



STRATEGY AND PLANNING

Study Notes

Strategy and Planning

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LESSON 1: PLANNING A SEARCH MARKETING STRATEGY

SEARCH AUDIT

What is the function of search audits?

Search audits allow you to establish a current standing of your search marketing activity.

Audit the current status of your search marketing channels by analyzing the following factors:

- **Technical SEO:** How well is your site adhering to Google's best practices? Is it accessible for crawlers? And does it provide an optimal user experience across devices?
- **SEO rankings performance:** How frequently does your site rank on local search engines? And in which positions? Does it rank via text, image, video, or news results?
- **Adherence to Google Ads best practices:** Does your paid search account follow all best practices? Are you making the most of the targeting capabilities available to you?
- **Content marketing performance:** Is your content created to drive brand awareness, how consumers research or drive acquisition?
- **Display and video ad performance:** What role does your display and video activity play in relation to the channels above?

In addition, benchmarking your current performance against the competition provides insight into how much investment will be required to succeed.

EXPECTATIONS

Assessing the opportunity

So, before you start setting targets for your strategy, it is essential to understand the size of the search opportunity for your company. This can help set budgets and expectations within the organization. You can achieve this by using Google Keyword Planner to find a total relevant search volume for queries related to your company, its products, and its services. You should then benchmark this against your current performance to assess how much ground you must make up to maximize this opportunity.

Another core area for assessment is level of competition in your industry. This will set expectations around performance and the budget required to hit your goals.

Keyword mapping for SEO

Page	Target Group
Credit Card Product	Credit Cards
Credit Card Comparison	Compare Credit Cards
Credit Card Information	What is a Credit Card?
Gold Card	Credit Card Benefits
Platinum Card	Lifestyle Rewards
Airmiles Card	Travel Rewards

Relating this directly to SEO. Mapping SEO keyword categories to landing pages maximizes the opportunity for each URL. So, here you can see on the left-hand side a list of pages, and on the right-hand side, a list of target keyword groups.

The first example is a credit card product. So, this is the main acquisition page for a credit card website. The target group would be credit cards, as you would imagine. But this moves down in the third row to credit card information. This would be a much more informational page based around what a credit card is, how it differs from a charge card, what the APR is, and so on and so forth. This is essential when you're trying to build authority around your website. If you build it purely around acquisition pages, you won't rank for the terms that you need to. You have to have main content, which in this instance would be the credit card product, and that needs to be backed up with supplementary content that meets search demand.

Avoid over-optimizing

As Google increases in sophistication, the requirement to map keywords in a very direct fashion decreases. Each page should have a clear purpose and a clear topic. But it is important not to over-optimize for specific key phrases. So, in the example that I've given, you want to bear in mind that the credit card product page is focusing on acquisition. But what you don't want to do is have a keyword density for phrases such as credit card, apply for a credit card online, that is anywhere above 3% for the whole page. So, you want to be quite careful with that. It's more of a topic-based approach rather than a keyword-based approach.

Tying opportunities to objectives

A crucial part of setting any search marketing campaign or strategy is to time your opportunities to objectives. Now, often these objectives are quite clear and quite obvious. You have a certain amount of money and it needs to be turned into 4X or Y, something like that. But there are a lot of different stakeholders within your business who will expect different things. An essential part of any search marketing strategy is setting expectations with the full list of stakeholders within your business. A lot of people will want different things. A lot of them will be acquisition based. But some of them are focused on driving brand awareness. If you don't set those expectations, it can be a little more difficult down the line when you come to reviewing performance.

A useful exercise at this stage is to meet with all stakeholders and ask what their objectives are. A good question to ask is, "What would make this successful for you?" If you can take note of those, then each time that you have an activity that you want to undertake within your strategy, you can map one of those objectives to that. That allows you to show your successes, and if things don't go too well, you can at least learn from that and move forward to hit it the next time.

RESOURCES

Personnel requirements

Although the market we operate in is very focused on technology, a strategy won't go too far without the right personnel behind it.

And we can categorize this broadly into four main areas:

- **Day-to-day account management:** These are the people who would be working on the account in Google Ads or they may be working on the SEO strategy or reporting. But you

need to understand how many of those people you're going to need. This is an area where you must plan ahead.

- **Data analysis:** Pretty much everything that we do is based around data. So, you need to have the right people in place to make sure you're making decisions based on accurate data that reflects the strategy that you've undertaken.
- **Account strategy:** So, will it be revisited weekly, monthly, or quarterly? These are things that are quite difficult to do once your strategy is underway. So, it's best to get this done up front.
- **Technical support:** For SEO and PPC in particular, there are technical requirements for your strategy. For SEO, that might be you want to increase site speed for paid search. It may be to do with a bid management platform that you want to invest in. All these discussions are best had before you start setting your objectives.

Technical requirements

So, going into more detail on the technology requirements, and this is focusing mainly on paid search at this stage.

Bid management

Before you choose the right platform, you need to know what KPIs you're working towards. Each bid management platform will have different benefits and drawbacks. If you know what you're trying to achieve, that will be easier to decide. You also need to decide what will be automated through scripts. We'll get onto this a little bit later, but in certain areas, you'll want to bid manually and you won't actually want to let your bidding platform take control. But we'll look at that in a little more detail.

Tag management

You must ensure that your tags are firing correctly and that they record all the data that you need. On the other side of that, you need to consider whether that will affect page load speed. Page load speed can affect your quality score in paid search, but it will also affect your rankings for SEO. So that you can have too much of a good thing in that sense.

Performance tracking

So, depending on your industry and your budget you may need to allocate more hours to tracking performance. It's important you can identify as early as possible how frequently you need to be in the accounts and assessing performance. When tracking performance, you need to be able to identify which metrics are the most important and which ones directly your business's KPIs.

Reporting

Reporting tech should be evaluated as a central consideration. This is where a lot of the stakeholders in your business will go. This is where they will make their judgments on a weekly and monthly basis of whether your strategy is successful and whether they should invest further.

Variable requirements

As much as we can plan ahead when preparing a search marketing strategy, there are a lot of variable requirements, which can at times make it exciting, and at times make it slightly frustrating

when you've got all of your media plans and budgets set for the next 12 months. But it's the nature of the game, and it's something that we can take advantage of.

Increased and decreased budgets: Depending on your account performance, you may want to increase your budget. If you can scale at a certain ROI that your business has set, you might want to keep doing that. On the other side, you may find that the cost-per-click has been increased, because there's a lot more competition. So, you need to be prepared for that and you need to have those discussions early on so that everyone in the business knows that you may have to have a fluid budget.

Account management requirements: Account management may be front-loaded for the first months; in, say, an account transition and strategy stage, you might require four people. As the account moves forward, you may need 1.5 people.

New technology and required support: So, this is where we see the real benefits of the industry that we're in. There's always new technology out there which is fantastic, if you can avail of that. The early adopters are often those who succeed. On the flip side of that, of course, you need more support. There may be new players that come into the game. You need more account management support and your business may need to support you in order to secure that. So, that's something to consider.

BUDGETS

Budgetary constraints

So, we're particularly looking at paid search when we're looking at budgetary constraints. Budgetary constraints are, of course, they're relevant for all different channels. Part of this looks at display marketing. But we're really looking at paid search.

Daily caps

You need to set daily caps within your monthly budget that will ensure that you stick closely to the budget that you've agreed. You can imagine that that could go far beyond where you want it to go if you hadn't set daily caps. So, for any given day in Google Ads your average daily budget can be exceeded by 20%. And that's just because Google's trying to maintain good visibility for you that steadies throughout the day. There may be an opportunity to increase by a further 20% and they will allow you to do that. However, that will be evened out over the month. So again, that's something to consider. It's a good thing for us as search strategists because it means we don't go 20% over for the whole month. But it does mean that there's going to have to be something to counterbalance that somewhere else in the month.

Frequency caps

These are particularly relevant for display marketing. One thing you might want to consider is that when volumes of potential impressions are low and you set a low frequency cap on the display advert, you might find that you aren't able to reach the budget that you've set. Because with a frequency cap, once a consumer has seen your ad a certain amount of times, they won't see it thereafter. You want to make sure if you're doing that that there's a large impression share out there that you can go after.

Impression share

Speaking of impression share, you can't predict exactly what your competitors will do over the year. And that means that sometimes they can become a lot more aggressive in an area where you felt comfortable up to that point. If that happens and you can't increase your cost-per-click, you'll need to have the discussion internally because the only way that you're going to regain those possessions is to increase your budget. It's the nature of what we do. If the cost-per-click increases, to be in the top position, you're going to have to pay more.

Different types of costs

So, now looking at the different types of budgets that we encounter on a daily basis but particularly in this planning phase.

SEO technical

The first type that we should look at is SEO technical costs. And the reason I've put this as the first one is these are the changes that take the most time to implement. One of the real challenges of the SEO industry is performing technical audits and ensuring that they actually see the light of day. That they are implemented. Quite often they're left to gather dust, because they fall quite far down in the company's list of priorities as they move to, say, a new platform or a responsive website or whatever it may be. So, up front you want to understand exactly what it is you want to achieve.

Now, if all you want to do is add 20 canonical tags to a website, that may only take a couple of weeks. However, if your recommendations are about improving your mobile site speed, that's probably a six-month job. And it will require a lot of budget. Normally internally you won't need external suppliers more often than not. But you won't have that discussion up front.

Content marketing

Your content marketing costs come in two forms really. You have the fixed costs of what it is that you need to create. So, be that a video or an infographic or whatever it happens to be, you should know what the fixed cost is for that. You'll also need content marketing strategy costs, which will go alongside that. Those will typically be on a day rate or on an hourly basis.

Campaign advertising

Your advertising costs will largely be tied to the media that you buy for your strategy.

They can fluctuate from day to day, sometimes from hour to hour actually. But you still know what you're dealing with in that sense. Your budget will be going to Google, Bing, or Facebook.

Personnel costs

Your personnel costs cut across all the top areas. This would be SEO content and campaign advertising because you need account management in all of those areas. It will typically be tied to the number of hours that each individual spends working on the plan and their designated hourly rate. So, you'll want to think about what level of seniority is required. Sometimes that can be just account manager level, sometimes you need someone very senior if you're planning a very complicated search strategy.

IT systems

Your IT costs will be fluid. I would suggest on a quarterly basis you have a budget set aside that you can dip into for this, because you can't always be sure of what's going to be required. Things change on a daily basis as we know. So, as a result, it is imperative that you plan ahead.

Different search engines

Another big consideration when you're looking at your paid search strategy is that there are different search engines out there. I've chosen to look at Google and Bing because they're the two biggest players in the West, but if you're dealing with, say, China, you'll encounter Baidu. In Russia, it will be Yandex. The same principles apply though, no matter which market you're in. So, these two giants in the West, are similar in the platforms that they offer and the targeting options. Google's dominant position is down to the fact that it has a larger audience. And larger audience gives it more data. More data to us as advertisers gives us more targeting options, more accuracy and a better return on our spend.

