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CHAPTER

How Search Has Changed Your Business

Twenty years ago, the World Wide Web as we know it today didn't exist. Ten years ago, only early technology adopters used search engines, and Google was a struggling young upstart. Now, over 50 percent of on-line Americans use search engines every day and over 90 percent of them use search engines every month. That's a lot of potential customers who are looking for you and a lot of market research about what those customers want.

Americans conduct 22.7 billion online searches a month¹ and worldwide, we type into a search box monthly 131 billion times. That's 29 million searches per minute.² It's safe to say that we've become a searching culture. Just take a look at the 2009 Super Bowl to see this in action. Look at the spiking searches on Google the morning of the big game. Thirty-five of the top 100 have the word "Super Bowl" in them, and another 27 are Super Bowl-related (see Figure 1.1).³

Business leaders know that the world is changing. More customer research and transactions take place online now than ever before, and those numbers are only going to increase. Globally, the number of searches grew 46 percent in 2009. According to Jack Flanagan, com-Score executive vice president, "Search is clearly becoming a more ubiquitous behavior among Internet users that drives navigation not only directly from search engines but also within sites and across networks.

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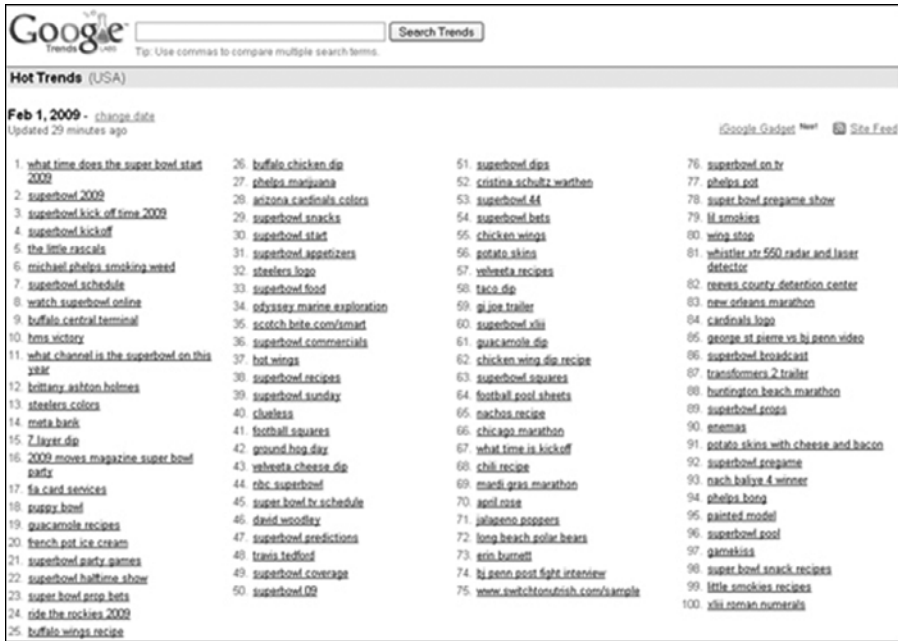


Figure 1.1 Google Search Trends, Super Bowl 2009

Source: Google Trends

If you equate the advancement of search with the ability of humans to cultivate information, then the world is rapidly becoming a more knowledgeable ecosystem.”⁴ But many professionals simply aren’t sure how to evolve their businesses to best take advantage of this changing landscape. This book will show you how to think about your business in a new way, to better connect with your customers through search, and to weave the value that search provides into all aspects of your organization.

Through organic search, you can reach potential customers at the very moment they are considering a purchase and provide them information exactly when they are looking for it. While many businesses are attempting to connect with their potential customers through paid search (such as with Google AdWords), the opportunity to reach these customers through organic search—the results that are algorithmically generated rather than paid for—remains largely untapped. In fact, 88 percent of online search dollars are spent on paid results, even though 85 percent

of searchers click on organic results.⁵ Search is a fairly unique opportunity to connect with your potential customers.

Never before have we had access to such remarkable amounts of data about potential customers. We know what they search for (and what they don't). We know how they shop and how they buy. We can even find out where they look on a page. Businesses spend such significant amounts of time and money on market research, focus groups, and usability studies, yet so many fail to augment this information with the abundance of free data available from those 113 billion searches a month.

We don't have to look farther than our local newspapers to see how consumer behavior has changed. The newspaper industry spent years trying to get readers to return to their old behaviors of expecting the newspaper at their doors every morning, and reading the stories as they were laid out in print. But those readers had moved on to searching online for news on topics of interest and getting that information in real time rather than a day late. Similarly, companies have to adapt and evolve with their customers instead of attempting to get their customers to return to their old ways.

Doesn't Google Show the Most Relevant Sites to Searchers *Without My Input*?

I was recently talking to *Wired* magazine senior writer Steven Levy (previously the senior technology editor for *Newsweek*), who's been spending a lot of time at Google researching his book, *Searching for Google*.⁶ Levy doesn't believe that businesses should have to do anything "special" to their sites for Google since Google's purpose is to surface the most relevant, useful results to the top. He compares the practice of site owners trying to influence this to students having coaches for the SAT exam.

I told him I didn't see things that way at all. I see the situation as similar to a retailer who opens a store in a new city. Before leasing a building, they'll likely scout out the area to find the best corner. They'll do some competitive research to see where the other retailers are located, as well as some customer research to see where their target consumers shop. (Many even stand on sidewalks and count people walking by!) Retailers know that even if their store has the most amazing

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merchandise at super low prices, they might not have many customers if they open their store in an alley that's closed to traffic and they don't let anyone know they're there. John Deere probably wouldn't have many people buying riding lawn mowers in a store in Manhattan.

