



Net Equity: Harnessing the power of search engine marketing for your offline advertising, direct marketing, branding and PR

The latest white paper from Weboptimiser

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Introduction

When I first helped to found Weboptimiser in 1996, our focus – and that of our clients – was very simple. Search engine optimisation was all about number one search engine positions and driving traffic to web sites. Our strapline used to be 'your number one partner in search engine optimisation'.

But before long we realised that, done right, search engine optimisation also made web sites faster, smarter and easier to use, as well as easier to find. In fact, it had a much more strategic role in supporting our clients' overall online business and marketing strategies.

We came to appreciate, for example, that keyword research could be used to define more effective creative executions for offline campaigns. We were the first to turn the concept of demographics upside down by using keyword research to segment and profile an audience based on what people want, rather than who they are, and to turn traditional paradigms inside out by focussing PR strategy on the news and information that people are looking for, rather than what the company wants to say.

We were also one of the first to understand that campaign-specific micro-sites could not only streamline the fulfilment path for those offline campaigns but could help boost the response at the same time. Likewise, we've pioneered the use of search engine optimisation and marketing in supporting our clients' branding strategies and in helping to deliver a fast and manageable response in the event of an unexpected event, to empower the PR department.

As a result, this latest White Paper addresses one of the key issues facing our clients today – the integration of online and offline marketing. It examines the vital contribution that search engine marketing can make at a strategic as well as tactical level and discusses how your search engine marketing company can help you get better results at every stage of your offline campaigns.

Of course, if you have any questions or feedback about this White Paper, do let me know. Either email me on Nicholine@weboptimiser.com or call me on my direct line, 0207 953 8536.

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Index

Because Internet marketing is still marketing	4
The same DNA.....	4
The same lifecycle.....	5
The same processes	5
Research to qualify the need.....	6
Profiling to identify the message	6
Creativity to test effectiveness	8
Measurement to track response.....	8
Interaction to collect information	9
How integration pays dividends.....	9
When you're planning	9
When you're testing	11
When you're managing	12
To attract qualified visitors	12
To improve the conversion rate	13
To enhance and protect your brand	14
To make yourself heard.....	15
To help your Customer Relationship Management.....	16
When you're reporting	16
In summary: the best of both worlds.....	17
Integration in action	17
About Weboptimiser	18

Because Internet marketing is still marketing

I'm not the first to point out the shared heritage and the similarities between online and offline marketing. From the start, savvy Internet marketers have looked below, rather than above the line to create more effective online campaigns. That's why even the earliest banner ads, because of the way they were targeted, tracked and monetised, were more like direct mailers than advertising.

It's not surprising they're so similar. After all, the Internet provides the opportunity for one-to-one communication, for a streamlined fulfilment path, for testing and re-optimising and measuring the results on the bottom line in the same way that direct marketing does. Likewise, it provides an open and accessible platform for communications that advertising and PR professionals have long recognised.

So it makes sense that offline marketing would be the platform from which Internet marketing would develop. They have the same DNA but they've evolved in parallel. They have the same principles and the same processes, but different languages and cultures.

The same DNA

First, if we take the 'ideal' offline marketing campaign, whether it's advertising, direct mail, or PR, it will have:

- **Visibility** – to be seen by the maximum target audience
- **Functionality** – the mechanics will work
- **Loyalty** – it will gather data to build rapport
- **Economy** – it will make money for you

Likewise, a fully optimised search engine marketing campaign has:

- **Visibility** – to be easy to find
- **Functionality** – to be easy to use
- **Loyalty** – it will collect information to develop relationships
- **Economy** – it will be deliver return on investment

The same lifecycle

So, if we put it all together, we can see that the principles of search engine marketing, across all four stages of interaction between a web site and its visitors, which we call the 'optimisation lifecycle' are very similar to the interactions between an offline campaign and its audience.

The optimisation lifecycle:



In fact, we can see that both disciplines are about generating volume and converting it into value through a fulfilment process.

