

## Shop Till You Read

We were intrigued on Monday this week to discover that “*nzherald.co.nz* has launched a new shopping feature for readers”, in time for Christmas.

This new shopping section of the online Herald “features a selection of products from wine to whiteware from a range of carefully selected suppliers representing well known consumer brands. It also showcases daily offers and products exclusively available to *nzherald.co.nz* readers.” Oh, and it’s powered by *Hubsta*, the shopping engine behind *The Deal* and *Yahoo!Xtra’s* online offerings.

We didn’t have to dig too deep to confirm that the bulk of the products offered on the Herald website are seemingly the same as those available through *Yahoo!Xtra*. Which got us to thinking: while it may be convenient (and perhaps even profitable) for the Herald to tap into the *Hubsta* ecommerce catalogue, it doesn’t do much to enhance the Herald brand. Nor will it endear the NZ Herald particularly to its advertisers, with whom it is now competing for shopper dollars.

It’s probably unrealistic (and too expensive to implement), but we would sooner see the Herald partner with its loyal advertisers, offering an exclusive selection of client products through online shopping facilities (ideally with clicks’n’mortar options as well).

Unfortunately, the current *Global Financial Crisis* tends to encourage short term pragmatism in such matters.

## Christmas, Social, Mobile: Deck Those Halls

‘Tis the season to come across heaps of research about Christmas shopping. The latest that caught our eye: Deloitte’s 24th annual holiday survey, conducted online between September 24 and October 2, 2009 amongst a sample of 10,878 American consumers. Drop us an email if you want a copy of the full results, but note these fast facts:

17% of surveyed consumers (31% of those aged 18-29) said they expect to use **SOCIAL MEDIA** as part of their holiday shopping process.

### Of those expecting to use social media:

- 60% Plan to use it to find discounts, sale info
- 53% Will use social media to research gift ideas
- 52% Will use it check w/friends & family on gifts
- 46% Intend to research product reviews
- 31% To coordinate shopping w/friends & family
- 30% To share a wish list via social media

And 19% (39% of 18-29s) say **they’ll use a MOBILE PHONE** to assist them over the holidays. Of those:

- 55% Will use their mobile to get store locations
- 45% Will use it to research prices
- 40% Will use it to get product info
- 32% Expect to use it to get discounts, coupons etc.
- 31% Will use it to read reviews
- 25% Aim to use their mobile to make a purchase

## Microsoft vs Google: The Battle Continues

We have to admit we’d pretty much written off Microsoft in the Search Engine Wars. As far as we could tell, a successful challenge to Google would require some snazzy new technology created in a garage by an unknown *wunderkind*, not an attack (however long & sustained) from the global software giant.

A couple of things have happened that have now made us re-evaluate that viewpoint. Firstly, thanks to a small but timely investment in Facebook, Microsoft has managed to get at least some access into that otherwise closed environment for its Bing search engine (while Google remains on the outside trying to pretend it doesn’t desperately want to look in).

And now the *Financial Times* is reporting that Microsoft has had discussions with News Corp over a plan that would involve the media company being paid to “de-index” its news websites from Google. According to the FT, Microsoft has also approached other big online publishers to persuade them to remove their sites from Google’s search engine.

Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer has said that the company is prepared to spend heavily for many years to make Bing a serious rival to Google. That didn’t seem to matter much – until now, when we see exactly how the company plans to spend its dollars. Clearly it benefits web publishers to have the two giants fighting (and paying) for content – but it is a worrying trend for those who support an Open WorldWideWeb.