



IDEAS:

WHERE TO SWIM

WEB ANALYTICS TIPS FROM THE POND GUY



Ian MacDonald, director of e-commerce for The Pond Guy, offers examples of analytics you can track on your own dashboard to get a better picture of who—and where—you should be targeting.

✓ Poor Performers in Site Search: These were terms people searched for, and clicked through on—but they didn't make a purchase. Why didn't customers like what they saw? Was it the price, the actual item, or another variable?

✓ No Results Found: In this instance, customers are searching for something they think you should be selling, but aren't finding it. Maybe you don't carry it, and if you don't, maybe you should consider stocking it. "This is a great way to expand your product line," MacDonald notes.

The other possibility is that you have it, but customers are calling it something different from your product description. For example, he notes, when he worked at Century Novelty people were constantly searching for "Mexican party supplies," and coming up empty, even though the site had hundreds of items listed for Cinco de Mayo.

"Integrate the phrases customers actually use in your names and descriptions to enhance SEO," says MacDonald.

✓ Who Searched, Who Didn't: Compare the behavior of customers who searched for something on your site, versus those who didn't. Look at the conversion rates and the time spent on the site, and see who spent more.

✓ Search Queries: This can help you drill down and eliminate stuff that your site doesn't carry, but could be wracking up costly clicks. For example, The Pond Guy sells pond dye, but not in the color pink. In a search report, if it sees people searching for pink pond dye, the site might want to create a negative keyword in Google to discourage The Pond Guy popping up in searches for "pink." Alternately, it does sell green pond dye, so it may want to have pages talking up that product.

✓ Funnel Analysis of the Checkout Process: This is something in Google Analytics that you might want to look at a few times a year, to get a visual illustration of how customers proceed—or don't proceed—throughout your checkout process.

✓ Map Overlay: With this, you can get performance metrics by geography, and see the value of a particular area's customers to your site. "At Century Novelty, we thought Canada was great—customers weren't complaining about shipping costs—but they weren't converting," says MacDonald. "By stopping ads from showing up in low converting regions, we saved \$20,000 a year." —**BETH NEGUS VIVEIROS**

Designer Insight

FASHION SITE USES DASHBOARDS FOR BETTER TARGETING

For in-campaign adjustments, recognizing immediate problems or even determining the general efficacy of current campaigns, a marketing dashboard can offer real-time insight.

At fashion and apparel sale and swap site Designer Social, owner Francine Davis Ballard uses a dashboard from Ducky LLC to track the progression of consumers as they move along the prospect-customer-influencer continuum. Her system gives graphic representations as individuals move from requestors to advocates and influencers.

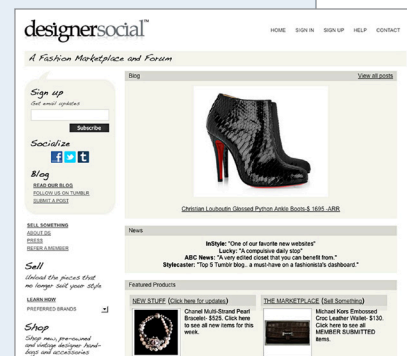
Effective use of social media is critical for Designer Social's efforts to recruit participants. One recent campaign involved giving away a bag on InStyle.com. Participants registered for chances to win on a microsite. The contest generated 50,000 anonymous impressions. Of those, 30% submitted their email addresses. In the Ducky dashboard, these now-identifiable people were represented by little figurines that migrated across differently colored vertical columns.

Nearly all of those went on to the next stage, which was completing a brief questionnaire about the brands they were interested in hearing about.

By the time respondents were asked to share the link to the microsite via a variety of social media channels in exchange for extra chances to win, only around 3,000 were left. But the company believed those individuals who shared the link were more likely to become influencers, and it was correct: Those individuals generated additional entries at nearly a seven-to-one rate. And each of those referrals, along with the people they themselves brought in, could be tracked back to the original participant through the dashboard.

"It's one thing to be a banner sponsor at Lollapalooza," says Davis Ballard. "I'll get tons of impressions. But I will have more success telling one person if it is the right person. If I tell something to Anna Wintour at Vogue, that is more valuable than telling 100,000 of the wrong people."

