

# Forrester Consulting

HELPING BUSINESS THRIVE ON TECHNOLOGY CHANGE

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## **B2B Search Marketing Best Practices**

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## Profile Of Business Search Users

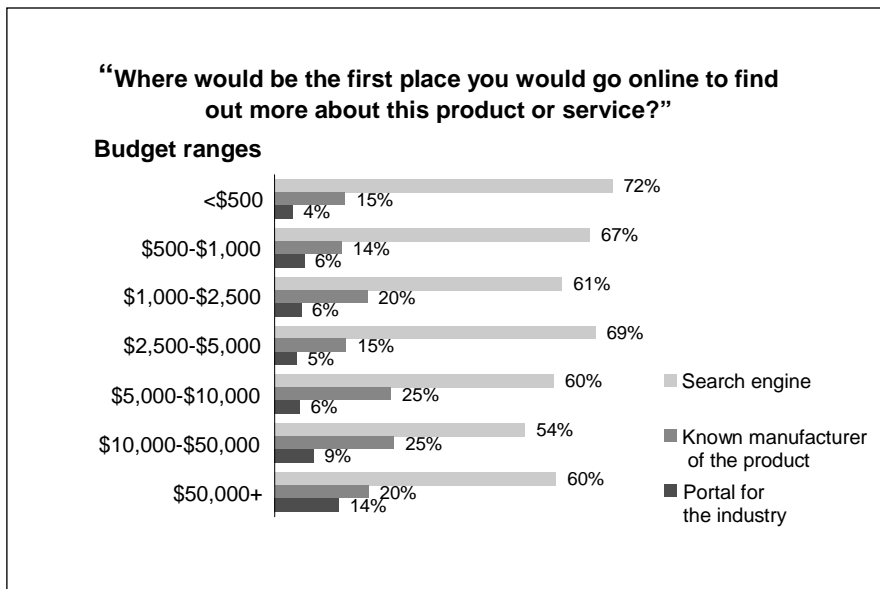
There's no doubt that businesspeople have different priorities than consumers when they use search to accomplish their goals – but does their search usage differ that much? We used both survey data from Forrester and Enquiro, as well as our marketer interviews, to understand if and how search use differed between B2B and B2C searchers.

### Search Engine Use In the Buying Process

First, search engines were far and away the preferred starting point to research products and services (see Figure 1). This was true regardless of the budget range for the purchase. One person said:

*“There’s nothing unique about B2B search. Whether we’re searching for a two-cent product or something highly considered, we still pull up to the computer and type words into a search engine.”*

**Figure 1: Most B2B Buyers Turn First To Search Engines**



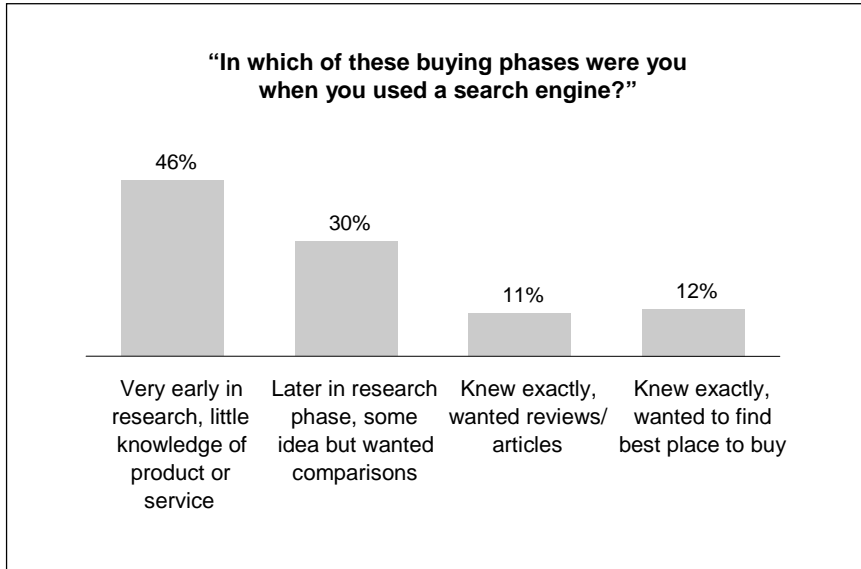
Source: Enquiro, B2B Survey Summary, October 2004<sup>1</sup>

Second, B2B searchers were likely to use the search engine very early in the buying process (see Figure 2). Almost half (46%) used search before they had much knowledge about the product or service, versus 12% who used a search engine to find the best place to buy a specific product/service. This is similar to what B2C searchers do, where 68% use search during the consideration phase versus 28% who use it to purchase (Source: Enquiro)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> This report is available at <http://www.enquiro.com/Downloads/Downloads.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> Enquiro “Inside The Mind Of The Searcher, <http://www.enquiro.com/Downloads/Downloads.aspx>.