But don't discount Bing. There are still a lot of opportunities there and its market share is growing. What you can find in Bing is for certain products and certain demographics, they over-index slightly versus the market average. So, it's always worth considering that.

Measuring returns

So, one of the main questions that will come up as you're planning a search marketing strategy is how are you going to calculate whether this has been successful? What's going to be the metric you use on a daily basis that says whether this has been a good day or a bad day, a good year or a bad year? I'm relating this to paid search in particular, because these are more complicated to calculate looking at SEO, for example.

Your main metrics are as follows:

- **ROI:** This is return on investment. It's your revenue minus the cost of goods sold divided by the cost of the goods sold.
- **ROA:** This is the return on ad spend. That's the revenue attributed to running ads divided by the cost of running the ads.
- **CPA:** This is the cost per action, or you may hear it called cost per acquisition, though the idea is broadly similar. This is calculated by taking the cost and dividing it by the number of pre-defined conversions, leads or orders.

The reason we've put pre-defined is that you may have a completely different idea depending on what you're trying to do, of what your CPA is. For some people, that action is a click. For some people, it's a newsletter subscription. For a lot of people, it will be a purchase of a product. But before you can calculate your CPA, you need to know what that action or acquisition means to you and to your business.

Estimating costs

So, with that in mind, we should be in a position to know how costs differ across these different areas. In the SEO world, we deal with two main areas. There are the technology costs and there are the personnel costs.

- **SEO:** SEO is heavier on the personnel costs than other areas. It's very dependent on consultancy versus media spend or content creation or anything like that. So, that's worth bearing in mind.
- **Content marketing:** We can split this into direct content creation costs, and then there's the personnel costs. If we were to add another layer to that we would talk about content amplification. That content amplification could be achieved through the areas below.
- **Paid search:** We're looking at media budgets, technology costs, because your bidding platform will charge you a fee alongside of what Google charges. And the account management costs.
- **Display:** This is largely similar. We're looking at media budgets, tech costs and account management.
- **Video:** It's also media budgets, tech costs and account management. What we should add to that, and that distinguishes it from display, but particularly from paid search, is that there's a large creative element that will define success. And we'll look at that a little bit later.

OWNERSHIP

Campaign objectives

Business goals

So, within your campaign objectives we'll start with the business goals. Now, these will be very high level, will normally come from the higher echelons of your industry, your business. And they won't be directly related to search marketing. Our task is to translate what business wants to achieve into a search marketing strategy. We need to see search marketing as a conduit that will help us achieve those goals.

Desired action from your audience. This is crucial, because if your campaign is based around brand awareness, what you might want is for someone to share the content on Facebook. If your content is acquisition-focused, you'll know that that action is probably going to be based around a purchase or a subscription or something similar. But if you don't know that from the very beginning, it can be quite difficult to decide what's working and what's not.

Required return on investment

And the third part, as with most things in our industry, is the required return on the investment. It is helpful to set a target. So, for a search marketing campaign, you may want to have an ROI of 3 or 4x. You can see how your campaign goes and you can be fluid on that and be open to conversations with people. But it's good to have a number in mind to aim for.

Task owners and responsibilities

So, finally, within the planning section, we're looking at ownership. We need to have task owners and responsibilities. There are three main areas within this. So you've got planning, execution and review. We'll look later at exactly which activities each person should undertake. But we'll keep these broadly categorized for the moment. In the planning stage, you'll want to deal with the search strategists, data analysts, technology support and your senior marketing team to get their input as to what they want from your search strategy. When it comes to execution, we'll put search managers in here and it is mainly the search managers that will execute. But your strategists and data analysts should underpin that work as well. When it comes to reviewing, that's where, pretty much, everyone is involved.

Now, it should start with the search strategists. Search strategists should be trying to decide what the patterns are within the data. Making some sense of it, turning it into a story that everyone can understand. They'll be working with the data analysts to do that and will often report back to the senior marketing team.

NOTES

LESSON 2: CONDUCTING RESEARCH FOR A SEARCH MARKETING CAMPAIGN

SITUATION ANALYSIS

What does a situation analysis require?

Current SEO technical setup

A situation analysis requires a clear understanding of, first and foremost, the current SEO technical setup. So what you'll be looking for here is to see if the technical elements are correctly configured for Google to crawl and index your website.

It's also essential to ensure that there are no errors in terms of how a user makes their journey through your website. And you want to look deeply into your analytics package to find where some of those blockages are.

Current search marketing activities

The second area you'll want to look at will be your current search marketing activity, so paid search, the re-marketing activity that you want to take off the back of that and display advertising.

Looking at existing search marketing activities like paid search can reveal the top performing messaging in terms of click-through rate. This can also help to shape your keyword research and identify top performing search markets. And this is something we'll come back to. Although we're looking at separate disciplines there are intersections between SEO, paid search and display and they can all help to feed into each other.

Assessing SEO

So let's start with SEO. So if you're looking to assess the technical SEO setup you'll want to look at the different stakeholders, the different markets, the different people who are going to want something different from your website. SEO is typically a rather subjective game actually in terms of strategies and implementation, but when it comes to the technical side, this is where things are rather black and white. Google has a set of guidelines and without adhering to them you won't be able to maximize your impact.

So I'll split this into four main areas:

- **Your company:** Now your company will be interested in the content that's on the website. This feeds into the technical side of things because technical SEO can tell you how well indexed that is, how legible it is both for search engine and the user, and how well they're interacting with it. So things like bounce rates will come into play.
- **Your customer:** If you're looking to assess how your customer interacts with your website from a technical SEO standpoint, you'll be looking at usability factors. So, are they finding some blockages within analytics? You'll find whether they are or not. Looking at your sector, the technical SEO aspect that can help you steal a march on the competition is site speed.
- **Your sector:** So much of what is going on SEO and in paid search is about mobile. Site speed is crucial in this area and we will look at that in a little bit more detail later.
- **Industry trends:** Looking at the industry trends it follows on from that logically that mobile optimization is a key area. What that means will change over time and that's why this is a little bit broader than the site speed for your company sector. But then industry trends mobile optimization can mean many different things. It could be accelerated mobile pages for example.

Measuring technical SEO

If we wanted to categorize how we could measure technical SEO, we could look at these main five areas.

- **On-page:** This has to do with keyword matching. We have seen how Google is moving away from a keyword matching approach. As it becomes more sophisticated, it doesn't require obvious keyword matching to understand what your page is about. The semantically related terms that are within the page will provide a topic-related insight into what you are doing. So you're actually in this area looking to avoid obvious keyword matching if you can. It should read as naturally as possible.
- **Crawling:** You can use a lot of tools like Google Search Console but an industry favorite is Screaming Frog, which is freely available as well. That will show you how accessible your website is for search engines, and show you where some of the issues are.
- **Keyword tracking:** You'll want to set this up historically so you can see where you've come from, and set it up so that you can see the impact of your technical SEO fixes in the future.
- **Backlinks:** Backlinks still drive a lot of SEO. Google uses these in the same way as the academic reference system. If you get a reference from someone that's reputable in your industry, say a news website like the Guardian or the Washington Post, by proxy, you will be seen as someone relevant in your industry. Something to watch out for though is negative backlinks. This could be due to historical activity long before your time working on this website, but you have the option to disavow these within Google. And when you disavow links it means that although Google knows that they're there, they don't take them into account when coming to rank your website.
- **Local SEO:** This will be more important for some businesses than others, if you have bricks and mortar stores, this will be very important – you want to optimize for local search, and that's not just Google. There are other suppliers on the market like Myles Anderson and BrightLocal that can help you to maximize your impact there.

Cross-device SEO

So working in digital we all know that our consumers and anyone who interacts with our content is doing so across multiple devices. Now we're looking at that just specifically for SEO. There are three main areas that we would want to look at.

- **Site speed:** Site speed as I've mentioned is of paramount importance particularly for mobile search.
- **Indexation status:** This is crucial. What we're looking at here is whether Google has taken your pages and stored them within its index. When Google receives a search query, that's where it goes to find the most relevant and authoritative results to serve. If you aren't in that index you cannot be served. Simple things to look for within your source code would be a no index card, which can be placed for numerous reasons, but if that's on there you won't rank for anything with that page.
- **Response code errors:** This is where there's a hygiene element to technical SEO. There will be 404 errors, especially if you're a retailer, that will show up quite often. You want to make sure those are either permanently, as 301, redirected to a page that shows a 200 status code which essentially says it's okay.

Going mobile-first

The phrase “mobile first” has been used for many years in the industry, but it’s one that Google has taken on itself, and it’s practicing what it preaches. The index up to now has been based on desktop results. So even if you were to search on mobile, Google would go into its desktop results, decide which results are most relevant and authoritative, and then serve the mobile version of that because you’re using a mobile user agent. So that is changing with mobile search set to take up over 75% of web worldwide usage by 2017. Google has decided it wants to reverse that way of looking at things. If most people are using mobile devices to search, why would it use the desktop version to judge what to serve? They’re going to do the opposite. Mobile results will be the first port of call even if someone searches on the desktop.

Now for most sites that are responsive there aren’t too many issues here. However, what we do want to bear in mind is that if you do have an adaptive site or if you still have a mobile version of your website that’s what you’ll be judged on. So this is something you really need to take into account within a situation analysis.

AUDIENCE RESEARCH

Knowing your audience

Audience research is a huge part of what we do. We need to know who we want to talk to, but we also need to know what they’re interested in. We need to know the best way to approach them, and when we finally do make that connection, what we want to say.

Quantitative perspective

We can look at this from a quantitative perspective and we will do that particularly looking at paid search and display. What those quantitative elements can allow us to do is to target with increasing accuracy. That’s us reaching out to the audience, and it may be us responding to the audience in something like a paid search strategy. But if we look at this from a content marketing perspective it’s slightly more qualitative. We do know which demographics we’re looking to speak to but your audience research will be based on lot more around things like surveys and a lot of the data that your company will have to hand. So this is a good starting point. We can underlay all of this with the data that we get from the likes of Google and Facebook, but as a really good starting point, it’s worth having a roundtable discussion about who your audience is, where they hang out digitally, and what might be the right message to communicate to them.

Brand personas

A great way to do this, and something to help fix the minds of everyone in your company on what you’re trying to achieve, is to create some brand personas or brand profiles. So that every time that you go to create a piece of content you can map it against one of these people.



In this example we have Jessica, John, and Claire; the bullet points that are underneath their names are mainly things that we can target in a lot of detail when it comes to paid search. That's a great benefit for us as paid search strategists, but what we depend on there is a stimulus. We're depending on these people to search for something and then we can be there to respond, and although we can't have a guaranteed ROI off the back of that we have a good idea that we're reaching the audience that we want and we can generate more demand. Once that demand comes through in the form of a search query, we can retarget that same person. So again, all of these channels do work together, both the quantitative and the qualitative.

