

round8 rough guide to search marketing

What Does It Involve?

The rapidly growing Search industry is now worth £2bn to the UK economy, and provides some of the most interesting and crucial career prospects in media. The role of a Search Marketer is to drive traffic to websites, with the eventual goal of getting people to spend money online. This can be done through using a combination of paid and organic search techniques.

In a professional capacity, most people specialise in either PPC (paid search) or SEO (organic search). However, as many people who work in the sector are internet enthusiasts, it is common to have experience of both sides of search marketing.

Running PPC campaigns involves making bids (like at an auction) on specific keywords so that the link to your website achieves a higher ranking on the search engines (Google, MSN, Yahoo!, etc.). This usually requires the analysis of lists of relevant keywords, which can sometimes be thousands of words long. It also requires you to be able to manage large budgets, as keywords will vary in cost according to their popularity. Many PPC specialists liken the buzz they receive to how they feel when playing an addictive computer game.

Natural Search, referred to as Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), involves the coding and structuring of websites, paying particular attention to site content. Again, this is to achieve as high a position as possible on the search engines. The effectiveness of the site is judged by the search 'spiders' which crawl the web and report their findings to the search engines. A successful SEO specialist will make the website appeal to both the search spider and the person viewing the site. SEO usually appeals to people from a web design or analytical background.

What Is The Environment Really Like?

As more and more businesses realise the importance of search marketing, teams are being created in every sector. This means working in search marketing can be like an office based job in any company, large or small. You will have targets to hit and will probably have to spend time training your colleagues in the importance of an effective search marketing strategy. One benefit is likely to be that you can work autonomously, and will play a crucial role in the business' marketing strategy.

Another option is to work for a media agency. Some of these are dedicated to search marketing, and only provide PPC or SEO services. Others have search marketing teams which sit within their structure alongside e-mail marketers, affiliate networkers, traffickers, general online marketers and sales teams. As you would expect, the huge number of agencies means there is no typical kind of environment. However, you can expect to be around enthusiastic, creative and motivated people who are keen to be at the forefront of technological developments.

What Are The Career Prospects?

Search marketing is still a young industry, having developed as a method of advertising since 2000. That means there is no such thing as a typical career path. However, there are opportunities to take your career in many different directions, ranging from account management to sales, online marketing to tool development. It is also possible to use your experience to become a high-earning consultant, or even set up your own agency and win your own clients. Furthermore, the UK is one of the world leaders in search marketing, so your skills will be valuable in other countries should you wish to travel or move abroad.

What Sort Of Training Will I Get?

Most employers will train you on the job, as they will have their own preferred ways of running campaigns, or will use bespoke software and technology. An agency is likely to pay for you to attend training sessions at the search engines themselves, so you can learn how each differs from the others. One of the best kinds of training, though, is what you teach yourself by reading regular blogs, online press, and experimenting with the free software available on the internet.

How Much Will I Earn?

Search marketers are very much in demand, and can often be very well paid for doing a job they love. Starting salaries for a Search Assistant (usually the most junior position in the team) begin at around £18,000. After around two years, you can easily earn in excess of £30,000, and Heads of Search can command salaries over £100,000. Commission is sometimes paid based on the effectiveness of your campaigns. It is normal for people who work client-side to earn slightly more than their agency counterparts. However, agency roles are often preferred because of the additional lifestyle benefits they can provide.

What Skills Do I Need To Do The Job?

There is no typical background or experience required to begin a lucrative career in search marketing. All that is required is an interest in the internet, an analytical mind and a good standard of written English. With these, you can progress quickly whether you work agency or client side.

Many people start by running their own small search campaigns for their own or friends' websites. This teaches you the basics of campaign management, and will let you know whether it's something you'd be interested in doing full time. It is easy to create an account with a search engine, to use the available free software, and to set up your campaign with small amounts of money. It is also a big plus on your CV if you've made the effort to try out search marketing for yourself.

Beyond this, employers are looking for strong personalities who will enjoy managing a portfolio of clients and won't be afraid to imagine creative ways of improving a search marketing campaign. Remember, search marketing is the fastest growing area of the internet, and is the natural home for innovative and entrepreneurial thinkers.

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