The same processes

In fact, at practically every stage in any two offline marketing and search engine marketing campaigns, the principles and processes are the same:

- **research to qualify the need**
- **profiling to identify the message**
- **targeting to segment the audience**
- **creativity to test effectiveness**
- **tracking to measure response**
- **interaction to build relationships**

Research to qualify the need

Every campaign, whether online or offline, starts with **research** to assess market awareness and demand. Offline, this might mean using surveys, polls and market data to find out what people want. Likewise, for a search engine marketing campaign, the search engines data logs can provide a wealth of information. Every search engine which offers Pay Per Click, including Google, eSpotting, Overture and Mirago, allows free and unlimited access to their search logs.

This data tells you how many people asked for a particular product or service in the last month, either in the UK alone or internationally, which, as a result, helps you measure the level of awareness and demand for a particular product, service or concept.

For example, I once received a mailer for a PDA printer - a tiny little thing, it looked like something Action Man would use on manoeuvres. Intrigued to see whether there was any demand for this product I checked the Overture keyword suggestion tool and saw that in that month there were only 12 searches for a PDA printer.

This doesn't mean that the PDA printer won't be successful, because the search engine data will only tell you about existing, rather than potential demand, but we can safely assume that the market isn't crying out for it.

Profiling to identify the message

Next, **profiling your audience** in order to develop the messaging that they'll best respond to, is a vital part of an offline campaign. A combination of resources might be used, such as customer feedback, user and focus groups, as well as statistics from previous campaigns and the copywriter's experience.

Likewise, in a search engine marketing campaign, you can use the search engines' keyword research tools to not only find out what people are looking for but how they're asking for it, in their own words.

This is intelligence of the best kind – direct from the people themselves, in their own time. Having access to this kind of intelligence is like talking to the largest, most honest and most unself-conscious focus group in the world, or like having a peek at your future customers' shopping lists. You can not only find out what people want, but the exact words they're using to ask for it, to help refine and enhance your messaging.

For example, we once did a campaign for Ford, helping with the launch of their new Connect Van. Our keyword research showed that a significant number of people always think of a Ford Van, no matter which model, as a 'Transit'.

We were able to take this perception into account when developing the pre-launch messaging of the campaign, by optimising for a variety of Transit and van-related search terms and catch all those people who were looking for a new Transit rather than a Connect van, which at that time, they'd never heard of, because it hadn't been launched yet.

Targeting to segment the audience

In offline marketing, targeting, to deliver the right message to the right person, is a fundamental. If you're selling lawn mowers you make sure you don't send mail to people living in flats. If you're selling baby products, you'd focus your PR or advertising campaign on family friendly magazines, rather than lads' mags. It's just the same in an search engine marketing campaign. You can use keyword research to see how many people are asking for something, segment your market into groups of people making the same search and create a tailored, search-term specific approach for each.

This is interesting because it turns the concept of demographics on its head. It means you can segment your markets and target your marketing based on **what people want** rather than **who they are**.

For example, you can use keyword research to segment an audience based on the stage they're at in the buying cycle. Research from Overture has shown that people use quite different search terms depending on whether they're browsing, comparing or shopping. Someone who is just starting to look for something will use vague, generic searches. If they're planning a holiday, they'll ask for 'cheap flights'. If they're buying a van, they'll ask for a 'Used Transit'.

But the further they move along the browsing, comparing and shopping, the more specific their search terms become. They'll start adding locations, channel preferences, makes and model numbers to narrow down the search. Those same holiday buyers will start asking for 'Cheap flights Malaga October' or 'Used Transit dealer Epsom'. You need to make sure that your site is optimised and marketed to catch and convert people at every stage in this buying cycle.

You also need to consider that just as many people look for news and information as they do for products or services and putting search engine friendly news content on your site, perhaps via a newsfeed is an ideal way

to not only attract more visitors but position your site as an authority in its own right. For example, someone who's starting to think about moving house might ask for 'Mortgage rate news' 'house price news', whereas someone who has already chosen the area they'd like to move to or has shortlisted potential mortgage providers might ask for 'Chiswick house price news' or 'Barclays tracker mortgage news'.

Creativity to test effectiveness

Just as every offline campaign is a mixture of art and science, so is search engine marketing. In all the best TV, poster or direct marketing campaigns, you'd create a choice of creative approaches and test out the response to them, perhaps using an AB list comparison, before rolling out the full campaign.