Choosing channels

By this stage, we have a clear idea of what our overarching strategy is, we know what our objectives are, we know what we need to get there. What we want to do next is decide which channels will help us deliver on each part of our activity. So within SEO it's an old idea but it is a truism that ranking for the competitive keywords is a long-term strategy. Based on the search amount of queries relevant to you, try to assess how much improvement is realistically achievable within a three, six or 12-month timeframe. That will be based on the competition that's out there but also the assets at your disposal. Do you have the budget to try and take on some of those bigger players?

Within paid search, the search volume for relevant queries will allow you to analyze the opportunity, but what will constrain that is the budget that you have available. So again be realistic about what you can do. And if you're thinking of SEO and PPC together here – a nice way to do this is to use PPC to take the heavy load where SEO isn't able to. Consider this example. You're ranking in position 125 for credit cards and you want to get on page one. It won't happen overnight within SEO. It's a six to 12-month strategy. So you might want to use PPC in those six months because you know it's a strong acquisition term for you. Once those SEO positions start to improve, you can lighten that load on paid search and have that traffic coming through via SEO.

It's a fine balance to strike but it can be quite a profitable one. And you can reinvest our paid search budget, whether that's in paid search or in display, the other area we have here. This is different in the sense that it allows you to prospect a lot more.

Now prospecting with display is difficult to define in ROI whether it's going to be post-click or post-impression, attribution does become quite difficult. But there is a lot of value in display advertising. This channel can drive more demand, so if you use a brand awareness campaign what you can monitor is the branded search volume that you see both in paid search and SEO. And that can be a nice way of freeing the benefits of display. So whichever vertical your business operates in, it's highly likely that your consumers use search engines for pretty much everything that they do online. That could be product research, it could be community-based forums, it could be to provide feedback, it could be to compare products before they purchase.

That means that you need to tailor your message. The stimulus again here is what the user puts into the search engine. We need to make sure that we understand that, we understand that intent is it informational? Is it navigational? Is it commercial? And we'll look at those three in a little bit more detail later on.

Why your target audience uses search engines

An important consideration for the moment is if your audience is using search for informational purposes you may want to focus on increasing your site's presence via quick answers. You'll most likely have seen these. They're in the positions zero as it's come to be known within the industry, which appears above all of the other SEO rankings that we typically see the 10 blue links that we've always had. You can rank within that position zero if you're anywhere between positions 1 and 10 and the content is fed programmatically by Google. So as long as you're matching that intent on what Google deems to be that search intent you can rank in those positions. That's a much more sensible strategy if your product or your company is based around informational searches. What you wouldn't want to do is tie an ROI target to that. You may want to track that user and see if after four more interactions, they make a purchase. You may want to cookie that user after they come into your website and then re-market to them via paid search.

Changes to Google Keyword Planner

We've mentioned many times, and we'll mention again I'm sure, that there are a lot of changes that happen within the industry, and sometimes they're good, sometimes they're bad, often a mixture of both.

And one that has happened within the last 12 months is changes to Google Keyword Planner. So this has always been the go-to place, particularly for SEO, to understand how many people are searching for a particular query, and we base our strategy around that. The values have always been normalized and aggregated to some extent, so never exactly gospel truth.

But what we're seeing now is that we don't have access to that. The values are aggregated around keyword category. So to use the credit card example, the volume that we look at for credit card and credit cards will look to be identical. It doesn't mean the 200,000 are searching for credit card and for credit cards. It means the 200,000 are searching for semantically related acquisition focus credit card terms. And I've said that can be a negative but there are always positives in this too.

So one is that we still have access to search console. As long as you're saving that data on a monthly basis because you only get 90 days access is really important to make sure you do that or you will lose it. And there's a two-day lag, so if you're looking on a Wednesday, you'll only be able to see up to the Monday of that week.

But it does give us something a lot closer to the real keyword level search volumes. We can use paid search data so again using the two channels together. And from an industry perspective, this could be a really healthy way to think about things. We've looked at keyword mapping and how we should move beyond simply putting one keyword per page and trying to hammer that because we know there are 200,000 searches. We no longer know that there are 200,000 searches which brings a healthier mindset. We're thinking in terms of topics, in terms of content effectiveness, and content purpose. So even in a change like this that shook the industry briefly, there are still some rays of sunshine.

COMPETITOR RESEARCH

Analyze competitors across Search Marketing channels

One of the areas that you'll want to look at on a weekly basis, if not daily, for paid search is competitor research, and for SEO this can be very telling because we know SEO is a long-term game. It requires a very long-term strategy. If we see a competitor moving in a certain direction, it would be quite difficult for them to change tack. If they did, they wouldn't see the results of that for 6 to 12 months.

SEO visibility

By looking at SEO visibility and any number of tools that are out there, the likes of Searchmetrics and BrightEdge, will help you to do this. You can get insight into their marketing strategy.

Content effectiveness

The second area is also key for this content effectiveness. This is not just what their content is, who they are looking to speak to, whether people are engaging with it, or whether it is working.

Working can mean a lot of different things. We could mean is it being shared on Facebook if it's a brand awareness campaign for example. Do we think that people are clicking through from this? And we can look at clickstream data for the things like this using similar software, for example. Are they looking at this content and clicking through to the site and making a purchase? That may mean that it's working for acquisition. Why this is really telling, and as so much more budget moves from offline to online, is that content marketing is about a lot more than just search, just targeting people. It's about branding. So we can really understand what our competitors are trying to do here.

PPC bidding strategies

There's no better way to understand what your competitors want to rank for than seeing what they're bidding on. The other thing that we can do here is that we can find out which terms are working for them, which terms are getting a good click-through rate and that insight can be invaluable. Because we can test that within not just our own ad copy but within our meta descriptions for SEO. So we could end up benefiting from something that they're doing well.

Keyword-level competitors

So as Google increases in sophistication the landscape changes greatly. That could be done to personalization, so based on what someone searched for before and what they've liked the results will be tailored. There are also universal results. You'll see videos and images taking much more prominence. So that search intent can be obvious. If someone is searching for a product, it's quite clear what they want. The modifiers around that product can make it quite different. So "credit card information" is very different to "apply for a credit card," for example.

But where Google has very advanced is in being able to tailor these results to what the person is looking for. So that has an impact on your strategy. You'll have general competitors, so if you work in a retail space you'll have the likes of Amazon and Ikea and Home Depot who will be prominent throughout, so you might want to set up some competitor tracking based around those. But underneath that, there will be some specialist suppliers and this example of Shutterfly specialize in coasters. So it's one example of a competitor that just dominates in a space. Now if you come into

this thinking our brand competitors are Amazon, Ikea, and Home Depot you could be missing out on quite a lot of these specialist players who could be taking the landscape from you.

Offline and online competitors

You need to understand your offline and your online competitors, how they differ, and where they merge. And one way to make sure you're covering this is to report based on search results. We looked at some competitors and some assumptions that you might make based on those. If you've set up competitor tracking you're monitoring versus the likes of Amazon, Ikea and Home Depot, someone like Shutterfly that we've just seen could actually be stealing a march on you but you haven't actually seen that. So if you're reporting, start with the search results that are there. You're getting a real view of what's actually happening, not what you assume is going to happen from a brand perspective. You can look at the impact of offline advertising on online performance. This is still kind of the holy grail of digital marketing. It's hard to really make that transition, and there's a lot of work going on in the YouTube area to make this happen.

What you can do from a search marketing perspective specifically is look at those branded search volumes. If there's a large scale out-of-home campaign for example, in a specific area you can look into Google Trends and you can see right down to the last 24 hours where those peaks are. That will be helpful because you'll know where they might want to spend their budget. They may want to go heavy on brand to capitalize on it, they may want to put it back on brand. You can also learn something for your own campaign and other ways that you could work better with your out-of-home team for example.

And another consideration that is really about that dichotomy between the generalists and the specialists. There are a lot of specialists who focus on paid search, and one of the main reasons for that is it's a beautifully crafted model that tells you exactly what your return on your investment is. That's the one question that we always receive as marketers and is one we've always struggled. But in the digital world this utopian view has as kind of come to reality. Mainly through Google Ads, not through a lot of other areas. But that means you'll see a lot of small brands that you may not even heard of that may not be offline competitors but who are really hammering their investment on paid search. That could drive up your cost-per-click but you also want to keep an eye on what they're doing. A lot of these small brands can be quite sophisticated.

INDUSTRY RESEARCH

The changing landscape can affect your budget

For every brand there will be considerations based around **seasonal peaks**, for example, and seasonal troughs that will affect your budget and how you want to shift that around. Underneath that, of course, you have the industry itself which changes on a weekly basis, which makes it exciting but means you can be caught slightly on the wrong foot if you're not prepared.

For example, there may be some **new platforms** that require some new budget. If you haven't prepared for that, it could be a difficult conversation to have. Mobile developments can affect your device betting strategy – we can now bid on a device level, which is a fantastic achievement and a long time coming. But some of those cost-per-click can be different based on mobile versus tablet, versus desktop; if you're planning to shift your budget from one device to the other, that can really affect your budget.

And seasonality, it can affect how much you want to invest but keep an eye on the cost-per-click and the CPA, because as you look to do that you can be sure that your competitors are doing the exact same thing. So although you can't know right down to the last penny exactly how that's going to be, you should really try and plan ahead, because you will know where your seasonal peaks are.

Changing landscape

Search marketers are always keeping up to date with what's going on in the industry which can be a job in itself from time to time.

And there are three core areas that we could link thematically by being mobile-focused.

Accelerated mobile pages

So recently we've seen the launch of accelerated mobile pages. Now this is stripped back version of HTML that leads to faster load speeds. You may have seen the lightning bolts that shows up in search results pages and alert people to the fact that this is running on accelerated mobile pages. Now that was used for publishers first and it stands to reason that it should but that was a test bed from what we can see. Some e-commerce players, notably eBay, made a lot of press for doing this, launched millions of pages using AMP HTML. So there's an e-commerce focus to this as well, and it won't be long before we see this in Google Ads. Either you work with your tech team ensure that they're skilled up, or there are simple plug-ins for what WordPress for example, they can help you to do this.

Expanded text ads

A second area that has affected every aspect of paid search is expanded text ads. A lot of these changes have been undertaken with the aim of, sure, getting more clicks for paid search but also for optimizing for that mobile experience. You can imagine having the right-hand rail ads makes it quite difficult to scroll and to see which ads are there. So expanded text ads differ from standard text ads in a few important ways. They have two headline fields into which you can input up to 30 characters. They have a single expanded description field which is up to 80 characters, and they have a display URL that uses your final URL's domain.

Universal app campaigns

A third area that is quite interesting, and one that a lot of people are experimenting with at the moment, is universal app campaigns. Why these are very interesting is that Google takes a lot of control here away from the manual optimization that we're used to. That's very helpful in a congested and complex landscape where people are moving from device to device, from platform to platform and not only that we have a lot of different actions that we want from an app. So we may want an in-app action which could be a purchase. We may just want an app install, or we may want a click.

