

# New Technology Briefing

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## Great search engine listings: Simple, practical steps to developing great keywords and listings

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### Abstract

Search has revolutionised direct marketing, but most marketing departments are yet to be evolutionised by search. This practical briefing aims to help marketers bridge that gap by sharing some of the key principles. We interviewed leaders in the search advertising industry to get their tips on everything from keyword selection to trademarks, relevancy of message to how to link deeply within a site.

### Introduction

Search has revolutionised direct marketing. It is the purest marketplace; buyers meet sellers and begin their exchange (Figure 1). And it is so easy that the smallest one-man-band businesses are taking advantage of it as much as the global marketing giants. Search delivers the hottest of leads, the most qualified of prospects: a self-selecting audience that wants to make the exchange. Whether it is booking a request to test-drive a car, downloading a product brochure, subscribing to a newsletter or making a purchase there and then — these customers have sought out those brands. They are ready to act.

It is not hard to see why that formula is grabbing the attention of so

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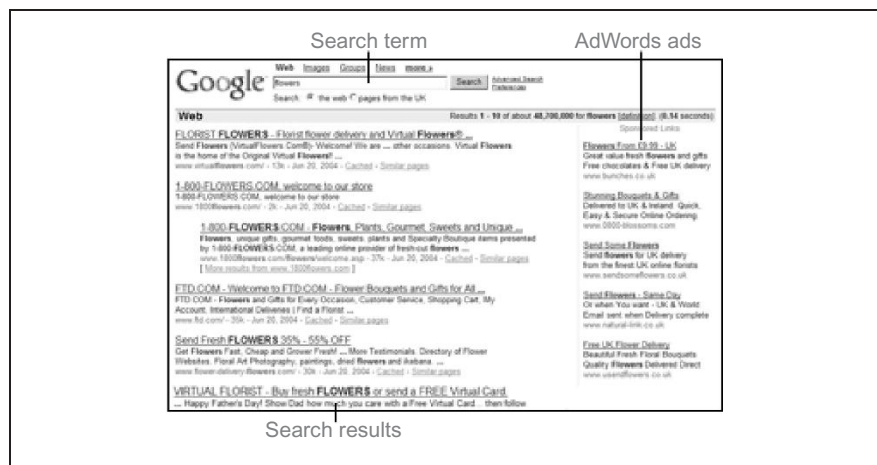


Figure 1: Search giants, but not the only game in town

**Exceptional media efficiency**

many marketers. In just five years paid-for search has gone from the research lab to become a business about twice the size of cinema advertising (in the UK). It is continuing to double year on year in many markets, and in the UK accounts for about 40 per cent of all online ad spend.

But there is more. As an advertiser you only pay when your advert is clicked — and that is the key to why it has been so seductive to the direct marketing industry. Has there ever been a more efficient, lower wastage, more accountable model in advertising? ‘Bidding for advertising space may be new for you, but the process is easy,’ says Stephen Taylor, European managing director of the Overture sponsored search network. ‘You decide how much you are prepared to pay and which search terms you would like to bid on. It’s simple to start, easy to use and you set the rules.’

The scale of its effect is vast. Search is the axis around which the future of direct marketing is pivoting. We are leaving behind a world where social grade and demographic profiling drove targeting, where consumers’ habits were predicted based on what was known about their neighbours, where job title and responsibility predetermined all your business interests. Instead we are moving into a world which the customer controls and where people’s uniqueness can be expressed. Search engine advertising is the key to tapping into that diversity and doing so on the customer’s terms.

### **Basic tips**

These simple, candid tips are from some of the pioneers who have been at the heart of building the search advertising industry.

#### **Start small; start to learn**

If you have never advertised on the internet before then this is a great starting point for you. Firms like Overture or Google will let you try the service out for only a token amount. Have a go on your credit card. Spend what you would on a client lunch and learn for yourself how the tools work and what to expect. Ditch your preconceptions of defining your demographic targets, planning tactical campaigns and reserving your media space. Here you are having a conversation with your customers: they are in control rather than you. If you talk their language they will hear, if you have something interesting to say then they will listen.

