

According to a 2001 IMT Strategies study, 45.8 percent of Web users cited search engines as their top choice for finding new Web sites. Not surprisingly, a top keyword position in a search engine can be key to growing your business.

Test your site by going to a search engine such as Google and typing a keyword that relates to your business. Does your Web site appear? If not, you need to explore search engine marketing.

Sure, it's possible to improve your ranking on a search engine by changing your Web site design, but this is hard to do and takes a longer time to show any effect. Plus, design doesn't guarantee a high ranking. There's a faster, easier way that's more effective: Paying for a sponsored link.

Most major search engines will let you open an account for less than \$100. Then, simply choose your keywords, ad copy and landing pages (the pages people see when they click on your links). You'll pay a per-click fee determined by other advertisers' bids. Keywords may range from 5 cents to \$2.50 or more per click. Pay one penny more than the next advertiser, and the search engine will place your link above theirs. Your account is debited only for clicks on your listings. Usually, it takes just 72 hours for your Web site listing to appear on the search engines.

To achieve maximum exposure with your target audience, choose popular keywords. But also pick phrases (not single words) that are focused to reduce your per-click fees, as popular terms have more advertisers and therefore higher bid rates. Select terms that relate to your company name, product or service, mission statement or the benefits you provide. For help, try these