Solving the agency search intelligence gap

30-second summary:

- Agencies are particularly struggling to find ways to gain a broad view of the search market.
- Many agencies rely too heavily on Google tools which on provide top-level search insights and need better tools.
- COVID-19 is resulting in surprising search results and agencies are having trouble explaining these outcomes without proper data.

Search advertising is one of the most dynamic and rapidly evolving areas of the advertising ecosystem today. And as search continues to emerge as the barometer by which all other advertising activities are gauged, the need for sophisticated search intelligence has never been higher.

Yet, agencies, in particular, are continuing to have difficulties deriving the search intelligence they need and finding ways to unlock the potential of the insights that they already have on hand. Moreover, as agencies continue to invest in more data-generating tools, they are having to sift through more data than ever, and are struggling to keep up.

With that in mind, below are some key items agencies should keep in mind when it comes to their search intelligence infrastructure and how they can get the best out of it.

Agencies only have a fragmented search view

The search landscape is vast and continues to reshape itself on a daily basis. Therefore, having the most comprehensive view of the search landscape and all its nuances is imperative to driving success and making the most informed decisions possible. And data is the key component in building this holistic view.

Incomplete and inaccurate data can not only depress campaign effectiveness but can also have detrimental impacts on an advertiser's standing versus competitors. For example, without high-quality data insights, it becomes impossible for advertisers to detect when competitors start to encroach on their brand terms – among other things. However, with the proper data tools in place, agencies can build better strategies for clients so that they can achieve maximum ROI and protect their market position.

Google tools don't allow for proper performance analysis

While Google does provide a top-level view of search performance it does not nearly do so in the depth that is needed for agencies to be able to properly explain performance to their clients, particularly as it relates to competitor activity. Agencies need to be able to quickly justify why performance has changed and what steps can be taken to address these fluctuations – positive or negative. And Google simply does not allow them to do this. Additionally, without a comprehensive set of insights, it can be very hard for agencies to justify budget needs to their clients as well, and how to counteract the spends that other competitors are dedicating to certain segments. So agencies should be very wary of only relying on Google's analytics

tools.

Explaining the COVID-19 effect

As COVID-19 has disrupted consumer online and search behavior it has also materially impacted the search industry. From differences in the types of searches to a growing prevalence of local search as individuals looking to stay closer to home amid the pandemic, the entire search industry is scrambling to make sense of what may unfold next as a result of the current crisis. In addition, as we continue to move towards the conclusion of the pandemic, search professionals are also being tasked with figuring out which pandemic era trends may stick around and which ones won't, adding a further layer of complexity to this already hectic period. Questions like, "which industries will emerge first?", as well as, "which competitors will emerge fastest?" all need to be answered.

Luckily, by embracing a more 'whole-market' approach to data, agencies can quickly make sense of the changes that are occurring and deliver data-driven explanations to clients seeking answers for why an unexpected outcome took place. Furthermore, agencies can keep track of which pandemic era trends seem to have "staying power" and game plan accordingly.

Enabling a holistic view

Given how many different silos exist organizationally at agencies, it isn't surprising that synthesizing all of the data that exists and reporting on it is hugely labor-intensive. This can be particularly challenging for agencies that are assessing strategies across the full complement of clients' advertising activity, including traditional channels such as TV and radio along with other digital channels like mobile and paid social in addition to search.

Breaking down the walls that exist between the different branches of agencies is the only way to get the “truth” when it comes to reporting. This means making sure that the data is fully harmonized, comparable, and accessible through an integrated tool that provides the right capabilities for each agency role. AI can also play a critical role in creating fast, highly usable insights that can quickly translate into action. . This integrated and intelligent approach will cut down significantly on time spent generating reports while also making an agency’s performance much more agile, effective, and accurate.

After having to deal with a tremendous amount of upheaval and rethinking over the last decade, the idea of having to adapt is not a new one for agencies. Yet, while agencies have done well to roll with the times thus far, search still represents a bit of a pain point. However, by re-examining the current state of their data operations, agencies can boost their search intelligence exponentially, while making their entire business more intelligent as well.

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