

**International Black Sea University**

**Faculty of Business Management**

**DEVELOPMENTS OF COMBINED METHOD FOR  
SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING (SEM)**

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Extended Abstract of Ph.D. Dissertation in Business Administration

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I acknowledge that this is my own work

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## **Introduction**

### **Subject Actuality**

Rapid technological progress and increasing availability of the Internet worldwide drive more and more organizations into online business market. As the number of online businesses increases, the role of internet marketing becomes more crucial in achieving organizational goals. However, in order to succeed online, companies need to market their products and services through search engines, which dominate the World Wide Web as the most visited web resources. The success in tough competition for obtaining new customers strongly depends on how organizations' websites are perceived and evaluated by search engines. Currently search traffic represents a valuable asset for any company engaged in e-business activities, and the role of Search Engine Marketing in overall business success cannot be underestimated.

Different companies use different strategies and approaches of SEM implementation. Constant algorithmic improvements of search engines forces companies to come up with new creative solutions. Many methods that worked perfectly yesterday are becoming less effective today. Annually organizations spend billions of dollars on SEM activities which are not always pay off. Due to the fact that there is no single way or approach which will guarantee the desired results for SEM, companies inevitably combine various methods and techniques to achieve targeted results based on available funds, target market size, etc... Thus, the main problem that online businesses face in SEM lies in selecting the most appropriate set of methods and techniques from many available options.

### **Research Goal**

Choosing the right combination of SEM methods requires a deep knowledge about possible positive or negative results of every SEM method that is available for implementation over short run and long run. The ultimate goal of the research is to find combined SEM methods and approaches for achieving organizational SEM goals. In order to derive an optimal combination of methods, individual SEM methods will be examined separately in the first place. Based on the results obtained for the examined SEM methods, it will be possible to conclude what methods to choose and how to implement those methods for achieving the desired effectiveness in SEM.

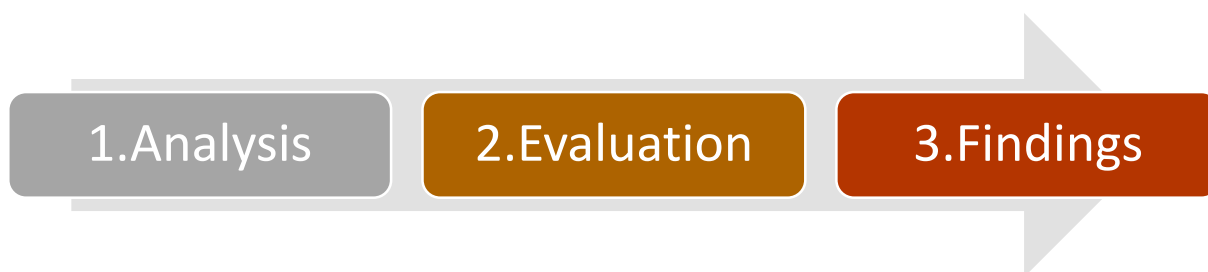
## Research Approach & Methodology

The logic behind general research approach of the dissertation involves the following steps:

1. Analyze the results of the applied SEM methods separately in order to identify the expediency of their implementation in SEM campaigns.
2. Discuss findings from the research results and aggregate the obtained findings.
3. Derive combined SEM methods based on the findings.

The analysis of each SEM method consists of three stages. The figure below illustrates the research approach applied to a sample SEM method graphically.

