

Industrial Search Engines

Article Posted 2009 May 04, Monday

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Promoting industrial products has never been one of the more exciting activities in the marketing or advertising world. Characterized by technical journals, trade magazines, industry trade shows, and listings in directories like the Thomas Register of American Manufacturers, industrial promotion is rarely an expertise of many advertising agencies. Since most industrial marketers also have very limited budgets and are typically more interested in generating leads than building brand name recognition, it necessarily follows that industrial promotion is different than many other forms of promotion.

For many of our clients, this meant that industry trade magazines and the Thomas Register were historically the major beneficiaries of their advertising budgets. In fact, for years, a number of our clients poured tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars each year into these magazines and directories.

Of course, search engines changed all of this. In what has to be one of the biggest fundamental changes in the history of industrial advertising, search engines started to phase out print directories as the most common resource for engineers, purchasing managers, and other industrial buyers looking to find suppliers. Recent studies by the Thomas Register and their newest leading competitor GlobalSpec confirm this.

Industrial Search Engine Marketing

So how does an industrial marketing professional take advantage of these dramatic changes within the market? For the most part, the principles of search engine marketing that apply to most websites also apply to industrial websites. Industrial marketers just have to be careful about how they interpret what they read in regards to online marketing as the vast majority of reports and studies in the search marketing industry are related to the B2C ecommerce segment of the market.

1. Organic Optimization

Typically, optimizing your web site to rank in the organic (free) listings in the major search engines like Google, Yahoo, and MSN will offer your company the greatest ROI on its advertising dollar. Of course, competition for "first page listings" is increasing every day and the time, knowledge and costs required to earn them has become more challenging. Essentially, optimizing your site requires good keyword rich content, a site structure that can be spidered by the search engines, and links from other respected sites, especially sites dealing with similar topics to yours. In many ways, a search engine friendly site is simply a well organized site with lots of good content that other sites want to link to.

2. Pay Per Click (PPC) Advertising

After organic optimization, another area that can have a great ROI for industrial marketers is PPC advertising. There is a reason that Google has been one of the best performing companies in the world over the past few years... their advertising model works. For

nearly all of our industrial clients, PPC advertising returns a lower cost per lead than any other form of promotion employed aside from organic optimization.

The key to utilizing PPC effectively is to generate a very detailed list of keywords to buy. For example, if you make plastic rods, make sure you also buy phrases like polyethylene rods, LDPE Rods, PVC Rods, polypropylene rods, and any other descriptive phrases that apply. Similarly, if you make packaging equipment, remember that people may also search for packaging machine(s), machinery, and specific equipment names like "form, fill, & seal machines."

Some advertisers have been hesitant to use PPC because of concerns over click fraud. However, there are simple ways to protect your campaign against this activity. Plus, the availability of powerful analytics programs that can quickly identify issues further help minimize click fraud and ensure that your ROI is maximized.

The three main PPC advertising programs are Google AdWords, Yahoo Search, and MSN adCenter. You may wish to experiment with other programs, but these three routinely drive the largest amount of qualified traffic to the sites we manage.

3. Online Advertising and Public Relations

Advertising and PR on the web can serve some unique purposes for industrial marketers. First, while search engine marketing provides an excellent ROI, it is really designed to target people actively engaged in a search for your products or services. If you want to get your message out to a much broader audience, advertising on authority and media

sites, sponsoring forums and blogs, and sending press releases out to relevant publications and websites can also be very effective.

Unfortunately, today the opportunities can be overwhelming. There are dozens of online industrial directories, industry specific web portals, online trade magazines, and countless forums and blogs. In fact, there are so many now that figuring out where to advertise can be very complex. This is especially true when one tries to measure the success of this activity while considering lead generation, brand development, and even how the ad or press release has affected its site's link popularity (a major factor in its ability to earn high organic rankings). In the remainder of this article, I will review the major industrial search engines and directories to provide some of my personal experiences and opinions on how you can integrate them into your campaign. Admittedly, this review will not cover every directory as many new ones have evolved in the last two years and we simply don't have experience with them all. Prior to advertising in any of these directories, I always recommend building or modifying your own website to make sure that it is optimized, search engine friendly and effectively converts visitors into leads or sales. As stated above, I would also recommend bidding on a targeted list of keyword phrases in Google AdWords, Yahoo Search, and MSN adCenter as these PPC programs typically generate more leads/sales at a much lower cost than advertising for our clients. Finally, make sure you put some web analytics in place to track all of your activity so you can see where you are getting your best ROI. Google Analytics is free and meets the needs of the vast majority of industrial marketers with whom we work.

