



Blast Radius ranks top shopping sites

VANCOUVER—The overall online shopping experience has gotten better in the last year as more retailers adopt best practices for design and usability, reports interactive marketing services provider Blast Radius, based here. The assessment comes in its second annual edition of The Best Online Shopping Experiences, which ranks online shopping at the top 100 online retail sites from a customer's viewpoint.

Online merchants are now challenged to differentiate themselves based on customer experience since so many have adopted industry best practices, says the study. Some opportunities to create differentiation are twofold. One is creating a seamless experience across all channels and stages of the shopping experience, enabling and encouraging customer participation to offer new value to shoppers. A second is introducing innovations to satisfy unmet customer needs.

Many cross-channel retailers are striving to provide consistent customer experiences, says Blast Radius. However, this is one area that poses logistical challenges. For example, many major multichannel retailers that post rich media catalogues online do not allow customers to click through purchase items online.

For the second year in a row, Amazon.com was found to offer the best online shopping experience, based on its continued dedication to customer experience. Some of Amazon.com's recent innovations include social networking capabilities, tagging, customer blogs and discussion boards, all of which permit user-generated content and a stronger ability for customers to engage and participate.

The biggest gain in customer satisfaction compared to last year was made by Buy.com, which moved from 98th place in 2005 to third place in 2006. The online retailer's improvement was based on better overall customer experience and a willingness to present a range of innovative features including RSS feeds.

Apart from Amazon.com and Buy.com, others in the top 10 were Walmart.com, Bestbuy.com, Tigerdirect.com, Macys.com, Newegg.com, Smartbargains.com, Overstock.com and Williams-Sonoma.com. ♦

Tool allows instant consumer surveys

SAN FRANCISCO—Market research provider MarketTools, based here, recently released a service that enables live data collection through consumers' cell phones. Called MarketTools Mobile, the tool recruits survey panellists, designs and deploys the survey and displays the data in real-time through a Web portal.

Before the official launch of MarketTools Mobile, Warner Bros. Pictures partnered with MarketTools to improve the way movie audiences provide feedback. Warner Bros. Pictures deployed movie exit surveys via the mobile technology with opening-weekend audiences.

The American Marketing Association recognized both MarketTools and Warner Brothers as finalists for the 2006 EXPLOR award based on the results of the test case study. The test demonstrated solid consumer acceptance of mobile market research surveys across a wide demographic span.

Through the new service, MarketTools' clients can reach select panellists, mobile users who have agreed to take surveys from their mobile devices through direct text message. Consumers can also decide to participate in surveys at the point of sale via a short code prompt.

In a survey with more than 400 consumers, MarketTools found more than 80 percent of respondents want to give their opinions from mobile devices on topics such as shopping, trial product usage, or mobile phones themselves. Additional high interest areas include movie evaluations and television programming. The primary benefit of taking surveys on mobile phones cited by consumers was "being able to take surveys anytime, anywhere" plus "ease and convenience." ♦

Online tools favoured for b2b lead generation

TORONTO—When asked to vote for their favourite best-of-breed b2b lead generation tools, 65 percent of b2b marketers nominated email, blogging and Web analytics tools in a recent survey by Direct Impact Marketing Inc., based here.

The survey indicated that although these tools were nominated based on affordability and user-friendliness, b2b marketers were deploying them strategically to fill a gap in marketing capabilities.

"The strategic considerations for marketers in evaluating these tools were a surprise to us" says Direct Impact Marketing President Robert Lesser. "Our hypothesis was that given the negligible fees associated with these online marketing tools, b2b marketers would be looking at them tactically to lower costs or to automate a manual function."

The satisfaction level with these tools was high. Only 13 percent of marketers indicated that a change of tool was planned, which was also surprising given the low barriers to switching tools. Adoption was also high within respondents' organizations – the majority of marketing staff have already adopted the tools or widespread deployment is about to occur.

B2b marketers indicated disparate and uneven sources of awareness about these tools. They ranged from word-of-mouth, to online media like ezines, search engine results and email marketing.

"Sharing our knowledge and experience with one another about lead generation tools is essential given the numerous fragmented and biased sources of information about them," says Lesser. "We need to know

what lead generation tools rank highly with b2b marketers. The results of this survey provide the industry with information in an easy-to-use practical format to make the best choices about lead generation tools that work best, as reported by the people actually using them."

The global community of b2b marketers now has access to a comprehensive knowledge base of the lead generation tools already successfully deployed by their peers. Direct Impact Marketing is publisher of a free online Lead Generation Tools Directory found at www.LeadGenTools.com

All products featured are nominated by users of the tools, not vendors, and ranked according to the number of votes posted by b2b marketers responding to the survey. The directory includes more than 65 lead generation tools in 14 categories such as blogging, search engine marketing, email marketing, Web analytics and Web conferencing.

Direct Impact Marketing conducted the survey to identify the most popular, affordable, and user-friendly b2b lead generation tools and to gauge marketers' usage and attitudes toward them. The survey polled more than 60 b2b marketers across North America from August to October.

Direct Impact Marketing Inc. offers outsourced b2b lead generation services and acts as publisher of the LeadGenTools.com community. Its services division is an innovative outsourcer supplying b2b lead generation services for marketing and sales executives. Leveraging industry best practices in lead generation along with customizing CRM tools, it supports its client-base with on-demand inside telesales and direct marketing teams. ♦



Direct Impact Marketing President Robert Lesser expresses surprise over the degree of strategic considerations marketers placed in evaluating b2b tools in the survey given the negligible fees associated with the online marketing tools.

Marqui software powers Suns new interactive blog

VANCOUVER, BC—The Phoenix Suns, a Western Conference team in the National Basketball Association (NBA), has selected the Marqui Blog Management software from Marqui, Inc., based here, to streamline the management and deployment of the team's new interactive blog site.

