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Commentary

Bing Has Good Bones

Robert Passikoff, Jun 04, 2009 05:00 AM

Anyone who needs another search engine, raise your hands. Come on, let's see them. Don't see many hands in the air? Not surprising.

According to industry data, 65% of people are satisfied with their online search. But as history has proved "satisfaction" is about what happened the *last time*. As we like to remind folks out there, of the 13 million iPhones active by AT&T to date, it's a solid bet that many are held by someone who was once another brand's "satisfied" customer.

Data also show that 42% of consumers' searches require fine-tuning. And importantly, 25% of clicks are the back button. All of which is a pretty clear indication that expectations are not being met. Loyalty, and meeting consumer expectations, is about what happens the *next time*. And meeting expectations is what Microsoft's newly launched "Bing" seems to be all about.

Some of you might think that the quality of search engines has approached parity, but according to the 2009 Customer Loyalty Engagement Index, that's not true.

If you look at the drivers of loyalty and choice in the category, consumers have frighteningly high expectations about -- and equally high levels of discrimination for -- facts versus insights. The expectations regarding the speed of the search have changed too. It's no longer that one searches "Brand Keys" and gets 83 pages in 0.24 seconds. That definition of speed has become table stakes.

Consumers now are looking for information they can *use*. Quickly. It's a nuance, but a critical one regarding consumer values in the category, according to our research in the category which identifies what it is that actually drives a customer to be loyal and engage with a brand.

The drivers that used to be "Number of Sites Catalogued" has morphed into "Don't Overwhelm Me, Please." "Links and Added Value Features" are the least important driver and have the lowest (of very high) expectations, and remain unchanged because consumers always want, well, more.

According to our Customer Loyalty Engagement Index, Google is #1 overall, but when it comes to the first most-important driver, Facts vs. Insights -- which has the highest of high expectations -- the rankings are as follows:

1. MSN
2. AOL
3. Google/Netscape
4. Ask
5. Alta Vista
6. Yahoo

And yes, primacy of product (or in this case, service) is critical, but as "brand" plays an enormous role in loyalty and choice, it's nice to see that "Bing" has, as they say in the trade, "good bones."

Microsoft certainly has the financial wherewithal to support the re-launch -- although, as Ask.com found to its detriment (aka, \$57 million spent in 2007 advertising its "algorithm"), if the brand and

the message don't meet the expectations for the category, it's probably not money well spent, particularly given that Walt Mossberg of *The Wall Street Journal* reported Ask's share of search is down 28%.

Back in 2005, Bill Gates noted: "The magic moment will come when our search is demonstrably better than Google's." Microsoft may again be doing what it has always done best: wowing people with what they really want and need from technology. As Arthur Clark noted, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

From the consumer side of the search process, this may just be the trick the audience has been waiting for.

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