*Figure 1: Research Approach Applied to a Single SEM Method*

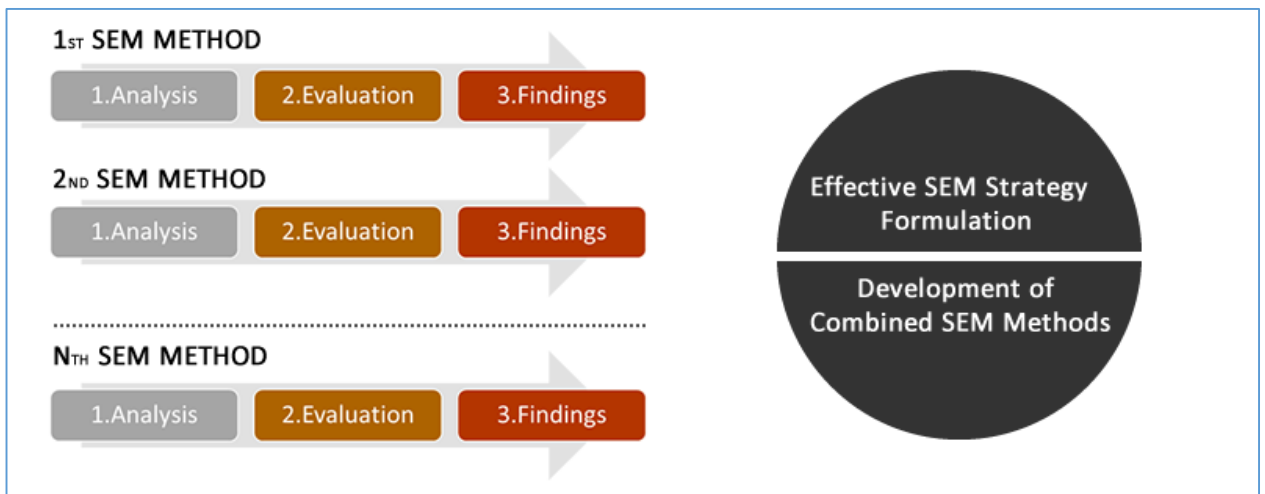


The following list presents SEM methods that are researched and scrutinized in the dissertation.

1. *Doorway Pages*
2. *Keyword Stuffing Practices*
3. *HTML Tags / Attributes Optimization*
4. *Content Correction & Optimization*
5. *URL / Domain Name Optimization*
6. *Link Buying & Engagement in Link Schemes*
7. *Social Media Marketing*
8. *Outgoing Links Optimization / Device Optimization*
9. *Canonicalization*

Firstly, the method that was applied to a live working website, is tested and analyzed. Based on the results obtained from the first stage, the method is assessed in terms of its effectiveness, search engine friendliness and total impact on SEM process. Thereafter, the findings and implications are made about the advisability of its implementation in SEM campaigns. Finally, the obtained results will be aggregated and analyzed to develop an effective SEM strategy for solving modern SEM problems of online businesses engaged in search traffic competition (Figure 2).

Figure 2: General Research Approach



The research was conducted on several live websites, which are operating online for many years. The following table presents the list of websites, which were used as a platform for implementing and analyzing the impact of the applied SEM methods and techniques on SEM results.

Table 1: List of Websites Used During Research & Corresponding Research Areas

Website	Research Areas
World Building Directory ( <a href="http://www.building.am">www.building.am</a> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effectiveness of doorways and keyword stuffing practices</li> <li>• The importance of content optimization under targeted keywords</li> <li>• The impact of meta tags optimization under targeted keywords</li> <li>• URL keywords impact on websites' SERP performance</li> <li>• The impact of keywords found in domain name</li> <li>• The effectiveness of sophisticated link schemes</li> <li>• The impact of social media marketing on search traffic</li> <li>• The impact of outgoing links quality on search engine rankings</li> <li>• The importance of device optimization in the context of SEM</li> <li>• The expediency of canonicalization process</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The domain zone impact on websites' SERP performance</li> <li>• Visitor behavior impact on websites' position in SERP</li> </ul>
<p>Construction Portal Armenia (<a href="http://www.construction.am">www.construction.am</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page title impact on positions in search results</li> <li>• URL keywords impact on websites' Image SERP performance</li> <li>• The effectiveness of sophisticated link schemes</li> <li>• The impact of outgoing links quality on search engine rankings</li> <li>• The impact of domain age on websites' SERP performance</li> <li>• The impact of the content volume on search engine rankings</li> <li>• Visitor behavior impact on websites' position in SERP</li> </ul>
<p>The Official Website of Comfy LLC (<a href="http://www.comfy.am">www.comfy.am</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link buying effectiveness and consequences</li> </ul>
<p>Fashion Industry News (<a href="http://www.fashion-book.org">www.fashion-book.org</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effectiveness of sophisticated link schemes</li> <li>• The impact of outgoing links quality on search engine rankings</li> <li>• Visitor behavior impact on websites' position in SERP</li> </ul>
<p>Armenian Business Pages (<a href="http://www.pages.am">www.pages.am</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page title impact on positions in search results</li> <li>• How image HTML attributes affect positions in SERP</li> </ul>
<p>Web Development Services (<a href="http://www.web-construction.info">www.web-construction.info</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effectiveness of sophisticated link schemes</li> </ul>
<p>Online Shop of Organic Products in Armenia (<a href="http://www.organicshop.am">www.organicshop.am</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effectiveness of doorways and keyword stuffing practices</li> <li>• The effectiveness of sophisticated link schemes</li> </ul>
<p>The Official Website of Avalon Company (<a href="http://www.avalonconstruction.ru">www.avalonconstruction.ru</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effectiveness of sophisticated link schemes</li> <li>• The impact of domain age on websites' SERP performance</li> <li>• The impact of the content volume on search engine rankings</li> </ul>
<p>Petrol Live Prices Armenia (<a href="http://www.petrol.am">www.petrol.am</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effectiveness of sophisticated link schemes</li> </ul>
<p>Collection of Funny Buildings (<a href="http://www.funnybuildings.com">www.funnybuildings.com</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The impact of keywords found in domain name.</li> <li>• The domain zone impact on websites' SERP performance</li> <li>• Visitor behavior impact on websites' position in SERP</li> </ul>

