



How Leading Advertisers Are USING SEARCH FOR BRAND BUILDING

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PUBLISHED
June 2014

THE **RUNDOWN**

Until now, search ads haven't been part of the brand marketer's standard toolkit. They've mostly been used—with great effect—at the bottom of the funnel, closer to where leads are generated and purchases are made. It's becoming clear, however, that search delivers influence throughout the customer journey. It's not just about clicks and conversions anymore. Search is an engine of insights. It's an opportunity to entice, educate and entertain. And its ability to influence at moments that matter is earning it a place at the CMO's table.

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Some of the world's leading advertisers, such as L'Oréal Paris, Intel and Fiat, have discovered new ways to use search—for brand marketing. They're using it to understand their audience, raise awareness and increase preference for their brands. And they're seeing strong results: A recent Google/Ipsos MediaCT [meta-study](#) showed that search ads drove an average increase of 6.6 percentage points in top-of-mind awareness, from 8.2% to 14.8%—a lift of 80%.¹

Why is search working for brand marketing today?

Search is our constant companion. It's not just a product anymore; it's a behavior. We turn to it at all times and in all places—on our desktops, laptops, tablets and smartphones. We use it to discover, learn, act and connect. It's part of our lives.

The reason search works for brand marketers is that it works for consumers. Brands have always wanted to create interest; search starts there. It provides a unique opportunity to connect with people on their terms and at moments that really matter.

A few years ago, the “First Moment of Truth” at store shelves began to be preceded by at-home moments of research on laptops and desktops—what became known as the “[Zero Moment of Truth](#).” Now there are billions of constantly connected “consumer moments” happening each day²—at home, at work, in stores and on the go.

These moments occur throughout the purchase journey. And, by their very nature, they're the moments when people are most receptive. With over 100 billion searches a month on Google alone,² brands can reach a vast interested audience, with the perfect message at the perfect time.

To make the most of this opportunity, the first thing to understand is how people search, and how that relates to their purchase journey.

The most specific searches are **branded searches**, where someone knows what she's looking for and the brand she prefers (perhaps even the product model itself). If, for example, she's searching for “nike flyknit,” she's already in the purchase funnel; she's aware of the brand and is even considering a specific product. The role of search, in this case, is usually to close the deal by providing the consumer with the specific thing she wants.

But let's say she's looking for something general such as “running shoes.” She's interested in a type of product, but she hasn't indicated a preference for a particular

brand. Not great news for brands that are absent from the [first page of results](#). This kind of **category search** is a perfect opportunity for brands to build awareness and influence consideration.

What if that same person were searching more broadly for, say, “[marathon running](#)”? There’s no product or category on this consumer’s mind, but there’s interest. An affinity search such as this is a golden opportunity for a brand to connect itself to a topic and, more importantly, the consumer.

These examples show how consumers use search differently during the various stages of their purchase journey, at moments that matter to them. Brands and marketers can use an understanding of this search behavior to gain access to an interested audience whose members are receptive now.

Connecting with the interested audience

Let’s look at how brand marketers are making the most of this opportunity, by understanding, reaching and influencing interested audiences using search—from discovering consumer insights to engaging people throughout their purchase journey.

UNDERSTANDING THE INTERESTED AUDIENCE

Of the over 100 billion searches happening on Google each month, 15% each day are completely new.² This makes search the world’s largest real-time focus group. Innovative advertisers are using search trends and their account data to inform their marketing.

For example, [Kleenex](#) used search behavior to identify and target areas of the U.K. that were suffering cold and flu outbreaks. The company initially released its Cold and Flu campaign during one of the hottest Octobers ever, and it was a bust. The following year, the marketing team came up with a search-driven remedy. It bought keywords such as “fever and headache” and coupled clicks with government data—finding a statistical correlation between the two—to build a real-time planning tool that revealed regional cold- and flu-related activity. This allowed Kleenex to identify where there was a need and respond to it. (It also saw a 40% increase in sales as a result.)

REACHING THE INTERESTED AUDIENCE

Leading brand search advertisers are using their research into the interested audience to buy search terms against selected keyword categories—turning understanding into reach across the purchase journey.

