Best Business-to-Business Search Marketing Campaign

Overall approach and category relevance

In August 2006, Tad Clarke, the Editorial Director of MarketingSherpa, wrote, "For the past 24 months, the tactic known as SEO PR (getting your hotlinked press releases included in search engine news feeds) has been the must-test search campaign de jour. So, we tested it."

The research firm asked SEO-PR to optimize a series of press releases about the findings of MarketingSherpa's third annual Business Technology Marketing Benchmark Guide. The guide included new market research, including a survey of 1,900 business technology marketers conducted in June 2006.

While 85% of these marketers had rated optimization of press releases for Google News and Yahoo! News the most effective emerging tactic, SEO-PR decided to create a series of press releases about other findings. The worst business-to-business lead generation tactic is a sweepstakes and the five best B2B tactics are:
1. Free trial demos or downloads,
2. Webcasts or webinars,
3. White papers,
4. Blogs, and
5. Podcasts.

Innovation in methodology and execution

While there was interest in testing un-optimized press releases against optimized ones, the clustering algorithms used by Google News would have omitted all but one closely related press release from the results for three days. (On May 13, 2008, Google News

removed the three day limitation, meaning that stories now stay in clusters for 30 days, which is as long as they're in the Google News index.)

Instead, SEO-PR used an innovative methodology based on a best practice used more than 25 years ago when press releases were still being distributed in envelopes. During that era, B2B public relations people would create two versions of a press release: One the "business press" who didn't use industry terms and a second for the "trade press" who did. Then, they would segment their mailing list into two groups and stuff the first version into envelopes addressed to the business press and the second version into envelopes addressed to the trade press.

For the MarketingSherpa test, SEO-PR created two versions of three different press releases optimized for six sets of search terms and then distributed two a week over a three-week period via three different press release distribution services in an A/B, B/C, C/A pattern. To get a baseline to compare results, no press releases were distributed for the three weeks prior to the test.

Excellence in tactical execution

When most people conduct a news search, they rarely scan beyond the first page of results. So, it is crucial to rank in the top 10 results for each relevant news search.

That's why SEO-PR followed the same five-step process when optimizing each of the different press releases:
1. Conduct keyword research to find 2 to 3 relevant search terms your target audience is likely to use;
2. Make sure your release actually includes these terms – particularly in the headline and first few sentences;
3. Add links intended to help people find interesting, related content, when applicable;
4. Use a press release distribution service crawled by Yahoo! News, AOL News and Google News; and
5. Measure the results of your campaign – in PR outputs and, when possible, in business outcomes.

Achieving success goals

Optimizing multiple versions of press releases for different sets of search terms enabled all of them to rank well in Google News – as well as Yahoo! News and AOL News. In other words, both journalists and bloggers were able to find one of our press releases in the results using different search terms.

The optimized press releases generated eight news stories and eight blog posts. Do we know which version each journalist or blogger found? No, but does it matter?

As for business outcomes, the news stories and blog posts generated more visitors to MarketingSherpa's sites than the press releases did.

In fact, the number of unique visitors to MarketingSherpa.com was 18.7% higher during our three-week test than it had been during the three previous weeks. More significantly, unique visitors to SherpaStore.com – where you could buy the new survey – increased 10.5% during our three-week test, compared to the previous three weeks.

When MarketingSherpa reviewed the results of test, it was surprised that different press release distribution services performed differently. That was true, but SEO-PR found an even bigger surprise.

A post in Brian Carroll's B2B Lead Generation Blog had referred 511 visitors to MarketingSherpa.com and 197 visitors to SherpaStore.com. The same article by Brian Carroll in WebProNews.com referred 23 visitors to MarketingSherpa.com and only 1 visitor to SherpaStore.com. In other words, the Brian's blog post generated 30 times more visitors than his identical news story. That is a new measure of blog engagement.

Optimizing the series of press releases for MarketingSherpa's third annual [Business Technology Marketing Benchmark Guide](#) was a finalist in the 2008 SES Awards for the best business-to-business search marketing campaign.