

10 Things Commonly Done Wrong in Google AdWords

If you are reading this on paper, please download the latest version in PDF free here: kno.click/adwords-mistakes

You may have heard people saying: ***SEO is dead.***

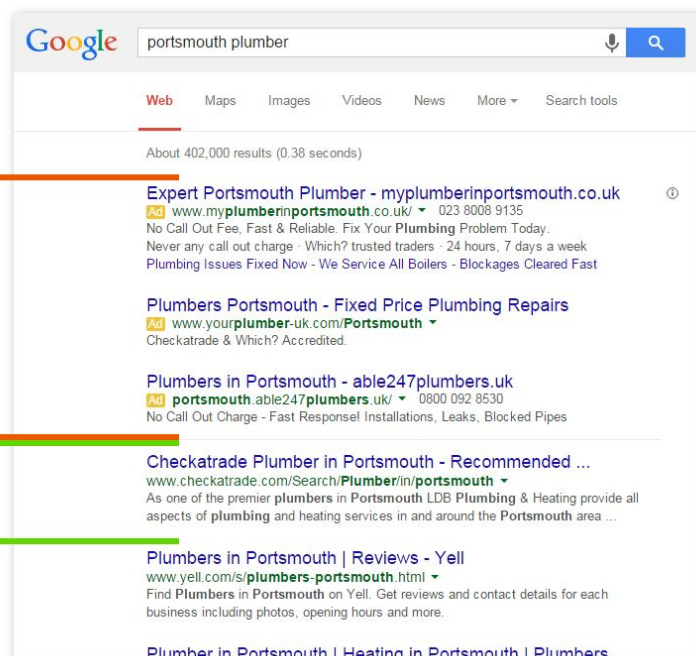
Well, we could debate *that* for many pages, but we think it's fair to say ***free-and-fast* Search Engine Optimization is dead.**

Your new web pages are not going to shoot up to no.1 in the free/organic Google search rankings instantly, whatever clever tricks *used* to work. The Google system is now too smart to be gamed. And the organic SEO tactics that work over the long term are not free when you consider the talent and time required to succeed.

Fortunately, as with queues at check-in desks at airports, there's a premium option which will get you straight to no.1 position -- sorry, ABOVE no.1 position -- in the Google search results: AdWords. (In fact, Google themselves market AdWords as a chance to [get "above Google search results".](#))

Google Adwords
(paid search ads)
ranking 1,2,3 above
the first organic/free
search result

Google (Organic/Free)
Search position no. 1



AdWords is how Google makes its money, and it is what funds all those wonderful free Google services like Maps, Earth, Gmail, and of course the search engine itself.

Businesses paying for AdWords can get their message and link in front of masses of target customers at just the right time and you only pay when someone clicks your ad. You can switch it on and off instantly and anyone with a credit card can start an AdWords campaign any time without any apparent difficulty... BUT...

The problem with AdWords, from the point of view of the manager of a small (often local or niche) business, is that it's a huge and complex system designed with one goal: to suck advertising £££s out of you as much and as long as it can! Think of it like a combination of the cockpit of a 747 and a Las Vegas casino.



+

=

 Google AdWords



The combination of complete access to all detailed ad campaign settings and features in AdWords, and the temptation (encouraged by the interfaces) to increase spending constantly, means a risk for businesses of overwhelm and unproductive expenditure.

If you haven't got into AdWords and that sounds unappealing and risky, unfortunately **it is no longer an option for any business to ignore Google**. Appearing in search for the right prospective and repeat customers is an essential - if not THE essential - component of any modern business's marketing.

Missing out on this online stream of customers means you are not able to compete in your market. And because, as mentioned at the start of this article, "SEO is dead", there isn't any quick and free way to get your web pages linked in those all-important search result pages. ***So if it's not an option to ignore Google, this means it's necessary to get your head round Google AdWords...***

Businesses that dive into AdWords, sadly, will more often than not jump swiftly back out again. The time-sink and overwhelm from the complexity of control options, coupled with the almost limitless potential to burn money, are a quick turn-off after the initial fun of seeing your ads start appearing at the top of Google searches.

