# The top 100 Italian ad spenders on the internet

Optimization, visibility and popularity of their websites

## *Executive Summary*

*The majority of large brands don't adequately utilize their web sites, at least in regards to development of online search engine visibility and the interchange of reciprocal links with other sites (further increasing link popularity). From examining the level of optimization in relation to the sites' popularity, it is evident that only one quarter of the websites reach their adequate level.*

*The majority of the analyzed sites are lacking adequate direct links from search engines, with the consequent result of not factoring high in the search engine results. Definitively, this research shows that web site optimization directly plays a role in boosting online visibility and link popularity.*

*The diffusion and importance of search engines, as evidenced by the vast array of research done in this sector, should therefore motivate businesses that invest in communication, and particularly in advertising, to consider their websites not just from the aesthetic point of view, but instead from a functional and service-based point of view. In order to be found online, it is a strict necessity to optimize one's site well in order to be placed well in search engine results.*

*The attention to the website's internal structure and the development of a network of reciprocal-linked sites around the web recalls traditional public relations work, though this time carried out on the scale of the Internet.*

*From examining the level of optimization in relation to the sites' popularity, only one quarter of the websites reach an adequate level.*

### Objectives / Metodoligy

The goal of the research was to analyze the web sites of companies that are heavily investing in the Italian advertising marketing and verify the level of each of the following: the level of site optimization, visibility on search engines and global online popularity. The websites examined in this study were those of the top 100 advertising spenders in Italy in the first half of 2004, as highlighted by Nielsen Media Research Ad-Ex. The analysis was conducted between December 2004 and February 2005. For those companies or industrial groups that have many sites, the most popular site was taken as a point of reference. In some cases, instead of the group website, particular popular brand websites were used to represent the company's entity for this research.

# The Research

## Optimization of Titles

Among all of the elements that make up a web site, page titles attracts a particular attention in terms of the ranking criteria used by search engines; as simple as they may seem (and as often as they go un- or mis-named), titles are one of the more important criteria used in positioning high in results on search engines.

Almost two out of three sites analyzed did not have a name assigned to their pages, or instead had the same name on all pages throughout the entire site. 21% of the sites presented a different title for each individual page, but only 16% had optimized titles that included some relevant keywords.

*Pie chart: optimized titles 16%, no title 4%, same title 59%, different titles 21%*
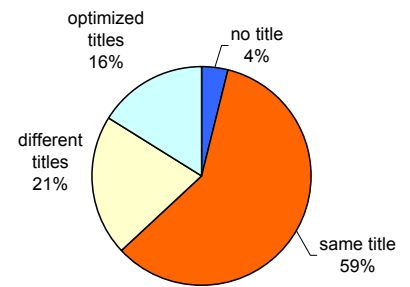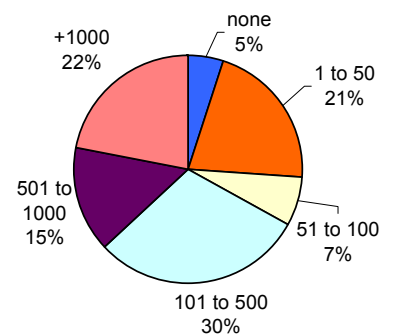
## Metatag presence

Metatags are "instructions" that can be included in HTML code inside of web pages to indicate what information should be added to search engines, particularly description and relevant keyword information. Even if the impact of this HTML tool isn't as great as it was 2-3 years ago, their use today is nonetheless still important.

Only 35% of the analyzed sites had any forms of Metatags (and only 18% had put them on both their home page and on the rest of the internal pages), while 65% had no forms of tags present whatsoever.