Tracking participant falloff at each step helped Davis Ballard be comfortable with putting survey questions in front of site visitors. Initially she resisted Ducky's suggestion that she augment her database by doing so. But the dashboard proved there was little dropoff when consumers were presented with the survey. —**RICHARD H. LEVEY**





THE SEARCH FOR PROFITS

Metrics shape Become.com's keyword bidding practices

Within paid search, the Mark Twain quote “The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug” is especially apt. Consider Become.com, a comparison shopping site which saw one word make a difference when bidding for a profitable paid search term.

“Everybody would like to rank [highly] for search terms that have a lot of volume,” says Arpana Tiwari, senior SEO manager at Become.com. “But you have to pick the keywords you can have an impact on in search.”

The right search term is essential for pulling desirable consumers to Become. The site aggregates product reviews and price comparisons, and funnels prospects to retailers who have listed their offerings with it. Become's revenue is on a per-click basis, which means if participating retailers aren't sent prospects who are ready to make a purchase, they won't be participating members very long.

Become experienced this during late 2010, when it looked to capitalize on consumers searching for Black Friday bargains. The problem is that Black Friday—so named for the first Friday after Thanksgiving, when according to retail lore retailers become profitable, or “into the black” for the year—is a very desired, and therefore very expensive, search term.

It also wasn't especially lucrative. Tiwari feels search engines tend to direct consumers to sites that have a fair amount of online his-



tory—say five or six years—while newer sites are ranked lower. As a result, fewer consumers were sent to Become—and those who did click through were browsing, and weren't necessarily ready to pull the trigger on a specific purchase.

A better strategy, according to Tiwari, would have been to bid on more focused terms, such as “Black Friday electronics deals” and then direct searchers to pages deeper within its site. “We then would have optimized content to promote products in those areas,” she says.

So call holiday 2010 a learning experience for Become. “Going into it, we didn't have a lot of time to prepare [the site] for some of those broader terms,” Tiwari says. “It met the costs, but we had high expectations and it didn't meet those.”

Become has taken advantage of measurement offerings from Searchmetrics to aid in its evaluation. The analytics firm provided search term analysis capabilities, along with referring domain data, which has guided keyword selection and bids. Searchmetrics also allows Become to present its findings in dashboard formats with varying degrees of detail and information: Data seen by a CFO won't necessarily be the same as that viewed by account executives who work with individual retailers.

Using what it learned during the 2010 holiday season, Become has modified its tactics during the period leading up to Valentine's Day. Become's administrators examined historical data and chose a few specific categories attractive to consumers likely to convert to customers, rather than putting resources into generating tons of pages or content.

Part of this effort has involved working with merchants to determine their most desirable products and creating top 10 lists, or suggested gift idea features, or blog entries which reflect them. Become then incorporates search terms most likely to generate sales in its site—and bids on these highly focused search terms to send consumers to these pages.—RICHARD H. LEVEY

SOCIAL MEDIA:

Consider “Liking” Facebook

WHILE FACEBOOK'S AUCTION-BASED BID AND COST-PER-CLICK PRICING STRUCTURES ARE SIMILAR TO GOOGLE'S, THEY CAN BE MUCH MORE VALUABLE TO MARKETERS FOR A FEW KEY REASONS:

■ **Interest-based targeting.** Advertisers, both in the most traditional (brands) and non-traditional (anyone with a Facebook page) sense, can use Facebook to target customers in several ways, including demographically, psychographically and behaviorally (based on Facebook usage). If a company is selling running gear, for instance, it can target people who have indicated an interest in running by liking related profiles and pages.

Why you might want to be advertising friends with the social site



■ **Immediate gratification.** Another attribute that sets Facebook ads apart from traditional search is that they offer advertisers instant gratification. For all the different ways a brand is able to present content on Facebook, there are only a few ways users can endorse or share it, which means that advertisers can narrow their focus to producing these key behaviors.

By tying an ad to a branded Facebook page, users are greeted by an opportunity to take action—either in the form of liking the page, or, in the case of more savvy brands, exploring custom landing pages, tabs and content generated by the marketer. Marketers who are trying to grow their databases would be foolish not to have opt-in and call-to-action features in place prior to drive new eyeballs to their pages through ads or other efforts.

■ **Potential for viral activity.** Facebook ads can be used to increase the number of fans of a company's Facebook page. This helps create an audience and community where brands can have a two-way conversation with prospects and customers. This could not be accomplished with Google or any other advertising medium.—GORDON PLUTSKY, director of marketing and research, King Fish Media.