Even the businesses that do a reasonable job of setting up AdWords campaigns can also end up frustrated and give up in the early stages. They may be acquiring a good volume of clicks, but these clicks seem to disappear into the ether and never reliably

give the business the huge surge of actual human business that was expected.

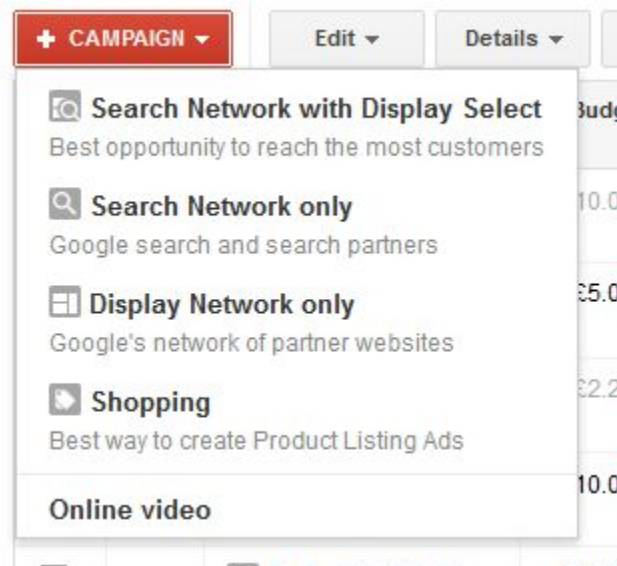
The overwhelm from the "747 cockpit", the alarm at the burning of cash in the "casino", and the frustration from getting clicks that don't seem to turn into customers, are all familiar issues to encounter for us when we are called in to diagnose what's going wrong and help turn around AdWords campaigns.

The headache of the complexity of the AdWords system can't really be taken away except with essentially "reading the manual" or being guided through it. Luckily, many of the main causes of headaches from burned-wallets and disappearing-clicks *are* quite easy to address.

This is because **most newcomers to AdWords make the same kind of easily-avoidable mistakes**, and below I'll help outline some of the most important ones to avoid. If you've already dived into AdWords, you will probably recognise some of these and hopefully get some ideas how to improve matters before you get burned!

So here are the top 10 most common mistakes and what you should be doing instead:

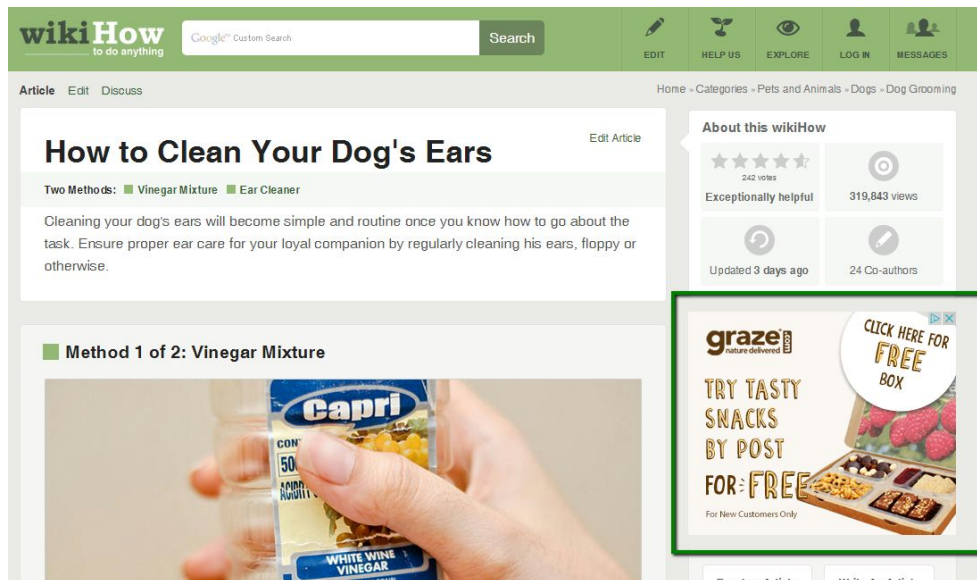
Mistake 1 - Mixing The Display Network With Search



By default when starting a new Campaign, Google AdWords will steer you into targeting Search and the Display Network at the same time as the "best opportunity".