Figure 2: Search Is Used Early In The Buying Process



Source: Enquiro, B2B Survey Summary, October 2004

### Search Engine Effectiveness

Overall, B2B searchers often found success in their online searches (see Figure 3). Only 8% said that they could not find what they were looking for. But several interviewers said that finding specific items remained troublesome:

*"It's all about getting no more than three pages of really relevant search results. I use a lot of terms to try to narrow the selection."*

Figure 3: Most B2B Searchers Found What They Were Looking For

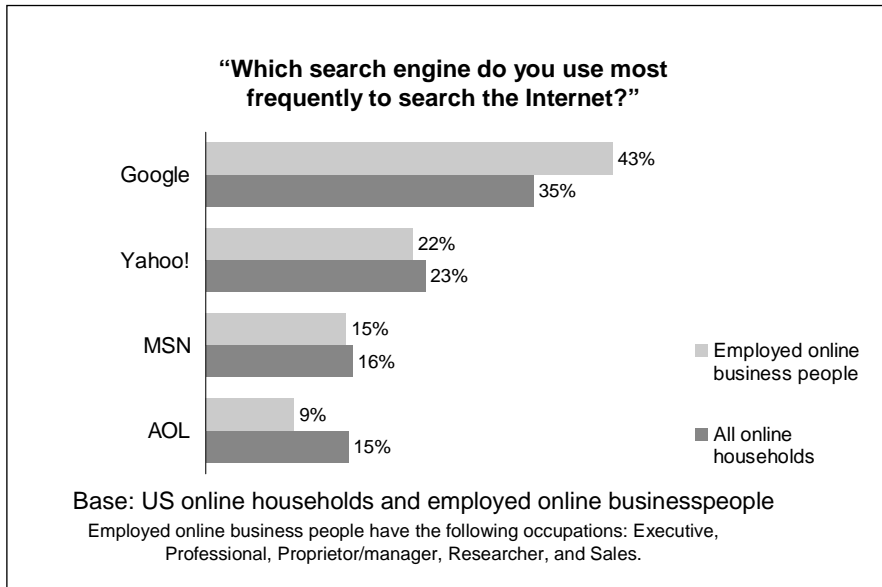


Source: Enquiro, B2B Survey Summary, October 2004

## Generic Search Engine Usage

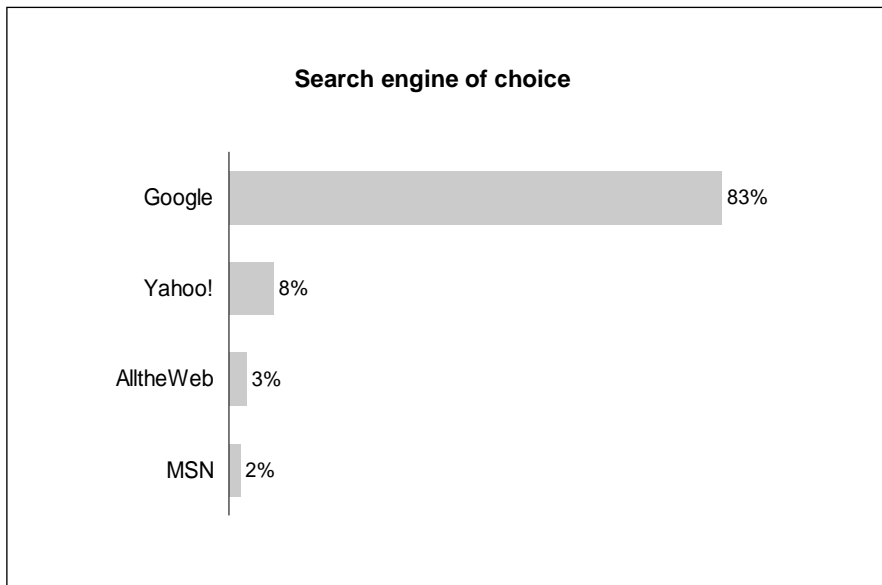
As with B2C search, B2B searchers strongly preferred using Google (see Figures 4 and 5). Forrester's data showed that more business people favored Google, while Enquiro's results showed that B2B searchers overwhelmingly favored Google.