Several SEM methods were not examined due to sufficiency of available knowledge about their effectiveness and implementation advisability. The following list summarizes excluded SEM methods and techniques:

1. *Cloaking / Content Hiding Practices*
2. *Link Posting Activities*
3. *Paid Search Advertising*
4. *Browser Compatibility Enhancement*
5. *Web Page Speed Optimization*
6. *Malware Removal & Protection from Hacking Attacks*
7. *Sitemap Submission / Server Uptime Monitoring*
8. *Geotargeting / URL Redirection*
9. *Language Optimization / Usage of Search Engine Friendly Technology*

## **Data Collection**

There are two types of data collected and used during the conducted research – SERP position data at specific point of time and historical time-series data. Data analysis add-ins available in Microsoft Excel 2013 software were used to analyze the collected data for research purposes. Several experiments and tests were carried out by using both types of available data.

The historical data was collected through Google Analytics and Google Webmaster Tools programs installed on the research websites back in 2011. The data obtained through Google Analytics includes historical traffic figures, traffic segments, information about keywords through which the websites were accessed, landing pages, visitors' geographical location, device information, visitors' behavior on the web pages, referring websites information, etc... Historical SERP position information and keyword significance levels related to several research websites were obtained through Google's Webmaster Tools. It is important to note that the historical traffic data used in the research is not available for public and represents the property of Comfy LLC, which granted an exclusive access to the usage of the data for research purposes.

SERP position data at specific point of time was collected through search simulation process undertaken at popular search websites by running search queries specially designed for specific SEM methods analysis. Search process was implemented by disabling all available customization options offered by the search websites in order to attain results which are not biased

by user's search history and personalization settings. All search phrases were executed on several computers with different network parameters to eliminate possible SERP position fluctuations associated with user's activities on computer.

### **Originality & Novelty**

Due to the fact that giant corporations are setting the pace in search marketing by constantly modifying mathematical algorithms that are empowering search websites, an up to date authentic data related to the process of analyzing and ranking websites by search engines becomes vital for constructing effective SEM strategies for organizations. That type of data is usually not available for public and represents a corporate secret of an organization engaged in online business activities. The conducted research compensates the lack of such original data available for research purposes. It is comprised of unique experiments and valid data analysis, which serve as a basis for constructing an effective strategy for achieving organizational SEM goals through combining various SEM methods. Moreover, the obtained results made it possible to draw bold conclusions about the effectiveness and efficiency of separate SEM methods as well.

The concept of combining various SEM methods is used by many companies operating online. However, the combination process is usually based on such factors that cannot guarantee the successful outcome. For instance, ease of implementation or information found on untrusted web resources can play a decisive role for online startups without sufficient experience in SEM in choosing methods and techniques for inclusion in SEM process. The research evaluates the majority of widely used SEM methods and proposes **a novel and scientifically confirmed** solution for solving different types of search marketing problems regardless of specific organizational goals, marketing budget or timeframe of SEM campaigns.

### **Practical & Scientific Importance**

The proposed general strategy for combining SEM methods

- can serve as a practical guideline for organizations in planning and implementing successful SEM campaigns,
- can be easily implemented in practice by e-businesses for adjustments and modifications of search marketing approaches that were used before for improving an overall effectiveness of SEM efforts.



On the whole, the constructed solutions will have a **significant practical value** not only for online start-ups, but also for mature companies operating online for many years, which need to keep up with continuous changes that occur in search engines' world.

The designed method for SEM consolidates many innovative proposals derived from the research results with some of the generally known SEM ideas and approaches, which were confirmed to be valid through various scientific experiments. The undertaken experiments and analysis **significantly contribute** to the current knowledge database of SEM also by adding an up-to-date and reliable information about the negative consequences and positive outcomes of separate search marketing methods and techniques which are widely-used by online companies. Finally, the research is carried out not only to enrich the scientific knowledge in the field of Search Engine Marketing, but also to reveal future trends of online marketing evolution. As it will be shown later, different forms of online marketing can have a positive or negative impact on SEM, and vice-versa. Although the research has a clear focus on SEM, the obtained results and findings can be used in related fields such as social media marketing or web development.