This is a mistake for most advertisers, because the audience interests and needs are so different in the two networks that you need different approaches to advertising to them. **In Search, someone has just searched for something and therefore is highly motivated to click the ad that comes up which seems to answer her question. This is the best part of AdWords. (And consequently also the most expensive / competitive.)**

On the other hand, in the **Display Network**, these are just the ads that appear dotted around normal blogs and news networks, and your ads (based on keywords) will show up on approximately relevant pages. Depending on how much work you've put into the targeting settings, your ads are quite likely to show up on lots of completely irrelevant sites too. Clearly that's quite different because it's a form of distraction advertising (however relevant your ad), when someone is on that page to read/watch what's on that page. You can't expect the same tactics to work as effectively compared to advertising in Search.



Google Display Network placements often (usually?) suffer from poor relevance if they are not carefully targeted by the advertiser

Some of the Display Network ads are even worse for user engagement than you'd imagine. Those annoying ads that sit at the bottom of a Youtube video, and you click to get rid of them? Display Network. **The annoying ads in free iPad/iPhone apps that your toddler clicks constantly? Also Display Network. Google will happily charge you for each and every click.** But how valuable to your business are these clicks going to be?

There are ways to get your advertising to work well in the Display Network, but targeting it with the same text ads and keywords and bid settings as you are using for search, does not make sense. (It makes sense to Google because you spend more money on more clicks.)

Mistake 2 - Paying For Mobile Traffic You're Not Ready For

As mentioned above, by default, Display campaigns in AdWords will show up on mobile devices inside apps. That can cause a LOT of wasted money on zero-attention clicks (many of them accidental probably), until you disable it.

But advertising inside apps is not the real “mobile advertising” issue. The thing is, a lot of web browsing of all types goes on with mobiles and tablets, so wherever there is a Display or Search ad seen on this device your ad is there leading mobile web visitors to your site. Are your landing pages, and your website generally, ready to serve visitors on mobile just as well as on full-sized desktop screens?

If you have not had your site recently built, in the era of mobile-friendly web design, the chances are that your site is not ready to serve mobile visitors nicely. You can test it out for yourself. If the user experience isn't OK on small screens or with touch navigation, then perhaps you should not be paying for clicks from mobile devices.

The best approach is to hurry up and get your website accessible and nicely styled on mobile devices as well as large desktop screens. In the meantime, if you are getting on with AdWords but don't feel so happy about the mobile traffic, you can de-emphasise it by reducing your bid substantially when a mobile client is detected.

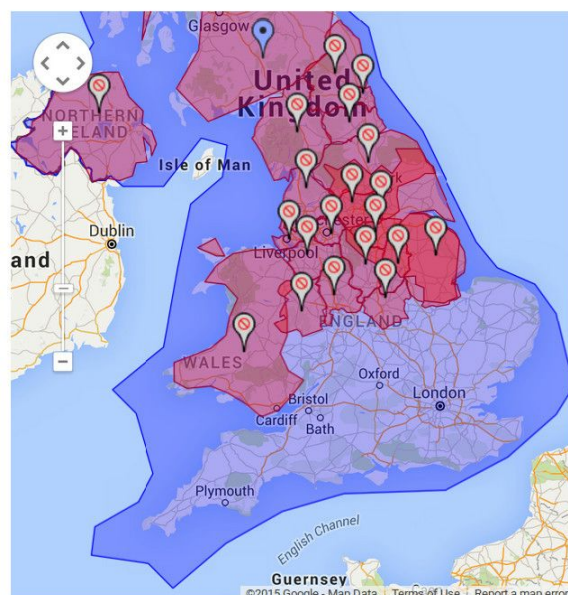
Mistake 3 - Targeting The Whole UK Instead Of Local Areas

This one is a no-brainer: if your business serves a particular local area such as Hampshire or the city of Southampton, why should you also pay for clicks from Aberdeen or Northern Ireland?

