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WHITE PAPERS

Beyond the Click: Integration Delivers A Better Search Campaign

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Over the past two years, search has come out from the shadows to become a full-fledged marketing channel. According to JupiterResearch, paid search was the single largest online advertising category in 2004. Spending on search alone is projected to reach \$4.2 billion in 2005, and to eclipse online display advertising within the next five years.

The Search Engine Marketing Professional Organization (SEMPO) reports over 40 percent of advertisers created new budgets for organic search engine optimization last year; the rest transferred funds from existing traditional and Internet marketing programs. The impetus for all of this? In 2004, according to Pew Internet & American Life Project, 84 percent of the total US Internet population searched the Web. The nebulous activity of browsing aside, that makes "searching" the most popular online activity right behind the original killer app – email.

With numbers like these, it's no wonder search marketing has become the progressive marketers' online acquisition tool of choice.

Now that search is on the same playing field as mediums like online display advertising and email, marketers must address it in an entirely different context. In the past, search campaigns focused almost exclusively on maximizing clicks. Today, getting the click is easier than you might think; it's incorporating search into your overall marketing strategy that takes some doing. Relevance, clarity, and cross-media consistency – the key principals of advertising apply to search just as much as they do to any other online format. So how does one achieve search success in the modern online advertising environment? In a word, integration.

THE INVALUABLE ROLE OF ANALYTICS

Integration, as it applies to interactive media, is an invaluable aspect of search marketing. Without it, a campaign is completely isolated, its marketers forced to navigate solo. Picture a pilot trying to land a jumbo jet without a team of air traffic controllers to guide him. While the pilot has access to the technology necessary to ensure a successful landing, he can't see the big picture or comprehend the nature of the obstacles that may stand in the way.



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In many ways, this analogy also describes the relationship between search marketing and Web analytics. Web analytics – a comprehensive suite of software tools and statistical analysis techniques – can deliver a breadth of knowledge unavailable to marketers running autonomous search campaigns. Any business can submit its site to search engines and directories for inclusion. Any business can launch and manage its own paid search campaign. The real effort comes after the search has been conducted, and after the click has been registered.

That, of course, is why advanced methods of measurement like Enlighten's Visit Quality Index were developed. You're probably familiar with assessing campaigns based on "conversion" rates, but in today's more sophisticated Internet marketing environment, the term conversion can be too simplistic. Many marketers equate conversions with sales, when, in fact, there are countless other measures of search campaign quality: post-click email campaign registrations, brochure requests or downloads, rich media content interactions, and dealer/store locator searches to name just a few. Conversions, as they're traditionally defined, aren't always relevant.

By applying a more comprehensive analytical framework such as a Visit Quality Index – a quantitative score derived from a combination of pre- and post-click consumer activities – marketers can gauge the value of search traffic from various engines and sites based on a more holistic view of online activity. By looking at overall visit quality marketers are able to better analyze – and subsequently optimize – their search marketing campaigns. They can also use this insight to enhance other aspects of their online marketing efforts, from media buys to website design. But without a clear understanding of what's truly happening beyond the click, marketers are flying in the dark.

As a result, independent search marketers often overlook the fact that they won't always get a second chance to influence a potential buyer. Consider the nature of the automotive industry. According to the trade publication *Automotive News*, consumers are typically "in-market," or actively searching for cars, for a time span of 8 to 10 weeks. They then drop off the search path for anywhere from 3 to 7 years, until they're ready to start researching their next purchase. Miss this window of opportunity, and you might as well smash a mirror. You're in for seven years of bad luck.

By applying the proper tools and analytical techniques, search marketers can track a visitor's behavior from the very moment they click – on the search engine, on your site, and beyond. Qualified visitors can be hard to attract. But producing a quality visit is even harder. Integrating your search marketing program into a holistic analytical framework can greatly increase your chances of securing that coveted consumer action – whatever it may be.



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TRANSLATING SEARCH RESULTS INTO SITE OPTIMIZATION

When it comes to optimizing search campaigns, marketers have no time to waste, not even the few days or weeks it might take to determine where the problem lies and introduce a fix. If the problem ultimately relates to your website, and your search campaign isn't integrated with the rest of your interactive marketing efforts, time is the least of your problems.

