Solve Retail’s Digital Marketing Dilemma
How to Boost Foot Traffic and Online Sales

By Leslie To and Caitlin Halpert
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to reconcile franchise and eCommerce goals and tracking</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franchises</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eCommerce</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to reach those goals with paid search</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franchises</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eCommerce</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to reach those goals with SEO</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franchises</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eCommerce</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Authors</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About 3Q</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

If you are a multi-location business with an ecommerce component, you know this dilemma well: how do you optimize the online experience for both eCommerce sales and local foot traffic? When franchises have unique and independent goals, this dilemma becomes especially thorny.

At 3Q Digital, we faced this challenge managing SEO and paid search for Relax The Back, a chain of retail stores specializing in back-support products, with over 90 locations in the United States and Canada. Relax The Back sells directly to customers online with their eCommerce website but also supports independently owned franchise locations that earn revenue only from in-store sales. The company sells products ranging from Tempur-Pedic mattresses and Inada massage chairs to hand-held massagers and ergonomic monitor stands. Our campaigns encompass both the corporate eCommerce site and individual franchises, each with their own goals and targets.

In this whitepaper, we’ll walk you through how we helped establish goals for both eCommerce and franchise stores, how we structured paid search campaigns to reach those goals, and how we leveraged usability studies and content strategies to fine-tune SEO for both eCommerce and local efforts.
FRANCHISES

When we took over management of Relax The Back, most digital marketing resources were going to eCommerce rather than to franchise sites. The company had a single account attempting to drive local foot traffic, but no measurements were in place, and the vast majority of spend was budgeted for eCommerce campaigns. Several individual franchises were running paid search through independent small-business vendors.

Franchise account management presented a couple of major challenges: how to translate foot traffic (non-digital events) into measurable digital data; and how to unify management of local franchise accounts to leverage learnings and best practices across those accounts.

We began by determining which on-site actions we could use as proxies for foot traffic. These included hovering over the map, getting directions, making phone calls, placing catalog requests, and sign-ups for the brand newsletter. Because we don’t have the data to differentiate, each event is assigned the same value.

These values, of course, are not numerically perfect, but using proxies allowed us to determine directional tactics — for instance, which keywords to target, which offers work best in ad copy, which sitelinks are most effective, etc.

Once the proxies and values were established, and using both historic and predicted conversion rates, we backed into traffic goals.

For SEO, we'll show how these franchise goals were met with a combination of revamped site structure and navigation and updated content; for paid search, we'll show how we set up campaigns to make sure the eCommerce site and goals didn’t cannibalize conversions from franchise spend.
ECOMMERCE

The main challenge with eCommerce was how to maintain (or improve) profitability and conversions while funnelling franchise resources to franchise performance.

To achieve this, we had to first lock in on an ROAS (return on ad spend) goal that would preserve profitability for the company while allowing enough traffic to increase sales volume. Our original blended (brand and non-brand) ROAS goal was too low to be profitable, but our adjusted blended goal was too high to allow for the level of traffic that would preserve revenue and sales.

Ultimately, we split out the non-brand ROAS goal, with the blended goal almost twice as high as the non-brand goal. This allowed us to allocate plenty of budget where we could anticipate profitable conversion levels (brand) while setting aside spend for increased revenue and awareness (non-brand) at slightly lower profitability with the goal of garnering more customers for Relax The Back.

ROAS, of course, is not applicable to SEO. The eCommerce SEO goal was linear: drive more revenue.
How to Reach Those Goals with Paid Search

FRANCHISES

Our big challenge with franchises was to ensure that franchise spend contributed as directly as possible to franchise sales (and not ecommerce sales). To accomplish this, we split out an eCommerce paid search account (as mentioned above) and created two other accounts:

1. National Branding – we used the Google Display Network to develop nation-wide awareness and ultimately drive in-store sales across all franchises.

2. Franchise – we created hyper-local paid search accounts funded by each brick-and-mortar location to drive in-store foot traffic by targeting higher-ticket products and pain-relief terms.

Within those campaigns, we tracked the proxy conversions noted above (hovering over the map, getting directions, making phone calls, placing catalog requests, and sign-ups for the brand newsletter).

Within the first year, our franchise accounts saw a 98% improvement in search CTR, and our franchise spend generated 88% less revenue for eCommerce – meaning that we had succeeded in directing franchise spend to the franchise sales funnels.
ECOMMERCE

Once we established goals of ROAS and revenue, we took a hard look at the types of products more likely to sell online vs. in store. It’s generally true that higher-ticket items will be easier to sell in a store, with the human upselling element in play. This was especially true with Relax The Back, whose main selling point is that their salespeople are trained to provide custom back and neck pain solutions, which creates an unparalleled experience for customers who come into the store.