Companies should think of their online presence as another "retail location." Organic search is the city they're in, the street they're on, the sign above their door. John Deere opens stores in towns where people have really big lawns, and they keep the doors unlocked so their customers can get in. If you don't do the same with organic search, you're missing an increasingly large percentage of your potential customers.

The Keys to an Effective Search Strategy

To incorporate search into your organization:

- Add search metrics to your data mix to better understand your audience, see industry trends, and build a better product strategy.
- Integrate offline and online marketing activities to capitalize on your offline advertising efforts and to keep from losing potential customers that your offline advertising efforts are driving to search engines.
- Develop a search acquisition strategy that fully harnesses the searching behavior of your potential customers.

To successfully execute your search strategy, you should build its importance into every aspect of the organization—not just marketing. A successful search strategy depends on IT and Engineering, Product Marketing, Business Development, Marketing and Advertising, PR, Customer Support, User Research, User Interaction Design, and any other department that thinks about the business, customers, product, or Web site. *Marketing in the Age of Google* will guide you toward building a successful search strategy and extending the process for execution throughout your entire organization.

This book talks about organic search—the search results that are generated algorithmically based on what the search engines think is most relevant for the query. Paid search (the ads that appear beside the

organic results) is also an important piece of the search strategy puzzle but a number of resources exist to help businesses better understand and use paid search so in this book we'll only be talking about it as it influences organic search.

What is your organic search strategy? If you don't have one, you're missing a key piece of your business strategy—and shutting out many potential customers who are looking for your business. If you're an executive, this book will give you a holistic view of how search fits into your overall business strategy and how to integrate it into the organization. If you're a marketer, developer, user interaction designer, or otherwise work on customer engagement, product development, or company awareness, this book will show you how to incorporate search into what you're already doing for an even better return.

Search as the Entry Point of the Web

For many of us the search box has become our entry point to the Web. When the Web first gained popularity, it became important for a business to have a Web site. As online activity became more prevalent, it became important for a business to include a domain name in advertising and other materials. Now things have shifted again, and it's vital for a business to rank well in search results both for their brand name and for queries relevant to the business.

But integrating offline and online marketing is only half the story. It's just as important to understand the needs of your customers. For years, companies have commissioned focus groups and large-scale surveys and conducted massive market research to find out what their potential customers want and how their current customers think about them. All of those activities are still valuable, but there's now an easier (and cheaper) way. Search can provide powerful data about exactly what your potential customers want and what they're thinking about you.

Every Day, Millions of Potential Customers Are Telling You Exactly What They Want

Intuit sells accounting software. Their product packaging, marketing materials, and Web site all refer to this software as *bookkeeping*

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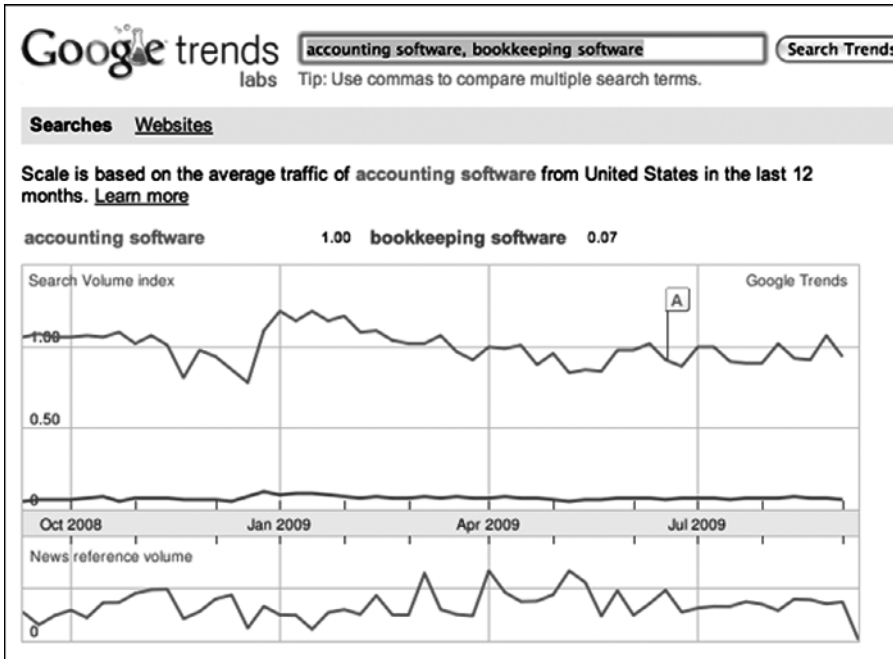


Figure 1.2 [Accounting] and [Bookkeeping] Search Volume

Source: Google Trends

applications. But if you take a look at what their potential customers are searching for, you'll notice that it's "accounting" over "bookkeeping" software by a substantial margin. (You'll learn how to find out how your customers are searching for you in Chapter 2.) See Figures 1.2 and 1.3.

Not only is Intuit missing this audience from its search acquisition funnel, it's not resonating with its potential customers as well as it could be in offline channels.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has an important mission to make accurate and useful health-related information available to the American public but limited resources with which to do so. If this group wants to help the greatest number of people first, it could start with search data. You can see below that many more people are looking for information on arthritis than on heart disease. See Figure 1.4.