The Phoenix Suns' new blog features court-side and personal commentary from a cross-section of team personalities, including players, trainers, commentators and dancers. It is billed as the first team-run blog in professional sports to capture every aspect of a sports franchise.

Marqui's blog software—which is available via its Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) delivery model—allows the Suns to quickly and easily post and manage blog content. It enables members of the organization to instantly connect with fans around the world.

"Blogging provides a unique forum for the NBA and the Phoenix Suns to reach out to its fans around the world and make following the team and players more interactive," says Jeramie McPeck, vice-president, interactive services, Phoenix Suns. "In order to accomplish that, not only did we feel it necessary to involve different elements of the organization—players, commentators, etc.—but we needed a product that would allow us to easily interact with the blog site and push out content."

"Marqui was chosen as it not only provided us with robust functionality, it also allowed us to quickly deploy the product so that our site was up and running before the start of the 2006-2007 season. As we get more comfortable with this new marketing vehicle, we plan to make the blog a key element in many of our multimedia marketing initiatives."

Marqui Blog Management software, a subset of the Marqui On-demand Marketing Software Suite, lets businesses post content, images and rich media files, such as video or podcasts, to the Web. It features approval-based workflow so companies can control who is allowed to write or approve blog content.

In addition to Blog Management, Marqui offers a comprehensive suite of SaaS marketing applications that simplify a broad range of marketing activities, including email campaigns, Web content management, search engine opti-

mization, analytics and program measurement. By combining all of these capabilities into one Web-based suite, Marqui enables customers to streamline marketing initiatives and improve program effectiveness without the issues or costs associated with installing multiple single-purpose products.

The Suns blog is frequently populated with player opinions on everything from games and player performance to life in the off-season. The Suns are said to be the first professional sports organization to also illuminate the perspectives of non-players and support staff across several facets of the organization.

"The Phoenix Suns' blog is demonstrative of the impact interactive Web-based communications can have on sports team audiences," says Marqui CEO Dale Borland. "The Suns' multi-dimensional approach to blogging provides fans with stories from inside and outside the locker room that may not otherwise be told and allows for two-way communication."

"We're glad we've been able to work with the Suns organization and help them leverage what we feel is the industry's premiere platform for easily deploying and managing a corporate blogging site. We look forward to working with more NBA teams and other sports franchises in the near future."

Marqui's on-demand Web marketing software has helped more than 200 organizations derive more value out of their content. Its client list includes BC Ferries, The David Suzuki Foundation, Cruise West, the American Marketing Association, BCIT, MDS, Nexen, Simon Fraser University, Sybase, the BC TIA, Shriners Children's Hospitals, and Tillamook Cheese. ♦

(Cutline for screen shot of Phoenix Sun's blog)

NBA's Phoenix Suns launches interactive blog by employing software from Canadian developer. The organization is said to unite players, trainers, dancers and fans through first team-run collaborative sports blog.

LiveDeal uses print, banners and Google to spread word

TORONTO—LiveDeal.ca (www.livedeal.ca), one of the nation's fastest growing local online classifieds sites, last fall launched a broad print and Web banner ad campaign to promote its service and available merchandise, including autos, furniture and sporting equipment, to value-conscious, time-crunched consumers.

In addition, it undertook its first Google keyword campaign targeting people searching for items in LiveDeal.ca's hot categories including autos, rentals and real estate.

"Since its debut in January 2006,



LiveDeal Canada General Manager Simon Jennings says since its debut a year ago the company has experienced steadily increasing traffic on its site as more Canadians discover the convenience, ease and value of shopping through its online local classifieds site.

LiveDeal Canada has experienced steadily increasing traffic on its site as more and more Canadians discover through word-of-mouth the convenience, ease and value of shopping through our online local classifieds site," says LiveDeal Canada General Manager Simon Jennings. "We introduced our formal ad campaign to promote the LiveDeal.ca service to a broader audience and believe the creative perfectly captures the concept behind our company – buying and selling locally is fast, easy and affordable when it comes to hard-to-ship items like cars, furniture, pets, unwieldy sporting equipment and of course, real estate."

The LiveDeal.ca print ads illustrated different scenarios in which items are transplanted from one person's life into another's. Items are shown as being torn out from the lister's possession and easily placed with the new owner. Several creative executions of the same concept—ocusing on different merchandise or pets looking for loving homes—demonstrated the broad range of available transactions on LiveDeal.

The creative for the print ads was designed by ad agency Bensimon Byrne, Toronto. The campaign ran through to the end of 2006.

LiveDeal ran the print ads in its partner newspapers including the Toronto Star, The Hamilton Spectator and The Guelph Mercury as well as in The Record. LiveDeal.ca also placed an extensive online display advertising campaign on the Olive Canada Network, an advertising network owned by Torstar of premium Web sites. Its site offering allowed LiveDeal to reach Canadians surfing major U.S. Web sites such as CNET.com, Maxim.com and NHL.com.

LiveDeal has also invested in keyword search advertising on Google to drive actively searching users to the site.

"Our online marketing strategy is designed to reach users when they are actively searching for a product or service," says Jennings. "Leveraging a popular search engine like Google for keyword advertising is a great way to build awareness of LiveDeal.ca with an audience who may not be aware of LiveDeal's vast and growing local offerings."

LiveDeal.ca is searchable by city, province or postal code. Buyers can browse or search for items using LiveDeal.ca's easy-to-use Web interface, seeing what's available locally first then nationwide second. Sellers gain a local or national listing with optional enhancements.

In addition to its proprietary Web site, LiveDeal.ca also powers the online classifieds sites of the Toronto Star, The Hamilton Spectator, The Record, the Guelph Mercury and the Gesca newspaper group. ♦