Paid Search Implementation Guide

Simon Kingsnorth



These materials are most effective when used in association with the book Digital Marketing Strategy

DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

Paid Search Implementation Guide

This guide is designed to give you a step by step guide to implementing your paid search strategy.

Other guides are available for other digital marketing channels. To best understand how this fits into your broader strategy see the book Digital Marketing Strategy by Simon Kingsnorth.

How it works

The guide is designed to be as easy to use as possible. Each guide is broken down into simple, key steps to take to ensure your strategy is as effectively and smoothly implemented as possible. So less of this chat and let's get to the detail.

1 Keyword research

While paid search is moving towards audience and individuals, keywords are still an important part of an overall paid strategy. Popular, or halo, search terms drive a high volume of traffic, but the costs per click can be well above $50. If your offer is high value, this makes sense. If your strategy is low volume, then niche and long-tail keywords are a better use of resources. Consider 5 key criteria in keyword research: relevance, intent, volume, cost and competition.

2 Setup your Campaigns and Ad Groups

In paid search, campaign refers to your budget settings and the location (geographic and ad network) of your ads. A stable might have one campaign for jumping lessons and another for birthday parties. Each campaign can have any number of ad groups, and each group any number of associated keywords. The keywords in an ad group are closely related (horse birthday party, riding birthday party) to increase the chances of a direct search match.

3 Write the ad copy

Creating copy compelling enough to grab someone's attention is a fine art. Google now uses Responsive Search Ads, which let you enter up to 15 headlines and 4 descriptions, and will test different combinations to find what works best for each user. While this gives less control over what appears, it allows for better performance over time.

Make sure your ad copy reflects your keywords and aligns with the landing page content - this boosts your quality score. Keep in mind that headlines may appear in any order, so each one should make sense on its own and in any combination. Use Google's ad strength tool as a guide during creation. Writing fewer variations gives you more control; writing more gives Google more room to optimize.

4 Consider match types

Once the ad is written, you can choose to have your ad displayed only when the exact keyword is used, if it is semantically similar to the search term or any number of other broadening parameters. The broadest search will get your ad displayed more often, but not always to your target audience. Since your click-through rate affects the cost per click, the cost of broad searches can quickly spiral out of control, although Google's AI is becoming advanced enough that it can efficiently optimise your bid strategy.

5 Understand quality score

As you might expect, the higher your quality score from Google, the more potential your ad has to achieve a high placement. The quality score acts as a tiebreaker for placement between two advertisers with the same maximum bid settings. Google wants users to click on the ads, so it has designed its algorithm to advantage advertisers with a solid history of relevant ads and a higher click-through rate. Google doesn't reveal the full algorithm, but confirmed influences include ad relevance, CTR, landing page experiences, and ad account history.

6 Consider search networks

When you're about to make your paid search campaign live, you'll notice a check box that says "also display ads on our search network." Before checking yes, consider if this is the right strategy for your brand. Google displays ads on third-party sites that have signed up to be ad publishers on Google's ad programme.

The advantage is a huge boost in your reach, which is particularly useful if you have a super niche product. The downside is that you have no control over where your ads are displayed. If you have a brand built on certain philosophical or moral principles, search networks could do more harm than good.

7 Understand paid search metrics

There are three categories of metrics for measuring paid search performance. The first, traffic, looks at things like number of impressions, click through rate, cost per click, average position, impression share and quality score. The next category, conversion metrics, returns data about revenue, margins, number of orders, conversion rate and average order value.

In B2B or high-value product scenarios, where the time between initial contact and purchase is expected to be long, the total number of leads is more important. Efficiency metrics are big picture and cover things like return on investment, cost per lead/order and lifetime value. While more complex to calculate, efficiency metrics give the most valuable information about a campaign's overall success.

8 Use advanced techniques

To really compete in the paid search game, you either a mountain full of cash or a good handle on advanced techniques. Preferably both. Businesses that notice cyclical trends in sales might take advantage of day parting and schedule ads during the time of day, week or month that reaches the most customers.

Restaurants and other businesses with a physical location or an unshippable product might look at location extensions. Service providers could explore star ratings and click to call, while shops selling physical products might take advantage of product list ads.

You can also use audience targeting to refine your campaigns. Google Ads allows you to either observe or target specific audience segments such as affinity groups (based on interests), in-market segments (based on intent to buy), or your first-party data like past customers. Remarketing lists for search ads (RLSAs) let you tailor bids and ad copy specifically for users who have previously visited your site, increasing efficiency and ROI.

9 Track your competitors

When you bid on keywords, the price is not determined by your competitors' activity, but knowing what they are up to is key to running successful campaigns. The easiest method is to look at the other ads that come up when you search for your keywords. Small companies do this manually, while larger ones use specialized software like Market Defender and AdThena can help track competitors' ad activity, including monitoring competitive ad copy, tracking day parting strategies and analyzing split testing behavior. Keeping tabs on what's happening in your niche also helps prevent brand hijacking.

10 Humans or robots

Small and medium-sized businesses typically manage all their campaigns with real people, either on staff internally or via an agency. Larger companies, with tens of thousands of products, a monthly ad spend in the millions or a strong preference for driving the cost per click down as low as possible often use automated bidding systems. Humans understand language semantics better, but robots get the work done in a fraction of the time.

Google offers a range of Smart Bidding options, including Target CPA, Target ROAS, Maximize Conversions, and Maximize Clicks that use machine learning to optimize bids automatically based on your chosen goal, helping advertisers manage large accounts more efficiently.