



Online Searches On Word 'TIRE' Can Bring Traffic To Your Store

An article written by Patrick W. Sandone for Tire Business Magazine (April 11, 2011)



(877) 860-2005 sales@getnetdriven.com www.getnetdriven.com

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The word “tire” was searched online more than 11 million times in the last month or so--- a simple fact highlighting why search engine optimization (SEO) can be so important to a business.

SEO is that art and science of ranking prominently on Google (and other search engines) in the “Natural or Organic Results.” Each month, when one of these 11 million searches is performed, your business has an opportunity to connect with new customers looking to buy tires.

Incidentally, more than 90 percent of these customers do not want to buy tires online, but do perform research online.

Using an online search engine is analogous to a potential customer’s checking a phone directory 15 years ago. Back then, buying a full-page ad in the “tires” section of the directory would ensure phone calls for your business when consumers in your community were looking for tires.

Today, this same logic applies, but consumers are not looking for tires in the phone directory--- most of them are looking for tires online. Good SEO has all the benefits that a full-page phone directory ad once had and more.

Search engine nuts & bolts

Before we dive into SEO, let’s talk a little about search engines and how they work.

By far, the most popular search engine for consumers looking for tires, and just about any other product, is Google. StatCounter shows Google with an 82.9-percent share of search usage for the most recent 12 months, while Yahoo and Bing were at 7.8 and 7.7 percent, respectively. When a consumer looks up tires on Google, your business has three main ways to connect with them--- natural results, local results and sponsored links.

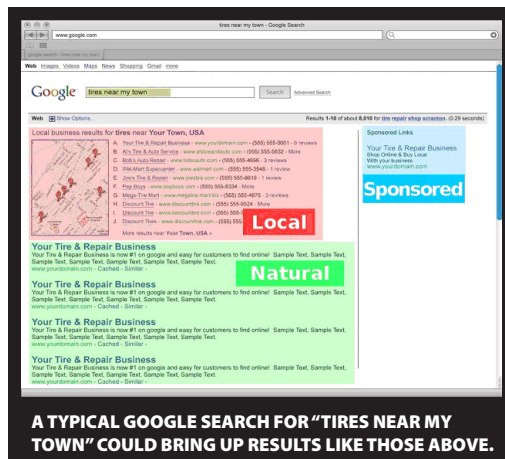
Natural Results: Natural (or organic) results are the non-paid listings on a search-engine results page. Pages are discovered by indexing services rather than users paying to have their sites listed. Factors that positively influence position in natural results are the number of external links to the site, keyword-rich content on the pages--- that is, con-

tent with frequent mentions of the business location and the word “tires”--- and well-constructed website code.

Local Results: Local results accompany a map on a search-engine results page. These show up above the natural results when a location is included in the search term. Local results can lead to large amounts of traffic, even for small businesses, because they are displayed prominently at the top of search results.

Sponsored Links: In sponsored links advertisers pay to have their websites listed in search results of their choosing. Sponsored links are displayed prominently at the top of the listings. Common methods of sponsored links included CPC (cost per click), where the advertiser pays for every click onto his or her website, and CPM (cost per 1,999 impressions), where the advertiser pays for every 1,000 times a link to his or her website is displayed on search listings, whether or not the link is clicked.

The local, natural and sponsored links sections are viable ways to connect with consumers, and each has a different strategy for ranking prominently. SEO is the name for the strategy to rank high in the natural results, and this can be one of the most cost-effective ways to connect with consumers online.



Improved visibility

The online resource Wikipedia defines SEO as “the process of improving the visibility of a website or a web page in search engines via the ‘natural’ or un-paid (‘organic’ or ‘algorithmic’) search results.” This is the process of helping your website appear higher on search results for relevant keywords.

For example, “Tires in Scranton” is a keyword term that might be important to tire dealers in Scranton, PA. Ranking high here could help you connect with new consumers looking to buy tires in your community. This is important because



many users of search engines do not go past the first page of the search results. If your business is listed in this position, this can make a lasting impression on the customers, leading to sales for you.

For local and regional tire dealers, the best focus for SEO is ranking high on searches with locally based keywords as opposed to just the term "tires," which is very competitive and dominated by national tire retailers and tire manufacturers who spend millions to be ranked prominently.

While the big boys might have an advantage on a term like "tires," local and regional businesses have an advantage on terms like "tires in Your City," "tires in Your State," or other city/state-based keywords. Indeed, these keyword strings can be valuable.

A quick analysis of one of Net Driven's customers found that for the term "tires in Edmonton" it received more than 500 unique visitors to its website in the last 30 days. A customer doing a search of this type is valuable since he or she likely is undecided. Even if Net Driven's client closed only 20 percent of those 500 accounts, this relates to 100 new customers just from one search term.

Strategies

There are many strategies that can be used to rank high for keywords of this type; some are simple and some more complex. Here are a few to consider (warning: a few of these are technical).

1. Great content – Search engines use the content (words) on your site as an indicator for what searches it should be ranked for. If you sell tires, you want to make sure that your website has lots of information on tires--- but not too much. Text should be naturally written. In other words, writing "tires" 1,000 times on a page won't help.

Also, not all words on your website are counted equally. Focus on using important

words in page titles, descriptions and deadlines where they have greater impact.

2. Focus on code – Putting good content on your site is the first step, but without the right website code, search engines might not be able to access your content. The following comments are for any aspiring Web developer reading this article.

First, using Flash for navigation on your website can be trouble if you can't make Flash objects web-crawler-friendly. Search engines have a difficult time accessing a website that uses Flash.

Second, avoid tables and use "div tags" instead--- these make your website easier to crawl. Also don't forget to get the maximum value from images by using "alt tags," and don't use images for text unless you use a CSS background image text replacement technique. These techniques will maximize the value of your content and give your website the credit it deserves.

3. Keep it fresh – One more comment on content: Keep it fresh. Adding new content like coupons, news stories, blog posts or even new tire data will keep the search engines coming back to your site more often and help you rank higher.

In summary, driving traffic to your website is one of the most important aspects of your Internet strategy and can be accomplished using SEO. A Web strategy without SEO is like building a retail store in the middle of the forest and not telling anyone it is there.

SEO can be one of the best ways to drive traffic online and can offer one of the highest marketing return-on-investments you can make. Performing SEO can be tricky, but by following the three steps above, you'll be far ahead of most of your competition and getting great traction online with new customers before you know it.



Patrick Sandone is president and founder of Scranton, Pa.-based Net Driven, launched in 2007 to provide "effective and affordable Web solutions to tire dealers and repairs shops." He previously worked as director of business development for Sandone Tire, his family's tire and auto service business in Scranton; as an associate with the venture capital firm Monitor Clipper Partners in Boston and Paris; and as an analyst with the investment banking firm Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette in New York City. Net Driven's services included custom websites, Internet marketing, social media and e-commerce specially focused on the tire and auto repair industry. Its website is www.getnetdriven.com. Mr. Sandone can be reached at psandone@getnetdriven.com.

