



Keyword, landing page optimization help circuit board maker migrate to new brand name

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Story posted: November 7, 2007 - 12:55 pm EDT

Sunstone Circuits is a Portland, Ore.-based manufacturer of printed circuit boards. Over time, circuit boards have become a commoditized product to their primary purchasers, designers and engineers, and much of the business has moved overseas. But Sunstone had a few advantages.

For starters, the company established itself early on the Web, embracing the Internet in 1997 as a sales channel. Back then, about 20% of Sunstone's total sales occurred online.

Another advantageous choice: focusing on the prototype sector of the circuit board industry and developing a reputation for quick turnaround, often delivering prototypes in 24 hours.

It even came to search marketing early, developing its first paid search program in April 2001.

Unfortunately, Sunstone had a marketing challenge, too. It had three distinct brands—PCB Express, PCB Pro and PCB 123—each with a separate Web site.

In 2006, a decision was made to consolidate under the “Sunstone” brand and align all search marketing under that name. After the brand consolidation took place, the company also wanted to boost its conversions, and Bob Schnyder, Internet products manager at Sunstone, knew that would mean refining the landing page strategy.

All of that would require a search agency partner, as Sunstone's search marketing program had grown to such a degree that it was no longer manageable in-house.

“I'm a [certified] Google AdWords Pro myself, so I know what I'm talking about when it comes to paid search,” said Schnyder, who set the bar high when he started looking for an agency. “I needed to find someone who could do it better than I could and a company that not only understood search but b-to-b search.”

Schnyder said he took eight months to research his new partner, and finally found SmartSearch Marketing, a Boulder, Colo.-based search engine marketing agency that specializes in b-to-b.

Schnyder asked SmartSearch to fill a tall order: In a three-month trial period, he wanted it to maintain the same level of revenue growth that Sunstone had already achieved from search with half the marketing budget.

“I knew a great firm could optimize our campaigns,” he said.

SmartSearch bought additional keywords, rearranged keyword groupings, restructured the campaigns and completely overhauled the keyword strategy to make the brand consolidation smoother.

It managed to prove its worth, and Schnyder extended the relationship beyond the trial. For the past year, the effort has focused on brand consolidation and refining landing pages.

“We were our own worst enemy because we were competing against ourselves,” Schnyder said. “In the organic placements, we're in the first top 10 with one or two listings there and, in paid search, sometimes we could have four different ads on our site. In a good sense, we dominated the real estate, but it also created confusion on the part of

customers. They would say, 'Wait, you say you're Sunstone, but you're also Express.'

He added that the benefit of moving to the Sunstone brand is that it allows him to have the real estate on the search results page, but then pinpoint specific areas within the brand through specific landing pages.

Creating relevant landing pages and directing customers appropriately improved results, because Google and other top search engines now also look not only at click-throughs but also figure landing page relevancy into their algorithms.

"Our competition is sending all their ads to the home page," Schnyder said. "If you have a more optimized landing page, you show up more."

Sunstone and SmartSearch began doing multivariate testing of its landing pages this summer. (In such testing, several versions of landing pages are created with variations in page design, copy, pricing and call to action to see which versions improve conversion rates.)

An initial test matched the current product page against the SmartSearch landing page design; the SmartSearch page converted 300% higher than the original product page. Once the winner was determined, Sunstone started multivariate testing on the winning page.

This week, SmartSearch is testing a new landing page for Sunstone that will have 60 different combinations of pages with variations of headlines, subheadlines, text, bullet points and page design.

Once it determines the combination of content and headlines that bring about the highest conversion rates, it can design new landing pages. And once that is done, the testing cycle begins all over again in an ongoing process to continually refine its strategy.

Today, the consolidated Sunstone brand generates 90% of its total revenue online. In addition, Schnyder saw an improvement in conversions (click-throughs) that was 85 times higher than what it had been before the brand consolidation.