Local Search
The Invisible Channel for Brick-and-Click Retailers

Introduction

Most ecommerce managers for national retail brands are too familiar with the ongoing process of adjusting pay-per-click (PPC) and search engine optimization (SEO) tactics to eke out incremental gains in clicks, conversions, and online revenue. These efforts are made even more arduous by spiraling PPC costs and intensified online competition. However, these brands frequently overlook a substantial source of in-market consumer traffic that they can own: local search. Although much of the discussion around local search focuses on the online-to-offline consumer experience, it is also a significant pathway for online purchasing.

A recent Ignite survey of over 1,000 online shoppers found that when conducting a local search for a nearby store that ended in a purchase:

- 35 percent of shoppers that used branded local search terms made a purchase online
- 25 percent of consumers that used non-branded local search terms made their purchase online

This means that even when shoppers conduct geo-modified searches (i.e., searches that include a zip code or the name of a town) to find local stores, they frequently end up buying online instead. Furthermore, local search traffic converts quickly, with nearly 60 percent of those that purchased online making their purchase within four hours.

Clearly, there is a significant volume of high-quality ecommerce traffic to be gained by recognizing and harnessing the local digital marketing channel. Brick-and-click retailers are especially well-positioned to serve these omnichannel consumers because they 1) have a physical footprint that can attract organic local search traffic and 2) possess both online and in-store selling capabilities. However, such retailers can only be successful at winning brick-and-click purchases if they optimize their digital presence and deploy tactics to turn local searchers into online buyers.

In order for retailers to attract and convert brick-and-click purchasers, they need to dominate organic local search results and drive traffic to their website where consumers can be persuaded to buy online instead of visiting a store. There are four critical local marketing strategies that can help these brands be successful in their efforts to tap into this source of ecommerce growth.

Create Authoritative Local Landing Pages for Every Location

The best way for a retailer to win search rankings is to dominate the organic search results with its own branded local web pages. A brick-and-click retailer can take advantage of its physical footprint by creating a unique landing page for each of its physical locations. When properly optimized, these pages can capture the majority of both branded and non-branded searches that are most relevant to the retailer's locations and offerings. Additionally, a shopper that is looking for a store location may instead choose to buy online, so providing this option through optimized local pages is paramount. This is a proven foundation for local search domination and also provides a new channel for ecommerce managers to win clicks, conversions, and online sales.

Consider an extensive Ignite study of ownership of page one Google search results for 15 brands across five verticals. The research analyzed over 140 branded and non-branded search terms for the most common keywords by vertical, with local qualifiers that spanned ten metropolitan and rural geographic markets. The study found that brands with local landing pages captured 64 percent of page one Google search results while brands without local landing pages captured just 4 percent of the results.

This data, combined with the fact that 25-35 percent of shoppers ultimately buy online after conducting a local search, clearly suggests that local landing pages are critical to effective ecommerce marketing — and to accessing new opportunities for ecommerce growth in a competitive market.

For some brands, creating landing pages for hundreds or thousands of locations can be daunting. The task requires competencies in location data management, locator development, SEO and geocoding. A proven third-party provider focused on local marketing will bring expertise and technology to brick-and-click ecommerce managers. Furthermore, a sophisticated provider will offer automated capabilities for centrally managing content and propagating information across multiple pages in one step — simplifying a brand's ability to boost its digital presence and win the highly competitive battle to attract online consumers.

Savvy brick-and-click brands that deploy local landing pages at scale will benefit from better organic search rankings and create a new path to sustained online revenue growth with owned and operated local landing pages. And once a retailer gets a customer to its own local page, there is a multitude of ways to persuade them to make an online purchase.

Don't Let Directories Own Local Search Results

The greatest opportunity for success in winning organic, local search clicks is with local pages for every location. Conversely, the easiest way for a retailer to surrender local search rankings is to not do this. When a brand fails to maintain local pages, directories and other third parties can too easily poach the consumer and impede the otherwise natural ecommerce purchase path.

