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BENCHMARK REPORT

2012 Search Marketing - SEO Edition

Research and Insights on
Creating and Capitalizing on a
Rich End-User Search Experience

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2012 Search Marketing – SEO Edition

Benchmark Report

Research and Insights on Creating and Capitalizing on a Rich End-User Search Experience

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2012 Search Marketing Benchmark Report – SEO Edition

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NEW RESEARCH AND INSIGHTS ON CREATING AND CAPITALIZING ON A RICH END-USER SEARCH EXPERIENCE

A rich end-user experience has become the hallmark of search marketing. Searchers now receive instant, real-time, personalized and local information. Blended search supports these developments by generating results pages that include not only blue links, but also video, images, news, press releases, customer reviews and real-time social media content.

This colorful backdrop of search activity is the setting for MarketingSherpa's eighth annual benchmark report of search engine marketing. Last year's study looked at managing the evolving search and social climate to achieve optimal results; this year's report builds on that by examining the fast-paced and growing shift to inbound marketing efforts. The role of content, including optimized local content, also comes under study. Marketers rated content creation as the most difficult (yet most effective) SEO tactic. This comes as no surprise, since content marketing sits at the intersection of search and social. To achieve good organic rankings and ensure that their products and services are found across all formats and venues, organizations must be strategic with their planning and processes, and ever-savvy with the creation and optimization of all digital assets. Simply put, good content makes for a better end-user experience.

Organized for fast and easy reference

The *2012 Search Marketing Benchmark Report – SEO Edition* is a comprehensive reference guide containing more than 150 charts with analytical commentary, hundreds of informative insights from your peers, several abridged case studies of real-life search and inbound marketing campaigns and more. To help you quickly locate the information most relevant to your marketing situation, we have segmented data throughout this report by:

- Average of all respondents
- Primary marketing channels
- Organization size
- Phases of search marketing maturity
- Key industry sectors

Highlights of this year's study

- The alignment of search marketing objectives against the most difficult SEO challenges
- The usage, effectiveness and level of effort required for SEO tactics and content products
- How organizations are allocating marketing dollars and where they are shifting their efforts
- What marketers are doing to fare well in local and mobile search results
- How agencies view their clients' SEO and inbound marketing efforts

