Synergized search is key to success in the new normal

30-second summary:

- Given that consumers run billions of searches every day – with Google estimated to process 40,000 per second it's clear marketers need a smart strategy to cut through the competition.
- The question is: Will they drive the highest traffic and performance with SEO or PPC?
- Head of Paid Media at Tug shares insight on how perfectly balancing these two facets can lead to success in the new normal.

Consumer activity online is at an all-time high. So, it's no surprise many marketers are aiming to make the most of it by hooking their attention early, at the point of search. But deciding how best to do so isn't necessarily easy.

Given that consumers run billions of searches every day – with Google estimated to process 40,000 per second – it's clear marketers need a smart strategy to cut through the competition. The question is: will they drive the highest traffic and performance with search engine optimization (SEO) or pay per click (PPC)?

Both have their own advantages and drawbacks. PPC is a quick win, enabling businesses to rapidly reach consumers and boost visibility. But its lead generation power only lasts while the money flows and, depending on campaign scale and scope, those costs can run high. Meanwhile, SEO delivers more lasting rewards and higher click-through rates (CTRs), often for less

investment. Yet marketers might have a long wait before organic searches pay off, and may still fall behind dominant digital marketplaces for certain keywords.

Ultimately, the smartest route lies neither one way nor the other, but in a combination of both. Blending PPC and SEO not only generates stronger results but also balances out their respective shortcomings, offering marketers the best chance of success in the new ever-changing normal.

Utilizing a combination of paid and organic search tactics isn't new – but it's never been clear how marketers can best do this, or a way to visualize the data for optimization. Leveraging PPC and SEO in conjunction with one another can be challenging, but creating the perfect synergy is possible if marketers focus on the following three factors:

Unify search operations

With consumers spending a quarter of their waking day online, marketers have plenty of chances to spark their interest through search. To outmanoeuvre rivals and capture eyeballs first, brands must make fast yet informed decisions about which approach will produce the ideal outcome.

Achieving this requires holistic insight which, in turn, calls for greater unity. Due to the general view of PPC and SEO as separate entities, teams often operate in silos, but this isolates valuable knowledge around consumer behaviour and the tactics that generate the biggest rewards. Simple as it sounds, removing divisions and encouraging teams to share their insight can significantly improve campaign execution and drive more efficient CPAs.

For example, information from the PPC teams on the best performing keywords and ad copy will help SEO teams to optimize meta descriptions and website content.

Sharing information on what keywords campaigns are covering will also prevent the doubling up of efforts – for example, as organic keyword positions improve, there might be an opportunity to pull back PPC activity and reallocate budget to other keywords to increase the overall coverage. Similarly, updates from the SEO team on keywords that are particularly competitive to rank in top positions are an opportunity for PPC to drive incremental conversions. And, on a more fundamental level, by sharing any new or emerging search terms with each other, both SEO and PPC teams can ensure they are up-to-date and reacting as quickly as possible to opportunities.

Select tech that drives collaboration

The next step is integrated technology. Implementing tools that collate and merge data from multiple sources – including PPC and SEO campaigns – will make collaboration easier. That's not to mention generating a complete overview of collective search operations, performance, and opportunities for businesses.

A holistic and unified dashboard, for example, can provide visibility of combined search performance against KPIs and competitor activity. This enables PPC and SEO teams to identify where there are opportunities and how strategies can be adjusted to leverage them, without duplicating each other's efforts. Marketers can understand where organic rankings are high, and competitor activity low, and vice versa, which means they know when to reduce PPC activity, as well as opportunities where it can drive incremental conversions over and above what SEO can deliver.

All of this, however, depends on accuracy and usability. Information needs to be reliable and actionable, which means simply joining up the data dots isn't enough: in addition to

robust cleansing, processing and storage, tools must offer accessible visualization.

Although frequently overlooked, clearly-presented data plays a huge part in enhancing everyday activity. Providing a streamlined picture of keywords and performance data is vital, but to ensure teams can pinpoint prime SERPs, accelerate traffic, and increase conversions, businesses also need tools that allow their teams to quickly find and activate key insights.

Don’t forget human checks

Dialing up tech use, however, does come with a word of warning – no matter how smart platforms may be, they can’t entirely replace human experience and expertise. On their own, sophisticated tools bring a range of benefits that go far beyond translating data into a more cohesive and user-friendly format. The most advanced boast immediate alerts that tell PPC teams where their competitors are bidding – or not – and use artificially intelligent (AI) analysis to deliver a cross-market, sector, and classification perspective on SEO activity.

Human knowledge is still paramount to steering search campaigns in the right direction and picking up on the nuances that machines miss. For instance, problem-solving machines might take the quickest path to objective completion for certain pages or messages, but seasoned search professionals may see the potential for longer-term uses that deliver higher incremental value.

As a result, organizations must avoid the perils of over-reliance on their marketing tools. By persistently applying manual reviews and checking automated conclusions against human knowledge, they can tap the best of tech and people power.

Today’s marketing leaders are grappling with multiple uncertainties, but when it comes to search, the way forward is clear. PPC and SEO are complementary forces; producing deeper insights and higher returns together, as well as minimizing risk. By connecting the two and taking a considered approach to data-driven search strategy, businesses can ensure campaigns are strong enough to succeed in the new normal and take on whatever tomorrow brings.

Asher Gordon is Head of Paid Media at Tug. He leads a multi-disciplined media team who plan, buy, and deliver integrated media plans for a diverse set of clients. With over 10 years experience working across multiple markets and brands at PHD and Wavemaker, Asher works with clients to better their marketing goals and drive their business forward.

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