

How to Predict Top Ranking in Search Engines

How frustrated would you be if you launched a Search Engine Optimization (SEO) project and chose search terms that had no chance of achieving high ranking?

Okay, so it's time to come clean. We're all obsessed with getting high rankings in Google and other search engines. Of course most of our attention is in the direction of Google's web site because of the high number of visitors they bring in. This is not something we like to admit openly, because we always advise our clients not to "focus solely on high rankings but overall visibility" in the search sites as well as focus on conversion once visitors land on your site, but sometimes the temptation is too great to resist. So is this a case of the consultants not listening to their own advice? Well, not quite. We like to think of it as research! Here's why.

For quite some time we had high ranking in Google for one of our target keywords, "internet marketing consultants." We liked that keyword phrase, for in the long run, that was what best described our business. It was in the top ten for a while until the November 2003 Google update, when, like so many others, it disappeared. Now, we must admit that we had played around a bit with SEO "tricks" focused on that keyword previous to that update and on occasion were penalized for aggressive behavior by a drop in rankings. Better to "experiment on our own site than a client's" was our reasoning.

For over a year we had paid close attention to monthly changes of not only our rankings for "internet marketing consultants", but the other sites that ranked in the top-ten for that term. We studied and recorded the changes very closely. We hate unsolved mysteries, and more importantly, this was a brand keyword that defined our business most appropriately. This obsession led to some expanded research we began over six months ago to see if it was possible to predict top rankings in Google.

We have never offered our clients a ranking guarantee and continue to refuse to do so. It's just not an honest business practice to offer something that is very much out of your direct control. At the same time, given the number of inexperienced operators posing as "Internet marketing consultants" we could relate to a prospect's frustration and desire to extract some revenge on inept performance. Many people have been burned by unfulfilled promises of high ranking made by other SEO firms. There is a definite desire on the part of our clients for some predictability as to whether certain keywords had any chance of getting into the top. So we developed a Google ranking prediction model that was based on the results of our research and experience. And it works! It is now possible to provide an indication of the competitive environment for your target search term and predict its chance to make it to the top.

So what value is there in having a prediction of whether or not you will rank in the top for a given search term?

Think about how frustrated you would be if you launched a Search Engine Optimization project and chose terms that had no chance of achieving high ranking within your resource and budget constraints. Think of the costs of a false start in a branding campaign that left you far behind your key competitors. On the other hand, think of how confident you would feel if you knew going into

the project how you ranked against your key competitors and exactly what you needed to do to beat them. In Search Engine Marketing, ignorance is not bliss, and knowledge really is power. So, what are the steps to take to achieve the power of an accurate prediction?

The first small, but important step is to take your target keyword and look closely at the top ten competitive ranking positions. Print out each competitor's web page and highlight the key business benefits they are claiming in their messaging. Does it align with your business objectives? Is there an opportunity for you to create a differentiator? Will you be able to create a unique brand message or will you be a "me too" message? Be critical of yourself, for this insight might help you re-define your on-line presence and develop a better marketing message that can be summarized in a search term. It will also help you align your site with prospective buyers' objectives, so when you do achieve high-ranking visibility, your site will be well on the way to converting visitors to buyers. But most importantly, it will enable you to develop web copy that search engines and visitors alike will find to be rich in relevant content for the target search term.

One result of this preliminary analysis may be a modification to your target keyword where you have discovered some additional qualifiers, such as "luxury", "bargain", etc. This new focus will help you develop web draw materials and web copy that support this target keyword phrase. You have now created your search brand keyword phrase and can "predict" the amount of effort it will take to reach maximum visibility in the search sites. This will help focus your energies and prevent disappointments with your SEO efforts.

So if you are wondering why your favorite defining search phrase is not in the top ten, then let us make a prediction. Ask about Market-Vantage's low-risk, high-value **Google Rank Analysis™** to find out why you're not in the top ten and what you need to do to get there.

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