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## The Common Thread Of Consumer Intent

Posted May 16th, 2008 by Chris Copeland

*"No man is an island, entire of itself"*  
-John Donne

Search marketers have spent more time on the proverbial island than the cast of "Lost." All of the adages about "playing at the kids' table" to "functioning in a silo" have been appropriate at various times over the past decade. This practice of "siloed" work has been perpetuated by marketing departments that have seen search as an IT function or a "Web" thing. Marketing agencies have seen it as a boutique offering that can be acquired or developed using a handful of people with varying talents, and surprisingly, it has been perpetuated by the search engines themselves.

A few months back, I was sitting with a high-profile client at an all-day event with one of the major engines. The event was designed to allow the client's CMO an opportunity to visit the campus, experience the search engine's way of life/thinking and dive into a variety of areas that held interest for this advertiser. We do a fair amount of meetings like these, and they frequently involve the following cast of characters: The Mobile guy, The Social expert, The Analytics guru, The Emerging Media specialist and the standard Paid Search/Display advertising team. In some cases, the net gets a bit bigger and TV, radio and print get thrown into the discussion.

Yet, for all the brain wattage and opportunity that exists, these meetings usually lack one simple thing: a thread. Advertisers have watched the marketplace become more and more fragmented and their audiences become more and more empowered to make their own decisions with little to no regard for the advertisers or its products. As this happens, one of the challenges becomes, how do we create touch points for our brand with consumers? As we like to put it, how do we connect advertiser content and consumer intent? This becomes even trickier when you start looking across platforms.

Let's take the cast of characters in the room as I described above. In a normal situation, the individuals are allotted 30 minutes to discuss what's now and what's coming tomorrow in their space and inside their organization. They will cover it as it pertains to the advertiser and how consumers are consuming. They'll then thank everyone and have a seat while the next cast member rises to give his audition for what the vendor hopes is a successful casting of all parts with one read-through. And while these discussions and pitches are often enlightening about the vendor's point of view and differentiation in the marketplace, they lack a cohesion with each other.

One of the knocks over the years at varying times for several of the major search engines has been that they seem to be throwing things against the wall. If you put a product a day into Beta, surely something will come out a hit, right?

But what we are finding more and more is the ability to connect at different stages, with varying messages that all lead down the purchase/decision funnel. We've done research that shows the ability through search marketing to push consumers down the funnel. For search marketer and advertisers, this means the ability to take consideration seekers (as defined by their keywords) and turn them into purchasers. However, the funnel is not a channel-exclusive vehicle.

Search is an action, not a destination. No one searches because they just want to; they search because they need to in some way.



So the purpose of search is a piece of the greater funnel that exists. Searching may be the pay off created by television, or it may be the start of the research phase that will ultimately lead to a conversion in-store or via a phone call. Yet without the thread between vehicles, digital or otherwise, there's little chance to pay this off properly.

But, let's be clear on one point: The thread is not about creative. It's not as simple as saying that we use this phrasing in our television advertising so we should do the same in our rich-media units and search creative. The thread is about themes and connectivity to the consumer on his or her journey.

In my next column, we'll explore what happens when the thread runs into the persona problem, and how marketers and their agency partners can begin to formulate thread-worthy approaches to consumer intent.

This entry was posted on Friday, May 16th, 2008 at 8:30 am and is filed under [Chris Copeland](#), [Search](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.

#### 4 Responses to "The Common Thread Of Consumer Intent"

1. *Paula Lynn* from Who Else Unlimited; hollywood5459@verizon.net says:  
[May 16th, 2008 at 9:58 am](#)

Impressed. "for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." Most people do not know it is a John Donne quote. Which opens a discussion - the influencing factors that create the need for the original search. Where does that bathrobe need come from? Or advise. Or...

2. *Jeff Martin* from Sales Driven Marketing LLC says:  
[May 16th, 2008 at 12:02 pm](#)

Great article, and I think it helps suggest there's still a need for good marketing plans. New media, including search, is great at tracking, but at the end of the day, new media and search is only one piece of a well organized, well executed, comprehensive marketing plan.

Jeff  
[www.SalesDrivenMarketing.com](http://www.SalesDrivenMarketing.com)

3. *Leslie McKerns* from McKerns Development says:  
[May 16th, 2008 at 6:23 pm](#)

You are right, Chris - No one searches because they just want to; they search because they need to in some way. And there's the problem. The company never thinks from the point of view of the searcher. It is so frustrating trying to find something on the web - it's like going to TJ Maxx with a shopping list, you won't find those things but you may stumble upon other things.

Themes and connectivity have to do with analyzing backwards - we have this thing, now how would people go about looking for it? And as far as touch points, analyze why they are searching (need) and what about this product would have particular appeal (relevance).  
<http://www.mckernsdevelopment.com>

4. *Meredith Speier* from RMG Connect says:  
[May 20th, 2008 at 5:10 pm](#)

Great post Chris. As a planner, I often struggle with getting this message across to clients (and sometimes even internal team members). I would take your thought even one step further...while the thread is that single element that ties the entire consumer-brand communication together, it is the intent part of the equation that we as marketers need to nail. Knowing what makes a customer tick, which part of the purchase cycle they're in, and what has driven them to the point they are are critical in pushing the right message to connect content to intent.

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