In a search engine marketing campaign, such as a pay-per-click search engine marketing project, having first used keyword research to define the initial creative messaging you can put together a range of test executions and potential keywords to target, then track them to see which works best. Once the best-performers (and, by contrast, the worst) are identified, strategy, activity and budget can be focussed to give the best return.

Measurement to track response

No self-respecting offline campaign is complete without a decent level of tracking to analyse the response. You'd track incoming orders, 'gone aways' and call centre activity correlated with a corresponding increase in sales. In a traditional PR campaign, you might count column inches and TV and compare it with the cost of an equivalent advertising campaign to measure its relative effectiveness in budget terms.

In a search engine marketing campaign, by the same token, you can put cookies on the site, or analyse the server logs, to not only show which creative approaches are getting the best results in terms of conversions, but how long people spent on the site, what they bought, how much they spent, whether they've been before and which page they left from. In offline marketing terms, it's a bit like knowing whether they opened the envelope or read the ad, how long they spent on it, what they did with it afterwards and what they did next.

Interaction to collect information

In many of the offline marketing disciplines, the more information you can collect about a particular target, the more personalised your future communication with them. That's why quite often, the fulfilment of an direct mail or advertising campaign includes collecting information from respondents, whether it's booking a test drive or claiming a free sample.

It's just the same in search engine marketing. The objective of a campaign is to drive traffic to a tailored and interactive landing page or micro-site, optimised with plenty of data capture opportunities, to take visitors to the next stage in the fulfilment process.

How integration pays dividends

If, like the vast majority of successful brands, you do both offline and search engine marketing, there are plenty of ways you can integrate the two and achieve both better results and economies of scale.

In fact, when you're **planning, testing managing and reporting** on your offline marketing, your search engine marketing company can help you get better results at every stage

When you're planning

When you're **planning** your overall marketing strategy, your search engine marketing company can give you a wealth of real-world inside intelligence that you can use in multiple ways. They can monitor search term trends, so you can spot new opportunities ahead of the rest of the market. They can tell you the relative size of market segments, and show you how other web sites are positioning themselves in those markets, so you can size up the competition and devise an effective strategy to win mind and market share. And, of course, they can tell you what your target audience is asking for on search engines, so you can develop more effective creative executions. Likewise, you can focus your PR strategy on what people want to know about you, rather than what you want to tell them, which completely reverses traditional communications paradigms in new and interesting ways.

For example:

Suppose you were planning a direct marketing campaign for a financial services company, Overture's keyword suggestion tool, which you'll find online at:

<http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/?mkt=uk>

can give you a wealth of useful information. Here is the data from a recent search on the keyword 'loan':

504616	<u>loan</u>
225866	<u>loan secured</u>
138429	<u>loan personal</u>
93993	<u>home loan</u>
70745	<u>car loan</u>
39845	<u>loan secure</u>
38444	<u>cheap loan</u>
37186	<u>bad credit loan</u>
26546	<u>loan unsecured</u>
22572	<u>loan mortgage</u>

There are a number of very interesting conclusions to be drawn from the data. Firstly, of the 504,616 people looking for a loan in the UK in the last month, over half of them are looking for a 'secured or secure loan', compared to just 26,546 people looking for an unsecured loan. This means that the online demand for secured loans is far larger than the demand for unsecured loans.

Likewise, of the 504,616 total, 70,745 are looking for a car loan. That's 14% of the market. So if you're a business-to-consumer finance company, you might want to consider adding car loans to your service portfolio, because, as the data shows, the market demand is certainly there.

Note also the high demand for a bad credit loan at 37,000, which demonstrates the strength of the sub-prime market. This is borne out by a survey by Datamonitor which found that 8 million people in the UK are defined as 'non-standard' for mortgage purposes, In other words they can't get a high street mortgage, because they're self-employed, can't prove their income or have arrears or CCJs.

We had a client in the mortgages sector who saw data similar to this, realised that every month in the UK tens of thousands of people were looking for a product they didn't provide and developed a 'bad credit' mortgage as a direct result. So, they used keyword analysis to not only drive their marketing strategy, but their Research & Development strategy as well.

