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Buzz Continues Re: Brand Perception, Click Fraud, Local Search

by Chris Copeland, Friday, Sep 28, 2007 2:30 PM ET

WHenever I find myself speaking on day 4 of a Search Engine Strategies conference, I enjoy pointing out that attendees who have lasted that long are now qualified to start their own search marketing practice. I say that partially in jest, but also because the only way you fill four days is to get so far into the weeds that you can't help but spend most of your time learning the nuances of every angle of search. Last week we hosted 200 individuals for our Client Summit. The content we built featured a split of elements between tactical and thought pieces. One of the unknowns going into the event was, would people tend to want to get into the weeds around tactics, or would they prefer to hear about opportunities and where the space is heading?

While no room was left empty during our sessions, there were clearly a few topics that showed where clients' heads were at and what they saw as crucial to their business.

Brand Perception and Measurement

One of the topics that continues to generate strong interest and discussion is how to measure brand influence from search. Discussion around the question raised in one of my recent columns, "[Should you buy brand terms?](#)" and some research shared by Offermatica allowed for further discussion of that topic at the event. Additionally, comScore presented the models they are using to measure brand shift as created by search results and content.

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What is interesting is that the noise around this topic doesn't seem to be equal to the execution of studies and findings being generated by companies. Pre-Panama, Yahoo conducted a few of these studies, and through panels ComScore can produce them, but unlike display where these studies are commonplace for many campaigns, they remain somewhat foreign to the search arena. But, if interest shown from advertisers at our Summit is any indication, it certainly seems as if companies intend to finally understand if brand perception and awareness can be altered through search -- and to do it via studies conducted by third parties and engines.

Local Search / Mobile Search

For the past two years and more, we've heard about the burgeoning markets of local and mobile search. Every year growth estimates increase, and every year we are told where the opportunity is, because in both local and mobile search, the talk is greater than the action.

With the local search session there was a large crowd and active discussion about how to utilize both engines and Internet yellow page types to increase exposure. It is clear that this space will get bigger and bigger and advertisers are looking for the edge to get in early and take advantage.

On the flip side was mobile search, where the same refrain of "we need better devices, need to understand who is going to serve up ads and need to reduce restrictions of application development" were heard. The space is still in flux. Google has made AdWords available on mobile devices and the iPhone has arrived. It may be the latter that really matters. I saw the first Web site built for the iPhone experience where I could actually seem myself buying something using the device -- something I would never consider on my BlackBerry or mobile phone. This doesn't mean we are there yet in the mobile space, but it does mean the adoption of mobile is closer than advertisers are giving it credit, based on participation around this subject at the event.

Click Fraud

There is always good theater when you put Google and Click Forensics on a stage. We took away the dueling powerpoints that have become industry standard between these two and tried to conduct

the search version of Peace in the Middle East. A recent Forbes.com article with Shuman Ghosemajumder provided the fodder for conversation. Click Forensics is contending upwards of 25% fraud in the space, while Google says, after they exclude 10% of all clicks as questionable, that the number is much, much smaller. Ultimately, both agreed that click fraud is an issue -- while disagreeing on how third parties should be utilized to measure it.

Tom Cuthbert from Click Forensics commented that you would "never let your bank balance your checkbook" -- but it's true that if you have an issue with your account, the place you turn for resolution is the bank. Something not lost on Google's Ghosemajumder, who pointed out that the issue of fraud is largely isolated to the AdSense network and to specific industries. There was some discussion about a potential solution where third parties are utilized to provide an arbiter to the situation, but that appears to be a 2008 opportunity, at best. While the issue was not solved, we did manage to experience a bit of détente. The two men shared a taxi to the airport together following their panel.

Overall, advertisers have a mixed focus between tactics and the future of the space, but it is obvious that the thirst for more insight and deeper conversation is not slowing down.

Chris Copeland is senior partner/managing director for Outrider, a search marketing firm headquartered in St. Louis and a GroupM company. Contact him at Chris. Copeland@outrider.com.

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