Google is using their systems to take your targets and ensure that you hit them. It does this by reaching into your creative inventory, taking the right imagery or video, mapping that to the right platform, and also targeting the right users. It's an interesting idea and it's telling it could be a bellwether for where the industry is going with increased automation, but do be wary of course that we need to be looking at this in a manual way, and ensuring that we're optimizing as much as we can ourselves.

Ongoing analysis and communication

As you track what's going on in the search marketing industry that's useful within your search team and you want to make sure everyone is up to date with what's going on, on a daily basis.

But you also want to communicate some of this both laterally within the organization and vertically to make sure everyone is up to speed with what's going on.

Search is such a giant part of what all consumers do nowadays that it affects every part of your business. So when there are important updates you want to communicate those right up to the highest levels.

An effective way to do this is actually to set a clear framework for your account and your account responsibility. So within the search team, within marketing, within brand, you might have a framework for who communicates what and to whom, and also how frequently you do that. It may be a monthly roundtable discussion where marketing and brand bring the latest news from their industries, and you bring what's happening in a search, it could be an automated newsletter that you send out. The important thing is for it to be regular and frequent and to communicate what's important to the right people.

NOTES

LESSON 3: SETTING SEARCH MARKETING STRATEGY OBJECTIVES

SEARCH OBJECTIVES

Purpose of objectives

Ultimately, the objective phase is about setting clear objectives for your search marketing activity.

The purpose and activities of the objective phase combine to establish clear KPIs that will measure performance. As such, it is essential to keep this interplay in mind as you strategize. Your purposes and your activities should always be linked. If done correctly, your campaign metrics will come through this process as a natural output. If you know what your activities are and what the purpose of each is, the KPIs should naturally occur.

Common objectives

So, within a search marketing strategy, there are some common objectives that you'll always see and these can be categorized in five different ways:

- **Business:** You'll want to know what the overall company you're working for is looking to achieve in the next year. That may be as simple as: Increase revenue and profits by a certain amount, or it may be something more to do with how they're perceived in the market.
- **Audience:** You'll want to know with whom your business wants to communicate, and where.
- **SEO:** Which keywords are most important for your brand? And, the reason SEO is in here in particular is, increasing visibility for core products can engender trust within your audience. If they search for a keyword and they see that you are ranked well via SEO, because they know it's not paid media, that can really help to establish trust, and establish your position as an industry leader.
- **Product:** You will know who your competitors are. In order to win in search marketing, essentially, you want to know what makes your product unique or superior, and what the strengths and weaknesses are of the competition, whether that's the products or their services.
- **Brand:** Are you aiming to raise awareness, improve brand affinity or retention, or are you looking to change how your brand is perceived within the market? If you know the answers to all those questions, you can really feed those into your search campaign.

SETTING OBJECTIVES

Business objectives

So, the metrics for measuring business objectives would be:

- Cost
- Revenue
- Profits
- Leads

Typically, this may differ slightly, but, broadly speaking, we can always come back to these four. Often the objective from the business perspective would be to increase the number of leads at the lowest possible cost and turn this into revenue and profit. These principles apply equally to a search marketing strategy, so it is worth keeping all four of these in mind as you execute and review your plan.

Audience objectives

Moving on to the audience objectives, we can categorize these in four ways:

- Satisfaction
- Feedback
- Service levels
- Referrals

Search marketing is a direct response channel, and this can sometimes mean that the focus is exclusively on acquisition. The business model that Google has built around Google Ads and that Bing has taken on is really around what you put in and what you get out the other end, and that is normally monetary, but there are other areas of marketing that directly affect that performance and we shouldn't forget that. So, these include things like customer satisfaction, feedback, service, and referrals. We can use these to our advantage in a practical way, too. So, we can use schema markup to highlight customer reviews and have these show up in search results. You can either do that hard-coded, as in the page itself, as in the source code, or you can use Data Highlighter within Search console. Both are equally effective. One reason to use Schema over Data Highlighter is that it's universally accepted by all search engines. Data Highlighter, anything you do in there will only be seen by Google.

So, if your focus is on Google and Bing, you'll want to use schema.org markup. If we get this right, it can have a positive effect on click-through rate, both for SEO and with ad extensions that we can use to show reviews via paid search.

SEO objectives

So, the objectives when we're looking at SEO are quite numerous. We have seven here and could have more, but we've picked the most important ones for this section:

- Keyword rankings
- Traffic levels, which can be organic or referred
- Your link-building performance
- Your Domain Authority
- Your Page Authority
- Your local directory affiliations
- The site architecture

Keyword rankings

It would be hard to pull these apart in any real terms, but for the purpose of clarity, that's what we've done in this section. So, the keyword rankings are the positions at which your domain is returned for specific search queries. These remain the fulcrum of SEO performance, monitoring, and other personalization and universal search make it harder to nail down what that true ranking position is. Rankings are so central to any SEO measurement framework. They are the entry point to the website from organic search. They will always be important. Traffic levels are typically assessed through the number of people who visit your site via organic search.

Traffic levels

But, as the remit of an SEO strategist increases to include things like content marketing, you might want to include the levels of referral traffic from any of the link building that you do. We aren't just building links for the sake of the benefit that we can have for our search rankings. We also want to generate traffic straight back to the site.

Link building

Talking about link building objectives, what you do here is take into account both the quality and the quantity of backlinks pointing to your site. Long gone are the days when we were looking for just the velocity of links that we were getting back to our website. Google's smart enough to understand, these days, that just having a lot of links pointing back to your site doesn't make you an authority. The system can't be manipulated, and that cat-and-mouse game is long over. So, you really want to focus on the quality of the backlinks that you're getting.

Domain Authority

Domain Authority is a score that's calculated by Moz, who are a real authority within the SEO industry, and it's based on a logarithmic scale from 0 to 100. So, it's much harder to get from 10 to 15 than it is to get from 80 to 82, for example. Obviously, it gets more difficult the higher you go. Zero is the lowest score you can have, 100 is the highest. It's a really good metric to understand the strength of a website. If website A has a Domain Authority of 60, website B has a Domain Authority of 70, and if they both launch a page about, say, credit cards, within the top level of their site hierarchy, site B with a Domain Authority of 70 is much more likely to rank higher. So, it's a way of predicting the performance of a site, were we to launch a new page.

Page Authority

As it sounds, Page Authority is similar, but it's on a page level. That has its benefits. Domain Authority is really a branding. Page Authority is where you understand, especially coming to the acquisition pages, how well you're going to do against the competition.

Local directory affiliations

Your SEO local directory affiliations are crucial if local SEO is a big part of what you're trying to do. With the increases in mobile search, local SEO is becoming more important. It's worth considering whether it is that important to your business. If you have physical locations, I would suggest that it is. If you don't, and you maybe just have administrative offices, it might be something that you don't want to look at too much. It can create conflicting signals for users.

Site architecture

And your site architecture is essential. So, as Google moves away from a lot of these spam signals in the past, and especially with the real-time roll-out of Penguin 4.0, you want to make sure your site experience is optimal. Your site architecture is your way of telling Google what's important to you. So, if you have a website that is about credit cards, but you lead with membership rewards and, say, charge cards and Gold cards and Platinum cards, and credit cards are at the third or fourth level of the site hierarchy, that message is, that product isn't that important to you as a business, and that's what Google will read. So, within your objectives, you might want to look at how you would reframe that site architecture to reflect your business priorities.

Product objectives

So, if we look specifically at the product objectives, and again, some of these are interlinked, your product objectives may come back to something like Page Authority. You may have a specific product and you want to improve that authority by a certain amount of points on that logarithmic scale.

You also want to look specific **search queries**. There's a certain element where ranking for search queries for the sake of it can be nothing more than a vanity metric, but to a lot of businesses it is really important. So, if you have a product that is just being launched, you'll want to make sure you've got new pages high up in that site hierarchy, you've got links coming back, both internal and external, because, as a brand, you'll want to be linked to those search queries, and your products will benefit from that, your click-through rates will be much higher.

The other three that we have within the product objectives (**lead** generation, conversions, and sales) should naturally flow from the search query objective. So, if you're ranking for the right queries that are linked to your products and your brand, and you're perceived to deliver good service on, that should translate it into lead generation, conversions and, ultimately, sales.

Brand objectives

Setting objectives from a brand perspective is an increasingly interesting part of putting together a search strategy. We've come from a place where the average mechanism of knowing what our ROI is going to be has really shaped the way that we think about acquisition, we think about re-marketing, retargeting, but a lot of those budgets that were really the reserve of TV and out-of-home, are now starting to move over into the digital space. And we, as the digital experts, need to change our perspective a little bit if we're going to avail of that, if we're going to deliver on those promises.

There are three objectives that we can set around this:

- Reach
- Reputation
- Awareness

And, from here, what you want to think about is, which channels would help you deliver on these? So, looking at reach, reputation, and awareness, you might want to think about the metrics that go along with that. So branded search volumes would be a very good way of judging this. The number of views for videos, particularly videos that may have been based on TV, and site traffic increasing will all be reflective of increases in reach, reputation, and brand awareness.

Marketing objectives

Moving on to the marketing perspective, and by marketing, of course, this encompasses search, but we're thinking broader, at the really top level of marketing within your organization. Your goal should be tied to the direct performance of your activities.

So, typically the metrics that you would put together here would be based around:

- Visitor numbers
- Page views
- Click-through rates

- Search rankings
- Social mentions

Taken in isolation, each of these metrics won't tell the full story and that's what we really want to do at this stage. We're looking to create a wider narrative of how marketing is performing for your company. We're not just going into the minutiae of the click-through rate for a certain search query. We want to think a bit bigger than that. So, what we might want to do is go into the detail of this with our data analysts and our search strategists in each one of these areas. But, as an output, we would want a broader narrative that tells the story of how well is our brand performing, in a marketing sense, online.

Choosing tools

When you're thinking about your search marketing strategy, you're going to think about the tools that can help you get to where you need to go with your plan. A really good way to do this is to begin with evaluating your target audience. So, where do you think you're going to be communicating with them? What sort of messages will you be relaying to them? And, what actions would you like them to take? How does that match with the objectives that we set through all the other areas? Could be brand awareness we're looking to increase. We may want more video views. And by looking at that interplay between the audience and the objectives, we should naturally come to an area that shows us which tools are the most relevant for us.

Now, those tools can be acquisition-focused, but you should also consider which tools you need for performance monitoring. Maybe competitor benchmarking, so something like SEMrush would work for both SEO and PPC. It may just be rank tracking where you look at something like a Searchmetrics or BrightEdge. You should consider that each of these tools will have a cost tied to them, of course. So weigh up the benefit that you're going to get from these tools. Look at where the overlap is between some of them, because some are specialist, someone more generalist, and see where you can drive some efficiencies from that sense as well. You don't want to lose out on anything, but you also don't want to pay twice for the same tool, which can often happen.

