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## **Product Placement Spots for Search Engines on TV**

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Why is it that when one search engine does something, every other search engine jumps on the bandwagon? From the introduction of similar new products and features to the coincidental timing of product announcements, the major search engines frequently tend to trip over each other's feet. This tendency is getting mention in the mainstream media with an article from tech-writer Seth Hansell in today's New York Times noting "[Search Sites Play a Game of Constant Catch-Up](#)".

Over the past seven days we've seen an array of product placements on television shows. For two years, the brand-name Google was used as a noun, a verb and an adverb. It is little wonder the other search engines want to produce a little word-of-mouth of their own. This is the kind of advertising money can't buy and in all cases, the search firms claim they did not purchase the placements. Yahoo has signed a content distribution deal with the producers of the Apprentice however.

If the search engines are not purchasing these placements, they are certainly calling favors from contacts in the entertainment industry.

Recently a character on teen drama "The OC" was "A9.Com'd" by another character. The episode was released the day before A9 announced their local-search product A9 Yellow Pages. According to Google-Video, here are the lines from the script:

*"Uh, you were right. Caleb Nichol is not a good Guy. Why, why happened? Did he call you? No, but I a9.Com'd him last night, and according to the O.C. Weekly, he's pretty much everything that's wrong with Western civilization, all wrapped up in one Guy."* (Fox - Fox Network - Thu Jan 27 2005 at 8:00 PM PST)

Next came the Yahoo surveys used in the last episode of "The Apprentice" in which the destination travel businesses (established overnight by two teams) were voted on via a Yahoo poll. The product placement promoted the "Review this" rating option featured by Yahoo-local. Here is some of the text from that episode:

*"Each team will be given \$20,000 to renovate and refurbish a motel on the Jersey Shore. Then you will welcome paying customers. After the guests check out, they will rate your motel on Yahoo"* (NBC - NBC Network - Thu Jan 27 2005 at 8:30 PM PST)

Previously, the quiet butler Jeeves got in on the action with a placement mentioned on the dysfunctional family comedy, "Arrested Development."

*"Now, unfortunately, it's a private Stock, so you cannot just buy up the shares unless someone is willing to Sell. Are you sure? That's what they said on "Ask Jeeves." All right, who's the majority shareholder now? A company called "standpoor." "Standpoor"?"* (Fox - Fox Network - Sun Jan 23 2005 at 8:30 PM PST)

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Google gets its share of mentions on television as well. Thousands of hits are found at Google-Video for the word "google" but most come from reference in the mainstream media. Often reporters say they have "googled" a word or prompt viewers to "google" something to add credibility to their story.

Aside from the ubiquitous mentions of Google in pop-culture, search engines are rarely mentioned on TV. This could mark a change in popular attitudes towards information. In the 1950's young characters were always exiting the scene on their way to the library. While I never heard Wally or the Beaver mention the local branch of the Carnegie Mellon library, today's TV characters are not only using search engines, they mention them by brand name.

Chances are however, these product mentions actually mark a new front in the battle to win users.