Armed with a site that performs and plenty of data from your keyword research and PPC advertising programs, you can now turn your attention to advertising. Buying listings in these directories can generate qualified leads, provide contact names and numbers, increase brand recognition, and even benefit your organic optimization efforts.

Listed below are some of the major industrial search engines and directories that we have analyzed, tested, and/or currently use. It is important to note that our review comes from our perspective as SEO Consultants.

Industrial directories and search engines create a difficult situation for industrial marketers who want to run their own search engine marketing campaigns. On the one hand, we can buy listings in these directories to generate more exposure, more leads, and more incoming links to our client's site. On the other hand, some of the money we pay these publishers to be included in their directories and search engines goes to fund their own SEO and PPC efforts. Considering that for many search phrases, our clients' main competition in Google, Yahoo, and MSN for first page positioning is these directories, the problem is obvious. If a company is running its own SEO and PPC campaigns, then these directories exist as both competitors and potential partners.

With that being said, here are the directories that I usually recommend to my industrial clients. There are many others that are not on this list, but based on my experience, these are the ones I typically consider when developing a comprehensive online program for my clients.

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Yahoo! Directory and Open Directory Project (ODP)

Many industrial marketers don't think of these general directories because they are not specific to the industrial market. From my experience, these directories rarely drive much relevant traffic to a site, but they can help the link popularity tremendously. The Open Directory is free so there is absolutely no reason not to submit here. Yahoo costs \$299.00 USD per year, but the link it provides back to your site can be very powerful and because Yahoo! often publishes your links in their worldwide directories (in English), many companies benefit greatly from them.

I also sometimes submit clients to Business.com for \$299.00 USD because it is a well respected directory and its outbound links typically help improve one's link popularity scores. They offer PPC advertising programs also although I tend to find that these work better for clients selling software or business products than industrial components or equipment.

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ThomasNet® (<http://www.ThomasNet.com/>)

Prior to the Internet, the Thomas Register's green books were very widely used directories and arguably offered the most comprehensive directory of industrial manufacturers. ThomasNet, their vertical search engine, benefits from this brand recognition and remains one of the most popular of the online industrial directories according to Alexa Traffic Rankings.

For the most part, the directory is broken up into thousands of categories and advertisers buy ranking points to see who gets listed in the top spots. I find it very well organized, comprehensive, and easy to use. They had a rocky transition from print to web, but I believe that they have firmly taken their spot as the leading industrial search engine/directory at this time. The key to having success with ThomasNet is in working with your sales rep to find areas where you can get the most value for your ad dollar.

For some of my clients with aggressive campaigns, they get as much as 10% of their traffic from ThomasNet and a decent conversion. I typically recommend that client's with larger budgets do some advertising in ThomasNet. If you have a decent budget, a \$3,850.00 USD program will buy you 10 links at \$260.00 USD per point and their deep linking

program for \$1,250.00 USD which typically generates some decent traffic and provides important inbound links. I specifically look to use ranking points in categories with high Google and Yahoo rankings, a low number of competitors, and decent category traffic. Your ThomasNet rep can typically help you with these latter two items, but you'll have to review organic listings on your own.

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GlobalSpec (<http://www.GlobalSpec.com/>)

While this directory/search engine is considered by many to be the most sophisticated industrial sourcing site available on the web, my clients have not had the greatest success with it. GlobalSpec's biggest benefit, in my opinion, is that they have more than 5 million registered users (Source: GlobalSpec Website) and they can give advertisers contact information about these registered users. This can be really helpful if you have a large sales organization that can follow up with everyone who looks at your category or clicks into your site. However, just because someone clicks into your site or reviews listings in your category does not typically qualify them as a decent lead. For most of our clients, they consider leads as those from people that filled out their inquiry form with a specific request - not people that simply visited the site or viewed a category.

Another major selling point of GlobalSpec is that it is built on the theory that engineers would prefer to type in the specifications they need and then get a list of potential suppliers rather than call around to each potential supplier or look through catalogs. To offer this, GlobalSpec

offers advertisers the opportunity to include one's product line (up to 1000 products) in its parametric search program so that engineers can find the right product for their application. Because the costs to load your products into this parametric search feature are significant, I usually advise clients to consider GlobalSpec if they sell products that engineers can truly specify on their own. If not, I usually just submit the site through their free submission process.

