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Don Quixote's Post Humous Virtual Expedition – Filling The Black Holes In Cyber Space

By Angelique van Engelen

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Perhaps the online community today is not so different from Don Quixote chasing after windmills, mistaking them for giants. Excessive web browsing might yield more or less similar symptoms of lunacy as those displayed in Quixote's mad adventures.

If the web were to appoint godfathers, Michael Saavedra Cervantes, Don Quixote's inventor, would be a very appropriate candidate. Already the founding father of European literature, his one and only book's structure is not too dissimilar to the myriad of modern cyber texts.

For starters, you often don't know where Quixote and his squire Sancho end one adventure or where they begin another. Also, Don Quixote offers an abundance of contradiction, imagination beyond what is ordinary, subplots here there and everywhere. And this is not where the comparison ends. There's even interaction between the author and the characters without it seeming to be a violation of the characters or of the story itself.

It's a bit ironic that despite high technology and the 500 years or so that have gone by since the book was published haven't made us invent a clearer concept of interactivity. Today, people interacting with their search engines are having a hard time actually finding efficiently what they are looking for. At the same time, companies run huge financial risk if their websites fail to secure high rankings in search engines. Where's the interactivity that actually connects efficiently all the time?

To stand out from the crowd in cyber space, you need a well–thought out concept. But where to begin? Researching the status quo of internet marketing is a good starting point because the marketing guys are there to bridge the gap between companies and customers.

The main theme of marketing studies at the moment is customer research. A lot more money gets spent on consumer behavior than before the deflation of the dotcom sector. The trend is driven by companies turning to quantitative analysts to find hard and decisive numbers about their actual

consumer markets.

Here goes, the more you can fragment a market, the better one's chances (of controlling it). Nothing new. What is new is the way marketers are devouring the data, dissecting it like biologists would owl droppings. Hopefully, interpretations of the findings are not exactly stomach turning but contributing to better interactive patterns.

So this is where we are – at the beginning of an understanding–based approach of customers. The trend has been termed 'new marketing' or 'behavioral marketing'. Wonder how companies are dealing with this? If you may believe the experts, companies are aiming to gradually reach higher click/sales conversion rates from their marketing campaigns, rather than going for quick sales. Apparently, the focus is more long term and on an increased understanding of what brings buyers to their decision.

Marketers say it's back to the drawing board throughout the bank. The very beginnings of the buying funnel are now researched in greater depth. This is good to keep in mind when you are getting to grips with cyber culture. Search behavior is the focus of a lot of market research, if only because so much information that comes out of this has yet to be capitalised on.

But marketers have a hard nut to crack here. Our search behavior is very difficult to describe in words, let alone pour data on it in models and derive a sensible meaning from it. "Searching has become such an intuitive function, we tend not to give the actual search process much thought", writes Gord Hotchkiss from Enquiro, a US firm that specialises in people's search behaviour.

The company's research into the way people browse for stuff is so simple you would think most of the findings would have been included in assumptions some five years ago. Yet many marketers were reported to be astonished at the findings. It appeared that it is very unlikely that two people perform identical searches even if they are looking for the same thing. Other firms confirm Enquiro's experiment. iProspect conducted a survey that pointed out that search engine click through behavior can only be categorised by a few, very vague, denominators; gender, education, employment status. The study also underlines that frequency of internet use and internet experience are factors here.

It makes the frantic hype around getting the search engine top rankings on a handful of keywords look a bit expensive. Yet, half the competition battle is won by being somewhere first. So companies, even though they don't know exactly where they are, will monopolise all those keywords they deem useful. Huge portions of marketing budgets are spent on the purchase of search keywords.

The result is the commercialisation of search engines. This is going on with rapid speed, and they are increasingly seizing significant portions of companies' marketing budgets.

Pay Per Click–only engines are starting to attract large numbers of listings. The main risk is failure of conversion of the increased traffic into sales.

