

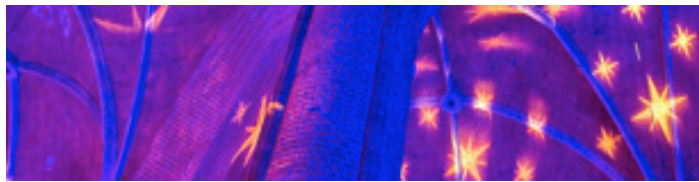


Search Engine Visibility
An Edelman Digital Position Paper

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Edelman Digital
A Full Service Digital Engagement Agency

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Introduction

Search engines have been a critical part of the Internet ecosystem since its earliest days. In July 2008, Google alone registered 7.23 billion searches. Each of these is a quest for reliable information—something that the searcher wants to know now and implicitly trusts when it pops up on the first page. Therefore, you could argue that search engines—rather than official company or brand Web sites—are the new homepages.

Not surprisingly, as Google, Yahoo! and Microsoft have grown in popularity over the last 10 years, companies have developed aggressive search engine visibility strategies to make sure they are noticed by consumers in the right places and at the right times.

Today, there are two primary visibility tactics:

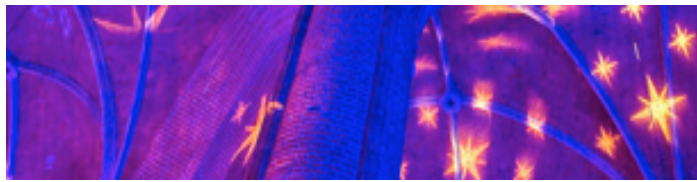
- **Paid Search** - More widely known as search engine marketing (SEM), Paid Search is an advertising paradigm in which marketers purchase small text ads that are triggered when certain keywords are searched (for example, an ad for Toyota Prius might show up on searches for "hybrid cars")
- **Optimized Search** - Often referred to as SEO, Optimized Search is a technical process in which webmasters make adjustments to their sites in an effort to rank well organically on high-value keywords (e.g. Toyota.com becomes a top result for "hybrid cars")

While some PR professionals participate in developing such programs, other individuals handle most search initiatives. Paid Search campaigns are managed by marketers who control search ad budgets. For Optimized Search programs, it's typically technologists who are in charge.

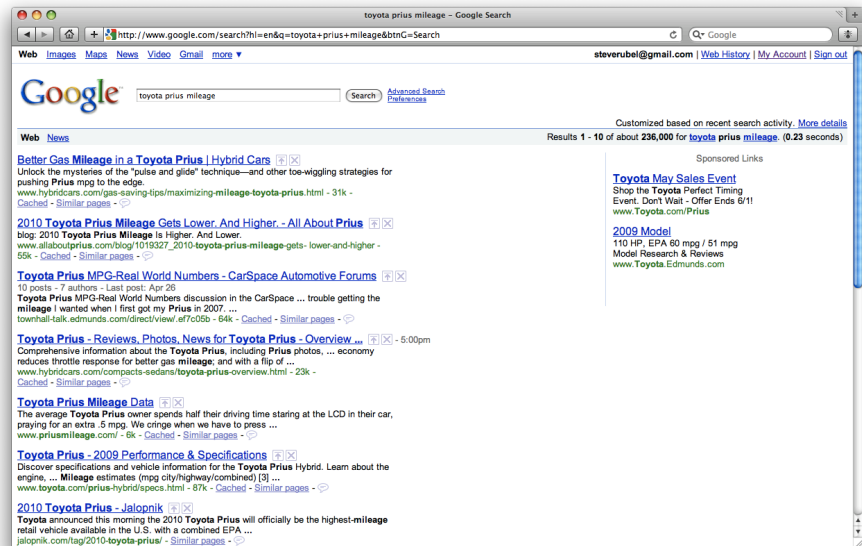
Today, however, there are two new search engine visibility disciplines emerging. Both sit squarely in the public relations professional's domain:

- **Reputational Search** - The premise and promise of Reputational Search is that any company, NGO or brand can apply a search mindset to tried-and-true PR tactics and, in the process, influence the search results around certain keywords.
- **Social Search** - With Google and competitors increasingly prioritizing social content from Flickr, blogs, Twitter and others in result pages, it is imperative that brands build out "embassies" in all relevant networks – places where employees work to serve the interests of the community, as well as their company. This will ensure optimum visibility, and help them prepare for the next great revolution: the convergence of search and social networking.

