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Since search engines are the first stop for people on the Internet looking for goods or services, the position your website appears in search results is an important factor.

If your URL (web address) shows up far down the results list, the chances of the consumer never finding you increase incrementally. Once you achieve a high search engine position, it is essential that you make sure you maintain the high ranking you have worked so hard to achieve.

This means you must come up with a strategy to monitor your search engines positions. This strategy is crucial to the success of any marketing campaign. Think of your search engine positions as your online portfolio. Would you let your stock portfolio be ruled by chance and market fluctuations, or would you keep close tabs on your stocks so you could buy and sell when the time is right? This is the way you must consider your search engines positions.

Be aware that at first, after you have launched your search engine campaign and done all the right things to increase your rankings, you will most likely see a continual upward climb. What you need to be on the lookout for is the moment that upward climb reaches a plateau. When this happens, your search engine position campaign moves into stage two, the monitoring and protecting stage.

In stage two, do not be concerned about the short-term fluctuations in your positions. These are similar to the subtle rising and falling of stocks in a portfolio. Short-term movement is an integral part of the whole process. It's the long-term changes that you must watch for and prepare to act on immediately.

Analyzing the long-term trends of search engines positions is imperative. The way in which search engines rank websites may change at the drop of a hat. If you are unaware of these changes - many of which are subtle yet can be deadly to your ranking - your position may drop to the bottom of the list before you can get your bearings. To prevent this kind of precipitous drop, you must create a system to monitor your positions on a monthly basis. Devise a chart to keep tabs on your top ranking positions or your top pages, and make sure to watch "the market" closely.

Each search engine uses a formula to compute website rankings. When a search engine changes this formula in any way, it may raise or lower your ranking. Some search engines use a number of different formulas, rotating them so that a formula doesn't become overused or outdated. Depending on which formula is being applied, your search engine position may suddenly drop or rise in rank significantly. Therefore, you must check your positions frequently in order to catch when a search engine changes formulas and what effect it has on your positions.

You must also deal with your competition - a crucial factor you must always be vigilant about. Your competitor's position may suddenly rise, automatically lowering your position. Or their position may drop, pushing your position higher. Each month, expect position changes due to the continual changes that are occurring in your competitor's position, and be prepared to adjust your marketing strategy to compensate for decreased rankings. Monitoring these fluctuations will also give you vital information about how to improve your website to increase your position in search results.

Of course, you must discern what the most popular search engines are in order for your monitoring efforts to be effective. Right now, there are ten popular search engines that direct most of Internet traffic to your sites. The challenge you face is that these top ten may change from month to month.

This means that you must not only monitor your search engine positions, but you must also keep track of the ranking popularity of the search engines you are monitoring. Find out which search engines people use most frequently every month and be sure to live in the present! People are fickle about their favourite search engines, and it takes constant vigilance to follow their dalliances. The search engines they loved when you first launched your campaign may be old news in the next few months. You must adjust your list of engines according to the whims of the Internet users. Check out <http://www.searchenginewatch.com/reports/netratings.html> for a current list of website favourites.

Another factor to monitor carefully is a sudden drop of your positions in all search engines. This is not the same as monthly fluctuations - this is a neon red warning sign! It could mean a number of different things.

If all your search engine positions have plummeted, it may indicate that search engines spiders - those sneaky programs that seek out your site and rank their positions - have found some type of problem with your website. If you have recently changed the code, for instance, the spider may become utterly confused and consequently drop your positions disastrously. If a spider creeps up on your website when it is down for adjustments or changes, you may actually disappear from a search engine index entirely. Or a search engine may drastically change its formula, and suddenly all of your website come up as irrelevant. If that search engine is a current favorite, it may create a domino effect, causing all of your position to drop in all search engines.

Some search engines rely on the results from other search engines, and it is vital that you know which engines these are and keep track of all the engines they influence. The biggest problem here is that search engines will sometimes change affiliations, and this can create a major shift in the geography of the Internet. For example, recently Yahoo decided to display only results gleaned from Google. So you must not only monitor your own positions, but you must keep abreast of seismic shifts in the landscape of the Internet as a whole.

Finally, pay attention to your keywords. Keywords are the foundation bricks of the entire search engine system, and they demand individual scrutiny in your monitoring efforts. If you have found that a number of your positions have plummeted, it may mean that a page of your website has become invisible or inaccessible to search engine spiders. Or the competition for that particular keyword or phrase has recently rocketed into outer space. In either case, you must act quickly and efficiently to regain lost ground.

Your search engine marketing campaign is an investment. It costs you time and money on a continual basis. Protect this investment as diligently as you would your financial portfolio. In the same way, track your positions from an objective perspective, and monitor your positions on a regular basis. Make sure your time and effort reap rewards by keeping your eye on the big picture - your long-term marketing campaign.