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What's On The Minds Of Advertisers?

by Chris Copeland, Friday, Mar 16, 2007 2:00 PM ET

ONE OF THE THINGS I get paid to do is have a point of view on all things "search." Once upon a time, the easiest way to explain my role in the organization at large was to say, "He's the Search Guy." Today the title's a bit better but at my core I'm still "The Search Guy." Over the past eight weeks I have been on a U.S. tour worthy of the Rolling Stones or The Police. With stops in 10 states, I have fielded a lot of questions and have had a number of interesting conversations. What is intriguing about my recent multitude of meetings is that the same questions seem to be top of mind for many, rolling off the tongue with great frequency.

What's on the minds of global advertisers? Here's a look at the most frequently asked and most interesting questions I have had to consider during my travels.

What's the deal with Panama?

I spent four days with Yahoo during my travels and the general mood can best be described as giddy. While part of that may have been the sunny location, more was tied directly to the early results of Panama. The new platform has lived up to its hype and seems to be giving large advertisers a boost in click-through rates while drops in CPCs are being reported. This is certainly not an absolute phenomenon, but it is safe to say that Yahoo has, to date, delivered the goods. Questions still linger: Will this lead to increased market share? Is this a case of smart marketers staying ahead of the general population curve? Will results eventually revert back to old production levels?

It is all too early to tell. But for now, the project Yahoo calls Panama is a success.

Do you buy Google's click fraud announcement?

So Google comes out and states that .02% of all click fraud goes

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undetected by Google, while the rest is caught and handled. One of the biggest challenges to this statement is, we are talking about billions and billions of action here across the Google network. So, while on one hand advertisers of all shapes and sizes may see virtually no fraud, there is another segment that would certainly and vehemently disagree with the engine's announcement.

And therein lies the biggest problem: The report is *about* Google, *by* Google. At its core, this comes back to a painful fact of life in a world where Google controls the market it practices. The company is the final judge and jury in this matter. The average advertiser is not using third-party fraud monitoring technology. And even if advertisers had rudimentary ways of detecting click fraud, the Google Terms & Conditions state that the engine decide what is and is not a valid click. Until the approach to click fraud changes on some level and a standard for auditing is adopted, the latest announcement and low percentage will remain a dubious report.

Given the size of our campaign, how should we handle messaging and content connection?

Whenever I meet a prospect, I do an exercise I call "Throwing Rocks at Glass House." Any campaign has holes in it. Some are caused by sloppy work, but more often than not these holes are caused by share-of-voice limitations, sheer volume, the speed at which programs get implemented and internal limitations that could not have been predicted ahead of time.

Recently I presented such an example that caused some people to shake their heads in horror -- while others laughed at the comedy of the error. I was then asked, given a program with over 100,000 keywords in its core campaign and 20 additional business units, what was the acceptable margin of error around match types and copy? Genuinely a great question.

We talk a lot about the human interaction and relevancy of search when we have these meetings -- and this is why. Our goal is to never see this type of error, but it can happen from time to time. Yet when we check things out, the cause, almost without fail, is directly related to priorities and process. Companies tend to prioritize technology so highly that they lose sight of the value in message and relevancy to the consumer, enabling these errors to become more and more prevalent.

The tighter the process for implementation and the more connected the program's priorities are, the lower the likelihood for messaging and content errors to happen.

What impact does our media have on our search program?

As "The Search Guy," I talk about this a lot. We placed a lot of early bets on analytics and the understanding of holistic search

management and integration. We spend a great deal of time looking at correlation and halo effect, and have conducted research that shows correlations between online display advertising and search CTR. No big surprise there. But when we started to see more than 80 percent correlation between the search conversion rate and the level of DRTV Gross Ratings Points, it became clear that search is entering uncharted waters.

Advertisers are thinking. They want more from search and are asking the same questions. And with that, I head back to the airport for another trip. This one, however, is a vacation. Time for someone else to be "The Search Guy" for a week while I field a new array of questions, like "Are we there yet?"

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