

Facebook & Microsoft Bing

*Why the search wars just got
interesting again*





Overview

Last week Facebook announced a new partnership with Microsoft that will see its search engine Bing provide a customized search experience based on their friend's likes. For example, a Bing search on the film "Toy Story 3" will now include a list of your Facebook friends who "liked" the film thus providing highly-relevant feedback and information from friends on a previously generic search result. The move has implications on a brand's search strategy as well as the broader high-stake battle between Microsoft/Yahoo and Google to gain or retain search market share.

Evaluation

Bing was launched in May 2009 as Microsoft's long-awaited competitive solution to Google that would "level the playing field" and provide a credible alternative to advertisers. Microsoft has had some success in the USA; according to recent Comscore data Microsoft's share of search has gone from 8.5% in Oct 2008 to 11.1% in Oct 2010. However, after some initial traffic spikes, Microsoft hasn't generated long term sustained consumer usage in markets outside the USA. Given these mixed results Microsoft are clearly looking for new killer features that will clearly differentiate Bing from Google and thus compel more consumers to migrate their search activity to their platform. Arguably the Facebook and Bing partnership delivers such a killer feature.

Implications

First, if Bing does gain market share advertisers will have the ability to move advertising spend to Microsoft, who in many markets has lacked sufficient query volume to justify testing to date. In effect, Google will at last have some competition in markets where they have dominated.

Second, Facebook will continue to grow in importance to advertisers and will now more than ever have a broader effect in their digital ecosystem. For example, the number of "Likes" brands have, and the number of people who they have as "friends" or "fans" will now be important measures in relation to search success metrics.

Third, integrated digital strategies will be more important than ever. The ability to coordinate your owned media (including Open Graph "like" buttons in your Web site) with paid media (paid search approaches) with your social/earned footprint will be critical to maximizing positive relevancy in search, which still dominates as most consumers' starting point online,

Fourth, expect new Bing / Facebook features as consumers become more comfortable with and in control of their personal information following them to various touch points across the web, For example, consumers are already requesting Facebook "dislike" buttons, with obvious implications for brands and advertisers.

Finally, watch out for an imminent announcement from Google on their new social plans for search!