

SEO OR SEM – THE ULTIMATE GUIDE

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Marketing jargon and acronyms can be very confusing for the layman. The techniques deployed are so precise, that even a seasoned marketer could have some troubles.

One of the most commonly discussed topics among marketers and advertisers alike is Search Engine Optimization, often along with a closely related topic called Search Engine Marketing, and this can be the root of considerable perplexity for any business.

As an established Digital Marketing agency, providing SEM and SEO services in Dubai we try to simplify these two terms, as we take a deep dive into the world of search engines and their indispensability in today's world.

Listed below are three major differences between SEO and SEM, to help you decide which one of the two will have the greatest impact on your business

SEARCH ENGINES: THE INFORMATION DATABASE

In the late 1990s, the Internet fast evolved into a mammoth connection of web pages, all hyperlinked to each other. The quest for cataloging, arranging and displaying this massive data gave rise to what we now know as search engines. In 1998, Google started its first indexing-algorithm, which ranked these pages and displayed a set of relevant sources and pages for anyone who looked for keywords. Thus the biggest Search Engine came into being.



Types of search engines

Today, search engines are pretty much responsible for all prevalent information in the world, as they have added a variety of extra features, such as addresses, contact numbers, maps, and videos alongside your typical search. Furthermore, even if Google is still the leading search engine it is in no way the only one, or even the fastest-growing one. Bing, Ecosia, DuckDuckGo and even Amazon Search Engine, are some of the fastest-growing search platforms.

PLATFORM OF CHOICE

But what stands true is that almost the entire web traffic passes through search engines. Although exact numbers are not known, Google is said to be handling 3.8 million searches every minute. Google monetizes this large ever-present traffic, as using its unique advertising and Pay Per Click model, it shows ads to its frequenters and collects hefty revenues.

So there are two sides to a typical search engine's business.

- Accumulate and display relevant information for user queries.
- Showcase advertisements to these users in exchange for ad money.

This brings us to the topic at hand- SEO vs SEM.

SEO services refer to writing and publishing online content, following certain protocols that helps search engines index your page higher. This could relate to any Search Engine, and the focus can shift depending on what your business is.

For example, if you're a retailer focused on selling on Amazon.com, you'd be better off optimizing your content for the Amazon Search Engine, rather than Google. Similarly, for other search engines, a subtly different set of guidelines need to be followed while optimizing content for these platforms. It is essential to understand that search engine optimization isn't necessarily one exclusive thing.

Whereas Search Engine Management is focused on Google's PPC (Pay Per Click) and AdWords (now called Google Ads) system. Although it can be theoretically done for any other platform, no other search engine has numbers to backup paid marketing strategies. The entry of Bing Ads into the market in the 2010s was a step in the right direction to dismantle this monopoly. However, Bing Ads has still not been able to displace Google from the top spot.

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SEO VS SEM: ORGANIC AND PAID

SEO includes many routine checks and daily activities to steadily increase your ranking for a given search parameter. It includes:

A) ON-PAGE SEO:

- Multi Device optimisation
- Hyper-relevant content
- Accessible to Crawlers & Bots
- Inclusion of relevant alt-text for images

B) OFF-PAGE SEO:

- Building backlinks to the website
- Social Media Marketing
- Guest Blogging
- Influencer Marketing

C) TECHNICAL SEO

- Website Auditing
- Navigation and Site Structure
- Breadcrumb Menus
- Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP)

and many more strategies.

Search engine result page

Most of these activities do not demand any payment to any search engines or third parties. These customizations are completely free of cost, as the management of these changes has to be done on the user's end. Then we take a look at what is SEM.

SEM isn't free and a monthly ad budget needs to be allocated and based on the score assigned to you, the expenditure is decided. Although SEO is a part of a broad SEM strategy, the addition of digital advertising makes it a pricier option.

This brings us to an important question: How does SEO work? Is SEO completely free? The answer is a resounding NO. To make your page rank higher, you would require keyword analysis, unique domain names, and hire specialists to tailor your content. That could take a long route and loads of money depending on where you are.

According to WebFX, SEO services typically cost up to \$500-\$1500 annually while SEM can cost up to \$9000-\$10,000 annually.

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SEO VS SEM: CONTROL AND IMPACT

As SEO isn't a one-time activity, it requires some patience on the user's side to actually understand the impact. Much like your social media presence, search engine optimization is a process that needs to be carefully strategized, planned, and implemented.

One key advantage of paid strategies within SEM is that they can have an immediate impact. You are in total control of PPC campaigns: Who sees your ad, how much you pay, when your ads are displayed, and what is being targeted or conveyed, etc.

