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## Relevant Segmentation Of Consumer Search: Part Three

by Chris Copeland, Wednesday, Jul 5, 2006 12:45 PM ET

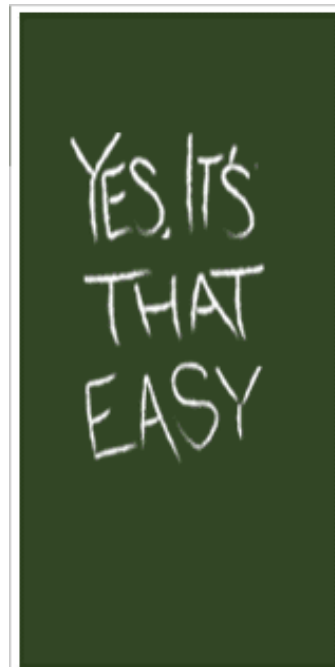
IN MY PAST TWO SEARCH Insider columns I advanced a concept of relevant segmentation of consumer search. [Part one](#) focused on what I believe is the wrong approach, of keywords as stand-alone marketing vehicles. [Part two](#) focused on how that notion plays out over and over again, with keywords being used to make broad assumptions about consumers, often improperly. So, that brings us to part three, the final chapter, at least for now in this forum--which many of you have anticipated according to your e-mails.

If my theory of relevant segmentation is right, then search strategy should be built off consumer behavior. This is one of those statements that often gets heads nodding--but doesn't get executed. Here's how I think it actually works in reality, and then I'll take a stab at explaining why it doesn't happen.

Let's say we have pharmaceutical manufacturer XYZ. This company has a comprehensive offline profile of its audience. The firm knows who they are, what they also suffer from, and what their HHI and demographic data looks like. But, when this company goes to advertise via search, its No. 1 concern is including the keyword in a listing to show consumers it is capable of being topical.

The listing looks like this, using the keyword "heartburn" as an example: "Tired of (Keyword Insertion - Heartburn)? Try BRAND XYZ to treat your symptoms. Free Sample available." Their landing page is usually the standard entry point that offers up a free trial.

But what if, instead, the company took the following approach? The pharmaceutical manufacturer has enormous data points that tells it what people are interested in, what their symptoms are and what the trigger points are through



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which their audience will: do research, go to the doctor, be willing to seek out treatment, or start taking a prescription. Very quickly we have three messaging points that are triggered by keywords.

Now we start to build out a keyword list with these factors in mind--one done from a different mindset. It's a mindset that looks at all the keywords and where they fall against these three areas. Recognizing that the last action (prescriptions) is the most valuable, in the short-term at least, this may be something that is pushed into paid search and paid inclusion. Realizing that other keywords are more likely triggers of a person researching for someone else--or are efforts prior to deciding to visit his or her physician--then we associate these terms with organic search or light usage in paid search.

Basically, because we have identified user groups and what motivates/appeals to them, our keywords, their application across various disciplines within search, and the interaction points on the Brand site, shift completely. We aren't marketing at people. We aren't worried about buying a position because someone else is there. With the ever-present importance to relevance, our marketing efforts face greater reward because we are speaking in a language through which our audience wants to engage with us.

For the keyword "heartburn," the reality is much more likely that a user is doing early stage research. Someone aware of the term "GERD" is much more likely to be a target--as they are already predisposed to the condition and aware that it might be more serious than a bad night of Italian cuisine.

Now, with relevant segmentation in mind, messaging looks like this: "Heartburn Again? Or is it something more? Use our Self Assessment Guide to find out."

Now we take them into a landing page that offers up a more engaging activity, while worrying less about the immediate push to a free coupon, and suddenly the consumer begins dialogue with the brand.

This concept will only get stronger over time. As engines (especially Yahoo and MSN) enable tighter synergies among activities across their entire networks, and enable messaging and positioning against user engagement patterns, relevant consumer segmentation becomes easier to do. It becomes easier as engines explore third-party serving of messaging, which would enable a better link between cookie-level data and messaging/delivery. As companies explore landing page deployment based on interaction with the brand and messaging that drove the contact, these factors become less conceptual and more applicable to the real world.

The key, and hopefully a theme since part one of this series,

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is that the consumer is in control. As quickly as customers adopt search, they can move away from it--not as a piece of their daily routine or Web usage, but in their positioning of search in their value chain. If search is simply a data-in, data-out business, then it becomes less valuable, especially in light of Web 2.0 and its many social aspects, which are less dependent today on advertiser input to formulate opinion of products/brands.

Relevant segmentation of consumer search is the platform that will enable marketers to execute relevant search marketing campaigns that deliver results, using their enormous breadth and depth of consumer data to better communicate. It is the vehicle that will enable data to come out of search and provide Web interactions, in general, that can shape their traditional marketing mix.

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