
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Claire Gauzente is a Professor of Marketing and Organisation, and a Researcher at the University of Angers, France. Her research interests include interactive marketing, relationship marketing, and ethical and privacy issues. Her work has been published in, among others, the *International Journal of Electronic Business*, the *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, the *Journal of Small Business Management*, the *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, the *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management* and the *Academy of Marketing Science Review*. She is the Co-editor of a book dedicated to textmining and serves on the editorial boards of journals such as the *International Journal of Business and Emerging Markets* and the *International Journal of Advanced Decision Sciences*.

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In February 2008, the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) announced that “Internet advertising revenues for 2007 are estimated to grow to \$21.1 billion, a 25 percent increase over the previous revenue record of nearly \$16.9 billion for full year 2006.” Part of the dramatically increasing internet advertising

investments are sponsored links. Parallel to this, 61 billion queries have been made on search engines (including Google, Yahoo and Baidu) by 754.5 million internet users (Comscore, August 2007). Taken together, those two facts explain the irresistible rise of search engine marketing.

While the practice of search engine marketing (*i.e.*, advertising techniques that are used on search engines, such as sponsored links or paid placements and search engine optimisation) and, more generally, search marketing (*i.e.*, advertising techniques that are used during the search process of internet users, which clearly goes beyond search engines), is developing and taking a growing importance in advertising strategies, academic research has, to date, dedicated very few efforts to the understanding of search engine marketing. A certain number of Information Science studies have investigated rank allocation mechanisms; however, the marketing field and consumer behaviour are virtually unexplored.

This special issue is aimed at delivering academic research about consumers' perceptions and the understanding of and the reactions in the face of search engine marketing techniques. It is also aimed at disseminating the conceptual and theoretical considerations about advertisements that are produced in response to consumers' or users' search actions, which is a notable difference compared to traditional unidirectional advertising.

In this issue, Lim adopts a post-modern vision of online search and search engine marketing. According to Lim, in the search economy, brands have less control over brand associations that are determined by consumers' navigation among organic and paid results. Moreover, brands must be found 'in the shortest time' and benefit from being 'the first to be found' on a search engine. Finally, Lim suggests consumers build 'stories' that integrate brands 'to fulfil their search'. The managerial consequences of this position are discussed.

When internet users make queries on search engines, they are probably "somewhere in the buying cycle, researching a product or service to try and satisfy an immediate need or future need" (Lee, 2008). In line with this, Ruiz-Mafé and Sanz-Blas propose that utilitarian motivations (seeking price reductions, assortment variety, convenience and time saving) are the key drivers of search engine use as a prepurchase information tool. On the contrary, hedonic motivations, as well as the internet and the online shopping experience, have a negative impact on such a use. Finally, search engine use as a prepurchase information tool has a positive impact on online purchase intentions.

In order to optimise their presence on search engines, companies and search media firms need to understand the drivers of search engine attractiveness and loyalty. Garnier defines loyalty toward search engines as "the deeply held commitment to repatronize a preferred search engine in the future". She demonstrates that loyalty is created by an affective commitment to a search engine and reinforced by a hedonic attitude toward a search engine. Her results also prove that calculative commitment, as well as the interaction between affective and calculative commitment, have a negative impact.

Jansen and Spink question the importance of paid placement versus organic results in creating traffic. They use 'a transaction log from a Web meta-search engine' to understand user clicks on sponsored versus nonsponsored links. According to their analysis, 84.2% of the click on Search Engine Results Page (SERP) are on nonsponsored links. There are no significant differences among the queries' orientations (navigational, transactional and informational) for either sponsored or nonsponsored links.

Karjaluoto and Leinonen are interested in Finnish advertisers' perception of search engine marketing. According to their qualitative investigation, the use of search engine marketing and its role in a company's marketing strategy depends on the company's size and its presence on the web ('click and mortar' versus 'dot.com'). Although Karjaluoto and Leinonen note that Finnish companies seem to rely more strongly on other forms of advertising, their study implies that search engine advertising (sponsored links or paid placements) seems to be more common than search engine optimisation.

Lastly, nonprofit organisations do not have the financial resources to compete for advertising space on paid results. As such, they are restricted to the use of organic results to create traffic towards their websites. McMahon and Griffy-Brown propose a methodology that is applicable to nonprofits organisations in order to compile and select keywords and optimise website presence on search engines.

Finally, we would like to take the opportunity to thank everybody involved in the creation of this special issue. In addition to the authors whose tremendous efforts made the issue possible, our gratitude also goes to the Editor-in-Chief, Prof. Rebecca Yen, for her ongoing support during the preparation of this special issue. Last but definitely not the least, our selection relied heavily upon the judgements of the reviewers from 15 countries and four continents, who dedicated their time to this special issue and provided valuable feedback.

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Reference

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