For example, in conducting Google local searches in various geographies for shoe stores (using both branded and non-branded search terms), the first and second organic results are often won by a directory (e.g., Yelp, YP.com, Citygrid or 411.com). Clicking on the directory result presents the consumer with a landing page or listing page filled with advertisements for both direct physical competitors and e-tailers. This increases the likelihood that a consumer will select a competing brand.

Even if a retailer's brand and location information are presented in the ads or listings on the directory page, the consumer must perform extra clicks to get to the brand's own web site where they can finally find relevant information and offers. Each additional click increases the chances that the consumer will lose interest and leave the retailer's site

before converting. In addition, if the shopper encounters the brick-and-click retailer's store location information on a directory page (instead of an owned landing page), the retailer loses the means to convince him or her to purchase online instead. The ability to build an inviting path from a local search to an ecommerce sale is relinquished.

When brands do not own the local search results, directories usurp the organic rankings and increase the likelihood of online consumers going to a competitor or abandoning the purchase process altogether — both resulting in a loss of ecommerce revenue for the brand.

Enhance Local Landing Pages With Rich Content

To capture the most possible ecommerce revenue via local search strategies, ecommerce managers must not only implement local landing pages but also enrich those pages with location-specific information such as custom offers, automated ads, and local terms and information — as well as rich content like smart CTAs, videos and social review feeds.

Enhancing pages with relevant, useful content is a proven SEO tactic for improving search rankings. Industry research shows that when brands take the time to populate landing pages with local and hyperlocal content, they capture an additional 17 percent of page one search results compared to those without customized content.

In addition, online consumers respond positively to such content. Ignite Research found that 45 percent of consumers are motivated to purchase online when free shipping is offered, while 28 percent of consumers are motivated by online discounts. However, they must actually encounter this information when they visit the site looking for location information like hours and addresses.

Building such meaningful and engaging content on local pages wins more searches, drives visitors to the retailer's site (where they control the brand and customer experience), and provides ecommerce managers with a simple and measurable way to build a bridge that will convert consumers from local searchers to online purchasers.

While customized local content can seem prohibitively time-consuming and labor-intensive, an automated local marketing platform can assist ecommerce managers in quickly and cost-effectively implementing local landing pages and populating them with customized content that is unique to each location.

Persuade the Shopper to Make an Online Purchase

Finally, to truly capitalize on local search as a new channel of ecommerce revenue and growth, brick-and-click retailers must design their local landing pages to optimize ecommerce conversions. Building local landing pages using the same top-navigation and design elements as the rest of the website reminds shoppers of your ecommerce capabilities and product offerings. It is also crucial to feature not only standard location page elements like store hours, address, phone, map and hyperlocal content — but also prominent ecommerce calls-to-action and other features that can direct visitors to online shopping pages. Retailers can also create dynamic or static landing pages based on referral keywords in order to feature ordering options for specific products and categories.

Consumers are becoming increasingly indifferent to the channel they use to ultimately make a purchase: they will decide based on what is simplest, fastest and/or cheapest. A customer who visits a local landing page may be planning to visit a store — but that doesn't mean they actually prefer to shop in-store or cannot be convinced to buy online. Accordingly, savvy brick-and-click retailers know that the best way to minimize the inherent risk of in-store shoppers changing their minds or visiting a competitor en route is to provide compelling incentives to make an online purchase instead.

Encouraging an online purchase instead of a store visit can be done in various ways, from time-sensitive discount promo codes to free or expedited shipping offers to simple reminders about the convenience of online shopping. In fact, Ignite's research revealed that the ease of ecommerce is its greatest enticement. The local landing page experience should not only provide the enriched location-specific information to enable an in-store visit, it should also subtly but forcefully highlight online shopping as the path of least resistance for a consumer to make a purchase.

For More Information

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