

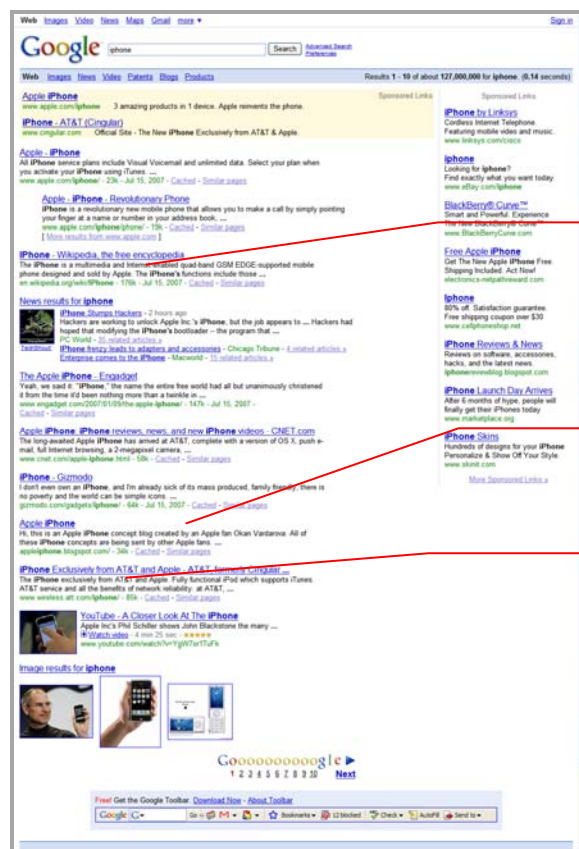
Over the past couple of years, Google has provided vertical search features as an alternative to the main search results. Providing a vertical result allows users the flexibility to search based on the type of results they would like to see. To use a currently newsworthy example, a user searching for “iPhone” may not be looking for the product site, but may actually be interested in seeing a video, image or news result.

As Web 2.0 has gained more traction, search engines recognize the value of vertical search and the greater flexibility it offers users. However, it has not been the greatest user experience, as one was only able to find these results either through clicking on a vertical search link (i.e., News, Video, etc.) from that search engine’s home page, or by going directly into that vertical engine (i.e., images.google.com).

Recognizing this, Google launched the most significant change in their history, called Universal Search. With this upgrade, Google is now indexing all formats of information and using one algorithm to determine relevancy. The result of this is that a user will now see News, Video, Images and Map results integrated into their Organic listings.

To illustrate this, look at the results page for a recent search for “iPhone.” In this result, Google has determined that there are several relevant result formats that used to be buried in their vertical sections.

Google Search for iPhone



Google News Results for iPhone

YouTube Results for iPhone

Google Image Results for iPhone

Why did Google Launch Universal Search?

Google wants to “organize the world’s information” – and Universal Search certainly achieves this. We would agree that ultimately this is good for the user, as it addresses the unmet need of being able to choose from various types of information formats on one page. However, there are several business benefits that should be pointed out. For all of its success, Google has notoriously low page views because their search results take users to a non-Google site. Just a year ago, 80% of Google’s traffic went to their home page with very little traffic being distributed within its vertical sections.

Ranking of Top 20 Google Domains – Week of 5/13/2006		
Rank	Name	Market Share
1	Google	79.98%
2	Google Image Search	9.54%
3	Google Mail	5.51%
4	Google News	1.49%
5	Google Maps	0.82%
6	Froogle	0.46%
7	Google Video Search	0.45%
8	Google Groups	0.43%
9	Google Scholar	0.27%
10	Google Book Search	0.25%

Source: MarketingSherpa 2007

The addition of Universal Search allows Google to keep users within their network for an increased amount of time. Since the launch of Universal Search, Google Maps has seen a 20% increase in traffic and YouTube an 8.26% increase. This increase in time spent on a Google site allows them to serve even more ads. Also, this additional time spent on Google, and the click data, will allow them to further refine their personalization features. If a user consistently clicks on Videos, it stands to reason that Google will adjust that user’s results to display more from the Video vertical.

Implications on Paid Search

Eye Tracking studies already have shown that less users are viewing the Paid Search results that appear on the right side of the page. Thus, there is a higher emphasis on the top listings. Universal Search will now potentially draw more attention away from Paid Search results. This will likely require clients to do an even better job at using stronger copy and targeting so that users will stay focused. We’re hard-pressed to think that Google would launch a feature that could take away a significant amount of clicks from AdWords. One hypothesis is that Google may choose to limit the amount of Universal Results it displays so as to not compete too heavily with AdWords. If Google sees click through rates diminish for high ticket keywords, would they limit what Universal listings show up based on how much revenue is being driven?

Short-term, we do not believe that there is a tremendous opportunity or negative impact for Paid Search clients. In the next few months, Razorfish will be conducting an Eye-Tracking study to better understand the effect of Universal Search.

Implications on Organic Search

Search is a constantly changing landscape. Over the past couple of years, webmasters have become savvier about SEO best practices. Not only is the number of competing sites increasing, but the number of sites optimized has increased as well. Obviously, Universal Search has greater implications for a client’s Organic Search strategy. Clients will now need to look more closely and optimize all of their assets in order to compete. The launch of Universal Search increases the competition because clients are now competing with results that were indexed in separate databases. Simply by adding an Image or

Map listing to the first page, a website that had been appearing in the bottom of the first page will now be moved to the second page.