MEASUREMENT

Adapting your measurement approach

So, we can look at tools from a broader marketing perspective, but, in reality, we need to look at each of the search marketing disciplines in isolation. They all function differently. They all are based on different platforms, there are different audiences and different actions that we want that audience to take. So, that, of course, affects the measurement approach that we're going to take.

Paid search

From a paid search perspective, or more for internal use than anything else, is budget tracking worksheets. We've looked at some of the caps that are in place from a budgetary standpoint, but you want to be ahead of that as well. You want to make sure, on a daily basis, you know exactly how you're tracking against what you want to be spending. Some of the core measurement approaches that we've looked at are CPA and also ROAS and ROI. That's really just understanding, if we put one dollar into Google Ads, how many dollars do we get in return? That should be monitored on a daily basis.

SEO

SEO is slightly different. So the mechanism behind it is quite different as well, although it's search-engine-focused. The audience we're speaking to and the actions that we want them to take are often quite broader. You should start with looking at the links, traffic, and rankings that you have. From there, it should naturally flow, what occurs. If you've built the website the way that you need to, in line with user expectations and desires and needs, once you get people onto the site, if they are of a sufficient quality, they should convert at the rate that you're expecting and that you've seen from paid search. If that isn't the case, then you know you need to go back to the drawing board.

Display

With display, it can be a little bit trickier setting the post-click or post-impression action windows. The key thing here is just to set something that is agreed on with everyone, whether that is a 7-day window, 28-day window, whatever it happens to be, and sticking to it. You can spend a lot of time really trying to understand the attribution side of all of this. If you have a great solution to that from a technology platform standpoint, then it's worth using. It's worth weighing up whether it's worth spending that much time on it from this perspective. Often, it's best just to set an agreed window, whether it's 7 days, 28 days, even 1 day, and then just stick to it as long as all stakeholders are happy. We've looked at how we might go about measuring the impact of each search marketing channel, and how would you weigh up which tools to use, and where the overlap between those might be?

The role of each channel

The next point we should look at is, how each of these channels is going to contribute to the business objectives? And these are all points you should really keep in mind when you're having meetings with wider teams and they want to understand what the expectations are from each channel.

Display

A display marketing campaign may be focused on improving reach. Those are slightly softer metrics than what we're used to in search marketing, and display can be equally useful for prospecting, but you will want to set those expectations early.

Content marketing

Content can achieve any goal you want essentially. Quite often, it will be social engagement or brand awareness.

SEO

Given that backlinks still matter from reputable sources, we may want to judge the quality of our content based on the number of those sources that come in to us. So, if we launch a new campaign, it's hosted on our website, how many links did that attract of a Domain Authority of 60 or higher, and how did that match our expectations? There are no guaranteed hard and fast rules with content. There's no "input of X will certainly give you Y," but you can test a lot on and that's the beauty of content marketing.

SEO will improve the site speed and the experience on there. These are areas we weren't always looking at as SEO. Site speed, potentially yes, but experience, not so much. That was the domain of the UX and CRO guys. But, given that Google, especially via RankBrain, is starting to weigh up those engagement factors, so if someone clicks through to your site, and they click straight back out and

go to someone else, that will be factored in. That will negatively impact your performance. And, the reverse can be true as well, so we can frame SEO from a business perspective as something that is improving everything that touches the website.

Paid search

Paid search is a lower funnel tactic, quite often. It can be expensive to use paid search for branding, not impossible, but it's often not used in that way. So, if you've done things right in these other areas where display is improving your campaign reach and your brand awareness, we've got content marketing tailored to fit the message that you have maybe offline in your advertising.

SEO is improving the site experience. Paid search can often be the way that you capitalize on that demand, turning that into traffic, sales, leads, subscriptions, whatever it has to be. And, this interplay between channels can be different. This is just a working example, but this is quite frequently how we see these channels work.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Communicating responsibilities

There are a lot of moving parts within a search marketing strategy. We have the different channels, but we have different platforms and types of personnel that are required to deliver on what we need to achieve. And, if you don't communicate those responsibilities clearly at the outset, things can be a little bit more difficult further down the road when it comes to things like deadlines, for example.

So, at this stage, when we're getting close to the execution, we want to make sure every person that's involved, across all different channels, knows exactly what is required of them, and a simple way to do this can be to list out all of the campaign activities, map that against all the people that are involved in the overall campaign, and share that so that, on a weekly basis, everyone knows what is required of them, and when. And have one person be responsible for that. The impact of that, of course, is that you will improve the effectiveness of your campaigns, and deadlines will be met.

Prepare a framework

There are different layers of personnel within your plan. This will be from the most junior, say, data analyst, through to your search managers, your marketing people, but also, from a business perspective, at the very top. So, it's not just a matter of having a list of activities and having one person be responsible. You'll want to have different layers of responsibility within that.

So, for each activity, one person should be responsible. That means they should be executing the plan. It could be more than one person, of course. If it's, say, executing an account restructure, you may have data analysts and search managers, but the key point is that you have to have at least one person who's responsible for getting the job done. Another person, or persons, would be responsible for the accountability section of this. So their job is to make sure that it gets done. That could be an account director, a marketing director.

It depends on the framework that you have, but someone who ultimately can report back to the senior levels and say that this is certainly going to happen by the time it's supposed to, or not, if that happens to be the case, of course, and you can act accordingly.

There will also be stakeholders, normally, at the senior level of your framework that you'll have here, who should be informed of account status changes. They don't need to necessarily be involved in account build-outs within Google Ads, or anything like that. But, if you are deviating from your target ROAS or ROI, these are people who need to be informed, and need to be informed quite quickly because it can affect other areas of the business.

REVIEWS

Setting review frequency

It's also essential for the success of your search marketing strategy that you know how frequently to review your performance. As a hard and fast rule, you should check every day how all of these are performing. So, by review frequency, we don't mean that we would leave, say, content marketing for a month, and not look at how things are performing, we will look at it on a daily basis. What I mean by the daily, monthly, and weekly elements that I put in this table is, we need to know at which point we can decide if things are going well, if the strategy is working.

Strategy and tactics are obviously quite different. The tactics that we have employed for concept marketing, for example, we can see on a daily basis if those are working. We know what sort of run rates we want to see. If we're looking at the strategy, though, a day isn't long enough to know. Things can change quite frequently. From a paid search point of view, however, within 24 hours, we can start to know whether what we've gone for is the right keyword, the right audience, the right territory. So, these review frequencies, as a rule, we would look at them daily, all of them, but you should review content marketing on a monthly basis to see if your strategy is working. SEO, weekly, and also monthly, and the other areas, you can see on a daily basis if things are going well.

Strategy and tactic

There's a large gap between a strategy and tactic. The two are linked but the tactics can change without the strategy itself changing. And, that's an important thing to keep in mind when we think about search marketing, because it's a very fluid landscape. The competitors change, the keywords change, the costs change, platforms, absolutely everything about this can change, but your business objectives will be clear. You will know that your plan is to increase customer retention, it is to increase acquisition. If that's your top-level objective and your strategy, is to reach people using certain messaging, for example, what you'll maybe want to do is tailor the media that you're using, but the messaging is not working. However, that could just be because of the platform that you're using. If your strategic imperative is to use a certain type of messaging, you can tailor those tactics without affecting the strategy itself.

The strategy can still be effective whilst completely changing what your tactics are. So, that could mean different bidding approaches. It could mean different territories, using new platforms, but what you really want to keep in mind, at the very highest level is the objective of what you're trying to achieve. Under that will be your strategy to help you get there, and the tactics underneath are much more fluid, and that's just based on the landscape that we're in. It means that you can avail of new opportunities as they come along and that can be more effective for your strategy, as long as it ties back to those original objectives.

NOTES

LESSON 4: DEVELOPING A SEARCH MARKETING STRATEGY

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Activities

You'll want to go and **create the media plans for different channels** based on the budgets that you've agreed. When you assimilate these together they may change slightly, but you would expect them to remain the same if you budget it correctly.

You'll then **assign resources to each aspect of the plan**. Do this first by thinking of who the best people would be to help you get to the goals you're looking to achieve. Rather than starting with a budget and fitting it in that way, if you start with the best possible team you can trim things accordingly at a later date if you need to.

From there, you'll **attach a proposed budget** for each activity which, if you've done things correctly with your media plan, you've looked at the resources that you'll need from a personnel and technology standpoint. This should flow naturally and the output of all of this should be one overarching search marketing plan which, as we know, may fluctuate over time but this is something everyone can buy into for the next 12 months.

Before we start looking at each individual channel in isolation, we should **think about what our overarching strategy is going to be** for this search marketing plan. This is a pivotal part of ensuring that all search marketing channels work in tandem to achieve optimal results. You'll want to do this for all five search marketing channels. It's search engine optimization, content marketing, paid search, display, and video advertising. Once you have those objectives, you can turn those into a brief, and a brief into a strategy by starting with a brief and identifying the clear platforms that are going to drive you towards a successful outcome.

SEO STRATEGY

Overarching strategy

SEO is quite a wide-ranging discipline and as such, it can achieve a lot of different business objectives. Three main ways that we could use this channel would be to attract, convert, or retain the customers that we're looking to communicate with. SEO can be a major driver of cost-effective traffic. We don't pay for the clicks, of course. So, if you're thinking long term, this can be a real driver for your business.

Objective of an SEO strategy

It makes sense that SEO should be able to perform any of these areas of attracting, converting, or retaining because it does encompass every aspect of your website. So, through data analysis, you can understand the purpose of each aspect of your website and assess which areas are underperforming or potentially overperforming. You can then attribute all activities in your plan to the objectives of either attracting, converting, or retaining customers.

A way of doing that might be to crawl all the URLs within your website, you might want to use Google Analytics or Screaming Frog for example. Find out which ones are really bringing in the high-volume traffic for you. And then, understand the intent of that traffic and understand the page itself. Is it built for attracting, converting, or retaining? If you know that from point A, you'll be able to strategize much better.

SEO campaign contributes to goals

Within those three areas of attracting, converting, and retaining customers, SEO can be categorized in three more ways.

On-page content

We can look at the on-page content. So this is a very multifaceted discipline and it spans everything from creative, interactive campaigns that you may host on your website through to the purchase confirmation pages.

All of this is not part of SEO. You should know the purpose of all those pages before you start setting targets. It doesn't make sense to have an acquisition page that's purely focused on volume. You'll want to know the conversion rates that you're getting once people come through to the site.

Creative content campaigns

These can engage the audience and attract backlinks. It's really important to understand how this fits in with the needs of your audience, however. It could be an easy catch-all term that content is king, and we need to build more content. If your industry isn't one where people are looking for creative assets and you're not a destination site for information, people come to you because they already know they want to purchase.

