BEYOND ONLINE ADVERTISING

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Abstract

The paper analyzes some online texts used in marketing to promote certain services and products. The texts will be considered from several perspectives: that of the writer (his purpose and constraints), that of the machine (search engine) interpreting the text, and that of the reader and the effect on him.

Nowadays, advertisers have learnt that straight-forward ads are neither as efficient as they used to be nor can they get potential buyers buy things. And there are two main reasons for that.

The first one is that competition on the market has become global, and quality of products or services is already an assumed standard, and second the clients have become smarter and more demanding when spending their own money.

Another factor that may turn out bad in online advertising, the same way that it does in real life advertising, is that potential buyers are no longer wiling to cope with interruption advertising. "Free" yahoo mail service is a good example of interruption advertising. Yahoo serves banners when all you want to do is read some interesting reply from your friend. But there are even worse facets of interrupting advertising, pop-ups, pop-unders, banner farms, link farms. And these aggressive forms of advertisings have repelled potential clients instead of driving them towards closing a deal.

So, advertisers have thought of finding a common ground with clients, and online this spells *search engines*. Search engine users want to find what they need as fast as possible, hence the search engine must comply to its best with the four Gricean maxims, that of **quantity**, where one tries to be as informative as one possibly can, and gives as much information as is needed, and no more; **the maxim of quality**, where one tries to be truthful, and does not give information that is false or that is not supported by evidence; t**he maxim of relation**, where one tries to be relevant, and says things that are pertinent to the discussion; **the maxim of manner**, when one tries to be as clear, as brief, and as orderly as one can in what one says, and where one avoids obscurity and ambiguity.

Search engines now stand as the environment necessary to establish a common context necessary for successful communication between advertisers and clients, but this is rather limited to the linguistic context. Search engines are thought now to be the best way of non-intrusive advertising as now smart search engine technologies serve their users advertisements that relate to the users search string. For advertisers this means that their ads are much better targeted, and users are more likely to click on an advertisement that is related to what the user is looking for. In this case the advertiser must "guess" the terms a user might use to find a

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certain product. Words with broader meaning can cause losses to advertisers, and frustrations to users. Synonymy, paronymy, homonymy, homophony, hyponymy, are all language issues that can help in successful communication or on the contrary it can create confusion.

Not all listings on the search engine result pages are paid for, and these results are the most important when an advertiser considers the strength of his site, as this is the least intrusive way of advertising, as the advertiser feeds the user the information he/she requires.

That is why this is the most valued channel of advertising, as clients that are sharing the same context are much closer to spend their money on what they are really looking for.

Google and Yahoo are the two biggest search engines and at the same time globally recognized as such by both sides the advertisers and the potential buyers.

Fortunately for advertisers, both the above search engines are helping out the advertisers with valuable information. Google trends, for instance, gives valuable information on its http://www.google.com/trends site. Here one can find out the **trends:** what is hip and to what extent, the area certain items are searched for and the approximate number of searches queried. Graphical elements can show the increasing or decreasing interest of the users towards certain items. Hence market research has become a much easier process and data is continually updated 24/7.

In the pictures below one can see that the interest for English literature for the last 30 days have been greater in countries where English is taught only as a second language. Because the keyword is quite broad one cannot know for sure whether the users refer in this case to ebooks or hard copies, free copies or they are willing to buy, or whether they refer to a certain period of English literature, whether they are looking for essays on English literature or for the works of a particular English writer. So this would be quite out of target advertising. But compared to a more restrictive keyword, for instance *modern English literature*, it could generate more traffic.

Also, it is interesting to notice in Figure 2 that compared to a sex-related keyword, shown in red, *English literature* is non-existent.



Figure 1: Shows top searches on the "Englis literature" keyword



Figure 2: In red is a sex-related term is being represented

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Overture.com, a subsidiary of Yahoo, does the same, but searches are shown in numbers and not in percentage.

Any site owner may have great info on his or her site or should sell great products for best value, but if no one visits their site, that is site awareness converges towards zero, they will go bankrupt. This is where marketers, linguists, and psychologists come in place.

On the following pages I will study the impact of some Google paid text advertisement and the extent they succeed to comply with several principles from pragmatics. These examples and the comments on them are true at the time when the paper is written. Values may change in time due to several factors: change in the algorithms of the search engine, changes of the advertiser in his text and or area where he wants it to appear.

This case study is based on the *weight loss* keyword.

