

SMALL-BUSINESS MARKETING

Why it's now harder than ever to be ranked No. 1 on Google



BY ERIC CAWLEY

Your quest to be ranked No. 1 in Google's search-engine results just became more difficult — and potentially expensive. Google has moved its

AdWords listings from the right-hand side of the search results to the top of the page — above the organic, unpaid search results.

To be ranked No. 1 through No. 4 in Google, prepare to pay more to play. Other businesses will share your desire, meaning AdWords competition — and the cost per click, or CPC — will likely increase.

If you don't want to pay out the nose, then

upgrade your organic-search rankings strategy. Previously top-ranked pages are now bumped down (and possibly off) the search page results.

How should you proceed? Steal a page from the travel industry, which has responded well to these changes. It is working more smartly than ever to be more competitive in enticing people to their destinations and hotels.

You need to do the same, and quickly, before your competitors pass you by. Here are some tips:

Re-evaluate your website's design.

Make sure your first impression has a modern appearance, is peppered with plenty of testimonials and looks good on everything from the smallest smartphone screen to a very large monitor.

Get a terrific, expe-

rienced writer and put him or her to work. If you don't have a blog, start one now. If you do, make sure it's contained within the website and post about twice a week. Two studies by BuzzSumo/Moz and Searchmetrics found that content that is at least 1,100-1,200 words tends to rank highest in the search-engine results.

(Chances are, your blog posts and webpages don't pass that test.) Note that word count alone doesn't guarantee you top rankings. Content that is plagiarized, is not compelling or isn't fresh is unlikely to rank, regardless of length.

Publicize your posts in the places where your online audience frequents, like Facebook or LinkedIn groups, or other blogs. Encourage them to share your content.

Ensure your site is listed in as many local directories as possible. This is because of Google's increased emphasis on local search results.

For more information, go to bit.ly/reputation checklist for a good summary of steps to take.

Eric Cawley is president of Complete Marketing Solutions, Meridian. eric@completemarketing.us, (208) 440-6754.