

Current State of SEM EDUCATION IN THE

UNIVERSITIES

Intro

SMS: Search engine marketing is quickly becoming an important part of marketing strategy for any company, big or small. Would you say that colleges and universities are dragging their feet in preparing students for this new industry?

Kristi: Search engine marketing is without a doubt one of the most important aspects of any marketing campaign. I believe that while traditional marketing builds a solid foundation, search engine marketing helps to build and develop the structure. I feel that many colleges and universities are "dragging their feet" because of uncertainties they may have. Although this industry has been around for over a decade, there are still very many individuals who are skeptical about the possibilities.

The main goal/purpose of any university is to educate and prepare their students for careers in the "real world." I believe that the powers-that-be in these universities fail to see the opportunities available in this industry and that since education is the "foundation", they feel the education they are providing is enough. Unfortunately, I do not foresee SEM becoming a field one can major in anytime soon; however, I believe the next few years we will see more and more universities providing courses and perhaps even adding it as a minor program.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

With Professors:



Kristi Serrano

After receiving her degree in Public Relations from Long Island University, Kristi joined CMP Technology LLC, where she worked as an Ad Operation Manager with clients such as Cisco, Motorola, IBM, and Philips. Today, Kristi works as a Marketing Manager for Prime Visibility, a search engine marketing company. She is also going to be teaching an Internet Marketing course at LIU in the Fall of 2007.



Perry Drake

Perry D. Drake has been involved in the direct marketing industry for 15 years. He is currently the VP of Drake Direct, a database marketing consulting firm specializing in the strategic use of customer information. Perry is a published author. His new book, "Optimal Database Marketing," is a how-to book geared to the marketer seeking to better understand the practices and principles of database marketing. Perry is also an Associate Professor at New York University, where he teaches web and data analytics courses.

To say
Intro



In order to expand these educational opportunities, more individuals must come forward and offer their services. How can we expect university professors to teach a course they know nothing about? I believe that while we are waiting for universities and colleges to offer these services, perhaps they are waiting for experts to come forward to offer their knowledge. I don't think a college is going to open a course and wait to see if it fills up or not. Neither are they going to start a major and pray for the same. Unfortunately, students are not aware of these opportunities and career paths, which stops them from requesting courses of this nature. If colleges and universities were aware of the number of individuals searching for SEO training, SEM courses, Internet Marketing degrees etc., the results would be much different.

Perry: I would not say universities are dragging their feet regarding this new industry. Like any new discipline or technology, it takes time for them to evolve and stabilize, for best practices to emerge and for experts to appear in the field. Until that time, it is hard to build a curriculum around something so new and dynamic. This is evident in many disciplines, not just search engine marketing. For example, in the 1960s when mainframes were being developed, there were no classes for computer programming. People learned on the job. It was not until the next decade that degrees in computer science began being offered.

The same is also true for the Internet. In the beginning, there were no web design or development degrees, let alone courses. Again, people learned initially on the job. Now you can take such courses and even obtain a degree.

You must realize that today, for search engine marketing, if you open a book on the subject and it is more than 2 years old, it is not relevant anymore. The SEM/PPC model is still changing at a fairly rapid pace, but obviously not as fast a pace as a couple of years ago. This new marketing discipline is beginning to stabilize and become a mainstream part of the marketing

mix in terms of attracting customers and building brand.

At NYU one of the classes I teach is a three-day, intensive web analytics class. Approximately one day is dedicated to SEM and SEO marketing. Since the last time I taught this course in the Fall 2006 semester to my next class later in the Spring 2007 semester, I will have to make a lot of changes to my curriculum. In that time, Yahoo! changed their PPC model, Google has new reporting features, new ad tracking software is available, new click stream data mining tools are on the market, and new insights from the experts have been published.

It is not easy to teach these interactive marketing classes. It is very demanding on instructors, given that the environment is constantly changing. Therefore, a major challenge to university administrators is finding qualified instructors willing to continually update their course material to keep it relevant.

SMS: Are marketing students interested in SEM-related courses? Are you getting many requests for these kinds of workshops / courses?

