SEARCH-TO-STORE ATTRIBUTION: SOLVING THE MISSING LINK

BRIDGING THE GAP FROM CLICKS TO BRICKS is not an easy one for search marketers. Even though e-commerce is increasing both in overall sales and as a percentage of total sales, most of the money gets spent in physical stores according to Forrester Vice President, Sucharita Mulpuru (Lubkert).

Search marketers are aware the premise of that statement is very true, but how can we tie value from our paid search efforts to the offline world? The problem doesn't stop there, we also need to recognize the big shift that is happening in search from desktop to mobile. According to Google, more Google searches now take place on mobile devices than on computers in 10 countries including the US and Japan (Dischler).

There are a few ways to go about translating online clicks to in-store purchases and how to attribute value to each click. Getting more accurate search-to-store data is not too far away, as data collection technology is improving day-by-day. Soon we will be able to accurately attribute the exact dollar value from online searches to in-store purchases: what I like to call searches to purchases.

ASSUMPTIONS AND FIRST PARTY DATA

Though far from new, one way to tackle search-to-store attribution is by using assumptions coupled with first party data. Let's say you sell sneakers online, but also have physical stores in the Northeast region of the United States. You can use search-to-store intent keywords like "sneaker stores in NY" or "sneaker stores near me" in your search campaign to attribute revenue by using the following scenario.

The keyword "sneaker stores in NY" drove 500 clicks at a cost of $5 per click to your website last week. 75% of those users completed an action of locating a store on the website (I know this based on the pixel placed on the store locator confirmation page—every time a user enters a zip code or city name). 50% of those users who searched for a store on the website actually ended up visiting a physical store. We arrived at this assumption using the latest Google data stating 50% of local searchers end up visiting a store within the same day of the search (Lawson). Google is defining these "micro-moments" as a series of moments a mobile user (potential customer) experiences down the purchase funnel as the number of "near me" searches continues to grow.

To continue, we will assume 50% of those users ended up buying an item. If you use a solution like StoreTraffic, you can gauge your in-store conversion rate (how many customers purchase via sales receipts divided by the number of store visitors). StoreTraffic uses thermal image cameras to see how many customers come in the store, like an automated traffic counter.

If you don't have StoreTraffic, then you might be able to opt into Google AdWords' latest beta called Store Visits. According to Ginny Marvin, from Search Engine Land, the Store Visits beta helps prove the online-to-offline impact by using the user's proximity to the advertiser's locations via Google Maps and Wi-

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Fi data (Marvin). The business needs to verify its location with Google in order to collect store visit measurements. This data is an estimate since Google has a privacy threshold they need to uphold and is using anonymized, aggregated user data and extrapolating it to the broader population.

Monetizing mobile and users' locations is crucial for capturing search-to-store revenue. According to Target's Kristi Argyilan, "people who have clicked on mobile-search ads spend more in its stores than those who click on desktop search ads. One-third of Target's mobile-search ads led to a user visiting one of its stores during the 2014 holiday season." (Barr)

In order to attribute revenue, you can say my average store order value in NY is $75. So now we have all the data we need to back into any metric such as Cost Per Store Locator, Return on Ad Spend, Cost Per Store Visit, Cost per Order, Conversion rates, etc. I know I threw a lot at you, but the below visual and chart should sum up what happened. I can now optimize my search campaigns to my clients' KPI, whether it's in-store revenue or cost per order. The only problem with using this is that we baked in a lot of assumptions that might not be accurate or might fluctuate with seasonality.

