How technology is changing what it means to be an effective (search) marketer

The demands and expectations of marketers continue to evolve, and increasingly, they "will be a hybrid of marketers, technologists and data analysts," says Stephen McDonagh, director of digital & growth marketing at 1-800 Flowers, Inc.

He discussed how emerging trends in data and technology are changing what it means to be an effective search marketer in a presentation with his 1-800 Flowers colleague Sara Resnick, director of enterprise community marketing for SEO & Social, during SMX Next.

McDonagh noted that the democratization of data storage (cheap, easy and nearly infinite thanks to cloud databases) and machine learning in the systems we use (smart/automated bidding as one example) have significantly affected search marketing – and marketing more broadly.

The new competitive advantages for (search) marketers

When machine learning is pervasive and data is plentiful and accessible, McDonagh says look for an edge by:

- Focusing on cross-channel strategies, collaboration and attribution for increasingly complex customer journeys.
- Being able to make strategic and tactical decisions faster than everyone else when everyone has the same level of data access. Automate reporting so you can get your questions answered faster.
- Knowing how the machine models work so you can choose the right bidding model for the right campaign, for

example. (This really is critical and something I emphasized in my SMX Next talk on search marketing in the predictive marketing era as well.)
- Regularly evaluating, testing and pushing tools and technology.

“Individual tools and tech will change so quickly that investing in any one technology may not provide a lasting impact,” he says. “Competitive advantage will no longer be predicated on just adopting new technologies.”

“Instead, the edge will be gained by creating an environment and culture that supports rapid iteration and testing – where teams are constantly testing and technologies relevant to their businesses,” says McDonagh.

Beware the hot new thing or a tech-for-tech’s-sake mentality. “Every shiny new technology is not going to be a fit for your business,” he notes. “As technology evolves, you must constantly build and rebuild your marketing stack to remain effective.

Tools for the ‘new normal’ in marketing

McDonagh noted that Google Data Studio offers a free and code-free option for automating reporting and data visualization. If you want to go further, though, he suggests building a marketing database to be able to bring in data from more sources and combine PPC data with SEO, CRM and other web analytics data. Tableau, Looker and Power BI are more sophisticated visualization options to consider.

Google Cloud AutoML Tables make it easy for non-coders to leverage machine learning and build forecasts. And Cloud AutoML Vision’s image recognition model can be used to automatically add product attributes to product catalogs, for

example, says McDonagh.

He notes that more recent college graduates have backgrounds in programming languages such as Python, R and SQL and suggests current search marketers expand their skills. “Take a course in SQL, Python, R, HTML, JavaScript, cloud computing, machine learning, or anything you may not be familiar with,” he says.

Use cases these skills, tools and technologies include automating daily reporting, tying SEM data to CRM data, cross-channel analysis and forecasting and scenario planning.

Just remember, technology isn’t a strategy. “Innovative tools will make finding answers easier, but you must ask the right questions,” says McDonagh.

Watch the full presentation here (free registration).

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