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NET SALES

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SLAM DUNK OR SCAM JUNK?

THE TRUTH ABOUT BROWSER-
BASED KEYWORDS

Search engine marketing is on fire. While the media continues to expose its success, more companies are learning how to achieve top keyword positions in search engines such as AOL, Google and MSN. But caught up in the excitement, growing businesses can be lured into a program that's not the real deal: browser-based keyword advertising.

Most consumers looking for information online type a keyword into a search engine such as Google. Consumers then click on one of the Web site listings provided. This is where companies need to market their Web sites: on the search results page.

However, not all consumers type in a URL to visit a search engine site. Some enter keywords into the address bar of a browser such as Microsoft's Internet Explorer. For example, instead of typing "www.nike.com" as the URL, consumers type "shoes." An advertiser can buy this keyword. When consumers type it into the browser's address bar, they'll be redirected to the advertiser's Web site. Third-party companies, not Microsoft, sell this service. But it doesn't measure up to buying keywords directly from the search engines.

First of all, for Microsoft's browser to redirect consumers to an advertiser's Web site, consumers must download a plug-in from vendors like CommonName or iGetNet. Even with 10 million to 28 million users

of their plug-ins, this isn't a huge number, considering there are more than 135 million active Web users, according to Nielsen//NetRatings. These advertisers will reach only a portion of total Internet users. Then, advertisers must hope a significant number of people with the plug-in actually use the browser as a search engine.

Brian Yui, founder of HouseRebate in San Diego, spent \$400 on this type of program for three, two-word real estate phrases. He received little traffic and found no customer support. Yui is giving another vendor a try, but he's not optimistic. With the second vendor, he also noticed an increase in pop-ups after he downloaded a plug-in.

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