Benchmark Report

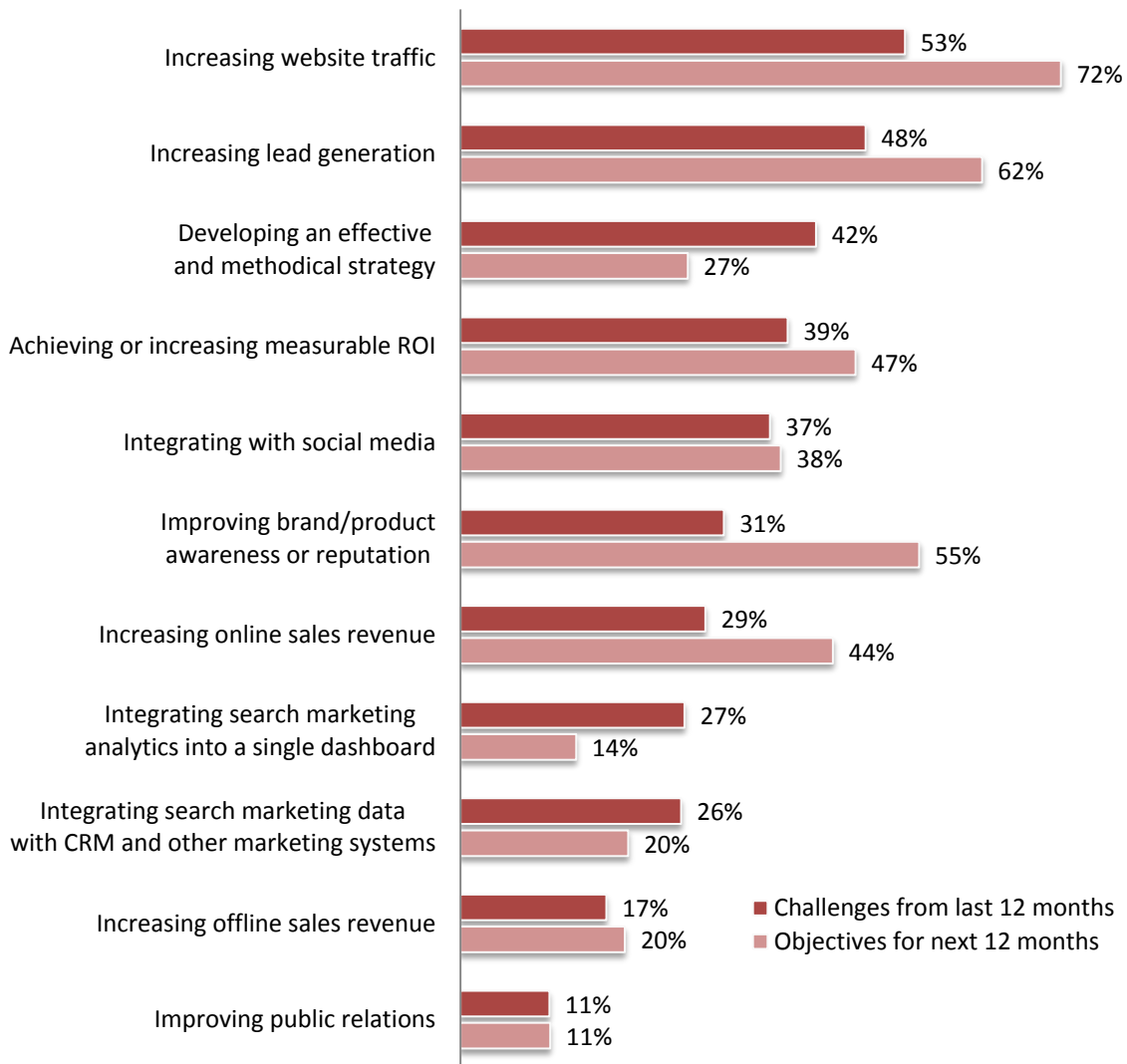
MarketingSherpa Benchmark Reports provide marketing executives and practitioners the comprehensive research data and insights needed to compare an organization's practices and performance against industry benchmarks in order to guide strategic decisions and tactical planning.

KEY FINDING: DEVELOPING A STRATEGY IS A TOP CHALLENGE...BUT BOTTOM OBJECTIVE

In planning for the upcoming year, marketers’ SEO program objectives frequently addressed the previous year’s challenges head-on. Bringing in more website traffic and increasing the volume and quantity of leads generated were cited as last year’s top challenges. These now are top objectives for the coming year.

Developing a strategy should be a top objective, especially in light of the fact that developing an effective strategy had been a top challenge for the previous 12 months. A strategy would also serve to guide prioritization decisions for other objectives. Nevertheless, many organizations sidestepped this and zeroed in on clear revenue drivers such as Web traffic, leads, online sales and brand awareness. Interestingly, increasing measurable ROI ranked higher as an objective than developing an actual strategy to do so!

Chart: Comparing most frustrating SEO challenges with most important SEO objectives



