

Clicks that count

Paid search is an established marketing channel, but making every click count remains an elusive goal for most marketers. Our panel of search experts suggests ditching generic and usually pricey keywords and thinking conversion, not just clicks, to better optimise dollars going on search

WORDS Jo Bowman

Paid search marketing, or pay-per-click (PPC), is becoming increasingly appealing for many advertisers, accounting for roughly half of all online adspend at the moment. Part of the appeal is that it can start with the smallest of budgets, which draws in clients who've never advertised before, as well as those looking to complement broader, cross-media campaigns.

In a nutshell, it involves bidding for keywords that consumers might type into a search engine; you bid what you're willing to pay for each time someone who searches that word clicks on your ad and through to your site. Whoever bids the highest gets to the top of the listings a user sees on search results, and advertisers pay only per click.

However, getting the best value from PPC isn't all that easy, and if it's not done carefully, there's a big risk that you'll get lots of clicks, your budget will get chewed up, but you won't have much to show for it.

Right words at the right price

Getting the right words at the right price is what PPC is all about, so, how to choose? "Buying expensive generic keywords such as 'digital camera' may lead to a lot of clicks but is that the overall goal?" asks David Temple of Neo@Ogilvy. "Longer generic keywords like '8 mega pixel digital camera' and branded keywords are priced lower and usually convert at a higher rate."

Kathryn Dawson of Strategy Internet Marketing says start with a brainstorm of what your target audience is likely to be searching for. Make a list of root words and divide the words you come up with into groups that are likely to be used by people looking for a specific product, service or piece of information. Each group should lead to a page that is relevant to what's being searched. Then start researching, using free tools such as Google's Traffic Estimator and Yahoo's keyword inventory,

Masterclass panel



David Temple is regional head of search at Neo@Ogilvy Asia Pacific, Ogilvy Group's digital and direct media planning arm.

He is responsible for leading the integration of search engine optimisation services and paid search offers in Asia Pacific. Temple is a frequent speaker at industry events such as Search Engine Strategies, Search Expo and eComXpo in China and the US.



Kathryn Dawson is marketing director of Strategy Internet Marketing, a UK-based search engine optimisation company. Prior

to joining Strategy five years ago, Dawson was head of international administration for an American software company and worked in Florida as a senior analyst.



Dr Rachel Cornish is director of Cornish WebServices, providing pay-per-click management services, and an associate fellow of

Warwick Business School in the UK. She is a qualified AdWords professional and has extensive experience of PPC management on AdWords, Yahoo and some minor PPC providers. Cornish also provides SEO services for B2B and B2C clients, and while based in the UK, can work internationally and in languages other than English.

which show the volume of people actually searching for different words. "Use them as a guide only, as they are not perfect by any means," Dawson warns.

It's worth noting that the search terms most commonly used aren't necessarily the obvious ones, so think laterally. Ford in the US, for instance, failed to anticipate a sudden surge in searches for 'Apprentice car' after one of its cars was given away as a prize during the TV show *The Apprentice*.

In some ways, choosing words that are likely to get traffic clicking through to your website is the easy bit of PPC. Where you send that traffic and what you do with it when it gets there is where things get really interesting, and where, Temple says, the most mistakes are made. Getting a handle on what's called "intent mapping" is key here; think about the reason why someone might click your link, and give them the most relevant page on your site when they arrive. That means that directing all users to the company homepage is a big no-no.

"Most companies view their homepage as the door to their company website, directing all the users there. Big mistake. If someone is looking up 'digital camera' and is directed to a homepage profiling every type of gadget you could imagine, you've lost them and the sale," says Temple.

He also cautions against combining too many products or services on a single landing page. If someone's looking up a particular model, don't take them to a place with your entire range of whatever you offer.

No matter how much homework you've done, there's only one way to find out how consumers will respond to your PPC campaign. "PPC can be an extremely profitable route to more sales, but it can also be a bottomless pit with little return," says Dawson. Her advice is to test, test and test again, using a budget of, say, 10 per cent of your total, and try it out with just

one product area or service, and see what works and what doesn't. Once you get your campaign properly underway, don't take your eyes off it. Your conversion tracking should be in place and tested before you go live with your campaign, so you can see where the results are coming from.