A quick use of the Yahoo Marketing Tool reveals an estimation of monthly searches in the entire US related to the above keyword:

weight loss program	381,579
diet	381,579
weight loss product	3,813 - 40,756
weight loss diet	40,757 - 381,544
fast weight loss	40,757 - 381,544
quick weight loss	3,813 - 40,756
natural weight loss	3,813 - 40,756
weight loss supplement	3,813 - 40,756
weight loss plan	40,757 - 381,544
weight loss healthy	3,813 - 40,756
easy weight loss	40,757 - 381,544
weight loss pill	40,757 - 381,544
rapid weight loss	3,813 - 40,756
weight loss help	3,813 - 40,756
diet pill	40,757 - 381,544
nutrition	40,757 - 381,544
how to lose weight fast	40,757 - 381,544
[…]	

It can be noticed that some of the suggested keywords are more general than the actual query or just related like *diet*, *diet pill* and *nutrition*, while most of them are more limiting through adding further restrictive words, by making a keyword more specific.

Also if we look at the other major search engine marketing tool, the result does not show keywords with broader or related keywords but shows more specific searches.(Adwords offer several keyword research options)

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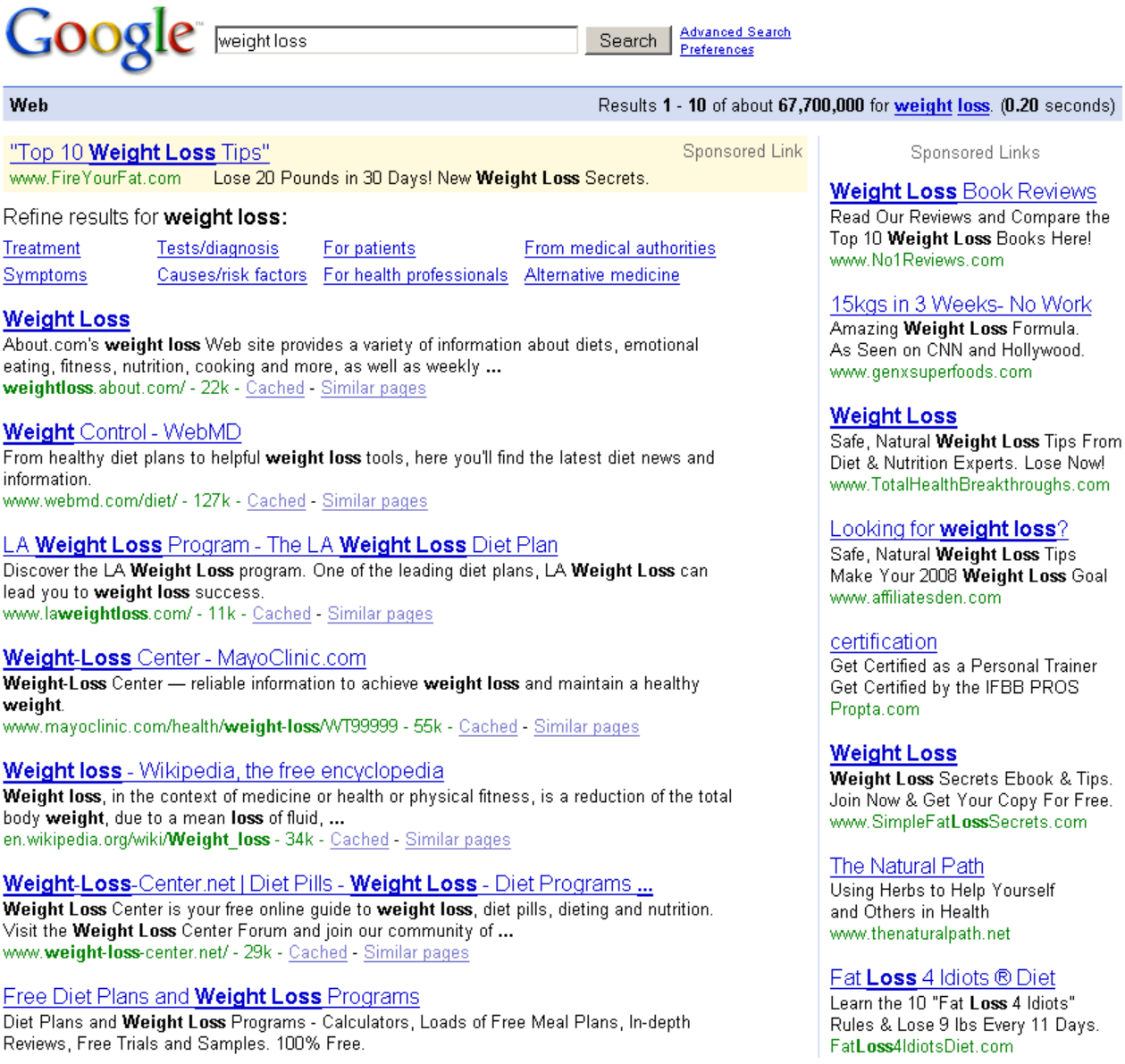
Keywords related to term(s) entered - sorted by relevance