## Brief Contents

The dissertation is comprised of five main parts – *Introduction, Chapter 1. Background & Literature Review, Chapter 2. Research Methodology, Chapter 3. Research and Discussions, Findings & Conclusion*. The introduction discusses the actuality of the subject and briefly presents the research methodology, research goals and problems, practical significance and contribution to knowledge. Thereafter, the background for the research is discussed in the first chapter of the dissertation. Firstly, it provides general knowledge about search engines and discusses the role of search engines in online business world. Then the first chapter explores search engine marketing process and describes all popular search engine marketing methods that are widely used in online marketing campaigns including keyword optimization, backlink building, website performance optimization, paid search etc.... It covers issues related to effectiveness and search engine friendliness of various SEM methods and emphasizes the problem for many organizations seeking to combine different methods for attaining better results.

The second chapter describes in detail the research general approach and the methodology used to conduct the research including the list of the websites that were used to carry out experiments or to analyze historical traffic figures. Data collection mechanisms and the methodological approaches used to analyze the effectiveness and implementation advisability of SEM methods are discussed in detail. Besides, several SEM methods, which are not the subject of the research due to sufficient available knowledge for making logical inferences about the usage of these methods in SEM campaigns, are also stressed out.

The undertaken research is described in the third chapter of the dissertation. Keyword optimization methods and techniques are examined in the first place. The obtained results justify the huge importance of keyword optimization practices in achieving organizational SEM goals. As the research revealed, keyword existence on page content, page title, URL and domain name play an important role for all major search engines in organic search listings sorting algorithms. With a few exceptions, all keyword optimization methods can be crucial for search traffic competition.

Thereafter, the third chapter deals with common ways of backlink building, which are not consistent with search engines' rules and guidelines. In order to identify consequences of buying links and participating in sophisticated link schemes, those practices were experimentally applied

to live websites. The results show that, as opposed to link schemes and exchange practices, which are not easily discovered by search engines, paid links pose too much risk to organizations engaged in such backlink building activities. Then, historical social and search traffic figures for hundreds of landing pages is compared and analyzed in order to unfold the true impact of social media marketing on achieving search marketing goals. The obtained data imply the importance of social media marketing not only as an effective backlink building method in SEM, but also as a powerful channel for raising web community's interest in targeted topics or search terms.

Further, the chapter examines device compatibility enhancement and outgoing links optimization in the context of SEM. The vital importance of outgoing links continuous monitoring and management process is proved through special experiment, which uncovers how search engines react on the quality and the quantity of outgoing links. Historical mobile traffic analysis reaffirms that companies ignoring necessary activities towards device optimization will suffer more in the future due to constantly increasing volume of global mobile traffic on the Web. At the end, the chapter presents an additional research and analysis which will enrich the knowledge about search engine marketing and help organizations to implement more effective SEM strategies.

Finally, the research findings about the examined methods are aggregated in the final part. It presents workable and effective solution to the problem of achieving organizational SEM goals through combining SEM methods based on the obtained results. Conclusion summarizes the research results, discusses practical and scientific importance of the developed method and offers insights about further research areas for solving search marketing problems in the future.

## Discussion, Findings & Conclusion

### Discussion of Results

The undertaken research revealed several important **novelties** related to individual search marketing methods either applied or intentionally omitted on live websites. These results are later used to construct an effective SEM strategy and to develop a novel method for achieving organizational SEM goals.

*Doorway Pages & Keyword Stuffing Practices:* The conducted research showed that creation of doorway pages through mild keyword stuffing techniques can bring additional search traffic for organizations. The obtained facts about doorways' positions in search results imply that search engines do not possess sufficient abilities to identify and remove such pages from their indices. Although doorways are designed to "steal" search traffic and do not offer any valuable information for website visitors, they can serve as an additional tool for obtaining extra search visits for organizations without search traffic conversion goals.

*Keyword Existence Experiments:* The obtained results confirmed the significant positive contribution of the vast majority of keyword optimization methods to achievement of high organic SERP positions. As the experiments showed, content, web page title and URL optimization practices under targeted keywords substantially improve search traffic volume received by companies. It was also proved that domain names containing relevant keywords also have an essential contribution in promoting websites through search engines, despite on that search engine officials constantly deny that fact. Lastly, common perception about the real impact of keywords inserted into meta tags on search results seems to be distorted. The research unfolded that the usefulness of these tags is certainly overestimated.

