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## Relevant Segmentation of Consumer Search: Part Two

by Chris Copeland, Wednesday, May 24, 2006 1:45 PM ET

LAST MONTH I PENNED AN [article](#) discussing the [notion](#) that keywords alone as a marketing vehicle are setting marketers up for failure. Keywords are simply how consumers express themselves, and we speak to consumers--not to keywords. So, what does this really mean?

The next time you are using public transportation, walk up to someone and just say "car," then wait for a response. More than 3.2 million people engaged in that exact behavior with Yahoo last month. Now I'll grant you that the average subway rider may not have as much data in their minds as Yahoo, but still, what does this mean?

If someone tells Google he has an interest in "car," the engine points him in the direction of Kelley Blue Book-type sites (organic search) or major manufacturer sites (paid search). It's the engine equivalent of throwing up their hands and saying "Take your crazy elsewhere."

From here on, we will deal only with paid search, because organic search is simply not flexible enough to be part of this discussion yet.

On the day this article was written, the top paid listings in Yahoo! looked like this: BRAND XYZ Vehicles Online

[www.XYZ.com](#) Car- find information on the XYZ model you're considering at the official site

It's probably a safe bet that someone typing in "car" didn't have that specific brand in mind. If they did, they might have done a more specific search for that brand. But let's break this down a bit more.

The No 1. interest of new car buyers through search, as studied by Yahoo, is price, followed by fuel efficiency, safety and incentives/rebates. So, regardless of the search--even one as generic as "car"--we know something about the tendencies and interests of the searcher, and, as marketers, are able to take a step closer in speaking directly to the person, not their query.

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This is further accentuated when you start looking at the landing pages associated with these search results. In the listing above, what is delivered is the standard homepage. There is nothing highlighting what we know to be the key deciding factors specific to search.

*The goal of segmentation is to identify patterns of behavior and leverage them.* In poker they're called tells. Not everyone is motivated by the factors I listed above, but most are, and it's not a gamble as much as an educated bet.

If we overlay this segmentation with traditional auto buyers for a select manufacturer, you get even closer to who we are speaking to on the other side of the query. Suddenly someone who types in "car" is not the crazy guy on the subway. For a specific manufacturer, he's a 52-year-old executive who makes six figures and is looking for a vehicle that exhibits status. With that the message, the post-click experience, and how we market to him post-search engagement in a contextual and traditional online sense, shifts as well.

Search is the forerunner of consumer-controlled advertising. 57 percent of all online auto buyers are unsure about what car they are going to buy, according to Forrester Research. The stakes in our marketing efforts are simply too high to serve up uninspired and generic responses because we assume a query is generic. It isn't up to the individual searcher-- to that person, the query has meaning. By studying the on-site patterns of that individual multiplied by all the other visitors from similar queries, we start to establish segmentation profiles and can serve customized experiences.

Success for advertisers in search comes when they quit talking at something-- such as the keyword--and start talking with the consumer.

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