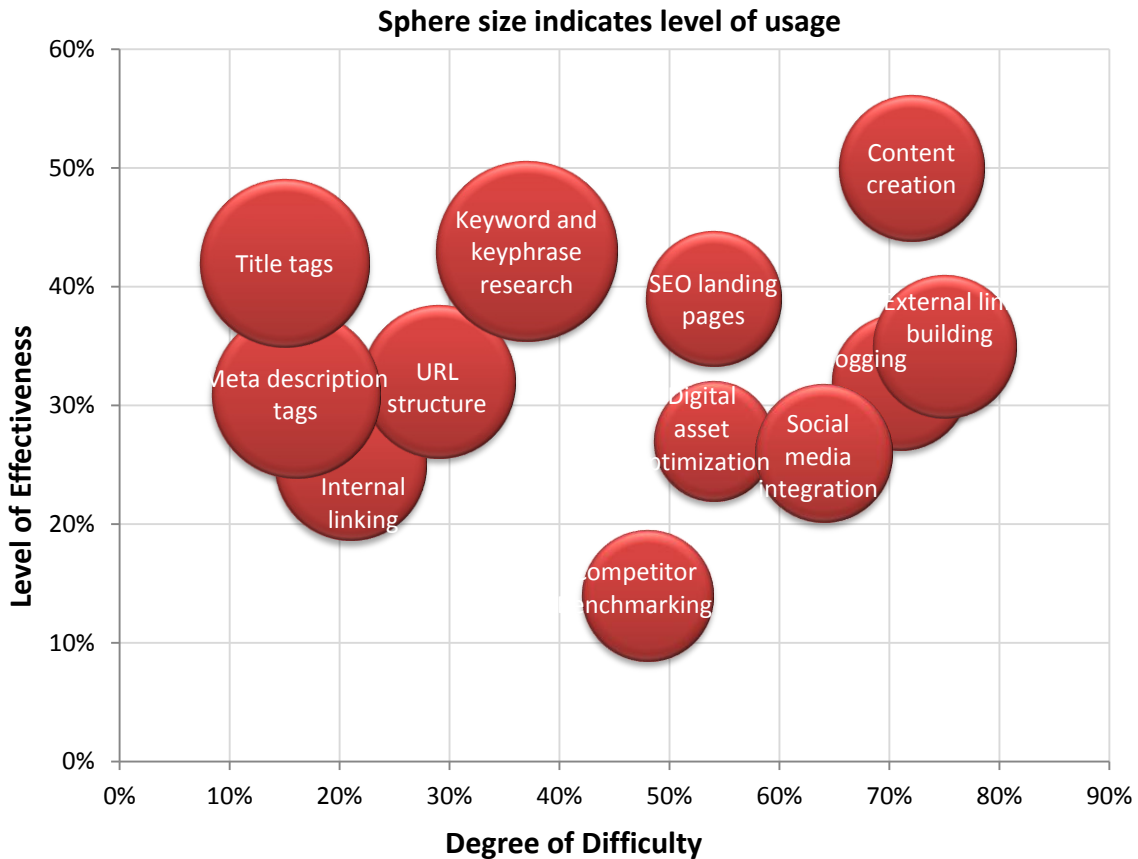
Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
 Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

KEY FINDING: CONTENT CREATION WORKS THE BEST, BUT TAKES THE MOST WORK

Keyword and keyphrase research is an old standby. When done well, this research delivers results and creates a competitive advantage, explaining its popular levels of usage. Creating title tags is another keyword-related and commonly used tactic – one which marketers considered to be equally effective.

Content creation stands apart in the cluster of tactics, both for its difficulty and its effectiveness. Good content creates buzz and attracts links. For this reason, marketers who commit to the effort required in creating quality content can improve their SEO positions.

Chart: Three dimensional view of SEO tactics



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
 Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

