

THE SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING HANDBOOK

ONLINE GUIDE
FOR BUSINESS
OWNERS



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3** UNDERSTANDING SEARCH ENGINES
- 4** USING PAID SEARCH
- 8** MAKING THE MOST OF KEYWORDS
- 12** CREATING A GOOD CAMPAIGN
- 16** OPTIMIZING YOUR CAMPAIGN
- 18** WHEN TO WORK WITH A PARTNER



1

UNDERSTANDING SEARCH ENGINES

Before you dive into Search Engine Marketing, you need to understand search engines. **A search engine is computer software used to search data (such as text or a database) for specified information on the World Wide Web.** A Search Engine Results Page, also known as SERP, is the page you see after searching. Popular examples of search engines are Google, Yahoo!, and Bing.

Every day, potential customers are using search engines, and are looking online for products and services. **Pay-per-click advertising (PPC) allows them to find your company, boosting not just the amount of traffic to your website, but the quality.** Customers are used to researching online when they shop. It's important they find you instead of your competitors. With a customized plan and targeted campaigns, PPC can bring you tangible results you can measure and repeat.

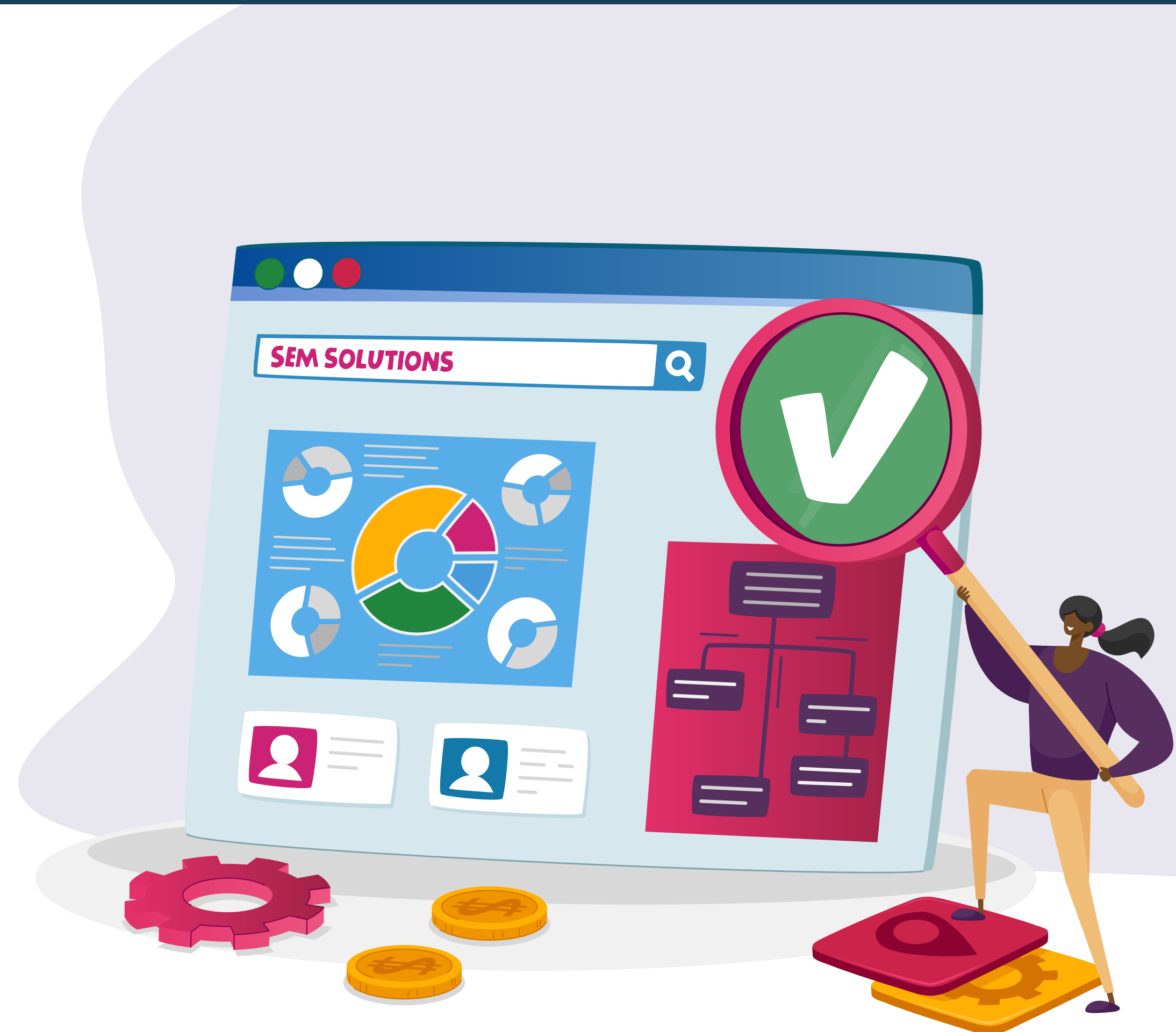
**BUSINESSES THAT INVEST IN PPC TEND TO EARN TWICE
WHAT THEY SPEND ON THIS TYPE OF GOOGLE AD.**