You also need to be clear about the results needed to make the campaign worthwhile. Dawson says that if you sell something for, say, \$300 and your margin is 50 per cent, then consider how much of the profit you're willing to spend to get the sale.

"Some clicks in your campaign will cost you 20 cents and others may cost you \$3, but the important measure is not the cost you pay for the click but the cost you pay for the conversion," she says. If you're getting big clicks but few conversions, then those keywords aren't profitable and you should turn them off. If others are converting particularly well, consider raising your bid for them to get higher up the rankings.

Rachel Cornish of Cornish Web Services says the speed with which PPC can be launched and adjusted — within 10 minutes in the case of Google AdWords, longer with Yahoo Search — means that if you get inundated with business, you can step off the gas. "PPC can be turned off or reduced quickly if the numbers of orders and inquiries received is too high. We have frequently done this for some of our clients."

Conversion not clicks

If there's help online and you know your market, should you pay an agency to handle your PPC campaign? Fair question. If you're just dipping a toe, it's probably worth having a go yourself. But if you have more words and a bigger budget, it's likely you'll need someone testing, monitoring and managing your campaign. Cornish says that if you're going to use AdWords, look for people who have passed Google's training and exam system and have managed PPC accounts for long enough to have qualified as AdWords Professionals. Consider AdWords Companies — meaning two or more people have passed the exams.

As the technology becomes more diverse, it's more likely you will need expert help. These days, search isn't just from a PC. Increasingly, advertisers will have to cater to phone-based search, with mobile-friendly landing pages and auto-dialling links where a conversation might be required.

Cost-per-click is how your budget gets

Case study Alert Electrical



Alert strategy... achieved a sharp spike in organic traffic after it optimised content on its website

Alert Electrical, a UK-based wholesaler and online retail supplier of electrical products, had been running a PPC campaign for some time. Strategy, which was already handling SEO for Alert, recently took charge of its PPC campaign

The PPC campaign was run exclusively with AdWords, focusing on different ad groups that each dealt with a specific product or type of product, such as electric storage heaters, burglar alarms, and power showers. In total there were about 40 ad groups, and roughly 2,000 keywords.

Results were monitored not only for specific words but for specific ad groups. The ad budget was then reinvested where the bulk of the conversions were being made, leading to a 67 per cent increase in total monthly revenue from PPC

within a few months. Strategy says conversion analysis data allowed Alert to stop spending on unprofitable areas. "It sounds obvious but a lot of people get caught up in advert click-through rates and bid prices, losing sight of the fact that the aim of advertising is to turn a profit," says consultant Rich Heaney. The PPC drive built on optimisation of Alert's website, which began several months earlier, with 4,000 of its pages indexed compared to 1,000 at the start of the exercise. The content was optimised and a strategic link-building campaign added in, leading to a sharp rise in organic traffic — traffic referred from search engines rose 92 per cent over six months.

Encouraged by the results, Alert is now expanding it to Yahoo and MSN PPC ad networks.

used up, but it's not the most important number to watch.

"Think 'conversion' not clicks," says Temple. "There's a big danger in only measuring click-through rates. If the click rate is high your ad must be working, right? Wrong. Users may be clicking on and then clicking back if they don't like what they see. Besides your click-through rate,

"Besides click-throughs, measure some sort of conversion... measure, measure, measure"

DAVID TEMPLE

measure some sort of conversion. It could be a white paper download, newsletter sign-up or an actual sale. Measure, measure, measure."

Cornish says cost per click is of almost no relevance to final ROI. "A high number of low-cost clicks which have a low percentage of visitors making a purchase will be worth the same as a small number of highly targeted visitors, many of whom make a purchase," she notes.

What might be called "useful clicks" aren't always an immediate sale, and can be weighted accordingly when measuring effectiveness. Repeat purchases that come from a click-through could count for more; signing up for more information a little less.

"Different values can be placed on each of these actions, and one campaign may measure different types of conversion or useful visitor," Cornish says. ■