Say you determine your paid search campaign doesn't result in the kind of post-click customer activity you believe it should. Without a holistic analytical picture, you're relegated to relying on the limited insight provided by Google and Yahoo!'s campaign management platforms. Because autonomous search campaigns are by nature devoid of external resources, marketers are too often forced to detect and resolve the problem in isolation. No additional media strategists to enlist. No expert site designers to tap. Every paid click represents a customer lost, and an investment wasted.

Imagine you are finally able to determine that visitors generated from a particular contextual ad placement on Google's site-targeted network aren't responding well to your landing page. Maybe it was something they ate. Whatever the case, your campaign now requires a landing page redesign with a subsequent fix to the brochure download section. This could be a problem, you think to yourself. After all, you outsource your site design. You certainly don't have time to play the middleman, but if you don't relay the information you found to your web design agency, who will? You wait for the website fix, and find your agency has misunderstood the issue. The agency can't really be blamed; they had no direct access to your search data. Again you find yourself in a holding pattern – your paid search campaign eating up advertising funds as your site is reworked.

From search engine placement to copy, landing pages, transactional applications, and even website information architecture, there are just too many variables that invalidate a fragmented approach to search marketing. While there's no question that search campaigns can be conducted independently, Internet marketers who miss the vital connection between search-generated traffic and website optimization will never produce the kind of fully successful campaign that true integration allows.

INTERACTIVE MEDIA INTEGRATION

The benefits of integrating search with other aspects of online marketing have been largely untapped. From launch to completion, drawing on the expertise of the same copywriters, strategists, media buyers, and campaign managers you use for your display advertising, rich media, and email campaigns can vastly improve the quality, consistency, and effectiveness of your search effort, as well as your online presence as a whole.

Consider the importance of message consistency. As Max Southerland, author of *Advertising and the Mind of the Consumer*, has said to advertisers, "The essence of your competitive advantage lies in the mental capital you have built up in buyers' heads through past advertising." In other words, a consistent advertising front is critical to maintaining the propulsion of your brand. And ensuring ad materials, imagery, and



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brand messaging remain consistent across interactive media channels is a formidable challenge for even the most sophisticated marketer. Integrating your search campaign with your online ad program, email marketing efforts, and website design is a good place to start.

Copy also plays a critical role in search marketing. As scientific as the search marketing process may seem, developing engaging copy is a fine art. According to Kevin Lee, search marketing expert and ClickZ columnist, "...there's no denying your headline and description may be your last chance to capture a prospect's attention before he becomes the competition's paying customer." You can manage your bids all you like. But without compelling search copy, you can still lose clicks to the next ad down.

The importance of good search ad copy impels the need for copywriting expertise, the likes of which is probably already being tapped for your banner ads and website. Of course, drawing on this talent also delivers the secondary benefit of maintaining brand messaging consistency.

Still think there's no harm in running a search campaign independent of your other online marketing efforts? Ask yourself how your search campaign affects those other efforts, and how your other efforts affect search. Don't think they do? Then you really need the overarching campaign view provided by interactive marketing integration.

Suppose you've just rebranded your organization and are launching a rich media ad campaign to promote your new image. You wouldn't run a simultaneous search campaign using outdated and contrasting key terms and slogans, would you? If your search campaign led you to discover that consumers were routinely searching for an obscure yet relevant phrase in relation to your product, wouldn't you incorporate that phrase into your website copy and meta-tags to enhance your organic optimization efforts?

Search marketing, web analytics, website design, and online media are cut from the same cloth, but their compatibility can't be maximized without integration. While integration can be a daunting task, search marketers must embrace this approach if they hope to create campaigns that are truly effective.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In her role as a Digital Media Strategist, Tessa devises online advertising and marketing strategies and interactive media plans for Enlighten clients. Through her past work in interactive media buying and planning, copywriting and print advertising, Tessa has worked with such companies as Audible, ABB, Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Intrawest and Procter & Gamble. As a former resident of Montreal, she has also helped market such top Canadian firms as Bell Canada and the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC). Additionally, Tessa is an accomplished journalist covering Internet media trends. For the past four years she has penned a weekly syndicated column for the world's largest interactive marketing resource, *ClickZ.com*, and she is a regular contributor to the Technology section of Canada's leading national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*. Tessa holds a specialized BA in Communications from Montreal's Concordia University.