There is increased competition as sites that ranked in the top 30 may now be pushed down because of a News or Video result. However, there is also tremendous opportunity because a large percentage of clients have not optimized all of their assets.

We are also evaluating if a number one Organic listing is as valuable as it used to be. Much like sponsored listings; a Universal Search result may diminish the click through rate on Organic listings that are actually higher on the page. Over the past couple of years, search engine optimizers have been preaching the need for text-based content that is keyword rich. If we find that search results containing images are generating a higher click through rate, then it will become important to help clients consider presenting their content in multiple formats.

How is Google Pulling in the Various Data Sources?

While much of how Google is managing this is secretive, we have already seen certain patterns when it comes to Universal Search results:

- Google News – Google News uses a different crawler to find News Results. News websites also have the ability to push content to Google through a feed. Ultimately, it is up to Google as to what they display based on the uniqueness of the content. This plays a role in what gets displayed within the Google News piece of Universal Search. Google News also appears for highly searched news items, but what gets displayed is constantly changing because fresh content is constantly being added.
- Google Local – Google Local results are showing up for many location searches. While in most cases they are showing up at the top of the page, we have seen instances where the local search is showing up in the middle of the search results.
- Google Image – Google Images seem to be appearing either at the top or bottom of the search's results. So what does this mean? Where and if photos appear seems to be based upon subject; for example, celebrity searches typically generate image results.
- Google Video – Google Video results seem to be present in Universal Search for keyword searches that have a large amount of video content within Google Video and YouTube. An added feature to video results is the ability to view the video within the search results by clicking on the "watch video" link. Currently, this is only available on Google Video and YouTube results. One would imagine that Google will figure out a way to add this feature for other video results in order to keep the traffic.

Our Approach and Summary

While Universal Search is still in the early stages, we believe there are tremendous opportunities for clients and their brands. Brands that are highly image- or video-driven now have the ability to have a voice in the Organic Search results that they once did not have. Clients with a "brochure" website that have 500 physical locations can now compete without having to revamp their websites or force an online interaction in order to judge success.

For our clients, we are beginning to evaluate their keywords more closely to determine if those keywords are generating a Universal Search result. Second, it's important for us to understand if the site lends itself to Universal Search. Many of our clients have videos and images that can be optimized to have an impact. As we evaluate the feasibility of Universal Search to drive business, we are asking these questions:

- Does the website promote brick and mortar locations?

- Does the site focus its content on news? How is the news on the site updated? Hourly? Daily? Google News only accepts news feeds from sites whose content is focused solely on news.
- Video-worthy items can be anything from your company's commercials to reproduction of your content in video format. Since the Google spider can't view and interpret the content of a video, search results are dependent on a well-written description with relevant keywords.
- Most sites should be able to get their images crawled and indexed on Google Images. As for what keywords the images rank for, it is dependent on the content surrounding the image. Content wrapping with relevant keywords goes a long way towards helping images appear in Google Image search.

If a website is a fit for any of these Universal Search verticals, then it becomes a matter of committing to providing updated content, or going back to optimize all of your assets. Websites that haven't taken advantage of optimizing for vertical search are missing an opportunity to increase visibility within Google. While adding search results from vertical search has increased competition web pages, it has also increased the opportunity to appear in multiple formats.

Google's mission has always been to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful. With Universal Search, we are quickly seeing that information is not just restricted to text-based content. Competition will always exist for rankings. Within the past two years, it has become very easy for anyone to create compelling content that has a viral effect. Now, with Google pushing that content to Organic results, the exposure will be much greater. Companies looking to continue growth in Google's search engine must consider these alternative content formats in order to increase the exposure of their site.

About the Author

Ray Rosti is an Account Director with Razorfish specializing in Search Engine Optimization. Ray provides SEO consulting and strategy for clients to enhance their search engine visibility nationally and internationally, and has worked with clients such as U.S. News and World Report, Disney, Visa and Starwood Hotels. Prior to joining Razorfish, Ray was an Internet Marketing Analyst with Drexel E-Learning, where he managed both paid and organic search programs. Before Drexel, Ray was an Internet Marketing Supervisor with Aon Affinity Insurance Programs managing web development, usability, SEO, web analytics and e-mail marketing for seven websites. Ray began his career in 1997 as an online marketer at VerticalNet Inc., where he later became a Product Marketing Manager for VerticalNet's job search engines. Ray holds a B.B.A. in Marketing and a B.B.A. in Strategic Management from Temple University.

About Razorfish™

Razorfish is one of the largest interactive marketing and technology companies in the world, and also one of the largest buyers of digital advertising space. With a demonstrated commitment to innovation, Razorfish counsels its clients on how to leverage digital channels such as the Web, mobile devices, in-store technologies and other emerging media to engage people, build brand loyalty and provide excellent customer service. The company is increasingly advising marketers on Social Influence Marketing™, its approach for employing social media and social influencers to achieve the marketing and business needs of an organization. Its award-winning client teams provide solutions through their strategic counsel, digital advertising and content creation, media buying, analytics, technology and user experience. Razorfish has offices in markets across the United States, and in Australia, China, France, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom. Clients--many of them served in multiple markets--include Carnival Cruise Lines, Coors Brewing Company, Levi's, McDonald's and Starwood Hotels. Visit <http://www.razorfish.com> for more information.

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