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## Challenging Perceptions And Changing Search Behavior

by Chris Copeland, Friday, Jun 8, 2007 2:00 PM ET

A recent *Financial Times* [article](#) entitled "Google Data Versus Human Nature" penned by Lord Maurice Saatchi commented, "People do not know what they want until a brilliant person shows them." In the article Lord Saatchi also argues that while Google and others in the "Yellow Pages model of advertising known as Search" contend that they can eliminate the mystery and waste of modern advertising, it simply will not work out like that.

Maurice Saatchi has forgotten more about advertising than I'll likely ever know, but that's a point I think we can debate until I gain royal status (which, by the way, is bloody unlikely). He goes on to discuss how in search, marketers believe they have hit upon the golden ticket because they merely need to buy a keyword for something relevant to their end goal. Therefore, consumers only see a search advertisement when they are ready to buy an item or make a meaningful action; thus, advertisers save significantly because they believe they can cut out waste through more succinct targeting.

This article found its way to my desk within 24 hours of another interesting document landing beside it. That document was an internal study we conducted on a client's campaign. The study was designed to measure the influence our paid search management strategy was having on consumer behavior. Anyone who has read my previous [columns](#) knows I am a chief proponent of a line of thinking we've dubbed "Search Consumer Segmentation." The premise is fairly straightforward. There is a much more tangible impact of segmenting paid search programs by stages of the buying or engagement funnel than by simply focusing on building out the long tail or by utilizing advanced bid management techniques,

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be it rules, ROI or portfolio based.

One standard methodology we see in other search programs is what I call the "convenience of bucketing." You could also use adjectives like sloppy or lazy if you prefer, but it's a practice built around lumping keywords together because there will be less copy to write and words can all go to the same landing page. It is the "best practice" strategy for dealing with the long tail -- generic copy, utilized in a multitude of places to create the most streamlined program. Far from the most effective for return, but a far less scrutinized point than bid technology is for many search marketers.

However, this approach falls apart as soon as you start to think about the path consumers generally take to purchase. Someone who knows they want a washing machine (to use Saatchi's example) may have no idea what make or model they want, not to mention may lack the understanding of what washing machine attributes are most important to them. I think this is where Saatchi would contend that it takes one of those brilliant people to show them why the washing machine being advertised to them is the newest, the greatest and all those other superlatives which can only be shown effectively with moving pictures and 30 seconds of TV time.

And in the first point we can agree. It does take a brilliant person to move someone from base-level interest in a topic to knowing exactly what they want and where to get it. In the study we conducted we found an overwhelming number of searchers were breaking with conventional search behavior of starting and ending with the same term in their query usage. We found that consumers were being shifted down the funnel in a clear and concise way. This was happening because the keywords were slotted against proper funnel points, messaging spoke to that state in the process, and finally, the landing page engaged them with the type of content relevant to their level of interest, as assigned through the consumer segmentation strategy.

Lord Saatchi is right in saying it takes a brilliant person to convince someone of what they want. Fortunately, the search space gives us the opportunity to take brilliant people, combine them with a deeper understanding of how consumers behave, and create an advertising vehicle where the understanding of a beautiful mind can lead to more effective and direct results for advertisers.

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