looking for leads/sales - not to become a free information provider to researchers.

Would you really want to trust your marketing to vague ideas and feelings about what might be typed in? The importance of the investigation, testing and measuring of these phrases cannot be underestimated - they are absolutely key to the volume of enquiries and sales you can make via the web. An analogy could be drawn with a listing in the Yellow Pages. If you are a Plumber and you're listed under Stationary Providers, you won't get much business!



## SEO : Words Of Caution

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Generally speaking, you should never start SEO with phrases that yield many millions of results. In a search for 'Car Insurance' on Google UK, you would find around 200 million results. Anyone can see it's not wise to compete with 200 million other pages when you're just starting out!



But... If I typed in "over 50s car insurance" (*assuming I was a car insurance provider specialising in over 50's*) - then there are less than 1 million results. A big number still - but actually much more reasonable when it comes to web searches.

I would usually have a far better chance of getting ranked for that phrase quickly than I would for just 'car insurance'. In fact, if I wanted to rate for phrases like 'Car Insurance' it would probably take a long time and a very large budget, as I would be competing with the insurance giants! Not a wise choice at all - and actually not the best way to go about things either.

Therefore, we're looking for phrases that yield less overall results - but quite accurately sum up what we do or the product/service we offer. In the industry, we call these 'long-tail' searches. Depending on how competitive your market is, the phrases could be from 2 to 7 words long. Typically they will be 3 or 4 words long.

We normally recommend performing SEO on phrases that return less than half a million results at the start (*in some cases, we may go with a higher count - particularly if the current page 1 results are not well SEO'd.*) Then, as we build links, we'll automatically start to gain some ground on the bigger search phrases, and if we put in enough effort, we can go after those big phrases in 3-12 months time. This strategy is also far more targeted at the start - as we go after the high-converting phrases with 'commercial intent' - i.e. customers who are looking to purchase.

Again though, things are never quite that simple. We also need to look very carefully at what sites we'd be competing with at the top of the current SERPS (Search Engine Results Pages). There are many phrases which yield quite a small number of overall results, but the top ones are on sites that have massive authority and link-counts. These could be hard or even virtually impossible to beat in any reasonable time-scale.

It's also useful and wise to build links to individual sub-pages on your web site, not just your home page. We call this 'deep-linking' - and Google in particular likes this. If you have a couple of category pages for example, which contain links to individual products, then it's worth driving appropriate search terms to those pages too. Don't just create links to your home-page. Google and the other SE's look closely at how individual pages on your site are listed and treated.

# The Importance Of Reputation Management

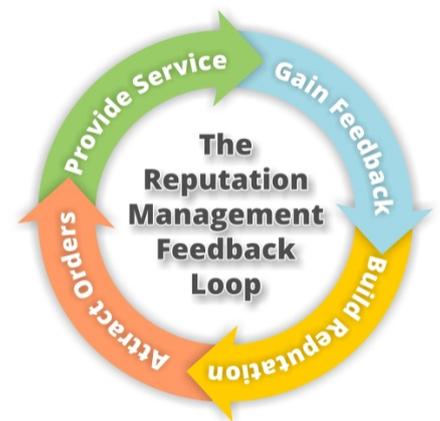
We've all seen how online reviews and ratings have exploded in popularity over the last few years, but have you considered that this is where potential new customers are looking for YOU?

Marketing has fundamentally changed forever... The easy availability of online opinions has now completely transformed our decision-making process. This is massively shaping the sales and long-term success of all businesses everywhere. Because your on-line & off-line 'reputation' are the same thing now: Online activity directly affects offline business success, and is dramatically altering the entire world economy.

A completely incorrect & biased comment - from an unreasonable customer - can affect the long-term future of your business, unless there are positive opinions to balance it out. This means ANYONE could potentially harm YOUR business's reputation, as reviews are often skewed by personal feelings, or just the 'type of day' someone's having - not to mention disgruntled ex-employees or unethical competitors.

