

# Search Engine Marketing – Self Employed and Climbing the SERPs

In online marketing, you often hear people talk about dominating the search engine results for certain keywords. What they're talking about is search engine marketing (SEM). This is a broad term that includes everything you do to increase your site's visibility within the search engines, such as Google and Bing.

Many people mistakenly mix up this term with SEO (search engine optimization), but these are two different concepts. SEO is part of SEM, but there's much more to it. SEM also includes using the search engines' ad networks and other forms of advertising to target search engine users.

## Advertising on Search Engines

Your SEM campaign starts with choosing the right search terms. These are keywords and key phrases your target market is using to search for sites like yours. It's important to choose keywords that are relevant and have a high number of searches per month. You can use an online keyword tool to do this.

Once you've chosen your keywords, you optimize your site for them (SEO) and take out ads that target these keywords. Search engine ad networks let you bid on keywords and decide on your budget. They place ads on people's searches depending on these factors.

## Why Place Ads?

SEO offers a way to draw traffic to your site for free or very close to free. Why use SEM and pay for ads? The reason is that ads get you highly targeted traffic quickly. The results are immediate, whereas SEO takes time. It's a good choice for limited time offers or new sites that either don't have traffic yet or don't employ SEO techniques.

SEM also helps you when you want to dominate the search engine results pages (SERPs) for your chosen keywords. By basing your SEM campaign around those keywords, you can make sure that the search engines place you at the top.

## The Pros and Cons of SEM

SEM is an essential part of any online marketing strategy. If you build a high quality site and employ no SEM whatsoever, it's possible to build a strong fan base over the course of several years through other types of promotion, but SEM gets you there much faster.

The main drawback of SEM is that it takes constant attention, maintenance and budget. Everything changes quickly online. The search engines (and especially Google) update their algorithms constantly, and you have to stay on top of these changes. If you rely too much on search engines for your traffic, one of these changes can seriously impact your business.

## The Keys to SEM Success

How do you run a successful SEM campaign? Best practices include:

- Split testing by taking advantage of all of the tools available to see what works and what doesn't
- Clearly defining the goals you want to achieve with your SEM campaign
- Taking time to choose the right keywords and changing them if necessary
- Using the highest quality content possible to provide value for your visitors
- Giving visitors a clear call to action.

Finally, it's important that you don't put all of your eggs in one basket. While SEM is important, you should employ other methods as well to get human beings to your site. The best strategy includes marketing to both search engines and real human Internet users.