On the other hand, SEO doesn't guarantee immediate impact, as it usually takes 4-6 months of constant effort to see a tangible result. That being said, in the longer run, a higher ranking through SEO ensures that your webpage has credibility, and brings constant clicks and traffic. Once you're set with SEO, it will bring loads of new visitors as you sit on the top of a search.

Here is a table of some of the other key differences.

DIFFERENTIATOR	SEO	SEM
Search results	Normal Entry with feature snippets	Will appear with an "ad" extension
Algorithm update	Affects the whole Website	No Effect
Search Engine Dependency	Higher	Lower

WHICH STRATEGY SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?

In fact, a combination of both SEO and SEM is beneficial to any firm. Combining the advantages of both practices will reap higher rewards.

Foregoing SEO is not a good idea at any time, as if you do not focus on your rank on the search engines, chances are that you would vanish under the weight and pressure of competitors

The Cycle of Business: A big part of what you want, depends on where you are. If you're just starting out in your business you should keep in mind that SEO will have long-term benefits. Being on the first page of a relevant search result brings with it intangible credibility and the majority of the traffic already.

However, SEM promises a top page finish depending on the campaign that you are focusing on and the amount you spend on each campaign, instantaneously.

Competitors: It is obvious that any profitable industry will come with its own set of competitors. Based on who you're facing, a strategy needs to be formalised.

If you don't focus on SEO, then your competitors might take over your position, and then have enough resources to maintain that position. If you are in an ultra-competitive market, then our advice is to aggressively include both SEO and SEM in your strategies.

Time: If you want instantaneous results, and more people visiting your page as soon as possible, then SEM is a good option.

However, if you are in it for the long-term without paying much for advertising, then just optimize the content and let the search engines do the work.

WHEN SHOULD YOU USE BOTH SEO & SEM?

Side-by-side and simultaneously, for the best results both these methods are obtained when they are deployed side-by-side and simultaneously. Whenever there is

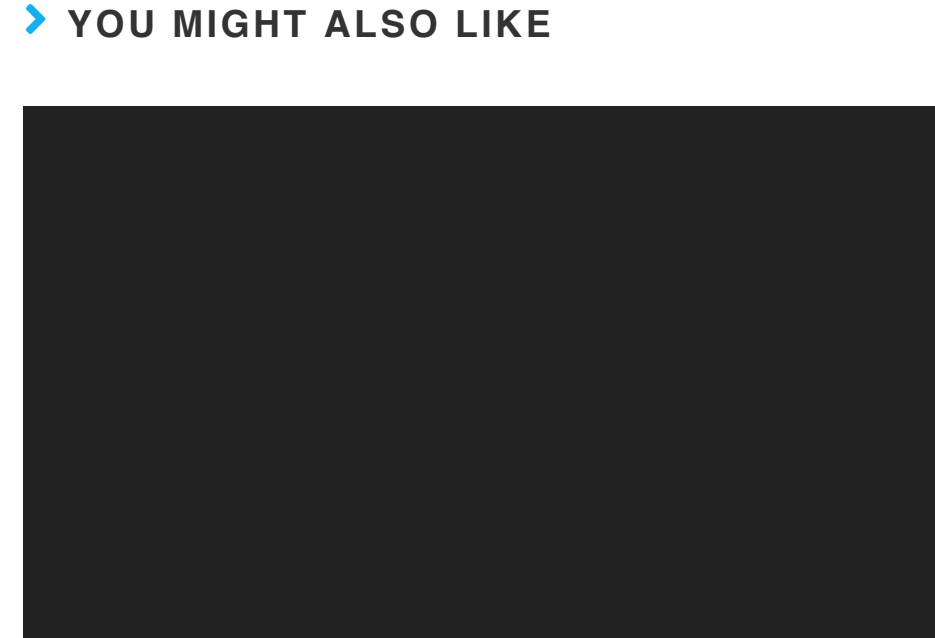
- A new festival, occasion, or celebratory event.
- Requirement of new types of leads, and new audiences.
- Diversification in the business.

then, using both these strategies together makes extra sense.

Constant SEO will make the SEM budget lighter, and intermittent SEM campaigns can help with more visitors and traffic. In short, both SEO and SEM are feedback loops and neither exists in a vacuum, or beyond the other.

Are you feeling overwhelmed with the number of options and technicalities that each strategy involves? Leave it to us. We at SocioLoca, a Top SEO agency in Dubai, have been building bespoke online strategies for all our clients. For a customized SEO and SEM strategy, you can contact our expert team of seasoned professionals. Send us an inquiry today!

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