

There is **something** about **Google**

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Google's success results from the brilliant application of sound marketing principles and provides lessons for us all.

Google is great. Just in case you have yet to discover this marvel of technology here is thumbnail sketch.

It is really is quite simple - Google is the world's best Internet search engine. From its birth in 1998 it now handles approximately 40% of the world's Internet searches and is able to deliver the results to its users in an astonishing 0.3 seconds.

The statistics about the company are astonishing. It has a user base of around 65 million people who use it 150 million times a day to search through the 3 Billion Web pages that reside on its 10,000 servers. The story of the company is a 'must read' for all of those who believe the age of the high tech success story are over.

At this point I suggest those of you who have yet to discover Google go and experience its delights and then return to this article when it will make a lot more sense.

From a marketing perspective, Goggle's achievements have been spectacular.

The company has spent virtually no money on advertising, yet Interbrand's BrandChannel.com voted it the brand of year, displacing last year's winner, Apple and beating Coke and Starbucks. According to research from the branding consultancy Brand Keys, Google has the highest brand loyalty of any online company. To achieve its premier position it had to displace Yahoo!, a company that was thought to have an impregnable lead as the market's top search facility. It has done all of this in a viscously anti-technology environment whilst creating a company estimated to be worth around \$1 Billion.

Is it possible for us mere mortals to learn any marketing lessons from the Google success story? The answer is undoubtedly, yes. These appear to be Google's principles of marketing.

Keep things very, very simple

The Google home page contains 32 items of text, including all of the navigation. I gave up counting the words on Yahoo! when I passed 600.

This is a very simplistic comparison but it does illustrate the point that Google is obsessive about providing a highly efficient search facility and discards anything that might distract or confuse its users.

The Google home page contains 32 items of text - Yahoo! has more than 600.

When Yahoo! was launched it had a format that was remarkably similar to Google.

Its site contained just 150 words and did nothing else other than assist users to find information on the Web. Since then the site has expanded, lost focus and its supremacy.

There seems to be a universal law of nature that says 'Web sites continue to expand their functionality until they become unusable'. Just because it is so easy to provide additional functionality does not mean it should be added. The next time there is a suggestion to add more to your organisation's home page, remember that handful of words on the Google home page and the success they have generated!

Unless you innovate you die

The thing that keeps driving Microsoft forward is paranoia that somewhere there is a Bill Gates Version 2 working on technologies that could threaten his empire. Google's management seem to be driven by this same fear.

To protect against this threat most companies expand their product/service portfolio to spread the risk over a range of products. What is too often associated with this strategy is the accompanying diffusion of marketing focus as resources and marketing energy is spread over a wider range of products.

So far Google has been brilliant at avoiding this pitfall.

During its short life the company has launched many new services. Froogle, a service to find information about products for sale online by locating stores and directing you to the place where you can make a purchase. Google Catalogs, a facility to search and browse mail order catalogues online. Google News, a service to access over 4000 continuously updated news sources.

Each of these services are extensions of the company's original product that are re-packaged to satisfy a very precise user need. Where Google has shown real marketing inventiveness is to add these services without detracting from its main product.

The cardinal rule at Google is, if you can do something that will improve the user's experience, do it

In the past few months the company has acquired several new companies (Semantics and

Pyra Labs). We have yet to see if it can leverage these company's products without defusing its market focus.

Know what your customer want and give it to them

I think the following quote, taken from an article published by the FastCompany, perfectly expresses this point '....The cardinal rule at Google is, if you can do something that will improve the user's experience, do it. It is a mandate in part born of paranoia. And the maniacal attack on imperfection reflects a genuine belief in the primacy of the customer....'

We have become so accustomed to the platitudes that companies utter about being 'customer centric' and how the 'customer is king' that when we see a company that really believes and makes a reality of the statement we fail to recognise what they are doing.

The company's site has equal appeal to novice and the most experienced Web user. This does not come about by accident but results from clarity of vision about the needs of the customer and continually innovating to meet their requirements. It is one thing to employ 10 staff to study the e-mail from customers and then to act upon their comments. Google does both of things.

Get others to promote your brand

It is very likely that your PC/Notebook has a little label attached saying 'Intel Inside'. It was a very clever marketing ploy by Intel to get its customers to promote its brand on every box they sold. The reason this was possible was the mutual advantage for

Dell, IBM, HP and the other vendors to associate themselves with the technical excellence of Intel.

Google appears to be following a similar route. More and more sites are using Google as their search mechanism and advertising the fact they are doing so. The 'Powered by Google' icon is set to become a common sight. During the past 2 months both Amazon and Disney have adopted the company's search facilities.

The other thing the company has done to expand its brand reach is to allow software developers to incorporate its search engine in their own products, whilst of course giving due recognition to Google. Rather than being dependant on all of the innovation coming from within the company it has created hordes of entrepreneurial developers producing new products. Perhaps the most interesting of these is Smackdown, which allows two names or phrases to be compared to see their relative popularity on the Web. I bet you didn't know that there are more references to 'Arsenal Football Club' than 'Manchester United Football Club' on the Web!!

Don't take yourself too seriously

On March 6 the Google logo had changed into a stone sculpture with the letter 'L' being replaced by the Michelangelo's Statue of David in celebration of sculptor's birthday. On the October 25 the logo appeared as an expressionist painting to celebrate Picasso's birthday. On Valentine's Day it had changed again with the two 'Os' being placed with interlocking hearts.

You cannot help but smile when you see the latest variant of the Google logo. The continual adaptation of the logo may seem a minor ploy but I think it perfectly illustrates how an ultra sophisticated service and company can still be fun.

From the perspective of logo design and extension it is sheer brilliance.

It is OK for marketing ideas to fail as long as you learn from the experience

Google has tried many new product ideas. There is the Google Toolbar that can be downloaded to your PC to assist your Web searching. If you get nothing else from this article I suggest you start to make use of this facility. There is the Google Viewer that provides a visual representation of the search process in something akin to a motion-player version of the site. Google has even experimented with voice search that enables you to phone your query and then see the results online. Some of these features will become part of the product offering others will die. What is certain is the company will have extracted all of the lessons it can from these ventures.

Hopefully, the next time you use Google you will see it as not only a great way of searching the Web but also as a live case study on how to incorporate the best principles of the Web and Marketing to create an astonishing company.

Web Sites mentioned in this article

Google www.google.com
Froogle www.froogle.google.com
Google Catalogs www.catalogs.google.com
Google News www.news.google.com
Smackdown: www.onfocus.com/googlesmack/down.asp
FastCompany www.fastcompany.com
Google Holiday Logos www.google.com/holidaylogos.html
Google Toolbar www.toolbar.google.com/