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## Search **INSIDER** THE INSIDE LINE ON SEARCH MARKETING

### I'm Rubber, You're Glue: Yahoo, Google And The Future Of SEO

Chris Copeland, Dec 02, 2008 10:00 AM

Two weeks ago, both Yahoo and Google introduced changes to the U.S. search results experience. Yahoo brought Glue to the States; the original version was introduced in India. Google brought forward GoogleWiki, which is about as close as Google has ever come to allowing users to taint the perfection that is the Google algorithm system. As one might expect, the Google release drew the lion's share of commentary, much of it for the wrong reasons around privacy. But combined, these two offerings signal three major shifts in the search landscape.

#### Search as a Personal Experience

At a recent event of industry insiders, Atlas Institute Vice President of Analytics Young-Bean Song shared data from the Institute that 70% of all clicks were split between brand queries and navigational queries (those where someone knows the company and uses an engine to get to the URL). That means only 30% of all paid search traffic is going to the upper funnel and assisting those who are seeking guidance or direction. This data shows that search has become a safety blanket and people use it as their starting point to the Web experience.

If this is true, then on a basic level GoogleWiki makes some sense in that it allows users to move things around and shape the 10 blue links as they see fit. Yahoo Glue is a fixed experience, but its predecessor in India allowed users to drag and drop the content on page to suit their own visual preferences. This is important not because of what any user sees on the front side, but what the engines learn on the back side. Today the algorithm is all about relevancy as defined by a computer directed by engineers. Both of these developments signal a major shift because they start to expose consumers to a new reality where they are more actively involved.

Play this forward a bit and think about these learnings combined with the approach of Microsoft's Farecast ([farecast.live.com](http://farecast.live.com)). The site enables you to update in real-time the travel information based on advanced criteria specific to your needs. Nothing terribly unique vs Expedia or Orbitz, but GoogleWiki starts a comfort shift with consumers on the search results page. Once you are comfortable changing the results, you become more comfortable changing other aspects of results. Millions of people walk into department stores and when asked if they need help respond, "I'm just browsing." If a search engine let you check a box and then display messaging and results from companies that valued a different type of communication with browsers, would you, the consumer, be more open to it? Would the advertisers be willing to pay more for a more appropriate conversation starter?

#### Search as a Brand Experience

Yahoo has long touted itself as the partner for advertisers looking for big solutions. The branding opportunities for a Yahoo home page takeover are significant -- and you can be sure that the exposure and awareness lifts are recognized by virtually every advertiser. Now look at Glue through that lens. Complete immersion into a brand or concept. Let's look at two examples of where this may be taking consumers and advertisers:

First, let's start with the non-branded experience of ["aspirin."](#) On the day this was written, there

were eight different content streams coming from multiple points of relevancy. Talking about tossing out the 10 blue links. From a consumer standpoint, this is either information overload or everything you could want in a single place to become the Wiki to end all Wiki of information on a given topic. From an advertiser perspective who wants to be synonymous with a given concept or topic, what more could you want and what price would you pay for the exposure of being included as provider of content and principal advertisers or sponsor of such a wealth of knowledge around a topic they support.

Now the results for [Dell](#). This is a corporate brand manager's dream and nightmare rolled into one. Before, you had two issues to deal with when trying to control real estate; the paid and the organic. Now you have many more streams of content flowing into this area. If they vary in terms of the quality and favorability of the content then this exercise could be like herding cats. If they are all working for you then this becomes the type of repository of third-party insights you drive traffic to (a la the Google Pontiac or Yahoo Special K campaigns).

In either case, a major shift in how brands are presented and content derived to inform.

### **The Redefining of SEO**

Search Engine Optimization. Wikipedia's defines it as "the process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to a web site from search engines via "natural" ("organic" or "algorithmic") search results." And if that is all that SEO is, the definition would need no change. For more than a year now, search marketers have discussed how Ask 3D and Universal Search on Google made Digital Asset Optimization (DAO) a more relevant part of owning result page real estate, and therefore essential to SEO. But SEO measurement has always started with one thing: Where do you rank on a results page? Every client communication I have ever done or seen around SEO starts with your rank of Engine X for Keyword Y is ....

Now apply GoogleWiki and Yahoo Glue to this and tell me how that works. The systems that are used to detect ranking on Google will have no means of knowing that a click came from a Wiki'd page. Look again at Yahoo Glue and tell me where the standard blue links are at on the page. The collaborative and social nature of the Web is slowly seeping into search. Because the organic area does not infringe on the golden goose that is paid search, all engines seem more liberated to alter the results. Google is providing you with their view, but if you want to listen to the masses or take into account your own preferences, they are now willing to do this. Yahoo is prepared to give a deeper, richer and perhaps stickier experience to consumers related to brands and industry defining terms.

I'd suggest that the future of SEO measurement is more about visibility and less about rank. Being #5 on Google may only matter until the masses determine you should be #8, or as we are starting to see, the individual decides that in their starting point view you don't even warrant their attention.

### **Prepping for the Changes to Come**

Neither GoogleWiki or Yahoo Glue are game-changers. No one is going to start using one engine more than the other because of these products. Google will learn far more from the user engagement with GoogleWiki then users will likely know. In fact some could argue that GoogleWiki isn't much more than Yahoo360 except with Google's scale involved. But what Google uses can help shape future products and community offerings. Let's not forget that "Social Media" has never been a home-grown success for Google.

Likewise, Yahoo Glue feels like a brand advertiser opportunity gold mine waiting to be tapped. "Bring together the enormous asset pools of Yahoo" has been the mantra of the Yang regime for the past year, and if this assists in doing that and connects with some segment of the public, it could be a win for a company in need of a few these days.

Regardless, change is coming. What Ask 3D started is only intensifying -- and for SEOs, brand marketers and consumers alike, change is in the air.