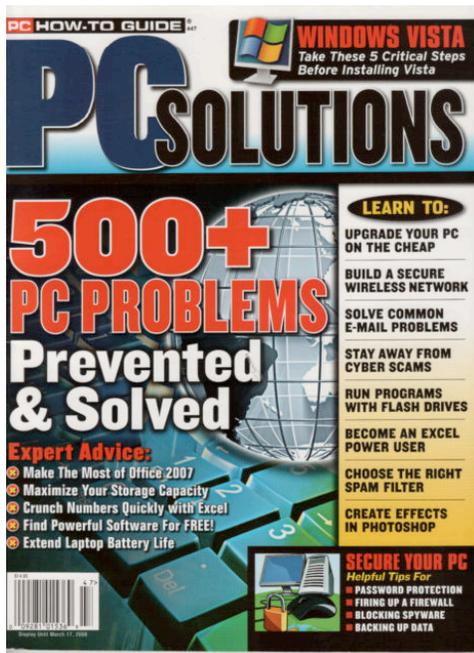


# SEO and SEM. What The Heck Is It and How Can It Help Me?

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You may or may not know what it is, but if you've ever done a Google search (and let's face it, who hasn't), you've been indirectly immersed in SEO and SEM. "Search Engine Optimization" and "Search Engine Marketing" respectively, are the ways and means in which companies and individuals have success or lack thereof in getting Website traffic.

SEMPO ([www.sempo.org](http://www.sempo.org)) is the largest nonprofit trade organization in the world serving the search and digital marketing industry and the marketing professionals engaged in it. The four main terms discussed in this article are important to understand. SEMPO lists the definitions as follows:

**SEO:** This is the process of editing a Website's content and code in order to improve visibility within one or more search engines.

**SEM:** A form of Internet marketing that seeks to promote Websites by increasing their visibility in search engine result pages. SEM methods include search engine optimization, paid placement, contextual advertising, digital asset optimization, and paid inclusion.

**CPC:** "Cost Per Click", or the amount search engines charge advertisers for every click that sends a searcher to the advertiser's web site. For an advertiser, CPC is the total cost for each click-through received when its ad is clicked on.

**PPC:** A model of online advertising in which advertisers pay only for each click on their ads that directs searchers to a specified landing page on the advertiser's web site.

## OK, BUT WHAT DOES THAT ALL MEAN YOU MAY ASK?

First of all, none of it is an exact science and there are no guarantees. Sure, that's not necessarily what someone wants to hear when paying for a service, or taking the time to learn it themselves. But that's the way it is, which makes it important information to have during the process.

The ideal success story would be to get listed on the first page of Google results, right? That's the goal. However, there is lots of competition and in order to get better rankings on search engines, you have to make it optimal to get noticed. So how do you do that? With the optimizing portion, think of your Website as being "user friendly" to the search engines and spiders (see sidebar). In other words, if your site is clunky and filled with copy that has nothing to do with your business, how will a search engine find you, and why would they want to list you first on the results page?

Let's break it all down, and thanks to an expert in the field, we have help. Denyse Corelli of Schoolhouse Communications in Bucks County, PA ([www.schoolhousecommunications.com](http://www.schoolhousecommunications.com)) specializes in SEO and SEM and has a 20-year background in marketing to go along with it. The

old line “If you build it, they will come” has very little sway when it comes to Website traffic. It’s all about HOW to get people there. Corelli points out the importance of being prepared. “It’s not enough to build a website, you need to direct targeted traffic there. SEO and SEM are your keys to building traffic and finding new visitors interested in your products and services.”

She cites at least THREE key points in making SEO/SEM successful.

### 1. GET READY:

Before you even consider spending money on SEO or SEM, it is important to be sure that all your ducks are in a row. Make sure your Website is ready to receive traffic. Good navigation is key, so that the optimization has a place to go. Is your site up to date with fresh content, does it look good and represent your brand or personality? You’re paying to do SEO and SEM (even if you do it yourself, you’re paying in time), so don’t send people to a Website that isn’t current. Think about SEO in the initial stages of Website navigation, even before Website design. You want to tailor the navigation to feature the main keywords. For instance, if you own a coffeehouse, you would want your navigation to reflect the main keywords of coffee, tea, and so on. Also, if and or when you are having a Website redesigned, consider how SEO could be affected, and make sure the new site is properly optimized. For instance, keep the same URL so you won’t be starting from square one in the search findings.