x2

Generally, **Search Engine Marketing (SEM) or PPC refers to paid search marketing, a system where businesses pay Google to show their ads in the search results.** Search engine optimization, or SEO, is different because businesses don't pay Google for traffic and clicks; rather, they earn their spot in the search results by having the most relevant content for a given keyword search.

This handbook will focus on SEM and help business owners discover everything they need to know about paid search.

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2 USING PAID SEARCH

Paid search is an essential tool for attracting customers online. Even better, it can be a profitable channel once you use it effectively.

According to Google, people who visit your site from a pay-per-click (PPC) ad are 50 per cent more likely to make a purchase than organic visitors. Google explains that businesses that invest in PPC ads receive a 200-per-cent return on their investment on average.

These numbers are hard to ignore. If you're unsure where to start, here are some of the most common questions we get from our clients about paid search.

WHAT IS PAID SEARCH?

By targeting search terms relevant to your business, paid ads allow you to deliver your content to customers who are hunting for what you sell. Similar to an auction, you bid on keywords that will get your ads in the most prominent positions possible. When you use PPC advertising you only pay when someone clicks on your ad.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SEARCH AND DISPLAY ADS?

Search ads show up in the main feed of search results when someone types a word or phrase into a search engine. Display ads can be seen on partner sites, appearing on the pages of the websites where internet users see them when they're reading online.

ARE GOOGLE ADS MY ONLY OPTION?

You can implement paid search marketing across multiple platforms, including Google, Bing, Yahoo and social media. However, Google Ads are the most well-known because Google holds a striking majority of the search engine market share. About 70 per cent of all online searches are done by searchers using Google.



USING PAID SEARCH CONTINUED

WHAT IS MY QUALITY SCORE?

Google gives your ad a score based on factors that include your ad's quality, the relevance of your landing page to the ad and your budget. If you improve your quality score, you can lower your cost per click and stay competitive within your budget.

WHAT IS KEYWORD RESEARCH?

Keywords are the search terms customers use when they look for ideas, products or services. If you can deliver a relevant ad to a customer when they search for that solution, you will attract a qualified lead to your business. Keyword research helps tell you what terms people use when they search, how often people search for each term per month and what the competition might be for each keyword.

CAN I PICK MY OWN KEYWORDS?

It's tempting to choose the most common words in your industry to describe your products or services, but this isn't the best way to tackle keywords. The keywords you choose on your own may be too general and cost more than specific keywords chosen from careful research.

WHAT ARE NEGATIVE KEYWORDS?