“Search engines – rather than official company or brand web sites – are the new homepages.”



The Search Engine Visibility Opportunity



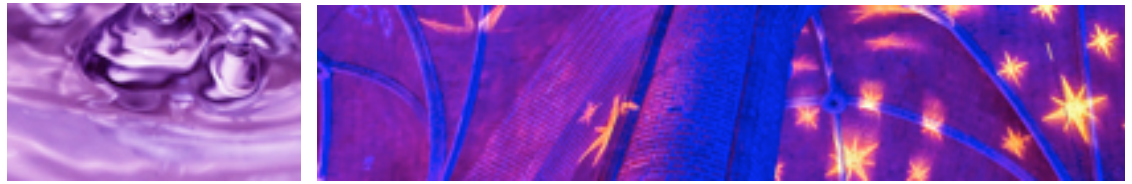
“Search engines have a global active reach of 85.9 percent of all users.”

Figure 1 - A typical set of Google results includes a mix of content that can be linked back to Paid, Optimized, Reputational or Social Search programs.

Search, without question, is the most dominant online activity. There is no greater influence on purchasing decisions and corporate and brand reputation than the links that Google, Yahoo, Windows Live and others list on their first page of search results.

Consider the following:

- According to Nielsen’s March 2009 "Global Faces and Networked Places" report, search engines have a global active reach of 85.9 percent of all users (up from 84 percent in December 2007)
- The average American visited 111 domains and 2,554 pages in March 2009, according to Nielsen Online. Given the reach of search, it’s highly likely that many of those visits (especially to brand sites) came via search rather than a direct bookmark
- Eighty-nine percent of U.S. online adults use search engines, according to the Pew Internet. Generation X (93 percent reach) and Generation Y (90 percent) are the top two heaviest users
- In the U.S., “search” and “Google” are essentially synonymous. Google led the search market in February 2009 with 63.3 percent of the searches conducted, according to comScore. Despite their best efforts, Yahoo! (20.6 percent), Microsoft (8.2 percent), Ask.com (4.1 percent) and AOL (3.9 percent) trailed by a wide margin.



- In Europe, 87 percent of all online activities begin with searches. (TGI Europa July 2008)

For many years, SEM and SEO were the only tools needed to build a visible presence in search engines. Recently, however, things have changed.

Since the mid-1990s, companies and organizations have focused exclusively on driving traffic to their Web sites. Now, many are recognizing that their properties are no longer the center of gravity. Instead, they are beginning to understand that it's equally important to monitor and elevate the credible content about them on other sites—including media and social content.

Thus, while SEM and SEO continue to be strong disciplines, what's different now is that people are starting to see that search engine visibility also happens elsewhere. Success, while not guaranteed, can be influenced with a hub-and-spoke strategy that focuses on quality content and networked relationships.

Fresh Quality Content

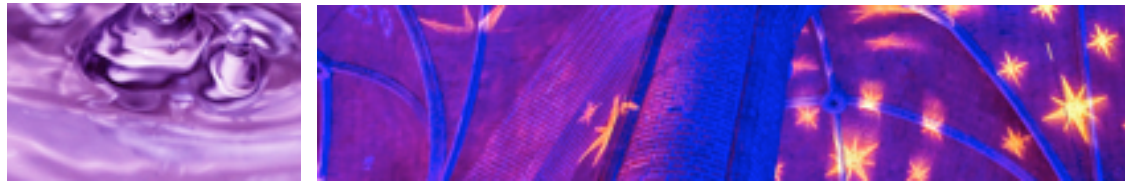
Google crawls sites that frequently produce quality content more rapidly than they do other, more static properties. The company scours these sites to keep its index fresh by unearthing a trove of new links. Sites that don't publish often are not indexed as rapidly.

