Ecosia

STORIES
Ecosia is a search engine that donates 80% of its revenue to a tree planting program in Brazil. Geckoboard had the opportunity to chat with Piotr Drozd, Head of Growth and Analytics at Ecosia. Piotr shared with us how data driven marketing is taking Ecosia to the next level.
Could you tell me a little bit about Ecosia and your role there?

Ecosia, or as we like to call it, the search engine that plants trees, is a social business, which means that our long-term vision is to have the greatest positive impact per Euro (or Dollar) on Earth’s environment. We execute on it by donating the vast majority of our revenue to a tree planting program in the Brazilian Atlantic Forest and our mission is plant at least million trees by the end of August 2014.

Technically speaking, our offer to end users is a search engine powered mainly by Yahoo and enhanced by our own features such as search tags or sustainability rankings. We’re trying to compete with the big players in the market by providing equal-caliber search quality with a very unique value proposition. Founded in late 2009 in Berlin, Ecosia got completely revamped in August 2013 and we’re literally growing by the minute ever since. Seen in that light, data driven marketing is at the very core of what and how we do things at Ecosia.

As a ‘growth hacker’, I’m tasked with overseeing and optimizing our marketing channels, evangelizing a data driven and evidence-based culture, and implementing analytics in terms of methodology and technology.

How you go about choosing your metrics, how do you decide what to focus on?

I guess in our case this was pretty straightforward. For all search engines out there the one metric that matters is the number of searches performed by users. Every other metric relates to our leading indicator, which, in turn, constitutes a basis for determining the objectives we set ourselves and the trends we’re trying to optimize for. Having a clearly-defined goal is vital to us as we believe Ecosia is at a stage where it can be scaled up globally. Our product seems to be both sticky and viral, and we try to continuously improve the user experience of more than 2.5 million Ecosians worldwide.

Apart from the number of search requests, we closely monitor the lifecycle of our users starting with acquisition through activation, retention, referral and finally - the bottom line - revenue. The same logic applies to all our marketing channels such as mobile apps, browser extensions, organic search, referrals or social. All of these point to and are analyzed within the context of the one metric that matters.

When it comes to some of the obstacles we face, given the number of various data sources and high search volume, it might sometimes be challenging to maintain a focus and we have to silence a great deal of noise along the way. Also since we take the
privacy of our users very seriously and don’t store any data or employ personalization algorithms, virtually each and every data point we collect is either aggregated or cookie-based, which makes measuring usage and engagement a rather difficult endeavor.

How are you using Geckoboard?

Our Geckoboard dashboard is displayed in real time in the office and everyone in the company has access to it – transparency is a value we hold closely and we believe that the more eyes see the numbers we’re trying to optimize the better.

The dashboard itself is integrated into our decision making process - it’s brilliant, we absolutely love it! Not only does it help us foster a culture of evidence-based practice, but also is a great way for individual team members to understand their impact on things such as growth rate or user pain reduction. That’s definitely one of the most gratifying aspects of our jobs. Plus, having the numbers on hand helps a lot with prioritizing tasks and us pulling in one direction.

What would be your advice to any marketer or any person working in growth that really wants to make a change and become more data driven?

I think the biggest challenge for any growth hacker is to fight the so-called Highest Paid Person’s Opinion or hearsay mentality. Sometimes the boss may try to impose his or her beliefs or tastes on the product, say, by kindly requesting you to change the background of the homepage to lavender pink because... just because! But what if the UX research or the A/B test you’ve done indicates that orangesignificantly outperforms pink and how do you communicate this to an opinionated line manager?

Another thing that I believe stirs much confusion in the space is industry benchmarking. It often happens that you know the number for something, say your monthly churn rate, but don’t necessarily know what it implies for you as the Online Marketing Manager or how it compares to your competitors. Is a monthly churn rate of 6% still organic or can it be attributed to something else and hence further improved? My advice here would be not to stop at getting the data right, but to attempt to leverage any insights in the wider context.

Many data-driven marketers fall into the cognitive trap of trusting the data fully, sometimes to the extent of becoming data-enslaved. I guess the lesson learned the hard way for me here is to remember that data is objective, but the process of collecting and crunching it is subjective. Rule of thumb? Be wary of anything that correlates too much with your beliefs.
Last but not least, it’s worth keeping in mind that data points are history and it’s always good to trust your gut feeling every now and then and have visionaries around to prevent tunnel vision.

If you found this case study useful you may also be interested in the following:

**More resources:**

More case studies (http://www.geckoboard.com/blog/)

Lean Analytics FREE online workshop (https://www.udemy.com/lean-analytics-workshop-alistair-croll-and-ben-yoskovitz/)

Interviews with data driven entrepreneurs (http://www.geckoboard.com/geckofuel/)

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