

How Do I Get Visitors to My Website?

by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson
Editor, *Web Marketing Today*®
PO Box 565, Loomis, California 95650

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There are four primary ways to get traffic to your website. Oh, yes, there are lots of variations, which I outline in my popular article ["The Web Marketing Checklist: 37 Ways to Promote Your Website."](#) But for the average small business they probably boil down to only four. In this whitepaper I want to outline each of these very simply so you can get the lay of the land. You can always dig deeper later. The Big 4 are:

1. **Traffic from search engines**, known as search engine optimization or SEO.
2. **Traffic from paid search ads**, the pay-per-click or PPC text ads that appear in Google.
3. **Traffic from other advertising**, such as newsletter advertising, solo e-mails, shopping bots, affiliate programs, banner ads, etc. I'll tell you which I think are the most effective and why.
4. **Traffic from former visitors**, how to develop an e-mail newsletter that helps you keep in touch with visitors and customers so they'll return to your site again and again.

But let's start with the most basic and arguably the most important -- traffic from search engines.

I. Search Engine Traffic Is the Cheapest and Best

Far and away, the least expensive traffic you'll ever have to your site will come through the "natural" or "organic" search results on Google, Yahoo, or Bing. To get traffic to your site for the search words or keywords that are important to your organization, you need to do what is called Search Engine Optimization or SEO.

Fortunately, this is something that the average small business owner or staff person can do himself or herself. Yes, it takes time and knowledge. But it doesn't have to take much money -- that is, unless you are trying to rank high for very competitive keywords.

SEO has two parts, each equally important:

1. Webpage optimization and
2. Getting links back to your website.

1. Webpage Optimization

Basically, webpage optimization involves setting up each of your webpages so that it can be easily "understood" and indexed by the search engine robots or "spiders" that come calling.

Each webpage (except your homepage, of course) should be clearly focused on just a single topic. The more focused the better. Then you give the search engines spiders clues or signals to the nature of this focus.

a. Begin with Keyword Research

Webpage optimization begins with keyword research, similar to what I describe for Pay Per Click advertising below. But instead of looking for hundreds of keywords and keyphrases as in PPC advertising, you're looking for a dozen or so -- perhaps just three to five. Here's how to approach this:

1. **Brainstorm** with other people in your company to see what keywords and keyphrases people might search on to find your products or services. Check your web analytics to see what keywords people used to find you -- they may surprise you.
2. Use **software** to help you **expand and then refine** your keyword list. I recommend putting the keywords you came up with in step 1 into [Google Insights for Search](#). This will tell you the relative number of searches for these keywords -- and may suggest some other keywords or keyphrases with high search volume that you haven't thought of.
3. **Omit extremely competitive keywords**, since you'll never be able to compete against the big kahunas for positions on the first page. Rather,

select some keywords and keyphrases that aren't so competitive, but are still searched on a lot.

4. Finally, **narrow down your list to say six to 12 keywords** and keyphrases to concentrate on. If you're just getting started, fewer is better. You can always expand this later.

b. Provide Great Content

Perhaps this goes without saying, but you'll need to offer great content on your webpages, if you want people to buy your products or services -- or for search engines to notice you. Webpages should contain 250 to 500 words or more.

If you've found a dozen keywords and keyphrases that are best for your site, then write one webpage focusing on each of the 12 keywords. Don't "stuff" keywords into the webpage artificially, but make sure that the keywords are included in the title, headlines, and first paragraph especially.

Providing great content is the foundational task for getting ranked in the search engines. Of course, writing is hard work. But here's where you start.

c. Create Page Titles Containing the Keywords

Once you've decided on the keywords to focus on, now write (or rewrite) the title tags for every webpage in your site, including in each title the appropriate keywords that appear on that page. Each webpage should have a unique title.

Remember, the title is different from the headline that may appear in large letters near the top of your webpage. The title is contained in the HTML of the webpage between <TITLE> tags. It is this title that appears in the search results -- not the headline on your page. So make each title interesting, provocative, inviting. You want to make a visitor click on your title rather than all the others that appear in search results.