Negative keywords help you indicate where and when you don't want your ads to show by telling Google which search queries are not relevant to your business. They can help you spend your ad budget more effectively

by delivering ads to potential customers without showing ads to people clearly searching for something else. For example, a pizza restaurant may want to appear in searches for "pizza delivery" and for "pizza restaurants for dining in" in their area but not in searches for "pizza dough recipes."



WHAT IS PAY-PER-CLICK AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

It's called "pay-per-click" because you only pay when someone clicks on your search ad. You can target customers by the item or solution they search for, as well as the location. PPC isn't just for e-commerce businesses, either. Three out of four shoppers who find local and useful information online say they are more likely to visit the physical storefronts for these businesses.

USING PAID SEARCH CONTINUED

CAN I PAY FOR ADS TO SHOW UP WHEN PEOPLE SEARCH FOR MY COMPETITION?

Yes. However, your quality score goes up when you show relevant content to people who click on your ad. Competitor ads can backfire when searchers who aren't looking for what you sell reach your site.

HOW MUCH DO I NEED TO SPEND?

The answer depends on your goals, budget and industry. It's best to figure out how much you should spend based on these elements, then try it for a few months. These tests will help you see what works and what investment makes sense for your business.

DOES PAID SEARCH WORK?

Yes. There is a way to make the platform work for you in most cases and to see a reliable return on your investment. The trick is to have the knowledge needed to use it effectively and to understand how to set your budget correctly to see returns.

CAN I PAUSE ADS IF I DON'T NEED THEM ALL YEAR?

Yes. You might create campaigns for different seasons or a few special ones for your busiest season. You may want to set aside a specific part of your budget for launches and run these campaigns for a set period.



USING PAID SEARCH CONTINUED

WHAT IS OPTIMIZATION?

Optimization happens when you monitor how your ads work and adjust as needed to ensure you spend your budget effectively.

WHY DO SOME ADS STAND OUT MORE THAN MINE?

Ad extensions can extend the size of your ad by increasing how much information appears in your ad. They don't cost anything beyond your standard cost per click and can make your ad stand out to deliver the right information to your customers in the best way.

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY ADS ARE WORKING?

Paid search is working if it's helping you achieve your business goals and you see a solid return on your investment. Watch for changes in results you can measure. These can include your conversion rate, cost per click, click-through rate, the number of calls to your business, the number of form submissions or even how much each conversion costs you.

WHAT KIND OF METRICS WILL I SEE?

The Google Search Console will show you a wide range of metrics, including cost, clicks, the average cost per click, conversions, impressions, click-through rates and cost per conversion.

HOW DOES PAID SEARCH WORK WITH MY OTHER MARKETING

Paid search can bolster your other marketing efforts as the insight you gain about your customers and their preferences can help you improve your content, additional marketing and even print advertising.

WHAT IS AD RANK?

Ad ranking determines where your ad is shown compared to other ads and if searchers will see your ad at all. It's typically based on your ad quality, bid amount, the context of the person's search, and the competition. It can change as these factors change.

Now that we've answered some of your general questions about paid search, let's dive into the details.



3

MAKING THE MOST OF KEYWORDS

In today's digital world, consumers don't want or need you to sell to them. They want you to help them, on their terms. But first, they need to find you.

Research shows 89 per cent of buyers start their buying journey with a search engine. If you're not paying attention to what potential customers are looking up and when, you're missing out on sales.

The modern buyer's journey is a three-stage process:



Stage 1: Awareness.

The buyer knows your brand and recognizes it as a trusted name.



Stage 2: Engagement.

The buyer understands what your company is about, and who you are.



Stage 3: Conversion.

The buyer is ready to take action. This can include making a call, booking an appointment or making a purchase.

For businesses, the engagement stage is critical. This is your opportunity to showcase how you can help. If buyers don't find you when they're doing their research, they won't consider you when it comes time to buy.

How do you show up during a buyer's search? By getting the right message to the right person at the right time. This can only happen if you know when potential customers are ready to buy, and then use the right keywords to help them find you.



