THE CONNECTED BRANDS INDEX

BENCHMARKING THE PERFORMANCE OF BRANDS IN NETWORKS

October 23, 2009

icrossing

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A first-of-its-kind analysis of how brands are performing online by ranking each brand against five categories: visible, useful, usable, desirable and engaged. Using Interbrand's Best Global Brands, iCrossing measured each against more than 65 data points across the five categories to determine each brand's overall score. Key findings show that brands are currently doing little to engage users. Opportunities exist for brands to:

+ Better understand their customers by understanding networks
+ Be more responsive by improving marketing infrastructure
+ Build intimacy with customers by being more active digitally

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iCrossing analyzed more than 65 data points – which span a brand's presence across social media sites, competitive site traffic providers, search engine tools, as well as an analysis of each brand's website – to determine a brand's overall score. Google led in each category and scored high marks in the engagement category when compared to the other brands.

This is how the brands were scored against the five criteria:

+ Visible: The visible category quantifies the findability and presence a brand has in the digital world.
+ Useful, Usable, Desirable: iCrossing used a standardized website review methodology as a basis to score each brand's website for the useful, usable and desirable categories.
+ Engaged: Engagement metrics were split into two categories of publicly-available data points – advocacy and actions.

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iCrossing found that the brands that ranked well in Interbrand's analysis are not necessarily the most connected brands online. We see significant opportunity for marketers to improve their brand's digital performance, growing into high-performing Connected Brands that result in more intimate customer relationships, and ultimately lead to significantly-improved business results.

Methodology ..... Page 12

The methodology used by iCrossing to evaluate a brand's Connectedness is aligned with the visible, useful, usable, desirable and engaged framework. Scoring and analysis were based on 65 data points covering the breadth of a brand's online presence.

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ABOUT THE CONNECTED BRANDS INDEX

Connectedness is a marketing philosophy. It is a measure of how intimate a brand is with its audiences. It's a characteristic of a brand, a 'state of being.' Think of it as a Zen stage in brand evolution. After all, a brand needs to be a living organism in today's marketing world, not an object, not a loudspeaker yelling at people. Connectedness is a way of thinking about how successful brands do marketing: focusing on audiences, not targets; engaging in dialogue, not shouting; and developing trust that lasts.

Read our Connected Brands Primer to learn more about our connectedness philosophy, and what it means to be a connected brand.

iCrossing's Connected Brands Index is a first-of-its-kind report that analyzes the quality and performance of a brand's presence in networks, and helps to determine how the results of marketers' efforts are paying off.

Using the Connected Brands Scorecard, a diagnostic tool developed by iCrossing, the Connected Brands Index shows how brands are performing online by ranking each brand against five categories: visible, useful, usable, desirable and engaged. Using Interbrand's list of Best Global Brands, iCrossing measured those brands against more than 65 data points across the five categories to develop a Connected Brands Scorecard for each brand. The results from the Scorecards were then combined to form the Connected Brands Index.

Key Findings

+ **Few companies are truly connected brands.** Of the top 10 Interbrand companies we analyzed, only three (Google, Disney, Intel) had a score of 5 or better (out of 10). The average for all 10 companies was 4.83.
+ **Brands are doing little to engage users.** Brands scored lowest in the engaged category; the average score for engaged was 2.11, with only Google scoring above 5.
+ **Brands fair somewhat better in categories relating website design.** All 10 companies scored highest in the visible, usable and desirable categories, likely reflecting their experience in Web development.

The bottom line is that opportunities exist for brands to better understand their customers by understanding networks, to be more responsive by improving marketing infrastructure and processes, and finally, to build intimacy with customers by being more active digitally.

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DETAILED FINDINGS

iCrossing chose to analyze the Interbrand Best Global Brands, believing that the 'best global brands' had sufficient resources to make significant investments in their online presence, and as world-class brands, might perform well in our research. To measure connectedness, iCrossing evaluated each brand against how visible, useful, usable, desirable and engaged they are with consumers.

To accomplish this we analyzed more than 65 data points, which span a brand's presence across social media sites, competitive site traffic providers, search engine tools, as well as an analysis of each brand's website.

