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What's The Big Idea Anyway?

Posted April 18th, 2008 by Chris Copeland

There are more than 14,000 books on Amazon when you do a search for "Big Idea." Donny Deutsch turned himself from ad man to TV host by focusing on "The Big Idea." But perhaps it was David Ogilvy who said it best when he described the importance of the big idea in advertising: "It takes a big idea to attract the attention of consumers... Unless your advertising contains a big idea, it will pass like a ship in the night."

Since its inception, search has been known for several dependable qualities. Search is a direct-response champ, as well as a fulfillment vehicle unlike anything else advertisers have had in their arsenal. What only savvy marketers once knew, now all marketers have come to appreciate: search is the right tool for the job when the job calls for something that connects consumers and products. Be it retail, financial services, travel or even pharmaceutical, the space is ripe with companies printing money using Google, Yahoo and the rest for their search efforts.

So what role should search play in The Big Idea process? For most marketers, The Big Idea is the creative concept that becomes the foundation for all advertising platforms. It's the engagement vehicle that takes an offer, a concept, a product, and allows for the mobilization to the masses. And since this idea is all about connecting, it has become commonplace for people in the industry to associate idea creation with creative types and the agencies where they reside.

But should Big Idea development be the exclusive domain of creative agencies? Should search, a medium that deals in text - and limited character counts at that — have any influence on The Big Idea? Should searcher marketers and digital types be content just being at the grown-ups table or should there be more engagement and involvement when it comes to who owns and develops The Big Idea?

I think there are a few questions that may challenge marketers to reevaluate their concept of The Big Idea.

Who owns The Big Idea?

If we go back to the quote from Ogilvy, he contends that it takes a big idea to attract the attention of consumers. But what if consumers owned that idea? For the past two years, Doritos has used the Super Bowl, the world's largest football and advertising event, as a stage to put The Big Idea in the hands of consumers. This year during the Oscars, Dove allowed the audience to vote and determine which commercial the company should run. While these are two very small examples, it is becoming more obvious that those who once owned The Big Idea are now turning it into a job for someone else to do for them.

How much do you trust your audience?

When Doritos does something like the Super Bowl, its execs know that the buzz from the concept is more than enough to cover the exposure and expense of buying the spot. It's a winner before it ever launches — and while that automatic buzz will eventually expire as consumer-generated content and advertising becomes more common, for now it's enough to move a needle.



But isn't the whole concept of search a shift that marketers need to harness better? Everyone knows that search allows consumers to seek out what information they want and then put their stamp on it by clicking. But it's what happens on the consumer's end leading up to the click that could help change all of advertising. If advertisers can harness the learnings from what motivates a consumer and understand who that consumer is, they can more intelligently target those same types of consumers in different media.

GoogleClick/MicroHoo and the potential of consumer selected messaging

I'm not a big fan of name-smashing as done above. DoubleClick is a Google unit. Yahoo will be something inside Microsoft. These are not mergers of equals. Even today's big merger of airlines results in a single name, Delta; a single CEO, Delta's; and a single HQ (I'll spot you the city –Atlanta), and you can guess which company is based there now. I trust your US geography can make this one simple. The point with the acquisitions is how the assets get utilized best, and this is where the aforementioned Internet-centric deals have some interesting offline potential.

Matthew Greitzer made mention in a Search Insider column a few weeks back about companies using their search messaging to help craft their messaging in other channels. This is a concept that few are doing, but has tremendous potential for swinging the ownership of The Big Idea.

Today, when a consumer watches a TV spot, he is being told what matters. Whether it is Ford hyping its Sync technology or Honda talking about fuel efficiency and green cars, the advertisers have decided what matters to you. But what if a system existed where you could understand the impact your messaging was having on consumers in search, and then dynamically change your media by market, time of day or audience composition?

Let's play this out a bit with a real world example: Let's say I'm a major automotive manufacturer and I have a model that I want to tout. Now this model has the latest technology, it gets great gas mileage and you can save a bundle in rebates and incentives. Now, let's say I know through search activity that consumers are searching (query volume data) for green benefits and cost savings far more than safety and technology. Then, let's assume that based on my click data, I know that what is really moving the needle are the cost savings offers due to the economic downturn. And lastly, when I look at what entices people to schedule test drives and play with the build a car/get a quote feature, it's my financing and cash-off deal that resonate best.

