

How people use search

When people in a business start thinking about Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Pay per Click (PPC) or Social Media (SM) they generally start by thinking how it can benefit the business.

That, of course makes sense, but some outside in thought is also a good idea – in other words, how do people use search? By starting from the point of view of the person doing the searching you would seem much more likely to create an effective solution.

So, firstly let's look at how people use search.



SM (Facebook, Twitter etc) gets much of the publicity these days but search (and thus SEO and PPC) is still how most people find things on the web. 70% of web users have a search engine as their point of entry. Let's face it when you want something now, waiting for 'friends' to reply just doesn't cut it.

Having said that, recent research* shows that social media is important in the purchase process. Friend's opinions are valued.



Most people still start with search with 86% of them saying it is very important. People say they use it because of the quality and scale of information, habit or the fact that they have always used it, and because it's easy to use.

In addition quality and depth of information available from search are cited as crucial reasons for using search versus social media.

Research by WebVisible shows that, when it comes to **local search**, search engines are the number one resource for finding local business information.

Method	%
Search engines	74
Print yellow pages	65
Internet yellow pages	50
Traditional newspapers	44
Print white pages	33
Television	29
Consumer review websites	18

Percentages are greater than 100 because respondents were permitted to select more than one answer

*[The Virtuous Circle: The Role of Search and Social Media in the Purchase Pathway, February 2011](#)

- 9.2 search results were viewed before the first click. 6.6 organic and 2.6 sponsored at the top of the page.
- Searchers looking to buy viewed more results, 9.9 on average compared with 8.5 for information seekers.
- 10.4 seconds was spent on a page to view the search results. Organic results were viewed for 8.8 seconds and the sponsored results at the top and on the right were viewed for 2 and 0.2 seconds respectively.
- Buyers spent more time viewing results, 11.4 seconds compared with 9.4 seconds for searchers.

Why people click

The same research from De Vos & Jansen found seven main motives as to why people click on or avoid a search result **and these give some real clues as to what to put in your page titles and meta descriptions as well as your PPC adverts:**

1. Familiarity and reliability. I know and trust your brand – especially for 'transactional/buyers'.
2. Keyword(s) used in the query in the search result – especially for 'informational'.
3. Position in the search results. The search engine is "telling me" to trust you.
4. The opportunity to read user experiences or to compare different products.
5. Indirect price information such as references to 'low costs'.
6. Variety of products – "...even if you don't have exactly what I want...".
7. Consumers seem to avoid results with aggressive advertising.

Finally, research at NYU indicates that the presence of both organic and paid search listings has a positive benefit on click through and conversion rates:

- Click through rates were up an average of 5.1% when both paid and organic results were present.
- Conversion rates increased by 11.7%, when both were visible, compared to when only organic appeared.
- 54% of the total growth in revenue generated due to both ads being present was provided by paid search.