

Eight Tips for Enticing Online Customers through Search Marketing this Holiday Shopping Season.

FEATURE ARTICLE: RETAIL

Holiday buying is the lifeblood of many online retailers; and never is it more competitive than this year – since economic woes not only mean less customers browsing and buying, but also less purchases per customer.

Each retailer will be competing for its share of this limited buying pool. What will determine the winner?

We believe the retail winner is the one to shout the loudest about its product or service at precisely the time that a buyer needs it.

This savvy engineering of when and how to position your product online may seem complex, but left in the capable hands of a Search Marketing agency like IMPAQT, it's not only made more simple, but more effective. On average, IMPAQT's retail clients enjoyed an unbelievable 9:1 return on ad spend this year, and during the holiday shopping season we really ramp up the creative use of Search Marketing.

Let us help you be noticed when it matters. We'll start by sharing eight tips (out of hundreds!) for capturing your share of the market, while leaving your competitors silent and invisible.

Tip #1: Do Your Research.

Tap into data-rich sources to get an historical perspective on your industry and products. Your Search Marketing agency may be able to understand online costs for your category for the previous year, according to Search engines. Other web analytics vendors like HitWise may show top industry category keywords and your competitor's top site traffic keywords.

Tip #2: Know Your Online Buying Days.

This goes beyond Cyber Monday, Black Friday and Brown Thursday. Know the buying days from October through January. And not only that, know which ones are browsing days, too. It may be prudent to change your campaigns to accommodate browsing as opposed to buying. And it's even smarter to align your offline buying (to brick-and-mortar locations) with online.

Tip #3. Get Realistic With Goals.

Not every retailer in the same category is competing with the same budget. So, adjust accordingly. Also, budgets may change with expected CPC inflation during the holiday season. You may need to act more innovative to compensate for less budget spend, or consider second guessing the use of a niche engine.

Tip #4: Consider All Insight.

Search Marketing is done best when not done in a silo. Have you regarded your organic rankings vs. Paid? Can either organic or Paid be leveraged to help 'lift' the other? What have been your trends with site traffic? And where are the opportunities that only you can spot? There are ways to more efficiently use the power of Search Marketing and cut down on wasteful spending. But you have to think outside of your campaign.

Tip #5: It's all in the Timing.

Yes, matching your Search execution to your promotional calendar is vital. But another simple piece of comparison homework is to, literally, count the number of shopping days in the season this year versus last year. For example, December 2008 has 4 full weekends, but December 2007 had 5 full weekends. This not only helps you establish realistic expectations, but it also helps you allocate budget appropriately. Consider shipping dates, which could differ for product type or categories.

Tip #6: Give Your Customers a Good Landing.

Landing pages matter. Yet, we sometimes see retailers giving this less thought than all the other steps leading the customer to it. Continuing a customer's online journey by serving them a targeted landing page is a best practice. With that said, in some cases of cross-selling, it may be more beneficial to use a category landing page rather than a product-specific landing page.

Tip #7: Get Technical.

Data details are what make or break your Paid Search campaign. Paying attention to the granularity of your results and opportunities is what could make all the difference. For example, consider dayparting for campaigns for which you see a higher percentage of conversions during specific time periods. Work with your Search Marketing agency to gain access to 'share of voice' and 'lost impression share' reports from search engine representatives. Analyze these and make adjustments as you go.

Tip #8: Plan Ahead to Spend Quickly when Opportunity Knocks.

They say opportunity doesn't wait. And never does it unveil itself – and disappear – quicker than online. The truth is that your Search Marketing agency can set you up to leverage timely opportunities by planning ahead on payments to search engines. This arrangement can help you quickly access more of a budget when you need to jump on an opportunity that presents itself quickly. Credit limits and rules differ for each search engine. Good Search Marketing agencies will not only know these details, but they will have also planned ahead for each of them.

With the line between brick-and-mortar and click-and-mortar entities growing thin, it is the opportune time to invest more in a medium that gains results through integrating the two. To ensure that your marketing strategies reach your customers on key dates throughout the Holiday Shopping season, consider using Search as a means of directly targeting them at particular times that you find necessary. Contact IMPAQT for a more in-depth discussion on how a Search Marketing campaign can propel your return on ad spend this Holiday season.