INTERBRAND 2009 BEST GLOBAL BRANDS

1. Coca-Cola
2. IBM
3. Microsoft
4. GE
5. NOKIA
6. McDonald's
7. Google
8. TOYOTA
9. intel
10. Disney

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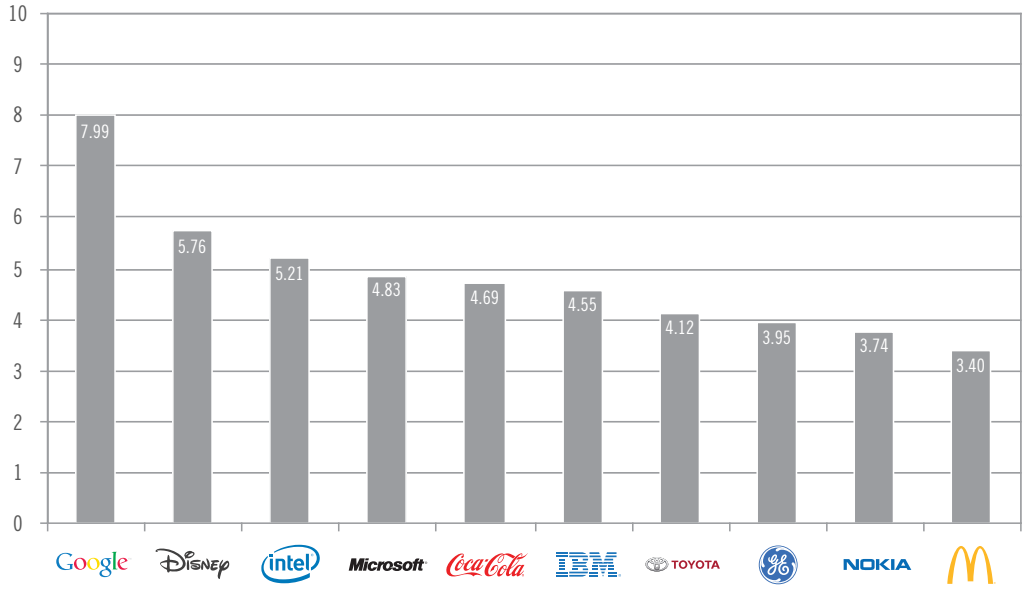
OVERALL RESULTS

iCrossing found that the brands that ranked well in Interbrand's analysis are not necessarily the most connected brands online. In fact, three brands that scored at the bottom of Interbrand's top 10 ranking – Google (7), Disney (10), and Intel (9) – scored as the top three in the Connected Brands Index.

When we look at the scores of each company in the table below and the Connected Brand Index graph on the following page, we see that the largest delta is between Google and the rest of the brands. Google led in each category and scored high marks in the engagement category when compared to the other brands.

Connected Brand Rank	2009 Interbrand Rank	Brand	Visibile	Useful	Usable	Desirable	Engaged	Average Score
1	7	Google	8.89	6.75	8.85	8.96	6.53	7.99
2	10	Disney	5.56	6.50	6.54	7.71	2.50	5.76
3	9	Intel	5.56	5.00	6.92	7.50	1.07	5.21
4	3	Microsoft	4.72	4.25	4.81	7.29	3.09	4.83
5	1	Coca-Cola	5.56	5.75	5.19	5.21	1.75	4.69
6	2	IBM	4.44	4.75	6.15	5.21	2.21	4.55
7	8	Toyota	5.56	4.25	5.58	4.17	1.07	4.12
8	4	GE	4.44	3.50	5.58	5.21	1.03	3.95
9	5	Nokia	5.56	4.25	4.81	2.92	1.19	3.74
10	6	McDonalds	4.44	3.50	4.81	3.54	0.71	3.40
		Average Score	5.47	4.85	5.92	5.77	2.11	4.83

CONNECTED BRANDS INDEX (OVERALL SCORE)



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VISIBLE

The visible category quantifies the findability and presence a brand has in the digital world. Visibility metrics include a range of data points related to both the official company presence (.com), as well as the brand's presence on search engines, social media sites, blogs and other places in the network. We also measured the number of referring URLs, overall reach, inbound links and total visits to the corporate landing page.