Rewriting your titles is by far the most important thing you can do to improve your search engine rankings. Yes, it's hard work -- but work that will pay for itself many times over.

d. Write a Description Metatag for Each Webpage

Like the title tag, a description metatag doesn't appear on the visible webpage, but is embedded in the HTML code. The description metatag should contain a

sentence or two (about 250 characters maximum) describing the content of a particular webpage, carefully including in the sentence all the important keywords contained on that page. Don't stuff keywords just to include them. Make sure the words in your description metatag really describe the content on that page.

The description metatag fulfills two functions:

1. **Guiding the searcher.** It often is shown in the search results, right under your page title. Thus it helps searchers determine if your page is relevant enough to click on.
2. **Clues or signals.** The keywords in the metatag supply the search engine robots (spiders) that index your page valuable clues as how to classify and index your content. If the spider finds the same keyword in the title, description metatag, headlines, and content, then it's pretty sure about how to classify your webpage so it can show it when relevant to a searcher's keywords.

e. Include Keywords in Headlines and Links

Your primary strategy is to use the main keywords for that page in the title tag, description metatag, headline or subheadings, and in your body text. Don't stuff keywords everywhere; just make sure that you're leaving a clear trail of clues as to the content. But webpage optimization is just half of the equation. The other half -- and the harder task -- is getting ...

2. Incoming Links to Your Site

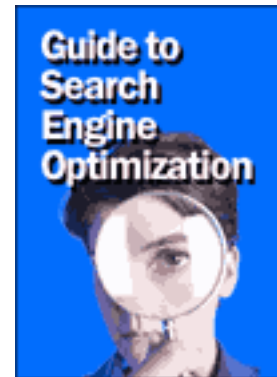
Search engine ranking formulas, known as "algorithms," rank sites higher the more links they have from other websites that point to their site. Links are considered a kind of recommendation that a site is relevant, worth visiting. But getting links from sites that Google considers trustworthy isn't easy. Start by submitting your site to various directories. Provide great content on your site that is *worth* linking to.

Here are some approaches that will help you get links:

- Provide a link on each page that encourages social bookmarking -- including logos of popular services such as Delicious, Stumble Upon, Digg, etc. Once service that helps you do this is AddThis.com.

- Register with online directories. First, get a listing in [The Open Directory Project](http://www.dmoz.com) (www.dmoz.com), and, if you can afford it, in the [Yahoo! Directory](http://ecom.yahoo.com/dir/submit/) (ecom.yahoo.com/dir/submit/). Then find other directories in your industry by searching for the name of your industry plus "directory," such as for: "healthcare directory". Submit your site to these directories.
- Write articles that others would want to host on their sites, each with a link back to yours. Submit them to article directories such as the [Ezine Articles](http://www.ezinearticles.com) (www.ezinearticles.com)
- Reciprocal linking involves exchanging links with other websites in your industry. It is inexpensive, but takes patience and constant work.

Search engine optimization will take several months to get traffic flowing well, but don't skip this step just because you're in a hurry. I consider SEO the essential foundation for Internet marketing. It's well worth the time you spend optimizing your website or the money you spend [outsourcing the project to a competent SEO company](#). When you're ready to dig deeper, get my book [*Guide to Search Engine Optimization*](http://www.wilsonweb.com/ebooks/seo.htm) (www.wilsonweb.com/ebooks/seo.htm), which will fill in the details.



But SEO by itself may not get you enough traffic, at least not right away. You'll probably need to build on SEO with the next step, Pay Per Click Advertising, also known as Paid Search Advertising.

II. Get Targeted Visitors from Paid Search Ads

I explained above why search engine optimization (SEO) should be your foundational strategy. It is certainly the least expensive. But SEO suffers from two weaknesses:

1. SEO takes **months to implement** fully -- and you need traffic to your site now!
2. SEO may deliver an **insufficient volume** of traffic. You may need to supplement SEO through paid search ads.

Paid search, often called Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising, displays your text ad on search engine results pages when someone searches on a keyword or keyphrase that you've selected. The beauty is that you get targeted customers, but pay only when someone clicks on your ad.

