

Real Estate Content Publisher Partners with The Search Agency to Increase Organic Traffic

Background

A longtime client of The Search Agency (TSA) owns and operates a network of real estate web sites with 7.7 million monthly visitors. The client operates two flagship sites – the first provides information on new homes, moving, and home finance; the second aggregates listings of homes for sale. The client offers a variety of advertising opportunities leveraging advanced technology to deliver ads directly to the consumers most likely to act upon them, based on their location and behavior. The client has an in-house staff dedicated to search engine optimization (SEO) and has seen consistently good results from their efforts.

Challenge

In the past few years, online real estate information has become one of the more competitive industries on the internet. Both flagship sites were early entrants and trusted brands, with a steady stream of organic traffic. But new competitors were beginning to eat into their market share and lure advertisers away. In addition, prices on the paid search side were increasing, making it more expensive to obtain traffic from this channel. While each site ranked well on head terms, both needed to improve ranking on long-tail terms and geo-modified keywords. In order to maintain their leadership position in online real estate, the client needed new ways to increase its organic traffic across its sites and strategically attract visitors across a wide range of keywords and geographies.

Solution

The client partnered with TSA in late 2006 to analyze their portfolio of sites and develop strategic recommendations to improve their ranking on key head terms, as well as geo-modified tail terms. Working with their TSA account team, the client implemented a number of dramatic changes to the content, architecture, and external links to increase the quantity and quality of organic traffic.

Content – Search Engines rely on a page's body content in order to determine topic authority. TSA recommended the following changes to improve search engine ranking on their highest performing keywords:

- ▶ **Eliminated duplicate content.** The client offered a number of articles, how-to guides, and research reports to drive traffic to their sites. Oftentimes, the exact same piece of content would appear on both of the flagship sites. The search engines discourage hosting the same content on multiple sites and this was negatively impacting each site's organic rankings. With TSA's assistance, the client initiated a new process to assign all content to only one domain. For example, "Home Finance", "Home & Garden" and "Moving" content would only reside on the first flagship site. The second site with real estate listings would then include links to the articles with "no Index, no follow" tags. This strategy ensured the search engines identified site #1 as the originator of that piece of content and moved it ahead of any syndicators.
- ▶ **Created unique meta data.** TSA created unique title tags and meta tags across the sites to eliminate duplicate content and to ensure all pages were being crawled.
- ▶ **Created "metro" pages to capture geo-targeted traffic.** 40,000 new pages targeted home buyers searching in specific cities or MSAs. This resulted in a significant increase in traffic on long-tail terms.

Architecture – A streamlined architecture allows the search engines to crawl pages more quickly, thoroughly, and regularly. TSA provided strategic recommendations to facilitate frequent and thorough indexing:

- ▶ **Changed from a subdomain to subdirectory architecture.**
Previously, all pages on the site were set up as subdomains (e.g. finance.theclient.com). The search engines view each of these subdomains as their own web site. With the amount of content on their subpages, it made more sense to arrange them into subdirectories (e.g. theclient.com/finance). This change allowed the client to segment their content and maintain a logical structure for their visitors, while providing a more authoritative and link-rich site to the search engines.
- ▶ **Re-wrote all the URLs to be clean and include more keywords.**
Most of their search result pages were not being indexed because of the multiple appended parameters. Under the previous architecture, a search for homes in Los Angeles would have

returned the following URL: `http://homes.theclient.com/search/searchresults.aspx?zp=91307&mp=31&mxp=31&bd=4&bth=4&typ=1`. By redesigning the URL structure to produce a cleaner result `http://www.theclient.com/realestateandhomes/los+angeles-ca/`, they not only improved the user experience, but saw a significant increase in traffic for these geo-modified keywords.

- ▶ **Eliminated code “bloat” to allow pages to be completely indexed.** Many of the client’s pages included unnecessary code which exceeded Google’s 120kb limit per page. For many pages, search engines were only indexing half the content, and not crawling key content and links. Eliminating the generic controls on these pages reduced the size and enabled full indexing by the search engines.

Linking – Search Engines measure the number and quality of inbound links to a site in assigning natural search position. With its portfolio of real estate sites, the client was uniquely positioned to strategically place high-quality links:

- ▶ **Tactically cross-linked between each of the flagship sites.**
The client was fortunate to have two real estate hub sites with high page ranks. Strategically linking between the sites served as a mutual endorsement and improved page rank on internal pages.
- ▶ **Linked between home pages and key metro pages.** Within each site, the client increased the links from the home pages to the deeper-level pages. These internal links helped improve the page rank on a broader number of pages and improved their ranking on geo-modified tail terms.

Results

Within six months of implementation, both flagship sites ranked in the top 10 on Google for 80% of their top 50 keywords. More importantly, the client enjoyed a 57% increase in organic traffic (over 5 million visitors) from Q1 2007 to Q1 2008. This growth in online traffic has continued and the two sites drew over 16 million visitors in Q2 2008.