*Link Buying Practices & Link Schemes:* The undertaken research uncovered that paid links represent a serious threat to organizations' success in achieving SEM goals. Although link buying is the most rapid way of increasing backlink mass for organizations' website, it is also the most risky one. As opposed to paid links, link scheme realization practices can serve as a working mechanism for obtaining high quality backlinks. If implemented professionally, link schemes will surely increase total backlink mass of promoted websites, which in turn can have a positive effect on search engine rankings over the long run.

*Social Media Marketing:* It was discovered that social networks can have a great impact on search traffic volume and hence on overall SEM success. Besides being as the most search engine friendly way of obtaining organic backlinks, social media marketing substantially boosts the popularity of targeted search terms among network members. Although social media marketing represents a separate form of online marketing, it also can serve as a powerful SEM method that exploits conquered top SERP positions by enhancing users' interest in specific subjects, which eventually results in increased search traffic volume.

*Outgoing Links Optimization:* The experimental deterioration of outgoing links' overall quality reaffirmed the huge impact of outgoing links on websites' search engine friendliness level. The results suggest that search engines pay a close attention to website link structure, quality and total quantity. Neglecting outgoing links quality can seriously harm not only the dynamic web resources with a lot of user-generated content, but also static websites which keep the number of outgoing links approximately on the same level during long period of time. While websites with dynamic content should mainly focus on user-generated spam removal, static ones need to monitor linked websites to ensure their quality over time. So in order to maintain the desired level of search engine friendliness and avoid sanctions from search engines for linking to untrusted web resources, organizations need to continuously monitor outgoing links and remove those that can cause troubles.

*Device Compatibility Enhancement:* Emerging of new devices with the Internet access raises the importance of different compatibility issues to a new level. The ease of navigation, user-friendly interface, high level of compatibility across various platforms and devices can play a decisive role for visitors to accept or reject products and services offered by organizations online. Hence, in order to maximize organic search traffic and conversion rate, companies need to implement device optimization activities to ensure that potential customers would not be lost to competitors due to device compatibility issues. The importance of device compatibility enhancement is also reinforced by constantly increasing mobile traffic volume observed last years.

*Canonicalization:* Although canonicalization process is encouraged by search engines and aims to reduce duplicate content volume, websites are not penalized for neglecting this process because the existence of non-canonical pages does not imply any malicious or deceptive behavior and usually is the result of specific URL architecture. The research unfolded that search engines successfully identify non-canonical web pages and automatically substitute those pages with their canonical counterparts in search results. Therefore, in order to cut costs and save time, canonicalization process can be omitted and left to search engines.

*Domain Age & Content Volume:* The obtained results from the experiments dealing with domain history and total volume of content imply that old-aged websites with solid content have a competitive advantage over their “young” counterparts. In other words, search engines view domain age as one of the indicators of trustworthiness and adjust their algorithms accordingly.

*TLD Zone:* As opposed to web search traffic competition, TLD zone can play an important role in image search traffic competition. The results revealed that all major global search engines crawl images hosted at **.com** zone more frequently than at country-specific TLD zones. This can result in wrong decisions made by image spiders regarding primary sources of images. Hence, companies competing for image search traffic should pay a close attention to TLD zone selection in order to defend their position as a primary source for unique image files.

*Bounce Rate & Other Visitor Behavior Variables:* The analysis of historical visitor behavior variables had not found any visible connections between SERP positions of organic listings and visitors’ behavior after entering web pages from search results. Although bounce rate, average visit duration and page depth are collected and stored by search engines, the latter do not make any SERP adjustments based on the values of behavioral variables. The research results revealed that web pages with poor visitor behavior statistics retain their SERP positions over time.