Start with [Google AdWords](http://adwords.google.com) (<http://adwords.google.com>), since they have the most search traffic, but also consider [Yahoo! Search Marketing](http://sem.smallbusiness.yahoo.com/searchenginemarketing/) (sem.smallbusiness.yahoo.com/searchenginemarketing/) and [MSN AdCenter](http://adcenter.microsoft.com) (adcenter.microsoft.com).

Paid Search is complex, but you can begin to understand it if you visualize it in four basic stages.

Stage 1. Selecting Your Keywords

Start by compiling a list of keywords that people might use to search for your service or product. Tools such as [Wordtracker](http://www.wordtracker.com) (www.wordtracker.com) or [Google AdWords Keyword Tool](https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal) (<https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>) will help you develop such a list. Generic keywords may not be best. The more specific the search phrase, the greater the likelihood that your searcher is ready to buy and the higher your conversion rate will be. Bid on a list of hundreds of keyphrases with two or three words each, not just the top dozen. If you're a local business, use local place names in your keyword list and use Google's geotargeting feature, so your ad isn't shown unless the customer is in your trade area.

Stage 2. Developing a Landing Page

Don't pay for advertising just to send click-throughs to your homepage. It's a waste of money. Rather, develop a specific landing page for each category of keywords. The landing page is designed to get your visitor to make the purchase, sign up, or leave contact information -- whatever your objective is. Read my book [*How to Develop a Landing Page*](http://www.wilsonweb.com/ebooks/landing.htm) (www.wilsonweb.com/ebooks/landing.htm) for specific instructions.



Stage 3. Forming Your Bidding Strategy

Next, develop a bidding strategy. Factors to consider are:

1. **Price.** Price per click is based on two factors: (a) The closer to the top, the more you'll pay. (b) Quality Score measures how relevant your ad is -- in Google's humble opinion. Not having a relevant landing page, for example, will lower your Quality Score and raise the cost per click you'll be charged.
2. **Position.** Position #1 gets the most traffic, but position #7 might get a better conversion rate at a lower cost.
3. **Ad location.** You can specify your ad to appear only on search results pages, but you might experience good sales by allowing your ad to be displayed on content sites, too.
4. **Precision of keyword matching.** You can select "broad match" so your ad is shown when any of your keywords appear in someone's search phrase. "Phrase match" requires these keywords to be in your precise order. "Exact match" means that your ad is displayed only when a searcher uses your precise keyphrase and no other. "Negative match" will stop your ad from showing if specific keywords indicate that this searcher isn't a good prospect for your product or service.
5. **Daily Budget.** If you're on a tight budget, specify the maximum amount you can be charged in a single day.

Stage 4. Testing and Refining

Fortunately, the search engines provide statistics so that you can determine the cost, the click-through rate, and the conversion rate for each ad and keyword combination. Use this information to fine-tune your strategy and improve your results.

1. **ROI analysis.** Some keywords cost you money, but don't get any conversions. Eliminate them or change wording and positions to make them profitable.
2. **Ad testing.** Test your ads with variations in the title and text to see which performs best.
3. **Day Parting.** You may find that the vast majority of your sales take place on weekdays between 6 am and 8 pm. It may be cost-efficient to program your ads so they only display during the hours you make your most sales. This is known as day parting.
4. **Geotargeting.** If you find that sales come only from your own country or region, you might want to restrict your ad so it isn't shown in other countries or regions. That way you won't have to pay for clicks that probably won't result in sales.

5. **Click fraud.** Unfortunately, you could end up paying for bogus click-throughs. Monitor click-throughs for patterns that might indicate fraud.

Of course, you'll need more than just this brief introduction before you begin paid search advertising, but I hope I've whetted your appetite. For more information read Andrew Goodman's *Winning Results with Google AdWords* (Second Edition; McGraw Hill, 2008, ISBN 0071496564) and browse [articles on Paid Search in our Research Room](http://www.wilsonweb.com/search/cat.php?querytype=category&subcat=mp_PPC) (www.wilsonweb.com/search/cat.php?querytype=category&subcat=mp_PPC).



