Pinterest on visual search: key takeaways

We invited Michael Akkerman, Global Head of Partners Program at Pinterest, to our NY office yesterday evening to speak on visual search.

He talked about discovery over search, audience engagement over audience size, less time more well-spent over more total time spent, and social communities over social networks. It was an insightful, instructive, and *obviously* visual-heavy session.

Here were some of the key takeaways / highlights.

Pinterest is a visual discovery engine – discovery over search

When people come to our platform, they're trying to discover new pieces of information.

Our Pinners are not looking to connect with friends or post at parties. They're doing home renovations. They're in the market for something. They want to go and actually discover something.

Google is great for when I know what I want, but it's really crappy when I don't know how to articulate it. How do I describe a style I've only seen, a city I don't know, a specific color?

Like this:

Or this:

I know them when I see them.

Pinterest is visual-first. We wanted it to be able to take images instead of words.

Pinterest = possibilities

What do I want to eat? What do I want to wear? How should I decorate my house? What’s my style? We help people understand their taste.

Total numbers of pins: 23 billion food and drink. 18 billion home and garden. 8 billion beauty. 23 billion style. 4 billion travel.

Are you in one of these categories? Your customers are on Pinterest.

> *“Even if you think your brand’s content isn’t on Pinterest, your customers are probably already bringing it there. Seems like those are people you might want to go and chat with.”*

What keeps people from buying? They’re still trying to figure out what they want – they’re still discovering.

For us, the camera is the new keyboard.

Let the image be the SERP.

Shop the look. Discover products inside an image.

Personalization not as a feature, but

rather the underpinning of the platform

On Pinterest, we understand that every single person has different interests. We don't want personalization as just a feature. We want it as the underpinnings of the entire platform.

The way we're doing it is we're bringing what's called the taste graph. The hipster guy from Williamsburg? His garden board doesn't look like everyone else's. My travel board? I want to go to Morocco. Not everyone does.

When you interact on Pinterest, it feels like it knows you.

What storytelling was on search versus what storytelling is on Pinterest. Driving people closer to an engaging experience.

Audience engagement over audience size

Content at scale:

- 250 million monthly active users
- 170 billion pins – 5x the library of congress every single day
- 3 billion boards

We have the largest human focus group in the world, curating content into boards.

"We're 250 million people, not 2 billion. It's really looking at the intent. You'll find platforms with much larger audiences, but they're not there to engage. We're a smaller audience size, but people are there with intent."

More time well-spent over total time spent

The visual revolution. 50% of the brain is dedicated to understanding visual information.

People retain 10% of what they hear, 20% of what they read, and 80% of what they see and do.

At Pinterest, that “do” part is very interesting. We’re about time well-spent. We want you off the platform as soon as possible – we want you to solve your problem as quickly as possible.

> *“When people use Pinterest, they feel positive. It’s about what you can build and achieve. Go make that recipe. Go build that birdhouse. Go nuts. Get off our platform as quickly as possible.”*

Purposeful communities over social networks

We’re not a social network – but communities are naturally springing up all the time around given topics, images, ideas, and brands.

Most people call Pinterest “my time.” Not about my social network.

Ads within the context of purpose-based community versus in a social network

1. Annoyance: “People use social media to share things about their lives with each other. And let’s face it, ads are annoying in that context.”

2. Value: “With Google, you know the intent but not the person. With Facebook, you know everything about the person but less about the intent. I was drawn to Pinterest because it combines both.”

Ads often don’t add value, and they feel disruptive, disjointed.

Why not make them *additive*? If you’re searching for a certain type of shoes, we’ll show you ads for those shoes.

> *“If the content is valuable, I don’t mind that it comes from a brand. It solves my problem.”*

How people shop: convenience and need over loyalty, bundles over individual items

Example of REI: They saw that normal human beings shop in bundles. If they’re going camping, they don’t need ten jackets and ten tents. They need a bundle of assorted things. Thus, they started highlighting and bundling trending Pinterest products on their own site.

Loyalty is elusive in today’s market

Most purchases are driven by shopping, not by loyalty to a brand. People who switch from brand A to brand B do so because brand B was present the second they were looking for a product.

Marketers like Pinterest because you can reach customers so early on in their buying journey

Pinners start the Black Friday hunt in August.

Most people start pinning, searching, saving 12 weeks before an event. That’s great for a marketer. You can drive interest incrementally over time.

When someone is designing their perfect home, looking for the perfect bag, planning their next vacation – you should be there. They’re discovering your product.

Agnostic cross-channel insight

Last-touch vs multi-touch attribution, in pictures:

“Last-touch attribution is like a shopkeeper looking out the door and seeing a bunch of customers lined up outside and saying “oh, if I had two more front doors, I’d have three times as many customers.” It doesn’t work that way.”

You need to do multi-touch attribution. You’re trying to engage customers, build brand, drive sales. But that looks different in every channel.

Kenshoo found that Facebook was undervalued by as much as 30%. We see the exact same thing on Pinterest right now.

The full livestream is available on our @Sewatch twitter here as well as online here.

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