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B2B STRAIGHT UP

Beware of the 'smartest' guy in the room

Kimon Lycos presents some applied knowledge for companies selling technology and innovation to other companies.

Everyone loves an expert; I certainly do. When I'm taking my car in for repairs, getting a job done around the house or using an accountant to do the tax thing every year, I rejoice in the fact that there is someone smarter and better than I am in a special field of knowledge. That leaves me to crack on with the stuff I'm good at. It's a comfort to know that there are people dedicated, single-mindedly to a task, because naturally if you spend all your time in one area, you would have to become pretty damn good at it.

This is true for all experts in all fields, except for volcanologists. I'm thinking of that earth burp known as Mount St Helens in Washington State back in 1980. The experts said not to worry, let's evacuate people to a distance of 13 kilometres into a 'safe' zone. There was just the small issue that the experts' only knowledge base was Hawaiian volcanoes, which have open craters to erupt in a violently controlled manner.

Mount St Helens was a completely different kettle of fish. No open vent, and even when a massive bulge appeared on the north-

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ern flank, no one except for a chap called Jack Hyde pointed out how nasty it could be. Hyde wasn't a part of the 'expert' panel, so his voice wasn't heard at the time. What came next was a catastrophic explosion beyond comprehension. The world's greatest landslide screamed 250 kilometres per hour down the mountain, carrying enough material to bury Manhattan to a depth of 120 metres. Then came the main show, with an explosion equally the power of 500 atomic bombs, killing people as far away as 30 kilometres, as the blast went out of that bulge that the experts had considered 'insignificant'.

On second thoughts there are experts in other fields who also get it wrong, such as (pause for effect) digital media people. In

fact, they are so far off the pace, they don't even have a proper sounding title; at least volcanologists have that much going for them. On the other hand, when a 'digital media person' cocks up it's not quite as cataclysmic for human life, so I guess on that score, it all evens out.

The real issue is, when an expert digital media person talks about B2B, are they an expert with B2B? They could be a borderline genius with digital media, but the problem is, without a deep understanding of B2B, some such experts could be causing innovation and technology companies to blow holes in their budgets and credibility.

The most striking example is in the world of SEO (search engine optimisation), with many taking the same approach to selling large capex products as you would when flogging collectable Hot Wheels. The most obvious difference is the time to buy. My boy takes about 20 seconds to decide what Hot Wheel he wants, a B2B buyer will take two years or more, just on the due diligence. Perhaps the best illustration of the expert gap is with keyword strategy.

B2C searchers often use well-known brand names, such as Hot Wheels, because many already know what they want to buy. The real hunt is for the best source. If a B2C searcher uses a generic term, expect less variance such as 'toy car'.

B2B keyword strategy is more complex, because often there are many ways to skin a cat. Imagine for instance, you sold cat-skinning technology, not a bad thought at all really. In any case, you have a business, which sells technology licensing for a remote controlled plant that skins a thousand fur balls per day, using various ingenious methods.

To attract licensees/investors/customers, you need your keyword strategy to cover not only the bleeding obvious such as your brand and 'cat skinning', but also 'slaughter systems', 'slaughter technologies', 'food processing', 'animal management systems' and dozens of other related and specific search terms.

You also have to consider the variation of what to call things, because people will use weird combinations of words because of industry-specific lingo or generic terms. Your typical B2B searcher uses words focused on the need or problem, rather than a product or solution. Add multiple searches during the buying cycle and multiple parties influencing the sale and B2B SEO keyword strategy can quickly become more complex than a weasel chasing a snake in your trousers.

It wouldn't be fair of me to diss volcanologists or digital media people without going out on a limb myself. So in the interests of 'Queensberry rules' I've nussed out a few trends for 2009.



2009 B2B TRENDS WITH DIGITAL AND INTERACTIVE MEDIA

- Expect more and more interest in SEO and programs with measurable web interactions for lead generation, demo downloads and such. Equipment manufacturing companies will lead the charge and will invest significantly in paid search.
- Traditional Flash banners are going, going, soon to be gone, with more moving to Flash video banners.
- Thought-leadership blogs designed to engage customers on key industry business issues will explode – it's magic for SEO, research, direct market feedback and creating genuine 'leadership' brands.
- Maturing on the creative side, with more storytelling, more emotion and more personalisation in marketing programs.

It seems B2B marketers are waking up to the fact that even engineers are human, if only barely.

- Greater broadband penetration will mean streaming video is a 'must' marketing tool. Think instructional videos to help customers install or use a product or service, while others create pure entertainment, hoping to build brand affinity or drive traffic.
- Facebook style social networking sites for consumers will develop as an increasing utility among business-to-business peer groups as well.

My dare to you is, tear out this page and keep it in the drawer. Create a task in your Outlook to review this in December 2009. And let's see how many of these trends you can rub my nose in as an 'expert'. **M**

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