

360i: Search Marketers Overrate Organic Listings

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MOST SHOPPERS WHO MAKE ONLINE purchases after visiting search engines either click on paid listings or click on organic results, but don't switch from one to the other, according to a new report by search engine marketing firm 360i.

But the small proportion that click on both paid and organic results before making a purchase tend to start out at paid listings and then refine their search--and convert--on links that appear in the organic listings. This pattern results in marketers giving too much credit to search results in organic listing, according to the report.

"Marketers tend to look at the last click before conversions," says David Berkowitz, the director of strategic planning for 360i. "There is a real process going on, and what this means if you're only crediting the last click rather than just the assist--you may well not be giving proper credit to the clicks that are taking part in the consumer's buying process."

360i found that 8.5 percent of online purchasers who use search engines click on both paid and organic links. But, because some marketers credit only the last click before a purchase, 12.6 percent of conversions credited to organic results actually were preceded by clicks on paid links. A smaller proportion of conversions that were credited to paid links were preceded by clicks on natural results.

The report is a companion to another study, released in May, which found that branded search terms--which consumers usually search for later in the buying cycle--tend to be over-credited by marketers.

The study was conducted using SearchIgnite, which tracks and monitors both paid and organic search engine traffic and conversions, monitoring 500,00 clicks from over 250,000 unique consumers during the second quarter of 2006.