MAKING THE MOST OF KEYWORDS CONTINUED

Purchase intent is about how ready potential customers are to buy. To determine how close a consumer is to buying you need to know:

- their demographic and who they are;
- the content they're consuming;
- where they are finding that information and how they're accessing it.

This knowledge will help you reach them with the kind of content they want, when and where they want it. More importantly, it will help move them to the next stage in your sales funnel.

CONSUMER INTENT IS MORE POWERFUL THAN DEMOGRAPHICS

Marketers who rely only on demographics risk missing 70 per cent of potential mobile shoppers. That's because when people want or need something, they turn to Google or YouTube. Marketers who build their SEM strategy around purchase intent are better positioned to respond when customers are considering their options.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PURCHASE INTENT KEYWORD SIGNALS

Buyers show their purchase intent in their digital behaviour. For example, seeking out articles on a given topic and increased visits to specific websites are signals someone is researching a specific item or solution to a problem. Getting a handle on purchase intent data is a good way to grow qualified leads.

Purchase intent keywords (also called commercial keywords) are search queries. They are your first signal that someone is ready and preparing to buy.

SEARCH QUERIES AREN'T KEYWORDS

The terms keywords and search queries are often used interchangeably. They shouldn't be. Keywords are the exact words marketers use to help search engines find companies, products and services. Search queries are the terms potential buyers type into a search box. Unlike keywords, they are not precise and sometimes only loosely related to what the buyer wants.



MAKING THE MOST OF KEYWORDS CONTINUED

HOW SEARCH QUERIES CAN BE HELPFUL

Matching search queries to your ideal customer's pain points and where they are in their buyer's journey will help you provide the value-added content and advertising that will help them move through your sales funnel.

There are three types of search query, each showing a different level of intent to buy:

Informational: The searcher wants to learn about something or answer a question. For example, "Best strategies to grow your business." The searcher is in the awareness stage of the buyer's journey and early in the sales process.

Navigational: In this case, the searcher is more focused and trying to find a specific website. For example, the search query "ABC Company" is navigational because the goal is to get to ABC Company's site. Buyers are in the engagement stage of the buying journey and researching their options.

Transactional: The searcher has completed their research and is ready to decide — the final stage in the buyer's journey. Examples can include specific brand or product names or more generic product categories.

Knowing the purchase intent keywords your ideal customers use will help you target them with the right information or paid ads.

The last word on keywords: they're critical to capturing purchase intent and helping buyers find you. If you're not using the right keywords, buyers will turn to the businesses that are. The right keywords are at the heart of an effective online advertising campaign.



MAKING THE MOST OF KEYWORDS CONTINUED



INFORMATIONAL KEYWORDS

These keywords indicate a lower level of intent. Searchers are looking to better understand a problem, potential solutions, or are not ready to buy. Or they may be assessing potential solutions. But, the information they find using these keywords will inform their decision.

Examples of **informational** keywords:

REVIEW **ABOUT**
COMPARE **HOW TO** **AFFORDABLE**



BUY NOW KEYWORDS

This group of keywords signals the urgency and the highest level of purchase intent. The searcher is not only ready to make a purchase, they want to do it now. They've done their homework and want to find the vendor who can sell them the solution that best meets their needs.

Examples of **buy now** keywords:

BUY **DISCOUNT**
AFFORDABLE **WHERE TO BUY**



PRODUCT KEYWORDS

This is the next most valuable category of purchase intent keywords. The searcher has clearly defined their problem and is looking for and researching solutions.

Examples of **product** keywords:

SPECIFIC PRODUCTS
BEST **TOP-RATED**

4 CREATING A GOOD CAMPAIGN

Once you create an advertising account on your chosen platform, such as Google Ads, you can create ads targeted at your ideal audience using appropriate keywords. You can set your budget to monitor spending and maximum costs per click. You may try different keywords and target different groups of customers. Each of these outreach efforts is called a campaign.