Guess what the Google AdWords default settings helpfully set up for you? That's right, default targeting of the entire UK. More lovely click money for Google.

Once again, it's up to you to customize your campaign. AdWords provides plenty of targeting options, for example based on your chosen radius around various postcodes, as well as the ability to exclude areas.

Choose your locations



Example AdWords location targeting for the South of England,

by excluding other regions.

Many UK-wide businesses still have a core catchment area or preferred local service radius. So even if your overall plan is to market to the whole country, with a finite ad budget perhaps it makes sense to concentrate locally first.

The AdWords location targeting does not only consider the physical location of people performing a Google search: it also considers people *outside* the area but *interested in* the location to match. In other words, for your Campaign targeted at Southampton, a search from a person in Portsmouth for "Southampton accountant" would show your ad, as well as somebody in Southampton just searching for "accountant". One benefit of this (when it works!) is that you can save a lot of time by not having to think of every possible location+keyword variation... it's all done automatically for you.

Mistake 4 - Advertising On Broad Informational Terms

Here are three example searches in Google:

1. do home teeth whitening kits work
2. teeth whitening cost
3. portsmouth teeth whitening clinic

As you will see, targeting the 3rd search here would probably be the most **relevant and commercially valuable for a dentist in Portsmouth offering teeth whitening treatments**.

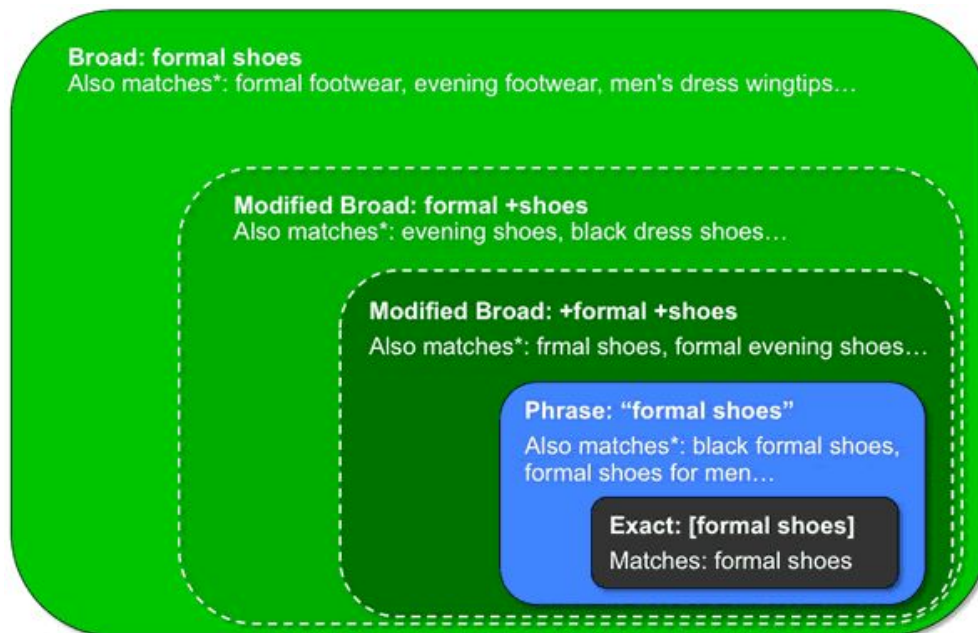
What about the other two searches? Well, those look a bit more like **general informational or research queries**. For sure these might be potential customers, and for sure you can bid on those and get the clicks from AdWords, but are those people ready right now to pick up the phone and book an appointment? Probably not as likely.

