

Introduction

Wikipedia.org, created in 2001, is a Web-based encyclopedia, written and edited collaboratively by online contributors. It has steadily increased its traffic in recent years, and in January 2007, cracked Comscore's list of top 10 visited Web sites, joining established portals like Yahoo!, Google, Microsoft and eBay.

A Hitwise study in October 2006 suggested that search engines were responsible for 69% of Wikipedia traffic, specifically from Google and Yahoo organic listings, which are determined by a search engine's algorithms for finding, sorting and ranking pages based on relevancy. In some cases, Wikipedia articles are returned on the first page of organic listings for branded queries in Google search results. Agency data suggests Wikipedia listings for some advertisers' branded terms receive upwards of 2.5 million impressions monthly, driving an estimated 50,000 monthly visitors to Wikipedia content.

Considering that Wikipedia guidelines firmly prohibit advertising within content, this document explores the role of Avenue A | Razorfish and its clients in monitoring and maintaining Wikipedia content in the context of search engine marketing.

Wikipedia guidelines

The Wikipedia project is broadly defined as a collection of encyclopedic entries (articles), created and edited by both registered and unregistered global users across an infinite range of topics: people, places, historical events, products, cultural phenomenon, etc.

Problem:

Since Wikipedia articles reach a balanced maturity only over time, companies run a short-term risk of losing control of entries about their brands.

Solution:

Companies need to monitor and perhaps help manage Wikipedia entries about their brands.

Benefit:

A vigilant understanding of Wikipedia's brand content guidelines can help companies maintain brand integrity.

Wikipedia.org attests that the collective wisdom of the masses can be a solid foundation for beginning research and that entries are “in general reasonably sound.” Wikipedia.org outlines the characteristics and development of such entries:

On the topic of advertising and marketing, Wikipedia.org specifies the limits to which contributors may create and edit articles on companies, brands and products:

Wikipedia is not a soapbox, a battleground or a vehicle for propaganda and advertising. Therefore, Wikipedia articles are not:

Advertising: Articles about companies and products are acceptable if they are written in an objective and unbiased style. Furthermore, all article topics must be third-party verifiable, so articles about very small "garage" or local companies are not likely to be acceptable. External links to commercial organizations are acceptable if they can serve to identify major corporations associated with a topic (see finishing school for an example).

The ideal Wikipedia article is balanced, neutral and encyclopedic, containing notable, verifiable knowledge. An increasing number of articles reach this standard over time, and many already have. However, this is a process and can take months or years to be achieved, as each user adds their contribution in turn. Some articles contain statements and claims which have not yet been fully cited. Others will later have entire new sections added. Some information will be considered by later contributors to be insufficiently founded, and may be removed or expounded.

Specifically regarding entries on companies or corporations, Wikipedia.org verifies that:

A company, corporation, organization, group, product, or service is notable if it has been the subject of secondary sources. Such sources must be reliable, independent of the subject and independent of each other....If the depth of coverage is not substantial, then multiple independent sources should be cited to establish notability....Once notability is established, primary sources may be used to add content. Ultimately, and most importantly, all content must be attributable.

Information on products and services should generally be included in the article on the company itself, unless the company article is so large that this would make the article unwieldy. [emphasis author's] In that case, the discussion of the company's products and services should be broken out from the company article in summary style....

Wikipedia's guidelines suggest it is both acceptable and even necessary for articles regarding companies and corporations to contain accurate and citable information about products and services, to the extent of which it compliments and supports the content of the entry.

Additional content within Wikipedia

Wikipedia articles also include a discussion tab, which is separate from the encyclopedic entry, but provides opportunity for user opinions and discussion on the topic and the content of the entry. Many discussion pages include conversations and explanations for why particular sections of the entry have been edited or removed or what may need to be added to complete the article. Discussion tabs can also include controversial sections where users discuss more opinion-based content, which can sometimes

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contain negative feedback on a company, product, politic, business practice, etc. Another collaborative information website, Yahoo! Answers, follows a similar conversational model where questions are posed by users and answered by the user base, then voted/ranked by quality and accuracy. Posts in these discussion forums are not edited, as they would be in a Wikipedia article entry; rather, they are supported or refuted by additional user submissions.

Wikipedia and outbound links

Recent press coverage in the tech community has focused on Wikipedia's shift to placing "no-follow" tags on outbound links. Search engines treat no-follow tags differently. Google, for example, claims it will not crawl links with the no-follow tags, and thus will not weigh these links in determining a Web site's natural search ranking. In this light, Wikipedia's move is clearly aimed at discouraging link spammers and the proliferation of poor quality content for the purpose of link building.

