

“Conquesting”

How, why and where competitors can hit your marketing

When one considers ways to maximize the ROI from advertising or marketing campaigns, it's pretty obvious that reaching sales prospects when they are in the consideration phase of a buy, or perhaps open to changing what service or product they currently have, is a rare and highly valuable moment in time. The difficulty is that this moment is often fleeting and identifying it and dropping our message at exactly that time is extremely hard. One very obvious way though, is to advertise at the time the prospect may be thinking about or is perhaps already working with a competitor, disrupting that process with our own more compelling proposition. Let's be honest; we are rarely the only game in town, but we are always happy to get a seat at the table when the cards are being dealt.

Conquesting, otherwise known as actively targeting competitor's customers or sales prospects with advertising messages, is a growing and ever more successfully exploited technique. To be able to both consider this as a tactic (and more importantly evaluate the threat this poses) it is vital to understand some of the methods that can be used. In this paper we will explore just a few of the more common and traditional conquesting tactics, as well as a few brand new ones that current digital media developments are enabling.

Firstly remember this simple rule: *If you are not thinking about this, you can be pretty sure your competitors are... so you are already one step behind them.* We know this because over the last 16 years that we have been buying media, we have seen and experienced many of the tactics described, almost always targeting our clients. In many instances our job has been to mitigate the impact such campaigns have on our clients business.

Executive Summary:

Conquesting: The targeting of advertising or marketing messages towards specific competitor content, locations or marketing activities to intercept and disrupt customers and sales prospects relationship and raise own profile.

Conquesting activities easily cross media platforms from print, out of home through digital and even social media.

Conquesting is a growing market segment and will be a more widely used practice particularly in digital space.

In many instances it may be very hard to even identify when your company or your brand is being targeted by competitors, particularly with web based content and search retargeting.

To assume you are not being targeted already puts you one step behind your competitors.

Search marketing and retargeting.

This is one area that active competitor advertising is most commonly seen and where we have the most calls from frustrated clients who see competitors actively targeting their brand terms and sales space. The rule is simple: If you have not registered your business terms like your brand name or product name with Google, then your terms are open for competitor targeting, whether your terms are generally trademarked or not. Basically, if you see competitors' ads on your key brand terms, then you need to act. In reverse, you can always try and target your competitors. If they have registered with Google then you will simply be politely refused... well worth trying though as it's both simple and effective!

But search conquering does not have to end there. While search engines are required to police terms that have been registered, the networks selling search retargeting are not bound by the same rules. This means you can advertise on web pages served to users who have recently searched for your competitor's terms. This search retargeting is currently under-utilized, but it is an effective way to intercept users who you know are engaging in some way with your competition, are actively searching out information about them and are perhaps ripe for a compelling alternative.

Content targeting.

Another way to use the newer web-targeting methods is to leverage content that discusses your competitor's products, solutions or general company commentary from user communities, bloggers, business analysts and editors. This can be done in a number of ways. In one recent example we saw, a key competitor targeted one of our client's event coverage on a major technology website. In doing so, every time there was either editorial coverage or blog content about the event, the competitor's ad appeared next to it. Needless to say this ruffled a few feathers.

Content targeting can also extend through to any web content that can be crawled by an analytics algorithm and then targeted with an ad. Various networks offer solutions that allow targeting by content with various degrees of sophistication. Google has obviously done this for years through its AdSense program, using keyword groups to find relevant articles on web pages and match advertiser's messages to the content. Now however, much more complex algorithms – used mainly for social media monitoring – can be applied and then matched with an ad. This will give a much more refined targeting ability, even identifying content as “reviews”, “research” or “purchase intent”. Crossed with specific competitor brand and product names, the obviously extremely powerful solution of hitting a sales prospect right in the middle of a sales cycle has tremendous power. This truly is

conquering in its purest form and we expect this strategy to be aggressively developed over the coming years as more companies get wise to the possibilities that this tactic brings to bear.

Event targeting.

It is always a fun activity to try and out maneuver a competitor at an event they might be hosting. Let's be honest: What better environment exists to get right into the heart of their customer and sales prospects than a three day concentration at one specific geographic location? Champions of this over many years have been Oracle with a very unabashed history of sticking it to competitors with no subtlety at all. Examples of this include parading cloud balloon wearing "No.1 in CRM" guerrilla street teams at the Salesforce.com event 'Dreamforce' and "Oracle beats EMC" taxis at 'EMC World'. But what comes around, goes around and Oracle is now on the defensive, forced to buy out just about every possible media opportunity it can around its own 'Oracle Open World' event.



Oracle "clouds" at Salesforce.com's Dreamforce11 in San Francisco

But there are more subtle ways to get that same audience. No matter what the location, mobile ad networks can offer location targeting, enabling campaigns around convention centers, hotels and airports. Hotel media options exist too; with opportunities like sponsored newspaper door drops, hotel TV networks and even sponsored gift packages. You can sponsor and wrap complimentary bus services, buy ads on taxis and even huge mobile billboard trucks that simply drive circuits around the venue and local convention hotels.

Don't forget the airport. It's typically a bottle neck for travelers arriving at any event and while careful planning is required to ensure the message is seen (arriving passengers are often dashing through quickly and may also travel light, so don't plan on them having much dwell time) it can still be an effective first ad impact or last reminder as the audience leaves.

