

Target Google's Top Ten to Sell Online—Oneupweb Study Shows

| a white paper with pizzazz

Executive Summary /::

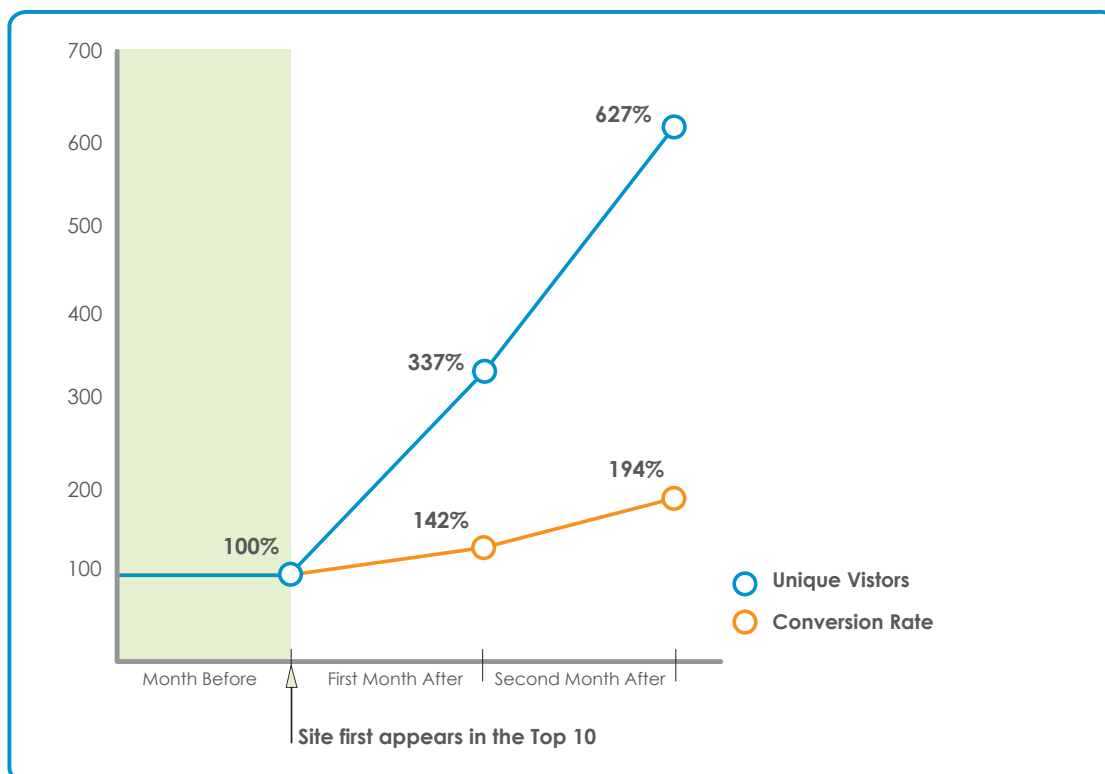
In an effort to substantiate SEO industry claims that first page listings in natural search results increase traffic and sales, Oneupweb reviewed data collected by its proprietary conversion analytics technology, ROI Trax®, to determine average increases in traffic and conversion rates occurring when sites move higher in Google search results. Overall, the data shows that improving one's position on search engine results pages (SERP) is effective in increasing both traffic and the rate at which that traffic purchases, indicating that well-positioned sites attract a more qualified customer. Search engine optimization is one method of improving one's position on SERPs.

The first month a site appears on the second or third page of Google's results for a targeted search term, traffic will increase significantly, an average of five times its previous monthly rate. The second month, traffic will be nine times greater than before it reached that position. There's also a slight increase in sales—up from no sales prior to reaching the second or third page.

Getting listed on Google's first page increases both traffic and conversion rates—a double bonus. The first month, traffic triples. The second month it doubles again to more than six times the traffic it had before achieving a first page position. And a greater percentage of that traffic will convert to sales—an incremental 42 percent more the first month, and nearly double the second month.

Executive summary continued on next page →

Traffic and conversion rate change for sites appearing on Google's first page of results. /::



Executive summary continued →

Pages 2 and 3 of Search Results /::

- The *month prior* to achieving a second or third page listing within Google's natural search results, sites averaged approximately seven unique visitors per search term.
- The *first month* after the listing appeared on the second or third page, the average number of unique visitors increased to nearly 36 per search term.
- The *second month* after a listing appeared on the second or third page, average visitors per keyword increased to approximately 65.

Page 1 of Search Results /::

- The *month prior* to achieving a first page listing within Google's natural search results, sites averaged approximately 14 unique visitors per search term.
- The *first month* after the listing appeared on the first page, the average number of unique visitors increased to nearly 46 per search term.
- The *second month* after a listing appeared on the first page, average visitors per keyword increased to approximately 86.

Entry into Google	Average Unique Visitors Per Keyword		
	Month Before	Month After	2 Months After
30 - 11	6.94	35.88	65.41
10 - 1	13.8	46.43	86.41

While many variables impact a successful web site's performance, Oneupweb's study demonstrates a clear benefit to highly visibly search engine listings.