III. Traffic from Other Kinds of Ads May Be Your Sweet Spot

We've looked at search engine optimization and pay per click text ads, but that's not all that's available. Good traffic is traffic that is interested in the products and services you have to offer. Let me review several other kinds of advertising that just might work well for your business.

E-mail Newsletter Advertising

Perhaps as a newsletter publisher I'm biased, but I believe that one of the most cost-effective advertising approaches for small businesses is to find e-zines that are squarely targeted on your particular niche and then advertise there. To find appropriate e-zines, search Google for a keyword for your niche along with the word "newsletter" or "e-zine." Also try these e-mail newsletter directories:

- [BestEzines](http://www.besteazines.com) (www.besteazines.com)
- [The Ezine Directory](http://www.ezine-dir.com) (www.ezine-dir.com)
- [EzineHub](http://www.ezinehub.com) (www.ezinehub.com)
- [John Labovitz's E-Zine List](http://www.e-zine-list.com) (www.e-zine-list.com)

Then contact the publisher of each matching newsletter regarding advertising rates. Some will have unrealistic rates, others don't really take ads. But you're looking for the one with a targeted list and "reasonable" ad rates. Of course, what seems "reasonable" to you will depend entirely on the profit you earn on each sale. Implementing this strategy will take some work to find the right

newsletters with responsive subscribers. But it may pay off big in getting targeted traffic to your site. Be sure to encode the URLs so you can [track click-throughs and sales using your analytics program](#).

Solo E-mails

These same niche e-zine publishers may accept solo e-mail ads, that is, e-mails that consist entirely of an advertisement which is sent to the entire newsletter list. Don't confuse this with sending spam. Readers of such lists implicitly agree to receive some advertising e-mails in return for free newsletter content in their chosen area. Solo e-mail "drops" or "blasts" or "dedicated e-mails" may seem expensive, but since the click-through rate is often significant, this is the advertising vehicle of choice for many savvy advertisers. If you're going to try this, consider employing a copywriter to write powerful ad copy that gets the click-throughs you need. [More info](#).

Comparison Shopping Engines or Bots

Online merchants often have good results using comparison shopping engines or "bots" such as [Shopping.com](#), [PriceGrabber](#), [NexTag](#), and [Shopzilla](#). Some charge merchants on a cost per click determined by the category of products you are listing. Others have a bidding approach. Shopping bots are used primarily to advertise tangible products, especially commodities. [More info](#).

Affiliate Programs

Affiliate programs can be sweet for merchants. Your affiliate program pays a fixed commission only when a sale is made, a subscription is complete, or a lead is confirmed.

The difficulty, however, is finding affiliates who (1) have substantial targeted traffic to their site or a good e-zine list, and (2) who are willing to commit to featuring a link, button, or banner ad on appropriate places in their websites or newsletters. Perhaps 95% of affiliates bring zero traffic to the merchant, so you're looking for the 1%, the super affiliates. To attract them you need to offer commissions generous enough to lure them away from competing merchants' programs -- not an easy task. If you can recruit your own affiliates, you can purchase your own [affiliate software for \\$100](#) or so. The other approach is an affiliate company that will expose your company's ads to its existing network of

affiliates. [Commission Junction](http://www.cj.com) (www.cj.com) does this for medium to large companies. [More info](#).

Ad Agencies

Ad agencies help companies place ads on appropriate websites and newsletters. They are usually paid by charging their clients the full rate and by paying an "agency rate" when purchasing the advertising. However, ad agencies only work for companies with a large enough advertising budget to make it worth their while.

Ad Networks

The poor man's approach is ad networks. These companies deliver banner ad impressions on a network of client websites. Ads are "targeted" loosely by industry. So long as the ad network has one or more appropriate sites among their publisher clients, your ads "might" show up on a website related to your niche. But ad network advertising tends to be generic and less targeted. Moreover, banner ads get notoriously low click-through rates -- maybe 0.3%. I can't say this sounds very promising, but for products and services that don't fit in a narrow niche, you might try ad networks. [More info](#).

