Case Study #CS829:

How to Optimize Press Releases & Get Higher Search Ranking and 75% Clickthrough Rate

SUMMARY: Gaining brand awareness is a struggle for every marketer. Getting exposure for a new company in a niche segment poses extra challenges.

See how a marketer used a search-engine optimized press release to put a white paper in front of the perfect prospects and achieve a 75% clickthrough rate. Includes landing page test results.

CHALLENGE

Trevor Schoerie faced a major marketing hurdle: His two-year-old company needed to establish his brand in a niche market segment with a limited number of prospects.

Schoerie's firm, PharmOut, specializes in Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) compliance and validation for pharmaceutical companies in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The market has fewer than 100 potential customers, and the nature of regulatory-compliance consulting makes brand reputation and credibility especially important.

"Picking up the phone to call them is not effective," Schoerie says. "If we can build up our brand, our reputation and our credibility, then when companies want services they can go out and find a provider. We needed to proactively present our brand."

Schoerie and his marketing team needed a campaign to accomplish two goals: raise awareness for their brand and establish their expertise in the field; and generate leads and prospects for their in-house marketing list.

CAMPAIGN

Schoerie's team saw educational white papers as an important tool to use to establish credibility in the marketplace. Because of the niche audience, they turned to a search engine-optimized news release to promote the white paper to the small field of professionals they viewed as their best prospects.

Here are the seven steps they used to develop the campaign:

-> Step #1. Create appropriate white paper

First, the team came up with a white paper that provided valuable tips for their audience and showcased the firm's expertise in GMP compliance. They chose a topic based on in-house experience.

One of their staffers had completed an autoclave validation project for a client. They used that staff member's experience to write a white paper about that process titled: 'Top 10 Considerations When Validating an Autoclave.'

-> Step #2. Identify keywords for SEM

The number of firms in the company's market area operating the kind of autoclaves in question is limited. So, Schoerie and his team needed to make sure the white paper was seen by the right prospects. They used search engine marketing to help promote the white paper across the Web.

Working with online tools that analyze search terms, they identified niche technical terms that would increase the chances of their white paper getting high search engine rankings.

That research targeted four primary phrases:
o Autoclave validation
o Loaded heat distribution for autoclave validation
o FDA compliance gmp gcp glp
o Vacuum assisted steam sterilization

They also identified two secondary phrases:
o Performance qualification
o Validation engineers

The research also showed that few companies operating in the Australian market were performing this kind of SEO marketing or paying attention to results on Google.com.au.

"Even the gold standard companies in the world who operate in our space [are] not optimizing their pages and coming up in the search engines. Because it's such a small niche, you can play with words and quite rapidly go up in rankings."

-> Step #3. Write an optimized press release

The team wrote a press release with those keyword phrases to promote the white paper. But writing that press release was tricky. They had to be careful to include the phrases often enough to be recognized by search engines without the press release being seen as spam by news sites.

-> Step #4. Design and test landing page

Next, the team crafted a landing page to receive clickthroughs from a hotlink in the press release. They decided to use traffic from the campaign to conduct a multivariate test to determine which elements achieved the best clickthrough and conversion rates.

They identified several key page elements to test:
- Hero shot of the white paper cover.
- Headlines:
o "Avoiding the pitfalls of autoclave validation" - matched the headline of the press release
o "Tips and tricks for autoclave validation" - promoted benefits using different language than the press release
- Note with a call to action that indicated registration was *not* required.

They tested these three elements in eight combinations.

-> Step #5. Build download/registration page

The team also created a separate download page, hotlinked from the landing page. It contained:
o Hotlink to download the white paper immediately
o Registration form to be notified of future white papers
o Links to additional white papers for download

-> Step #6. Submit press release to newswires

The team limited its press release distribution to online outlets to drive clicks back to the landing page. They chose a Web-only distribution service that sent press releases of up to 500 words to 3,600 news websites.

-> Step #7. Track results

Before submitting the press release, the team set up an online alert system to monitor websites that had picked up their release landing page performance. They set up the alert for one key phrase from the press release:
o "Autoclave validation"

They also tracked clickthroughs, download rates and registration form completions for their landing page. Because of the niche nature of the white paper, their goals were modest:
o 50 white paper downloads
o Two keyword terms in the top five rankings on Google
o 10 contacts for their marketing database

RESULTS
The SEO campaign paid off almost immediately, with an eventual 75% CTR from the landing page to the registration page to download the white paper.

- Within three hours, the press release was picked up by 20 news sites, with prospects noticing.

"I think the clincher was when one of our past clients called up and said, 'I see you're doing autoclave validation now as well … you've arrived,' " Schoerie says.

- Within 75 minutes, three prospects had submitted contact information through the registration form.

- Two days after the release, the team achieved:
o Two top-five rankings on Google and Yahoo!
o 42 downloads of the autoclave validation white paper
o Nine visitors downloaded another white paper
o 8% of visitors added contact info to registration form

- One week after the release:
o Three terms in the top five search engine rankings
o 58 downloads of the autoclave validation white paper
o 13 visitors downloaded another white paper
o 17% of visitors added contact info to the registration form

- Six weeks after the release:
o Eight top five rankings on search engines
o 200 downloads of the autoclave validation white paper
o 105 visitors downloaded another white paper
o 16% of visitors added contact info to registration form

The landing page test also delivered a valuable insight: the best performing test used the same headline as the press release and informed visitors that registration not required.

With his company's profile that much higher among prospects, Schoerie says he can now maximize his time in prospect meetings. "Customers don't want to know who we are any more, they want to know how we're going to do this project. That's a change that's happened in last six to nine months."

The only real expense was the AU$400 cost for the press release distribution. Schoerie's team did most of the white paper and press release writing themselves. The total cost for the campaign was about AU$2,500. With an average value of $32,000, even one autoclave validation project generated by the campaign would more than pay for the expense.

Useful links related to this article

Creative samples from Pharmout's optimization campaign:

http://www.marketingsherpa.com/cs/pharmout/study.html

CommOut - helped design and launch the SEO campaign:
http://www.commout.com.au

Google AdWords - used to track search terms:
https://adwords.google.com

Google Alerts - used to monitor websites that picked up their release:
http://www.google.com/alerts

Google Website Optimizer - used to monitor downloads and clickthroughs:
http://services.google.com/websiteoptimizer/

Wordtracker.com - used to track search terms:
http://www.wordtracker.com

Australian Associated Press, an affiliate of PR Newswire - used to issue press release:
http://www.prnewswire.com

WebPosition - software that helped optimize PharmOut's press release:
http://www.webposition.com

PharmOut:
http://www.pharmout.com.au/

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