Figure 4: Business Buyers Favor Google



Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Figure 5: Google Leads As The Engine Of Choice For B2B Searchers



Source: Enquiro, B2B Survey Summary, October 2004

## Vertical Search Engine Use

While Google dominated generic search engines, vertical search engine use was much less prevalent among our interviewees – they often did not know about vertical search engines, or they used them only in very specific circumstances:

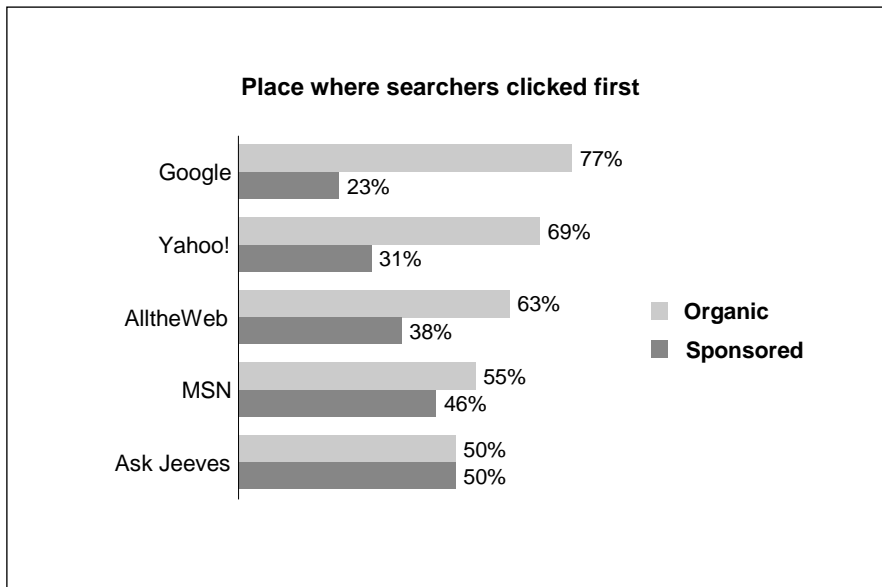
*“I was looking for a list of IT people who work for law firms and finally found something that could be a match. It turned out it was really a list of lawyers who work in the IT industry. Maybe I should have used a vertical search engine, but I wouldn’t know where to start.”*

*“I use Google mostly. I might use a vertical site – for example, if I’m looking for process management software, I’ll go to download.com, and if I’m looking for product management, I’ll go to Business.com.”*

## B2B Searches Generally Favor Organic Search Results

When B2B searches used generic search sites, they tended to click on organic search results first, rather than on paid ads (see Figure 6). For example, 77% of Google B2B search users clicked on organic search results first – a comparable number from general consumer research showed that 61% of consumers selected organic search results first.<sup>3</sup> Note that MSN and Ask Jeeves B2B search users were more likely to choose paid search ads, which is consistent with similar consumer research. One of the causes for this is the way these two sites balance the appearance of organic and paid search results.

Figure 6: B2B Searchers Click On Organic Search Results



Source: Enquiro, B2B Survey Summary, October 2004

<sup>3</sup> From the iProspect Search Engine User Attitudes White Paper #3: Search Engine Relevance, April 2004.

## Best Practices In B2B Search Marketing

Our interviews with marketers, search marketing agencies, and the search engines themselves revealed B2B search marketing best practices in four areas: 1) Create a strategic plan; 2) Organize keyword buys; 3) Analyze and optimize results, and 4) Use vertical search engines to reach B2B marketers.

### Create A Strategic Plan

One of the worst things a search marketer can do is to just start buying keywords without a strategic goal and an execution plan. To create a good plan, marketers should:

- **Create personas of each target group.** Everyone has a different intent when they type in a keyword, for example, “office supplies”. One person may be interested in finding an office supply store nearby while another wants to find one that offers free delivery. Marketers need to be aware that these different intents exist and focus on the ones that they can serve best. Even for broad keywords, marketers can use ad creative and landing pages to better target these different audiences.
- **Develop scenarios and plot the role of search in the process.** The most advanced search marketers are also developing scenarios for each personas, charting the path they take through the decision making process and the role search plays over time.
- **Determine the keywords each persona uses within the scenarios.** This includes mapping out typical keywords used at different points – for example, early in the process, a search may be for “cruise” but later it may be for “princess scandinavian cruise”.
- **Put search in the context of your overall marketing plan.** A best practice is for marketers to put search into perspective vis a vis the rest of the marketing plan. One marketer realized that he could make an investment in brand awareness and thereby increase the likelihood that the searcher would type in the company name rather than a generic search term that would show ads from competitors