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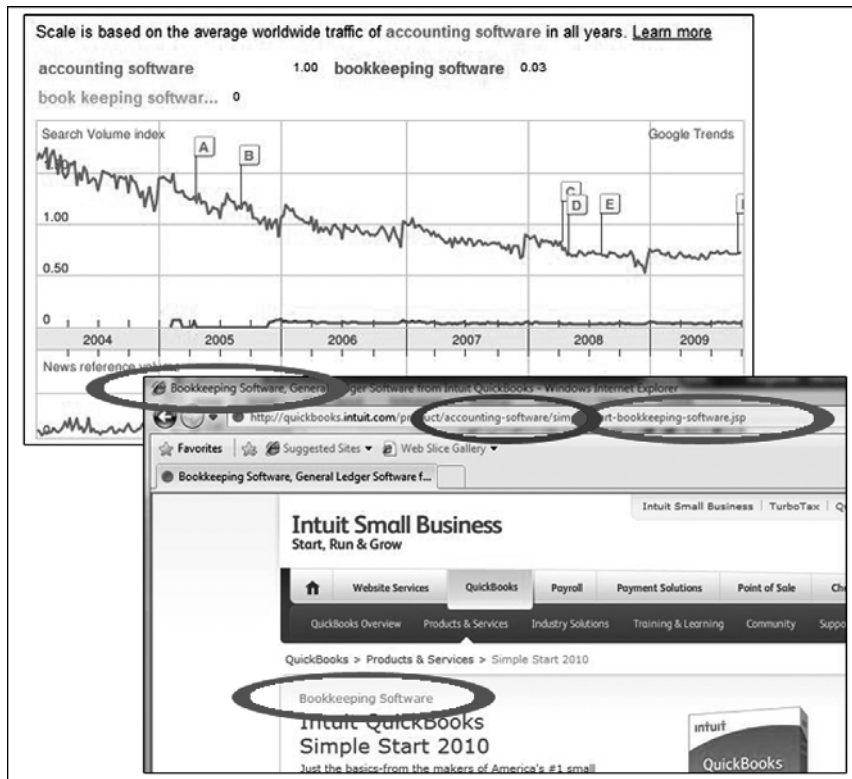


Figure 1.3 Speaking the Language of Your Customer

Source: Google Trends and Quickbooks.Intuit.Com

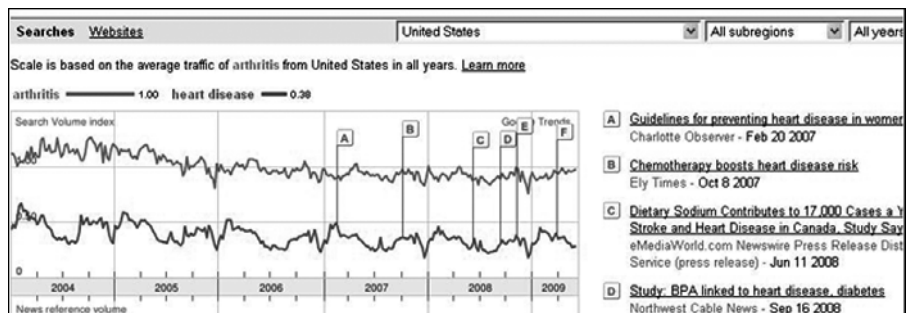


Figure 1.4 [Arthritis] and [Heart Disease] Search Trends

Source: Google Insights for Search

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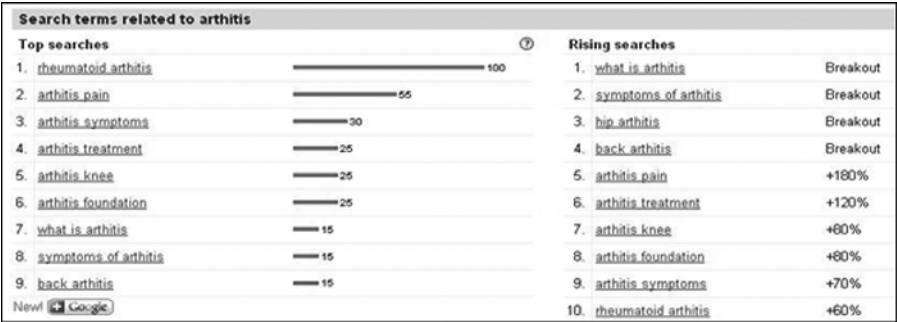


Figure 1.5 [Arthritis] Search Trends

Source: Google Insights for Search

Diving deeper, we can see that “rheumatoid” is the type of arthritis that people search for the most and that Ohio’s population has one of the keenest interests in this topic. See Figures 1.5 and 1.6.

Many factors go into prioritizing projects, but your potential audience’s primary interest can be a valuable one.

Whether you run an online business, a multinational conglomerate with no online presence, or a two-person startup out of your garage, your customers are providing you with valuable data that can help form your business strategy.

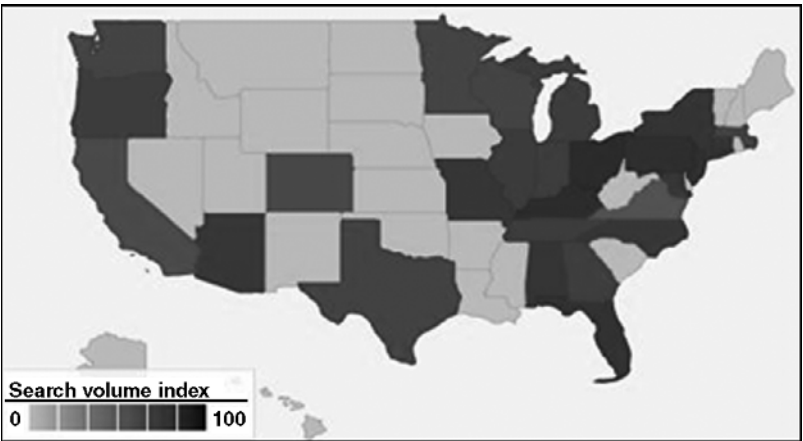


Figure 1.6 [Arthritis] Regional Search Trends

Source: Google Insights for Search

How Search Has Changed Marketing

As defined by the Chartered Institute of Marketing, marketing consists of “identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably.”⁷ That definition doesn’t change as business moves online.