Google leads the others in this category, which is understandable given the reach of Google.com. According to Compete.com, Google has more than twice the number of visits, number of referring URLs, and overall reach than the next nearest competitor. The same is true with the number of inbound links according to Yahoo! Site Explorer.

Six of the 10 scored above a five, with the average score being 5.47. Visible was the category in which Nokia had their best score and McDonalds's score was hurt by the lack of an official YouTube channel.

VISIBLE SCORE

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USEFUL

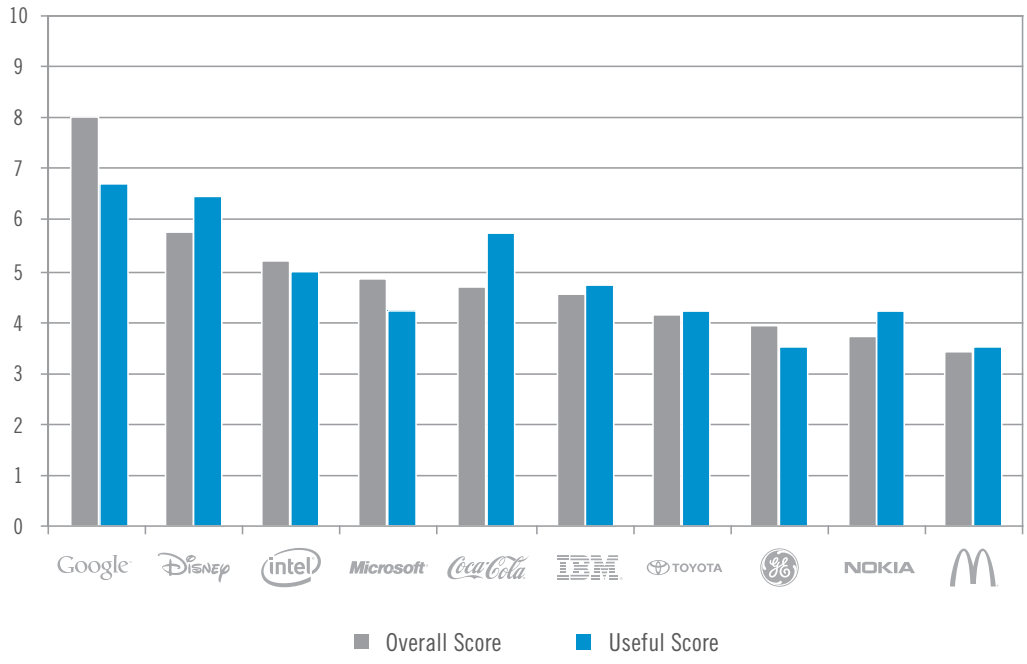
iCrossing used a standardized website review methodology as a basis to score each brand's website for the useful, usable and desirable categories. For each brand, iCrossing developed a prototypical user and defined a specific use case for that user on the brand's website. For the useful category, iCrossing analysts looked at how well each site scored against a set of 10 questions including "Does the landing page(s) provide evidence that user goals can be completed?" and "Is essential function available where needed?" (All 10 criteria used to judge the useful category can be found in the methodology section.)

Useful was the second-worst performing category for the brands as a whole, with an average score of 4.85. Three out of the 10 scored below their average scores. Coca-Cola was helped most with their useful score of 5.75 – it was their highest-scoring category.

Google received their high score for having essential functionality available where needed, helping users avoid and recover from errors, and an overall well-performing site with all pages loading in less than three seconds.

Disney had solid content and function where needed, but lacks clear privacy and security policies on some of the pages, an example being the lack of privacy and security policy links on the trip planning registration page.

USEFUL SCORE



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USABLE

The usable category quantifies how well a user can navigate and find relevant content on the site. iCrossing analysts looked at how well each site, from a user's perspective, scored against a set of 10 questions including "Are content and function classified logically?" (All 10 criteria used to judge the usable category can be found in the methodology section.)

With the exception of Microsoft, all of the brands' usable scores exceeded their average total Connected Brand Index scores. It was the highest scoring category for IBM, GE and Toyota. It was also the highest scoring category overall, with an average score of 5.92 for all brands.

Intel scored well in this category, but had some issues with the ambiguity of some of the menu categories and subcategories, as well as a large number of links on the Work landing page causing user confusion.

