

Website Engagement in a Changed World

Tim:

Hi, and welcome to SoloSegment SearchChat. I'm Tim Peter. In this episode of SoloSegment SearchChat, SoloSegment CEO, Steve Zakur and I take a look at the new SoloSegment website engagement report with a focus on how you can use personalization and content recommendations to improve engagement for your website visitors.

We dive into the stats that show how B2B buyers use your website to learn more about your products and services and how you can use content personalization to improve the experience that they have. All that more on the latest SoloSegment SearchChat, coming at you right about now.

Steve, how are you?

Steve:

I'm doing really well, Tim. How's it going to your world?

Tim:

It is a little slice of heaven as always

Steve:

A light at the end of the tunnel on COVID means we'll be out of the jails we've been in soon.

Tim:

I am telling you, I think our last episode with the final episode of season one, this is season two of SearchChat for joining us.

But I think our last episode of season one was right before the world shut down. And yeah, obviously that played a role in why season one...

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Tim:

I like it. Well, welcome to season two. We're back. I'm glad to be chatting with you once again. I think we've got a lot of cool stuff to talk about over the over the next, handful of weeks and months and the like.

And, Steve, you and I were talking before the show about this new research report we just put together about website engagement in a changed world, and we'll give people the URL for that later. It will be in the show notes of course, but there were some really fascinating findings in the report that I think are going to be really relevant to the folks listening. So, what, when you look at the report, like what jumped out at you as, wow. That's crazy! And people need to know.

Steve:

Well, I think when you look at the context of this report, we've been through this year of COVID, we certainly have seen in our business as providers of digital marketing technologies, right. We have seen an acceleration of companies' appetite for that digital transformation.

I mean, there are, for better, for worse, there were a lot of laggards out there that weren't making the shift, were relying upon kind of human resources, if you will, to drive their businesses. And COVID kind of forced them to think about how people work in different ways, of course, but also, how does digital factor more into their day to day?

So I think one of the new things we discovered was shift to digital is accelerating. But also what we found out was how much, some of the fundamental truths have not changed, right. That people expect, and I think the figure was 80%, right? People in their B2B experiences in their professional lives expect the same kind of customized experiences that they want in their personal lives. And so that's actually a fundamental truth that why the number might have increased. Really hasn't changed all that much.

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Tim:

Yeah. No, that makes a lot of sense. I mean, if you think about it, one of the big myths of B2C versus B2B, it's this idea that, people think when you're selling to a business that it's completely different from anything else. And in fact, you're still selling to a human being, right. I mean, obviously that human being is part of a buying process. Obviously, there are more human beings involved or that they have to jump through various, hoops to make that happen.

Steve:

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And, and you have to engage that person, I've done B2B selling for many years in many different contexts. And one of the numbers that did surprise me was, most B2B purchase decisions require a six to 10 people. So, I knew it was a lot, I didn't know it was 6-10.

But, that's what the research shows that there's a lot of. In addition to the person, who's the decision maker, right? There are a lot of influencers and certainly you're dealing with procurement and finance and all these other organizations. But, what's interesting about that is as we think about personalized experiences in the consumer context, it's. "Well, what does Tim want? And what's Tim's relationship with, and what's his context and what is his desire", right? And now you're actually having to address many different contexts, many different goals.

And, I just think about like two basic ones, right. Maybe the, the business person, right? The person who has decision making authority they want increased engagement on the website. They want more conversions. They want more revenue. And while the person in procurement wants those things to, they also want a great price and lots of good value, et cetera. And so, as you're thinking about website engagement, it's not only that you really have to step up your personalization game to meet those expectations, but you also now have to deal with what we in marketing called many different personas.

And as if that first task wasn't hard enough, right? How do you engage people on your website? Now you have to engage multiple personas for the same kind of deal, same transaction.

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Tim:

Well, and especially depending on, as you said, what they care about, but also the content they engage with. I think the other thing that was interesting about that stat that you just talked about, about six to 10 different decision-makers is that the research shows that each one is independently making use of a half dozen pieces of content or more as part of that process. Right? Some of those, there may be some overlap, but on lots of those there aren't. So if somebody is coming and looking at your product or coming and looking at your service, they may be looking at multiple pieces of content about the same thing, but how do you know how to show the right one to the right person based on who they are. And I think that's something that's always, always a tough thing to do. Now you talk about this a lot that obviously a solution that people look at when trying to solve for this problem. Is ABM, right. Account based marketing, and account based marketing is a really cool tool and a really useful tool, but it's got its limitations from time to time, can you, can you talk about that a little bit?