You might want to focus your content efforts in that way. There's no need to go creating content assets purely for the sake of it. You should really think about the purpose of the content you're creating.

Content for email marketing campaigns

The content that we create as SEO strategists can also be used for email marketing campaigns. It doesn't just have to be what goes on the website. A lot of what we create can be re-purposed and used for completely different ways. It could be Gmail-sponsored posts, or it could just be classic email marketing campaigns. But there's a lot of crossover between SEO and the areas that we wouldn't traditionally have thought that it would cross into.

Evolving nature of search engines

The search marketing landscape changes quite frequently as we've touched on quite a few times and will again, almost certainly. That evolving nature continues to open up opportunities for us and some of these areas, we'll look at in more detail with paid search in a few slides' time. But for the moment, we can look at this specifically for SEO.

Demographics

There's a lot more information out there to do with demographics and we can take this from the paid search strategists and teams that we work with and break people down into some of those demographics.

We can then map that against some of our landing pages and tailor the content. If we know who these demographics are, we know what they're looking for, we know some of their past behavior, we

can tailor the content that we serve them to make sure that they are going to make the conversions that we want them to.

Location

Location targeting or hyperlocal targeting as it's becoming known as Google gets much, much more granular with, it is essential, now, where with paid search, we can really go after some of those queries, with SEO, we just need to make sure our local properties are optimized to the best of our ability.

That will increase the propensity that anyone that's in the vicinity will be served our results first whenever they search for whatever the query is.

Devices

And the rise of mobile has meant the evolution of on-the-go search. User journeys occur across multiple devices and that's something we need to bear in mind for all of the channels when we're looking at strategy.

But one thing we should steer clear of is viewing mobile users as merely mini-desktop users. It really doesn't work that way and you'll notice it. You're looking at your analytics package; people will behave differently across different devices. They will be searching for different things. You should tailor your content based on that. But also bear in mind the frantic nature of mobile search versus desktop.

Desktop is more considered. It can be used more as a branding tool. Mobile is about those, as Google calls them, micro-moments. It's about capturing attention. You don't have the time to really tell your story in the detail you might on desktop. A strategic thought that we should have when we're looking at all channels.

Voice search

When we look at new technologies and new developments, we're obviously looking at how we can make the most of them for our businesses and one recent trend and upcoming trend that will affect things for the next few years is voice search.

The first points that you should consider is whether this is very relevant to your brand. It's not used yet for acquisition purposes necessarily; it tends to be informational. But there are a lot of considerations here as we see the number of voice searches increase that we should take into account. So search query trends are changing quite a lot because the way that we search on desktop or mobile is quite deeply engrained.

We have a way of doing things. There's a certain language to it. We search for terms like credit cards and not necessarily which is the best credit card for me, which would be more natural language. But what we see with voice search is that people are speaking in much more natural language because they're expecting the results to be different. That means a lot of things.

Changing search query trends

It does mean informational queries increase, it does mean that you have to be the one correct answer and make sure that you're being served up for that. But it also means that we get a lot more

information. We've looked at the keyword volumes and the fact that we can't look at a keyword level for SEO anymore. This is a great way to look into this. We still know what the queries are.

We may not know the exact volume that they come in but if we're looking at a term like credit cards, it's hard to infer exactly what that person is looking for. If we take a term like credit cards, it's hard to know exactly what that person is looking for. We can't necessarily infer intent from that. If that becomes a longer query, which credit card is best for low credit, there's a lot more information there. We can do a lot more with that. We can create a lot more content around that. There are a lot of different ways of thinking about this. It's not just that there are opportunities to rank, there are opportunities to serve better content as well.

Integration with third-part tools

Voice search is integrated with a lot of third-party tools and software. It's worth thinking about the likes of say Amazon Echo, it defaults to Bing. So, if people thought using Amazon Echo a lot more, a lot more searches will default to Bing, and if you're not thinking about Bing as part of your search strategy, you could miss out there.

There are other integrations that are going on that are quite interesting, with the likes of Uber. There may be more in an e-commerce sense that happens in this way. Amazon Echo seems a logical one with Amazon itself but there could be a lot more opportunities for people and we should keep an eye out for some of these integrations because voice search can't answer everything on its own.

Increased usage of user location signals

The more we know about people, the more we know about what they want and where they are, the greater accuracy we can use to target them and the messaging that we can use and a good example here is Google Home. So yes, there's Google Home, there may soon be Google driverless cars, there's Google Assistant which is a software that tries to integrate all of this.

If you combine hardware in different locations with software that is ubiquitous, you can really start to be hyperlocal in your targeting and deliver on some of those utopian dreams that we've had for data or marketing. So that will probably bleed more into the paid area than the organic area, but if you really want to consider and it may be very relevant for your business.

CONTENT STRATEGY

What does a content strategy involve?

So, moving on to content strategy. This involves three key phases and it's underpinned by one main consideration when it comes to content strategy which is that content marketing and digital content can really perform whichever role it is that you want. It can be for awareness, it can be for retention, or it can be for retargeting. Content by its very nature can fill any vacuum that's there.

Define the role

The first thing we want to do is define the role that it's going to play within your business. This is a discussion that is had very, very frequently. I see content strategy as that area that links together the offline and online worlds. Brand budgets were typically the domain of offline advertisers and out-of-home advertisers and TV but as that budget starts to move into digital, it's really content marketing

that will stand to be the beneficiary of that. It's the best place to deliver on some of those promises of brand marketing.

So, you need to understand whether you want content just for acquisition. That will completely shape who writes the content, who amplifies it, which audience you want to speak to, and how you judge the success or failure of that content.

Know what it could achieve

If you know what you want to do, what else could occur? What could happen six months down the line? What are your competitors doing? These are discussions you should be having way in advance of implementing a content marketing plan.

Know what is required from all parties

The third thing you'll have to do, and particularly with content because it's not such a defined specialism. You need to know exactly what's required from each party to make sure you deliver on your goals.

Value of a content strategy

So, we mentioned earlier that there are different categories of search query. And when you're setting your strategy this is something you really need to get to the heart of. We can group those in three main ways. There are other ways to cut this, but this really covers the crux of the consumer journey.

Informational queries

This is where users are looking to research products or understand the functionality of a product. It may be a simple Q&A that they're looking for. But it can also help to generate leads. So, it's really something worth considering. One thing you might want to do if you're trying to link content to paid media channels, is use these queries for data capture. So, people may be searching for, "What's the difference between a charge card and a credit card?" They may enter the sites and then leave but you can gain a lot of data on that user. And you can re-market to them with more acquisition-focused copy.

Navigational queries

Navigational queries are people who really know what they're looking for. And if they're looking for your site and they're not finding it, you're doing something wrong. A lot of what we do with search is the result of us doing something right. We've gone out, we've got a strategy, we've implemented it and it's worked. So, we rank first. But navigational queries can have very practical implications for your strategy as well. Looking at the example of American Express, they may be ranked first for organic search with American Express credit cards, but the landscape and the real estate below that could be a little bit more complex and you can have aggregators and the likes are there, so they may want to put some of their media budget into paid search to ensure that they're there, they're taking up as much of that space as possible.

Where you can test with this sometimes and save some budget, is by moving that navigational search query budget from paid search and seeing if that traffic still goes to SEO. You won't have to pay for the clicks then, of course, and that can drive cost efficiencies. But it is worth considering

whether that is actually going to be effective for you and the benefit of navigational queries is the cost-per-click will be low because it relates so clearly to your brand.

Commercial queries

Commercial queries are where a lot of the budget will go, especially for paid search in particular. This is when someone, running with the credit card example, searches apply for a credit card. The intent is overt. We know what they're looking for. They want a credit card and it's really who gets there with the best offer and convinces them. What we can do here is split these terms between the different channels and as we've mentioned earlier, these are the most expensive terms. Cost-per-click can run easily into \$20, \$30, \$40. If you could via SEO, that would surely be more cost effective and it is.

So, as part of a 12-month plan, you should look at your rankings for SEO and think at what point will I be ranked in the top three for these commercial queries? And at that stage, by how much could I reduce my paid search budget? You might find that there's a spot there where you're getting the same amount of traffic for a much lower cost and you can reinvest, because you can't target every commercial query given the high CPA and CPC.

So, when we look at these, the best way to consider informational navigational and commercial is to look at SEO and PPC combined.

PAID SEARCH STRATEGY

Value of a paid search strategy

So, we've looked at SEO and we've looked at content marketing. A real core area of any search marketing strategy is paid search. The value of a paid search strategy is quite clear, and it has a lot of benefits.

- **Clear ROI:** It provides a clear ROI which everyone loves to see within a business. Your spend is clear, and your returns are very clear.
- **Direct response channel:** So, you can optimize towards whichever action you want. It could be an app install, it could be a click, whatever it happens to be you can optimize to that. And this makes it generally distinct from brand-focused marketing which would look at some of the softer metrics.
- **Drives scalable conversions:** If your strategy is going well and you fund the ROAS or ROI that you're looking for, you can experiment quite a lot and see how far you can actually take that. In a lot of businesses, as long as you're hitting that ROAS or ROI target, you can scale. Because they know that there's profit to be made from it. So, there's always budget available for that sort of thing.
- **Retains customers:** The fourth benefit is something that's not quite so recent to us, but it's still developing is re-marketing. And the beauty of re-marketing is that it allows us to retain customers. It can also allow us to convert. And the cost-per-click tends to be a lot lower for re-marketing because it is taken as read that these are people who've interacted. They may have visited the site and added something to a basket but not converted. As a result, when we re-market to them, the cost-per-click is lower because their intent is quite clear.

Match types

Something that you'll have to get right if a paid search strategy is going to be effective is using the right match types for the right audiences, the right locations, the right devices. Budgets can spiral out

of control if this isn't done correctly. For example, you'd use a broad match when exact would have done and reverse can be true as well. You can miss a lot of opportunities. These match types can clearly improve the efficiency of your campaign. So, knowing the limitations and the benefits of each will allow you to use your budget much more effectively and hit your goals.

- **Broad match:** These are ads that show on searches that include misspellings, synonyms, related searches, and other relevant variations. So, you might want to do this if you have a catch-all term and you know anything related to that is going to be relevant enough to your brand.
- **Phrase match:** These are ads that will show on a specific phrase and close variations of that phrase. We have exact match which will show on the exact term or very close variations of that term. It's one to use if you know exactly what you're going after.
- **Negative match:** Something else that is crucial to get right is negative matching. This is, quite simply, as it sounds, is using negative matching means that your ads will not show on the terms that you have specified. You can also include a match type to a negative. So, you can phrase match a negative keyword to make sure you're just not involved or related to anything around that. It can be very important for branding, but from a purely pragmatic point of view, you can waste a lot of budget if you have a negative match to the correct terms.

Advantages and disadvantages of match types

As I mentioned, there are the three main types of, a lot of variations within, each of these. And each comes with advantages and limitations.