*Pie chart: on home and internal pages 18%, on home 12%, on internal pages 5%, none 65%*
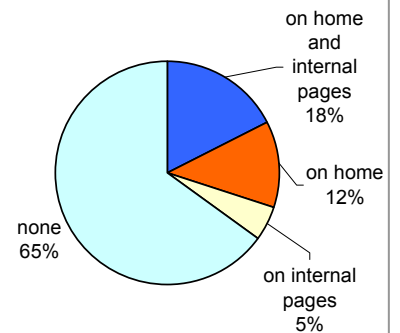
## Pages Present on Google

The simple existence of a website does not assure that it will automatically be linked to search engines. In fact, depending on the structure of and technology used in creating the website, the website may or may not be archived by a search engine at all. It is therefore fundamental to verify how many pages are effectively listed because each page can be a entryway into specific information. Obviously the absolute number of pages present on search engines is relative to the total number of pages in an entire site, but the analysis nonetheless shows that a third of the examined sites had less than 100 pages present on Google, and only 37% had more than 500.

*Pie chart: none 5%, 1 to 50 21%, 51 to 100 7%, 101 to 500 30%, 501 to 1000 15%, +1000 22%*

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## Presence on Web Directories

Web directories continue to represent an important instrument for increasing online visibility. Even if internet users are turning more to keyword searches, directory access remains nonetheless very relevant. Not only are directories visited by some internet searches, however, search engines place a strong importance on directory presence when ranking pages of a web site.
Analyzing the principal directories used in Italy, Virgilio, Yahoo! and Open Directory (whose archive is used, among others, by Google), we see that 35% of the analyzed sites were present in all 3, and a strong 17% were not a part of any of the three.

none 17%
on 3 35%
on 1 20%
on 2 28%
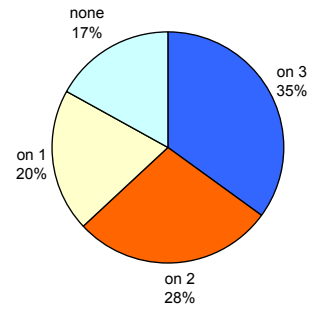
## Link popularity

Other than internal elements of the site (such as Metatags analyzed earlier), one of the parameters that characterizes online visibility is represented via Link Popularity, the quantity and quality of links received from other websites. Naturally, the fact that pages contain links to outside sites generally allows for a traffic flow from one site to another, thereby increasing visitors. Search engines view favourably the amount of links that a website receives from other sites. Google, the search engine that places most weight on link popularity, utilizes their PageRank parameter that assigns a level of popularity from 1 to 10. In regards to the sites analyzed, 39% have a PageRank between 1 and 4, 53% either 5 or 6 and the top 8% between 7 and 8. Of course, the right quantity of inbound links is different for each site and normally it is related to site's quality and notoriety. However the number of links received from other sites is the key factor that determines overall site popularity when gauged across the entire Internet. In terms of the research on the top spenders of advertising, even with these big brand names, half of the sites have less than 50 inbound links (12% don't even have one inbound link) and only 10% have over 500.

+1000 5%
501 to 1000 5%
none 12%
101 to 500 19%
1 to 50 36%
51 to 100 23%
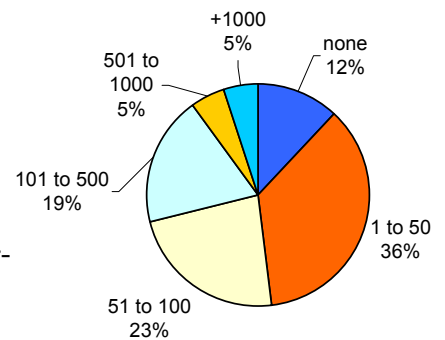
### Positioning of Competitive Keywords

The presence of a website in a search engine's archives do not necessarily guarantee visibility. In fact, to be able to emerge in the top of the search engine's listings (Google, for instance, lists well over 8 billion pages) it is necessary to position oneself well with significantly competitive keywords.

In relation to this study, 20 highly competitive keywords were chosen per sector of each of the analyzed sites. The results demonstrate that 38% of the companies are present in the first 20 results per keyword search, yet a strong 62% did not factor into the results at all.



