

National Brands Find Local Affiliates Lacking In Search, Mobile Marketing

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Brands desire more effective digital marketing from local affiliates

National brands' investment in local digital marketing is on the rise. According to local-marketing automation company Balihoo's September survey of marketers in North America, 35.9% planned to boost their local digital dollars in 2013; just 6.8% planned to decrease spending.

Most marketers reported already investing in common digital marketing tactics such as Facebook marketing (69.3%), search engine optimization (SEO) and display advertising (50.3%) for purposes of local marketing. The use of local websites (46.4%) and pay-per-click (PPC) advertising (44.3%) was also common.

In their report, Balihoo highlighted the low reported usage of local search registration, a practice of listing one's business in local online search directories such as Yahoo!, Google Places, CitySearch or Yellow Pages websites. Once a common digital tactic for local businesses, it is now used by less than one in four marketers.

This decline could be partially attributed to changing consumer habits when searching for local information online: One need only look at consumers' increased use of mobile search and social media properties such as company pages and ratings and reviews sites to find local information.

In fact, in the coming year, the greatest number of respondents said they planned to implement digital tactics such as local blogs (31.5%), online customer reviews (31%) and mobile marketing (35.4%).

Many of the national brands surveyed (51.3%) used local affiliates such as dealers, resellers, retailers and channel partners to promote or sell their products and services in local markets. Though affiliates are useful for growing brand awareness and driving consumers toward in-store purchases, national brands were less than satisfied with their affiliates' digital marketing efforts: 47.8% of marketers said their local affiliates lacked the desired level of online visibility in their markets, and 30% felt affiliate websites were poorly optimized or outdated.

Specific areas in which brands felt their affiliates lacked expertise most often included search marketing—specifically search engine optimization (SEO) and pay-per-click advertising (PPC)—as well as mobile marketing.

Lack of experience with mobile marketing is understandable considering the newness of this marketing medium. However, poor use of search marketing-related tactics is surprising, given search's tenure in the digital marketing industry.

Though affiliates were rated more effective with their social media marketing, social encounters are less likely to drive consumers to actual websites than PPC and SEO. The ability to drive consumers to local affiliate websites is both important and critical for both in-store and online purchases: Forrester Research found 90% of US online buyers visited two or more nonretailer websites before making a purchase decision.

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