Keywords	Avg Search Volume	Search Volume Trends (Dec 2006 - Nov 2007)	Highest Volume Occurred In
weight loss			Jul
fast weight loss			Jun
weight loss pills			Jun
quick weight loss			Jun
weight loss programs			Jul
weight loss program			Jul
weight loss diet			Jul
weight loss pill			Jun
la weight loss			Jul
weight loss tips			Jul
rapid weight loss			Jul
weight loss surgery			Jul
weight loss plan			Jul
healthy weight loss			Jul
weight loss diets			Jul
weight loss supplements			Jul
medical weight loss			Jul
best weight loss			Jul
weight loss plans			Jul
weight loss products			Nov
weight loss cure			Mar
natural weight loss			Jul
alli weight loss			Jun
weight loss drug			Jun
the weight loss cure		No data	No data
weight loss supplement			Jul

This is what the marketer sees and knows in general about the market, what is being searched at a certain moment. He is using this info to convert net surfers into buyers, and this is how the surfer sees the information displayed in the search engine results page when looking for any of the above terms or related keywords. Search engine have become very good at "guessing" what the user is looking for, yet the advertiser must build his campaign in such a way that it complies both with meeting the expectations of the potential customer and with the search engine algorithms.

Searching for *weight loss* on Google and Yahoo gives different natural ranking but some results can direct towards the same sites whereas sponsored links direct towards same sites or internet pages only if a site owner applies a quasi- road block online advertising campaign. This paper will discuss only the paid links on Google search page results.

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The purpose of the current study is to look only at the sponsored links as this is not "natural" ranking; natural ranking works differently. With sponsored links the marketer bids for the best spot, the closer to the top of the page the more expensive and more likely to give good conversion rate.

The focus of the paper is to see whether the info in the links is relevant to the actual search query and to what extent and to see if the actual page to which it leads is pertinent.

"Top 10 Weight Loss Tips" at the top of the search engine result page is well constructed. *Top 10* conveys that they have the ten most important guidelines to losing weight, the message is clear and short, they are using digits and not the number written out in words, and it does comply with the context of weight loss. The URL, in green, *FireYourFat.com* further emphasizes that the user is on the right track, even if the choice of words used in the domain name sound somewhat bombastic and making it sound like losing weight is very simple, it is like firing someone, so it sounds like a very convincing statement. Yet sequences of the last part of the text ad are in contradiction with the domain name "… 30 days …", as 30 days are more than it would take somebody to fire someone. Even so, 30 days can be considered a short period of

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time for someone who knows how difficult it is to lose weight, but then 20 pounds sounds like a good achievement. Yet, most people will read only the first part of the text ad which is written with bigger fonts and it is also underlined. So that text add will trigger responses from users. Very important in the case of this particular ad is its position at the top of the page, above the regular search results page, as readers on only text pages always start from top-left.

Accessing the index page of the *FireYourFat.com* shows what the page is about. Unfortunately the site is not about tips it is about a new drug, so the word *tips,* advice is not quite what the index page offers, but what is even worse it is that browsing through the site gives the same page over and over. Even if the site does offer remedies to lose fat what it actually offers is in contradiction to what it advertised in the sponsored link. This may cause frustration. The page itself further attempts to convince the potential buyers the old way, using "as seen on TV" methods. Still this particular online communication does not comply entirely with the four Gricean maxims.

The context requirements are somewhat met:

- physical context (under the shape of online content, specifically given by the search query, and in general by the online environment. The search engines have the same general structure but they differ in terms of algorithms and other features mentioned previously. However the physical environment provided by each site may be very different in terms of images, text format and formatting, categories, etc. depending very much on the purpose of the site owner)
- epistemic context (this element may affect directly the keywords by which the search is being conducted, and even if the search engine attempts a close match, the site itself may not be what the user has hoped for, as is the case with the above site)
- linguistic context (can vary depending to whom the site is addressed; in this case it does use specialized language, yet simple, to further emphasize to the visitor that he/she is visiting the right site.)
- social context (in the case of this site the social context is that of people having the same health problem: obesity)

By looking at the other sponsored links show that the search query is matched only in some aspects. They have a broader approach to the issue of *weight loss*. Also in terms of meaning the search query is a quite broad concept. This can be restricted by adding one or more words to further narrow down the contexts.

Conclusions:

Unfortunately in most cases the content found online is still long way from being true to the norms of natural communication, as most marketers tend to mislead the potential buyers by using advertising techniques and not efficient communication techniques. Deceptive advertising techniques have, however, come under heavy criticism from the part of online buyers, so the natural tendency is developing towards efficient communication, as on the long run this turns out to be the most cost-effective method of selling products and services.

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WWW SOURCES:

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