L'Oréal Paris, for instance, used search to reach a vast audience seeking information on a popular new hairstyle. Back in 2012, L'Oréal Paris noticed a spike in Google searches for [“ombre hair.”](#) At the time, this type of hair treatment was expensive and done only in salons. The company realized the potential of creating a product for the home market to meet the demand and developed one in just a few months. L'Oréal Paris created [YouTube content](#) devoted to the topic and got widespread [press coverage](#), helping to establish brand awareness. And, of course, it owned search for the term. In the end, the very people who had alerted L'Oréal Paris to the trend were greeted with search ads that linked to helpful marketing, right at the moment of interest.

ENGAGING THE INTERESTED AUDIENCE

By providing searchers with the content they're looking for in moments that matter, savvy marketers are influencing both purchase decisions and brand metrics.

Intel uses search to engage an audience looking for answers on a wide range of technology topics. It advertises against a broad array of keywords, from branded and category searches all the way to affinity searches such as “what is big data.” Within each of these search types, Intel takes audience members to relevant and useful content. In the case of “what is big data,” Intel's search ad links to information and resources that help businesses understand and benefit from this growing trend, positioning Intel as a “trusted partner across the compute continuum,” says Corey Carrillo, Intel's global search and online marketing manager. The goal is that the Intel brand is always there, and always as relevant and helpful as possible.

Measuring the results

Advertisers who are making search work for brand marketing are not just thinking about it differently, they're measuring it differently, too. Typically, search campaigns are measured by looking at the specific outcomes they drive, using “performance marketing” metrics such as cost per conversion. Success here means efficiently driving conversions rather than maximizing brand reach and influence.

Successful brand marketers are measuring their brand-building search campaigns with brand-relevant metrics. They're monitoring coverage of the search terms they want to associate their brand with to ensure that their ads are appearing. In the running shoe example above, this would include category searches such as “running shoe” and affinity searches such as “marathon.” Coverage can be measured as both a percentage of

possible impressions and with respect to competitors (the search equivalent of “share of voice”). In addition, they’re looking at metrics such as ad impressions, website visits (ad clicks) and engagement actions such as time on-site.

With these metrics, brand marketers can monitor how their affinity, category and branded keyword lists perform, refining them over time. They can also include search ads in their standard media plans, ensuring that their marketing reaches the widest possible audience and that campaign-driven searches are integrated.

Finally, some advertisers have undertaken custom research to understand the effect search has on brand awareness. These studies compare awareness before and after seeing brand ads in a search engine results page, using test and control groups. As mentioned earlier, a [meta-analysis](#) of 61 experiments saw an average increase in top-of-mind awareness of 6.6 percentage points, from 8.2% to 14.8%—an 80% lift.¹ Similarly, when participants were asked to recall up to five brands, unaided awareness increased on average by 9.2 percentage points, from 17.5% to 26.7%—a lift of 53%.¹

Fiat’s campaign for its Fiat 500 model is a [great example](#). The company took a two-pronged approach to search: It addressed branded terms such as “Fiat” and “Abarth” to connect with people who were familiar with the brand, and it advertised against category terms, such as “small car,” “compact car” and “city car,” to attract new and undecided customers. In its study, top-of-mind awareness increased by 6.0 percentage points, from 3.0% to 9.0%—a 200% lift.³ Unaided brand recall on desktop increased 11.5 percentage points, from 11.0% to 22.5%—an increase of 105%.³

Conclusion

The fundamental challenges of brand marketing are to understand, reach and influence people at scale. Innovative brands are finding new and successful ways to do this with search advertising. Brand marketers have always sought to deliver the right ad to the right person at the right time. With search, these marketers reach an audience they know is interested, and interested right now. This audience doesn’t necessarily have to take action immediately; the marketers in this story have found that search can drive brand results throughout the purchase path. That translates to a journey that delivers relevant and timely messages for the audience, and heightened awareness and engagement for the brand.

For information on how to use search for your own brand marketing, take a look at our [“Search for Brands: Brand Marketer Guide.”](#)



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Sources

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