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Web-Positioning Software: Good or Bad?

By [Shari Thurow](#)

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Last week, Fredrick Marckini [lauded NetIQ](#) for acquiring popular search engine positioning software, WebPosition Gold (WPG). Fredrick feels NetIQ cornered a brand new search engine marketing (SEM) and advertising analytics market.

Many search engine marketers don't share his joy with NetIQ's acquisition, nor do they feel Web analytics is a new market. My own attitude toward marketers and Web analytics is, "Where have you been?"

Search Engine Positioning Vs. Web Analytics Software

I'll just come right out and say it: I don't endorse any position-checking software.

Never mind that WPG and other well-known position-checking software are commonly used by marketers. Just because a product is popular or common doesn't mean it's effective.

Since 1997, we've provided clients with reporting from Web analytics software (a.k.a. site statistics software). Our designs, copywriting, and site architecture are always based on visitor behavior. After careful data analysis, we can redesign and rewrite a site based on visitor data and, thus, create more effective Web sites.

Sure, Web analytics software has evolved since 1997. It now includes more detailed keyword analysis and search engine advertising data. This makes our analyses more thorough. In that sense, I agree with Fredrick and laud Web analytics companies for responding to the search industry.

However, top-10 search engine positions alone don't communicate user behavior. Site owners should focus more on those who will spend money on their products and services: their target audiences.

Instead of overzealously maintaining a top-10 position (unfortunately, still a search engine optimization (SEO) obsession), online marketers should spend more time and money on visitor behavior.

Moreover, no position-checking software company I know of has received permission from search engines to perform automated queries on their indexes.

Server Loads and Advertisers

Search engine representatives have consistently *not* endorsed position-checking software. One explanation they provide for this is advertiser demand on their server load.

Suppose your site has over 100 targeted keyword phrases. You want use position-checking software to measure your site's search engine visibility. With 100 keyword phrases, the software performs 100 queries per search engine. If you wish to check positioning on 10 search engines, the software performs 1,000 search queries for just one site (10 x 100 = 1,000).

In the real world, thousands of companies want to know their site's search engine visibility. To keep things simple, let's say 100 companies with 100 unique, targeted keyword phrases want to perform position-checking:

100 companies x 1,000 queries = 100,000 search queries

If these companies check their position weekly (I commonly see this in [RFPs](#)), the total will be:

100,000 search queries x 52 weeks = 5,200,000 queries per year

Extrapolate these simple calculations to real-world business. Imagine the server load for the thousands of companies, all using position-checking software.

That server load interferes with the search engines' ability to provide users with relevant information. Further, advertisers pay for space on the search engines. How can they differentiate a position-checking query from a qualified visitor's query?

Even Google [states directly](#) it doesn't endorse position-checking software:

Don't use unauthorized computer programs to submit pages, check rankings, etc. Such programs consume computing resources and violate our terms of service. Google does not recommend the use of products such as WebPosition Gold™ that send automatic or programmatic queries to Google.

Doorway Pages

Another problem with WPG is its doorway-page generator. I've [written](#) about doorway pages before.

The SEM industry has advanced beyond computer-generated doorway pages, but ad agencies still use them. One of my colleagues, who also specializes in search-friendly Web design, recently told me about four ad agencies whose entire SEO program is based on WPG doorway pages. He constantly turns those doorway pages in to the spam police.

Granted, not all ad agencies are ignorant when it comes to SEM. But [ad agencies](#) must understand the optimization market more thoroughly. WPG might provide a quick fix, but that quick fix is often [search engine spam](#).

Conclusion

I'm not enthused about NetIQ's acquisition. Rather than turn to an SEM company for guidance on Web analytics development, you should instead work directly with search engines and usability professionals. The SEM industry might be more effective if companies worked with usability professionals who understand search behavior.

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