Steve:

Yeah when you think about the journey that marketing operations or marketing managers go on to figure out what technology is now going to help them meet this expectation, they often start with either technology they already have because a lot of systems have some sort of personalization technology built in, or maybe they go buy personalization technology.

And it also, it starts with, let me get this personalization technology and where I have some personal data. I can use that to fuel the engine and they run into the harsh reality. That is. And we've looked at this data for our customers, three to 5% of website visitors to B2B websites are identifiable and that's for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it's because the buying cycles are long, cookies expire. So you can't kind of re-identify the person when they return. I think it's largely due to many folks who lurk in the dark. There's kind of a disincentive to raise your hand and identify yourself, right? Cause that you're going to get hammered by the emails and the phone calls. everything else. Because

Tim:

Wait, you mean B2B sales people?

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Steve:

I have been guilty of this myself. I must admit. As a matter of fact, I got a lead this morning and I specifically put in the CRM, do not contact for four days. Cause I know, first, this person doesn't want me to go hunt them down after 30 seconds after they hit the submit button. But also, I mean, it's not good sales process. Right. They need to, internalize and think about the thing that they're looking at. So we'll let them do that. But, but yeah, so there's that disincentive, right?, when do you want Steve calling you? And the reality is you want sales people, you wanna engage with them much later in the process after you have kind of considered it, et cetera.

Not to say, though, that it's important or it could be meaningful for both the company and the individual to get engaged perhaps earlier than they're comfortable with and not having the personal information on 95, 97% of your visitors. That really is where ABM came in. It was this kind of reality in the marketplace that there was this gap that something's gotta be done for all these people lurking in the darkness.

And that's where you saw account-based marketing technologies emerge now account based marketing isn't new, right. We've been doing account-based marketing since the fifties. Right, for 70 years. Yeah. But recently There has been this gap and these technologies, what they do of course is they look at the data stream on the website and they try to figure out what the physical location is of the person. And if you can determine the physical location and that physical location happens to be associated with a company, know you connect those two dots and you say, I'm going to start sending this visitor messages about that are specific to that account, or alternatively, maybe specific to the industry of that person.

And so account based marketing begins to fill that 95% hole in your knowledge about visitors and we've found, again, based upon data that our customers have shared with us, about 15 to 20% of the time, the website visitors are addressable by ABM technologies. But that's a pre COVID number.

And they all said, because it's, location-based, I'm currently sitting at my home. And so you don't know about me, my home in Connecticut is not associated with solo segment. And so it would be hard for me to be addressed by these technologies.

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And these companies saw a significant dip in the utility of that technology, although it's coming back and it's coming back pretty fast as people of course move back into the office.

Tim:

Sure, sure. Which, which we know. We know many people are going end up back in the office. We know many people are going to end up working from home. We know many people are going to be in a hybrid scenario. Right. I mean, it's, it's not, , I think, I think, and I'm sure you're going to talk about this in a moment, but I think it's the situation where , you can't be prepared for the either or of, "oh, there's going to be people who work in the office a hundred percent of time", or, "oh, there's going to be people who work from home a hundred percent of the time". It's going to be a bit of an "and", but it doesn't fill that entire gap that you're talking about.

Steve:

Absolutely. And, we kind of figure on average, it's about 85% of those visitors who really are truly anonymous -and that's going to be what you've got to crack the code on - is how do you engage those 85?

Tim:

And that's for all of those reasons, right? It's not just work from home. It's not just cookies. It's not just, ad blockers or things along those lines. It's all of this added together?

Steve:

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And, you mentioned ad-blockers, that's a, that's a great point. We often think about like the exogenous factors within the industry or within the software industry that is or within the regulatory environment as being kind of the villains in our ability to engage. But part of it, I mean, all that stuff right. Is based upon, kind of the desires of the humans, right? The people, people don't want their privacy trampled on, don't want their data trampled on. And so, not only do you see the challenges in the regulatory and software industry, but you also see what's happening, but the people are doing right.

They're using ad blockers as a perfect example. People are learning how to delete their cookies. Our study shows that almost 50% of people are deleting cookies every 30 days in their browsers, I was like, whoa, that used to be something nobody knew how to do.

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And now, apparently half the people are doing it. So it's those sorts of things that are going to impact the ability to address those.

Tim:

Right. By the way, I, feel bad, comedy is always timing and the timing on this is completely lost, but, I admit I missed a part of that because I was looking up the word exogenous. But I get what you mean, right? The external value.

Steve:

I used the big word. I'm sorry.