For eCommerce, this buying behavior produced a disadvantage, particularly for products like mattresses. Relax The Back sells only expensive Tempurpedic mattresses, while competitors offer both Tempurpedic and cheaper alternatives. Relax The Back’s online experience does not provide the customized in-person expertise that the franchises do, and because online shoppers are generally more price-sensitive, Relax The Back has a difficult time competing for mattress-based keywords.

When we dove into the data, we discovered that lower-priced items produced revenue far more reliably for eCommerce and allocated spend accordingly. We were also able to add Product Listing Ads (PLAs) to their account to get increased visibility in an ad format they’d not previously tested. We also moved products with poor eCommerce ROAS to our National Branding campaigns to test results nationally; if the results were good, we built those products into the franchise accounts. This increased the odds of foot traffic – and profitable upsells – for specific high-priced products at the franchise level, and it cut back on poor eCommerce spend.

Year over year, our eCommerce ROAS improved by 25%.
How to Reach those Goals with SEO

FRANCHISES

For franchises, the SEO goal was straightforward: drive higher volumes of visitors to local (franchise) microsites, which in turn would drive more local foot traffic (again, measured through on-site proxy actions).

To do this, we moved the existing local microsites away from a single-URL iFrame structure and created static URLs for all subdirectories with expanded local content. This gave search engines and users more geo-specific options to enter the site. The new microsites mirrored the look and feel of the new ecommerce site (more on that below), creating a cohesive user experience.

Old microsite design:

New microsite design with expanded content:
The results were dramatic: local traffic grew 59% because of the improved structure and content, and the traffic was also more engaged thanks to features like location map and hours and more relevant content. As a result, local proxy conversions saw 89% growth.

**ECOMMERCE**

Given the mandate of redirecting a significant portion of eCommerce traffic to appropriate local microsites, we faced a steep challenge in maintaining eCommerce traffic numbers and undertook a website usability study to determine how to optimize the eCommerce site experience.

Based on the results of the study, we unified the ecommerce site under one standard site experience that would be easily accessible across desktop, mobile, and tablet devices.

*Old ecommerce site design:*
New ecommerce site design:

The results were dramatic: eCommerce traffic grew 31% while online purchases increased 7%. This spoke very directly to the growing importance of user experience across devices, which must be a significant part of any SEO campaign.
Conclusion

So what should retail companies with online and franchise presences take away from our campaigns with Relax The Back? We think there are four main themes that stand out:

- Importance of user experience across devices. For both eCommerce and franchise sites, the buying process has become increasingly spread out over stages that correlate to devices. An optimized user experience across devices must be implemented. At the heart of this is a cohesive website with helpful, relevant content and a clean navigation structure.

- Importance of campaign structure. Splitting out accounts based on differing eCommerce and franchise goals is essential. Each account can be cleanly structured for optimization toward those goals, and other accounts can be created to test products that need further analysis.

- Use of proxy metrics can provide measurable data. Franchises must be able to translate non-digital events into actionable data to optimize campaigns. The use of proxy metrics to approximate in-store actions is, although imperfect, an essential directional strategy.

- Optimized product mix. Consumer behavior and company strategy (e.g. on-site upsells) should help determine the mix of products emphasized in eCommerce and franchise accounts.
About the Authors

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About 3Q

3Q Digital believes clients deserve three things from a digital marketing agency: passionate service and complete transparency (EQ); channel-specific intelligence and knowledge (IQ) to develop new strategies as digital marketing evolves; and rock-solid execution (XQ) to ensure optimization of every campaign.

The company developed these beliefs as PPC Associates (2008-2013), which made its mark as a pioneering, results-oriented SEM agency before expanding to offer best-in-class services in display advertising, social media advertising, mobile advertising, video advertising, and SEO. 3Q Digital works with some of today’s fastest-growing clients, including GoPro, Square, California Closets, RelaxTheBack, SurveyMonkey, Fitbit, and Eventbrite.

If you’re interested in learning more about 3Q Digital’s services, please call us at 650 539-4625 or visit http://www.3QDigital.com/contact/.

3Q Digital is based in Silicon Valley and has offices in San Francisco, Chicago, San Diego, and Burlington, VT.
For more information on how 3Q Digital can help your marketing campaigns:

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