Another way you could use this data is in choosing the most effective creative or editorial approaches. For example, it shows people are looking for 'secured' rather than 'homeowner' loans, as they are sometimes known. So an offline campaign that focuses its messaging on the former, rather than the latter is more likely to strike a chord with people and get a higher response rate because it reflects what people are asking for, in their own words. In other words, an ad, mailer, or press release that talks about 'lower interest rates for secured loans' for example, will be more effective than one about 'homeowner loans'.

When you're testing

When you're **testing an offline campaign**, you can use search engine marketing as a fast and effective **proof of concept** to gauge the response before the main roll out

Pay per click, whereby you pay a fee to the search engines for every visitor, is the most exact of the Internet marketing sciences and ideal for this kind of test. You can see what you spend and what you get in return, simply by checking your tracking data. It's very quick as you don't have to wait months for the 'natural' or 'organic' results. Pay up front and your ads or sponsored links can be on the search engines, and bringing you vital intelligence you can use offline, within a couple of days.

To put together an online test, your search engine marketing company could use a combination of providers, creative executions and other variables to see which approach works best. By tracking visitor behaviour as part of the test, it would also highlight any usability issues with the site that would need to be fixed in advance of the main roll-out.

After all, if you're using your web site as the fulfilment path for an offline campaign, you need to be confident that people are being given a warm welcome and the clickstream, from SERPS to data capture to checkout, is as smooth as possible. The information you get from an online test campaign is a vital source of intelligence to help you find weaknesses in the navigation, a lack or relevant content or problems with the checkout or interaction systems before the main campaign, rather than after.

When you're managing

When you're **managing** an offline campaign and you're using the web as the **fulfilment**, your search engine marketing company can not only help you:

- **attract the maximum qualified visitors** but
- **maximise the conversion rate** when they get there
- **enhance and protect your brand**
- **make yourself heard**
- and give you **CRM intelligence** to support your future online and offline strategies.

To attract qualified visitors

Taking traffic first, you can use the search engines to bring all sorts of visitors to your site, before, during and after your offline campaign. You can attract people asking for your product or asking for your brand, people who don't want to guess your URL and those who can't tell the difference between a browser and a search engine. You can catch people at all stages of the buying cycle, before they've even seen your promotion or when they're actively responding to your call to action.

You might be surprised to learn that the search engines are a useful part of your offline fulfilment. But even at the height of high profile advertising, dm or PR campaign, with a clearly marked URL or even a campaign-specific micro-site it doesn't matter how big or clever you make your call to action. You'd be amazed at the number of people who'll use search engines, rather than links, browsers, bookmarks, banners and buttons, to find what they're looking for. As our own experience proved, you can run a prime time TV campaign, with a celebrity footballer, whose name embodies the product, and a sizeable number of people will still go straight to a search engine and do a generic search, immediately after each ad is shown.

There are two choices, search engine optimisation for the natural results and pay per click search engine marketing. Search engine optimisation or SEO, is a long term strategy that involves re-engineering your site's structure, code and content (without changing its look and feel) to make it rich in the search terms your target audience is using and well connected to relevant sites.

In essence, SEO can make sure that your web site's content, from your products and services, to your forums and bulletin boards, helps to make your site more search engine friendly. For example, if you use a dynamic content management system, part of the SEO service will be to rewrite the URLs to make them spiderable. Likewise, if you publish press releases, white papers or editorial features on your site, SEO can make sure they're also submitted to the most appropriate third party sites to enhance your link equity and improve your visibility at the same time.

The alternative – and increasingly the complement – to SEO is Pay Per Click search engine marketing. You don't have to make any changes to your site and there are no ethical issues to contend with. If speed and flexibility are your priority, a Pay Per Click campaign can get your visibility off to a flying start, with traffic in just a couple of days.

But in either case, it means making sure your site is engineered, positioned and promoted to be the answer to your future customers' prayers.

To improve the conversion rate

So, now you've brought lots of qualified visitors to the site, as part of your fulfilment process. Next, how can your search engine marketing company help improve one of the key metrics by which the campaign will be measured, **the conversion rate**? After all, when you've invested in an offline campaign, you need to be certain that the web site can pick up the baton.

Fortunately, a good search engine marketing company will know how to make a web site visitor friendly, as well as search engine friendly.