The Correlation Between Google Positions, Traffic & Conversion Rates.

The Study /::

The default setting for Google provides searchers with 10 results per page; page one lists a total of 10 links to sites in the natural or organic listings (not sponsored links). The search optimization industry tells clients that very few searchers review more than the first three pages of these results. Intuitively, the industry believes traffic is highest for the first page—1 through 10 results or the top 10. And just as intuitively, the industry believes that time-starved, distracted users don't drill down past page three. How does that behavior affect business?

In January 2005, Oneupweb collected website traffic and conversion data associated with keywords entered into Google. The intent was to determine what happens to traffic and conversion rates once a site is listed on Google's second or third page. And then determine if there is another change when a site reaches the first Google page. We divided data into two categories: the first category covered data from Google's second and third pages; the second category covered data from Google's first page.

For the first category, Oneupweb only evaluated data from site listings entering Google's second and third pages for the first time. Sites that previously or routinely appeared on those pages for a particular keyword search weren't included in order to pinpoint an immediate change.

And for the second category (data from Google's first page listing), data is from the first time the site appeared in the top 10 for that keyword.

In our study, traffic is defined as new unique users—returning customers weren't tracked as traffic. Traffic increases represent new Customers or first-time visitors. Additionally conversions were defined as online sales.

The study focused on businesses selling to consumers online. Several companies were reviewed in a variety of industries.

Oneupweb reviewed traffic and conversion data for three separate time periods:

- the month before a site appeared in one of the two categories for a particular search term
- the month after the site was included in one of the two categories for a particular search term
- the second month after the site was included in one of the two categories for a particular search term

While a typical SEO campaign sells for a year or more, not just two months, our study focuses on this time frame to show the most immediate changes position brings.

Some keywords had monthly traffic figures as high as 780 unique visitors per term; other terms didn't get a single visitor. Some had conversion rates as high as 50 percent and as low as zero. Some clients requested optimization for narrowly focused niche products they had in inventory. The company's site is positioned very well for these keywords but consumer demand is extraordinarily limited. Other clients are well-optimized for seasonal items before that season hits. As expected these terms didn't get any traffic or conversions at all, indicating that it does no good to be well-optimized for a term consumers aren't interested in. We included this data in the study as well providing an accurate and conservative view of SEO opportunity.



Finally, note that we reviewed consumer-driven on-line businesses with relatively short sales cycles. Those businesses with longer sales cycles will see changes in conversion rates relative to their sales cycles.

Second and Third Google Pages /::

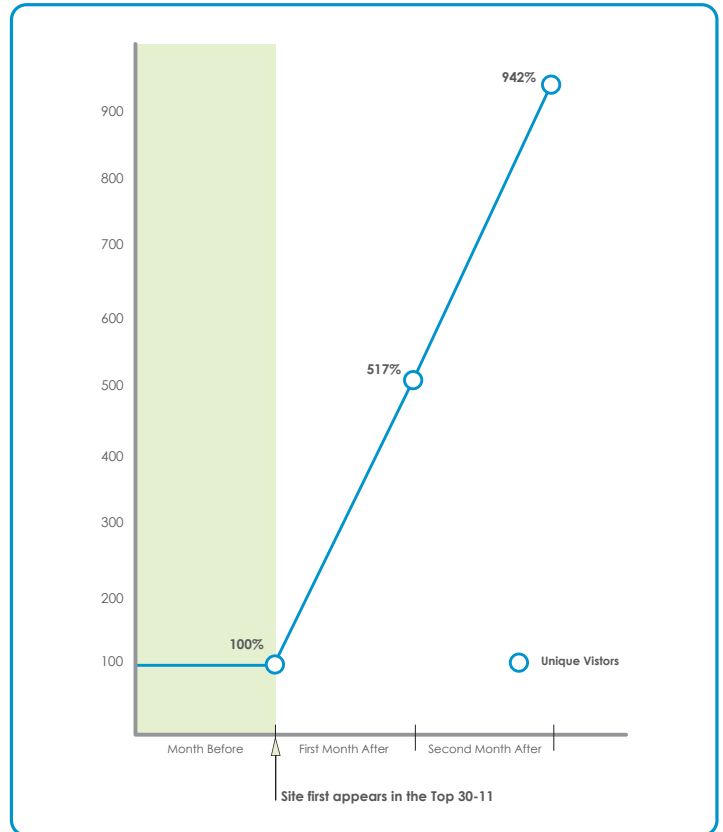
Being listed on the second and third Google results pages improves a site's traffic and conversion rates for that term. Traffic increased 517 percent for the first month after a site appeared on page 2 or 3 and 942 percent during the second month (as compared to the month before the site hit page 2 or 3).

The table below shows the average number of unique visitors per keyword for sites appearing on Google's second and third page of results for each month.

- The month prior to achieving a second or third page listing within Google's natural search results, sites averaged approximately seven unique visitors per search term.
- The first month after the listing appeared on the second or third page, the average number of unique visitors increased to nearly 36 per search term.
- The second month after a listing appeared on the second or third page, average visitors per keyword increased to approximately 65.

