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Ten golden rules to search advertising

Kate Burns

is Google's managing director of advertising sales UK, responsible for the growth of the company's UK market businesses and expansion. Kate was Google's first international employee and has spearheaded the establishment of the UK sales office. Google UK is now a major European market, with clients such as Lloyds TSB, Renault, Expedia and Ebay.

Kate has extensive experience in search advertising. Prior to joining Google, she was the pan-European sales director for Altavista, and prior to that she worked at Doubleclick for three years on major accounts.

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Keyword advertising delivers ROI

Kate Burns
UK MD of AdSales
and Operations
Google UK
The Courtyard
12 Sutton Row
London
W1V 5FH, UK
Tel: + 44 (0)20 7031 3000
Fax: + 44 (0)20 7031 3001
E-mail: UK@google.com

Kate Burns

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Abstract

There is no better way to spend your marketing money than with keyword advertising. The latter is an online text based form of advertising triggered when a user types in a keyword to a search engine. This form of advertising is highly relevant, which increases the likelihood of customers finding you. Users searching on terms specific to your products or services are qualified leads. And you pay only for customers who click to your site. Keyword advertising therefore produces a significantly higher return on investment than other forms of marketing. This paper offers practical tips on getting the most out of keyword advertising.

Introduction

Every second, everywhere throughout the world, consumers and advertisers use keywords on search engines to find exactly what they are looking for — each other. Search engines act like a gateway, making the wealth of online information easily accessible to internet users. Whether they are looking for the latest mortgage or trying to find a new current account, wherever there is an internet connection, search opens the door to the information required.

There is no better way to spend your marketing money than with keyword advertising. Keyword advertising is an online text-based form of advertising which is generated when a user types in a keyword to a search engine. This form of advertising is highly relevant, which means that customers are likely to find you. Users searching on terms specific to your products or services are qualified leads. And you pay only for customers who click to your site. This means that keyword advertising has a significantly higher return on investment (ROI) than other forms of marketing.

What if your website ranks high in the search results for relevant keywords? You still should advertise. Why? Because keyword advertising allows you to:

- use keywords to reach target audiences effectively
- direct users to specific areas of your site
- focus on time-sensitive promotions in an ad creative
- initiate a call to action
- ensure prominent placement
- syndicate through partner networks
- build brand awareness and educate the marketplace.

1. Build a strategy which incorporates natural search optimisation and paid advertising listings

A natural search strategy should ensure that your website is search crawler friendly. If you follow these basic guidelines your site should be indexed easily by the search engine crawlers, thus aiding your ranking in the natural search results.

Make pages for users, not for search engines. Create a useful, information-rich site and write pages that clearly and accurately describe your content. It is key that you do not deceive your users, or present different content to search engines than you display to users.

Ensure that your site has a clear hierarchy and text links. Every page should be reachable from at least one static text link. Site maps are critical for web crawlers: users like seeing links that point to the important parts of your site. Think about the words users would type to find your pages, and make sure that your site actually includes those words within it.

Try to use text instead of images to display important names, content or links. If you decide to use dynamic pages (ie the URL contains a '?' character), be aware that not every search engine spider crawls dynamic pages as well as static pages. It helps to keep the parameters short and the number of them small.

Avoid tricks intended to improve search engine rankings. A good rule of thumb is whether you would feel comfortable explaining what you have done to a website that competes with you. Another useful test is to ask: 'Does this help my users? Would I do this if search engines did not exist?' Do not participate in link schemes designed to increase your site's ranking. In particular, avoid links to web spammers or 'bad neighbourhoods' on the web, as your own ranking may be affected adversely by those links.

2. Understand the differences of search advertising

Relevance to the user is key: The most successful (and profitable!) ads connect internet users with exactly what they are looking for.

Identify your goal and success metrics for each campaign and choose keywords, creative messages and landing pages that will get you to this goal. Search campaigns are most successful when there is a tangible, useful online service or function available to the user. Purely marketing-led sites tend to be less compelling to the search user.

3. Identify your goals

Establish specific goals and success metrics so you can choose keywords, creative messages and landing pages that will get you to your goals for this campaign.

Include hard numbers and objectives that you can measure against. For example, '1,000 account registrations per month' is much better than 'increase traffic'.

**Relevance is the key
to success**

**Invest time in
creating a robust
keyword list**

4. Build a relevant, targeted keyword list

You do not want to pay for clicks from customers who cannot use your product or service.

Consider the subtle ways in which a B2B user might search differently than a consumer would. Try and get into the mindset of your potential customer, and try to use industry-specific keywords and any variables where possible.

Avoid broad keywords or keywords with vague meanings. For example, if you sell credit card accounts avoid the keyword 'credit', as any search containing the word credit — credit fraud, for instance — would trigger your ad. Choose specific, relevant keywords that accurately reflect your website and the products being advertised — an example would be 'Low APR credit card, 0% balance transfer'. Think of keyword variations such as plurals (credit cards), spelling variations, misspellings (low ARP) and synonyms. Use multi-word keywords, such as 'cheap credit card'.

