

Ahead of the Game: Maximizing Super Bowl Ad Value with SEO



By Kevin Bobowski, SVP of Marketing, BrightEdge

The Super Bowl never really ends, and I expect I'll be hearing about the collapse of the Atlanta Falcons and the heroics of the New England Patriots at least until kickoff of the next Super Bowl. But like most marketing professionals, I'm far more interested in hearing about the strategies that helped brands wring every dollar of ongoing value from their big investments in Super Bowl advertising.

Much of that value will continue to be driven by the smart SEO strategies that are becoming ever more essential to advertising success. We're already seeing some dramatic stories of winners and losers among this year's Super Bowl advertising – including one brand that appears to have squandered nearly all of the SEO value of its advertising through one simple oversight.

An analyst for Merkle Inc. says Weathertech appears to have killed much of the SEO value of its Super Bowl landing page because someone left “noindex” meta-robots tag on the page. The tag is commonly used during development, but it's removed when a page goes live. The unfortunate upshot: A page whose URL had been optimized for organic search became undiscoverable.

While those sorts of big mistakes are rare, even small

tactical missteps in SEO are painful. A new survey found that 36 percent of respondents expected to be searching out brands that advertised on the Super Bowl and watching commercials online in the days and weeks following the game. More than 10 percent, in fact, expect to be watching Super Bowl commercials more than once a day.

Success stories can be spectacular.

In the first couple of days after the Super Bowl, Budweiser's mildly controversial commercial, "Born the Hard Way," drew nearly 35 million views on YouTube. Another Super Bowl advertiser, 84 Lumber, drew 61 million social impressions with its Super Bowl commercial, "The Journey Begins," and a five-minute version on YouTube.

The time spent engaging with good ads is staggering. According to YouTube, the top 20 Super Bowl ads from the last nine years drove more than 440 million minutes of watch time – the estimated equivalent of watching the Big Game itself more than 1.8 million times.

That's the sort of brand interaction and long tail that helps to justify the \$5 million price for 30-second spots during the Super Bowl, and it demands an attentive SEO strategy.

At BrightEdge, we found that 51 percent of the traffic that lands on brands' websites originates from organic search. In other words, organic search is just as important as paid search, e-mail or social media to ensure that Super Bowl viewers visit the brands behind their favorite commercials online over the course of the year.

Given the importance of organic search, it is mission-critical for organizations to have SEO-specific strategies paired with ad buys. Today's SEO professional is involved in all forms of content from the start to ensure that it delivers long-term search value.

The brands that take a long view of their online return from content investments generally have built a team that includes the senior marketing executive, a designated SEO manager, a marketing manager and content producers. Each understands the importance of SEO and is committed to using SEO effectively.

Together, that team takes a five-step approach:

1. They understand, on a query-by-query basis, where the best search demand originates. The top SEO teams have put months into understanding the keywords that drive traffic, and they've looked specifically for long-tail keywords.
2. They've also taken a careful look at the strengths and weaknesses of the ways their competitors use desirable keywords. They understand how their competitors are using optimization and keyword strategies, and they're willing to learn from their competitors' successes.
3. Taking what they learned from their analysis, they have created a list of targeted keywords. They've made sure that writers and other content producers maintain top-of-mind awareness of the keyword strategies and use them effectively.
4. They've optimized landing pages to ensure that visitors can easily find content, whether it's a Super Bowl ad or some other message – and they've further optimized their pages to drive these repeat viewers toward a specific conversion.
5. They've established a detailed game plan – no pun intended – to track the success of their SEO strategies. They haven't merely agreed that the team will take a look at things at some unspecified point. They have detailed specifically who on the team is taking responsibility and the trends they'll be watching. And they've assigned someone to watch competitors as well.

The football teams that will square off in next year's Super Bowl have already begun drawing up plans that will lead to

success many months from now.

The marketing teams that use effective SEO to deliver meaningful customer engagement and returns also are creating tomorrow's successful strategies today. They realize the winners of this battle can never stop improving.

***About the Author:** As the SVP of Marketing for BrightEdge, Kevin leads the company's go-to-market strategy and a growing marketing team responsible for building the BrightEdge brand, driving demand, and expanding customer relationships. Prior to BrightEdge he was the Chief Marketing Officer of Act-On software. Kevin was also VP, Product & Market Solutions at ExactTarget & Salesforce.com, where his team fueled the company's growth through a successful IPO in 2012 and acquisition by Salesforce two years later for \$2.7 billion. Kevin has a BA from Michigan State University.*