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MEDIA PLANNING & BUYING

An ROI-boosting alternative to search marketing



By [Scott Litman](#)
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- mleis** @AdamBroitman OH SNAP. Mazel Tov! 27 minutes ago
- uwehook** RT @GlimmerGuy: Why you can't work at work -- because offices (and managers) are designed to interrupt. <http://bigthink.com/idea...> 59 minutes ago

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ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS:

- Pay close attention to the Last Mile -- the final steps between marketing and consumers
- Articles placed on media websites give marketers more room to tell a story and educate consumers
- A two-click process lets marketers weed out tire-kickers and pay only for the traffic that has a real level of interest

The pressure is on. The recession has forced the majority of us to do more with less. And now it's our job to develop marketing campaigns that deliver results -- clicks, leads, sales -- using far fewer resources than in the past.

The good news? Savvy marketers are leading a major shift in how and where marketing budgets are being spent. They're turning to "The Last Mile," the final step between you (the marketer) and the action you want an audience to take. Funding Last Mile tactics is appealing because they're typically performance-based, highly measurable, and often provide great flexibility for marketers to make changes quickly.

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In practice, this means that the days of the "big idea" are being replaced (or supplemented) with a world of A/B and multivariate testing. That is, instead of coming up with one big campaign idea and hoping that it performs well, marketers today have unbelievable tools to aid them in determining what message, content, imagery, and offer resonates best with the audience.

For many, the first media dollars spent will go to search, and in many cases, the effectiveness of the medium rewards that belief. For most clients, agencies look to understand the maximum viable inventory available through search and then fully leverage marketing dollars against this. But once you have fully committed to search, what then? The keys to Last Mile thinking are to never become complacent and continuously look for improvement. It is remarkable how many businesses establish budget and search terms, then just let it ride. There is a continuous need to measure, monitor, and optimize search.

While paid search is important, it isn't the only pay-for-performance game in town. For business-to-consumer advertisers, it's important to check out other options like article-based marketing, which combines the pay-for-performance aspects of search with the awareness aspects of display media.

While search is great at finding an audience that is looking for a product or service, article-based marketing can be used to generate awareness and, with the right model, drive qualified traffic. Articles placed on media websites use more than just the 70 characters found in paid search ads, giving marketers more room to tell a story, educate consumers, drive awareness, and build the brand.

One example: A fitness company was relying almost exclusively on paid search, but wanted to drive more qualified traffic to its site at the beginning of the process to ultimately improve the ROI of its marketing program. The company incorporated the article-based ad platform [Adfusion](#) into its program primarily to find qualified leads, and then reconnected with the opted-in consumers later to seal the deal. The company offered a free report in exchange for an email address, which was a relatively easy conversion to achieve.

Educational articles about the fitness company were placed on major news websites throughout the course of a year, and the exposure drove quality traffic to the company's site. Over 12 months, the campaign generated a 200-percent ROI and, at its peak, generated 2,500 new opt-ins each day.

Adfusion uses a two-click model, which means visitors self-select based on their interest in the subject matter of an article, and those who click through are highly qualified and motivated. Like search, marketers pay only for results.

In contrast to search, the two-click process allows marketers to weed out tire-kickers at the beginning of the process and pay only for the traffic that has a real level of interest, delivering an ROI that has the potential to exceed that of traditional search PPC. This is because with article-based marketing, if someone who clicked on the headline started reading the article and realized they weren't interested, they'd abandon it before clicking on the second link and thus avoid the cost to the marketer.

In a lot of media, marketers lose the intimacy you can start creating with a potential client. In addition to driving consumers through the conversion funnel, article-based marketing tactics can have a positive impact on branding efforts. Over the course of the fitness company's campaign, more than 5 million consumers read the article. The company also saw a lift in its search results while running the Adfusion articles.

If you're considering a PPC article-based campaign similar to this, here are nine steps to help you maximize your ROI:

- Understand exactly who your potential customer is, and target your messaging and offer to that audience.
- Know your product and develop a message and value proposition that resonates.
- Make sure there is a compelling offer. Give your audience something that they can act on to drive conversion.
- Spend considerable effort developing the right article, headline, and call-to-action. Because it's economical, you have the flexibility to test various combinations.
- Take an information-based approach in order to educate the reader, and then provide an opportunity that's low on the conversion hierarchy to deliver additional information.
- Don't underestimate the importance of landing page optimization. We see too many campaigns where all of the energy is on the media, the creative, or the budget, and the landing page itself is what's really preventing conversion.
- Develop a mechanism to re-connect with the contact once they're in the pipeline in order to convert the initial interest into a sale.
- Develop clear success metrics at the beginning of the campaign, and track the campaign's efficacy based on those metrics.
- Test, test, and continue testing. Every campaign provides data on how to make the next campaign even more effective.

While long-term marketing efforts often feel like a marathon, when all is said and done, it's how you perform in the Last Mile that ultimately makes or breaks the race. Map out a strategic Last Mile course, and implement tools with the highest ROI to win.

Scott Litman is managing partner of [Magnet 360](#) and co-founder of the [Minnesota Cup](#).

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