But while the core elements of marketing remain the same, it’s no secret that consumer behavior is shifting. We frequently turn to online sources for things we used to get offline—from news and local directories to television shows, music, and movies. This evolution means that the expectations of your potential customers and their methods of interacting with you may be different than before. For instance, they may expect support online, whereas before they may have looked for an 800-number.

This shift also means that traditional forms of advertising don’t have the reach that they used to have. If 10 million fewer people are reading the printed newspaper in April, 2009 than April, 2008,⁸ then 10 million fewer people are seeing your print ads. If people are throwing away Yellow Pages books, then none of those people are seeing your Yellow Pages directory listing.⁹

Savvy marketers are transferring spending to online advertising—particularly paid search—but they haven’t yet started to take full advantage of the 85 percent of clicks that organic search produces.

Buyers Are Shifting to Searching

Our buying patterns are changing along with our online behavior.¹⁰ Of the 18 billion monthly U.S. searches, nearly 12 percent are retail-focused.¹¹ United States census data from 2008 showed that e-commerce sales reached \$31.9 billion that year.¹² Market research company Forrester estimates that the worldwide e-commerce market will reach \$235 billion in 2009. Clearly, we’ve begun buying online. How do we get to those e-commerce sites? In 2007, Microsoft internal research found that 86 percent of searchers start at a major search engine when shopping and 70 percent of those product-related queries are for categories, such as [digital camera].¹³

In part because search has become such a core way in which we navigate the Web, the home page of a site may not be the entry point for

a visitor. Any page can be the entry page, which makes it increasingly difficult for marketers to craft messages that welcome visitors and compel them through the conversion funnel. We have to rethink our approach to site design and user interaction based on this new world. (We'll talk more about how to ensure every page of your site is a compelling entry in Chapter 4.)

Even those retailers who don't sell products online or who have substantial offline sales are still impacted by search. Online advertising triggers \$6 to be spent offline for every dollar spent online¹⁴ and the in-store sales boost from search is three times greater than online display advertising. Considering that those numbers were calculated for paid search, how much of a greater impact can organic search have with 85 percent of the clicks?

Sixty-three percent of search-related purchases occur offline,¹⁵ and for some categories, this number is even higher.¹⁶ What about local businesses? In a WebVisible/Nielson study, 82 percent of respondents said that they've used the internet to find local businesses; 80 percent say they've researched a product or service online before buying it locally. Yet, only 44 percent of small businesses even have a Web site.¹⁷ If you have a business, you need to be visible in search engines whether you sell online or not.

Paid Search Isn't Enough

As already noted, companies can connect with searchers in two primary ways: *paid search* and *organic search*.

Paid search consists of ads that advertisers can buy to display to searchers who type in particular queries. These ads are labeled "sponsored" on the search results page. These ads can be very targeted (for instance, an advertiser can show an ad that says "buy wool socks here" to a searcher who types in "where can I buy wool socks?") and the order in which the ads appear is based on a number of factors including the amount the advertiser is willing to pay for each click, the relevance of the ad to the query, and the quality of the page linked to in the ad.

Organic search, on the other hand, is comprised of results that are algorithmically generated. Search engines mine the Web, extract the content, assign value and relevance to each page, and then return and

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Figure 1.7 Organic Search versus Paid Search

Source: Google Search Results

rank those pages for each query. See Figure 1.7. (You can learn more about this process in Chapter 5.)

Businesses are becoming increasingly savvy about paid search. It's a measurable advertising mechanism by which you can track exactly how much you're spending and what the return is. However, many businesses have not yet invested in organic search because they aren't sure how it works or how to measure it. But whatever the return you are getting from paid search, your organic search return will be greater. And if your site is visible in both paid and organic results, both strategies will provide an even *greater* investment.

Let's take a closer look at the numbers.

Organic Search Performance

Not only do searchers click on organic results 85 percent of the time, an organic listing is between two and six times more visible than a paid one. One hundred percent of searchers look at the first organic result, while only 50 percent look at the first paid result. As the rankings go down, the gap widens: 50 percent of searchers see the seventh organic listing, but only 10 percent of searchers see the seventh paid listing.¹⁸ Even if you're

looking for increased brand awareness rather than clicks, organic search will provide a greater return.

In May, 2009, online intelligence-gathering group Hitwise reported that paid search engine traffic to Web sites was down 26 percent from the previous year, yet organic search traffic was up.¹⁹ Research company com-Score found that while 2009 U.S. search queries were up 68 percent over the previous year, paid clicks had grown only 18 percent during that same period.²⁰ In some cases, this was due to a reduction in paid search spending, but this was also the result of changing searcher behavior. Searchers are typing longer queries that trigger fewer paid search matches and they are increasingly recognizing the difference between organic and paid results and have growing ad blindness. Studies have also shown that searchers trust organic listings more than paid ones and that organic results are perceived as most relevant.²¹ Additionally, the increasing number of videos and images in search results draws the searcher's attention away from the paid search column.