Without Reputation Management, the 'happy' majority of your customers go UNHEARD, whilst the discontented minority are free to damage your name.

Google now makes SO much information about you EASILY available (and often in excruciating detail), that business survival now hinges upon managing your reputation for the future.



It's virtually pointless having a great online/offline marketing strategy, if your online reputation isn't equally great. The search-engines are generally the first port of call when a customer wants any information about your business. What does it say about your business if the front-page of Google contains negative commentary; true or otherwise? How would that now affect your potential customers thought-process? Will they still consider you as a viable option? Or will they now look for other alternatives; ones which they hadn't even thought to consider until they saw that 'bad' press?

And if there's no bad press at present (which is the ideal situation to start with,) then you need to start collecting and publishing good-press and positive commentary from your current customer-base. This will; 1) shield you against any future issues; 2) raise your profile so you steal customers from other businesses that aren't looking after their reputation!; 3) over time, increase your positive search results in Google's organic listings - so that your 'rankings' may improve as a side-effect.

Consider honestly: When was the last time you bought a service or product (big or small) before 'researching' it online? And when was the last time you bought something that had a low rating/review? We're all massively influenced by social commentary, customer feedback and reviews now; it's basic human nature.

**Don't make the mistake of pouring time and effort into other areas of online marketing without taking care of your online reputation.**

## Conclusions

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Hopefully this will give you some insights into the concepts of SEM & SEO. It's actually an incredibly complex and ever-changing art, as the Search Engines never keep the rules the same. The basics endure, but the strategies used are constantly evolving.



You need to work with a company that keeps up with the latest developments, but still sticks to tried and tested 'safe' methods. *And that's where we come in...*

As highly successful promoters of online businesses ourselves, we believe that SEO is the lead generation tool of choice. Where else can you get 'free' targeted advertising and marketing? Everyone is moving on-line now. Gone are the days of Yellow Pages and business directories. If you want to find something now, you just type it into a Search Engine. It's the only future-proof form of marketing left.

Although PPC (Pay-Per-Click) is more immediate and is very useful in testing phrases, ultimately, it's SEO that will yield the longer term, lower cost results. And Reputation Management acts as 'Reputation Insurance' - to ensure that you remain an attractive and viable option to current and potential new customers.

**Contact us via [evolvesem.co.uk](http://evolvesem.co.uk)  
for an informal discussion on your requirements**

## About Us

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We've blended years of experience in Internet Services, IT, Reputation Management and traditional Sales & Marketing to help you reach your customers, build relationships and convert them to sales.

And we do it with a solution that's custom tailored to meet your specific needs. From internet marketing, web strategies and search engine optimisation to advertising, direct marketing and business/process consultancy, you can rest assured that we have the knowledge, experience and expertise to create a solution that fits your business needs.

All marketing activity is supposed to help you find new customers and convert them. Don't get caught up with a so-called 'SEO Expert' who has no real understanding of the full business process. We own and run several successful sales businesses ourselves, and have provided business, marketing & IT Systems consultancy for over a decade.



### **10 Years Of Successful Commercial Delivery**

We've been providing commercial SEM, SEO, IT and E-Commerce services since 2004, and have our own web/software development team. We practice what we preach, and have been heavily involved with our own successful online marketing projects & tools development throughout.

### **Over 2,000 Clients Served Across 50+ Countries**

With over 2,000 clients and hundreds of agencies served - many of which have been with us for several years - we have both the real-world experience and pedigree to deliver. We are a truly international operation and have clients all over the world.

### **A Proven Technical Research & Development History**

With years of empirical testing and analysis across tens of thousands of domains, we consider ourselves leading-class technical SEO's. We have thousands of online marketers and agencies that have used our tried-and-tested bespoke software tool-sets and solutions.

### **We Talk Your Language And Take The Time To Understand You**

So often, technical ability doesn't translate into a client-friendly jargon-free conversation. We offer a down-to-earth plain-speaking approach, and have operated in hundreds of different markets/verticals. We always take the time to properly understand YOUR business and goals.