What's more, Google and other search engine algorithms are extremely democratic. While none of the search engines detail methodologies, at any given time the mix of search results almost always includes sites operated by brands, media companies and ordinary individuals.

The democratic and yet secretive nature of search algorithms, which also sometimes include videos and images in the web result pages, is prompting some media companies to cry foul.

In March 2009, *Advertising Age* reported that several major news organizations had asked Google to give it favorable positioning. According to the report, *The New York Times* noted that a search for Gaza, which had been in the news a lot recently, "returned links to outdated BBC stories, Wikipedia entries and even an anti-Semitic YouTube video well before coverage by the *Times*, which had an experienced reporter covering the war from inside Gaza itself."

While some may view this as "sour grapes," it underscores the democratic opportunity: any content creator can see his/her page rank well on search engines, regardless of prestige. However, a site first has to earn Google's trust.



Networked Relationships

If quality content is the king of search engine visibility, then the link, which is increasingly earned through social relationships, is the queen.

Linking remains a key cog in the search engine ecosystem. Google's PageRank system, for example, assigns every page on the Internet a ranking on a scale of one to 10. The higher the rank, the more that page can affect search results. Links drive this ecosystem. If a specific page frequently receives lots of links from other pages that have a high PageRank, some of that "Google Juice" is passed on.

Links have long been a focus of search engine professionals. Many SEO specialists still try to place as many pointers to their site as they can – though some do so in less than scrupulous ways by setting up dummy sites called "link farms."

These days, however, search engines are de-emphasizing such static links. Instead they look for links that are based on relationships. Put another way, they look for socially connected content.

For example, if a corporate blog post generates a lot of genuine discussion on Twitter and then, later, a CNN.com link, it's more likely to see that post rank highly on related searches.

With many links today flowing into and out of social network hubs, there are great rewards to those who build "digital embassies" and connect them to their web sites. Companies need to continue to use Paid and Optimized search to drive traffic to the mother ship. However, these "embassies" inside social networks are becoming essential for building relationships and therefore credibility and links.

What's more, as search and social networking converge, more queries will come from inside communities. Millions, for example, now turn to Twitter Search (<http://search.twitter.com>) rather than Google News when news breaks. The feature became so popular that it is now integrated in the main Twitter.com interface.



“Social Search could end up being Google's Achilles heel.”

