

# It doesn't end with Search...

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Topic: It doesn't end with Search...

Search has evolved to be the channel that's always "on". Most blue chip and mid size online marketing strategies have already accepted Search as a prerequisite to any successful campaign, although not many companies understand that nothing works in solitude. Search is only one part of this magical equation that creates superior performance marketing. So what does it take? What is the job profile for the individual variables in the equation that makes it balanced perfectly, scalable and mostly "right".

Starting with Search, it has the highest conversion rates, a huge scalability and is either delivering traffic/conversions for free (SEO) or on a cost per click model (PPC) with lower risk than traditional CPM models. But what exactly happens if we take a deeper look at the traffic created by the untouchable Search guru's Google, Yahoo and Bing? Is it true that Search is the primary pull and push channel? Is it the first point of contact? Does it create the first desire? And what exactly happens if e.g. PPC is already scaled to the best possible ROI limited to Search. Does the story end? Can we do more...

The solution is easy of course, even with the huge potential of PPC and SEO there is an end to its scalability, so marketers looked into new ways of complimenting their strategy. Affiliation, E-Mail, Coops and Online-Media turned out to be not only a nice side to an online campaign but is rather the wrapping to create a perfect package.

The next question on scalability takes us to an awkward turn and a very old saying "Never put all your eggs in one basket". The dependence we have or created on Google, Yahoo and Bing, is it healthy or smart? Does market leadership end with their market share? Does success or failure of a campaign need a magnifying glass or does it just require a step back and taking a look at the real picture, the canvas?

Going back to my first point on the "right" equation. Nothing works in silos. The process of desire to ultimate purchase takes into account, need, price, flexibility, loyalty, reach, exposure and of course availability, to mention the least. Hence the magic of cross channel approach. To understand the real ROI of this multi step process from desire to purchase, one needs to look at the canvas and not just the one channel i.e. SEARCH.

Looking at the "canvas", in the last 18 month for some of our clients we have integrated a centralized cross channel performance tracking system into their website. The idea was simple - we wanted to see what channel does the user touch and interact with before search engines catch the sale as the final touching point. In order to test the system on a big target audience, we picked a fashion retail brand with high brand awareness, running TV, billboards and extensive online marketing campaigns at the same time for nearly all age groups and consumer clusters. The technology enabled us to see every touch point of our consumers the moment they would load, see or interact with any online ad material including search engines.

The results were magnificent – we collected a huge amount of data and figured out that up to 40% of all consumers touch at least 2-3 different online channels (search, affiliation, media, email) before they decide to purchase a product. Due to the fact that we were talking about fashion retail the process of sensibilization was basically within 1-3 days. This obviously will differ with higher cost products or products that include more than one decision maker ( in my case my wife) like vacation, home or insurance.

Nevertheless, after measuring for a couple of weeks we decided to change the entire campaign management from a “the last touch point gets the cake ” structure to an “every touch point should get a slice of the cake” structure. The change in campaign optimization due to totally different CPO’s and ROI’s on the pull vs. push channel changed the scalability of some channels in the core. We learned that search really isn’t the perfect “new client channel” due to the fact that more than 40% of all search sales touched media or affiliation as well as email before they bought something.

We also learned that if we cut off generic terms / two word phrases and reduce PPC on a keyword level to brand, misspellings, long tail and niches we would save up to 30% of our media budget but only lose 3% of our overall new customers we get. Channels like Media and Affiliation as well as email became much more effective and CPO’s dropped by up to 50% due to the fact that Google, Yahoo and Bing didn’t grab all the (last cookie wins) sales on their account.

To cut a long story short, today our fashion retailer and other clients exchanged Google and other search engines as their # 1 media investment channel and exposed themselves and their budgets to all variables/ channels. A perfectly balanced and profitable equation for them and of course a lucrative business model for their online shop.

Search will always play a very important part in winning new clients and promoting your product but PPC and SEO isn’t the only way to go if you want to put your success in a bigger variety of suppliers as well as exposing yourself to a healthier scalability and new target groups. At the very end the mix is important because consumers aren’t one dimensional and so isn’t online marketing. By integrating multi channel or cross channel measurements and campaign handling as well as payment you will be even more successful on Search and online marketing as ever before.

Sincerely

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