IV. Retain Customers with an E-Mail Newsletter

You want to get more traffic! Yes, but what about the people who have *already* visited your site and liked what they saw? They are the very best prospects you can imagine for your products or services. How do you bring them back? Develop an regular e-mail newsletter or blog.

Insulate your Website against Energy Loss

You've spent lots of time and money for search engine optimization and advertising to get people to your website. But if your conversion rate is only 2% to 3%, like energy being lost from an house without insulation, you're wasting 97% to 98% of your marketing efforts.

You can turn this around using a strategy adopted by tens of thousands of successful online businesses -- develop an e-mail newsletter of value and then make it a high priority to get site visitors to sign up. Done right, you should be

able to get at least 10% to 20% of your visitors to subscribe. Multiply that over a year and you'll have a substantial e-mail list of highly targeted prospects.

Develop an E-mail Newsletter of Value

People won't sign up to get more e-mail unless they believe they will receive value from doing so. So what value could you offer site visitors in the form of an e-mail newsletter? It will vary from one business to another, but consider:

- Helpful **how-to** articles
- Industry **updates** and **analyses**
- **Links** to new trends and important news articles
- Product **reviews**
- **Special prices** on Internet-only sales

Pause right now and write down several ideas. Once you've determined how to offer value, you have two primary challenges.

1. Get Visitors to Sign Up

The first challenge is to get site visitors to subscribe to your newsletter. You can get a subscription form from an e-mail marketing service such as [iContact](#) or [AWeber](#). To get sign-ups:

- Place the sign-up form in a **high-visibility spot on every page** of your site.
- Next to each sign-up form explain how a person will **benefit** from this newsletter.
- Provide **incentives** for signing up, such as a free whitepaper or a coupon.

2. Build Trust Regularly

The second challenge is to provide great content on a regular basis. Too often a small business will start an e-mail newsletter or blog that bogs down after the first month or two. Indeed, writing a regular e-mail newsletter is a commitment of at least half a day for each issue. Look at the time as a marketing expense that

will bring your best customers back to your site again and again. I recommend that you:

- Set a **regular schedule** of at least once each month.
- Plan ahead with an **editorial calendar** that lists topics you'll cover for the next 6 to 12 months, one topic per issue.
- **Assign a person** the task of writing and publishing this newsletter and give him or her time to complete it.
- **Hire a local writer** to take this project, if you don't have the resources in-house.
- Consider using **free articles** available online at article sites, such as EzineArticles.com.
- **Feature** and link to one of your **products and services** in each issue to generate repeat traffic to your site.

This e-mail newsletter strategy is not a short-term fix for traffic, but a long-term, relationship-building approach designed to develop a customer base that values your services and will buy from you regularly in the future.

We've covered a lot of ground in this whitepaper:

1. Search Engine Optimization
2. Pay Per Click Text Ads
3. Other Types of Paid Advertising
4. E-mail Newsletters

I've left out one very obvious marketing venue: social networking through Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and others. The reason is this: While social networking is indeed very important in our day, the four types of visitor-getting strategies I've outlined here need to form the foundation, the basis of your

marketing. Once this is solid, then begin to explore one or more social networking venues in which to market.

If you'll implement the strategies I've outlined above, you'll find that the traffic to your site will increase dramatically. The ball's in your court now. Which strategy will you begin to implement immediately?

About the Author

Dr. Ralph F. Wilson is an Internet marketing pioneer. He founded [Web Marketing Today](http://www.wilsonweb.com) (www.wilsonweb.com), a free weekly Internet marketing e-mail newsletter in 1995. Since then he has provided up-to-date Internet marketing information to his 100,000+ opt-in subscribers.

Dr. Wilson is the recipient of the Tenagra Award for Internet Marketing Excellence. He is the author of hundreds of articles and more than a dozen [books](#) on Internet marketing, including *Planning Your Internet Marketing Strategy* (Wiley, 2001) and *The E-Mail Marketing Handbook* (2nd Edition, 2004). He has spoken widely on Internet marketing at both industry conferences and one-day seminars his company has produced.