



Navigating the tradeshow waters

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There was a time when there was just one show in town, and that was Search Engine Strategies. It grew to become a regional and then international affair, and all search engine marketers flocked to the event closest to them in hopes of learning more and driving new business leads.

Over the years, agency-focused shows, such as Ad:tech, OMMA and MIXX have incorporated search elements into their content mix. This occurred roughly around the time that interactive agencies started building search competencies and search engine marketing agencies diversified to offer a broader suite of services.

It should be no surprise that Search Engine Strategies has re-positioned itself to appeal to Madison Avenue and senior level marketers on the client side. A recent Search Engine Watch blog post penned by Greg Jarboe got quickly to this point. Titled "[Ad agencies should slide on down to SES New York](#)," the piece prominently featured speaker Carol Kruse, VP of global interactive marketing for The Coca-Cola Company during the show.

"[Kruse] will address what it takes for big brand companies to shift their marketing mix to align with new customer behaviors, putting more ad budget to search and digital advertising," Jarboe wrote.

All of this would be fine and good, with the exception that if multiple shows share the same audience, they really ought not share the same spot on the calendar, and vice versa. One of the more infamous examples is that between OMMA and MIXX. After a falling out, the show split into two separate events and now each player insists on occupying the same two days in September at venues just blocks away from one another. SMX and SES, on the other hand, have politely aimed to avoid such clashes.

So what happens when OMMA Global Hollywood (a pretty fancy name for OMMA on the west coast) occurs at the same time as Search Engine Strategies New York? Is this just a sign that search is increasingly being folded into the mix? Reflective of poor (or very good) planning? Regardless of the answer, the unfortunate timing of events does not bode well for the industry. Some might argue that the audiences don't really overlap, and this is true to some extent. The most tactical, search-focused individual probably doesn't care too much about what happens at OMMA. However, a decision does need to be made from the sponsorship and exhibitor level.

Cindy Spellman, director of corporate communications for Outrider, has taken a more sophisticated approach to her own marketing mix as the number of shows increases. “When you look at your marketing dollars across the year, how do you spread to reach each audience?” she asks. “What is the objective?”

This year her firm is hosting an on-site career center at SES with the goal of recruiting talent for the growing business. Spellman has slated CMO-level conversations with key clients “at the smaller, more focused events held during the rest of the year.”

Others, such as Mark Schwartz, VP of business development for TMP DM, have seen this movie before. He reminded me that at one time, there were multiple e-mail conferences, and that today most e-mail marketers attend the DMA annual and DMDays shows.

“We’re seeing the beginning of a convergence between search and the other channels,” said Schwartz. “SES is trying to expand so they can comment on that convergence, but it’s also part of that natural growth of a still-young industry,” he said.

For the time being, he will represent his firm at SES New York.