One considerable advantage of investing in organic search is that it continues to provide value over time, whereas paid search traffic disappears as soon as you stop your spend. Fifty-six percent of Google queries show no paid ads at all, so if you're counting on paid search to provide all of your visibility to searchers, you could be missing half your audience.²²

The Additional Lift of Ranking in Both Paid and Organic Results

Numerous studies have found that when a site is visible in both paid and organic search results, both results receive more clicks than if either appeared alone. This could be because seeing a brand in both places reinforces the perception that the brand is reputable. It could be because even if we don't consciously process that we've already seen the brand, it seems familiar and, thus, relevant when we see it a second time. Whatever the reason, studies have found that click-through rates, conversion rates, and revenue are all higher when both organic and paid listings appear for a search.²³ An iCrossing study found that when a brand appears in both the organic and paid results, the searcher clicked on that brand 92 percent of the time, compared

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TOTAL	CLICKS	increased by 91.80%	PAGE VIEWS	increased by 43.63%
	ACTIONS	increased by 45.00%	VISITORS	increased by 40.69%
	ORDERS	increased by 44.92%	TIME ON SITE	increased by 38.91%

Figure 1.8 iCrossing Study Adding Organic Search Components to a Paid Search Campaign

Source: icrossing.com

to 60 percent of clicks when the brand appeared in only one location.²⁴ This study found the results show in Figure 1.8 when an organic search component was added to an existing paid search campaign.

A Google-sponsored Enquiro brand study, which focused on consumers in the early stages of purchasing a fuel efficient car who hadn't yet decided on a brand, found that:

- Searchers who saw Honda in the top paid and organic result were 16 percent more likely to think of Honda as a fuel efficient car than when the brand didn't appear in either place.
- Searchers were 42 percent more likely to recall Honda when the brand appeared in both kinds of results versus just the top organic listing.
- Searchers who saw Honda in both organic and paid results were 8 percent more likely to have purchase intent toward Honda and were 26 percent *less* likely to consider a Honda purchase if the brand appeared in neither spot.²⁵

You Can Get Ahead of Your Competition by Focusing on Organic Search

The numbers make one thing clear: organic search is a worthwhile investment. But whereas online ad spending continues to grow—at \$9.1 billion in 2007, and projected to reach \$20.9 billion in 2013²⁶—the percentage spent on paid search has outpaced organic between 2004 and 2008 (organic search had 12 percent of marketing spend in 2004 and

10 percent of marketing spend in 2008 at \$1.3 billion²⁷). Chances are, your competition isn't yet taking full advantage of what organic search can offer and you can take the lead here while they're playing catch up.

Michelle Goldberg, a partner at venture capital firm Ignition Partners, stresses the importance of organic search to the companies she funds:

*Understanding the differences between paid and organic search and implementing each correctly is critical to the success of an early stage company. Paid search may provide immediate volume, but only provides customers as long as the company pays for clicks. If not done right, a company can spend \$1.00 to make \$0.95. Organic search is a long term and generally much better margin solution. The largest expense associated with organic search tends to be content creation, which can have long term benefits for both search acquisition and overall customer engagement. Not only is focusing on content creation good for search, but it's also good for users and the business overall because you're creating content that consumers find valuable and that helps you build a more sustainable business over time. I make sure every startup I work with has an organic search strategy.*²⁸

How Search Performance Can Impact Offline Ad Campaigns

Advertising (such as TV commercials, radio advertising, print ads, and direct mail) will cause a certain number of potential customers to go into your store, call you, or type your domain name into a browser, but more often than not these days, those potential customers will search for more information. Television commercials in particular can drive search traffic, as over half of us watch TV and surf the internet at the same time.²⁹ Two-thirds of us are motivated to search due to an offline channel such as a TV ad.³⁰ Offline advertising can drive searches for both the ad taglines and the products themselves. For instance, Apple started airing "I'm a Mac" ads in 2006, and the search volume for the phrase has steadily gone up ever since (see Figures 1.9 and 1.10).

If Apple had simply aired the commercials expecting consumers to go directly to their stores, they would have missed the entire potential

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Figure 1.9 Apple's [I'm A Mac] Commercial Reel

Source: Apple.Com

customer base of searchers. But these would-be consumers have a positive experience when they search, as Apple.Com is listed as the first two results for [I'm a Mac] (see Figure 1.11).

However, not all companies enjoy such a successful integration of TV commercials and organic search. During the 2009 Super Bowl, Hyundai spent approximately \$13.5 million on advertising by sponsoring