IBM had issues with flow efficiency, working in hyperlinks, form fields and interactive elements not behaving as expected.

USABLE SCORE

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DESIRABLE

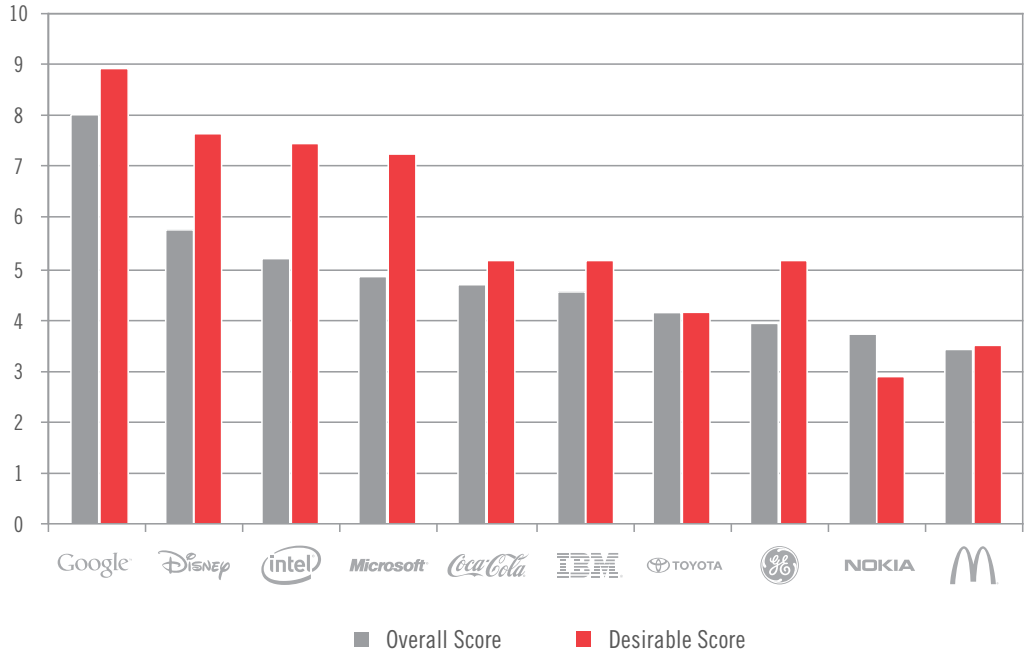
The desirable score quantifies how well the website reflects brand positioning compared with other channels, the emotional impact of the site, and whether the site gives a user a reason to return. (The 12 criteria used to score each site can be found in the methodology section.)

Desirable was the second-best scoring category overall and the top category for Google, Disney, Intel and Microsoft. Nokia was the only brand to score below its overall score on desirable, with a score of 2.92.

Nokia gives users a reason to return and had high production values, but scored poorly on all other desirable categories because of some issues with brand positioning on the site – it lacked the personality of the Nokia brand.

Google took the top score in almost all of the categories, but saw some of the same issues with brand positioning.

DESIRABLE SCORE



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ENGAGED

Engagement metrics were split into two categories of publicly-available data points. These categories were advocacy – used to determine how willing users are to promote the brand – and actions – a measure of how well the company uses offsite visibility to communicate with consumers. Twenty metrics were measured in total, including numbers of subscribers on social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube, Twitter activity and social bookmarks. (Complete engagement metrics can be found in the methodology section.)

Engagement was the poorest performing category for every brand, even for Google, whose score of 6.53 is more than twice that of the next highest scoring brand. On average, the brands only scored a 2.11 on a scale of 1-10 with McDonald's having the lowest engaged score of 0.71.

Although Google had the highest overall score, Microsoft, Disney and IBM ranked above others in several individual metrics.

