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In The Game Of Advertising, Search Is Benched

by Chris Copeland, Friday, Jan 12, 2007 10:18 AM ET

EVERY YEAR, REPRISE MEDIA DOES a study of Super Bowl advertisers and their ability to close the loop between search and TV. And every year, advertisers get a little better at connecting their investment in a 30-second Super Bowl spot (this year, \$2.6 million) with their search buying activity. But how good are advertisers really becoming at tying together daily life with search? For me, daily life is usually about sports. Whether watching or playing, I'm something of a sports fanatic. So, I thought an interesting and relevant study would be to take a few typical media interactions in my life, all sports-specific, and see if the ads followed through with a search component.

On Saturday, I took to the couch to watch the Universities of Tennessee and Connecticut renew their annual women's basketball rivalry. This is a big deal at my house; I grew up in Tennessee and am married to a high school girls' basketball coach. In between Candace Parker's dunk and a furious U. Conn. rally falling short in the second half, I spent a commercial break watching the ads and surfing Google to find that three-point basket advertisers and search clients hope for.

Here's a sample for a single commercial break (search query in **bold**):

Circuit City is proud of its **24-minute guarantee**. It is the focus of the company's current TV campaign, and in the search space, it is the focus of many reviews and blogs citing the company's shortcomings. Unfortunately, Circuit City is not buying against it.

Have you seen the **Mariner**? If you do not look for its manufacturer, Mercury, you are not likely to get the genuine experience. A search for just Mariner leaves us with third-party auto sites and general information about every kind of Mariner *not* made by Mercury.

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And finally, Vytorin. Vytorin is a drug that treats high **cholesterol**. Now, this drug has been blessed with a weird little name that is likely to be misspelled. So, consumers seem much more likely to search based on the condition it treats. Sadly, while other advertisers buy for their branded and non-branded sites, Vytorin is nowhere to be found

On Sunday, it was time for the game I had been waiting for all week: Jets vs. Patriots. I grew up a New York Jets fan and this was the measuring stick--the playoffs against the three-time Super Bowl champions. For advertisers, though, the real action took place in the breaks during the game.

Early in the fourth quarter when the game between these challengers was still close, the connection between commercials and search messages was not.

First up, Sprint with an ad touting its **mobile broadband** service and directly referencing Cingular. Yet, no paid ad for Sprint or Cingular was found on my Google search, with an opportunity to counter program in the search space with an off-message ad in the 5th position.

Next was Hertz, introducing its new **Hertz Local** program. Not sure what that is? You still won't know after clicking the Hertz ad that comes up first. You'll just get the company's home page

Did you know **David Spade** has a new show coming to CBS? Well, you still would not know if you went searching to find out the premise after seeing the ad run on CBS during its own telecast. No luck either if you searched for the name of the show. However, you would see an ad for an ABC show airing against it in January.

Sadly, the Jets ended up doing as well in the fourth quarter as the ads I reviewed.

One positive from my TV commercial watching was the Nissan Titan commercial. It mocks general perceptions by showing two guys fast-forwarding through a DVR of a football game to show an ad for the Titan. Even more impressive, Nissan actually comes up with a Titan ad #1 and takes you directly to the Titan page on the NissanUsa site.

My normal Monday morning normal Internet routine is to start at ESPN.com. On Monday, I was greeted with a full-page takeover from UPS touting its new commitment to international shipping. Well, I want my sports, so I thought I'd check out the UPS offering later. Unfortunately no one on the media side who bought the home page takeover thought to tell their search counterparts about the buy. Thus, no search ad for UPS and a below-the-fold organic listing.

And finally, before settling in to watch the College Championship game that night, I flipped through my latest issue of *Sports Illustrated*. The first two ads were brought to you by major pharma manufacturers GlaxoSmithKline and Pfizer.

Did you know there's something called **Restless Legs Syndrome**? Neither did I, but Requip treats it. During a search for Restless Legs Syndrome, the product is nowhere to be found--even though the ad has a direct call to a Web component.

Finally, we conclude with the print ad for Spiriva, which treats COPD. That's Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. Unfortunately, the ad has no match in search.

After three days and four different activities, I found that the success of connecting search and alternative advertising scored as well as Ohio State against Florida during the BCS title game on Monday. That is to say: not well, and not nearly often enough. Advertisers are missing a simple, relevant link to their audience.

Generally speaking, marketers seem to get better every year when the Super Bowl rolls around. But for the daily life of a sports fan, at least, it is a whole different ball game.

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