With Google, MSN or Yahoo, I then begin to learn all of this in tandem with time of day, geographic details, and eventually, behavior activity of the consumer. I have now connected advertising systems that allow the following to happen. Based on my insights from above, I can set rules or parameters that will change my media and messaging in other channels. So my display creative may switch from a rotation of offers to a specific offer given the statistical certainty that an offer in search resonated best with a market and audience.

Ultimately, this may become a way for companies to dynamically update what print, TV or radio creative get run *based on what their audience wants on their terms, not what advertisers want to push.*

As it seems, more and more the opportunity for The Big Idea may rest in our ability as advertisers to connect with consumers on their terms. As David Ogilvy concluded, "I doubt if more than one campaign in a hundred contains a big idea." With ratios that poor, is it any wonder that consumers in general have tuned out?

If we can let their words and their interests shape our advertising in the future, isn't that a Big Idea worth exploring further?

This entry was posted on Friday, April 18th, 2008 at 11:15 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.

3 Responses to “What's The Big Idea Anyway?”

1. *Kim Barrington* from the kimbroy agency says:
[April 18th, 2008 at 1:46 pm](#)

Bingo!

2. *Derick Harris* from Cyber ID says:
[April 18th, 2008 at 4:12 pm](#)

This item is almost entirely nonsense. Big Ideas rarely obtain from the center. They nearly always happen on the margins.

Right out of left field. If, as the author claims, in connection with advertising per se, that “[t]he Big Idea is the creative concept that becomes the foundation for all advertising platforms”, kindly name even one so-called “big idea” that obtains from advertising. Google? A platform to be sure. A big idea. Not at all! Google is as mundane as it gets when it comes to marketing. Who owns big ideas? Presumably, audiences own them, because in terms of advertising which means selling something, an “idea” defines as “big” when it sells “big”. In other words advertising chases its tail. By the time advertisers figure out trends, the parade has already gone by. The only thing that redeems this item is the author’s hypothesis that, perhaps, big ideas in advertising are a function of connecting with consumers on their own terms? Well, no kidding! This entire item could have been boiled down to that one simple sentence. If consumers have “tuned out” from advertising, perhaps it’s really because audiences are sick to death of the manifest stupidity that obtains from the slogans, jungles and double talk that constitutes “advertising”.

3. *Milena Krasteva* from WebTrends says:
[April 21st, 2008 at 1:30 pm](#)

The Big Idea behind Google is creating a virtuous cycle of driving eyeballs to relevant natural search and ad results, resulting in clicks, and conversions for advertisers who, in a blind auction are compelled to bid their maximum willingness to pay to get their ads in top positions. More relevant ads, more eyeballs, more searches, more clicks, more advertisers, more keyword competition, higher CPC ...you get the picture...all this spells profit for Google. And we all saw the latest Google earnings report. But that’s a tangent. With this model Google and the top search engines in general have defined the concept of one-to-one marketing.

The article outlines another Big Idea: “...With Google, MSN or Yahoo, I then begin to learn all of this in tandem with time of day, geographic details, and eventually, behavior activity of the consumer. I have now connected advertising systems that allow the following to happen. Based on my insights from above, I can set rules or parameters that will change my media and messaging in other channels. So my display creative may switch from a rotation of offers to a specific offer given the statistical certainty that an offer in search resonated best with a market and audience. Ultimately, this may become a way for companies to dynamically update what print, TV or radio creative get run based on what their audience wants on their terms, not what advertisers want to push...”

I had to chuckle. As futuristic as the article makes it sound, similar systems are already a reality and with even more automation than the author imagines. How about a system which takes your high level business goal, such as a simple ROI target, your budget, then all your creative combinations, your keywords with all their match types, your landing pages, geo-targets etc., then runs them on all the top search networks, automatically determines which ones are the best ones to keep to meet your ROI goal and stay within budget. It gets even better: the system determines what the bid should be for each of these unique combinations and then places the bid on the network for you 24/7. Now toss in a few additional channels such as display ads and RSS feeds. This is an incredibly hard problem to solve. At WebTrends Dynamic Search we solve it every day. Shameless self-promotion? Maybe a little, but I’m biased, it’s my product. Big idea? You tell me: milena@krasteva.com.

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