### 2. KEYWORDS and PHRASES:

View your Website and see if it makes sense with keywords that are relevant to your business or subject matter of your site, such as “coffee roasting” if you’re a coffeehouse. If you drive people to a page with good and valuable keyword rich content that REFLECTS THE SEARCH TERM they used, they’ll tend to stay on the page longer, which is ideal. You can also track sales to the keyword level and refine campaigns to match business goals, which is something a company like Schoolhouse specializes in.

### 3. UNDERSTANDING THE COST/BENEFIT:

The point with both SEO and SEM is to drive traffic.

SEO invests time and money upfront, yielding results over a longer term. Getting picked up by search engines takes time and patience to see it through. Do a cost/benefit analysis, even if it’s a simple version. The more successful preparation you do, the more chance of return, which at that point is “free” as in organic search results, but remember, there is still no guarantee.

SEM (using PPC and CPC) is quick. You can set up a campaign and have more clicks and traffic immediately with a pay as you go plan. There are more analytics as well and you can set your own budget.

### WHEN IS IT TIME TO HIRE SOMEONE?

SEO and SEM are highly specialized and the basic answer to whether or not you should hire someone is whether or not you have the time, knowledge, interest, and skill level to learn it and apply it yourself. Since time is money, for most people, their money would be well spent bringing in a professional for such a niche service. If you insist on doing it yourself, there are plenty of online resources to help, not to mention youtube videos for learning good SEO practices and techniques. You could easily spend hours on Google Analytics ([www.google.com/analytics](http://www.google.com/analytics)), which offers a truly spectacular array of tools at your fingertips. If you’re new at SEO and SEM, Google and

MSN/Bing will be all that you need. Check out the Websites [www.wordtracker.com](http://www.wordtracker.com) and [www.semrush.com](http://www.semrush.com) for robust tools to help your SEO and SEM campaigns.

Having said that, if your advertising budget allows, it's time to think about bringing in the people who already know what they're doing, and will get you the results you are looking for, and much quicker in most situations. As with any type of service provider, make sure you check out their credentials.

Schoolhouse Communications has been leveraging the best in SEO and SEM through customized and personal service based on the needs of each particular client. Ensuring that the search engines "see" the Website in order to bring in more "free" traffic from searches is one of the goals of this well-established company. They believe it takes an integrated approach to achieve the best outcome and are experts at conducting lengthy keyword research to identify the best search phrases. In other words, balancing good keyword selection and good copy with how a site is navigated is the desired blend for the best results. A simple re-write of a sentence on a Website's home page can make all the difference in how or when the search engines pick it up.

### MORE ABOUT SEM

Since you only pay when someone clicks, SEM can provide a clear return on investment. If you set up an SEM campaign, you WILL get people to your Website. It's a matter of WHAT they do when they get there, which goes back to good preparation for visitors. Ads can be targeted very specifically for where you want growth in your business and you pay based on the number of people who click through to your site from any given ad that you place.

When it comes to Search Engine MARKETING, a company like Schoolhouse will do a test campaign with Google's AdWords program. PPC advertising is a great way for site owners to immediately get top placement in key outlets like Google, Bing/MSN and Facebook. You know those ads that pop up along the top and right side of Google results pages? Those are generated from AdWords accounts that companies pay for and the basis of the "pay-per-click" method of SEM. Every time a user clicks through to your Website from those ads, you pay "per click". The good thing is that you only pay when there is a click, not just from having the ad there. So in a very indirect sense, the name of your company is being seen even if someone isn't clicking on it immediately, an added bonus in the traditional sense of advertising. Equally important as the ads themselves is the tracking that coincides with the campaign. The better the tracking, the more specific the campaign can get with the best keywords and any revisions that need to be done for the best return on investment of ad dollars. A test campaign is a good way to begin, and a successful result will give most people the understanding that their money is being well spent.

### WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

There is more to SEO and SEM than meets the eye, so a good way to decide how it is best suited for you is to contact a company based on referrals, and discuss the cost for running a test campaign, and for evaluating your current or planned Website to see if it is optimized correctly. Start there, and let the traffic begin.

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