

THE WORD IS OUT.

"I saw a big improvement in results right away and higher sales with the new system."

Stewart Hines, Owner, Hilton Head & Myrtle Beach Home Rentals



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The Evolution Of Search

by Chris Copeland, Friday, Apr 13, 2007 12:30 PM ET

THERE'S A SUBTLE BUT FASCINATING shift going on in the search marketing space today. It is the definition of what being in the search business means, and more importantly, what it is going to mean. Even Google has gotten in on the act. Eric Schmidt was quoted in a *Wired* interview as saying, of the search giant, consumers should "think of it first as an advertising system." Now pardon me for speaking out of both sides of my mouth, but "Thank you for your honesty" and "What?!?!?"

For years, Google has been about organizing the world's content and I'm sure its principals would still tell you that's what it is about. Yet even Google has acknowledged the shift we witnessing. The real question for advertisers is, what business is their search agency in -- and why does it matter?

Most search agencies have staked their livelihood on keywords. The epicenter of all activity is the keyword. They attribute credit to the keywords, they credit assists and give weighting to keywords, they worry about the long tail of keywords and they invest millions upon millions in the development of technology to manage those keywords in a multitude of ways.

And therein lies the problem. What search marketing now faces the dawning of an evolution --an evolution from media as a communication platform into a transaction platform. Keywords are conduits. Consumers, as always, are the Holy Grail of the channel.

The media business has long been based on predicting user behavior. Media is placed where we believe consumers will be. Whether it is moviegoers sitting at home watching "Grey's Anatomy" on Thursday night or men reading *Sports Illustrated* and wanting to see shaver ads, advertising's track record is a history of planning

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"The new Yahoo! Search Marketing system has given us phenomenal results, especially when it comes to acquiring new customers."

Paula Drum,
Vice President Marketing, H&R Block

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and buying around where we predict people are and what appeals to them

But search changes that. Search is all about matching consumer intent with advertisers' content. It is seeing the field before we act. Search behavior, whether it is someone buying an air conditioner when temperatures hit a certain point or buzz around a new TV show debuting, can and will change the way all other media is planned and bought.

The closer we get to understanding where people are in the funnel in search, the better we can communicate. Search is not simply a vehicle to push product or even build brands. It is a diagnostic for all other media. A recent study was able not only to correlate search and display advertising, but search and offline media. It told us how those channels impacted engagement in the search channel. This correlation -- between an advertiser's search program and their other media -- helps us with all levels of planning, from the levels of GRPs needed to move the needle to the positioning and exposure needed in the search marketplace

When we are able to start sharing our cross-channel intentions and planning off of these insights, we as advertisers, both on the client and the agency side, become smarter and more connected.

This is the business I am in. The question is, what business are you in?

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