*“If they [B2B searches] are using search later in the process, they are then usually searching on our company name. In which case, we’re better off investing money in branding and working with analyst firms to get recommended.”*

### Organize Keywords Buys

Keyword ad buys can become complex very quickly, especially as marketers start buying more than 50 keywords. Forrester suggests the following best practices to maximize your paid search investment:

- **Buy more keywords.** Many of the marketers we spoke with had a limited set of keywords, typically no more than 50 words. While the B2B market is somewhat limited because buying generic keywords would draw too many B2C buyers, Forrester believes that marketers should dig deeper to uncover words that describe the problems a customer faces. One best practice – develop keywords against your most valuable customers and understand the language they commonly use to describe your product. Some sources for additional keywords include mining search terms on your site, talking with salespeople, and interview key customers themselves.

- **Use more keywords in a phrase.** One way to expand the list of keywords being bought is to use longer phrases. Most marketers make the mistake of buying short keyword phrases - 49% of searchers use 3+ words in their search terms,<sup>4</sup> versus only 26% of search marketers who buy 3+ keyword phrases.<sup>5</sup>
- **Use negative keywords to exclude B2C customers.** One feature of paid search is the ability to use negative keywords. For example, buying the term “china” wouldn’t make sense unless you could also exclude words like “dishes” or “pattern”.
- **Structure and organize your keywords into categories.** One problem with buying more keywords is managing their performance. A best practice is to organize your keywords into categories, with each category reflecting a common customer goal. One marketer even had a different landing page for each category:

*“We’re in the process of linking leads to sales, tracking the CTR on the 14 keyword groups to a specific landing page. There, they register for a whitepaper, and we can track to the completion of a sale.”*

- **Adjust your ads on weekends and evenings.** Marketers may find that it makes little sense to pay top dollar for leads on weekends and evenings – especially if leads typically want to pick up the phone and call for more information (and can’t reach anyone during non-business hours). One alternative to completely turning off your ads during these times to run ad creative that is more research-oriented than ones focused on transactions that require customer interactions.
- **Buy contextual ads separately from keywords.** In general, there was confusion over how contextual search ads -- programs such as Google’s AdSense or Overture’s ContentMatch – can and should work. Most marketers could not break out contextual search ads from regular paid search ads, so they simply turned them off. But because these text ads appear on content sites like Businessweek.com based on the content of the article, they reach business buyers early in their decision process. Marketers should use different keywords, ad creative, and price points when buying contextual ads. One marketer had a specific approach to contextual ads:

*“Volume for B2B contextual ads is much smaller. We restrict the ads to run only on sites that have the targeted audience and identified the sites that were also running AdWords. We checked on keywords, and throttled the campaign off and on in the contextual program to see the impact of contextual.”*

## Analyze And Optimize Results

Techniques for buying keyword ads are only the beginning – tracking, analysis, and optimizing the results are also crucial. Marketers should:

- **Track beyond the clickthrough.** Some marketers were able to track leads to whitepaper downloads or registrations. One marketer was even able to track search leads to the

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<sup>4</sup> OneStat.com, February 2004

<sup>5</sup> Find Me Faster, May 2004

completion of a sale. But several marketers admitted that they did little more than track the number of clickthroughs that came from paid search to their sites – this was a typical comment:

*“We don’t do much measurement. We don’t have the ability to track between the click-through and associate that traffic with registration or a white paper download.”*

- **Invest in improving organic search placement.** Several marketers also said they would spend more on site optimization to increase organic search result rankings in 2005, with the hope that they would be able to replace paid search traffic with free traffic from organic search results. But while one marketer found during a three-month test that turning off paid search ads resulted in a more profitable business, the site also suffered from significantly lower traffic volume. The result: They are running paid search again, which drives overall greater traffic, albeit, at a much lower profit rate.
- **Understand the branding impact of search.** In some ways, this seems like an oxymoron – search is supposed to be all about direct response, not branding. But several studies from the Internet Advertising Bureau have shown that search has a branding effect.<sup>6</sup> Marketers should ensure that branding messages are consistent between search and other channels. Also, assigning a value to search branding may allow marketers to justify paying higher prices for strategic keywords.
- **Evolve the use search marketing agencies.** A few marketers were using search engine marketing (SEM) agencies which handle paid search and/or organic search optimization. Forrester believes that these marketers should continually evaluate their strengths and needs in search – in such a dynamically changing industry, it’s possible to go it alone, but there’s always the chance that your competitor is using an SEM that could give them an advantage. A good agency can help specifically with better measurement and optimization, especially with bid management tools that can ease the burden of buying paid search ads.

