CONSUMERS AND ORGANIC PRODUCT MARKETING RESEARCH 2014

Internet Users’ New Expectations on True Organic Brands

.ORGANIC

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The multi-billion dollar organic industry represents a movement that is not only embraced but deeply committed to by many consumers. Truly organic products are certified by an accredited agent against specific standards and regulations. However, many companies and products that are NOT organic-certified still associate themselves with the term “organic” in their online marketing. Key findings from a research survey of over 3,200 Internet users in the U.K. and U.S. show that:

- **Nearly 70% of Internet users believe some companies are misrepresenting themselves as “organic” to command a premium price.**
- **60% would like a new way, online, to help them easily differentiate the true organic.**
- **With the recent launch of .ORGANIC, a new web domain that is available only to verified organic companies and products, almost 60% of Internet users are more inclined to visit a site on .ORGANIC than the legacy .COM when searching for organic products.**
The organic market is confusing to Internet users, as consumers believe that many non-organic companies and products pretend to be organic. Adding to the confusion is the use of terms like “natural,” “healthy,” or “green.” After all, in the traditional Internet world where only a small number of top-level domains exist, (i.e., the last part of the web address after the dot, such as .COM or .CO.UK), any website can have the word “organic” in its web address and content.

The Internet is, however, entering a new era: in 2014 hundreds of new top-level domains have been approved by Internet Corporation of Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the entity responsible for the Internet’s addressing system, and hundreds more to come in 2015. Such change gives businesses and organizations more choices in finding the web addresses that best represent who they are and what they do while revolutionizing how consumers search and navigate the Internet.

One of the new top-level domains launched in September 2014 is .ORGANIC, available exclusively to bona fide organic community members. Only entities that are certified organic or otherwise meet stringent eligibility requirements are allowed to use this web address. That means Internet users coming to a site on the .ORGANIC domain will know immediately it is a verified organic company or product.

Afilias, the domain operator of .ORGANIC, commissioned independent market research agency YouGov to undertake this research. The total sample size was 3,204 adults and fieldwork in the form of an online survey was completed in mid-November 2014. The figures have been weighted and are individually representative of all U.K. and U.S. adults (2,057 and 1,147 adults respectively, aged 18+). The objective of the survey is to understand how Internet users respond to this new Internet age when web domains, as in the case of .ORGANIC, carry meaning in the domain name itself.
The online organic market is confusing to consumers: 43% of the poll respondents acknowledge that they can’t easily differentiate who’s truly organic and who’s not when they are researching or shopping online. Only 5% claim they don’t have such a problem. But what most consumers (almost 70%) are convinced is that some companies are taking advantage of their confusion and pretend they are organic in order to charge a premium price. What consumers want is simple: 69% think companies should stop associating themselves with the term “organic” if they are not.

60% of Internet users outright want an easy way to identify those companies and products that are truly organic.

“I think some companies are not truly organic but they try to confuse consumers so they can charge a premium price for their products.”

“I would like companies/products that are not truly organic to stop associating themselves with the term organic.”

“I would like to have a way to easily tell who’s truly organic and who’s not when I am researching/buying online”
In the traditional internet world where web addresses end with .COM, CO.UK, .NET, etc., any company can get a web address with "organic" in their name and claim they are organic, as there is no verification process (e.g., www.OrganicCompanyABC.com).

In September 2014, a new web domain – .ORGANIC – was made available exclusively to companies and organizations that are certified organic or otherwise meet stringent eligibility requirements. Every applicant for a .ORGANIC name is verified before being allowed to use the name (e.g., www.CompanyABC.ORGANIC). For example, products that bear the European Union Organic Seal in the U.K. or the USDA ORGANIC seal in the U.S. are certified and qualify for the .ORGANIC address.

While the .ORGANIC domain is a brand new concept at the time of the survey, 1 in 4 consumers already expect to see organic companies and products on the domain, appreciate its exclusivity for verified organic companies and products, and agree it will make it easier for them to identify the truly organic.

![Fig. 3: “Thinking about the new .ORGANIC web domain, which, if any, of the following statements do you agree with?”](image_url)
Going beyond the abstract concept and focusing on expected behaviors, almost 60% of consumers claim they are more inclined to click on a site on the .ORGANIC domain vs. the .COM domain if they are looking for organic products online. Such potential behavior change shows once consumers understand what .ORGANIC stands for and the verification process that drives its exclusivity, many will quickly embrace the domain as a way to distinguish the true organic from the rest.

Fig. 4:
“Please imagine you are searching online for organic food products. Two websites show up in the search results: www.CompanyABC.organic and www.CompanyXYZ.com. Which web address do you think you would be MORE inclined to visit for organic products?”
When asked to name the brands they believed should be on the .ORGANIC domain, the research participants provided over more than 700 responses. Some of the most-mentioned brands include:


CONSUMERS WOULD LIKE THESE BRANDS TO BE ON .ORGANIC

The graphs below show the brands in a tag cloud format with the size of the brands corresponding to the number of mentions by the respondents.

Fig. 5:
Brands that U.K. consumers believe should be on the .ORGANIC domain

Fig. 6:
Brands that U.S. consumers believe should be on the .ORGANIC domain

Some of the brands mentioned by consumers already have a .ORGANIC web address, e.g., Applegate, Stonyfield, and Clif Bar.
Internet users welcome a new way, online, to help them easily identify the true organic and expect qualified brands to be on the new web domain, .ORGANIC. Once they understand the exclusivity and verification process involved in the .ORGANIC domain, nearly 60% expect to visit a site on .ORGANIC more than one on .COM, whereas only 7% still prefer a site on the legacy .COM domain. Such a behavioral shift means true organic brands will need to quickly adjust their online marketing strategies to keep up with consumer expectations.

ABOUT AFILIAS

Afilias is a global leader in advanced registry services with approximately 20 million domain names under management. In addition to being the registry operator for .ORGANIC, Afilias powers a wide variety of top-level domains including domains for geographies, brands, communities and generic terms. For information about new top-level domains and the services Afilias provides, please visit:

www.afilias.info

CONTACT:
For further information about this research report, please contact: press@afilias.info