Enter the Google AdWords default settings: enter your keyword as **teeth whitening**

...and your ad will show up (in what is called **Broad Match**) for *all* of the above searches, as well as thousands of other possible searches including all sorts of much less relevant terms.

If your ad, by default, is the same ad for all three of these searches, and leads people to the same landing page on your website, you will be paying for a mixture of relevant and less-relevant visitors. While some of the traffic is highly relevant, your overall / average results may lead you to believe you can't get any good results.

Targeting narrower keywords and watching the keywords that trigger your ads will help you avoid paying for clicks from broad informational searches from people who are not ready to convert into customers. Focusing your click budget using more accurate keyword targeting will allow you to test out the effectiveness of different keywords instead of getting swamped by hundreds or thousands of keyword variations each without enough clicks to prove whether they're worth bidding on.



*In each ring, the keyword shown also matches the searches inside the smaller rings. Illustrative – figure not drawn to scale.

Different keyword match types in Google Adwords.

Mistake 5 - Neglecting The Importance Of The Ad Text

You only have a few short lines of text to attract customers' attention and clicks in search ads... but this means small details of your ad are super significant in influencing how well you attract clicks. The ad is small, but it's definitely not a trivial skill using that space to craft a compelling marketing message!

<p><u>How to Write a Book, Fast</u> 14 Days from Start to Finish Unique, Step By Step Program www.writeabookfast.com</p>	<p><u>How to Write a Book, Fast</u> Finish Your Manuscript in 14 Days Unique, Step By Step Program Write-A-Book-Faster.com</p>
<p><u>How to Write a Book Fast</u> 14 Days from Start to Finish Unique, Step By Step Program www.writeabookfast.com</p>	<p><u>How to Write a Book, Fast</u> 14 Days from Start to Finish Unique, Step By Step Aff. Program www.writeabookfast.com</p>
<p><u>How to Write a Book, Fast</u> Get The Job Done in 14 Days or Less Unique, Step By Step Aff. Program jerrymarshall.com/writeabook</p>	<p><u>How to Write a Book, Fast</u> Get The Job Done in 14 Days or Less Unique, Step By Step Aff. Program www.writeabookfast.com</p>

Ad copy detail split-testing. Example from an [excellent article at Wordstream about how to improve Click-Through Rates](#) with better ad copy.

Luckily, you don't have to get your ad text right first time in AdWords. You can add any number of ad variations to an Ad Group and the system will rotate them automatically to see which one gets the best click-through rate. In other words, you are under no pressure to create the perfect ad text from the start, and you don't have to do complex

analysis to figure out what is performing best. All you need to do is write a couple of ad variations and test them against each other... then switch off the weaker one and write the next variation on the better one... and so on.

A higher click-through rate also means a higher quality score, which in turn means lower cost to maintain higher rank in the search ads. In other words, testing ads to find better click-attracting copy will directly save you a lot of money.

Assuming you are receiving some relevant traffic from your ads, it is initially a better use of your time to work on your ads rather than adding piles of new keywords or fretting too much about bid adjustments...

The same applies to the Display network, where the greater potential for creativity in graphic ad banners means it's worth spending time testing many ad variations over time, to see what gets the clicks.

Mistake 6 - Sending Clicks To Your Homepage

One of the most common practices for new AdWords advertisers is to send clicks to "land" on the homepage of their website. This seems logical because your homepage is envisaged as a kind of catch-all starting point for navigating around all your product/service and company information.

However, web users searching for something specific are usually not going to be best served by something general. Actually, **AdWords doesn't want you to do this**. Your homepage is rarely the right place for first-time visitors to arrive, and you shouldn't require your web visitors to go "via" your homepage in order to understand who you are and what you can offer.

