



Briefing // Search

Big brands still confused by search

By David Tiltman

Search is becoming more important to brand owners, but that doesn't mean it's particularly well understood, according to a survey of 100 marketers by Reform.

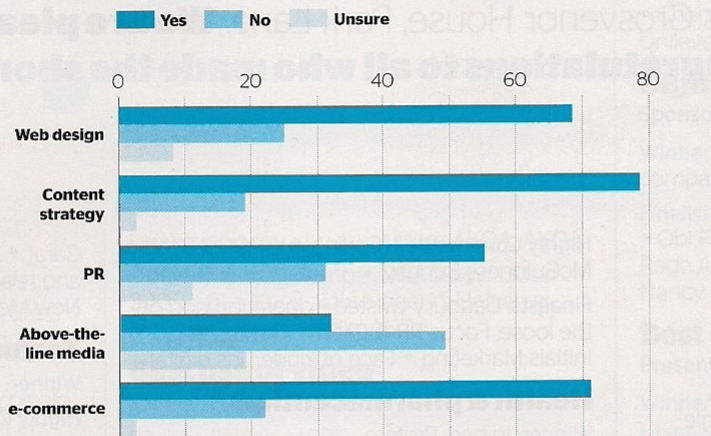
Eighty-three per cent of respondents declared that search had become more important to their business over the past year, while 66 per cent said search was their most important marketing channel. But it's not all good news. The worrying finding for search managers and agencies is that what they do is little understood by their colleagues. Just 31 per cent of marketers said others within their business fully understood the role of search.

"That's particularly true of natural search," says Paul Mead, managing director of VCCP Search. He believes many executives still expect their companies to rise of their own accord as a result of content creation or PR.

The study also raised questions about client-agency relationships. Many brands are considering bringing search-engine optimisation and paid search operations in-house. This trend is still at an early stage – 32 per cent of

Search strategy integration levels

Is your search strategy integrated with the following?



Source: Reform

respondents managed search internally, with another 56 per cent mooting such a move. Overall, 33 per cent said search was too vital to be outsourced.

Amanda Davie, managing director of Reform, believes agencies bear some responsibility for this trend. "There's a whole industry of search operators set up by entrepreneurs. They've grown quickly but they haven't always trained staff in client servicing. Disappointingly, a lot of brands

think they're better off taking search in-house."

There is a sense that many brands are becoming more choosy about what they use agencies for. Danielle West, UK head of search at Bauer Media, is one marketing manager who has moved the search function in-house. She says agencies should be "forward-thinking" in the way they train brands and shift search management into in-house teams. West admits she retains a budget to bring in a consultant for complex search activity, but the day-to-day work is handled internally.

"For an SME just starting to grow, it's not a bad idea to bring in an agency. But this should not be a permanent set-up. You should not be reliant on an agency for monthly reports in the long term," she says.

But as client-agency relationships develop, there may be a few nasty surprises in store. The survey reveals that 47 per cent of brands don't own the search technology or the tracked data; and 52 per cent of these clients either don't own, or don't know whether they own, PPC data. The next step for many, clearly, is working out what they have access to and how they can use it coherently in the future.

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Danielle West, Bauer Media

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