BUDGETS AND BIDS

Often you will have to bid against other companies for popular keywords, but don't be discouraged. There are ways to ensure success. One is by bidding on keywords related to the products and services your company offers. You can also bid on high-value locations where your ads are more likely to be seen. The search engine will show your paid ads to searchers as they look for your keywords. When a potential customer clicks on your ad, you are charged the amount you bid.

CREATING YOUR SEM BUDGET

If you want to create a budget for SEM, you should come up with a number based on your goals and business operations. Consider how many new leads you'd like to bring in.

A car dealership could set a goal of creating 50 sales leads per month from its SEM efforts. To start, the marketing team needs to know the number of visitors to the dealership's website and how many of those become leads for the sales team. With this data they can calculate how different levels of SEM investment might result in different levels of success. If they currently pull in 25 qualified leads a month from their website, they need to double the website traffic to achieve their goal of 50 sales leads.



CREATING A GOOD CAMPAIGN CONTINUED

TARGETING THE RIGHT CUSTOMERS

Before investing in SEM, know who you are targeting. SEM should be part of an overall marketing plan that includes developing an ideal customer profile and buyer personas. An ideal customer profile will help you decide who you should be marketing to, while buyer personas help you figure out how to sell to the different decision makers in that group. Once you know who you're trying to attract, you'll be able to create ads and campaigns that target these personas, increasing the likelihood of success.



TEST AND ADJUST

Test different approaches to see what works best. You may want to compare how different keywords perform. See what happens when you try narrow or broad matching, which is a way of figuring out how closely someone's search needs to match your keywords for your ad to show as a result.

You may try changing your ad copy or creative marketing to test the response. You might test a high value keyword to see what happens. If it brings in more qualified leads, it might be more valuable than a cheaper keyword that brings in few.

Be open to spending more at the start and testing for a few months. This way you can create a realistic budget based on what works. A larger budget in the beginning will allow you to test more variables, which will give you valuable insight when confirming your plan and a long-term budget.

CREATING A GOOD CAMPAIGN CONTINUED

KEYWORD RESEARCH PAYS OFF

Get creative with your keywords. Targeted keywords can help you spend wisely and do more with a small budget. Once you understand the platform, more specific search terms, called long-tail keywords, might hold more value for you

Google Ads keyword planner is a great place to get started. With a free account you can search keywords related to your business. It will provide you with related keywords to help you understand what your customers are searching. It can help you narrow down your keywords so you can get your ad in front of the right customers.

HOW IS MY SEM BUDGET SPENT?

You control what you spend on SEM by creating budgets for each campaign you manage. This means you can run separate campaigns targeting different key searches. You can set maximum amounts per month and monitor ad spending, pausing when or if needed.

WHAT IS THE AVERAGE COST-PER-CLICK?

Average cost-per-click (CPC) can vary depending on competition and prices for keywords. A useful guideline is to consider the lifetime value of a customer in your industry. If a company can expect a high amount of revenue from a customer over time, it can justify a higher acquisition cost.

Compare the lifetime value of a customer purchasing a pair of shoes with the lifetime value of a customer who spends 10 years with the same insurance firm. The insurance firm customer is more likely to stick with it for years and spend more money. This means the insurance firm can consider spending more per customer on SEM than the shoe store.

It is helpful to research examples of industry CPC averages when creating your SEM budget. For instance, in the United States, the overall average CPC for Google Ads is between \$1 and \$2. However, the average CPC for industries such as insurance and law can be \$40 or more.

CUSTOMER ACQUISITION COST AND LIFETIME CUSTOMER VALUE

Calculate your cost for gaining each customer and compare that to the average amount they might spend with your company over a lifetime. If the amount it takes to bring them in is less than their value to you over the long-term, SEM can be a profitable channel for you.



CREATING A GOOD CAMPAIGN CONTINUED

AD QUALITY AND RELEVANCE

The costs associated with SEM will also depend on the quality of your ad, the relevance of your landing page and content, as well as the location, device, search context and other factors. All of this affects your quality score, which can influence your bidding costs.

HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR SEM BUDGET

Start with your overall marketing goals and consider how your business currently brings in customers. You may want to expand your business by a certain number of customers per month over the next year.

Look at your current website traffic and the number of visitors who become customers. This is called your conversion rate. Each time a visitor calls or purchases a product, they become a customer or a qualified lead for your sales team. If they become a lead for your sales team, dig deeper to see the number of qualified leads your team converts into sales.

If you know the amount of traffic it took to create your current customer base, you can work backwards to figure out how much website traffic you might need to produce enough leads to meet your new target. This exercise can also help you see if you need to improve website conversions or sales.

Your website traffic goal can be multiplied by the average CPC in your industry to give you a potential SEM budget for your business.

HOW DOES SEM TIE INTO MY OVERALL MARKETING CAMPAIGN?

The amount you spend on SEM also depends on your total marketing budget. You'll want to create a workable plan to cover all your marketing efforts, then break out amounts for each type of marketing you choose to do. Your cash flow must cover the costs you've planned. Also, make sure your business can handle the extra customers.

MANAGING YOUR SEM

Ensure someone on your team can check on your SEM campaign frequently. Although SEM is easy to set up, it is not a set-it-and-forget-it solution. Trends, search volumes, keywords and other factors can change daily. This is why optimizing your campaign is critical.



5

OPTIMIZING YOUR CAMPAIGN

GET ONLINE

Almost 60 per cent of all live websites use Google Analytics. This powerful tool is now a digital marketing standard for good reason.

Google Analytics offers a deep dive into how your website or app is performing. It merges with Google Ads, Search Console and Data Studio to give marketers access to a huge amount of data. Making sense of this information allows you to better understand the people on your site and what motivates them. With these insights you can adapt and optimize your strategy to convert more leads into sales.

The hard part? Getting to that point requires having a good handle on Google Analytics and its key performance indicators (KPIs). These metrics offer an objective way to monitor, analyze and optimize how users behave on your site. They also help website managers deliver on marketing goals.

The five most important Google Analytics KPIs are the bounce rate, sessions and users, top five search queries, audience, and conversion rate.

Google Analytics is a dynamic tool that will help you track, analyze and use your web data. You can learn who is visiting your site, how they are finding you, and what aspects of your SEM and SEO strategies are working. When you know this story, you can assess the performance of existing online marketing efforts and build better, more effective digital campaigns.



OPTIMIZING YOUR CAMPAIGN CONTINUED

BOUNCE RATE

This is the number of users who exit your website after viewing one page. People leave websites for two main reasons: they aren't finding what they need and the site is not easy to navigate. By keeping an eye on your bounce rate, you can determine the effectiveness of your content and design.

SESSIONS AND USERS

Google Analytics defines sessions as the total number of visits to your site. This includes both new and repeat visits. Each time someone visits your website is counted as a session. If a visitor is inactive on a site for 30 minutes, Google Analytics starts a new session. It does the same at midnight. So, if a user logs in at 11:59 p.m. and leaves at 12:01 a.m., Google counts that visit as two sessions.

Users are the number of unique visitors to your site. If the same person visits your site 50 times on the same device or browser, Google counts 50 sessions but only one user. Google does make a distinction: it categorizes these repeat users as returning visitors.

TOP 5 SEARCH QUERIES

Comparing top organic and paid search queries and keywords will tell you if the majority of visits to your website happen by design or as a result of unrelated search terms. You can see whether your paid

search campaigns are generating the high purchase intent queries they were created to attract. Search queries will also show you if your SEO strategy is helping buyers find you when they start researching online.

AUDIENCE

You can learn your visitors' demographics, what they're interested in, how they behave on your site and the types of devices they're using to access your website. This data will confirm whether the people you're targeting are finding you. You can also use this information to zero in on who to target in other campaigns.

