

Search Marketing Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: An Author Reviews His Speculations – 8 Years Later

Abstract of a Work-In-Progress

James B. Pettijohn, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus of Finance and General Business
Missouri State University

Introduction

In 2009, the author and a colleague published a paper entitled, “Search Marketing Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Promoting the Conversation,” in the *Journal of Direct, Data, and Digital Marketing Practice* (Grehan and Pettijohn, 2009). The paper, which examined the history and state of Search Marketing (SM) as of the 2008-09 time period, also presented speculations regarding SM’s future. The authors wrote the paper as a conceptual article intended to point out how search marketing was changing and to promote reflection regarding how it would/could evolve in the future.

To insure consistency with the earlier paper, it is important to begin with the definition of SM that was included in its introductory comments:

SM, also called Search Engine Marketing (SEM), sometimes is defined as the practice of compensating search engines in return for placement in search results (Elliott, 2006). The authors, however, prefer the more comprehensive definition that is embraced by the Search Engine Marketing Professionals Organization (SEMPO). That definition encompasses Search Engine Optimization (or SEO), paid placement, contextual advertising, and paid inclusion (Sherman, 2007). The primary difference between these two definitions is that the latter adds SEO, which involves actions designed to improve a website’s ranking in *unpaid*, or organic, search results, to the mix. It is the SEMPO definition that is used in this paper (Grehan, 2009).

The purpose of the present paper, which at this point is a work-in-progress, is to summarize the content of the earlier paper with the ultimate objective of examining the speculations that were made in 2009 to see if the intervening eight years have proved them accurate. In doing so, the author will basically be discussing the current state of SM as of 2017.

Outline

While the author is only in the early stages of this work-in-progress, what he intends to do is to briefly review the ideas put forth in the earlier paper, and then to evaluate the accuracy of the speculations made in that paper. What follows is the basic outline of the first part of that

paper. The outline draws heavily from an appendix included in the original paper (Grehan and Pettijohn, 2009).

The Early History of Search

1. Before the WWW and Google, search engines existed. In 1994, WebCrawler, probably the Web's first full-text retrieval search engine, launched. SEO was all about manipulating rankings through on-page factors.
2. A cottage industry of small search engine optimizers started to grow. An increasing number of marketers became aware of the tactics and techniques they could use “adjust” Web pages and outsmart competitors.
3. Google arrived and introduced a hyperlink-based algorithm called PageRank. (Jon Kleinberg wrote about incorporating network theory and citation analysis into a ranking algorithm he called HITS.)
4. With the advent of PageRank in the late 1990s, the emphasis in SEO switched from basic page design and content to securing incoming links, and the SEO industry had to change, because, to paraphrase Thomas Edison, PageRank came dressed in overalls and looked like work.

Search in 2008-2009

1. Discovering knowledge from hypertext data such as text and link analysis is still a large part of the science called information retrieval. These signals have significantly helped search engines determine relevancy and rank according to authority.
2. Although industry leaders acknowledge that SEO is much more of a marketing process than a technical exercise, much effort still is devoted to crawler activity and indexing.
3. Search engine crawlers became more intelligent and developers have grown more cognizant of the need for websites to be more crawler-friendly. But even after 10 years of research and development, inherent problems from processes related to search engine information retrieval still remain.
4. Google's rollout of Universal Search in 2007 once again completely changed the business of search marketing.
5. All of the other major search engines have followed Google's lead and are discovering new methods of uncovering patterns in different types of web content, structure and end-user data.
6. Signals from end users who previously could not vote for content via links from web pages are now able to vote for content with their clicks, bookmarks, tags and ratings. These votes are very strong signals to search engines, and do not rely on the elitism of one web site owner linking to another or the often mediocre crawl of a relatively ignorant search bot.

2009 SM Speculations

1. With Google's launch of Wiki, e-marketers can say goodbye to the tradition ranking reports, since Google Wiki allows the end user to re-rank search results.

2. Since Google does not provide advance warning regarding fairly dramatic changes that affect the entire SEO industry, digital marketers need to be better prepared and understand where search is going.
3. SEO vendors and in-house SEO teams must be fully aware of the new signals and able to develop new forms of optimization and strategy, because SEO will give way to a new form of Digital Asset Management and Optimization for a search engine audience expecting a much richer experience.
4. The new SEO will place a much greater emphasis on optimizing a range of file types, from PDFs to images to audio/visual content, etc.
5. More emphasis will be given to feeds to search engines. This will not be just XML feeds into paid inclusion and shopping comparison, but will also include feeds with other types of information, such as local, financial, news and other areas.
6. Mobile will increase in popularity and search will gradually become more personalized.
7. Personalization and Digital Asset Optimization will end 1999-style ranking reports, as search results will be based on blended results from end-user specifics, such as geographic location, time of day, previous searching history and peer group preference.
8. Online, monitoring of the customer's voice will become more important than the brand message.
9. Monitoring search results for different file types will become increasingly important as end users (even competitors) upload content that may be related to your brand/ product/service.
10. Reputation management will be highly valued as marketing continues its reversal from a broadcast medium to a listening medium.
11. Marketing into networks will see huge growth, and social search will grow with it.

It is the preceding 11 speculative comments that the author intends to examine and evaluate in detail in the present paper. Examples of the author's initial evaluations will be presented at the conference.

References

1. Grehan, Mike and James Pettijohn (2009), "Search Marketing Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Promoting the Conversation," *Journal of Direct, Data, and Digital Marketing Practice*, 11(2), September – December 2009, p.p. 88-99.
2. Elliott, Stuart (2006), "More Agencies Investing in Marketing With a Click," (document on the World Wide Web: <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/14/business/media/14adco.html?ex=1299992400&en=6fcd30b948dd1312&ei=5088>), March 14.
3. Sherman, Chris (2007), "The State of Search Engine Marketing 2006," (document on the World Wide Web: <http://searchengineland.com/070208-095009.php>), February 8.