Google's Vince Update - Big Brands Benefit

Wed, Jul 8, 2009 | Posted by Liz Ayers

Note - all rankings were taken at the time of writing and will vary between users. This is an analysis of GoogleWeb UK?s SERPS, which are accessible to the general public.

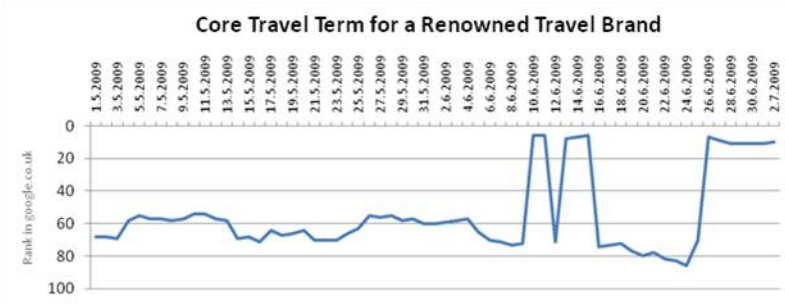
The tide has come in for brands with the roll out of Google?s Vince update in the UK, with changes appearing over the past few weeks.

The Vince update is otherwise known as the ?Brand Update?, as with it Google has put more weight on a site?s brand strength when deciding its position in the results pages.

Position shuffling in results was initially noticed about 3 weeks ago; since then, improvements have been seen across all verticals for the majority of iCrossing?s blue chip client base.

The Vince update was initially seen in the US in February, when iCrossing US reported impressive increases in Google.com positions for their clients.

The graph below shows how the new positions has helped to increase our US client?s traffic. (Please note the US date format)



Seeing the great uplift in rankings and traffic meant that here in the UK we were naturally anticipating good results for local and international brands when the Vince update was eventually rolled out here.

However, when our UK team first noticed changes it was not clear that it was indeed Vince. Unusual sites started to appear in the top 10 landscape of various verticals. In the c*ar insurance* SERP we saw the appearance of Elephant and More Th>n. In *flights;* British Airways, and in hotels; Marriott - none of which were usually visible on the first page.

The new positions were unstable for a week or so; sites saw massive increases in rankings one day, but returned to former positions the next day. Rotation of different brands in the top 10 saw Esure, Sheila?s Wheels and Diamond appearing and then disappearing for *car insurance*.

The frequency of these rotations has decreased over the past week, so the positions we see now may be stabilising, and we expect to see them settle close to today?s results.

The graph below shows the significant ranking fluctuations of a major brand for its core term in the travel

sector, from the beginning of May through to today. The initial fluctuations can be seen in early to mid June where Google?s update testing may have occurred prior to the full roll out. Stabilisation of higher positions occurred during the last few days in June.

A review of core search sectors shows the expected trend of brand promotion as a result of Vince.

Flights (Travel Sector)

For the term *flights*,travelsupermarket.com now holds position #1 closely followed by major brands Ryan Air and Monarch, all having experienced uplift from the update. The sites which have dropped out of the top 10 are aggregator and comparison site such as flightsdirect.com, lastminute.com, expedia.co.uk, flightline.co.uk, and flights.com. Replacing them are airline brand sites: Easyjet, Monarch, Flybe, Ryanair, and British Airways. However, no airline brand yet holds position #1, perhaps showing the limits of the brand upweighting.

Hotels (Travel Sector)

Information sites about hotels previously featured highly in the top 10 query *hotel*, including pages from news.bbc.co.uk and en.wikipedia.org. The update has removed these, as well as travelsupermarket.com, all-hotels.com, direct-hotels.co.uk, and generalhotel.org. Replacing them are brand sites travelodge.co.uk, premierinn.com, hilton.co.uk, ibishotel.com, ichotelsgroup.com, and starwoodhotels.com.

Loans (Finance Sector)

Less movement has been seen for query *loans*. What there is, however, bears out the same trend, with allaboutloans.co.uk and thisismoney.co.uk dropping out in favour of sainsburybank.co.uk and northernrock.co.uk. It is likely that the recent media exploits of Northern Rock has heightened its brand awareness, gaining them mentions on social media sites, and fluctuating its brand authority appearance to Google.

Car Insurance (Finance Sector)

The previously untouchable top #4 positions for *car insurance* were also shaken up by the arrival of Direct Line at position #1 (now settled at position #3). Aviva (previously Norwich Union) was at position #3 pre-Vince and is now outside of the top 10! It seems likely that their rebrand to become Aviva is behind this drop, with the inflation of brand value in the algorithm meaning that less recognised names are now a

significant ranking handicap.

Dresses (Retail Sector)

This sector oddly bucks the trend. Looking at today?s SERP for *dresses* at position #7, we can see a Wikipedia listing which was not present prior to the update, in defiance of the usual pattern. Brand site Coast-stores.com was promoted to the first page during the update, but topshop.com (previously at position #8) has suffered a surprising demotion to #15.

International Roll Out - beyond the UK & US

The roll out doesn?t appear to have occurred internationally. Those of our clients who maintain both UK and European sites have not seen the same improvements in the international SERPs. These sites can look forward to benefit further when the update is rolled out worldwide.

So what about lesser known brands?

Where big brands are reaping the benefits of this update, less known brands are suffering. The message from the update is obvious, backing up Google?s core messages to focus on content, rather than SEO tricks, to gain higher rankings. The more useful content you can provide on your site, the more use it is to visitors, and therefore the more it will be talked about elsewhere and referenced; enabling it to become a known brand. Lesser known brands need to concentrate on brand awareness, putting emphasis on using social media to push themselves as recognised specialists in their sector, and understanding their position and standing in that sector?s network. Such brands should create good content and promote themselves with creative and interesting marketing ideas to create uplift in brand awareness. Get people talking about your site; post-Vince, there is even more chance that this will feed your rankings.

Copyright (C) Connect - Digital Marketing Expertise from iCrossing