While outbound links from Wikipedia may not improve natural search rankings on Google, they may be beneficial in establishing link popularity across other search engines. Additionally, well placed Wikipedia links will still drive quality traffic to a company's Web sites. For both these reasons, maintaining relevant outbound Wikipedia links is recommended.

Industry perspective

Several perspectives on marketing within online social and community networks like Wikipedia have surfaced as these sites increase in visits and registered users. Some see the collaborative nature as an opportunity to facilitate dialogue about products and brands with consumers while providing accurate and relevant content to users. However, others believe that the integrity and accuracy of Wikipedia content is compromised if companies seek to influence or benefit from overt marketing messages in encyclopedic entries. As the scope of Wikipedia content and the volume of visitors to

the site continue to grow, increased information about companies and brand names will materially impact the online brand identity, especially with regard to consumer products and services.

Avenue A | Razorfish's approach

Avenue A | Razorfish has not yet undertaken contributions or maintenance of Wikipedia articles for any of its interactive clients. However, the agency both monitors and alerts clients to the presence of their Wikipedia entries and search results listings from both real-time observation and as a result of analytic inquiries due to unusual traffic or referral-site patterns.

Recommendations

Avenue A | Razorfish clients can undertake several steps to increase awareness and possibly engage in management of their Wikipedia entries. Avenue A | Razorfish recommends the following:

- Identify how Wikipedia listings rank and display for queries on brand terms in the major search engines; develop a ranking report for Wikipedia entries across high-consideration, high-volume search terms.
- Evaluate referring site traffic to determine the volume of traffic originating from Wikipedia.org.
- Create Wikipedia-qualified individuals—contributors who regularly post and verify material across the encyclopedia and become trusted members of the community; these individuals are typically granted more leniency on posted content.
- Evaluate Wikipedia entries for accuracy and content; edit or flag inaccuracies within the entries.
- Update an entry regularly to provide up-to-date and ascertainable information on products and segments of the business as well as general encyclopedic information about the company or brand.
- Participate in dialogue about the company and products through discussion tabs.
- Provide outgoing links within the entry that support and provide users with additional information about the organization (for example, business profiles).

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Avenue A | Razorfish's search marketing team can work with clients to execute these recommendations.

Conclusion

The increasing prevalence of Wikipedia entries in the search results pages requires that marketers take notice of the online identities created through the use of collaborative information sources like Wikipedia. Wikipedia itself indicates that articles on corporations and services are useful and necessary when written and edited with unbiased and accurate information. Companies who seek to maintain strong and specific brand identities should be aware of the content being viewed and be prepared to include Wikipedia as a consideration of how brand identity is created and communicated online.

*** This POV was written by Karin Blake, with contributions from Richard Deede, Joshua Palau, Chris Boggs, Sean Stahlman, Matt Greitzer, Todd Thiessen and Amy Vickers.*

For More Information

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Further Reading

Further reading on Wikipedia, marketing in Wikipedia, and industry perspectives can be found at the links below:

Wikipedia: About – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About>

Wikipedia: What Wikipedia is not

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:What_Wikipedia_is_not

Wikipedia: Notability (organizations and companies)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Notability_%28organizations_and_companies%29

The Wisdom of Wikipedia – Marketing Profs Daily Fix Blog – January 3, 2007

http://www.mpdailyfix.com/2007/01/the_wisdom_of_wikipedia.html

Marketing and Wikipedia are Antonyms – March 6, 2007

http://www.micropersuasion.com/2006/03/marketing_and_w.html

Using Wikipedia for Marketing – March 3, 2007

http://rohithbargava.typepad.com/weblog/2006/03/using_wikipedia.html

On Marketing and Social Change – March 7, 2007

http://socialmarketing.blogs.com/r_craig_lefebvres_social/2006/03/pr_and_blogging.html

About Avenue A | Razorfish

Avenue A | Razorfish is one of the largest interactive marketing and technology services agencies in the world. The company helps industry leaders such as Kraft, Dell, The New York Times, and Starwood Hotels use digital channels to acquire and service customers. Avenue A | Razorfish's full suite of digital offerings includes online advertising, Web site design and development, email and search engine marketing, emerging media strategies, and enterprise portal development. Its award-winning client teams have a deep understanding of customer needs and provide solutions through distinct business disciplines that include: analytics, strategy, technology, media, creative, and user experience. An operating unit of Seattle-based aQuantive, Inc. (NASDAQ: AQNT), Avenue A | Razorfish has offices in major markets across the United States, and global operations in Australia, China, France, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom. For more information visit: avenuea-razorfish.com.

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