## **Derived SEM Strategy**

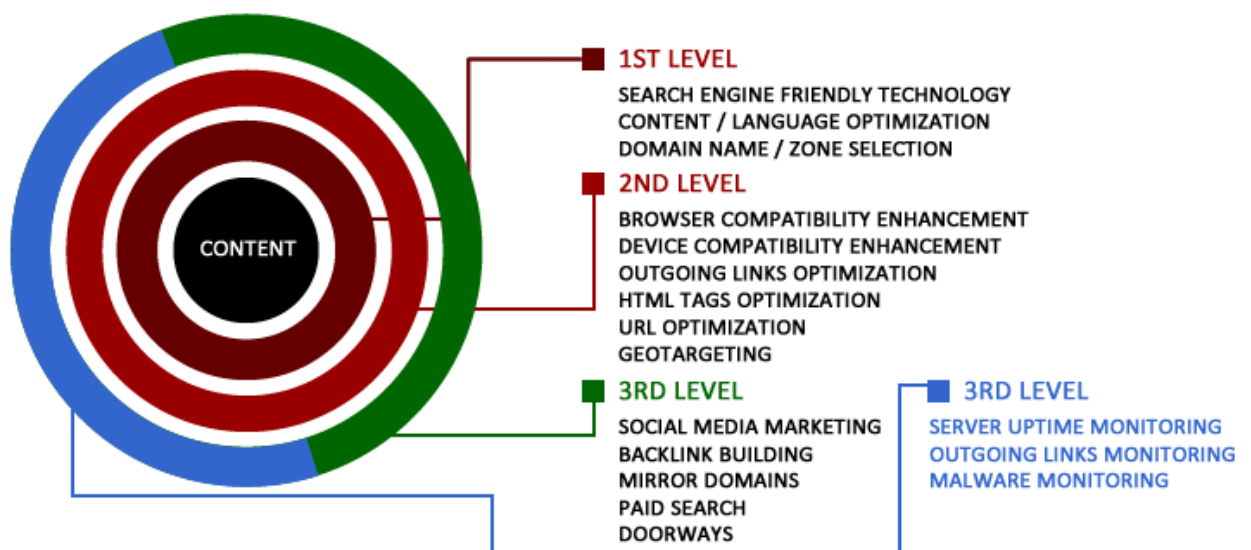
The research results confirmed that SEM strategies focusing on backlink building through various popular methods cannot be the effective ones. The findings imply that total backlink mass does not play a decisive role in the process of sorting organic listings by search engines. In other words, today’s search engines offer even more content-oriented ranking algorithms than before. In order to construct an effective SEM strategy, organizations need to focus on content-related optimization methods and techniques, whereas backlink building activities should be considered as supplemental. The obtained results speak about the key role of content in search engines’ algorithms. The wrong conception about the role of the content for modern search engines is the main cause of poor SEM results for many organizations, which underestimate the content and overvalue other supplemental methods.

However, unique content is necessary, but not sufficient condition for achieving organizational SEM goals. The conducted research showed that content “packaging” is also vital for SEM success. For instance, it was shown that unoptimized content, poor HTML markup and

randomly generated URLs will result in improper assessment by search engines and can put websites with high-quality content behind their weak competitors. Furthermore, the “packaging” has substantial impact not only on search engine rankings and SERP positions, but also on human visitors, who surely will prefer attractive websites with convenient navigation and design over web pages that have compatibility problems. Thus, companies need to achieve a “packaging” balance between search engine friendliness and web design in order to make the content attractive both for humans and search engine robots. Overall, it can be concluded that content quality, compatibility and search engine friendliness are the core components of a successful SEM campaign, whereas other activities can serve as additional tools for achieving organizational SEM goals.

The obtained findings make it possible to construct a general strategy, which will encapsulate the content-oriented concept of search marketing. The figure below depicts the strategy graphically.

*Figure 3: Proposed Strategy for Combining SEM Methods*



As the figure shows, content should be the main focus of the effective strategy for combining SEM methods. The dark red inner circle represents the core SEM activities that are vital for search traffic competition. It involves content optimization and usage of search engine friendly technology in web development process. Besides, domain name and zone selection are also included in this stage due to the fact that changing domain name after website was launched will result in the loss of accumulated trust and all of backlinks associated with the previous domain. Although the initial

domain name selection process is not directly connected with content, it represents a unique identifier of the content and hence should be considered in the first place.

The second red circle involves SEM methods and techniques that are strongly recommended for implementation after the core SEM activities. Along with compatibility enhancement methods that aim to increase visitor experience and satisfaction level, it contains also SEO activities for boosting website positions in search results and increasing search engine friendliness. Overall, implementation of those methods reflects the “content packaging” concept, and combined with the first level activities, represents the main set of methods which are crucial for achieving SEM goals in modern e-business world.

Finally, the outer circle stands for supplemental SEM activities that are not directly related to the content. As it can be seen in the figure, these methods are divided into two groups. The first group (marked blue in the figure) aggregates continuous SEM monitoring activities for maintaining search engine friendliness over time. The second group (marked green in the figure) contains various SEM methods for increasing search traffic either by backlink building activities (link schemes and free link posting practices) or through social media marketing, paid search, doorways and mirror domains. On the whole, the third level contains SEM methods that will have a positive contribution in overall search marketing process by ensuring additional search traffic for companies and increasing the probability of successful conversions.