What web users want, when they come in to your site from their Google search, is to get **information/utility that is as relevant as possible to their search query**, and therefore get to information (and action steps) as fast and easily as possible. So, instead of having a broad range of keywords matching all sorts of different searches, and sending them all to just one generic landing page on your site, you should be doing the opposite: splitting up lots of different small ad groups according to topic, and **designing different ads and landing pages that are tailored to what people are looking for**.

Google AdWords will reward you with a higher quality score where your landing page matches the search and ad more closely. So even if your keyword selection and bidding tactics are excellent, you are unlikely to see the best performance until you take the time to design the most relevant landing pages possible.

Mistake 7 - Not Distinguishing Between Different Stages That The Customer Is At

If you think about acquiring a new customer for your business, they don't spontaneously walk through your door and become a loyal customer all in a flash. There's a process to it, usually beginning with researching solutions, getting recommendations, and evaluating the information of a shortlist of providers (you and your competition). This is sometimes referred to as the customer *journey* or your sales *funnel*. (Don't design your website to look and feel like journeying down a funnel, though.)

Depending on the complexity and value of your products/services, the prospective customer's early research may continue, on and off, for a while until the customer at some critical point decides to pick up the phone or otherwise take action. By the time they take action, they might have checked out quite a bit of information about you, so even if they are a stranger to *you*, if your marketing has done a good job, you're definitely not strangers to *them*!

Therefore it should go without saying that, when you advertise to prospective customers, including in AdWords, not everyone is at exactly the same stage of consideration. Some have heard of you or even know quite a bit about you, while others are clueless about what solution they need, let alone knowing about any providers of that solution. Often, as with point 4 above, you may want to begin by prioritizing advertising to people who are close to taking action, rather than just performing digital tyre-kicking.

But the wider problem here is that many advertisers speak to their customers (in ad text and landing pages) with the same information and 'pitch' at all times and in all places. But people who are right at the beginning of their research, e.g. "where to buy tyres online" will need different kinds of ad to grab and hold their attention, compared to people at the later stages, e.g. "tyre fitting garage Fareham". Separating out your AdWords Ad Groups by likely customer stage and intention is just as important as creating groupings just based on keyword similarity. You can't do this 100% scientifically of course, but you can try to **design ads and landing pages that connect with people's interests and concerns at the right stages**, instead of just broadcasting a generic message that they either already know, or aren't ready for yet.

After you have set up your basic AdWords campaigns and they're working well for you, the next stage to look at is called **Remarketing**. This is all about identifying particular user groups, e.g. "people who have visited my site in the past month but did not convert into customers" and targeting them for specifically designed follow up messages and offers. The difference in response rate is huge compared to just sending the same blanket marketing message to everyone.

Mistake 8 - Not Having Commercial Goals In Mind And Not Tracking Any

The biggest mistake many advertisers make in AdWords is simply not tracking what happens after the click... Did that person buy something? Did she sign up? Did she even read the page or click into the rest of the site?

If you don't know any of this, you are really just shooting into the dark and hoping something will hit.

While many advertisers switch off their AdWords and give up because of not seeing enough conversions coming through, a sadder fact is that many of such campaigns are probably converting OK *on certain keywords and ads...* but you just don't know which ones. In other words the poor-performing parts of the campaign average everything out and make it seem a waste of money.

Until you can track which Campaign, Ad Group, Ad, and Keyword **combinations** are working for you in terms of conversions, all you have to go on are guesses and averages, and overall averages will always look poor.

Of course, you can't track the conversion of customers on your website if there are no trackable actions for them to take. The first step in tracking conversions in AdWords takes place away from the computer: a deep **think about what the commercial goals of your website and online advertising are exactly**. For many businesses this will require a re-think of the website content and how to offer actions for people to take e.g. contact forms, newsletter signup forms, click-to-call buttons, booking systems, online shopping carts... etc. These can take quite a bit of extra effort to set up in terms of content and design. Next you will face a technical challenge of how to track the actions that people take on your pages (such as submitting a form, completing a checkout, etc). All of this will take time and resources but you can get the basics solved easily if your intended action to track is straightforward (such as a contact form submission or checkout success), and doing a bit of preparatory work on goal tracking is preferable to jumping into AdWords "in the dark".