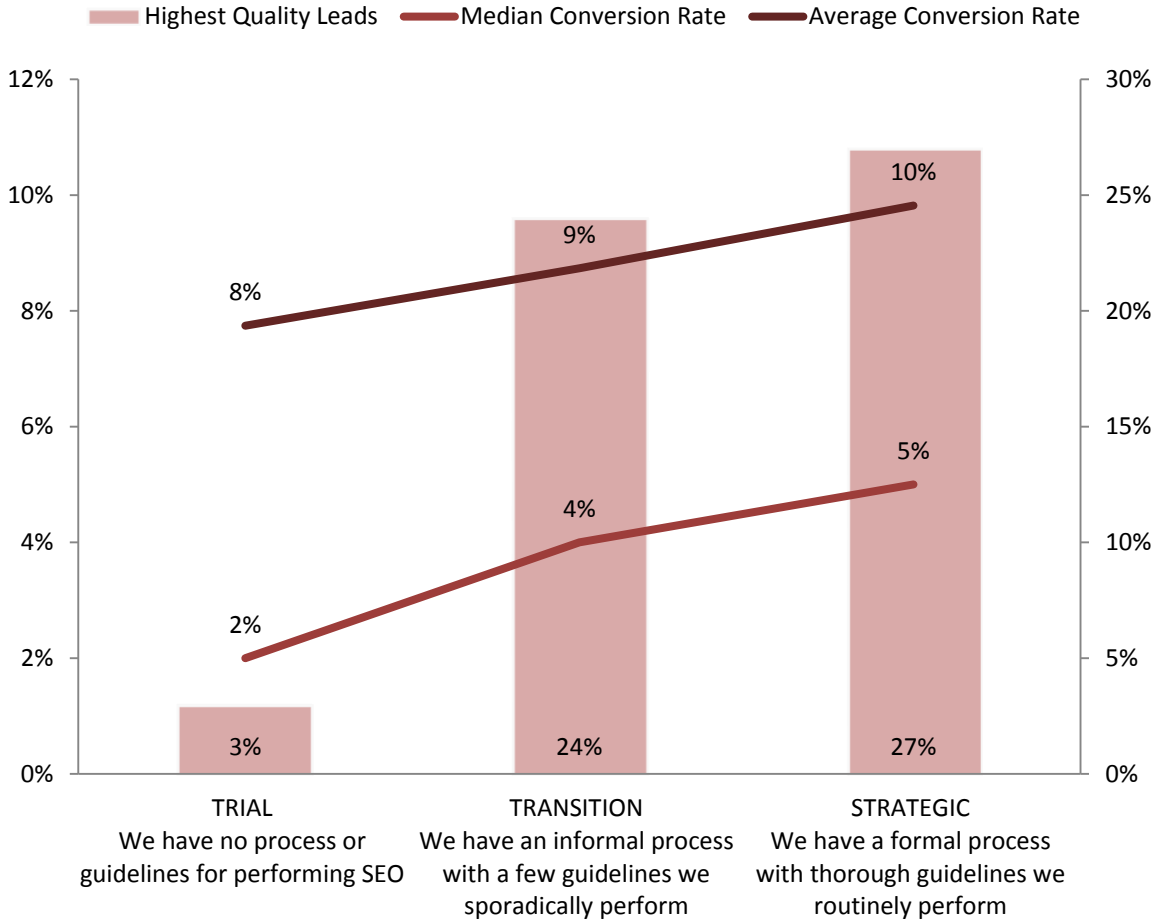
But, what is good and effective content? From the perspective of marketers surveyed, Web pages ranked highly, with half of marketers stating that they are very effective in helping them achieve their marketing objectives. Many Web pages also act as SEO landing pages if they serve as an entry point from search results. When pages have strong customer-oriented language, good layouts and clear call-to-actions, there is a greater likelihood of “click through” than “click back.”

Webinars and whitepapers were other leading examples of good content, with 46 percent and 40 percent of marketers, respectively, rating these as very effective content products.

KEY FINDING: INCREMENTAL SEO IMPROVEMENTS ADD UP TO LARGE GAINS

Organizations that routinely follow a formal process and thorough guidelines for their SEO practices and programs reap the biggest bottom-line benefits. One example is lead quality. Organizations in the Trial or Transition phases for SEO performance management each had a percentage of natural search leads deemed "low-quality." In contrast, only organizations in the Strategic phase could declare that all leads from natural search traffic were either of the highest quality or of mixed quality.

