

The safety and stability of search

February 9, 2009

Marketers spent more on search last year—especially in the fourth quarter—than they did in 2007, and paid search spending shot up 43% year-over-year in the fourth quarter of 2008, according to a January report from interactive marketing analytics company Covario Inc.

But there's a caveat that accompanies this good news. Those end-of-year expenditures were approved many months before our current financial crisis. Today, the majority of marketers face a very different paradigm than in recent years, with overall interactive marketing budgets—while still growing—inching up only a little, according to a Dec. 16, 2008, eMarketer report.

SEARCH INTROSPECTION

Andrew Davidson, partner and director of search at interactive agency Neo@Ogilvy, said that some search strategies are worth revisiting in this economy. “There are big opportunities using geo-targeting and dayparting,” he said. “Companies that have clusters of customers in different [Designated Marketing Areas] can target those areas during peak business hours.”

Geo-targeting also is an important strategy when it comes to landing pages, something that only a handful of marketers are working with today, said Jonathan Ashton, VP-SEO and Web analytics at Agency.com.

“When you're optimizing your site,” Ashton said, you need to understand that local has to be a core strategy—especially if you're going to be advertising on local sites. If you operate in 10 cities, each of those 10 cities should have its own content and landing page,” he said.

This strategy will also help you boost your placement in organic search listings and help you save money in the long run. For example, buying the phrase, “Commercial Real Estate” is much more expensive than “Ann Arbor Commercial Real Estate.”

A company's landing page strategy may also change depending on changes in its goals. For instance, a marketing message without a specific call to action can build brand awareness by sending recipients to a company blog or customer-generated content. Such landing pages should contain the exact word

or phrase that brought the prospect to your site, as well as a specific call to action, contact information and a link to your e-mail marketing opt-in page.

RIGHT WORDS, RIGHT PLACES

Even great landing pages, integrated with search and other online marketing tactics, can fail if the campaign doesn't use the right words.

Take the Garrison, a social and recreation center that caters to corporate and event planners. The company recently reviewed its search strategy and found it was omitting an entire keyword category related to personal services.

The New York state retreat added 25 new search terms based on that review, said Matt Fanelli, director-digital media at Media Networks, which works with the Garrison.

Where to find the newest catchphrases or industry buzz words? Spend a little time on sites where your customers and prospects hang out, and don't forget to check industry publications, blogs and social networking sites.

Experts, however, advise caution. Check to see if any of these words or phrases is becoming broader or more “consumer”? For example, 10 years ago, searches for “Apple” were more likely to come from people looking for computers. Now those searches are probably coming from people looking for an Apple's consumer device, such as the iPhone or iPod.

Then there's the question of whether or not you should do a broad or exact match. A broad match may result in more traffic, but might not yield the best qualified traffic.

“There are some times you get some really strange matches with broad match,” Media Networks' Fanelli said. “You should also look carefully at your competitive strategy. Companies still bid on competitive brands and keywords, but that isn't always the best idea,” he said.

“It's a strategy, but there's also potential for fallout,” Fanelli added. For one thing, it may spur your competition to bid on your key terms, driving up the price and confusing searchers by blurring your own brand strategy. ■