Mistake 9 - Gaining Untracked Conversions From Phone Calls

In the above point I stated that you should decide what actions you want your customers to take on your site, and ensure you are tracking them as goals in AdWords. **But what if the conversion goal is a customer phoning you up?**

You may be keeping a log of phone calls, and you might even try asking your customers where they found you (or noting if they mention the website by themselves)... but this way you will never know on an Ad Group / Ad/ Landing Page / Keyword basis what tactics are and aren't working. This kind of guesswork isn't suitable for anything except the smallest campaigns.

If you can't track which marketing campaigns generate phone calls, you might abandon some PPC keywords or groups that don't seem to be performing well on a click-quantity basis, when actually it is the source of many of the phone calls you are receiving. In several instances, businesses I've spoken to who acquire customers from phone calls either say they keep AdWords running because it *seems* to generate calls, or have stopped "wasting money" on AdWords because it *didn't seem to generate that many* calls... but either way they are **just guessing**. Effective AdWords advertisers try to avoid being left guessing like this!

Enter **phone call tracking**. Instead of displaying just your one main phone number on your web pages, you display different automatically set variations according to which campaign the web visitor has come from (down to whatever level of detail you wish). The phone tracking software - either using Google's readymade solution or 3rd party software - tracks the redirected calls and connects all this data to your AdWords. This allows you to track backwards from particular phone calls to see which ads the web visitor came from, and track phone calls inside AdWords as conversions alongside any other website goals you've set.

If attracting phone calls is a main part of your business model (as enquiries, leads, bookings, or direct phone orders) then it really is essential to track if you want to be able to work with AdWords efficiently and over the long term.

A reasonable and lo-tech alternative to dynamic/tracked phone numbers is simply to have some extra forwarding numbers for different campaigns / parts of your business so at least on a general basis you can distinguish advertising-generated calls from your normal main helpline. These can easily be purchased at about £10 a month (or less in bulk) including local area code numbers so that the numbers look natural.

Mistake 10 - Optimizing PPC For CTR And CPC When You Need To Think In Terms Of CPA

OK, just pulling your leg a bit with this alphabet soup! To rephrase: if you focus only on your average click-through rate (CTR) and the average cost per click (CPC), all you will end up doing is instinctively trying to get more clicks for less money. However, this will cause you to worry about lowering your bids and thus dropping down in the rankings, or simply targeting cheaper and less commonly searched keywords... and then react to the drop in clicks by bidding back up again but feeling like the clicks are annoyingly expensive. **That is a very common vicious circle.**

Of course the better approach comes down to knowing which of those clicks are turning into leads or customers - the conversion rate. But even more important than the conversion rate is the conversion *value*. This is the £ value you assign to each type of conversion (lead or sale) and it's up to you how you want to calculate that (which would be a whole essay in itself!). As with defining your commercial conversion goals, this is one where you need to get away from the computer and sit together as business

people and really think about what your financial assumptions (and accounts!) tell you a lead or a new customer are worth.

Suffice to say, **once you know that a particular type of conversion is worth £x then you can look at the cost of the clicks to win that conversion...** the Cost per Acquisition (CPA) and see if it is less than your conversion value, i.e. a positive return on ad spend.

Once you have a handle on the conversion value against your CPA, you'll stop trying to make all the keywords the same low price, and stop chasing clicks for pure quantity, and start to **adjust your ads and bids according to the most valuable topics and keywords**.

Conclusion

In conclusion, most small and medium businesses using AdWords fall into two types: the "vicious circle", or the "virtuous cycle". The vicious circle is when you are making many of the mistakes outlined above, leading you to spend a lot of money, and get frustrated with an apparent lack of business results... and so sooner or later you are just going to give up. The AdWords work will be short-lived, apparently not much was gained, and it will be abandoned. Meanwhile, every time you search in Google you see all your competitors getting that valuable traffic from their AdWords. Time to try again... another wallet burning exercise... *vicious circle*.