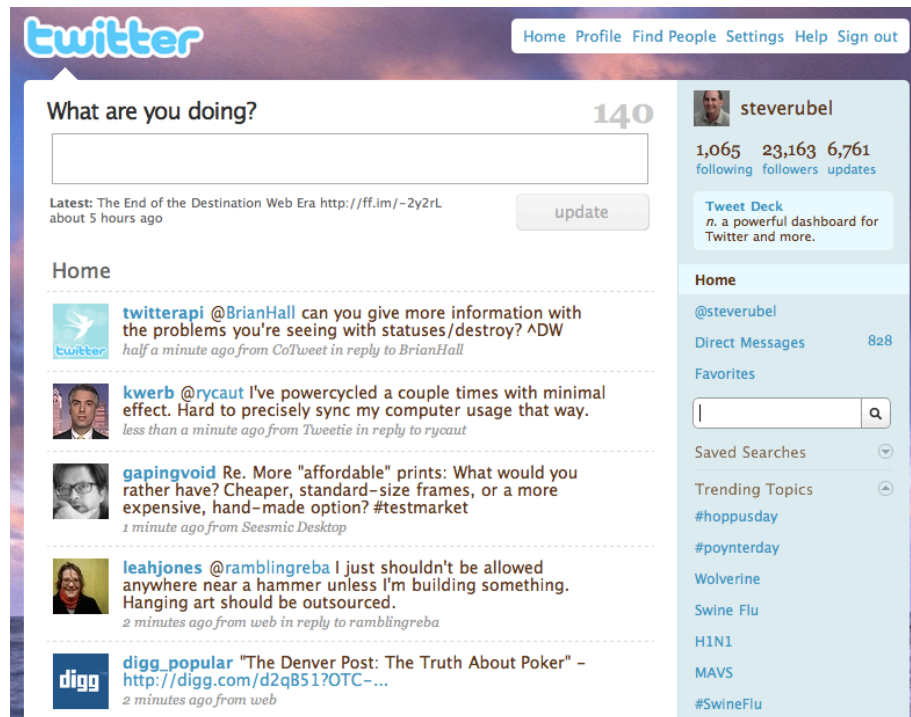


Figure 2 - Search and trending topics are now part of the Twitter user interface.

Social Search could end up being Google's Achilles heel. Institutions that set up credible "embassies" inside social networks, participate actively, and earn links will be more visible than those who make their Web sites the sole focus of their online presence.

Reputational Search in Action

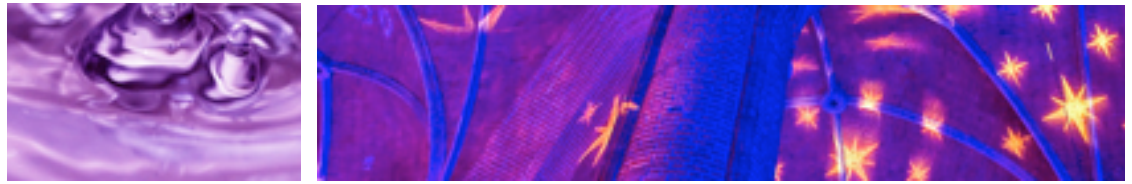
Reputational Search is the blending of basic SEO tactics with classic PR approaches. The objective is to not only to generate media and/or social media coverage, but also to do so in a way that can influence search results.

Specific Reputational Search tactics are not new to PR professionals. They include press releases, corporate newsrooms, media relations and blogger engagement.

Further, all the same rules apply: press releases still need to deliver the news. Media pitches need to be tailored a reporter or blogger's beat.

What is different is the messaging and the prioritization of targets.

Today PR pros carefully craft messages and infuse them into press releases with the goal of influencing media coverage.



Unfortunately, the majority of these messages are written for readers, and not necessarily searchers. That is, we tend to use different words and phrases when writing than the ones we intuitively use when searching. For example, someone who has a headache might search for "headache remedies" and not necessarily "aspirin." Messages today need to adapt.

In addition, media outlet targets are usually prioritized based on reach and/or relevance. In the future, search impact potential should also be factored in equally. Some sites can have an extraordinary impact on the search engine result pages (SERPs) and they're not always the usual suspects. For example, some blogs have a higher Google PageRank than media sites.

Reputational Search Building Blocks

There are three basic components to a Reputational Search program: research/planning, content development and measurement. These mirror a typical SEO program.

Research is a fundamental part of every Reputational Search program. The goal is to find the natural language keywords that people use when searching and to size up the competition for those words in the SERPs.

As a rule of thumb, generic words and phrases, such as "hybrid car" or "coffee," and brand name keywords, such as "Prius" or "Starbucks," will face a lot of competition in the SERPS from brand, media and other institutional sites. This makes success less likely.

