

Search Trends 2018

MediaCom Trends - Search

Changes across many fronts

It'll be a busy year in Search with changes on many fronts – from ongoing developments in audience segmentation and targeting to further growth in search behaviour analysis, potential user resistance to the new AdWords interface and more. Here are eight major trends we see:

Audience segmentation will keep evolving

Audience segmentation will remain the dominant theme in Search. Strategies will continue to evolve as targeting becomes increasingly refined. Keywords remain a key element of a

paid search account, but the clever use of audience signals – from distinguishing returning website users from existing customers to identifying those searching on mobiles etc. – has been proving successful. For example, using the Google AdWords In-market Audiences feature for improved access to predefined audience groups. These techniques will be further developed and enhanced through 2018 to support a variety of goals from cutting wastage to more tightly customising communications by audience segment.

Growth in search behaviour analysis

Search behaviour analysis has been proving incredibly powerful – for example, in determining what website content should be created or which navigation options are most relevant to mobile phone users. Marketers in 2018 will increasingly seek new ways to feed search behaviour data into platforms like Facebook. Mixing in data from new sources will enable richer audience targeting, above and beyond what could be achieved by relying on a single media owner's targeting capabilities.

Voice Search demanding attention

Voice Search had a high profile last year, and it will be important to consider its growing adoption in practical marketing terms. For example, are there indeed enough points of differentiation between text-based and voice searches to justify different strategies and account set-ups? Or, more fundamentally, is the ease of voice search creating incremental searches that brands can take advantage of?

Automation getting smarter

Automation can easily be misunderstood as “machines now completing tasks humans used to be responsible for”, therefore allowing search professionals to lean back and relax. In truth, it's no longer possible to run a successful search campaign without tapping into forms of automation. That's due to the complexity of set-ups, the variety of audience signals to react to and the 24/7 nature of searches. Whilst automation already extends to areas like performance reporting and bid management, 2018 will see more developments – for example, by having systems learn over time to improve the precision of predictive bid

management or keyword-less targeting via dynamic search ads (DSA).

New formats altering Search Engine Result Pages (SERP) environment

The look of search engine result pages (SERPs) is evolving every year. Google and Microsoft particularly are continuously launching new ad extensions to enrich the user experience. We expect this trend to continue in 2018, with a particular focus on visuals – in line with the dominant positioning of Google Shopping Ads.

Amazon becoming a serious player for product search

In overall search volumes Google's dominance has been taken for granted. However, Amazon is now becoming a serious threat, at least for searches relating to product purchases. Its growing paid listing service, Amazon Marketing Services (AMS), which lets retailers steer users searching within the Amazon environment to their Amazon shop pages, may divert even more paid search media spend from Google.

New AdWords interface meeting potential resistance

Google AdWords has been around since 2000. The platform has seen various makeovers through the years but the new user interface, closely aligned with Google products like Data Studio and designed for a multi-screen world, is a major change. Whilst new UI features are being well received, some other functions are not being transferred. As a result, many search professionals are reverting to the old view. This won't be an option soon, once the full rollout is complete in 2018.

Mobile and Attribution remaining on the agenda

It's been at least five years since mobile became a major agenda point in PPC and its importance has not decreased. With mobile's share of searches still growing, marketers must be specifically catering for users searching on smartphones. Practical implications range from selecting the most relevant ad extensions to reviewing the average landing page

load time on 3G. Attribution will also continue to be talked about, and not only because many brands still rely on the last-click model. Marketers will be seeking to master data-driven attribution measurement and subsequent strategy changes which will push media performance past the siloed, last-click approach.

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