

Guide to a Successful Career in Search Engine Marketing



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Introduction to SEM (Search Engine Marketing)

Search engines have become an integrated part of our lives. In today's world, 'being online' is not an option. In US alone, around 7 billion searches are being made every month. Travel, finance, entertainment, education, health or ecommerce, search engines are being used to find information, products and services.

Search Engine Marketing or SEM is the process of marketing a website via search engines. SEM strategies primarily consist of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising.

SEO is the process of improving natural or organic rankings on search engines. Search engines rank websites based on variety of parameters and each search engine has its own algorithm to rank different websites. However, one common and most important ranking parameter is a site's credibility which is determined by the quality and quantity of other sites which link to it. PPC is a type of internet advertising in which the advertiser pays an agreed amount to a search engine for every click a visitor makes on the advertisement. It is also referred to as Cost Per Click (CPC), Paid Placement and Search Engine Advertising.

SEM Industry

According to a research by SEMPO, Search Engine Marketing industry was at \$9.45 billion in North America in 2006. It is expected to be over \$18 billion industry by the year 2011. The SEM industry grew significantly in 2006 as compared to 2005 when it was less than \$6 billion in size. According to the same research, while SEO is the most popular form of SEM, it accounted for around 10% of the total spending. However, Paid Advertising accounted for over 85% of the total SEM spending in 2006.

Over the last few years, the importance and the acceptance of SEM has grown significantly. According to a survey by SEMPO, of all the respondents, more than 50% said that Senior Management at their companies are 'very involved' in their SEM program. Sales and Brand awareness were the two major objectives behind all SEM programs.

SEM Job Profiles

Growth in the SEM industry has created a strong demand for experienced and talented Search Engine Marketing professionals. This demand is expected to grow even faster in the coming years with lots of new opportunities for existing and budding Search Engine Marketers.

The SEM industry offers various kinds of job roles for its professionals. Given that the industry is still evolving, these job roles are also changing and new roles are being created with new initiatives. For instance, online PR (Public Relations) has gained significant growth over the last year and so is the need for PR writers and marketers.

An SEM professional may be employed for an in-house work or by an agency. For instance, ecommerce companies like eBay, Google, Yahoo hire SEM professionals for their own products and services promotion. However, agencies like iProspect hire people to serve their clients for various SEM assignments. One may also work as a freelancer. Since every activity of an SEM job can be done online, lots of freelancing opportunities exist for independent SEM professionals. Find below the list of some of the key job roles in the SEM industry. Please note that depending upon the size of the organization, some of the mentioned roles may be combined into a single role.

- ▶ SEO (Search Engine Optimization)
 - VP/Director, SEO

- SEO Manager
 - SEO Team Lead
 - SEO Executive (Link Building, Keyword Research etc)
 - Content Writer and Editor
 - Account Manager (for organizations who serve multiple clients)
- ▶ PPC (Pay Per Click)
- Campaign Executive
 - Campaign Manager
 - Ad Writer or Copywriter
 - Account Manager (as above)

Besides the above mentioned roles, organizations also hire technical professionals and graphic designers for building tools and technologies for effective SEM implementation and service.

SEM Salaries

Although there is no official data available on the salaries earned by SEM professionals, the annual salary for an SEM professional in US typically range between \$30,000 for an SEM executive to \$250,000 for a VP level position depending upon the years of experience and the location. The salary offered for similar roles in India range between Rs 120,000 (approx \$2500) to Rs 30,00,000 (approx \$65000) per annum.

In-house professionals demand higher salaries than professions working in an SEM agency. The key reason behind this salary difference is that in-house professionals possess stronger domain knowledge compared to an agency professional and thus the role performed by an in-house professional is more critical.

Required Skill Sets

To be a successful SEM professional, one needs a variety of skill sets. Moreover, the skill sets requirement changes with time as per the changing needs of the dynamic SEM industry. Find below the details about the key skills required by an SEM professional.

