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Adwords Survival Tips

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Advertising on Google's Adwords can best be described as operating in a hostile environment. Even though the search engine giant makes \$15 Billion a year on this "little" paid search business they have, they don't go to any great lengths to make it easy for you to work with them.

In Google's defense, it has to balance two customer bases that can't exist without each other. On the one hand, there are the searchers. They want good information, relevant search engine (and paid search) results, fast answers, quality content, and no spam (definition open to interpretation). On the other hand, there are the advertisers. They want traffic, as much as they can get and as cheaply as they can get it. There are also some "bad apples" out there that try and get away with underhanded techniques and get rich quick schemes. These are the ones that Google is the most concerned about. The problem is that the very measures that Google puts in place to protect itself and its searchers from these types of advertisers are the ones that can make it difficult for the well-intentioned advertiser from making Adwords work for them.

Adwords can be a very profitable place to invest your advertising budget. In fact, I make most of my living doing so. The key is to understand the (sometimes unwritten) rules, tips, and tricks to employ in order to keep Google happy. If Google is happy, then your per click costs will be going down, and your traffic will be going up. The added benefit is that making Google happy will generally result in better profitability for you as well. Google is happiest when your ad is getting a high CTR (click through rate, meaning lots of people are clicking on your ad), and the people who click on your ads are satisfied with the information they see on your web site. This makes Google the most money, and should work the same for you. Google measures how "happy" people are with the web sites they visit by how quickly they hit that back button.

Here are my tips to rescue your Adwords campaigns.

Tip #1 Keywords

You don't have enough of them.

If you don't have at least 500 - 1000 keywords in your campaigns (and I don't care what market you're in), I can guarantee that you're leaving profitable keywords on the table.

Use one of the keyword research tools like Wordtracker and Keywordtopia. If you plug in your "root" term (the most general term or two that describes your product or market), you'll be amazed at the things that pop out and have you thinking.

Don't forget plural versions of existing keywords.

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Look for combination multipliers like cities and states...for example, instead of the one keyword of "weight loss center", use that along with each state, and then add each state along with "weight loss centers" etc.

Brainstorm a bit with friends and colleagues and add in these ideas. You'll have thousands of keywords in a very short period of time.

Tip #2 Correct Usage of Match Types

There are three match types in Google; broad, phrase, and exact. Check out Google's Adword's help documents for a discussion about how each one works.

Most people who are just starting out with Adwords make this mistake. They only bid on the broad match. That is, putting the keyword or phrase by itself with no quotes or brackets around it. In fact, Google has a built in suggestion to start out only using this match type. That is not always sound advice.

I recommend bidding on all three match types (this also effectively triples your keyword list). There is almost no way of knowing which match type will be the most effective for you. You need to try them and track them, then adjust accordingly.

Tip #3 Keyword Grouping

Most advertisers start out with one ad group and stuff hundreds or even thousands of keywords or phrases into it. This does not make Google happy. They immediately think that you can't possible write relevant ads for all these keywords, and have relevant landing pages etc. So, they tend to give you a low quality score and your clicks will be very expensive (if you can even get your ads running).

The key is to make tightly focused adwords groups. The way that most people do it is by a "theme". Generally, if all the keywords or phrases in an adgroup can be served by one highly targeted ad and landing page...they are in a good grouping. However, my suggestion is to have one adgroup for EVERY keyword (include all three match types, so every adgroup really ends up having three keywords or phrases). This is a lot of work, but there are tools out there that can help. Google's own Adwords Editor is free and will help a lot.

Tip #4 Landing Pages

You simply must have targeted landing pages for each of your customers' "conversations" that are going on when they sit down to search for something.

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If you're doing advertising and trying to capture leads from people who are looking to sell their home in San Francisco, send them to the page that talks about why they should use you to be their listing broker. If you're capturing leads from people looking into relocating to San Francisco, send them to a page that talks about your expertise in handling relocations and helping people buy homes.

Too often, advertisers capture totally different type of customer leads and simply send them to their home page. This does not make people happy, as they want to continue the conversation they were having quickly...and get answers to their questions and problems, not try to navigate through your web site to find the information. They're not happy, so they hit that back button in less than 5 seconds. This does not make Google happy, you've lost a sale, and Google may penalize you with higher click charges.

Tip #5 Writing your Ads

This could be a whole article in itself. Common mistakes to avoid:

You must try to repeat the keyword or phrase in the ad (this is why keyword grouping is important). Google makes the assumption that if you repeat what the user typed in, your ad is most likely relevant. They will reward this with lower bid prices.

Don't continue a thought or sentence from one line to the next. Not many people actually read the ads...they skim and click when their eyes are attracted to something.

Capitalize the first letter of every word. This is scientifically proven to increase clicks. Why? I don't care, and you shouldn't either...it just works!

Use the display URL effectively, especially if it has the keyword in it. Don't use www.wieghtlossclinic.com use WeightLossClinic.com . It should be obvious which one draws the eye more.

Tip #6 Split testing

When you set up an adgroup, always write two different ads. You must then monitor them to see which one is performing better. You can literally increase your clicks 3x or more by doing this. It doesn't matter what you change and make different in your ads. Just change something and always test and monitor.

When one ad can be declared as the winner (search the web for split test calculators to get the statistical answer), get rid of the underperforming one and immediately write another new one to try and beat the one that just won.

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Tip #7 Content network

I recommend turning the content network off at first, and then taking the terms that have been profitable for you and starting another campaign that ONLY advertises on the content network.

If you do both in one campaign, it can be very difficult to effectively track your keywords' and ads' performance and your return on your advertising investment.

Tip #8 Geographic and schedule targeting

If it makes sense for your market...use both.

In our real estate example in San Francisco, you'd want to run two different campaigns for trying to get listings in your area. People searching on "Sell house San Francisco" not paying attention to geography, and people searching on the more general "sell house"...targeting only those people in San Francisco.

Examine all the metrics for using the scheduling feature. There are campaigns, for example, that are only really profitable on the weekends. If you can determine that, then obviously it makes sense to only run your ads then.

Tip #9 Conversion tracking

If you do nothing else, do this. You must track conversions!

If you don't know what you're getting for your advertising dollar, how can you make good decisions?

If you're selling a product online, the best way to do this is to use Google's own conversion tracking. This works very well. It's a simple bit of code that you, or your web designer can add to your sales confirmation page that tells Google that, for this keyword or phrase, a sale was made. Google stores and reports on this information so that you can go to one place and see what you spent on keywords, and what the return on that investment was.

There are other ways to do this, and it's a bit more difficult to do if you're not selling something; however, it's absolutely mandatory. Do web searches on conversion tracking to learn more.

Tip #10 Bid Adjustments

All keywords are not created equally. You must examine your spend and your conversions for each and every keyword and adjust the bid (individually) for each of them.

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Bonus Tip

Bonus Tip - Learn the Adwords editor...and use it.