

DIGITALCHOICE



JOSH FRITH, MANAGING DIRECTOR, @WWW DIGITAL

For me a website needs to have a reason to exist. Many don't and many believe they do when really they don't. Brand Karma, created by [Publicis Mojo chief creative officer] Craig Davis, does. Outside of being "another" social media channel, it focuses our attention to the brands we interact with on a daily basis and what they really mean to us. The good, the bad and the ugly...

The site delivers a simple interface to navigate to the brands themselves clearly listed by category. Then, it offers the user the capacity to easily comment against the brand and see other opinions as well. These opinions – and others from broader sources such as press – form an overall view of the brand depicted visually by a brand "flower" judging the highs and lows of the brand on how it treats its customers, employees, suppliers, investors and the planet.

As a real-time environment for impartial information and opinion it's a refreshing change. We've all seen consumer opinion "packaged" and interpreted as research. However Brand Karma shows you genuine conversation around the brand, delivering real-time sentiment.

When I spoke to Craig to understand what he wanted to achieve from Brand Karma, he said: "Because it had a point, which is to address a problem. As an industry we regard ourselves as creative and problem solvers, we should be trying to solve problems."

He was also keen to state that the site is still beta and therefore learning from user feedback, while six months in development it is still very much evolving from user feedback already received. As you would expect of a site that lives and breathes consumer opinion it too needs to listen. The future holds mobile integration, the capability for users to add their own brands – although with careful moderation to retain the site's integrity – and a refined email alert system.

In the end, what appeals to me is hope that this will make the brands themselves better. Some might shy away from social media or feel scared to "get involved" with the conversation, but with sites like Brand Karma bringing the conversation into the mainstream this will undoubtedly be good for the consumer and likewise the brands... provided they learn from the conversation.

CLIENT Brand Karma
CREATIVE Craig Davis



GET TO KNOW SEM TECHNOLOGY

IN AN OPEN LETTER TO MARKETING DIRECTORS, TOM SKOTIDAS EXPLAINS WHY THEY SHOULD LEARN ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGY AGENCIES USE TO MANAGE SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING.



Dear marketing director, I hope this letter finds you and your search engine marketing program well.

I am writing because I am concerned that you might be missing out on a key part of your SEM performance.

I want to discuss SEM technology – or as it's commonly referred to, "SEM Bid Management Software". This software uses bidding algorithms and rules to automate and help manage a company's SEM program.

For years now, SEM technologies have proven to be outstanding add-ons to agencies' consulting work. Leading platforms in this space include Kenshoo, Marin, Efficient Frontier and SearchIgnite – my agency's own.

But instead of being treated as an add-on tool – a servant to the surgeon – SEM technology often ends up becoming the main feature

of the agency. Unfortunately, SEM technology often replaces the very people you think are working on your account.

And this begs several questions: Does your current agency use SEM technology? Have you even been shown what the technology looks like? If so, what is the contribution of your agency's consulting team, beyond mere software manage-

ment? Have you been invited to contribute – at the strategic level at least – to the bidding and optimisation process?

I've spoken to hundreds of ecommerce and marketing managers over the past three years. I've discovered many are aware of the concept of SEM technology, but are not familiar with their agency's actual technology offering and its impact on their SEM program.

Why is that? One reason is many agencies still refuse to use SEM technology, either due to the high monthly fees, or the lack of awareness of the various technology platforms on offer. Compared to the US or UK markets, the awareness of, and training in, various SEM technologies in Australia is still relatively low.

A second reason is agencies are worried that if they demonstrate their SEM technology to their clients, the latter might try to cut them out of the picture and bring the technology in-house.

A more likely reason relates to white-labelling – agencies using a

can get ugly. The client might dump the incumbent agency and retain another agency that is using the same software. Ouch.

The fourth, and perhaps most likely reason for the low awareness of SEM technology among marketing managers is agency pride. I am referring to the desire to persuade the client it was the agency's people that produced the client's great SEM results, not "the robot".

The truth probably lies in a combination of all four reasons and is the impetus for this letter.

Remember this fact: for a very large number of search marketing agencies – especially those whose staff is populated by entry-level graduates or fluffy account managers – their technology is often their only SEM resource.

So if you are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars, perhaps millions, every year on SEM, ask yourself: How often does your agency approach you with cutting-edge consulting advice? How much time does the agency spend on involving you at the strategic crossroad of consulting and technology? And how much time do you spend reviewing the software that dictates such a large chunk of your quarterly and yearly performance?

Invite your agency to come to your office and take you through a presentation on their SEM technology. Make sure you ask for a real-time demonstration, using the best demo account of them all: yours.

This type of transparency is required if marketing managers are ever going to get the full picture of their search engine marketing performance, and where it actually comes from in most cases.

Tom Skotidas is head of marketing at First Rate.

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DIGITAL BRIEFS

Parenting site

Pacific Magazines title *Practical Parenting* has launched its first website, which will act as the gateway to Yahoo!7's parenting portal, and will include photo sharing through Flickr, as well as forums, advice, competitions and articles. Online advertising will be sold by both Yahoo!7 and Pacific Magazines with Yahoo!7 securing Canon as the launch advertiser with its current Canon Pixma campaign. The site will go head-to-head with Fairfax Media's Essential Baby, which boasts 181,000 members.

Unilever appoints

Unilever has appointed Reprise Media to handle paid search, search engine optimisation and social media, just two months after the agency launched in Australia. The appointment brings search alongside Unilever's strategy, planning and buying function, which is handled by Reprise's sister agency Universal McCann. Reprise won the account from incumbent Outrider, the GroupM agency, following a review. Reprise's client roster also includes Youi, Coles, Cathay Pacific and MasterCard.

Brands not twits

Only 12% of the top 50 Australian brands are listening and responding to their customers' comments on Twitter, according to a social media study by advertising agency BCM. Only 54 of the top 81 brands had Twitter profiles and of these only six brands actively listened and engaged with customer comments, with the majority (72%) using Twitter as a one-way channel to publicise promotions and promote news updates. Telstra was the most responsive company responding to 45% of comments.

BBC.com hires

BBC.com has appointed Scott Hamilton as advertising sales director to lead the Sydney-based advertising sales team. Hamilton joins BBC.com on 12 April from Yahoo!7, where he was senior group sales manager. Before Yahoo!7, Hamilton held senior sales roles at ACP Magazines and PBL Media in both Australia and New Zealand. Following Hamilton's appointment, current regional advertising sales director John Williams will move to a pan-regional focus over the next six months.

Isobar appoints

Isobar, the Aegis Media-owned digital agency, has appointed former @www general manager Glynn Honey as managing director. Honey replaces Marcus Hawkins-Adams, who takes up the role of general manager at iProspect New Zealand, Aegis Media's SEM agency. Prior to @www, Honey was client service director at Hyro.

Head to the web

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