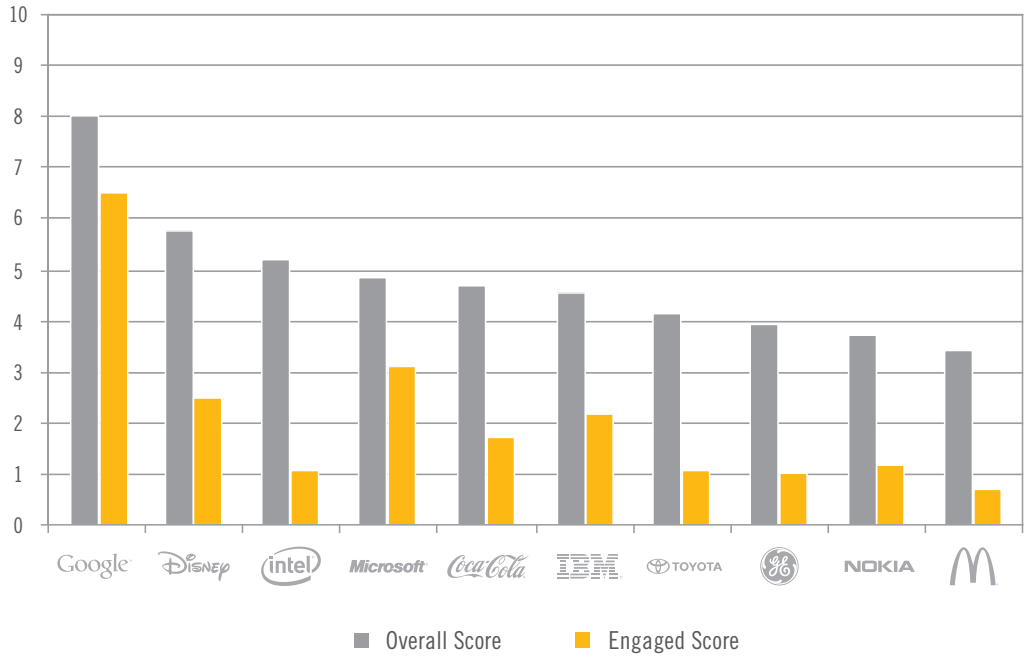
+ Microsoft has the highest number of tweets per day and the highest number of twitter followers.

+ Disney has some of the highest metrics on Flickr.

+ IBM succeeded by having the longest average stay as well as the highest number of twitter accounts.

Companies seem to be engaging with some, but not all social networks. To become a connected brand, they need to engage with all users, regardless of their preferred site.

ENGAGED SCORE



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CONCLUSION

Our research uncovered some surprising findings. Google moved from number 7 on Interbrand's 2009 list (it was number 10 the year before), to number 1 on our index, clearly reflecting the digital nature of their business. Disney ranks number 2 on the Connected Brands Index, up significantly from number 10 on Interbrand's list. More interesting was that engagement scores were low across the board, which we view as a general reflection of brands' limited adoption of social media efforts. Lastly, none of the 10 best global brands we evaluated scored higher than a 7.9, leaving room for other entrants at the top of the index.

We see a significant opportunity for marketers to improve their brand's digital performance, growing into high-performing Connected Brands that result in more intimate customer relationships, and ultimately lead to significantly-improved business results.

If you would like to learn more about iCrossing's approach to building Connected Brands, then join the conversation at www.icrossing.com, or contact us.

Call us toll-free at 866.620.3780
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METHODOLOGY

Using the Connected Brands Scorecard, a diagnostic tool developed by iCrossing, the Connected Brands Index ranks the Interbrand Best Global Brands against five categories – visible, useful, usable, desirable and engaged – to determine an overall "connectedness" score on a scale of one to 10. The Scorecard consists of more than 65 data points across the five criteria, including presence and consumer engagement across social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube; unique visitors, inbound URLs, and consumer actions on corporate blogs, as well as an extensive review of each brand's website using a standardized review methodology. Sources for the evaluation included Compete.com, Yahoo! Site Explorer, Flickr, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, TweetStats, Twitalyzer, Reddit, Digg and Del.ic.ious.

SCORING

Scores for visible and engaged were created using a scale ranging from the minimum and maximum values for each brand and categorizing scores accordingly. For useful, usable and desirable, scoring metrics were determined based on the ideal state defined by iCrossing, starting with our standardized website review methodology as a basis and scores were assigned to brands according to these standards. Brands were given a store for each of the Connectedness elements and scores were combined to create an overall Brand Connectedness Score.

