Search engine marketing for non-profits

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Non-profit organizations should be exploiting the strategies of online marketers to gain traffic to their websites, raise awareness of their "brand" and its aims and convert visitors into donors, according to a study published in the first 2009 issue of the *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*.

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) involves focusing on how well a website can attract high ranking in the search engine results pages (SERPs) of the main web search engines, Google, Yahoo! and Microsoft Live Search. The non-profit webmaster should focus on pertinent keywords and relevant generic phrases and then edit website page titles, text and hidden meta text, as well as image tags to accommodate these keywords and phrases. The aim not being to manipulate the search engines illicitly but to ensure that the non-profit's website provides the best answer to a given pertinent search query. Ultimately, this will increase the number of visitors to the site.

Dave McMahon and Charla Griffy-Brown of the Graziadio School of Business and Management at Pepperdine University, Los Angeles, suggest that, unlike conventional advertising and marketing campaigns, which can costs tens, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars, SEM is well within the financial means of most non-profits even during an economic downturn.

By adopting SEM strategies, such as page optimization and building links with other related websites to improve search engine ranking, a non-profit will also be obliged to fine-tune its web presence according to its

values and the feedback from its donors, and those who benefit from its existence.

The focus on truly relevant keywords and search terms that potential donors and other interested parties find useful will improve the service to its particular community that any non-profit might offer, the team explains. The researchers also suggest that an SEM approach to marketing will help non-profits answer the call to target potential donors more effectively and differentiate themselves better from other organizations.

McMahon and Griffy-Brown point out that achieving a high ranking in the search engines is a relatively easy goal for a webmaster. However, they point out that while high rankings in search engines is admirable, high rankings for poor search terms will consistently deliver poor results. "The compilation, selection, and evaluation of search engine keywords are vitally important to any search engine marketing campaign," they say. The team concludes that user questionnaires will help an organization find the most effective keywords for an SEM approach.

With a higher ranking for relevant keywords any non-profit will then be able to take best advantage of the highly personalized communication that is afforded by the web and specifically the advent of social media tools such as blogs, citizen journalism sites, online networks and communities, and shared bookmarking and news services.

Source: Inderscience Publishers