Chart: Organic traffic lead quality and conversion rates, by SEO maturity phase



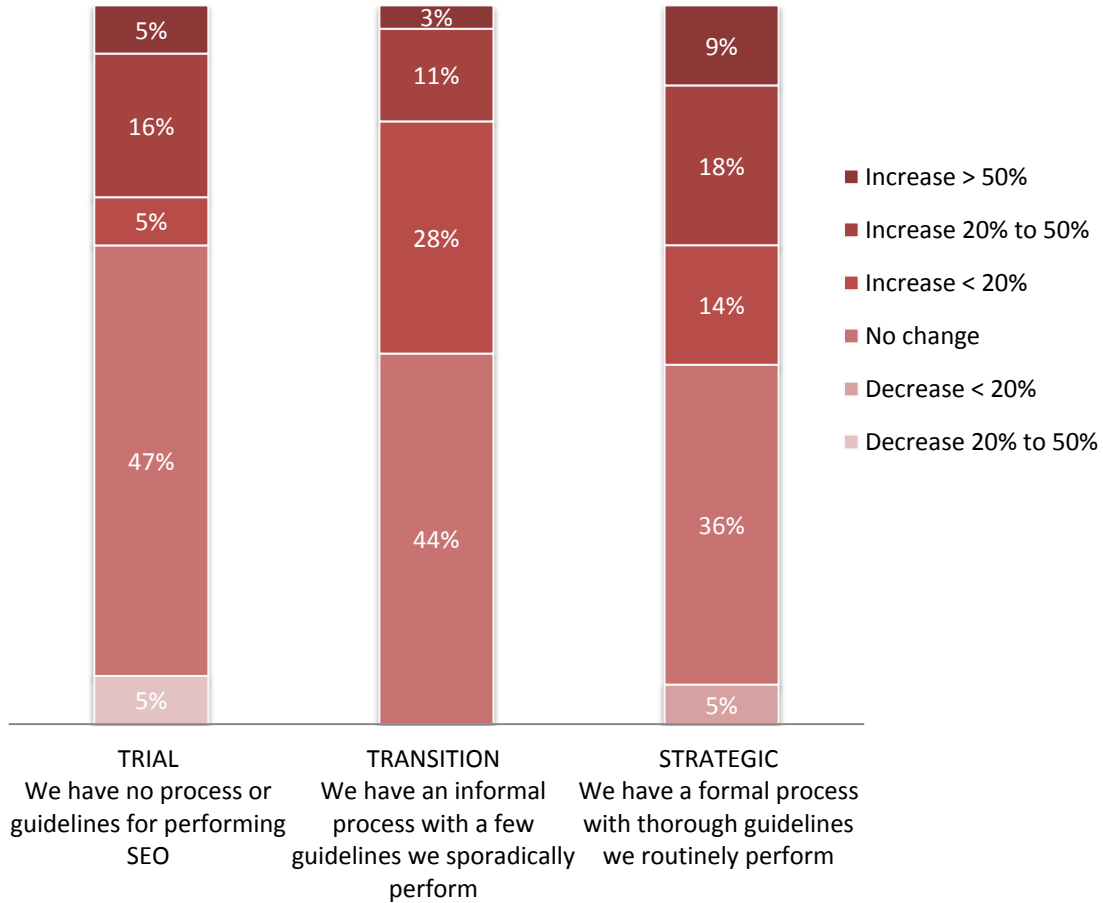
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Not only do the efforts of strategically minded organizations pay off through a larger percentage of high-quality leads from organic search traffic, but they also convert more of these leads. When looking at median conversion rates, Strategic organizations tend to convert 150 percent more leads than Trial organizations and 25 percent more than Transition organizations, or those with informal processes and guidelines.

KEY FINDING: FUTURE INVESTMENTS IN SEO BACKED BY HAVING SEO PROCESS IN PLACE

Who doesn't like to get the biggest bang for the buck? Organizations in the Transition and Strategic phases of SEO maturity convert more high-quality leads from natural search visits. As such, it makes sense for organizations to put more money into these programs.