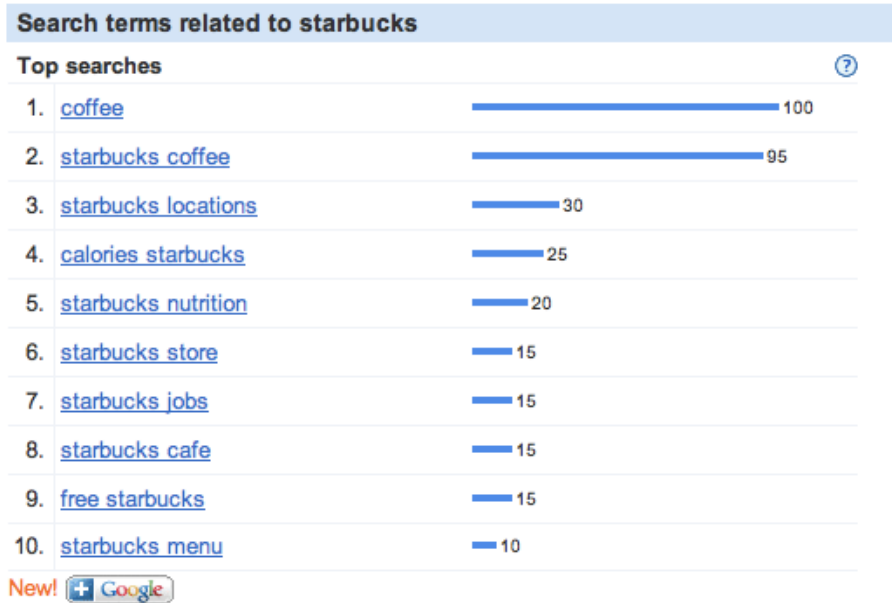


Figure 3 - Google Insights provides rich data into how people search.



A smart Reputational Search program is more likely to use a set of very targeted keywords: for example, phrases such as "Prius alternatives" or "Starbucks recipes." Many of these results will only have low-ranked sites in the SERPs, making it more likely that you can reshape the mix with a solid media and/or blog result that utilizes these keywords.

Using free tools such as Wordtracker, Google Insights, the Google Adwords Keyword tool, Microsoft's AdCenter Labs, and Yahoo Site Explorer, a trained PR professional can develop a deep understanding of how people search. Some of these sites can tell you the number of searches per month on a given phrase, and the results are often surprising. (Edelman Digital conducts such visibility analyses all the time using an array of paid tools.)

A second source of keyword insights is conversational research - chatter on blogs, social networks, micro blogs, video sharing sites and more. Using tools like Twitter Search, Technorati, and Facebook Lexicon, a PR professional can get a sense for the natural words and phrases people use when talking about a particular topic. Media research and analysis can also provide a more robust picture.

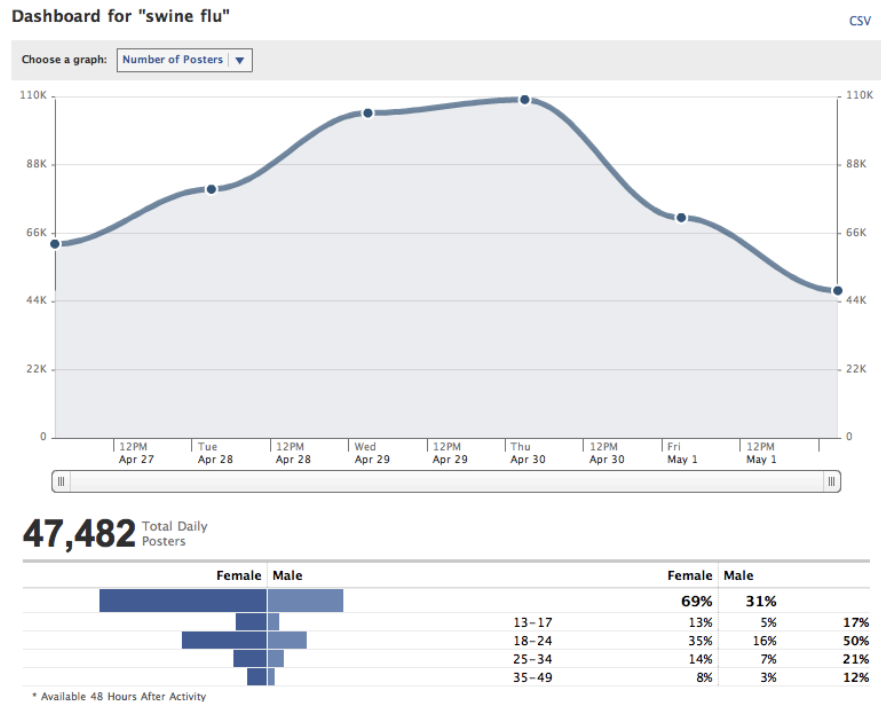
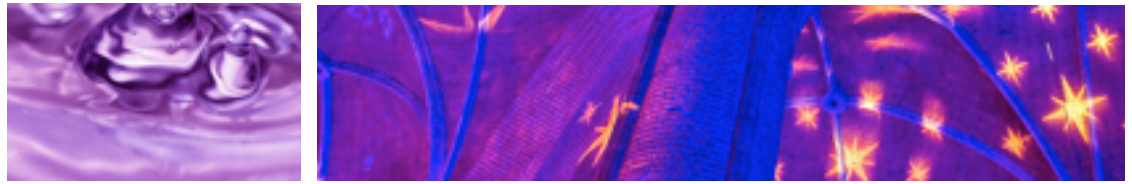