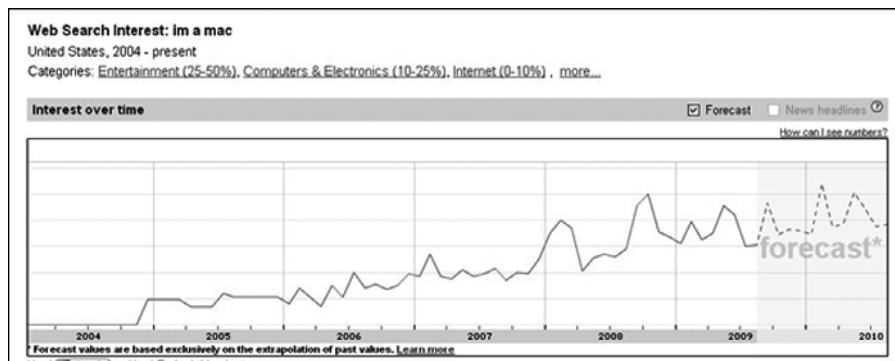


Figure 1.10 [I'm A Mac] Search Volume

Source: Google Insights For Search

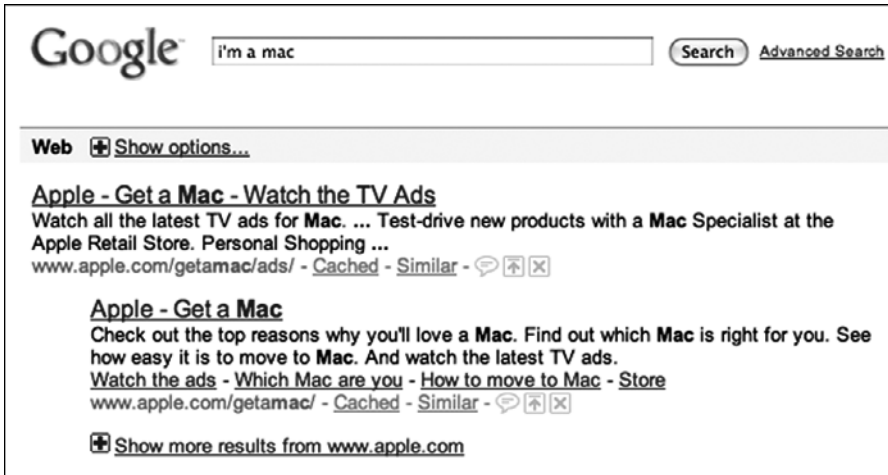


Figure 1.11 Google Search Results: [I'm A Mac]

Source: Google Search Results

the pregame show and running ads throughout the game. Two of its commercials centered on its new coupe (at \$6 million for airing costs, plus commercial production costs). It first appeared that Hyundai understood how to integrate offline and online activities and recognized their customers' desire to interact with the company online. The ad showed the car speeding around a racetrack with exciting imagery and video and ended with a Web site: edityourown.com. See Figure 1.12.



Figure 1.12 Hyundai "Edit Your Own" Commercial

Source: Personal Screenshot

The site combined interactive elements and social media components and enabled visitors to create their own videos that starred the Hyundai Genesis Coupe and share them with their friends. Clearly, the ad was intended to drive visitors to the “Edit Your Own” site and it’s likely that the marketing team responsible for the campaign measured the commercial’s success in part based on site traffic.

How well did the ad do? It probably did cause some viewers to type edityourown.com into their browser’s address bar, but it also did something else. It caused viewers to search. Not long after the commercial aired, Google’s Hot Trends showed that interest spiked for both [Hyundai genesis coupe] and [edit your own]. See Figures 1.13 and 1.14.

Did searchers find what they were looking for when they typed [edit your own] into Google? Not exactly.

Someone looking for edityourown.com would have likely been disappointed, since that domain doesn’t appear anywhere in Google search results. To Hyundai’s credit, it did buy a search ad for the query, so even though it doesn’t appear in the organic results, it does appear on the page. Unfortunately, since the ad shows the hyundaigenesis.com domain rather than edityourown.com, many searchers might have overlooked it and assumed it wasn’t what they were looking for. And since we’re an

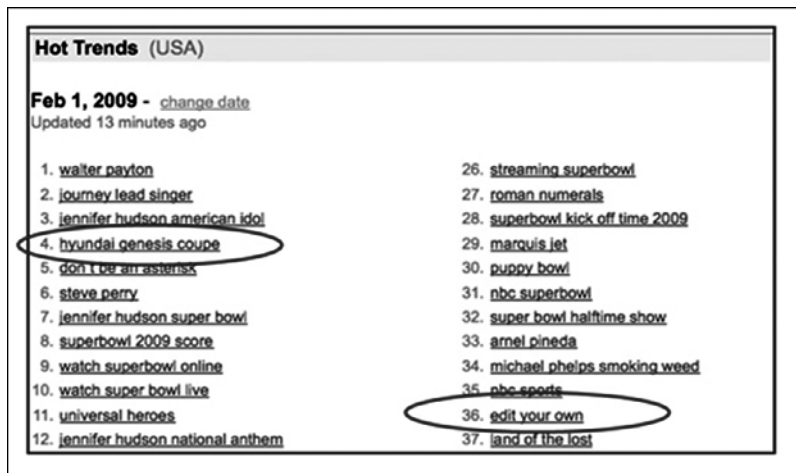


Figure 1.13 Google Search Trends, Super Bowl 2009

Source: Google Trends

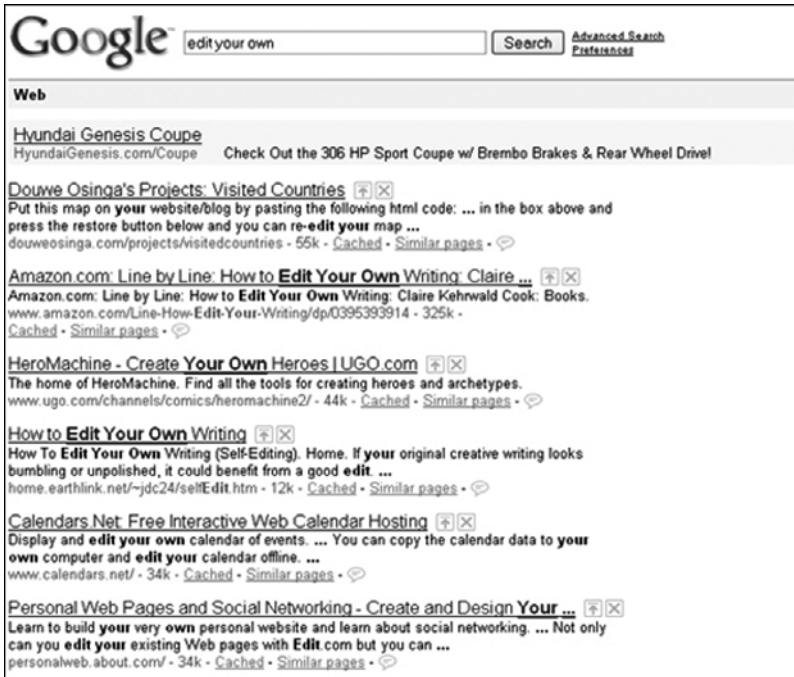


Figure 1.14 Google Search Results: [Edit Your Own]

Source: Google Search Results

instant-gratification culture as well as a searching culture, many people likely gave up and simply went back to watching the game after their failed attempt to find the site.

