



SEARCH MARKETING:

IN HOUSE, OUT OR IN BETWEEN?



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A growing debate amongst retailers is the most effective structure for their Search Marketing efforts -- whether to handle your SEM efforts entirely within your organization, or to outsource to a specialized team of experts.

As the former head of Search Marketing for Things Remembered, I was a one person SEO/SEM team within the eCommerce department. I became the online marketing advocate for the company and helped to champion budget recommendations and organizational alignment. But at the same time, I felt isolated from other search engine professionals, and missed the support and creativity of a team environment. When I turned to running the eMergent Marketing team within Brulant, I became part of a 40+ member team that shares best practices, emerging strategies and out-of-the-the box thinking.

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Having been both on the "in-house" and "out" sides of search marketing, I recognize the unique factors that come into play as companies evaluate which solution is right for them.

IN-HOUSE VS. OUT: THE PROS AND CONS

By handling search marketing in-house, you foster a strong connection to your products and service offerings, and an in-depth understanding of your industry and top competitors. Your in-house team also has unobstructed access to your company's timely and complete forecasts, sales data, inventory, etc.

However, many of the best SEO/SEMs are extremely competitive individuals, and internal positions are not typically able to foster this competitive spirit. My interviews with in-house teams (and my own experience) reveal there is often a sense of boredom and eventual lack of motivation that comes with continually working on the same site as opposed to the new challenges and opportunities presented by cross-functional work. In addition, your professionals may feel that as part of a small internal team there is a lack of informal learning opportunities, which can inhibit professional growth and the ability to deliver in a rapidly changing environment. Couple that with the idea that SEM professionals are rarely equally trained or experienced in both organic optimization and paid search marketing, and you may be sacrificing by relying on one resource, or have to add overhead by investing in a larger in-house team.

Lastly, organizationally it is often difficult to drive change from within. While an entirely in-house team can offer better integration and coordination with other internal

departments, (i.e. marketing, merchandising, IT, and finance), external resources can often be needed to justify priorities, directional change, and budgets.

SO ASK YOURSELF..

When making the determination whether to outsource or not, consider the following questions:

- How dynamic/competitive is your industry? Will your campaigns require constant adjustment and testing?
- How aggressive are the goals for the search engine marketing efforts?
- Have you allocated the appropriate budget to support your marketing costs plus the fees of a qualified internal team or external partner?
- How likely are you to be able to attract, recruit, and retain top search engine marketing talent within your company?

HOW TO GET THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

An integrated team approach enables efficient maximization of the "Pros" associated with in-house and outsourcing models. Use of an external partner enables the client to:

- Introduce diverse skill sets and creative strategies
- Avoid the need to attract, recruit, and maintain hard to find and expensive resources
- Leverage best of breed tools and processes
- Maintain focus on other aspects of the business
- Potentially minimize cost risk by developing a performance-based partnership

