

MSN PPC Advertising Network Finally Debuts

Contributed by Joel Walsh
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MSN PPC Advertising Long-Awaited Debut Announced

{bot_wrgoogle} You probably already know that there are really only two major players in the world of PPC advertising: Overture and Google Adwords. By the end of 2005, there will likely be a third: Microsoft's MSN Search.

Microsoft recently announced that it is launching its new MSN PPC advertising engine in Singapore and France by mid-late 2005. Smart marketers are probably already planning how they might justify advertising their products or services in Singapore to get a taste of the new service. The service's introduction into Canada, the UK, and the US may very well come before the end of 2005.

The new MSN advertising program has been long awaited. MSN is Microsoft's leading website property, and perhaps the web's most visited "portal" (website with both search and content such as news) after Yahoo! MSN's search engine accounts for one in five web searches, putting it in third place behind Google and Yahoo!

Search engine advertising mostly a two-player game

Currently, MSN shows advertising that comes from Overture, the web's largest online advertising network in terms of revenue. Overture was bought by Yahoo! a number of years ago. Since Yahoo! is the direct competitor of MSN in every way, plenty of people have been wondering why MSN didn't take its advertising program in-house long ago. It seems especially strange considering that even Lycos, whose search engine now accounts for a small fraction of total web searches, has its own advertising network.

In many minds, the fact that Microsoft would go to Overture only demonstrated how excellent an online advertising program Overture was, and just how hard it really is to set one up. Before going to Overture, MSN was getting advertising from LookSmart, an advertising network that does not own any websites that compete with Microsoft properties in any big way. Even before it had lost its largest advertising outlet, LookSmart was widely seen as a subpar second-tier engine, in a category with FindWhat or even Kanoodle. The fact that LookSmart had seemingly squandered a chance to make inroads into an online advertising market dominated by two big players cast a lot of doubt on whether there would ever be a serious challenger to Google Adwords and Overture.

What Microsoft's new advertising network means for the future

Will the new MSN advertising network succeed where so many have failed? Or will it become a bloated, relatively uncompetitive product only supported by Microsoft's vast bulk? (Not that Bill Gates has ever fathered such a bastard child.)

There's a very good reason to believe that the new advertising program bears the seeds of its own destruction, thanks to a typically Microsoftian act of overreaching and obliviousness to public opinion. That bad seed is the same bad seed that has spoiled the fruits of so many internet marketing labors: behavioral and demographic targeting, which always seems to disagree with some people's stomachs, no matter how delicately it is arranged in the bowl. (Editor's note: too extended a metaphor? Well, website copywriters have egos, too, you know, just like the rest of the web dev. community. At least you didn't have to sit through five minutes of flash animation to read this.)

Next: MSN PPC Advertising to Incorporate Demographic & Behavioral Targeting: Killer App. or Achilles Heel?

Microsoft's press release announcing the new MSN advertising program is also worth reading if you're that into this.

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