Exact match

The advantage is clear. It's highly targeted, the ad copy and the landing pages can be really personalized because you know exactly what someone has searched for. You can infer what their intent is, and you can tailor the copy. The limitations of course, are you'll miss a lot of opportunity. This is one to use in combination with others. You can bucket some keywords that are exact match but make sure you're overlaying that with some phrase match and broad match to capture all the interest that's out there.

Phrase match

Phrase match is incredibly useful because it can help you to capture traffic for keywords that you're not bidding on. So, you may know, broadly speaking, what you're looking for, but search queries change all the time. There are new searches every single day that'll be related to all of your products and services. So, if you're using phrase match, you're making sure that you capitalize on that. And as long as you've done your negative matching correctly, you'll also miss out on the ones that you really don't want.

However, a limitation of phrase match is that it doesn't take into consideration different word orders. So, it's really something you want to be thinking about when you look at this in relation to exact match and broad match.

Broad match

You can use broad match to find new keywords and then if you find that something's performing well within there because you will of course, see with complete clarity what's performing and what's not. You can remove those ones that are underperforming as negatives, and the ones that are

performing you can then move into your exact match bucket. Remember the limitation of broad matches is self-explanatory; I guess the clue is in the title. If you're trying to promote a website or an app or a video, you'll capture a lot of traffic that isn't relevant, so you have to be prepared for the fact that is going to happen. You can get a lot of important lessons from that, and they can shape negative and exact matching thereafter, but you should set this aside in ring fence, almost a test budget for some of your broad matching.

Benefits of remarketing lists

We've already mentioned re-marketing lists and how useful these can be. And this is a real reflection on the fact that there are so many different touch points for a consumer as they move through that typical funnel from consideration and awareness through to purchase and retention. Re-marketing lists allow us to use CRM data, for example, people that we know are quite qualified and then tailor our messages to them. And we can do that across search video and shopping.

So, as people use different touch points to make that conversion, we can be there and tailor different messages. Something else that's worth considering as we look at a broad perspective of information all the way through to retention, is that the cost-per-click can actually be much lower for this. So if you have data that you really think you can trust as part of a re-marketing list, whether you've captured that on your website or via an email marketing campaign, can re-market not just with greater accuracy and clarity, but also in a very cost-efficient way and we'll look at a case study that has done that well recently.

A significant proportion of the time that is spent on mobile devices is spent on apps. It isn't spent on a huge number of apps and a lot of the apps that are downloaded aren't actually used but apps can be a really useful source of information because Google for example via Android can tell how often they are being used and that helps to shape its ranking. So one to consider for the organic side of things.

Google Ads and app installs

On the paid side of things, app installs have been part of paid search strategy for a little while. We can set targets based on those in-app interactions. Google was finding of course if there's a walled garden around apps, and a lot of people spend their time on apps and mobile traffic's increasing, that's a massive missed opportunity for them. So what they've been able to do is index that content and track how people are interacting with what's going on. That of course means that we can optimize to those.

An app campaign used to be based around app downloads. We can now have in-app purchases and this can be really cost effective for people because once you have them inside your app, there aren't that many different interactions that they're having. It's hard to get someone's attention on a mobile device, but within an app you can do that. So really one to consider because we can look at this from a point of view of just awareness as a brand to get your app out there, but you can use it for acquisition and retention. If people keep using your app, they're more likely to keep purchasing within there.

Bid adjustments

If you don't keep a tight rein on the budgets that you're spending within paid search, there can be an awful lot of wastage. So you want to look at bid adjustments to make sure that you're really maximizing the reach that you have and reaching the right customers. These bid adjustments will

provide a lot more control and flexibility and you can optimize with a lot more precision if you're doing this correctly. We can now optimize to **different devices** and set bid adjustments for mobile, for computers, and for tablets. So, based on what we know about what customers want on each device, we can bid up or bid down in those different areas.

There are a lot of specific bid adjustments that we can look at, too. The cornerstone of paid search has always been bid adjustments on a **keyword level** and remains the same. But we can also adjust our bids based on the **time of day or the day of the week**, which can be a huge consideration for a lot of companies. The **location** of users, the device that they're using, and **demographics**. Regarding demographics, we have gender, age, parental status, and household income.

We can also adjust our bids based on the ad placement that we have and on the audience that we are targeting. A lot of these bid adjustments can be done automatically and a lot of what we do in paid search is moving towards a more automotive way of working. But we should also look at the drawbacks of such an approach. If the rules that drive that automation aren't 100% sound and logical, you will still lose a lot of your budget. So a paid search strategist's skill and experience is still incredibly beneficial here so we shouldn't depend too much on automated scripts.

OTHER PAID STRATEGY

Display advertising

The role of some paid media strategies is quite clear and where we can differ things is in the details and the tactics that we take.

From a strategic standpoint, there are two very different ways to look at display.

It can be used as a **brand awareness** tool. In this sense, you might be happy with a high CPM, which is per thousand impressions, because you want to get in front of a certain audience. You want to get on certain websites where you know that they are and you think that that will in future, pay dividends.

Quite often what we want to do with display is **re-market** to previous visitors, so is it making sure we stay front of mind, and we can use dynamic ads to do that. There are responsive ads for display that Google offers that will adapt to the diverse mix of content types and screen sizes and this is where display is getting a lot smarter.

The impact of your display ad will be of course be affected by **where it is served**. Someone has gone to a site to see something else and your ad pops up. If that doesn't really fit in with what they were seeing, it can be quite a jarring experience. An impact can be negative, so what we want to make sure is that it is as cohesive as possible.

Google has its own display network and this reaches over 90% of visitors, so looking at some of the other targeting options that we have and the data that we're starting to build up, we can really ensure that those negative experiences don't happen and that re-marketing via display can be a really effective tactic for us.

A consideration for display that we don't necessarily have when we're looking at, even SEO, but particularly paid search, is the **creative element** and this is crucial. We can find the people we're looking to talk to, we can make sure we're on the right website, but when we find ourselves face to face with them, we need to make sure we say the right things in the right way.

We need to know whether we're going with an image-led campaign, whether it's going to be a dynamic campaign, or if it's re-marketing and we're showing them products they've seen or similar products. What you also need to know is who's going to produce that creative. Not just what it's going to be, but who will produce it and when? As part of your media plan, you'll need to know exactly where that's coming from, what the sizes and scales are of your creatives, and how they're going to be deployed, via which networks? From there you can start to look at the finer details of what the expectations are for performance, but first thing to get right is the organizational side of display.

NOTES

LESSON 5: EXECUTING A SEARCH MARKETING STRATEGY

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

Output reports

Performance measurement is crucial. You'll need to know whether things are going to plan, and where you need to put certain levers and move things up or move things down a little bit to make sure you're delivering on the objectives that you have set.

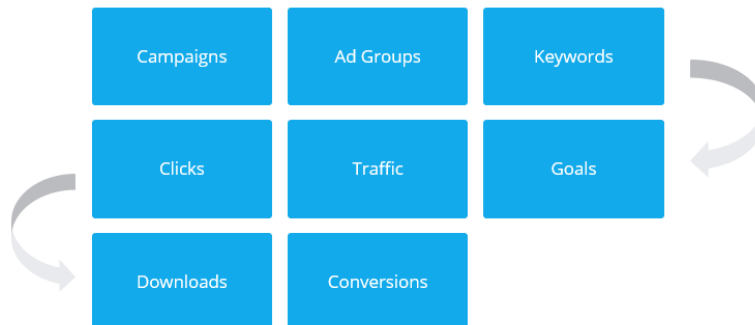
From an SEO perspective here, you'll need to look at Google's search console, but also Google Analytics. And, in the case of the former, you're looking at search queries and impression volume, mainly. We'll also combine that with some of the data we get from Google Ads, from paid search.

Looking at Google Analytics, we can see which landing pages are performing well. We can see user engagement rates, and we can also get a geographical summary of where our ads are performing particularly well.

WEBSITE ANALYTICS INTEGRATION

Integrate with paid search campaigns

When we come to looking at page search performance, and here we're really looking on an hour-by-hour basis if this is a key seasonal campaign. And we put some of the main metrics we'll want to look at there in key considerations, like the ad groups and keywords, and the conversions that you are getting.



Linking with Google Ads

First and foremost, though, you want to make sure that you have linked your website or your app with Google Ads so that we can understand what happens after someone clicks on an ad. Normally for Google Ads, we'll take the conversion code and place it on a specific page that a consumer, by proxy, must land on if they've completed a conversion. So, this could be a thank you page after a checkout, which they would only see after having done that. The conversion is then attributed back to that keyword in Google Ads which drove the sale, and we can report on that. So, that must be set up as early as possible.

If you link Google Analytics with Google Ads as we all should, you can pull in the data for revenue in orders as well, which makes things a lot richer. The number of Google Ads-tracked conversions and the number of orders in Analytics may not necessarily match due to attribution. There are different attribution models at play. The important thing is to stick to one. When you're reporting across a large number of channels, it makes more sense to use Google Analytics. It gives us a consistent view

across all of those. The Google Ads-specific data will assist with that because what it does provide is richer data on a paid search level. It's once we want to start looking at, SEO and display and everything else that happens within the website that we'll want to look at Google Analytics instead.

Integrate with display campaigns

We, of course, need to look at how our display ads are performing and this requires a slightly different integration. There are some similarities in that display needs to be integrated within our analytics platforms to incorporate view through conversions. This can be quite a contentious issue within the industry. What it does require is an agreed and uniform view. It's the nature of display that it's very hard to define exactly how much value it had. We know it had some, but how much did it really affect someone? Some people will see an ad via display, and genuinely engage with it and go on to search for the brand and make a purchase. Some will click straight through. Some simply won't see them.

There's a lot of wastage within the CPMs that we purchase, which is well-known. What we want to do is set the conversion window so the length of time that we believe is the maximum it would take someone to convert after seeing or clicking on, which is an important distinction as well. And then place the code on the relevant pages on your website or app. So, that will allow you to view your display performance in whichever way it has been agreed within your business.

Integrate with video campaigns

The first thing to think about when we're looking at video advertising campaigns and especially in this execution stage as we're getting into the detail and trying to make sure that we're monitoring performance is that your video ads won't necessarily be shown on Google Ads or via YouTube. If you promote a video via Facebook or Twitter, Instagram, or any other online property, you need to make sure that you've got the campaign tracked correctly through your analytics platform. Typically, your analytics platform will have custom URL parameters, which allow you to add information, such as, for example, a campaign name. This helps the platform to organize the data so when you filter for performance, reviews for just video campaigns, you'll only see the results for those relevant ads.

So, initially, you will have to add this tracking code to your website or app pages, or buttons, whatever it is you're really wanting to track the performance of via a video campaign. Once you've done that, anytime someone lands on your property after having seen one of those adverts, if they go on to complete the conversion that you have decided to track, a subscription, a play, a purchase, whatever it happens to be, the cookie that has been following the user will fire and record a conversion within your analytics platform.