Tim:

I feel like we're going to have the SAT question.

Steve:

They're coming up to this.

Tim:

Perfect. Perfect. All right. So, you kind of set up the scenario where you've got for all kinds of reasons, internal reasons, external reasons, exogenous reasons that, people, people don't know, marketers don't know who the folks are on their website. And it really poses the question of how can organizations personalize the website experience when they don't know who the person is 85% of the time.

Steve:

I mean, that is the big question. And, it is at its heart part of a question we pose and it's very interesting. Several folks have mentioned this to us. It's this personalization, privacy kind of paradox, can these two things coexist together and, at the heart of it, it's getting people to raise their hands, getting people to say I'm ready to engage.

And so there's no trick. There's no trick. What you have to do is to present kind of the compelling case that the pain that they're feeling can be solved with the solution that you're providing.

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And I think the quicker and the more compelling way you can do that, of course, you're going to make those conversions. And one of the great challenges, especially in large enterprise companies, so if you have tens or hundreds of thousands of pieces of content, it is likely you have the right piece of content to convince every visitor. Right.

Tim:
Right.

Steve:
So it's not a content problem generally. It's not a content problem. The problem is it's a findability problem. Right. So how do you connect this person with the right content? Now, if you have an awesome search engine that's one way you can do it, right. They can ask the question that I am searching for this thing. Please present it to me. That is a place where a lot of companies honestly do not invest a dime.

They see, the search cost. They think of search as Google and they don't understand the value prop of "searchers are generally your best opportunities", right? 87% more likely to convert something like at least 43% more likely to buy and sometimes much more than that. And so search is the first place you can make your content more find-able because again, I bet you have the answer on your website now

Tim:
Right. Yeah, of course.

Steve:
So. Set aside search, everybody's navigating your website, now the question is, how do you in real time figure out, oh, well this, I might not know it's Tim, but based upon the content that Tim is looking at how do I figure out what additional content might help him progress on his journey and move along? I mean, for years we've done up by, we marketers have done related product links on websites, on pages and those sorts of things. So it is possible to do that manually to have every content owner tag their content in a way that that allows, maybe some sort of related products thing to guide people along.

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Tim:
Sure. Of course.

Steve:
But the reality is. People do that very poorly. There was one study that was done recently, actually, not recently, it's now about five years old, but it shows that people who tag content disagree with themselves about 30% of the time. So not necessarily the right way.

Tim:
That's like within a two week period, right? I mean, it's not like they're tagging this content and they're coming back to a year later. It's like, they're tagging the content. They're coming back to it a couple of weeks later and going, I would tag it like this, and it's not the same as what they've done.

Steve:
Correct.

Tim:
And that's just human nature. I mean, we, we're not card catalogs.

Steve:
Correct.

Tim:
We're not computers. It's not how we think.

Steve:
So what's left is well, there's a lot of data right now, and 10 years ago, it was really hard to discern what that data means and it's getting easier. And when we think about how do you help people with this findability problem, that is to say, how do you help visitors on your website find the right content. What we're really thinking about is three sets of data, right? What is the intent of them?

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When somebody is looking at a piece of content, they might not be able to tell you what their specific intent was, but you can kind of discern what, what people who look at this page as in general, what their intent is, because you can look at the reasons people have come to that in the past. And some of that's done by your search engine, right? Your search engine sends people to pages, but also gives you some insight into why people are on those pages.

And so, we think of, if you can harvest this intent data that exists on your website, you don't need a third party for this, but if you can look at this intent data on your website, that's one thing that can clue you into, the why of the, why they're there. And the second thing we look at of course, is the content itself. There are -you don't have to rely upon the people, to the content owners to tag the content on any longer, because today there are so many technologies that can essentially read, especially electronic content can read it very effectively and, you can do topical analysis on it. You can do industry analysis, a lot of different things you can imagine you could do with that content. Again, give you some sense of why are people on this website and now what are they looking at? What are they interested in? And then the final piece of the, the equation is actually the visits themselves of all the people over time, because, for anybody who's ever looked at reports about paths through websites, there are as many paths through websites as there are people on the website. Right,

Tim:
Right.

Steve:

Yeah. They're all kind of snowflake unique animals. But of course there are patterns in that data and there are patterns in that data, especially when you look at all your conversion moments. And then for large enterprise B2B, it's primarily things like download the white paper, look at the case, study, contact forms, those sorts of things. But, there are patterns in the journeys that lead to that point. And if you can discern somebody on that journey early enough, Well, now you have an opportunity to influence that journey, perhaps intercept them before they abandon and move them along. Because the goal of course is to help people discover that content that demonstrates that you are the solution to their problem, so that instead of raising their hand in a month or two months or their second visit, third visit fourth of the fifth visit that you get them to raise their hand. Now.