Out Of Home.

As you can see from the above examples, Out Of Home (or OOH), offers a wealth of opportunities to get in the space (and face) of your competitors. However, it can go much deeper than the event targeting described above. More common and perhaps more permanent targeting can be done around corporate headquarters or customer service centers. This tactic is used not only to target customers, but often to elicit recruitment. Bleeding a competitor is, after all, not just about stealing customers. Staff can be an even more precious a resource to attract away.



Example of a not so subtle Microsoft billboard ad seen not far from the VMware campus

Analyst research.

Just Media, Inc., contacted one analyst organization, Aberdeen Group, to discuss ways in which a client might use their services to develop content that would address the client's advantage over their competitors. The solution is relatively simple, surely effective and as suspected, already being used. Basically, using research data, user studies and other analyst resources, they can happily develop

compelling content that shows one company's obvious advantages in leading the field. This is after all nothing new. However, they can then help develop marketing programs to actively promote this and in doing so actively target customers of the competitors. A neat and very effective third party endorsed conquering strategy. One obvious caveat here is the need to have some recognizable, competitive advantage, since no analyst will simply create a fabricated content piece simply for a few dollars. However, we suspect that in most cases, as with most technology sales, some product differential will exist to make a compelling case.

Buying competitor's leads.

Using content assets distributed through publishers and other online networks to collect leads is a well known and mature strategy for companies to build prospect databases of sales prospects. These leads then typically go through a process of follow up telemarketing calls or lead nurturing, finally becoming, in some cases, highly valuable sales leads. But did you know that some vendors are willing to sell leads that have been engaged through content assets that may have come from your competitors (or in reverse your leads)? Not only is this possible, it's highly likely the price paid for these leads is significantly less than you pay for your current CPL programs.

To explore more fully how this works, imagine you are a supplier of virtualization solutions. You can now purchase contact details for leads who have engaged with "virtualization content" in the last 30 days from other vendors, such as VMware, Microsoft or Citrix. While some restrictions are applied – you will not be told exactly what brand content the user has consumed – the simple fact of buying other high cost leads at a fraction of the cost, knowing the user is actively in research or purchase mode and consuming "content related" to your solution, makes this a highly attractive tactic to rapidly build active databases for your own lead nurturing and have the opportunity to interrupt the sales cycle with your own messages. This tactic, to be really successful, obviously needs a serious lead nurturing strategy of its own. Ideally, upon receipt of the leads, email marketing will make content offers about the subject in question, or telemarketers will rapidly establish contact to validate and develop the lead.

Client customer email list buys.

If like me, your email inbox is filled with offers to buy competitor customer databases, then you will already be aware of how much this industry segment is growing. As an agency we don't handle these types of buys, but we know clients who do actively incorporate this as a direct marketing component and apparently see decent results. Although Just Media, Inc., are not endorsing this, since we really tend to question the source and accuracy of the data being sold, this reality is something

that you should be aware is now potentially blowing open your precious customer contact list.

Ambush Marketing.

Although differing slightly from Conquering, ambush marketing is clearly a similarly aggressive and controversial subject. Most ambush marketing takes place around major sporting events where official sponsors have invested millions in associating their brands with the final product – like The Olympics or FIFA World Cup – only to see competitors steal their thunder with small, high impact stunts.

A great article on ambush marketing by the BBC can be found via this web link: <http://tinyurl.com/cwkyt3w> but just one recent example that made global headlines is the Danish soccer player Nicklas Bendtner who after scoring a goal during the recent European Soccer Championships, pulled down his shorts to reveal sponsored underpants by an unsanctioned company.



Nicklas Bendtner displays his 100,000 Euro underwear!

For the pleasure, he was fined 100,000 Euros; but the initial exposure and PR the stunt gained on a global scale delivered a huge amount of free press coverage for both player and sponsor. An investment that paid off handsomely for both parties.

Conclusions.

Conquering is here to stay and will grow over time as new techniques make it ever more affordable and actionable. It's always been a valid media strategy, it is just that previously it tended to be driven mainly by executive ego or a few feisty marketing department or agency staffers. Now however, it makes real sense to integrate into media plans as a genuine component of an audience targeting philosophy and we expect every company to start to include it actively moving forward.

Understanding the ways it can be used and building smart creative messages to accompany it as a strategic element in a marketing program is something everyone now needs to be considering. To avoid it as a subject or get upset when it happens is to be living with one's head in the sand.



About Just Media, Inc.

Just Media, Inc., is an independently owned media buying agency based in Emeryville, California, founded in 1996. We work with national and international, blue chip technology clients in categories ranging from healthcare to education, financial to travel, and more recent sectors such as solar and green tech. Our guiding principle is that the only results that truly matter are what we provide for your brand, today. Our more experienced approach to media evaluation provides consistently stronger results. Our expertise is creating media strategies and developing Lead Generation & Branding campaigns in all media formats including; digital, search, print, out-of-home and TV.

Notable 2011/2012 clients include: Wildfire, Seagate Technology, Netgear, Nvidia, Parallels, YouSENDIt, Autonomy, EMC, Fujitsu North America, Hitachi Data Systems, Juniper Networks, Lumension, Motorola Business Solutions, Salesforce.com, Nexsan, Job Science, Financial Force, Citrix.

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