

## Internet Marketing Without a Big-Picture Strategy Dances in Circles

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### Stop Tracking the Illusive "Magic Bullet"

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Website owners are left to wonder whom to believe when it comes to impressing the search engines. Which approach can deliver the "magic bullet" they've been promised? Is it time to jump to the next "sure thing," that will entice both search spiders and web surfers?

The primary methods promoted to attract search engines and Web traffic aren't new:

- Links and reciprocal links
- Pay-per-click (PPC)
- Search engine optimization (SEO) in all its variations
- Blogs and forums
- Writing and posting articles or press releases
- Paid placement with ads and banners

But each of them shares a common limitation. At its best, each is only part of the answer. An answer that won't hold still long enough to get nailed down - before the next "must have" appears.

### The Internet is Maturing, and so are Search Engines

In recent years, the capabilities and sophistication of the search engines have exploded. Public use and expectations have grown to match it. The public's reliance on the Internet as a reliable source expands ever faster. Recent studies found the Web to be the most trusted source of information for making major purchase decisions, second only to spouses for finding referrals.

A Harris Interactive consumer survey (2004) reports that 73% of adults are now online - 156 million users. That's up from 69% eight months before. Most Internet users (80%) expect that they'll find reliable, detailed facts online (Pew Internet and American Life Project). So they go online first when they need information. And they have confidence in what they're able to find.

Now more than ever, access to that gigantic pool of information-hungry Internet users depends on a website's relationship to the search engines. Is it possible for people to find it? The stakes are high.

Integration of Methods is the "Next Big Thing"

Refined keyword and page optimization are the standard anymore. SEO has morphed into Search Engine Marketing (SEM). The key difference is integration. SEO methods aren't seen as separate solutions, but as parts of a multi-pronged endeavor. Success now depends on how well they all dovetail.

That's a fundamental shift from the lurching "do this..., now that..., now that..." approaches, which have characterized the on-line norm. And anyone who's still playing by that game plan will be left behind.

Be suspicious of any SEO strategy that's wedded to a single method - no matter what impressive statistics they cite. And when the search engines "burp," (as they surely will now and then) a site's visibility can be lost. A diversified approach to links and search engines reduces vulnerability. Achieving that requires shifting focus to a bigger, more inclusive picture.

#### My Experience with Reciprocal Linking

As a person who has been in SEM for years (and fine-tuned hundreds of websites) I've gotten good at spotting trends as they develop. And I've seen too many "can't lose" methods fade.

No question that linking is important for search engine placement. There are effective and targeted ways to acquire incoming links that don't require a link exchange. However, I saw some problems with the way many reciprocal links are pursued. My concerns led me to write an article, *Reciprocal Linking is Dead*, <http://www.etafficjams.com/reciprocal-linking-is-dead.htm> back when most insiders were proclaiming it to be the way to go. (Fresh articles about why you should develop reciprocal links appear daily.)

An integrated search engine marketing strategy is vital for your website's visibility and survival. Resist the shortsightedness of putting too much reliance on what everyone is recommending.

#### Beat the Pack by a Country Mile

If you're ready for the "Next Big Thing," stop chasing the flavor of the month. The trend is toward building an integrated strategy where all the options mesh. Achieve all the added benefits that come with integrating every method your website employs. Now that's a next thing with staying power.

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