So, it's a little bit more complicated than with other channels. The key is to be *consistent* here. To set those tracking parameters to make sure that it's coming in and it's filtered correctly within your analytics platform. Otherwise, it can get a little bit murky. And the main reason is that your video ads can be served in so many different places.

Integrate with social media campaigns

The core consideration when it comes to social media integration is that additional tracking code needs to be implemented to track social plug-ins. This is because, of course, content is shared from all over the web onto these different platforms. So, if you have that code setup correctly, you will be able to see that.

A key question here is the attribution side of things. Data isn't necessarily shared across all these different platforms, Facebook and Google being the two main contenders in this arena. It can be quite difficult to get a single customer view across that, and it's something that a lot of people in the industry are working on quite hard. As long as you're getting rich sources of data through from social media, however, you can use this to affect other strategies.

So, a simple example would be an SEO strategy. If there's copy that's really resonating on social media, why not try that within the meta descriptions or title tags? Within SEO we don't have many chances to capture attention. The only real way we can do that often is that title and description. If it worked on social media, it could work for you in SEO. You'd also learn a lot about your audience, about which creative performs well. It could be difficult with just the ad copy you have via PPC to really understand what it was that resonated with them. But if you have strong creative with a really strong message on social media that certain customers have interacted with, you've got some very deep insight there that you can use to shape, for example, your content marketing strategy, but also PPC and display.

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LESSON 6: EVALUATING A SEARCH MARKETING CAMPAIGN

REPORTING

Analyze performance data

At the core of the learning phase is reporting. As search marketers and especially strategists, we need to know how to *analyze* performance data to extract *meaningful patterns* and insights.

There's a lot of data that is at our disposal on a minute-by-minute basis, but what we need to be able to do is discern between short-term anomalies and long-term trends.

Short term

On a daily basis, you may notice performance fluctuations, but before deciding to change tack and change your strategy, consider some other possible interpretations. Tracking codes may not be implemented correctly, pixels may not be firing, or it could just be a public holiday, for example. All of these are things that we need to consider before deciding that our strategy simply isn't working.

Another good way to do this is to look at year-on-year patterns, as well as month-on-month. It provides a healthy perspective because it will of course factor in the seasonal trends that we see in every industry. It's a good idea to set up reporting meetings with regular frequency. And that's not to say that the reports that you discuss and that are presented should be identical. They should reflect those time periods.

What we mean by that is that on a short-term basis looking at daily, weekly, and monthly reports which are the short-term performance analysis and adjustments, we do this knowing that it isn't showing the whole picture. It's what we're seeing week on week. We are making small bid adjustments. For example, we're maybe trying out different devices, different ad copy, tweaks that are within the strategy.

Long term

Long term, we're thinking about revising the strategy potentially. We're looking at whether it's working. Is it really resonating with the audience? Have we missed the trick? Is there something new that we need to avail of? So those meetings should be set normally quarterly or biannually and the core of that meeting should be insight that we've gleaned from across all channels. Something that can inform major strategic decision making and that may affect the rest of the business, rather than purely focusing on search marketing.

Long-term strategic decisions

Focusing on just the long-term strategic decisions, there are three areas that mainly will shape that and will give you the insights that can inform more long-term strategic decisions.

SEO visibility

With SEO, it's visibility, more often than not, so we're looking at the trend here in the SEO rankings over a six-month or a 12-month period, particularly in relation to the positions of your competitors that will give you a good perspective on how well you're fairing overall. It can do so as a brand. For example, if your branded search volumes are increasing, then there are things that are going right more often than not anyway. Looking at the non-branded terms though, what we really want to understand is what did we set out to achieve six or 12 months ago? How well has that fared? An

example we've turned to a few times is the one of credit cards and if we set out at position 125 and we expect it to move to place in seven within 12 months. This is a really good barometer of how well things are working for us. If you haven't moved to the position you expected to, how has the landscape changed?

You can also look for the path of least resistance. It may be that video results have improved, and you might want to optimize that way. Although we set out for long-term strategy, we shouldn't be afraid to change tack when things clearly aren't going quite as we expected, or when the landscape shifts completely.

PPC conversion rates

Your paid search conversion rates when taken en masse across all of your ad groups and campaigns and all the subsets that you have within there, will give a really good idea of whether the messages that you have on the website that you are showing to people are really resonating with what they expect. If those conversion rates are really high, you have a product or service that people are really interested in and it could be something that you want to scale. If it's below where you would expect it to be versus the industry, it could be reflective of a strategy that's not working, and you can dive into where that is. It could be the targeting, the messaging, it could also be the website. So that's a really key one when you're thinking about long-term decision making.

Example: Video

If we look at the video campaign performance, this does give us a very different insight to what we get from SEO visibility or PPC conversion rates. Long-term strategic decisions, SEO bias nature will be in there. PPC conversion rates are a useful barometer, but they don't tell us that much about the creative side of things, the real side of brand perception. What we can see from video is how different creative assets have performed and over a long-term period we can really understand how that's working. So looking at views, conversions, for example, can show what the audience is expecting to see from your company and how well you're performing versus that expectation.

MEASUREMENT

Ongoing and iterative process

We started by discussing the importance of all stakeholders buying in to one cohesive strategy and that remains true once we get to the Learn stage. What we also need to understand is that this is an iterative process. Even if you have a perfectly optimized paid search campaign, it will need to be tweaked. Whether that's just through creative fatigue or new technological advances, you will have to do so and the way that we do this is in four stages. We launch, then we review, we adjust that and we relaunch, and it continues to go on in that fashion. From a pragmatic point of view, internally, you'll want to set up meetings on a weekly basis to sit with your team and understand who can really help with this. What insight have we taken from the last week's performance or in the case of SEO, most likely the last month's performance.

What we shouldn't be afraid of though is that a campaign that had performed exceptionally well last month may simply not perform the following month. It doesn't have to be through fault of the strategy or the targeting or the tactics. What we shouldn't be afraid of as search strategist is that something that performed so well for us yesterday might not do so today or potentially tomorrow. That's not through fault of the strategy that we've set out with. It can be due to seasonal campaigns; it can be creative fatigue. We shouldn't be worried about the fact that sometimes we simply have to

discard what we've done before. The important thing is to make sure that we've learned something from it, that we can feel confident about the next iteration is going to be even more successful than what we did before.

Stages of the process

So, to bring the process of measurement to life, there are five main areas. And these are the areas that we started with in the prepare phase.

Technical SEO

Measuring this is actually quite a complex task because websites are living things, in a digital sense. There are always new pages, there are pages that are obsolete, and that hygiene area of SEO is incredibly important. So set up weekly reports to make sure that you're on top of everything that's going on technically.

SEO content

Your SEO contents can be measured on a weekly basis. It depends on the nature of the page. If it's an acquisition-focused page you will want to look at it weekly. Trends there can tell you something about whether you're matching search intent. Someone searching for a credit card for example, if the bounce rate is incredibly high, you're not getting that intent right on the page so you will want to revisit that. If you're looking at a creative campaign, the lag time there may be a month before you want to decide whether it's something you continue with or perhaps discard.

Paid search

Paid Search is normally looked at on a daily basis, but much more frequently than that in fact. And this is where a lot of the personnel costs come into it and you can adjust things quite frequently based on the traffic and the engagement and the conversions that you see. It's one of the richest areas of data that we have, and as such it allows us to react very quickly.

Display advertising

Depending on whether you wanted to prospect or re-market, or simply target people that are new, but you'll still want to revisit that display strategy and look at the measurement on a frequent basis. It depends on the strategy you've taken. If you've decided to prospect in the hope that customers will later search for your brand and convert, the lead time on that is quite long. If you were hoping that you could retarget people and serve them dynamic ads, if those aren't working within a couple of days you might want to revisit those.

Video

Again, it depends on the way that you've chosen to use this channel, but it's very quick. You can see very quickly whether people have liked the video or not, whether they're viewing it or not. If you're comfortable that you're targeting the right audience, then you might want to think about the creative. If you think the creative is right but the engagement rates are low, try different targeting options. But as long as you've got measurement set up for daily reports to come through and you're comfortable with the segmentation of your audience you can make those changes very quickly.

CYCLICAL PLANNING

Never stop planning

And to ensure that we deliver on all of this with optimal efficiency, we use a cyclical planning model, which is just plan, research, objective, prepare, execute, and learn.



When we apply this model to search marketing, it's really important to consider that although we're looking at separate channels and we've talked about overarching strategies, your audience doesn't necessarily distinguish between display, PPC, and SEO for example. We can share data across channels and we just need to make sure that our consumers get a cohesive experience that there isn't anything jarring in the messaging between display, PPC, and SEO.

Maintaining a long-term strategy

And there are four steps to how we use a cyclical planning model to maintain a long-term strategy.

Consistent measurement

First and foremost, and this really is the base of everything that we do, may not be the most exciting part of the strategy but the consistent measurement is crucial. Once you've agreed on your campaign objectives, measure them consistently and ensure that all stakeholders are aware of what that measurement is going to be. Otherwise, it's very hard to get insight into how successful you've been. It's also hard to share your successes entirely if you don't have an agreed measurement framework.

Regular performance reviews

You should hold regular performance reviews so set a regular schedule for those, maybe weekly, monthly, and quarterly. But also be aware of the material that you should have within those, which channels are most fitting, at what stage should you be deciding that display has been a success for example, might that be weekly, monthly or quarterly. It depends on how you use it, but you shouldn't have identical sessions weekly, monthly, and quarterly. They should be tailored based on what you expect to see.

Maintaining pace with the social landscape

You should be prepared to incorporate new developments into your plan. Always see these as an opportunity to grow. We don't blindly go into any new developments if they aren't relevant to our business, but if we see an opportunity there, whether you've ring fenced a budget for testing or

whether you want to sell this into internal stakeholders, early adopters do always avail of lower CPAs and lower CPC so it's worth testing these.

Increasing investment over time

So, if you're hitting your campaign targets, look for areas to continue that growth. That's often what the business wants to see. If that ROI or ROAS is sitting at the level that it needs to be, you'll find that there is investment, but that's difficult to do six months into the plan.

When you're making your media plan you should have your expected scenario, but also a best case and even a better case beyond that, so that it's known that as long as you are hitting the targets, there's room to scale.

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Frequently changing industry

What makes what we do so exciting is that the industry changes on a frequent basis. That's only really exciting if you're on top of things though, and if you know that these are opportunities!

Make sure you're up to date with all the industry news, attend events, have those discussions internally. It's very important to foster that passion for what we do because that comes through in the results. New developments can affect every aspect of your campaigns and new competitors enter the market all the time and that can affect the cost of paid media campaigns.

As long as you're aware of where those new opportunities are and you can spot gaps in the market, there are always opportunities to improve your performance.

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