In contrast, the **virtuous cycle** is what makes AdWords a sustainable and healthy part of your permanent marketing activities. Your ad campaigns are generating useful data, and you are experimenting and optimizing to keep and develop the ones which are commercially useful, while weeding out the ineffective or overly expensive parts. As your confidence in the conversion rate and conversion value grows, you are able to bid higher amounts for the good keywords (targeted in the right places), and bid on more keywords and broader targeting over time, squeezing out your competitors... who anyway won't compete for long if they are in the vicious circle in their approach!

This is not myth: there are plenty of businesses out there who are happily in a virtuous circle: in fact, businesses spending over £100,000 a year on AdWords are estimated to make up over 80% of Google's ad revenues.^[2] Clearly it is working well for them, and you can bet it is closely tracked to prove its value. But you don't have to be a big spender in AdWords for it to work. It's just a matter of knowledge, willingness to experiment, and perseverance to get to know the details, analyze your statistics, and grow your ad spend in manageable stages.

If you feel daunted by AdWords, use my 10 points as a planning checklist for your initial tests: my suggestions such as ignoring the Display Network and de-emphasising Mobile Device traffic will help simplify your job.

Finally, don't forget you can get professional help with AdWords, whatever your

intended scale. Figuring everything out in AdWords all by yourself is likely to be a more expensive and frustration-filled option, compared to hiring an experienced marketer to set up and optimize campaigns confidently from the start. Along the way, you'll learn a lot from working with a good agency too - useful if your business is growing and you plan to bring the marketing work back in house later.

In a way, the most costly mistake in AdWords may be giving up too soon, i.e. the lost opportunity. Many businesses are missing out on the business growth and competitive boost that Google traffic offers... which can be unlocked quite easily once you have the right people helping you.

About the Author

George Baily runs **KnowledgePower**, a Digital Marketing Consultancy in Havant, Hampshire. We specialize in... you guessed it - AdWords!

Find out more about AdWords management services for local clients here:

<https://knowledgepower.com/adwords-havant-hampshire/>



Notes

[1] Google's Avinash Kaushik discussing the benefits of specially designed (separate) mobile content, e.g.

<http://www.kaushik.net/avinash/mobile-site-app-analytics-reports-metrics-how-to/>

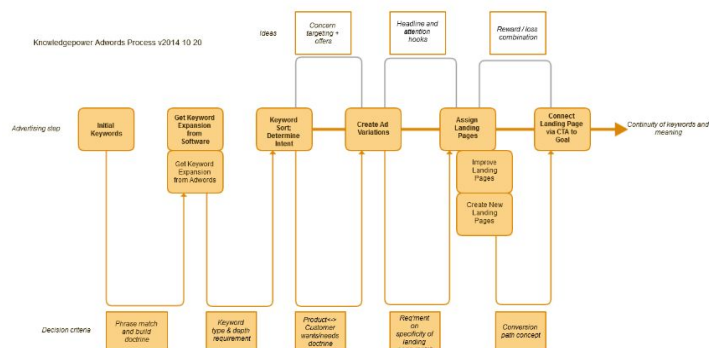
[2] Although Google does not release figures about different sizes of advertisers, it is known that a huge proportion of revenue comes from the big hitters, e.g. see "2014 Top Retailers in Paid Search"

<http://www.adgooroo.com/resources/blog/2014-top-retailers-in-paid-search-report-is-here/> - and AdWords'

relative failure to attract sustainable small/local business advertisers was much discussed back in 2010 when Google bid to buy out Groupon, for example see:

<http://adage.com/article/digital/google-s-interest-groupon-local-ad-business/147349/>

[\(This document: version 2015 11 - Follow @knowledgepowers on Twitter to get updates.\)](#)



Example diagram that we use to explain our continuous optimization process when managing your Google AdWords.

[Contact KnowledgePower today](#) to discuss your marketing questions and ideas.