First, they'll look at how visitors are arriving at the site. Rather than just dropping people off at the home page and expecting them to find their own way from there, it's much better to take them straight to the content they're looking for. Campaign-specific micro-sites, with their own URL and dedicated content, often work well for this, but as we already know, plenty of respondents will use the search engines instead. So a good search engine marketing company will use deep linking strategies that connect your listings on the search engine results pages, whether natural or paid-for, to relevant content within your site.

The second issue is the usability of the site. You can optimise the site to give your visitors a warm welcome and a smooth and seamless fulfilment service, from start to finish. Your search engine marketing company can make the site faster, smarter, friendlier and easier to use, with the

navigation and content people are looking for, as part of its standard optimisation service.

A good search engine marketing company can also make it **accessible to all members of the online community**, including those using assistive technologies, in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act, which is promising to get tough about now. A good search engine marketing company will know exactly how to make your web site accessible – and will often include this as part of their standard optimisation service.

In short, your search engine marketing company can optimise your site in such a way as to provide a streamlined fulfilment path, offering a helpful reception, relevant content and good service, to maximise your chances of conversion and turn visitors into a community of customers.

To enhance and protect your brand

Another vital contribution that your search engine marketing company can make to your overall marketing strategy is that of enhancing and protecting your brand equity and integrity online. However well-known or well-regarded your brand offline, it is crucial that you are seen to own your brand on the search engines.

After all, if you don't, someone else, with a potentially competitive or negative message such as a blogger, or forum posting, will take that space. There won't be a blank space in the search engine results page where you should rightfully be. Offline mindshare doesn't automatically deliver online equity, as several luxury brands have found to their cost.

A good search engine marketing company will ensure that you are in a highly visible position, not just under your company name, but your brands, products, services, trademarks and, just as importantly, promotional campaigns or creative straplines. This can be achieved either through the natural or paid-for results, depending on your budget, timescales and overall search engine marketing strategy.

Your search engine marketing company should also, as part of their service, be able to keep you informed of any illegal or negative uses of your brands or trademarks online, not just in terms of infringements, but what the web is saying about you, to help you monitor your brand perception as part of your overall branding strategy.

To make yourself heard

Audibility, as well as visibility, is a central part of a successful public relations strategy, and again, your search engine marketing company can add a lot of value. To start with, they can carry out keyword research to find out what kind of information people are looking for and define your news, product information and corporate messaging based on the search terms that people are using. As with profiling and targeting, search engine marketing intelligence turns the traditional communications paradigm on its head, because you're basing your strategy on what people want, rather than what you want to tell them. Likewise, they can ensure that your press releases and editorial features are search engine friendly, to ensure you can be easily found when people are looking for news on an ongoing basis, and position you as an authority in that space, which improves your link equity and therefore your visibility, at the same time.

Vitality, your search engine marketing company can also help you provide a quick response to a sudden event or issue, control the messaging and hence protect your brand and market share.

For example, if you sell pharmaceutical products, your site should contain plenty of useful information and resources for everyday visitors, optimised for the natural results in the long term to promote the health benefits of your products. But, if there is a sudden PR issue, such as a product recall or health scare, you can use the pay per click results to give you instant visibility and get your side of the story across in the very place that people will be looking – the search engines. After all, just as many people search for news and information as for products and services, as we found when we made our own newsfeed search engine friendly and our web traffic doubled as a result. Another strategy is to optimise your site for events that haven't happened yet, to put you in the best possible position when they do.

To help your Customer Relationship Management

Just as importantly, your search engine marketing company can help you get to know your current and potential customers in a completely new way – by providing vital intelligence for your CRM knowledge base.

In practical terms, it's about offering privileges in return for information. People are quite happy to provide personal information about themselves in return for, say, an email newsletter, access to VIP content or to claim a special offer.

Your search engine marketing company can set up your site to gather this information – with data capture opportunities at the front end, database integration at the back and cookies everywhere. In conjunction with visitor tracking, this data provides a wealth of intelligence to enable you to send out more targeted, personalised communications both offline and online.

When you're reporting

Finally, when you've run your offline campaign and you're **reporting** on the results, there are several ways your search engine marketing company can help – in a variety of formats and layouts.