METRICS

Visible

Visible metrics represent two areas, offsite and onsite. These were used to measure the connectedness of the brand with offsite communities as well as how well those tactics work at bringing users to the site. For the purposes of this study, we used publicly-available metrics, which include:

Offsite:

+ Official Flickr Account
+ Official YouTube Channel
+ Official Facebook Group
+ Official Twitter Group
+ Existence of company blog

Onsite:

+ Number of Unique Visitors
+ Number of Referring URLs
+ Overall Reach
+ Number of Inbound Links

Useful, Usable, and Desirable

iCrossing created a framework to measure each brand's website for usefulness, usability and desirability based on standardized website review methodology. By defining user goals for each brand, iCrossing was able to evaluate each brand's landing pages, content, functionality, privacy and security policies, performance, navigation, search functionality, legibility, formatting, site layout, brand positioning and interaction between brands and consumers across each site. Questions posed for each site reviewed are below:

Useful:

+ Does the landing page(s) provide evidence that user goals can be completed?
+ Is essential content available where needed?
+ Is essential functionality available where needed?
+ Are essential content and functionality given priority in the display?
+ Does the site present privacy and security policies in context?
+ Do location cues orient the user?
+ Does site functionality provide clear feedback in response to user actions?
+ Is contextual help available at key points?
+ Does the site help users avoid and recover from errors?
+ Does the site perform well?

Usable

+ Are menu category and subcategory names clear and mutually exclusive?
+ Do menu categories immediately expose or describe their subcategories?
+ Are content and functionality classified logically?
+ Is the task flow efficient?

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+ Is the wording in hyperlinks and controls clear and informative?
+ Are keyword-based searches comprehensive and precise?
+ Does site content use language that's easy to understand?
+ Does the site use graphics, icons, and symbols that are easy to understand?
+ Is text legible?
+ Does text formatting and layout support easy scanning?
+ Do layouts use space effectively?
+ Are form fields and interactive elements placed logically in the display?
+ Do interactive elements behave as expected?

Desirable

+ Does the site's content support brand positioning in a manner that is consistent with other channels?
+ Does the site's functionality support brand positioning in a manner that is consistent with other channels?
+ Do the site's language and tone support brand positioning in a manner that is consistent with other channels?
+ Does the site's imagery support brand positioning in a manner that is consistent with other channels?
+ Does the site's typography support brand positioning in a manner that is consistent with other channels?
+ Does the site's layout support brand positioning in a manner that is consistent with other channels?
+ Does the site communicate brand attributes that are meaningful to target users in a manner that's relevant to target users?
+ Does the site have high-quality production values?
+ Does the site elicit an emotional response from the user - does it deliver a positive memorable experience?
+ Are the uses of technologies both inspiring and pragmatic?
+ Is the site interactive and participatory, does it facilitate a dialogue between user and brand and between user and user?
+ Does the site give the user reason(s) to come back?

Engaged

Engagement metrics were also split into two categories of publicly-available data points. These categories were advocacy, used to determine how willing users are to promote the brand, and actions, a measure of how well the company uses offsite visibility to communicate with consumers. Metrics included:

Advocacy:

+ Number of YouTube Friends
+ Number of Tweets about the brand
+ Number of shared/recommended content links on Reddit.com
+ Number of shared/recommended content links on Digg.com
+ Number of social bookmarks on Del.ic.ious

Actions:

+ Visits per person
+ Average stay
+ Page views/visits
+ # of Flickr contacts
+ # of Flick discussions
+ # of Flickr posted items
+ # of Flickr photo search results
+ # of YouTube subscribers
+ # of YouTube channel views
+ # of Facebook fans/friends
+ # of Facebook discussions
+ # of Official Twitter accounts
+ # of Tweets per Day (average of all accounts)
+ # of Twitter followers
+ # of Twitter following
+ # of inbound links to blog

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ABOUT ICROSSING

iCrossing is a global digital marketing agency that combines talent and technology to help world-class brands find and connect with their customers. The company blends best-in-class digital marketing services — including paid search, search engine optimization, Web development, social media, mobile, research and analytics — to create integrated digital marketing programs that engage consumers and drive ROI. iCrossing's client base includes such recognized brands as Epson America, Toyota, Travelocity and 40 Fortune 500 companies, including The Coca-Cola Company and Office Depot. Headquartered in Scottsdale, Arizona, the company has 550 employees in 12 offices in the U.S. and Europe.

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