However, the role of the supplemental methods in achieving desired SEM results should not be underestimated. It is important to note that methods’ combination strategy depicted in Figure 3 does not divide SEM methods based on their effectiveness. For instance, paid search or social media marketing are among most effective SEM methods for raising search traffic. The concept behind the division into 3 levels lies in the priorities of implementation and reflects the logical connections between problems each of the methods are designed to solve. For instance, one can still receive high volume of search traffic with poorly optimized content through social media marketing or keyword targeting through mirror domains, but the conversion rate will be substantially lower. Analogically, paid search will boost domains position to the top, resulting in increased search traffic, but the overall SEM results will be disappointing for the same reasons. Speaking differently, the effectiveness and efficiency of the methods from the 3<sup>rd</sup> group will be significantly lower in case of ignoring any activities from the first two groups. So before promoting the content via combined supplemental activities, companies need to prepare and “pack up” that content through various SEO techniques.



## **Development of Combined SEM Method**

The obtained findings and the constructed general strategy make it possible to develop a **new** combined SEM method that can be used for achieving the desired results in search engine marketing process. The method, which is described in detail below, consists of **9 main steps** and fully corresponds to the effective strategy proposed in the previous subchapter. It embodies the content-oriented approach of SEM and is designed to solve search marketing problems that organizations face while operating in online business world both for short-term and long-term perspectives. The implementation of the method involves website coding and online marketing activities, which are mutually complementary.

*Step 1 - Planning Goals:* The beginning of a successful SEM involves several planning and preparation activities, which should serve as a basis for an effective implementation of the further steps. Firstly, it includes an identification and clear formulation of organizational SEM goals. A company needs to precisely define what is expected to be achieved through SEM efforts. The SEM budget, timeframe of the campaign and the visitor conversion mechanisms ought to be determined during this phase.

*Step 2 - Keyword Research & Competition Analysis:* After the goals are clearly formulated, a thorough keyword research and competition analysis should be undertaken. Firstly, it includes an identification of keyword phrases and search terms, which should bring a valuable search traffic into promoted websites. In other words, an SEM specialist needs to separate keyword groups that are strongly relevant to the content of a website and ensure the semantic consistency with the defined SEM goals. In parallel with the keyword research process, a competition analysis for keyword segments must be undertaken to determine the feasibility of receiving the desired traffic level for the given marketing budget.

*Step 3 - Content / Language Optimization:* The next phase starts with content optimization activities, which should be in line with the undertaken keyword research results and marketing goals. Necessary content corrections and language adjustments are made to ensure the desired level of content uniqueness and consistency with target keyword segments. This process mainly involves three groups of activities – undertaking translations, keyword optimizations and boosting content uniqueness.

*Step 4 - Ensuring Search Engine Friendliness:* The next step of the method involves several SEM activities that aim to secure the desired search engine friendliness level of a website. It

involves outgoing links management, usage of search engine friendly technologies and domain name selection process.

*Step 5 - HTML / URL Optimization:* After the content is optimized and the basic activities for securing the website's search engine friendliness are undertaken, SEM moves to the next step, which involves markup and coding optimization practices for boosting the website's positions in search results. As the obtained results suggest, HTML optimization mainly must deal with web page title modifications, meta tags corrections and special image attribute optimization under the targeted keywords. Thereafter, the URL structure and its relevance to the web page keywords should be analyzed in order to determine the possible weak points. If the analysis implies that there is a space for optimization, URL structure ought to be revised for achieving better URL relevancy with the keywords included in the content.

*Step 6 - Enhancing Website Compatibility:* In this step, an SEM specialist assesses websites' compatibility issues and determines the set of necessary developments required to implement in order to enhance websites' performance for different devices, platforms, operating systems, browsers, etc...

*Step 7 - Increasing Search Traffic & Popularity:* The seventh step is comprised of the three parallel directions of SEM, which do not have a strict sequence of implementation and serve as a supplemental tools for achieving SEM goals. During this step, organizations must choose the most appropriate directions of boosting search traffic and website popularity depending on various business factors like organizational SEM goals, financial capabilities, content quality, time limitations, competition, target market properties, etc... Based on the above mentioned factors, a company will be able to make a decision from the options presented below.

- *Simultaneously realize **all of the three** SEM directions in its marketing campaign*
- *Choose **one or two** directions for implementation*
- *Totally **omit** the seventh step*

It is important to note that although theoretically the third decision is possible to be an optimal one among the options, but due to the constant increase of online web resources and tough competition, currently it is very hard to imagine special cases when the seventh step can be omitted without a risk of losing valuable search visitors to the competitors.