Not everyone is convinced of the merits of Pay Per Click campaigns. Garrick Saito who is one of many small business owners on the web says his company Respree.com, selling reprints of art works, largely abandoned his campaign. "I still use Pay Per Click today for a very limited purpose, bidding on

terms that I will only pay \$.01 per click on. Of course, the traffic is not nearly as great as if you were to bid \$.25 or \$.50 per click, but then again, the advertising dollars don't add up nearly as fast either", he says.

Saito is one of many small business owners that are looking to optimise free organic listings by changing search keywords. It is his experience here that enables him to do that somewhat effectively and without the help of an outsider. "I am trying to optimise my pages so my products, categories and artists rank well", he says. Saito is not sure if his own company is representative of his branch. "I can see competitors with deeper financial resources spending money (perhaps a lot of money) on PPC campaigns and other placements. However, [...] the larger players are more the exception than the rule," he says.

So the commercialisation of search engines might not necessarily be succeeding in attracting small to medium size businesses, the vast bulk of the internet population. But the free lunch is probably over very soon come what may. Search Engine Trends reports that demand for free listings has recently risen in relation to what the engines offer; demand for free listings is 80% and what is offered is 75%.

Companies wanting reasonable visibility might soon have to fork out. Further evidence to this point is this; 44% of search engines offers paid listings, whereas demand is merely 4%. Pay Per Click advertising is a similar story with 33% of the engines offering this and demand at 4%. This looks meagre, but if you think of it as a new trend, the 4% is quite convincing.

Meanwhile, one wonders what good the newly emerging order is to customers. How are we going to see the forest amid the trees? A recent study into the various kinds of searches people type into their browsers are indicating consumers still are somewhat overwhelmed by what they are offered, despite some five years or so of experience with the medium.

Apparently, the more questions you type into your browser, the more autonomous a user you are, according to the sponsors of one such study, ComScore Media Metrix. So called 'sophisticated' markets include (in descending order) the UK, Canada, the US, France and Germany. But even in these countries, people are not overfacing their browsers with innumerable questions. In the UK, people entered on average 40 queries per month. And this is the highest scoring country of the list.

Perhaps everyone wonders where to start. Or maybe we've taken the web for what it offers with most of our information sources safely bookmarked and ready for use independently from the search engines.

It's another question whether companies are actually ready for intensified relations with their customers. JupiterResearch found that only one out of five companies that have access to statistics on consumer behavior actually also optimise their targeting.

Perhaps Don Quixote was not so totally outlandish, trying to slay windmills – at least he spotted them, went after them and changed his approach rather than gave up when he discovered he was totally mistaken!

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How To Deal With Cyber–Bullying?

By Asma Latif

There have always been bullies, but the Internet has opened a whole new realm - cyber–bullying. Cyber–bullies are children who verbally harass other children online. While this is not officially considered an online crime, it can be detrimental to your child's self esteem. Cyber–bullying can include cursing your child, spreading rumors about them and posing as your child in chat rooms. Sometimes a child may know exactly who their harasser is, but some cyber–bullies hide behind aliases while threatening online children. This might not seem as large a concern as adults who send pornography online to children, but People magazine recently published an article on several children who had been cyber–bullied and ended up taking their own lives because of it.

Parents need to talk openly to their children about online protection against cyber–bullies. First and foremost, encourage your children to talk with you about any problems they may have with online harassment. Encourage them to confide in you or another trusted adult, such as a teacher, if they are being cyber–bullied. The Internet often gives users the illusion of anonymity and therefore, many think they write and say whatever they want without much thought. Teach your child how to block the email addresses in an attempt to stop abusive emails. Because it is easy to get additional email addresses, you may need to block additional addresses obtained by the cyber–bully. Instruct your children to save any messages that are mean or intimidating.

Remind your child that cyber–bullying is just like regular bullying. They are doing it to get a reaction out of them. If you can convince your child to ignore the bully's emails and comments, chances are the bully will get bored and give up. Point out to your child that real online friends won't believe lies the cyber–bully may be spreading.

Finally, if the person bullying your child online goes to his or her school, for your child's safety, you may need to seek the advice of a teacher or principal. Online activity like this can lead to a diminished self esteem, cause learning problems and prolonged exposure to abuse and demeaning treatment.

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and

) helping other parents

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