It's clear from the Google Trends data that the commercial spiked interest in the campaign, but if the marketing department measured success only based on site visits, it may have considered the commercial a failure. But the failure occurred at the point of search—not due to the commercial itself. Though Hyundai appeared to understand the relationship between offline and online media, it was missing a crucial piece—that of organic search. Harnessing the power of that relationship is a primary strategy you'll learn in this book.

Hyundai wasn't the only Super Bowl advertiser that could have benefited from a better search acquisition strategy. Consider this snapshot of Google Trends during the last few minutes of the game. Google Trends tracks searches that have substantial spikes in query volume over

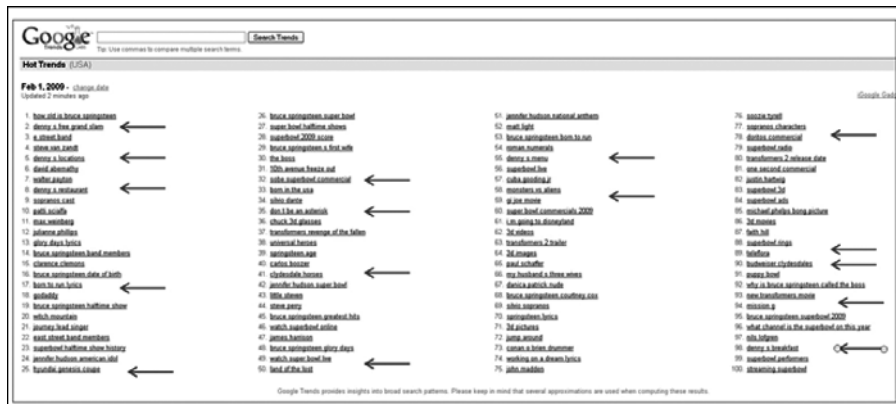


Figure 1.15 Google Search Trends, Super Bowl 2009 Commercial Search Spikes

Source: Google Trends

a short period of time. In the last moments of the Super Bowl, 16 of the top 100 spiking searches were related to Super Bowl commercials.³¹ See Figure 1.15.

When I did those searches myself to build a Super Bowl commercial scorecard, I found that many had results that may as well have been a locked door and a closed sign.

Reverse Advertising: Avoiding the Advertising Death Spiral

Marketers have been bemoaning the rising problems with traditional advertising for years. Marty Neumeier, author of *Zag: The Number One Strategy of High-Performance Brands* and *The Brand Gap*, describes the “advertising death spiral”³² during which consumers filter out advertising because it’s not relevant to their current task. In turn, advertisers get louder, causing consumers to filter more and advertisers to yell even louder. (This filter occurs online,³³ as well as offline.)

Marketer Seth Godin, in his book, *Permission Marketing*, calls the traditional advertising methods of blasting a scattershot message to a large group of people (through such channels as radio and TV ads) who may or may not be interested in your product “interruption advertising.”³⁴ But what’s the alternative?

The answer: let your potential customers tell *you* what they are looking for. This way, you won't interrupt your potential audience from the task they're focusing on in order to get their attention. Instead, what you have to offer *is* crucial to their current task. Search provides results that are relevant to the activity in progress and searchers are filtering out everything else to concentrate on that. You won't have to fight for the viewer's attention and convince them they need a product (and all the while risk the advertising death spiral). Instead, you can focus on convincing this purchase-ready group that they should buy *your* product.

Danny Sullivan, one of the first search engine industry experts, calls the process of acquisition from search "reverse advertising."³⁵ You simply find out what the members of your target audience are looking for, and then meet their needs and wait for them to come to you. Someone typing [fuel efficient cars] into a Google search box is much more likely to be considering purchasing a car than someone who's sitting on the couch watching *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

Reverse Advertising in Action To see reverse advertising in action, consider an auto manufacturer. We'll use Volvo as our example and assume that Volvo is targeting its V70 wagon to moms who don't want to drive a minivan and who are looking for safety, as well as room for two children. Volvo might opt to buy expensive TV ads that showcase these features during time slots that its target demographic is watching (such as during *Oprah*). However, only a percentage of that audience meets the target demographic (men and single women watch the show as well). And within the target demographic, only a small percentage is interested in buying a car.

Buying television ads might be a worthwhile investment, both to drive sales and raise brand awareness, but consider the additional acquisition opportunities available through the reverse advertising of organic search.

Using search data, Volvo compiles a list of what its target audience is interested in during the quest for a new car and what the audience searches for. The company adds this content to its Web site and uses the information in this book to ensure that that content appears for those searches. In this way, it connects with exactly the customers who are looking for the company at the exact moment those customers are

focused on its product. And it ensures brand awareness by having visibility in that critical moment in the buying cycle when its competitor could have dominated.

Rather than just talking at a large group of people, hoping some of them will listen, this approach enables Volvo to be the listener and provide information to the right people at the right time.

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Historically, consumer data and industry trends haven't been that easy to come by. Before launching a new product or feature, companies had to rely on expensive and time-consuming surveys and focus groups, and it often took awhile to gather enough feedback from these sources. Competitive and industry research was slow and expensive. But the abundance of search data has allowed all of that to change dramatically. We can see *exactly* what our customers want at a much larger scale than focus groups could ever provide, and competitive and industry data is just a click or two away. We can get immediate feedback about whether changes are working and see trends of consumer interest rising or falling before we invest in R&D. (We'll dive into the details of how search data can provide insight about our customers, our industry, and our competitors in Chapter 2.)