Figure 4 - Facebook Lexicon provides a snapshot of how people discuss key issues on the social networking site.

The end game here is to compile a list of keyword phrases (the more the better) that: a) accurately reflect how people talk and search, b) don't have a tremendous amount of competition and c) generate enough search volume to be worth your while.



As part of this process, be sure to capture snapshots of the different search result pages. The first page is all you need to benchmark success. Googlers rarely go deeper—in an eye-tracking report by Enquiro, 72.4 percent of searchers said they found what they were looking for on the first page.

Once you have a robust list of keywords, integrate them into media pitches, press releases and other materials. The frequency of keywords isn't important; instead, focus on position.

Feature keywords up front in press release headlines so that they become the page's "title tag." In addition, you can build an entire media outreach campaign around keywords so that they become integrated into the editorial coverage.

As a general rule of thumb, aim for the "magic middle" - keywords that are searched but aren't too generic and therefore don't face a lot of competition. And use them often in a meaningful ways, like headlines.

Finally, measurement is essential. Most people in PR are not using Reputational Search data to measure the impact of a campaign. In addition to tracking the results that end up in the SERPs, using Google Insights and other tools can help you demonstrate an increase in searches around a given phrase or group of phrases.

With some basic training and expert counsel, any organization can be well on its way toward making its existing PR campaigns work that much harder.

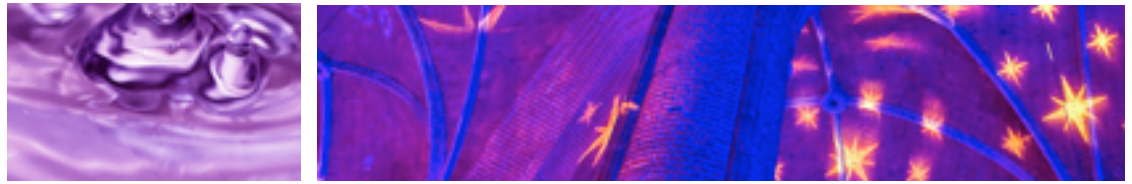
Case Study: Journalism Evolves at Hearst

The public relations industry, in some ways, is behind the curve on search. Consider, for example, how Hearst publications have adapted.

In the past, readers visited the *House Beautiful* or *Good Housekeeping* Web sites directly via a bookmark. Today, it's different. Millions are stumbling in and out of the site using an eclectic mix of search keywords.

Hearst responded by adapting the way it writes and edits stories to help ensnare Googlers.

The first step was to equip its entire editorial staff with Wordtracker - a keyword tool that suggests words that are more commonly used by searchers. Then, Hearst trained its writers and editors to favor words that have very literal meanings, rather than words that apply to many different contexts. For example, the word "style," long used in Hearst's print publications, applies to far more subjects than the word "fashion," which typically only applies to clothing and accessories. Thus, "fashion" would be expected to capture more searchers."