- ▶ General Skills
- Strong quantitative and analytical ability
 - Excellent communication skills (particularly writing skills)
 - Constant urge for learning (industry is dynamic and one needs to stay abreast of the best practices)
- ▶ Technical Skills
- Sound understanding of Computers, Internet, Email and HTML skills
 - SEO techniques - both "do's and don'ts"
 - PPC techniques including specific knowledge about programs such as Google Adwords, Yahoo Search Marketing and MSN Advertising
 - Sound understanding of tools such as Word Tracker, Google Keyword Suggestion & Traffic Estimator, Google Toolbar, Google Analytics, HTML Editors and FTP Softwares
 - Sound understanding of relevant programming and scripting languages such as PHP, ASP, XML and CSS (for technical positions)
- ▶ Sales & Marketing Skills
- Ability to understand the customer and the market
 - Customer Relationship Management

- Ability to think creatively & bring innovation to the marketing approach

Unlike the software industry where lots of options such as certification exams exist for one to assess his skills, the SEM industry offers limited avenues for skills assessment. Given the newness of the industry, it is justified. However, few options still exist for SEM skills assessment. Find below few such options:

SEM Certifications

- [Google Advertising Professional Certification](#)
- [Yahoo Certified Ambassador](#)

SEM Quizzes

- [SEM Times Quiz](#)
- [W3schools HTML Quiz](#)

SEM Learning Resources

Success in Search Engine Marketing requires both learning and practice. The key element of learning in the SEM industry is to be abreast of latest best practices. Therefore, one needs to have a constant urge to learn in order to be a successful Search Engine Marketer. An SEM professional has numerous options to learn SEM concepts and best practices. However, it is critical that one chooses appropriate options for continuous learning. Find below a list of selected learning options.

- ▶ **Discussion Forums** - Given the dynamic nature of the SEM industry, participation in discussion forums is considered the best approach to be abreast of latest happenings. Below is a list of some of the popular SEM discussion forums.
 - [SEO Chat](#)
 - [Search Engine Watch](#)
 - [Web Master World](#)
- ▶ **Blogs** - Blogs are another powerful source of continuous learning. Find below some of the blogs which publish valuable information about SEM concepts including latest revisions and trends.
 - [Google Adwords Blog](#)
 - [Yahoo Search Marketing Blog](#)
 - [Matt Cutts Blog](#)
 - [SearchEngineLand](#)
 - [Top Rank Blog](#)
 - [Andy Beal's Blog](#)
 - [Bruce Clay's Blog](#)
 - [Gord Hotchkiss' Blog](#)
- ▶ **Articles and Tutorials** - Some people do not want to go through a complete training or a course. However, they are interested in a crash course or a quick revision. Find below some of the popular SEM articles and tutorials written by SEM experts.
 - [SEMPO Learning Center](#)
 - [Beginners Guide to SEO by SEOmoz](#)
 - [Google Webmaster Guidelines](#)
 - [SEO Tutorial by Elixir Systems](#)
 - [W3schools HTML Tutorial](#)

- ▶ **Online Trainings** - A training or a course in SEM offers a structured way to learn SEM skills and provides a good start, especially for the beginners. However, one needs to be responsible for continual learning to be updated about latest trends. A self study based online training offers the convenience of learning from anywhere and the flexibility of learning anytime, compared to a classroom based training. Find below a list of some of the valuable online training programs in SEM.
 - [SEMPO Institute](#)
 - [Adwords Learning Center](#)
 - [Yahoo Search Marketing](#) (click on 'Find out How Sponsored Search Works.')
 - [DMA Training Program](#)
 - [Search Engine College](#)
 - [SEO Online Training from Lynda.com](#)

