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Going Out of Business: The End Of Search Marketing

by Chris Copeland, 1 hour ago

A guy walks into a search pitch meeting and says, "Thank you for inviting me here today. But I'm not in -- and you don't want someone in -- the search marketing space to be your search vendor."

Now the punchline to that could have been the guy ends up on a barstool in about 15 minutes because he was thrown out on his ear. But it wasn't. In fact, the reality was a two-hour discussion about the change that is taking place which has its roots in search, but transcends our business entirely.

Most people in the search space have spent the past five years desperately looking for ways to get into the "grown-up" conversations. Big agencies, which puff up their chests and tout their TV buying revenues and the power they wield in shaping the opinions of consumers through 30-second commercials, have been the power brokers that search could only dream to be.

And while a few companies have evolved or attempted to distance themselves from the search-only business through PR devices and VC-based means, the majority of search agencies are now either subsets of larger chest-thumping media groups or, still in a very search-centric, solutions-based world that remains stuck talking about bid management technologies and keywords.

Full disclosure: I oversee both agency-centric search groups and a stand-alone unit in the space, so my commentary comes from a place of full view, which I believe qualifies me to talk about what may happen next. And that next is a place where the old guard and the new guard find themselves united in a battle for perceived value in the eyes of both advertisers and consumers.

It's also the reason why I suggest that the business of search marketing is evolving to a point where, inside of 12 months, the

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suggestion that we are in the search marketing business will be like suggesting humans are in the oxygen business. It's simply what is required to survive. For a long period of time, we've agreed that search is changing consumers. It's also changing marketers because it forces them to be relevant and timely.

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Our job as marketers is to elevate perceptions about brand, and encourage these brand experiences to be shared. A portion of this is done inside the context of paid media, be it TV or search. But the brand, the connection and the distribution has to be the driver, not the sheer volume of media we can buy at cheaper costs than the next guy.

Advertising sits at a crossroad today where a majority of consumers attribute, in part, the current economic plight to the industry, and younger generations feel empowered to form opinions through their own collective without input from the very merchants whose existence is dependent on brand affinity. The question of change is not so much a question, but a mandate that some are moving toward rapidly -- while others hold on to the past without care for the pending repercussions.

Our future is digital, and it is rooted in a more social and searchable world, but it remains centered around the brand, the assets and attributes that exist within that brand. So, when is a search agency no longer really a search agency? Next time, I'll explain what I think the future holds, why it will become the norm and what to look for in this new vehicle for brand performance.



This commentary is insightful. I recommend it to others.

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