

Searching for Sign-Ups

Effective search engine marketing campaigns don't just locate consumers anymore. **Ben Comer** looks at how SEM motivates individuals and gets results

Just a year ago, banner plays, expensive keyword purchases and tallied hits, views and time spent on a page comprised the bulk of search engine marketing (SEM) in the pharma sector.

Although many pharmas and their agencies are hoping consumers will travel from a branded home page into a third or fourth page of content, those marketers ahead of the curve are pairing actionable content results with consumers right off the bat, and measuring the value of each customer acquisition.

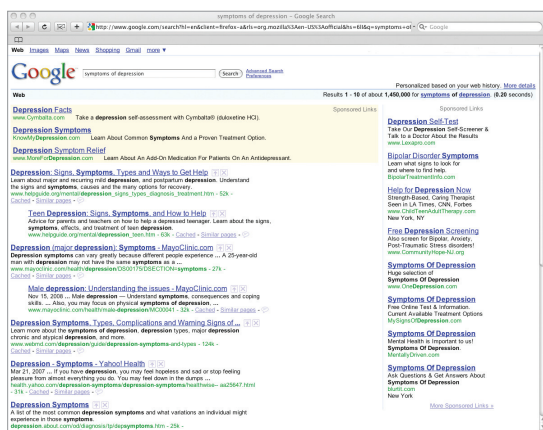
According to Josh Pierry, principal of Pierry Interactive, an SEM, SEO and online marketing consulting firm, some brands are demanding guaranteed return on investment (ROI).

"We'll run banners until we get 100 sign-ups," says Pierry, referring to free trials (in the case of a sleep



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A well-planned campaign should bring up relevant ads when consumers are doing online health searches

medication SEM campaign), coupons downloaded, diagnostic quizzes taken, or simply signing up to learn more, or joining a community. "Marketers don't want to blow two million banner impressions without any coupons getting downloaded," he says.

A well-executed SEM campaign allows marketers to "reach the right consumers, at the right time, with the right message," says Mary Ann Belliveau, healthcare industry director, at Google. That includes "testing and iterating on the messages which resonate with consumers and healthcare professionals, understanding consumer interest in a brand's competitive set, and also quantifying the impact of an event or news on a brand," she says.

Consumers want information from multiple sources as well—the average individual seeking health information will visit three to six websites, says Bill McGee, senior vice president at Healthline.com.

Organic search results are the most valuable, although disease condition sites, rather than a specific branded webpage, tend to dominate organic results, says Pierry.

To maximize organic exposure, marketers should ensure that "all of the assets on the branded sites are discoverable through paid search," says Belliveau. "For example, if someone searches for 'symptoms of depression,' a well-planned search campaign would result in a relevant ad appearing next to the organic search results. This ad would ideally include messaging around symptoms of depression and drive the consumer to a landing page on the pharmaceutical company's website, where it would be possible to check to see if they have symptoms of depression."

Google offers a free tool called Website Optimizer that allows companies to experiment with content and design combinations for optimal results. Additionally, Google announced in December the launch of a beta allowing AdWord advertisers to show text and image ads on the iPhone, the T-Mobile G1 and other mobile devices with full Internet browsers. Mobile searching will become increasingly valuable, says Belliveau, since it will allow marketers to reach people who are, for example, searching for allergy relief while they are on the go.

No matter where a search takes place, one of the biggest mistakes marketers make, says Pierry and others, is purchasing expensive keywords, and landing consumers on a page with limited resources and insufficient value. With the amount of information available online, brands have to present consumers with precise, actionable content corresponding to an individual's particular need, with a single click.