1st and 2nd page 19%

1st page 12%

2nd page 7%

none 62%
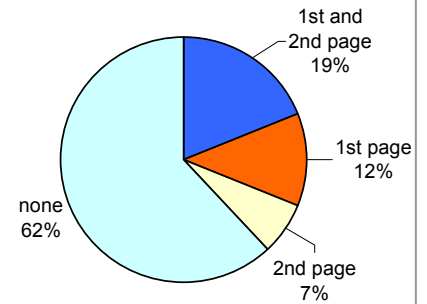
## Relationship between site optimization and online visibility/popularity of the site

At the end of the analysis, it is possible to compile all of the site information and divide the results into two camps: optimization and visibility/popularity. The first focuses on optimization of titles, the presence of Metatags, the quantity of pages present in Google and in the web directories. The second group instead deals with the information like link popularity, PageRank and positioning of competitive keywords. For each one of these parameters there is an assigned weight in relation to its relative importance and function.

The results show in an unequivocal fashion the direct relationship between site optimization and the resulting popularity and visibility online. Sites containing titles and adequate Metatags showed up well on search engines and in directories, and they factored in well in terms of search engine query results.

In the online representation of the top 100 'big spenders' in Italian advertising, we can note that only a quarter have been ideally positioned well on the web via optimization. 50% instead have insufficient optimization programs, and their online visibility therefore suffers.

**Top ad spender website status**



visibility & popularity

optimization
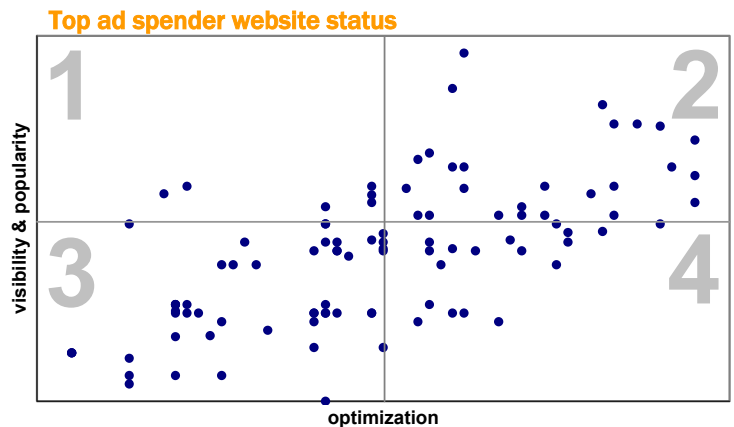
In a sector-by-sector analysis, it is evident that websites that are better positioned came from the Telecommunications and Services industries, as opposed to the Clothing, Food and Pharmaceutical industries, where sites tended to be less optimized and therefore less visible.

