

Building a next-level SEM strategy:

Practical tips from top
industry pros

Search engine marketing (SEM) professionals carry a big responsibility. Online search is the most important way today's consumers connect with businesses, yet 3 out of 4 of those online users never scroll past the first page of search results.¹

In this environment, SEM is a do-or-die necessity. It's the best way for businesses of any size to stand out and get noticed on increasingly crowded search results pages, where paid search ads often dominate the above-the-fold space.

Here's a resource to help SEM pros stay ahead of these challenges. We reached out to three top SEM experts to mine their search engine marketing insights—their favorite tips to help businesses get found first, get noticed fast and do it all as efficiently as possible.

1. HubSpot, "Value of Search Engine Marketing (SEM) for Your Business," powerpoint, May 2012.

Meet the SEM experts

Our panel of contributors represents the state of the art in search engine marketing—combining to represent decades of experience in both agency and in-house SEM settings:



Zach Bruner, Hanapin

A production associate at respected search firm Hanapin Marketing, **Zach Bruner** is part of the team that brought the search industry Hero Conf and one of the industry's most influential paid search blogs, PPC Hero.



Larry Kim, WordStream

An award-winning SEM veteran, **Larry Kim** is a respected speaker and prolific author on all things paid search. The founder of PPC software firm WordStream Inc., he has a vast knowledge of search marketing trends and techniques, combined with practical insights gleaned from billions of dollars invested on behalf of the agency's SEM clients.



Michelle Morgan, Clix Marketing

Michelle Morgan brings a wealth of experience developing and executing campaigns across pay-per-click (PPC) platforms in both agency and in-house settings. Her experience working with integrated, third-party SEM tools gives her an especially well-rounded and holistic view of the paid search landscape—one she shares regularly as an industry speaker, influencer and author.

QUICK TIPS

A dynamic duo of Bing Ads ad extensions

Most SEM pros know something about **Bing Ads ad extensions**—optional ways to add additional pieces of information about a business to its pay-per-click (PPC) ads, like a phone number or a link to a specific page on a website. Yet in many cases, they may not be familiar with every extension or just how useful they can be for improving SEM performance.

Bruner said Structured Snippet Extensions and Sitelink Extensions are his two favorite Bing Ads extensions, due to their ability to give SEM pros a bigger playing field for their PPC efforts. "Structured Snippet Extensions are essentially an easy way to obtain more ad real estate. Sitelink Extensions offer this as well, alongside greater specificity in the ad."

PRO TIPS

Successful SEM pros spend 80% of their time *planning* campaigns—not *executing* them

According to Kim, SEM experts that spend the bulk of their time executing campaigns, rather than focusing on strategy and planning tasks, may find themselves taking a fast ride to the wrong destination.

“I think an enormous amount of time, 80 percent of time, is spent on the little things—but I think it should be the opposite,” Kim said. “I think 80 percent should be on the strategy and the guarantee and the unique selling proposition and then the offer. That’s the difference between successful marketers and not-so-successful ones.”

According to Morgan, an emphasis on strategy and planning also helps SEM pros avoid assumptions that can lead to misguided campaigns and wasted marketing

resources. “I think sometimes marketers go in with blinders on. They’re too apt to jump in, see what’s been done on the account before, or make assumptions that aren’t always representative of the company, and then build a strategy based on that,” she said.

Instead, Morgan noted, SEM pros need to recognize the long-term value of a more deliberate planning process—right down to the fundamentals that drive every campaign strategy. “Really nail down the company’s objectives, strengths, target audience and competitive landscape to identify your highest value prospects—that’s a necessary first step,” she stated. “It informs your marketing strategy throughout the life of that client relationship.”

QUICK TIPS

Successful SEM pros make time for planning by choosing tools that help them work faster and more efficiently. **Bing Ads Opportunities** is a great example—giving SEM pros ideas for new keywords and bids that support faster and simpler campaign execution.

PRO TIPS

Use demographic targeting to pick up where remarketing leaves off

In the marketer's world, few things are as precious as a second chance to engage a consumer and close a sale. That's the point of remarketing—a tactic that many SEM experts rely on to deliver strong results with limited investments.

According to Kim, remarketing (known as **Remarketing in Paid Search** in Bing Ads and Remarketing Lists for Search Ads in Google AdWords) should be a list-topping priority for most SEM campaigns—and especially for those with limited budgets.

"If you've got just \$1,000 to spend on a campaign, you should spend all of it on remarketing if you can," Kim said. "The customers you land using remarketing are the low-hanging fruit; they're the people who've heard of you, and they're the most likely to buy and click and convert." Kim said he commonly expects to see remarketing perform two to three times better than other types of PPC campaigns.

The challenge, Kim stated, is that remarketing requires a pool of known visitors to a business website. This is always a relatively select audience—but in a smaller campaign scenario, it may include a thousand viable remarketing candidates.