#### **Talk your customers’ language: Learn what they are looking for**

Start by listening to your customers; talk with them. Hear what they say when they talk about your products, about their needs, about what they are looking for. These are the DNA of the keywords that will be at the heart of your campaign.

#### **Develop a range of keywords**

*Keywords*, not word. Someone looking for a holiday cottage might also use words like ‘farm’ or contractions like ‘B&B’. As a search marketer you need to become skilled enough with language to fill out a list of

**Research your customers’ language**

keywords based on these sorts of similes. Language is rich, elegant and powerful. Unfortunately it can also be ambiguous, complex and confusing. Two people describing the same object can use entirely different words, yet both will be equally right. As a search marketer your challenge is understanding the customer's intent, and the only clue you have is their language.

### **Simple steps to keyword list-building**

The seven steps of keyword list building are as follows.

- Step 1: Select the first keywords.
- Step 2: Build up a keyword list using your insight terms.
- Step 3: Fill out that list using a thesaurus tool.
- Step 4: Let a spelling tool build a list of misspellings and typos around each of the keywords.
- Step 5: Develop a list of negative keywords.
- Step 6: Combine patterns of keywords together.
- Step 7: Evaluate the costs of the keywords in relation to your acceptable cost per click or cost per customer.

David Harrison, president of The Search Works, is a fan of letting the technology take the strain: 'The automated tools can help you find the keywords that will really make you money. They build you lists quickly. Some words may seem to be logical but may only serve to attract browsers, not buyers.'

Using the tools transforms your original handful of words into hundreds. If you are an agency you will even be able to dazzle your clients with this new-found impressive knowledge of their sector.

### **Smart terms for high conversion**

#### **Combining keywords together**

Would 'Cotswold cottage' deliver a better lead for a holiday home than just 'Cotswolds'? Of course it would. Stephen Taylor of Overture is a real advocate of smart terms: 'Understanding the user's intent and then combining the important words together helps you narrow down the customers into those that are looking for exactly what you have.'

#### **Think about the customers you do not want as well as the ones you do**

'It's not just about what makes people click, it's also about whether they buy, and that means thinking about the negatives too,' says Harrison. For example, if you are selling iPods then do you want your advert appearing next to a search term like 'iPod tunes'? Of course not. That customer already has an iPod so they do not need you. You are too late. Just as you can bid for certain keywords, so too can you screen your listing from appearing against others. You can set up a range of negative stem words ('tunes') and create a rule in the bid management tools so your listings will not come up when they also appear in the search. Without refining your terms using these negative stem words you will be exposed to getting some very low conversions and paying a high price for lots of clicks. The combinations of keywords you want, and negative stem words

### **Develop 'negative-stem' phrases**

you are screening against, can solve the problem, reduce your spend and have a massive effect on conversion rates.

### **People cannot spell or type**

Unfair? Consider this: when researching for this paper 26,000 people in the UK were looking for 'Personals' through the Overture search network. But start digging into the data and you will also spot variations on the term; misspellings. Who knows whether it is their enthusiasm to find a date, or just laziness from living in a world of Microsoft spellcheckers, but alongside 'Personals' there were more than 40 misspellings, most of which were getting significant clicks: 'Presonals', 'Pesonals', 'Persnals' etc. Some will be corrected by the engines because they've seen the same pattern many times before: "'Presonals": do you mean "Personals"?' But many more will not be. That means terms people are typing in, with a clear intention, but few bidders. Smart bid management tools will help you uncover these, which means cheaper bid prices, fewer competitive bids, much higher conversion rates and much lower customer acquisition costs. Many of these misspellings of that popular word were at the minimum bid price of 10p.

### **Get streetwise about trademarks**

There has been much gnashing of teeth from brand owners realising they have to bid, and compete in that bidding, for getting their ad to be triggered by their own trademark. 'Sometimes there's an arrogance in marketing teams that presumes no one else can bid against the keyword,' explains David White, the founder of Weboptimiser. But if the trademarks are already licensed to retailers, affiliates or other third parties, then of course they will be out on the web using these to sell products as well. It is simply a sales channel conflict, and one that usually benefits from some sensitive treatment rather than heavy-handed lawyers.