With access to your visitor tracking data, your search engine marketing company should be able to give you detailed information about your campaign, from the quantity of the response to the quality of the fulfilment process. You can show which creative approaches and campaigns were most profitable, demonstrate improvements in your cost of customer acquisition, and best of all, prove how every penny of the campaign was spent and what the return on investment was.

In summary: the best of both worlds

So, your search engine marketing company can help you:

- Identify new opportunities
- Size up the competition
- Develop effective creative
- Test before roll-out
- Maximise response
- Optimise the fulfilment
- Enhance and protect your brand
- Make yourself heard
- Gather CRM intelligence
- Account for every penny

Integration in action

When we first started working with Rightmove, the online property portal, they were running a high profile TV advertising campaign featuring the footballer Ian Wright, with www.Rightmove.co.uk as the fulfilment.

One of the first things we did was look at their server logs to see how it was working and to see what we could do to boost the traffic to the site. As expected, there was a surge in traffic immediately after the ads were shown. Also as expected, most of those searches were for Rightmove and for mis-spellings of the name but a sizeable proportion were for more generic terms, such as 'London Estate Agent'.

As a result of this tip-off, we optimised them to rank highly for these generic terms and mis-spellings. This not only gave the client thousands of qualified visitors that would have otherwise been scooped up by competitors but gave the TV campaign a more effective fulfilment path and helped to enhance and protect the Rightmove brand at the same time.

About Weboptimiser

Weboptimiser was founded in 1996 by **David White**, whose first technology venture was the founding of Saga Systems in 1981 and **Nicholine Hayward**, a copywriter whose involvement with the Internet began with Digital's Universities Without Walls campaign in 1992.

Over the next 8 years, Weboptimiser introduced the concept of ethical, brand-friendly optimisation to the Internet marketing community and pioneered many of the concepts, techniques and terminology that have since become standard practice.

Today, Weboptimiser is one of the largest, longest-established and best-respected optimisation companies in the UK, while search engine marketing, is widely accepted to be an integral and essential part of a company's online strategy and a core component of its offline success.

Pioneers of optimisation

It was Weboptimiser who first realised that there's more to optimisation than just search engine positions, that there's more to visitor tracking than simple log file analysis and there's more to pay-per-click search engine marketing than using automated bid management software. As a result, our clients' sites don't just enjoy first page positions on the leading search engines, but are faster to load, easier to use and have the content, community and communication that Internet users demand today.

Results that count

At Weboptimiser, we consider return on investment to be the only worthwhile metric, not search engine positions or traffic volumes. As a result, we're happy to report that Marriott International increased its revenue by 32%, the Royal Festival Hall increased its online bookings by 25% and The Chartered Institute of Marketing got an 110% return on its investment in search engine marketing.

Web credentials

Working at the heart of the Internet community, Weboptimiser has agency agreements with the major search engines. We have provided optimisation resources to New Media Age, Revolution, and Netimperative and work closely with the Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB), the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) and e-consultancy.

Ethics and accountability

Weboptimiser only uses search engine-approved optimisation techniques and shuns the use of spam techniques, which, although more profitable and easier to implement, could damage our clients' brand and net integrity. We offer complete accountability, including full disclosure of results against costs.

Technological leadership

Weboptimiser is a marketing and technology company, with an elite team of search engineers, software developers and copywriters. We were the first to offer a live online visitor tracking service, the first to develop optimised, content-rich micro-sites. We also developed automatic news feed content creation and created the first robot-based web assessment system. Many of the techniques and terminologies used as standard in the search engine marketing space came from us, and our White Papers and seminars have made a vital and visionary contribution to the intellectual and technological developments in the industry.

How can we help you?

For a confidential discussion of your [search engine marketing strategy](#), call Nicholine Hayward on 0207 953 8536 or email nicholine@weboptimiser.com

For a **free assessment** of your site's search engine and visitor friendliness, visit: www.weboptimiser.com

For a free subscription to our weekly **Internet Marketing newsletter**, visit: <http://www.weboptimiser.com/>

For a cup of tea, visit: The Foundry, 156 Blackfriars Road, London, SE1 8EN