In an interview with the Wordtracker blog, Dan Roberts, Senior SEO Analyst for Hearst Publications' Digital Media, says the company's online traffic has grown 150 percent since it started using Wordtracker.

Social Search in Action

Last year, two-thirds of the global Internet population visited social networking or blogging sites, accounting for almost 10 percent of all Internet time, according to Nielsen's "Global Faces and Networked Places" report. What's more, Nielsen reports that time spent on these sites is expanding at more than three times the rate of overall Internet growth.

Content and relationships are what make social networks so attractive to consumers. And links are the social currency people share with each other. As a result, those who establish meaningful presence in social networks not only will generate conversation and build relationships but also establish "link equity" that makes them more visible on search engines.

Today, the most visible participants on social networks are individuals trying to build their personal brands. Companies are beginning to do the same as they recognize that social networks are not only critical for building relationships, but also for overall online visibility.

Social Search is becoming an essential leg in any search engine visibility strategy. Unlike Paid Search and Optimized Search which focus on company/brand web sites, Social Search, like Reputational Search, focuses on sites beyond your direct control and in making them visible.

The secret to Social Search is to employ an "embassy strategy." Companies that set up meaningful, engaging and permanent outposts inside all of the relevant social networks will be more discoverable than those who don't. Today the benefits of visibility are measured via Google results. Tomorrow it will be within search engines that are embedded into the social networks themselves.

To ensure optimal visibility, consider building embassies that focus on mutual benefits, collaboration and "Good Purpose"—that is, corporate social responsibility. The goal is to build a network of relationships and to earn links. This requires you to play by the rules and staff embassies with human faces that can serve the network as "ambassadors."

Not all social networking hubs are created equal, however. Some are more open and visible to Google, such as blogs, Twitter and Flickr. Others, notably Facebook, are more private.



However, on the whole, social networks are becoming a key way for people to find content that's meaningful to them. In response, all of the major networks are building out search tools that could, conceivably, threaten Google.

Having embassies isn't all there is to a Social Search strategy, however. Just as with Reputational Search, the programs need to be framed in the right context. This is where keyword and conversation research play a critical role. Research will ensure that these embassies are relevant and will also help guide the content and engagement strategy so that it enhances the likelihood of being discovered within the social network itself and, more important, on Google.

Case Study: JetBlue Uses Service to Build its Twitter Embassy and Visibility

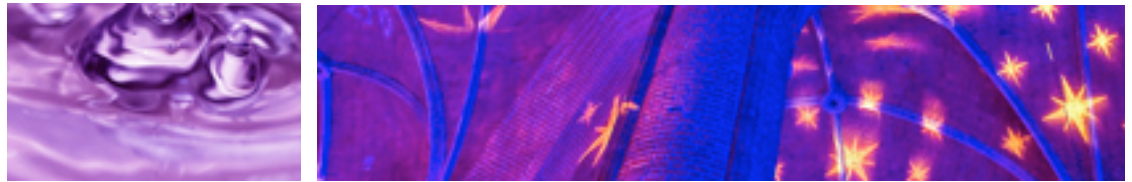


Figure 5 - JetBlue maintains a robust presence on Twitter.

The airline industry is notoriously struggling, and millions of consumers have expressed their frustration with not having their needs addressed quickly. As social networks become more popular, many people are using them to praise or, more likely, complain about the companies they do business with.

In 2008, JetBlue set up a Twitter account to address customer inquiries in real time. JetBlue wasn't the only company to do so; lots of other brands, including Edelman clients HP and MGM Mirage, wisely set up embassies on Twitter as the social network witnessed massive growth.

JetBlue stood out from the crowd, though, by being highly responsive to complaints. Such expediency caused the media and bloggers to take notice.