### Use Vertical Search Engines To Reach Other B2B Searchers

While Google received the bulk of spending and attention, several marketers also found good success at smaller, more focused vertical sites (a list of generic and vertical B2B search engines is available in Appendix A. While these sites rarely provided the volume of the generic search engines, they often provided leads that were much more efficient as the cost per lead was often lower.

*“I wouldn’t buy a general search term like tableware china on Google, but I would buy it on a vertical product.”*

*“Network World [the magazine] is slightly more effective than Google. One reason is that Google takes a lot of effort to maintain – we’re constantly tweaking, especially with the ads. Network World is so targeted for our audience – leads are actually more qualified than on Google.”*

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<sup>6</sup> The IAB study examined the branding value of an ad campaign that included paid search and contextual ads. It is available at [http://www.iab.net/resources/iab\\_searchbrand.asp](http://www.iab.net/resources/iab_searchbrand.asp).

The biggest problem marketers faced when using vertical search sites is that it can be a lot of hassle for not much reward.

*“Outside of Google and Overture, the other search engines suck wind. Sites like Business.com have good conversion, but traffic is very low. They can’t drive the volume to move the needle.”*

## Appendix A: B2B Search Engines

- **Google.** Google was the engine that drew the most praise from B2B marketers. Many felt that Google leads were highly qualified simply because they typed in the appropriate keyword phrase.
- **Overture.** Most marketers did not spend extensively with Overture, because it is perceived to have a more B2C focus. But one marketer enjoyed significantly better results on Overture than on Google, so marketers should still test keywords on Overture – especially because the search marketplace continues to evolve.
- **Business.com.** With its strong B2B brand, Business.com has gone through a revival in the past year and is focused on growing its directory services. Business.com has more than 400,000 listings and 65,000 industries, with most of its revenues come from two segments – computers and office products. Marketers view it primarily as a directory, not a search engine, especially since placement is based on a fixed price rather than on true PPC.
- **Find.com.** Find.com is a meta search engine focused on B2B categories – it indexes 3,000 business sites for content. It syndicates PPC ads from partners like Industry Brains and Zedo, and also generates revenues from selling access to premium content. Its primary marketing channel will be through one of its investors, FindSVP, which has access to 1,500 corporate customers. The company is small – there are fewer than 12 people on staff.
- **GlobalSpec.** Its core product, SpecSearch, contains more than 75 million parts. Marketers laud the services registered user base of 1.5 million users – when they request information for a part, a full profile is provided. The company recently launched EngineerWeb, which searches across 100 million sites. GlobalSpec also offers marketers sponsorships of a biweekly newsletter with a circulation of 450,000.
- **Jayde.com ensures quality with a human-edited directory.** With 2 million businesses in 277,660 categories, Jayde.com has built one of the highest-quality B2B directories. Because editors add each business individually into the index, only one listing per business appears per search. Jayde.com’s revenues come primarily from newsletters it sends to registered users.
- **ThomasNet.com** With 650,000 suppliers and 67,000 product categories, ThomasNet’s industrial directory sets the gold standard when it comes to industrial search in North America. Marketers – 25,000 in total -- pay a flat fee for enhanced sites and listings. ThomasNet buys 30,000 keywords on search engines to drive traffic to the site.
- **ThomasB2B.com.** A sister company to ThomasNet, ThomasB2B.com was formed in partnership with FindWhat to create an ad network of PPC B2B search advertisers. The

current network has 1,100 advertisers, having just launched this past quarter. The major feature is ads that are bought from among 11,000 categories, rather than by keyword. The advantage: These categories can span across geographies, as ThomasB2B.com targets those categories across multiple languages.

- **Bitpipe and KnowledgeStorm provide white paper access.** These two companies syndicate white papers to publishers like Forbes, InfoWorld, and Fast Company. KnowledgeStorm focuses specifically on IT providers.
- **IndustryBrains, Kanoodle, and Quigo.** These companies provide contextual ads on content sites and offer the marketer the ability to manage these ads separately from paid search.
- **Superpages.com aims to serve “local” B2B marketers.** Through its partnership with FindWhat, Verizon’s Superpages.com has created a PPC advertiser base of more than 15,000 businesses. Several of these advertisers are B2B-focused, although most are consumer-oriented.