Search Data as Market Research

Continuing our earlier Volvo example, search data indicates that the audience most likely to buy a Volvo V70 is searching most for "reliable" and "safe." See Figure 1.16.

Keywords	Advertiser Competition ②	▼ Local Search Volume: July ②	Global Monthly Search Volume ②
Keywords related to term(s) entered - sort by relevance ②			
reliable cars		33,100	22,200
reliable car		22,200	18,100
most reliable cars		18,100	12,100
safe cars		14,800	12,100

Figure 1.16 [Reliable] and [Safe] Search Volume

Source: Google Adwords

Keywords	Advertiser Competition ?	Local Search Volume: July ?	Global Monthly Search Volume ?
Keywords related to term(s) entered - sort by relevance ?			
family car		135,000	110,000
car for kids		60,500	49,500
cars for kids		49,500	40,500

Figure 1.17 [Family Car] Search Volume

Source: Google Adwords

This audience also tends to search for [family car]. See Figure 1.17.

Based on this data, our hypothetical Volvo marketing department creates two pages of content in the V70 section of its Web site. One is about the V70's safety and reliability and includes crash test ratings, safety scores, and comparisons to other cars that this demographic may be considering. The other is all about how great the V70 is for kids. It provides back seat dimensions and shows photos of different passenger configurations involving car seats and adult passengers. Then, rather than (or in addition to) broadcasting this content out to everyone, Volvo waits for its key demographic to find it.

Someone typing [most reliable family car] into a search box is much more likely to intend to buy a car in the near future—and a kid-friendly one, at that—than someone watching a television show with the “right demographics.” Volvo connects with a potential consumer who is broadcasting his or her purchasing intent and actively looking for a car just like the Volvo V70. Not only does Volvo connect with the right audience, it can actively compete in an acquisition channel that may have otherwise only included its competition.

Focusing on search doesn't mean that you should abandon your other acquisition efforts. In fact, organic search can work hand-in-hand with other marketing efforts. That commercial during *Oprah* may increase brand awareness, which in turn makes the searcher more likely to click on that Volvo result later, rather than the Toyota listing.

If You're Not Among Consumers' Choices, They Can't Choose You

Consider the case of UK airline BMI, whose primary customers live in the UK and Ireland. A substantial number (including me) live in other

countries and are planning trips to the UK. I was in Seattle, planning a trip to Ireland and looking for a flight from London to Dublin. Since I had flown this BMI route before, it was the most prominent brand in my mind as I started my search. I searched for [Heathrow to Dublin] and didn't see the BMI site. However, Aer Lingus appeared third in the results of my search (see Figure 1.18).

Even though BMI was the brand that I recalled most vividly when I began my search, it wasn't available for consideration when I made my choice, and Aer Lingus was an easy alternative.

But what if I pressed on, determined to include BMI in my consideration set? A search for its brand name, [BMI], doesn't return its site in the results either (although a fairly negative news article about them *does* appear). If potential customers can't even find you in a brand search, you are missing one of the most qualified channels of customer acquisition.

We've seen how search data can provide a wealth of market research and enable you to connect with customers early in their re-search cycle—at the very time that they're looking to buy your product. In the following chapters, we'll learn how to put that information in action.



Figure 1.18 Google Search Results: [Heathrow to Dublin Flight]

Source: Google Search Results

The Level Playing Field of Search

If you're under the impression that only big brands can compete in the game of search, you'll be pleasantly surprised to learn that smaller companies can often have the advantage. This is particularly true when potential customers are conducting non-branded searches—that is, searches for [safe cars] rather than [Volvo]—because they evaluate choices based on the results they see. Large companies aren't always nimble enough to take full advantage of what search has to offer and a smaller company can often beat a larger one in the rankings. Unlike TV advertising and other large-scale marketing campaigns, companies don't require a huge budget to compete in organic search. They simply need the knowledge to build an effective search strategy. In fact, a comScore study found that market segments with smaller consumer bases (for which a scattershot approach such as TV advertising wouldn't be cost effective) can use search for significant lift to a very targeted population.³⁶

For smaller organizations, organic search can provide a low-cost way to build a highly targeted audience. Avvo, a Seattle startup that provides an online legal directory for consumers, found that even though they were a small company, they were able to quickly build a large audience through organic search by adding search engine optimization (SEO) best practices throughout their organization. Conrad Saam, Vice President of Marketing for Avvo notes that not only was integrating an organic search strategy into their business effective, but it complemented and enhanced their focus on quality content and an engaging user experience.

“We launched Avvo in 2007 to fill a content gap on the web—helping consumers make informed, intelligent decisions about their legal situation. In doing that, we adhered to the most fundamental SEO principle—build a great product and fill it with content that people care about. Our primary focus was on providing consumers with something they really needed. SEO was baked into everything we did to ensure that all great content got to the people who were looking for it. We think about the search impact of everything we do—from marketing to product development, to public relations, and

even customer service. In two years, we became the most popular legal directory on the web—more popular than our huge corporate competitors with massive advertising budgets. In the end, it was much more effective to develop a robust, useful, and searchable site than to buy TV spots on CNN.”³⁷

Large brands can also use this knowledge to their advantage, if they can evolve their businesses to integrate search and changing customer behaviors into their product and customer acquisition strategies.

But whether you run a multinational corporation or a Napa Valley bed and breakfast, where do you start? You might be anxious about making the right move if you don’t have a background in online marketing or data analysis. Well, you can relax. This book will give you everything you need to get started creating a business strategy that takes full advantage of everything that search has to offer and builds this knowledge into your organization.

