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White Paper

Know Where You Stand, Know Where You Are Going

Developing an Actionable Search Performance Metric

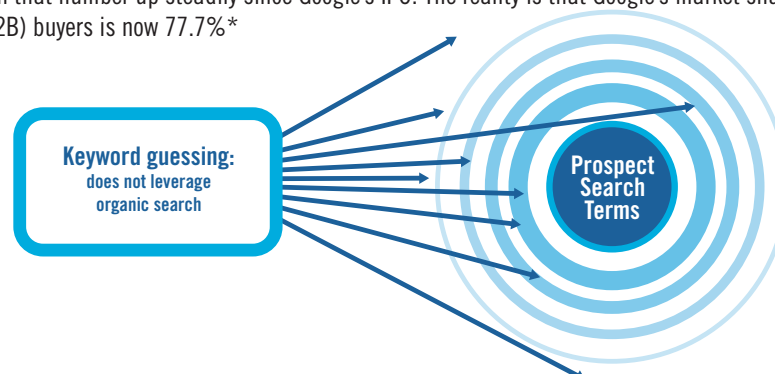
▶ Description of the problem

Managers are getting the message – if they aren't visible on search engines like Google and Yahoo, their business will suffer. From big corporations to small startups, it is becoming very clear that invisibility on the major search engines is a missed opportunity of the first order.

In fact, it may be worse than many managers realize. For client after client, we have found that search engine optimization is delivering increases in visibility of over 500%, which clearly indicates the depth and breadth of businesses' "search deficit." The factors behind this widespread problem are stunning, especially as you look at them in aggregate:

- Eighty-five percent of Internet users searching for a new product or service do their research on the web.
- Virtually any mainstream product or service is in competition with literally millions of page listings on the most common search terms. Even obscure products or services return thousands of listings. If a company is not in the first two pages of search results returned on key search phrases, over half of their prospects will not see the listing.
- Most sites have used guesswork to determine a list of keyword and phrases, and differentiation and positioning as their primary text. We assure you, no one is using your tagline to search, as memorable as it may be.
- It's been reported only 6% of sites are actively measuring results and monitoring performance using web analytics – you can't manage what you don't measure. Additionally, web analytics present an incomplete picture of the search market – the reason for this white paper.
- The world of search is consolidating behind Google – currently over half of all searches are performed using Google technology, with that number up steadily since Google's IPO. The reality is that Google's market share with business-to-business (B2B) buyers is now 77.7%*

Organic Search:
You can't manage what you don't measure.



*Enquiro and MarketingSherpa, Business to Business Survey, 2007



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In short, if a company sells a product in the business-to-business market and is not on the first two pages of results on searches of critical keywords, that company is at a distinct competitive disadvantage: their products are invisible to these current active prospects.

Of course, prospect-centric search engine optimization as a business is relatively new, having “gone mainstream” in really only the last five years. And there has been a lag in web marketers’ understanding of the metrics available to measure search performance. Fat weekly reports based on your server logs may actually be providing Marketing with misinformation: for example, traffic from specific search terms only tells you terms for which your site is currently visible – these don’t tell you what terms you are invisible on, and what is the amount of missed opportunity.

RefreshWeb discovered, as we acquired more clients and those clients wanted to see the effect of our work, that there was no metric that adequately measured the improvement in their search performance – at least, not to our satisfaction. So we decided to develop one.

The solution: Total Available Search Market™

The first question is, of course, “What would a useful search marketing performance metric look like?”

First, it must measure the overall market and the site’s place within the market. Analyzing traffic with web analytics software gives the client information on site activity without relating it to the potential currently being missed in the market, or any in-depth insight as to the company’s position as it relates to the competition. For the metric to be truly useful, it needs to be equally valid in analyzing a competitor’s site as it is the client’s. It should be outward-looking, and indexed to specific search engines. Ideally, it would be timely – based on current prospect behavior.

Second, any metric must be easy to understand quickly. With a clear yardstick, clients can make better decisions confidently, and can show concrete ROI. This means that the measurement must be stated in marketing terms, not technology terms. Finally, it must be actionable. By providing specific information, the metric would show where opportunities are in the market, where the client is doing well, and where the client needs to make adjustments. A metric with these qualities would provide a foundation for solid marketing strategies.

The metric we developed is called TASM,™ for Total Available Search Market. For each client, the TASM reflects the universe of people searching for one of their solutions, using research into current search terms and search volumes. To determine a client’s TASM share, we take an extensive list of relevant keywords and run them through a formula that factors the visibility of each keyword and the number of people searching on it, then aggregates the data in order to measure period-to-period performance for comparison. The actual formula is proprietary, but illustrating how it works is fairly straightforward:

1) Determine the number of searches on a given keyword phrase (KP). For example, “Sarbanes Oxley compliance” currently gets 4140 searches per month.

2) Determine what page the subject company appears on when the search phrase is “Sarbanes Oxley compliance.” Example: search on Google for “Sarbanes Oxley compliance” and the company currently appears near the top of page two of the search results, or number 12 of 21,400,000 listings returned.