Kristi: A few months back, I spoke at C.W. Post in regards to SEM and SEO and the feedback was remarkable. There were more questions asked than I could even answer and the enthusiasm and general interest was so high. When I graduated from college, I only knew of three areas I could go into: public relations, marketing, or advertising. I chose marketing and ended up where I am today; however, the issue is that students are not aware of what SEM is. Before we start offering courses, I believe that we must educate the students and make them aware of these different opportunities.

On a daily basis someone contacts me and asks me about the course. People want to learn more about this. I'm glad I can be a pioneer in this effort and help pass on what I have learned.

Perry: Absolutely. Students are very interested

in SEM topics and courses. My new web analytics course fills up quickly since we started offering it as a part of a larger program here at NYU. People are eager to acquire this skill for one of two reasons: (1) they are considering becoming an SEM specialist and managing campaigns in an agency environment or (2) as a brand manager at a direct marketing company, they need to augment their marketing skills to address corporate initiatives for multi-channel integrated marketing campaigns.

Every day SEM marketing is becoming a bigger part of many businesses multi-channel marketing budget. It is proving itself a valuable tool for advertising and branding.

I am not exactly sure what all the other universities across the country are doing or offering but I do know that NYU understands the trends and in my opinion is actually in the forefront here. For example, they saw the need and had the vision to start a new Digital Media Certificate program just last year. This program offers about 15 different Internet and electronic-media-related marketing courses from blogging to wireless marketing. In fact there is even one course dedicated to SEM marketing. And, as you can imagine, since this new certificate program began, it has been highly successful.

In addition, the Master's Degree Program in Direct and Interactive Marketing at NYU just last year put in place two new electives for the students – "Advanced Internet Marketing" and "Advanced Web Mining" – I teach the latter. Both of these new additions were a result of students demanding more materials in these areas to assist them better in this new and dynamic multi-channel world.

SMS: Based on your inside knowledge, what would it take for institutions like NYU or LIU to realize that search engine marketing is becoming mainstream and act accordingly?

Kristi: Unfortunately, I think that this motivation and information must come from inside the

university. I was fortunate enough to have Abby Dress back me in this endeavor, as she realized the importance of SEM and Internet marketing. The problem is that there are not enough people in educational institutions who are aware of SEM. There are a few universities that offer this as one elective course as part of a minor or major program, but until a university succeeds in developing a minor program or a major program that really takes off, there will continue to be skeptical people.

I do, however, believe that there are individuals who understand the importance of SEM but either do not know how to approach it as a course or do not have the proper resources. As the industry continues to grow, so will the opportunities to educate individuals. In the meantime, I will work my hardest at making sure C.W. Post and LIU take advantage of this opportunity and hopefully the rest will follow.

Perry: NYU is realizing this important fact and is trying to answer the demand. As time passes and these disciplines stabilize a bit more, I believe we will begin to see more and more

courses at all the various universities dealing specifically with SEM and PPC marketing. I am sure it will be much sooner than later.

Also, you must realize that NYU has a bit of an advantage here over other universities in terms of what they can offer the public regarding such courses given that it is located in the heart of New York City. As such, I imagine they have a much easier time than other universities in finding the experts to teach these classes and to be guest speakers.

But let's not forget that professional organizations play an important role here also. They typically fill the initial demand for hot new topics through special training sessions, conferences, and seminars. For example, in the New York area we are lucky in that we have two big organizations helping train in these very important Internet-related topics: namely the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) and the Direct Marketing Club of New York (DMCNY).

In April and May of this year, for example, the DMCNY is running a five-week long breakfast

series on web marketing and has invited industry experts to speak. I have already signed up to attend all five. As an instructor, it is important that I stay on top of the latest in the field. And, believe me, it is not an easy task given how dynamic it is.

In addition, the DMA is constantly doing research regarding trends in the industry and ensuring their conferences and training programs are meeting the needs of all industry professionals. In fact, based on a recent survey the DMA just conducted and that I helped them analyze, we learned that the usage of electronic customer communications such as email is ever-increasing and at a more rapid rate than postal for both consumer and business marketers. Of course, for the exact details of this survey you will have to see the "2007 List Usage Report."

We are getting there. And, in time, we will see more and more unique SEM and SEO courses being offered at the university level, and then we will be preparing ourselves for the next big new thing. ■

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