Chart: Expected 12-month SEO budget change, by SEO maturity phase



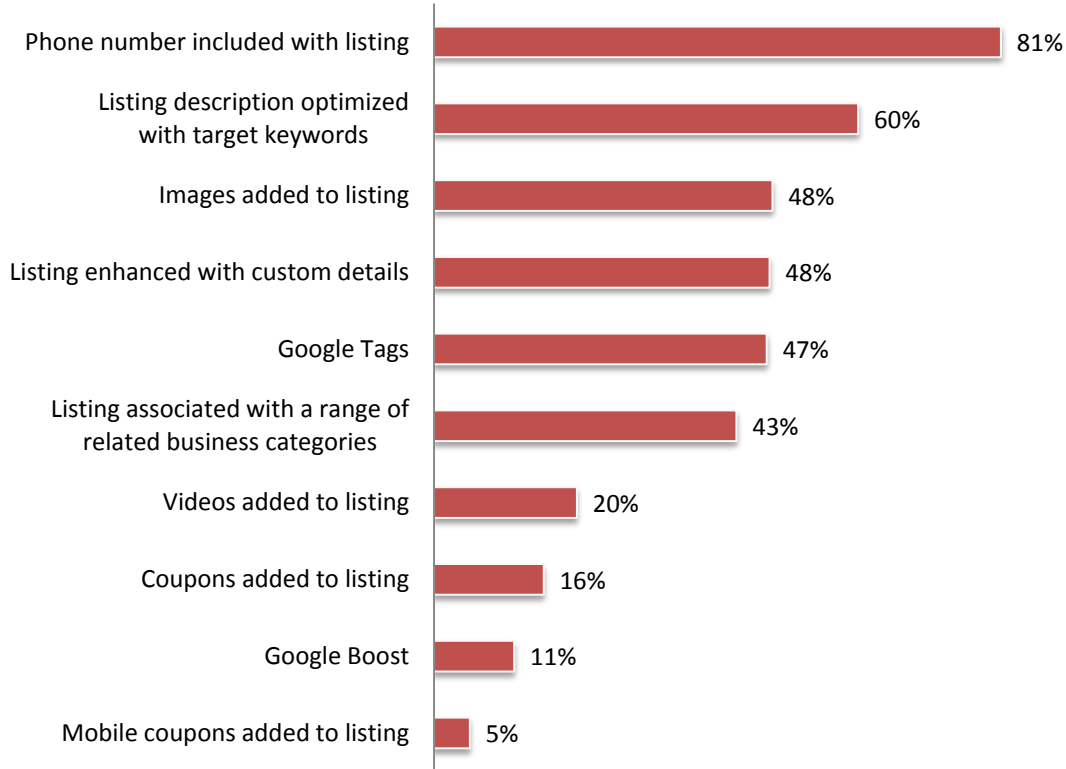
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Organizations that are relatively immature with their SEO processes are still investing money into SEO. The overwhelming majority of these organizations spend their SEO budgets on staff salaries, whereas Transition and Strategic organizations tend to divide their budgets across staff salaries, outsourced agency services, and for-fee SEO marketing and analytics tools.

KEY FINDING: LOCAL BUSINESS LISTING TACTICS ARE UNDERUTILIZED

Local business listings and reviews now sit atop natural search results; therefore, it is critical to be found through local search. Despite this reality, only 37 percent of organizations surveyed claimed a local business listing on one or more search engines. Of those, most did not fully employ available listing tactics.

Chart: Local business listing tactics used for local search purposes



Source: ©2011 MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey
 Methodology: Fielded April 2011, N=1,530

Even fewer organizations, namely 27 percent, had optimized for local search as part of their organic search (SEO) strategy. Adding local content to Web pages, blog posts and titles was the most popular local optimization tactic for this group, with 81 percent committed to this effort. By contrast, posting customer reviews or making customers aware of a customer review site (e.g. Yelp, Places) were efforts that ranked low in their execution. With local search algorithms placing weight on the quantity of reviews and citations, the importance of encouraging more (unbiased, non-incentivized) reviews cannot be overrated. Interestingly, marketers indirectly agreed with this in another question, where 88 percent said that customer reviews were the most effective content product for helping them achieve their marketing objectives.

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