In November the Consumerist blog noted that JetBlue's Twitter representatives are faster than its customer service (<http://tinyurl.com/59vou8>):

"Reader Metschick needed a wheelchair for her Grandmother's JetBlue flight. She decided to post a quick message to Twitter before calling customer service, putting it simply:

JetBlue, I need a Wheelchair!

Before she even spoke to customer service, a representative handling JetBlue's Twitter account had responded to her, willing to hook her up directly to someone who could help."

As of this writing, JetBlue's Twitter page ranks in the top 10 results in a Google search for the airline. Links like these not only helped JetBlue's Twitter presence perform well on Google but also enhanced its overall reputation. Still, for all of JetBlue's success, news and blog posts can reshape the SERPs as the blog results in Figure 6 show.

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Queens Crap: JetBlue kissing Forest Hills goodbye?  
Apr 5, 2009 ... Helen Marshall (if she had half a brain) should find out what **JetBlue** needs to stay put or in a similar location IN Queens and provide it ...
queenscrap.blogspot.com/2009/04/jetblue-kissing-forest-hills-goodbye.html - 122k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - 

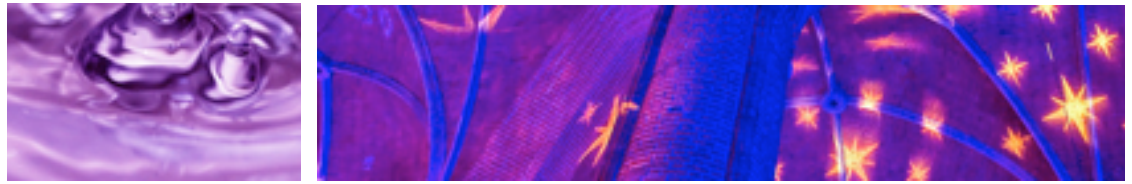
The Perrin Post Travel Blog: Travel Advice and Vacation Tips From...  
Timely and practical travel advice and insights from Condé Nast Traveler's consumer news editor Wendy Perrin, including money-saving tips and inside ...
www.concierge.com/cntraveler/blogs/perrinpost/2009/04/cheap-jetblue-f.html - 88k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - 

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I traveled to the interview on **JetBlue** and stayed at the JFK Hampton Inn. **JetBlue** has a shuttle that runs to Forest Hills at 7 AM and 8 AM. ...
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JetBlue Airways (JetBlue) on Twitter  
Name **JetBlue Airways**; Location 11375; Web <http://www.jetblue.com/> Bio Have a question? Follow us and let us help! - Currently on duty: Morgan, Alex and Justin ...
twitter.com/JetBlue - 40k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - 

Figure 6 - JetBlue's SERPs contain a mix of paid, optimized and social content.



Five Simple Steps to Be More Visible Online

Search engine visibility is a complicated and it's constantly changing. In fact, it's becoming more personal as Google and others layer in new technologies.

Still, while Paid Search remains the domain of advertisers and Optimized Search sits in the technologist's court, Reputational Search and Social Search are heading straight for PR professionals. The key to success is to do everything we do now to plan, manage and measure programs - but to do so in a way that also takes search engines into account.

Here are five simple steps to become more visible online...

1. **Research** - Know how people search online and how they talk online and work to ensure that programs (both Reputational Search and Social Search) use the right discoverable language.
2. **Teamwork** - Although Reputational and Social Search programs can be managed by PR professionals on their own, it's important to do so in the context of the overall search engine visibility mix. Therefore, it's key to work with others in your organization that are executing other search marketing programs.
3. **Planning** - Reputational and Social Search programs take time and effort to develop quality content and networked relationships. With ample planning, companies can guide the success of these programs while minimizing risk.
4. **Experimentation** - While SEM and SEO typically are managed by others, there's no reason why they couldn't be used in a public relations context. Paid Search, for example, is the fastest way to build awareness in a crisis situation where there's no time to lose.
5. **Benevolence** - Finally, Google knows if you've been bad or good. The more you create value online and others recognize you for doing so, the more you will be able to build a sustainable and visible online presence for both your "hub" and your "spokes."

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