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Kellysearch (<http://www.Kellysearch.com/>)

According to their site, Kelly's was established in the United Kingdom over two hundred years ago in 1799 and has been published ever since. For all intents and purposes, it is the largest Industrial Directory in the UK and since going online; they have made quite an inroad in the U.S. We first noticed leads from Kelly's showing up in the stats of some of our clients who operate Internationally, but now we are seeing the U.S. version of Kellysearch provide a fair amount of quality traffic. This increase in traffic is helped by the fact that Kellysearch is backed by the Reed Elsevier Business Publishing Group - one of the largest publishers in the industrial market. Due to this relationship, Kellysearch powers the online buying guides of many different industrial online magazines like Design News, Packaging Digest, Modern Materials Handling and Purchasing.com as well as many others.

Their pricing is pretty reasonable for exposure in a lot of categories and I have found all of their salespeople to be very pleasant to work with. The big challenge they face is that I rarely see their pages show up highly in the organic rankings in Google and this has severely limited their

traffic when I compare them to ThomasNet. Still, some of this lack of traffic is factored into the lower pricing model they have, so I still think it warrants consideration.

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MacRAE'S™ BLUE BOOK (<http://www.MacRAESBLUEBOOK.com/>)

First published in 1893, MacRAE's Blue Book is America's original industrial directory and claims to have over 30 million annual visitors. Despite this, none of our clients have ever advertised with them so I don't have much information to pass on. Links from this site don't seem to pass much link popularity, but I still recommend that clients submit their sites and get a proposal for advertising. Placement on their pages can also be obtained by using the Google content network.

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Industrial Directory (<http://www.IndustrialDirectory.com/>)

This directory is a compilation of small niche directories that are optimized for the search engines with very specific keyword rich domain names. In fact, the owner of the Industrial Directory says that historically, the majority of their traffic came from people who actually searched by typing the domain names in the browser bar. Now, many of these keyword domains rank pretty well in the search engines all by themselves so they can pass a little traffic. The site's simplistic design and functionality leave many of my clients to think I am crazy when I recommend it, but at \$39.95 USD per listing, to me it is a no-brainer. The link popularity boost alone is worth the cost for most of our clients. The fact that many of these directories rank well

in Google, Yahoo, and MSN for relevant searches makes them even better. You can check out a list of their directories at www.IndustrialDirectory.com and now you can purchase them online so it's pretty convenient. You can view one of their niche directories at www.ExpansionBolts.com.

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Engineers Edge (<http://www.EngineersEdge.com/>)

This site is more of an information portal for engineers than an industrial directory, but it does include a directory that sells listings for \$150.00 USD from pages with decent link popularity or \$350.00 USD for a directory listing and a link from a relevant article. It is a respectable site that can provide some link popularity and traffic to a site and we have used it regularly for our clients.

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PowerSourcing (<http://www.PowerSourcing.com/>)

Also known as The Industrial Resource Network, I recommend listing in this massive global directory of industrial suppliers for every client mainly because it is free AND passes link popularity. Anyone involved in organic search engine optimization knows how hard this is to come by.

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Zycon (<http://www.Zycon.com/>)

This industrial directory was started by a group of manufacturers in the Detroit area to provide an easier-to-use and more cost effective advertising vehicle for industrial manufacturers. Their system tracks visitors, click thrus, and RFQs and is very straightforward and easy to use. The directory has a limited presence in the search engines for the programs that we manage, but some of their pages are starting to rank well and given their low costs, we've done a few small programs with them and they seem to perform well enough to justify the costs.

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MotionNET.com (<http://www.MotionNET.com/>)

While this directory does not cover the number of categories that many of the larger industrial directories do, it does have a nice presence in the search engines and can be very cost effective since it only costs \$200.00 plus \$25.00 USD per listing as a one-time reviewing fee. Spread this listing cost over many years and factor in the link popularity it will provide over life of your site and the investment seems pretty easy to justify for most sites.

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Specialty Directories

Depending on one's industry, there are probably specific directories, trade magazine buyer's guides, or International directories that will generate leads and inbound links in a cost effective manner. Analyzing the back links of competitive sites and seeing what sites rank well for your desired search phrases can identify many of these opportunities. Some examples include:

- www.DeviceLink.com
Medical device manufacturers' directory.
- www.4Specs.com
Provides a great ROI for companies manufacturing industrial building products.
- www.Ferret.com.au
Australia's Manufacturing and Industrial Directory

- **Automobile manufacturers of the World**

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Automobile_manufacturers_by_country