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In keeping with the industry's rule of thumb Oneupweb confirmed that websites falling below page three don't sell. In our research, not one sale was recorded for a site below Google page three for the time period. And so we couldn't determine a



Traffic and conversion rate change for sites appearing on Google's second or third page of results. /::

base rate of conversion for comparison in the months after a site was listed.

While conversion rates tripled from the first month to the second month, the rates are very low (300 percent of nothing is still nothing). In order to sell online, set your optimization goals on getting in the top 10.

Google's First Page of Results /::

Traffic rates of sites entering the first page of Google's results for the first time have an average increase in traffic of 337 percent the first month over the month prior. The second month sees an increase in unique visitors of 627 percent.



The table below shows the average number of unique visitors per keyword for sites appearing on Google's first page of results for each month.

- The month prior to achieving a first page listing within Google's natural search results, sites averaged approximately 14 unique visitors per search term.
- The first month after the listing appeared on the first page, the average number of unique visitors increased to nearly 46 per search term.
- The second month after a listing appeared on the first page, average visitors per keyword increased to approximately 86.

Entry into Google	Average Unique Visitors Per Keyword		
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While the rate of traffic improvement isn't as steep as the change seen when a site first appears on pages two and three, the final average audience is larger overall.

Conversion rates for words first entering Google's first page of results follow a similar pattern increasing 142 percent the first month after and 194 percent the second month after.

Once a site is positioned in the top 10 for a keyword, that site has more visitors and a larger percentage of them purchase from the site.

When Oneupweb reviewed the list of sites achieving a top-10 position for a particular search term, we noted that more than 75 percent debuted there, without previous listings on Google pages 2 or 3. Oneupweb believes that professional skill had much to do with

the success of these sites for these keywords. Other factors include the number of competitors, the level of optimization, and the number of other (non-competitive) businesses targeting that same term.

By averaging both months of post optimization data, Oneupweb minimizes market effects like seasonality on the trends. Using those two-month averages, keywords appearing on Google's first page for the first time can expect traffic increases in excess of 480 percent and conversion rate increases of more than 200 percent within a few months.

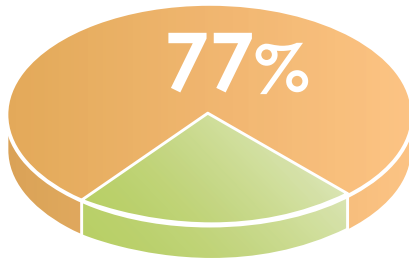
How to Apply This Information to Your Business /::

Oneupweb is confident this data is a conservative view of SEO opportunity—many Oneupweb campaigns have greater success rates. Use this information to help SEO skeptics or those unfamiliar with SEO understand its effectiveness in general. Combine this research with Oneupweb case studies and an initial assessment from a reputable SEO provider to get a clearer understanding of how a campaign can benefit your online business.

Strong search engine optimization programs have goals based on a company's current sales, marketplace potential, competitive situation and target audience. Oneupweb does not recommend using these percentages as a benchmark for your optimization efforts or to evaluate the performance of a site for a single keyword. There are too many mitigating factors in individual cases to apply these aggregate trends to individual businesses.

Traffic and purchasing patterns vary by industry. Oneupweb performed this study hypothesizing that being in the top 10 results is better than being in the top 30—and being below the top 30 is like being invisible. Clearly, the study establishes that trend.





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Methodology /::

Oneupweb reviewed the traffic and conversion rates for more than 100 keywords for a variety of online retail sites in a variety of industries. Keyword data met the following criteria:

- Professionally optimized by Oneupweb
- Debuted in Google results pages on either page 1 or pages 2-3
- Appeared on Google results in 2004
- Used ROI trax® to collect unique visitor and sales conversion data

Keyword results were then divided into two categories: data from keywords appearing on Google's first page and data from keywords appearing on Google's second and third pages combined. Oneupweb reviewed the traffic and conversion rates for each of three months:

- The month prior to the listing appearing in the results
- The month after the listing appeared in the results
- The second month after the listing appeared in the results

Data was averaged across the entire category ("first page" or "second & third pages".) The month before the term hit Google's first page or second and third pages was used as a baseline. Percentage changes were figured using that month as 100 percent.

Several paired-samples t-tests were computed to determine the strength of the relationships between position, traffic, and conversions. Oneupweb found that there were statistically significant relationships between traffic and appearance on the second and third pages, both when comparing one month before with one month after ($t(31) = 2.3446$, $p < .05$) and one month before with the second month after ($t(31) = 2.4959$, $p < .05$). While there were strong relationships between conversions and appearance on the second and third pages at both one month and two months after, they were not statistically significant ($t(31) = 1.9126$, $p = .0651$ and $t(31) = 1.2139$, $p = 1.2139$, respectively.)

Relationships between traffic and appearance on the first page of results were statistically significant. Comparing one month prior and one month after first appearance on the first page, traffic increased 336% ($t(81) = 5.5461$, $p < .001$). At two months after, traffic increased 625% ($t(81) = 5.2076$, $p < .001$). Conversions also increased at one month after ($t(81) = 2.7976$, $p < .05$) and at two months after ($t(81) = 4.0124$, $p < .001$)

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