"Once you've tapped out the remarketing, that's going after your low-hanging fruit, you have to get a ladder, and you're going to have to climb up that ladder and go after the higher-hanging fruit," Kim said. The key to doing this effectively, he said, is to identify and target audiences with demographic traits similar to an advertiser's remarketing audience.

Demographic targeting modeled on an initial remarketing audience, Kim added, can expand a potential audience by a factor of 10 or more. "They're not going to be as good as you'd get with remarketing, but you're still going to get good value from the clicks you buy—assuming you have the right targeting options at your fingertips."

QUICK TIPS

Remarketing is a valuable SEM tactic, but it takes time to accrue an audience big enough to sustain even a minimum remarketing program. According to Morgan, that makes the setup process for Universal Event Tracking (UET) a critical to-do item, since UET tags are necessary for remarketing with Bing Ads.

"One of the first things everybody should do upon creating a Bing Ads account is to install that UET tag on your site," she stated. "That's the first thing to do after opening the account—even, if you can, before putting in the billing information. Don't put it off, because forgetting can be a really costly mistake."

Bing Ads audience targeting: Success by the slice

Segmenting your audience by demographic or other defining traits can be a powerful tool for getting more value from your SEM budgets—as Kim and other SEM experts point out. Bing Ads makes audience targeting easy and effective with a number of options, including:

- Audience age
- Audience gender
- Geographic location
- Device type
- Time of day
- Day of week

When a business needs to shape its SEM campaigns to target a specific, high-value audience—a tactic that experts like Kim and Morgan call upon in their own SEM pro tips—these capabilities deliver a vital edge.



PRO TIPS

Flexibility is a virtue—to a point

According to Morgan, planning is an important aspect of a successful SEM strategy. The trick, she said, is to know how to build the right amount of flexibility into your plans.

“When clients have a specific amount of money they want to budget for each channel, that can be a problem,” Morgan said. “It leads to missed opportunities—or worse, it leads to clients wanting to continue putting money into a channel that just isn’t working for them.”

She also noted, “There will be fluctuations in how channels and platforms perform. If you’re vigilant and ready to roll with the changes, you can adjust your budgets and really get more bang for your buck.”

At the same time, Morgan said, SEM pros want to keep a sense of perspective—knowing the difference between tactical agility and knee-jerk reactions. “Some get sucked into a ‘day trading’ approach,” she said. “They chase changes in performance that don’t last and can’t deliver enough value to justify the effort.”

QUICK TIPS

- Test targeted keyword segments to take advantage of Bing’s deep understanding of context, intent and natural language across apps, sites and devices.
- Use robust reporting features, including data visualization and period comparison reporting to measure accurately and optimize with certainty.

PRO TIPS

SEM budgeting is a process that never stops

Bruner said it's critical to recognize that allocating SEM budgets is a process that never stops—at least if you're doing it right.

"There is no tried-and-true approach to how Bing Ads should be incorporated in PPC efforts," Bruner said. "I take an approach to using Bing Ads that I think every PPC advertiser should take: experiment, analyze, adjust, repeat."

The prospect of a constantly shifting PPC budget mix may seem daunting, but Bruner offered a few tips to make the process simpler and easier:

It's OK to "play it safe." One approach Bruner recommends is to start by migrating top-performing campaigns from a Google AdWords account, and then building from there with similar campaign budgets and strategies. "From there, you can run tests, gather data, make optimizations and ultimately grow an efficient Bing Ads presence," he stated.

Focus on goals. Bruner suggested allocating PPC budget to Bing Ads with a goal-based approach. "Start small and build based on what is meeting the account goals and working," he said. "If it is low-performing, use a branded campaign to cater to the audience that is there. Otherwise, expand your Bing Ads presence as much as you can within the bounds of your set goals."

Don't fix what isn't broken. "If something is underperforming, cut some of that budget and allocate toward whatever has the most restricted performance."

Bruner also advised SEM pros to be ready when opportunity knocks during the course of their experiments adding Bing Ads to a PPC mix.

"If you are in a situation where a higher Bing Ads budget would mean a lower Google AdWords budget, this isn't necessarily all bad," he stated. "Oftentimes, Bing conversions can come in different volume and at a lower CPA" than Google AdWords—an advantage that multiplies the benefits associated with a growing Bing Ads investment.



Boost your SEM intelligence and efficiency with Bing Ads

These tips show that the most successful SEM pros are constantly learning on the job, picking up new skills and staying alert for new opportunities. A search marketing platform like Bing Ads rewards SEM pros who are always on the hunt for better channels and tactics, helping them learn how to work smarter, more efficiently and with more rewarding results.

Learn more from our [live and on-demand webcasts](#). Join the experts as they cover the latest tips, tricks and trends, from cutting-edge SEM strategies to the most effective ways to use Bing Ads features to grow your business.



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