CONVERSION RATE

The conversion rate tells you the percentage of visitors who are delivering on the goals you have set for your website within a given period. For example, you will learn the percentage of visitors who purchased a product, read a blog or signed up for a webinar.



6 WHEN TO WORK WITH A PARTNER



You want to attract more customers and would love to pass more qualified leads to your sales team. You've dipped a toe into SEM but aren't sure what to do to get results. You're stuck and feel like you're wasting money. Now what?

In this final chapter, we'll examine five hurdles you face trying to effectively use SEM. This will help you decide if you can fix the problems or should bring in a partner to help you.

HURDLE 1: YOUR BUDGET ISN'T BIG ENOUGH

How did you come up with your SEM budget? If you're like most business owners, you probably are spending a small amount to try it out but can't seem to get results. Setting a small budget over a long period may mean you can't take full advantage of SEM. A small budget stops you from bidding on lucrative keywords. It limits your ability to test and adjust your campaigns. Worse yet, it doesn't show you what you're doing wrong, so you may end up wasting money because you don't realize you need to change course.

Once you learn more about SEM, you can use your business goals to set a budget. You can consider how many new customers you'd like to bring in and figure out how much you should spend on SEM based on that number.

WHEN TO WORK WITH A PARTNER CONTINUED

HURDLE 2: YOU'RE USING THE WRONG KEYWORDS

You probably know enough about SEM to know that keywords are important when trying to draw traffic to your website. However, using keywords goes beyond simply choosing the most popular words related to your industry. Keyword research means pulling data to compare widely used keywords with keywords that might be the most lucrative for you. You'll need this insight to weigh the cost of relevant keywords against their potential to be successful.

As you explore SEM, you'll realize how easy it is to make common errors when creating Google ads. Keywords affect how you build your campaigns, how you spend your budget and how you measure your results. It's easy to overspend on the wrong keywords when you don't understand how to evaluate them. Learning about short-tail and long-tail keywords, negative keywords, and types of matching can help you be more competitive while staying within your budget.



For example, a shoe store owner might want to compete for the keyword “boots” to help sell out winter inventory when she should target customers in her city searching for “black women’s winter boots.” This is likely a less expensive keyword phrase to bid on and more likely to attract customers who can shop in the store and want to buy winter boots.

HURDLE 3: YOU DON'T HAVE THE EXPERTISE TO CREATE A ROBUST SEM STRATEGY

An effective SEM takes time and experience. Yours may not cover all the stages of the buyer’s journey the way it should. The shoe store owner mentioned above wants to be able to identify potential customers who need to learn about the store, those know about the store but don’t realize it carries winter boots and those who need winter boots this week because it snowed. Without this knowledge, it’s likely her SEM will suffer from poor campaign structure or lose out because she is sending people to the wrong web pages.

WHEN TO WORK WITH A PARTNER CONTINUED

HURDLE 4: YOU'RE NOT UP TO DATE ON CURRENT TRENDS

Best practices change frequently. Success relies on technical know-how that can change depending on SEM trends and updates across the different platforms. If your SEM campaigns aren't working, it may be because you aren't monitoring them to make necessary updates. You can fix this. Find a few leaders in the space to follow, keep an eye on SEM blogs and resources, and make note of changes that will affect your current and future campaigns.



HURDLE 5: YOU DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO OPTIMIZE YOUR SEM

It's possible to learn enough to create ads and campaigns with SEM, but your effort may fail because you don't have the time to manage what you've set up. It won't work if you try to set everything up once and let it run without any monitoring. It won't work if you don't regularly pull accurate data, measure your results and make meaningful changes.

YOU CAN DO THIS

It takes time and skill to create effective ads and landing pages that will convert to sales. Ideally, you have someone savvy heading up your SEM and talented team members jumping in to handle the ad copy and creative that falls within their wheelhouse.

If you don't, consider outsourcing SEM to a partner. Postmedia Solutions has the marketing expertise and resources to create a strategy and execute it in real time while you focus on your sales team and operations.

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CONSULTATION NOW**