*Step 7.1 - Social Media Marketing & Backlink Building:* As the research confirmed, social media can serve as a powerful platform for exploiting attained top positions in search results and

will surely increase search traffic volume through increasing popularity of the subject among online community members. Although all of the major social networks provide many marketing tools for free, paid social media advertising opportunities are more effective compared with their free counterparts. So before launching a social media marketing campaign, a detailed analysis of possible options should be undertaken by taking into account budget expenditures and the expected gain. Nevertheless, the optimal decision is to take advantage of free social media marketing instruments and leave the paid options for closing the gaps or launching special short-term mini-campaigns.

Along with social media marketing tools, backlink building mechanisms can also serve as an alternative and much cheaper way for increasing website popularity. However, as the conducted experiments revealed, the effectiveness of various backlink building techniques, including link schemes and pseudo-organic link posting activities, is much lower than social media marketing. Implementation of backlink building alone without other supplemental methods will not have a substantial positive impact on search marketing results. Thus, these activities should be combined with other mechanisms for increasing website popularity online.

Step 7.2 - Mirror Domains & Doorways: In case of heavy competition and sufficient financial capabilities, purchasing mirror domains under targeted keywords will bring an extra search traffic to the organizational website by improving search positions due to the keyword existence in additional domain names. Mirror domains can be a workable solution for those kind of companies that have problems in tackling competition for specific keywords via other keyword optimization methods described in the previous steps. Realization of doorways through mild keyword “stuffing” practices can have a positive contribution to the organizational SEM efforts only in case when conversion of search visitors is not among SEM goals.

Step 7.3 - Paid Search Advertising: Finally, paid search represents the fastest and the most expensive way for increasing popularity and search traffic at the same time. Because of the fact that paid search advertising in its various forms does not have an impact on organic search results, the decision regarding inclusion of this method in the SEM campaign is mainly determined by simple comparison of the expected gain with the cost of purchasing keywords. Getting search traffic through purchased top positions for vital keywords in highly competitive segments is the most common problem that paid search advertising can solve. Besides, paid search can be used also for branding purposes by companies that possess sufficient funds and aim to boost brand awareness through SEM campaigns.

Step 8 - Monitoring Search Engine Friendliness: The third phase of the developed method consists of continuous monitoring activities, which aim to identify both technical and strategic errors. The following list presents required SEM methods for identifying possible technical errors over time in order to maintain the achieved level of search engine friendliness.

- *Monitoring Server Quality*
- *Monitoring the Quality of Outgoing links*
- *Monitoring Website for Malware, Viruses and Other Types of Hacking Attacks*

Step 9 - Analysis & Adjustments: Finally, the last step of the method involves conducting an analysis of the achieved results and making necessary corrective adjustments. Collecting historical analytical data through various software solutions, running experimental search simulations, closely monitoring the competition and maintaining an up-to-date knowledge about algorithmic modifications by search engines will help organizations to decide if there is a need for adjustments. If the results are unsatisfactory, organizations need to determine the cause of the failure and take corrective measures.

## **Conclusion**

The research results suggest, in order to achieve the maximum efficiency, organizations need to apply a **content-oriented approach** of combining SEM methods. That concept was used as basis for constructing the **9-step combined method**, which can be easily implemented in practice not only by online startups, but also by experienced companies owning mature and trustworthy websites. Overall, the obtained results and aggregated findings were used

- to construct an **effective** SEM strategy,
- to develop a **new combined** SEM method for achieving organizational online marketing goals.

In conclusion, it is worth to evaluate the expected viability of the developed approach for combining SEM methods in the future. The current trends suggest that **the role of the content will only increase** along with search engines' evolution, and striving for valuable search traffic without high-quality and optimized content will be even **more challenging tomorrow**. Thus, the proposed combined SEM method based on the content-oriented strategy not only represents the optimal solution for succeeding in search engine marketing today, but also conforms with the expectations about the evolution of search engines in the future.

## List of Publications

- **Vladimir Minasyan**, (2012), Inside Search Engine Marketing (SEM), IBSU Journal of Business, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2012, pp. 35-38
- **Vladimir Minasyan**, (2014), Search Engine Friendliness of Search Engine Marketing Methods, IBSU Journal of Business in Volume 3 Issue 1, May 2014, pp. 47-51
- **Vladimir Minasyan**, (2014), The Role of Facebook's Marketing Tools in Achieving Organizations' E-Marketing Goals, IBSU Journal of Business in Volume 3 Issue 1, May 2014, pp. 53-56