Choose the right targeting option for the visitors you want to attract. You can choose a language and a country, region or even a city, or radius targeting.

Try to include all of your brand and product words — users will not always know or remember your website address so you need to ensure they can find you if they search for your company or product by name.

Do a search on any search engine for words you are uncertain about. If the majority of the search results have nothing to do with your product category or intended meaning then *do not* include the words in your keyword list, as they will not perform well.

Get more keywords by using something like the free Google Keyword Suggestion Tool (<https://adwords.google.com/select/main?cmd=KeywordSandbox>) — all the major search engines have this facility. When using the tool look over the suggestions carefully, pull out any irrelevant words, look out for negative keywords and adjust your list accordingly.

Brand awareness is an important consideration. Display the brand in the creative as prominently as possible, but preferably not at the expense of having a targeted headline. Use phrases like 'official site' or 'buy direct' to capitalise on your brand's reputation.

Slogans are only rarely effective. If you want to incorporate one, you should still try to reserve space in the creative to describe more specific site benefits.

5. Organise your campaign

Organise your keywords into ad groups based on theme and goals.

Write customised creatives for each ad group. For example, you could put all keywords about credit cards in one ad group and all keywords about mortgages in another group.

6. Write clear, compelling ad text (creative)

The quality of your ad copy is vitally important — the following guidelines may help.

— Test multiple creatives for each ad group.

**Ad copy must be
clear and concise**

- Be concise; avoid repetition.
- State products and services clearly.
- Identify what is unique about your offerings.
- Put the keyword in the ad to show relevance.
- Include a strong or specific call to action.
- Try to include an offer or unique proposition.
- Use grammatically correct and clear statements.
- Highlight any tools/services/online resources in your ad text — provide a compelling reason for the user to click.

7. Choose useful destination pages (landing pages)

It is critical when you attract a user to click on your ad that you do not lose them when they move off the search engine and on to your website. Creating a smooth transition from your ad to your site is critical. Once someone clicks, it is up to the information and layout of your site to assist in completing the conversion. Think of your site as an ongoing process of improvement and refinement.

Again, it depends on the industry you are in and experimentation will enable you to achieve the best ROI. When a user clicks on your text ad you need to take them to where they want to go (this is called a landing page), and this page needs to be specific to the ad, *not* a homepage or category page. So you must send users to a destination (landing) page that relates to your ad text. For example, if your ad offers a free product, link directly to a page which clearly displays that product.

Target different destination pages for different ad groups or keywords. Do you want to drop people on a high-level page or a product-specific page? Should the landing pages be focused on the product, or more diverse and cluttered?

Use similar language to the ad text. Make it easy and intuitive for the user to convert to being your customer or act on the advertisement.

8. Track results

All the search engines track click-through rates (CTRs) and impression data for each of your keywords and creatives. Use this information to make adjustments to your campaign. Make use of the free conversion tracking tools which the search engines provide. The tools will allow you to analyse which keywords generate returns.

Use these data to understand how much each keyword is worth to you and change your individual keyword bids accordingly. If a keyword is not performing well, consider changing its matching (to exact match, for example) or deleting it. If a keyword is performing well, add more keywords like it. Compare performance across multiple creatives per ad group, and disable the ones that are not doing as well.

Assign unique tracking URLs to each of your ads or keywords to identify which of your customers clicked through to your site from your ad. This will also indicate which ads and keywords converted the most clicks to sales. Test different creatives — different ad creatives can represent a four-to-five-times difference in your CTRs and post-click conversion rates. As with keywords, the only way to know is to

**Take the user directly
to the web page
they want**

**Monitor
your campaign**

experiment. Do you want ads with catchy slogans, or ones providing ‘just the facts’ of your product and price? It depends on the industry and the product. Test numerous creative approaches, and track results.

9. Do not be preoccupied with position

Tweaking your bids so that they run right above a competitor is often fun, but not a very valuable use of energy. Competitive bidding is not sustainable — a more secure way to boost your ranking is to make your keywords and ad text as relevant to your audience as possible. Your business benefits the most from finding the value of an ad and then trying to get the best deal within that framework.

Minor keywords can provide a lot of traffic and often represent the best ROI. The only way to find them is to try many and evaluate what works. The best campaigns start with an expanded list of keywords, which should be culled effectively to determine the best performers. Initially it is important to be comprehensive by including product names, brand names, plurals and common misspellings. In addition, try combing competitor sites to identify keywords that might be appropriate to your business.

10. Measure everything: It is all about results

The ever-increasing need for all businesses to be accountable for ROI means that search advertising is a perfect fit in any marketing plan. All digital marketing efforts should tangibly measure results. With search advertising, you can know that without guesswork. Try many different words, creative treatments and landing pages, and measure exactly what you get from each one. Cut out the noise about positions, audience reach, view-through conversion rates and other obfuscating metrics. Pick what works best for you. And when it is evaluated on ROI, the author’s company is confident that keyword advertising will come out on top.

Try, test, evaluate