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National vs. local search: Pros & cons

February 11 2008

Should your company invest its marketing dollars in a national search campaign, or is it more beneficial to go local? Four experts consider the options and offer their advice.



Herndon Hasty, Account manager, Range Online Media

While national search campaigns get hefty amounts of attention from marketing departments for their wide coverage, there is only upside in taking the time to get involved in local search opportunities. As long as a company's locations or offerings are appropriate for being found locally, it has nothing to lose in participating but revenue and market share.

In some cases, a company doesn't even need to have a location in a given area to advertise successfully in local results for that area. As long as a company can offer searchers a product or service that can be delivered to the location, it can successfully compete at the local level. Unfortunately, many companies are turned off at the prospect of putting the effort for a single national campaign into a series

of targeted local sites — and are missing out on highly targeted campaigns that convert better and, for paid efforts, cost a fraction of a national campaign.

THE TAKEAWAY: Targeted local and national campaigns mean more ways to reach consumers.

The opportunities don't end at the sites themselves, nor at the pieces that find their way into national search results. Search engines are moving towards “universal search” results, which means including elements beyond national results — such as local matches — towards the top of a national search engine's results.

The advent of universal search means that companies which take part in local portals, Internet yellow pages and other location-driven results not only stand to win from direct traffic to and referrals from these channels, but also from subsequent highly ranked placements in universal search results.

The highly targeted opportunities that local search results and geo-targeted national search ads offer means more chances to be in front of your customer at the right place at the right time with the optimal message. For large and small companies alike, there's nothing to be lost in increasing your local search presence and being as consumer path-targeted as possible.



Bruce Crair, President and COO, Local.com

It used to be that all a company had to do to get noticed was to advertise in the local newspaper or Yellow Pages directory. But, for today's customers ready to buy, the Internet — and local search — provides new opportunities for businesses selling online.

THE TAKEAWAY: For growing businesses, local search is often more relevant and cost-effective.

For a local company looking for local customers or a national company steering customers to local storefronts, local search provides targeted messages to the consumer searching for a product or service in a particular area. Local search lets businesses with a local presence connect with these customers.

Another benefit of local search is that it delivers highly relevant search results to the consumer. Relevancy means users can find the products and services they seek in a specific location and businesses gain consumers who are ready to buy. National search delivers multiple and sometimes irrelevant results.

Using specific local search algorithms and local Web indexing technologies, the local search provider connects the searching consumer to the company. Local search allows businesses to sign up for online listings that allow them to instantly post and update their business information, including contact information and business descriptions online. Traditional Yellow Pages advertising is published annually, thus instant updates and changes can't be made to listings.

For growing businesses with limited marketing dollars, it is often more cost-effective to advertise using local search, because ROI is higher when a business is able to target its advertising dollars with a specific category and location.



Robert Balancia, Managing partner, interactive, G2 Direct & Digital

There has been a lot of buzz recently about the growth of local search. Depending on your offer it might be the next best way to grow your business.

The question, therefore, is how you should determine if local search should be included in your search engine marketing budget, and if so, how you should get started.

It is obvious that any advertiser with local or regional retail locations should be vigilantly testing local search, directory placements and possibly mobile search placements. For national advertisers, your first step should be to look at information you already access on a daily or weekly basis, such as your Webtrends, Overture or Google Analytics. Here, you can start to look for geographic patterns of increased purchase or intent. In these regions, it may make

sense for you to layer in a local search budget.

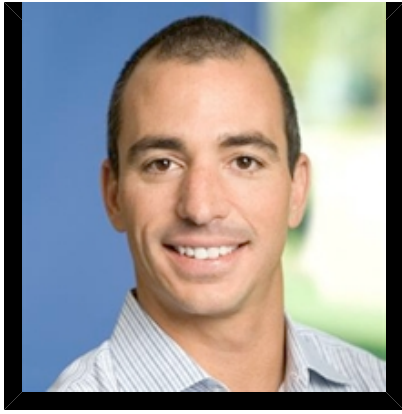
THE TAKEAWAY: Layering of national and local search can help companies of all sizes

The next logical place for your company to test is where you have store locations or your chief competitor has a presence. If your search engine marketing is performed in house, start by setting aside a portion of your national search budget or see if you can add to it with some test cells of local search on Google, Yahoo and MSN. If you work directly with the big three, have your representative size the opportunity by your category or vertical.

The layering of national and local search can help you take full advantage of all of the awareness and demand for your products and services. Why not expand this low risk “pull” medium and make a good thing even better?



Warren Kay, Managing director of strategic alliances, Yahoo



In terms of local and national search, I wouldn't say that one tactic has an advantage or disadvantage over the other. It really depends on where the consumer is in terms of their buying cycle and how marketers can best promote their product or service.

THE TAKEAWAY: Keep campaign goals in mind when planning local and national search tactics

Companies often want to do broad national advertising or branding. If that's the objective around the campaign, there are plenty of advantages to national search. In that case, they can really focus their campaign, tactics and message on the national level.

However, if a national company has some sort of bricks-and-mortar presence in various areas of the country, it may want to use local search to promote or drive traffic to its various locations. After all, if a consumer is interested in buying a particular product, he or she is searching for a vendor to buy it from.

The difference between local and geo-targeting may be subtle, but it is pretty important. In my opinion, a national advertiser that just wants to send different marketing messages to different parts of the country is effectively geo-targeting its campaign.

For a national advertiser without a physical presence, like an e-commerce business, geo-targeting makes sense. For example, geo-targeting allows it to send different messages to consumers in places like New York and California. But geo-targeting doesn't make sense when there isn't a differentiated product with any regional variations.

When marketers are geo-targeting a campaign, they need to take into consideration the ROI and the conversion much more so than the actual volume or total. When people geo-target their campaign, the volume for their term is going to do down. However, although volume might be low, that's where the conversion comes in. The ROI on the traffic can be phenomenal.