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And share their information so that you can put them now, move them into that bucket, which is odd this is a personal person with personal information that we can now actually engage and market to.

Tim:

No, that's cool. That's cool. So, Steve, I'm gonna set you up here to do a little commercial. How would one do it?

Steve:

How would one do do that Tim? Well, some of our customers do that with our products actually, all of our customers do that with our products.

So, I talked about search and navigation modalities, and I talked about them because you really do have to consider both. Now. I think it's kind of most common for us as marketers to think about the navigator on the website, the person who lands on a page and how do they move along and engage with the content and get to the next thing.

Right? We talk about these visitor journeys and personas and those sorts of things. And that's what we're trying to do with our GuideBox product is exactly that right? To see, to look at the data stream. Some of the data I talked about earlier to look at those data streams. And even though we don't know anything about the person themselves, Look at the behaviors and through the understanding of those behaviors and of behaviors that lead to conversions, guide people to those positive outcomes.

And by the way, it's not only positive outcomes for the company, right. It's positive outcomes for them because they have pain and they need to be it to be solved.

Tim:

Right. I mean, one of the reasons we personalize is to actually create better experiences for customers. Yes. We want to create better experiences for customers because they had lots of good things happen.

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Like they buy from us and they tell their friends and their family and their fans and followers all about doing all that kind of stuff. But it doesn't happen if they don't have a good experience at the first place, if they don't actually accomplish what they're trying. So that makes total sense.

Steve:
Absolutely.

And, I talked about search earlier and this is kind of the stepchild that I think a lot of folks need to focus on. We have a product called SearchBox and , it helps make search better, no matter what search engine you're using, because a lot of the problems with search are not the search engine.

It's not the people who are managing the search engine. It's not the content, right. It is actually feedback from customers, from users, from visitors on the website. About their experience. And if you look at the data streams, both of what's happening in search and what happens after a search, you can gain a lot of insight into what makes search successful.

And by using that data, feeding that data back into your search engine, you can automatically make search better. And I think I mentioned this a little bit earlier. I mean, searchers are more likely to do business with you. Because if you think about it, they've been frustrated by they're looking at this site. They can't find something. I mean, if you go to that search bar, instead of going back to Google, that means you're a dedicated, committed individual. And so there's a lot of value in, in making search better. And so that's why we encourage folks, If you don't need our SearchBox product, you think you can do better on your own. Absolutely. Go for it. Make your search engine better because there is gold in those searchers and searchers. And if they're frustrated, they're going to go away and now your competitors get shot at right.

Tim:
Right. Makes perfect sense. It makes perfect sense. Steve that's great stuff. I mean, any last thoughts you want to leave folks with, I'm just looking at the time, it's time to wrap up.

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Steve:

Yeah. I think that kind of the big thought. For now that we're in season two and kind of returning to this thought of engagement, we certainly have to reflect upon what's gone on in the past year, as far as the business environment, especially the digital business environment. I'm going on my first business trip a Monday. So I'll be like in Chicago for three days, it's going to be kind of strange. Yeah. But we are going to be getting back to it, and we're going to be getting back on planes and seeing people and back into the office. But I do think that fundamentally, digital is here to stay.

I think while the zoom calls will go down, video is going to be an important part of how we communicate and, I think websites, we all thought they were important before. But I think this notion of digital engagement is going to be increasingly important. And by the way, we see it in our numbers. Right. We see the boards that we're doing with our clients is increasing. So this is, this is the big thought -it's if you were behind before and you haven't already started to accelerate your digital transformation, you at least have to get ahead of your peers in the industry, because I think people have religion on this, and they're moving, and the laggards are no longer going to have the ability to kind of make it up with humans. I think that digital is definitely something that folks have to address.

Tim:

[Sounds like a perfect place to wrap up. I would like to say just another quick commercial, , if anybody wants to learn more about website engagement in a changed world and some of the stats that Steve has been referencing today, what I encourage you to check out SoloSegment's new report, "Website engagement in a changed world," looking at how handy that is, which you can find at SoloSegment.com/website-engagement. And we'll post a link to that in the show notes again, that is SoloSegment.com/website-engagement.

Steve, thank you as always for great discussion. I'll look forward to catching up with you here on SearchChat next time. Have a great rest of the day.

Steve:

Thanks. You too, Tim.

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Tim:

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