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3) Research indicates that 50% of B2B searchers looking for a solution to this problem (and not just information) will review the second page of search listings returned. And just for simplicity's sake, say 50% of searchers are using Google. That means this company's Google listing is currently visible to 1035 people searching for information on "Sarbanes Oxley compliance" (50% of Google's 50% of the total). *Visibility is not clicks – it is closer to impressions, a number used for years in advertising, and now a key metric in pay-per-click advertising.* Click behavior is much more conservative—perhaps 1 out of 10 impressions becomes action.

4) Repeat the process for every relevant search phrase – we generally select around 25-50 search phrases (out of hundreds we research) because that is a good number to work with when optimizing primary and secondary pages of our clients' web sites. We prioritize these based on volume and our analysis of each term. And then we focus on results: Top 3, Top 10, Top 20 rankings are all valued differently, but they all have value.

5) Aggregate the number of persons the client was visible to in a specific period. Let us restate the obvious here: If we are going to compare periods, it is crucial to be working with precisely the same KP list period-to-period. If the list has been modified between periods, then we are comparing apples to bowling balls. But it is useful to view the aggregated data to compare periods because there is a fair amount of "noise" in the data – the net reach on specific keywords will wax and wane just because the search volumes vary, but looking at the aggregate score gives us a good sense of whether we are doing better or worse period-to-period.

Keyword	Count (?)	Predict (?)	30 Days
sarbanes oxley compliance	119	138	4140
enterprise risk management	98	114	3420
corporate compliance software	79	92	2760
sarbanes-oxley audit	52	60	1800
sarbanes-oxley tools	52	60	1800
compliance software	49	57	1710
sox compliance	29	34	1020
404 sarbanes oxley	30	30	903
regulatory compliance software	21	24	720
compliance management software	19	22	660
network audit software	16	19	570
sarbanes oxley software	14	16	480
sox 404	12	14	420
corporate governance and internal control	11	13	390
corporate governance software	11	13	390
sarbanes oxley software	11	11	341

Reality check: Does TASM™ work?

So does this procedure meet our criteria of being market-based, easy to understand and actionable? Sure does.

The TASM is first defined by a wide range of active searches on topics, terms and phrases relevant to the client's products and services. This is confirmed and expanded by competitive research, and vetted by the client's marketing team. The market itself defines the range of terms that comprise the Total Available Search Market.™

Data for the number of searches on a given KP is widely available and statistically valid (in other words, the sample size is plenty large enough to be able to draw useful conclusions). And the behavior of searchers confronted with a long list of search returns is observable and extensible to any searcher confronted with any list of search results, which allows us to analyze any web site and compare web sites that use the same KPs. Furthermore, since KPs are highly correlated to the products and services a company offers, the potential value of search volumes on relevant KPs is something everybody can understand and work with.

As for actionability, that box too can be checked off. With TASM data we can develop an action plan with the keywords we need to beef up, the ones we can leave alone and the ones we might want to drop in order to add KPs that are more likely to pull good prospects. The critical factor here is reviewing the search marketing performance of a given website on a keyword-by-keyword basis. That makes the data sufficiently granular to be useful and actionable.



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The TASM is a useful metric, but it's also a telling reporting tool. Our service includes bimonthly ranking reports, and once a month, we do detailed research into search volumes. For any two reporting periods, be they month-to-month or year-over-year, the TASM provides online analysis that can be variably sorted to reflect reach percentage, market potential or net gains and losses. Each report is reviewed and commented on by an analyst prior to posting in the client area.

In the end, the proof of the pudding is in the eating – our clients love the transparency and accountability of their TASM reports. It gives them a very understandable view of a fairly complex, altogether new and sometimes mysterious phenomenon: search marketing performance.

John Rasco
Founder & President



Total Available Search Market™ Trend Analysis

Pre- and Post-Optimization Comparison

This shows the initial improvement, using your original list of keyword phrases. Our 10/19 report shows results that include all the search terms we targeted with your optimization. These rankings will trend upward over the next few weeks. Note that the volume of searches will vary between reporting periods; what shows as a net loss may actually have higher rankings, but with fewer searches available. Also, there may be searches where this report shows zero--our tool has a threshold of 60/month.

Percentage Increase in Reach: 192.55%
Prospects Reached Increase: 8,404

Search Term	08/26/2007 report				10/18/2007 report				Change
	Reach %?	Daily	30 Days	Persons	Reach %?	Daily	30 Days	Persons	
corporate compliance software	93.62	5	150	140.4	95.95	64	1920	1842.2	1701.8
sarbanes oxley software	74.19	35	1050	779.0	90.20	21	630	568.3	-210.7
sarbanes-oxley software	91.73	5	150	137.6	84.43	6	180	152.0	14.4
corporate governance software	95.43	21	630	601.2	82.78	64	1920	1589.4	988.2
sarbanes oxley and corporate governance	56.37	10	300	169.1	73.14	64	1920	1404.3	1235.2
sarbanes-oxley audit	48.04	41	1230	590.9	54.92	56	1680	922.7	331.8
sox audit	9.82	50	1500	147.3	51.54	64	1920	989.6	842.3
regulatory compliance software	39.61	8	240	95.1	51.30	17	510	261.6	166.6
sox 404	13.84	98	2940	406.9	50.03	122	3660	1831.1	1424.2
sarbanes-oxley tools	1.00	41	1230	12.3	47.52	55	1650	784.1	771.8
sox 404 compliance	7.19	11	330	23.7	39.37	13	390	153.5	129.8