### **The relevancy of links to the content they describe is critical**

Search engine users are eager to find what they are after. They are looking to click and they do not have time to waste. Listings need to be relevant to the keyword, and the content at the end of the link needs to be relevant to both. Relevancy is critically important in making sure advertisers get the right results; that the customers coming to their pages are highly targeted.

### **Get the listings to work harder**

The listing is your advert. It is what appears when the user types in the keywords you have bid against, and it consists of a title and description. It is a tiny space, yet what you write will make or break your campaign. The keys to success here are accuracy, relevancy and clarity. Metaphor and suspense may be trusted friends of copywriters in many media, but here they need to be swapped for a utilitarian approach that builds on that customer insight you have already acquired and bolts-in a call to action. Some important tips to include are as follows.

**Relevancy of message is key**

- Re-use the search terms. Remember to include the search term in both the title and the description. Make it simple and clear to the customer.
- Highlight the benefits, but watch your tone of voice. Overenthusiastic sales copy may leap out from newspaper pages, but here you are more likely to find that some well-grounded, objectively written text gets the clicks.
- Include the brand name. ‘It sounds simple, but the brand name should be included,’ says David Harrison. ‘And brand messaging and slogans from other media such as television and press advertising should be incorporated wherever possible: users will recall this, giving your headlines and descriptions greater impact.’
- Be concise. Edit, edit, edit. Get every word to work for you and give the customer just what they need to make them click. Really get this space to work hard for you.
- Focus on your unique selling points. ‘Look at competitor copy and products before writing your own,’ says Harrison. ‘You don’t want an ad saying 2mb broadband for £25 per month if competitors have 10mb for £5 per month. In this instance you need to focus on another of your strengths in the ad copy to stand any chance of success. Maybe your installation is quicker or cheaper! Don’t just look at your advert individually; visualise the competitive landscape and how you will look when side by side with others.’

### **Traditional DM testing: a powerful role**

#### **Test what is working best for you**

The world of direct marketing has a powerful legacy for web search marketers. Professor Derek Holder, managing director of the Institute of Direct Marketing, is clear that this should feel like familiar ground to many. ‘If you’ve run a direct mail campaign then you’ll know all about split runs; trying a variation of the offer and analysing the response rate. Try different language in your keywords and see what works. Test and test again.’ Factor this in as a core part of the work on your campaign, and your conversion rates will continue improving.

#### **Link deeply within your site**

There is nothing more distressing to a digital marketer than watching a great campaign collapse on click-through. Why do so many marketers still take these fired-up, ready-to-act customers across to their site and dump them on the home page? Why not simply take them to the page with the actual offer they have just seen, a clear route to action and minimal clutter? Sure, include all those endorsements and kitemarks you are proud of, include search tools that let them find other things on your site if this product is not right for them, but do not let anything obscure the fact that the customer is here and they are ready to buy. You have worked hard to get them here, so make the next step effortless.

#### **Finally, take a fresh look at your traditional marketing**

Equipped with all this new knowledge of how you are gaining new customers through the web, where they are going, what they are buying

**Comparing online  
versus offline  
acquisition costs**

and how much they are worth to you, it is time for one last step. Take a fresh look at your other acquisition channels; re-examine your traditional media. Look at your acquisition costs, conversion rates and value of customer spend. Compare all of them side by side with your new digital channel. You may yet be in for the biggest lesson of all.

**Summary: Key points to take away**

- Learning is easy, and you can start for less than the price of a lunch.
- Getting your language right is critical. Abandon brochure-speak. Clear your mind. Open your ears. Learn their language, master their vocabulary. What you hear will then become the keywords at the heart of your next campaign.
- The trick is simple: develop a wide range of keywords that match your customers' search terms.
- Use the technology tools to build lists of core keywords rapidly.
- Develop combinations of keywords to match the specific searches of your customers.
- Use negative stem words to weed out customers who would be of no value.
- Celebrate poor spelling and hopeless typing — let them stretch your marketing investment further.
- Learn about your current trademark situation, assess your options, devise the plan, be clear with your sales channel partners, revise your licensing agreements and keep your ear to the ground.
- Appreciate the importance of relevancy.
- Constantly monitor performance, test new ideas and refine your creative.
- Take your customer directly to the offer you are promoting.