500 CLICKS

375 LOCATORS

187.5 VISITORS

93.75 ORDERS

Total Cost	**$2,500** (500 clicks x $5 per click)
Store Locator Conversions	**375** (500 clicks x 75%)
In Store Visits	**187.5** (375 x 50%)
In Store Orders	**93.75** (187.5 x 50%)
In Store Revenue	**$7,031.25** (93.75 x $75)
Return on Ad Spend (ROAS)	**$2.81** ($7,031.25 / $2,500)
Cost Per Store Locator	**$6.67** ($2,500 / 375)
Cost Per Store Visit	**$13.33** ($2,500 / 187.5)
Cost Per Order	**$26.66** ($2,500 / 93.75)
Conversion rate	**18.75%** (93.75 / 500)

BARCODE TRACKING

When possible, a more accurate way to value search-to-store is through barcode tracking. This is relatively straightforward, but it works like this: you create a dedicated landing page for ONLY your paid search efforts and keywords that are specific to driving in-store traffic (e.g., sneaker stores in NY). The landing page has an offer than can be redeemed for in-store purchase only and can be printed or scanned with a bar code using a smartphone. Using the data from barcode scans, you can track X users who redeemed a coupon in store at an average order value of Y.

The problem with this is not everyone will pull up a barcode on their mobile phone or print one unless an incentive like a coupon is offered.

ADVANCED DATA COLLECTION TECHNOLOGY

Consulting firm Deloitte has recently estimated that more than half of offline or in-store retail sales are influenced by digital (PC + mobile) (Sterling). It's no secret that Google wants to tackle search-to-store. The more an advertiser can attribute value to paid search ads, the more they will spend. Google has been working closely with advanced data collection companies such as DataLogix and Axciom (Liveramp) to track the purchases people make at brick-and-mortar stores after clicking on a Google search ad.

By matching this anonymous consumer information from the data providers to web-based tracking cookies, Google can determine how many products were purchased by people who clicked on a given ad and how much more money those people spent than consumers who did not click on that ad.

So how do these companies try to solve the missing link between online search ads and offline purchases? Data providers identify approximately 30-35% of online cookie pools and are able to match them by tracking sessions from offline sales data via loyalty cards, credit cards, and other POS information (Kaye). Using point of sale and CRM systems from the retailer, data providers are able to match up the connection using the Google click ID. It's not 100% accurate, but it's much better than using blind assumptions. As these technologies grow and get better at collecting 3rd party data, the results will improve.

We have used this method for clients at Elite SEM and it has been a game

changer in how we view certain product categories. What we thought didn't work when just looking at online sales, we found worked very well in-store. In some cases, the ROI would increase between 300-400%!

Another technology on the forefront of advanced data collection is beacons. Beacons are Bluetooth enabled low energy devices that can communicate with mobile phones. Still very much in its infancy, beacons can help tie an online persona to an offline person once they enter the store. The potential of what beacons can do is exciting and one of the solutions that can be used in conjunction with DataLogix and Axciom to obtain accurate data to help bridge the online and offline gap.

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BEST PRACTICES FOR SEARCH-TO-STORE SEM

If you are interested in using one of the methods aforementioned, the first thing you should do is to make sure your accounts are using all of the available tools for location targeting. You definitely want to keep the following points in mind for your search campaigns:

- Break out campaigns by DMA or city and geo-target a radius around your stores using location bid adjustments (e.g., you might want your ads to be higher in the search page for searchers within 1 mile of your store location).
- The ad copy you use in your search text ads should speak to a store visit (e.g., "Shop In Store For 20% Off").
    - *Use location extensions to provide information on how to get to your store.*
    - *The store locator landing page should be user friendly, so a user can easily find a store.*

- Keywords should be geo-modified (e.g., sneaker stores in NY).
- Leverage Local Product Listing Ads (aka Local Inventory Ads) in order to drive users to local stores that carry the searched products. Product Listing Ads have an image, title, price, promotional messages, and your store or business name inside the ad.
  - —*Sears embraced Local Inventory Ads in a recent Google study. The goal was to reach mobile customers to improve brick and mortar sales. Sears saw a 16% higher click-through rate and 122% higher store visits compared with online PLAs (Think with Google).*

To summarize, tracking search-to-store is still in its infancy, but improving quickly. There are ways to get directional data on the traffic coming to your store, but soon this data will be more robust and accurate. Now go turn your searchers into purchasers! ◼

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