

Intelligent Advertising for Small Business **Perhaps you own a café or a spa, or you build swimming pools. It's not an online business, but you have a website that describes what you have to offer. You'd like your site to have more visibility, and you've had a salesperson tell you about the benefits of buying a listing on their portal site. It sounds like a good deal, but how do you know? Here are a few tips that will help you make an informed decision.**

Find out what's already working for you

The first thing to do, if you haven't done it already, is to install Google Analytics on your site. It is a free software that gives you important information about what is already working on your site – for example, which sites refer visitors to your site, and which keywords your visitors search for. Knowing exactly how many visits you get, and what those visitors are looking at on your site provides an important base to improve on. And, you may find some pleasant surprises – perhaps an article about your business or a site that you didn't know existed is referring important traffic to your site.

Installing Google Analytics is easy, but if you don't edit your own site, you can ask your hosting provider or web site designer to do it. For many sites, the installation takes less than 15 minutes.

Find out how highly the advertising site ranks.

Most potential customers will find your site by either searching on the name of your business, or by searching keywords that describe your business. For example, they might search on "spas in phoenix" or "car detailing West Hollywood". Run some test searches. In order to gain visibility for your site, the site from which you are considering using to advertise needs to rank highly for the keywords that apply to your business. If the portal you are considering doesn't show up on the first page, you probably won't gain much from advertising with them.

It's a good idea to get the specific page your ad will appear on. If your salesperson wants to sell you advertising on www.special_spas.com, make sure you know exactly what page your listing will appear on, such as http://www.special_spas.com/newyork/dayspas.html. Then, make sure that page comes up for your desired keyword searches.

Another thing you can do is to check the "Page Rank" of the page. Page Rank is a measure of how Google's algorithms assess the importance of a page, on a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 indicating that the page is considered very important. You can see the page rank of every page you visit if you download and install the Google toolbar on your browser. Information about the toolbar and a free download is available at <http://toolbar.google.com>.

Advertising space on a page that does not rank favorably is unlikely to improve the visibility of your business. Representatives from these sites may explain that they have a strong brand name and that thousands of visitors will see your listing. Fortunately, you can evaluate the traffic for yourself using Google Analytics (see next point).

Evaluate the traffic

Advertising fees vary significantly from site to site. What allows one site to charge twice what another site charges for a similar listing? Theoretically, more expensive listings should perform better. The bottom line is this: How much traffic can you expect to get and does the fee make sense? To help you determine this, try asking for a trial period of a week or two during which you can evaluate the traffic.

Once your ad or listing is live, you'll be able to use Google Analytics to get all the information you need to make the right decision. Use the Referring Sites report (in the Traffic Sources section) to see how many visits the new listing is generating for you. The Pages/Visit (average pages viewed per visit) column in the table shows how much of your site these visitors are viewing.

You can also tell if the visitors referred from the ad are seeing the pages that you want them to see. If you have defined certain pages as goals, the percentage of visits to these pages will show on the Goal Conversion Tab of the Referring Sites report.

Select the Goal Conversion tab. The table contains a column for each goal you have defined. The conversion rates represent the percentage of visits in which the goal page was viewed at least once.

If you are concerned about a single clicker masquerading as multiple visitors, the Referring Sites report comes in useful again. In the table, select one of the Sources. The Referring Site report appears. Now, use the Segment drop-down menu to segment your visits. For example, if you segment for "Visitor Type", most of your visitors should be new visitors. You should also see a variety of entries when you segment for "City", "Browser", and "Flash Version". If all visitors are coming from the same city, have the same browser, operating system, and Flash version, you may have reason to be suspicious.

The web empowers you

The great thing about the web is that it is a trackable medium. Instead of guessing which ads and links work, you have a range of analytical tools at your disposal enabling you to identify the right advertising opportunities for your business.

To find out more, please don't hesitate to contact us using the form at the bottom of the page.