- ▶ **Classroom Trainings** - Although classroom based training has some disadvantages over an online training program, the fixed schedule of the classroom training offers a more powerful structure (one's learning does not depend on one's mood) to ensure the learning it promises. Find below a list of some of the recognized classroom based trainings.
 - [SEOToolSet](#)
 - [High Rankings Seminars](#)
 - [Search Engine Workshops](#)

- ▶ **Newsletters** - Newsletters are a great way to keep oneself informed about the latest happenings in the SEM world. Find below some of the popular and valuable SEM newsletters.
 - [Search Engine Guide](#)
 - [SearchDay](#)
 - [ClickZ News](#)

- ▶ **Professional Organizations** - By being part of reputed SEM organizations like SEMPO , one can stay up to date about latest happenings in the SEM industry. Moreover, such memberships offer exceptional opportunity to network with industry experts. Find below some of the reputed Search Engine Marketing professional organizations.
 - [SEMPO](#)
 - [SeoPros](#)
 - [SMA-NA](#)

- ▶ **Conferences** - Participation in SEM conferences is another great opportunity for training & development, directly from the industry experts. Find below some of the prestigious Search Engine Marketing conferences.
 - [Search Engine Strategies](#)
 - [WebmasterWorld Pubcon](#)
 - [ad:tech](#)

SEM Interviews

Search Engine Marketing is both a Science and an Art. The selection process for SEM professionals may involve a single interview, multiple rounds of interviews or a combination of written test and an interview. A candidate is most likely to be tested on both general and technical skills, as mentioned above. Many organizations first conduct an aptitude test and then follow it up with a technical interview.

Please understand that it is possible that the person interviewing you may not know more than just few SEM buzzwords. The reason they are considering you for a position is that they need your expertise and that you may be the first one to bring that expertise. The company may not be fully convinced about the potential of SEM for them and you may be able to convince them through the interview process. It is critical that before you go for the interview, you study the website of your potential employer and the products/services offered by them.

Some of the questions commonly asked in an SEM interview are:

1. What are the advantages of SEO over PPC?
2. What is Web Analytics?
3. How do you optimize a dynamic web page?
4. What is black hat SEO?
5. List 5 important website elements for SEO.
6. Mention 3 popular PR, Directory and Article submission sites.
7. List 5 most common SEO incompatible issues found on most websites.
8. What are the most common ROI metrics in Search Engine Marketing?
9. What is a landing page?
10. How do you perform keyword research?

Visit [SEM Times Interview](#) section for a comprehensive list of SEM interview questions.

SEM Jobs Resources

The growing SEM industry has created lots of new jobs and the demand for SEM professionals is going to increase continuously at least for next couple of years. Find below a list of some of the popular job sites for SEM.

- [SEM Jobs at SEMPO](#)
- [SEO Jobs in USA](#)
- [SEO Consultants](#)
- [Monster's SEM Jobs](#)
- [SEM Jobs in India](#) (search for 'seo' & 'sem')
- [GetAFreelancer](#) (freelancing SEO jobs)

About the Author

A graduate of IIT Delhi and an entrepreneur from India, Pradeep Chopra is the founder of [SEM Times](#), a Search Engine Marketing community which enables SEM professionals to assess their skills and knowledge, required to build a successful career in the SEM industry. Pradeep is a Search Engine Marketing expert and a member of [SEMPO's Global Committee](#) which facilitates the growth of the SEM industry internationally. Search Engine Marketing is his passion and SEM Times is a vehicle for him to fulfill his passion and contribute to the rapidly growing SEM industry.

Pradeep is one of the founders of [Whizlabs Software](#) Pvt. Ltd, a global leader in IT certification preparation and IT skill assessment. He co-founded Whizlabs in the year 2000 and established its business model for which Whizlabs won the Most Innovative IT Company in India award by NASSCOM in 2004. He is a regular speaker and an author on variety of business topics, especially Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Search Engine Marketing. Pradeep can be reached through email at [pradeep \(@\) semtimes.com](mailto:pradeep (@) semtimes.com).