**Top ad spender website status analyzed by sector**
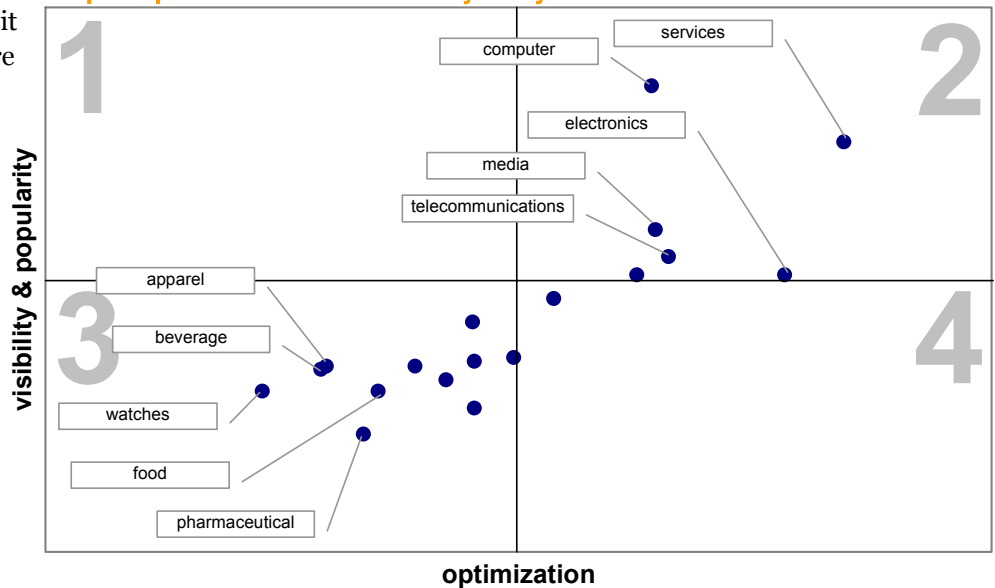


## Companies analyzed in the research

| | |
|---|---|
| Agip Petroli | Ing Direct |
| Artsana | Italaquae |
| Autogerma | Johnson & Johnson |
| Banca Intesa | Johnson Wax |
| Barilla alimentare | Kia Motors |
| Bayer Italia | Kraft Foods |
| Beiersdorf | Lavazza |
| Binda | Lidl |
| BMW | L'Oreàl Saipo |
| Boehringer Ingelheim | Manetti & Roberts |
| C. Dior Italia | Mazda Motor Italia |
| Calzedonia | Mc Donald's Italia |
| Campari | Media Market (Mediaworld) |
| Chanel | Mercedens Benz |
| Chateau D'Ax | Merloni Elettr. |
| Chrysler Jeep Italia | Microsoft |
| Citizen Italia | Natuzzi Mobili |
| Citroèn | Nestlè |
| Coca Cola bevande | Nestlè - Divisione acque |
| Cogedi International | Nike Italia |
| Conad | Nissan |
| Coop Italia | Opel General Motors |
| Cosmetique Active Italia | Parfums & Beautè - Divisione Lancome |
| Daewoo Motor | Peogeot auto |
| e.Biscom | Perfetti Van Melle |
| Ed. De Agostini Ist. Geog. | Poltrone e Sofà |
| Ed. Mondadori | Pool Pharma |
| Ed. Rcs Libri & Grandi Opere | Poste Italiane |
| Eminflex | Procter & Gamble |
| Esselunga | Reckitt Benckiser |
| Euronics | Renault Italia |
| Fater | Riunione Adriatica Sicurtà |
| Ferrero | San Benedetto |
| Fiat - Divisione Alfa | Serta-Expert |
| Fiat Divisione auto | Sky Italia |
| Fiat -Divisione Lancia | Sony Italia |
| Foppa Pedretti | Suzuki Italia |
| Ford Italia | Swatch Group Italia |
| Forus | Tele2 Italia |
| Galbani | Telecom Italia |
| Gervais Danone | Telecom Italia mobile |
| Gillette Group Italia | Terna (Enel) |
| Grossisti Riuniti Elettrodomestici | Toyota Italia |
| H3g | Unieuro |
| Heineken Italia | Unilever - Divisione Lever Fabergè |
| Henkel Divisione detersivi | Unilever - Divisione Sagit |
| Honda auto | Unilever-Bestfoods |
| HP | Vodafone Italia |
| Hyunday Italia | Volvo Italia |
| Ibm Italia | Wind |

**Ad Maiora** is one of the major Italian web marketing and online advertising agencies, and a leading European search engine marketing company.
It offers complete solutions for search marketing campaigns, online ROI tracking and performance measurement.
Since 2002, Ad Maiora has operated a Keyword Research Center to monitor online users' interests and behaviours in search engines, and it is the creator of MotoriDiRicerca.it, the most important search engine guide on the Italian internet.
Founded in 1997, Ad Maiora employees 26 people, with offices in Rome, Milan and San Francisco; it is member of the Boards of IAB Italy and SEMPO (Search Engine Marketing Professional Organization), and a founder of E-SEMA, the first European Search Engine Marketing Alliance.

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