Keywords to the Wise

Cultivating Demand
with Keyword Strategies

AdWords Best Practices Series

Google

Introduction

Consumers are constantly connected — a computer at work, a smartphone on the go and a tablet when lounging at home. Throughout the day, users search for what they want, whether that takes the form of shopping, research or staying entertained.

As people search for things on Google, advertisers target those searches, or queries, using keywords. The relationship between queries and keywords is at the heart of search advertising with AdWords.

We hope that the keyword best practices outlined here will take your account's performance to the next level.

A checklist for keywords & targeting

Here's a summary of the best practices we'll cover. Search engine marketers should consider these points to get the most out of their keywords.

Align Keywords with Your Business Goals

1 Think holistically about the different ways that customers could reach you.
   Why: Your keywords should reflect all of the different types of user queries that could help someone find you when they're looking for something you offer.

2 Align your keywords and their management with your overall business goals.
   Why: Different keywords have different purposes, and they should be held accountable to the goal that most aligns with their purpose.

3 Delete your low search volume keywords.
   Why: Reduce clutter. If keywords aren't going to drive any traffic for you, there's no need to keep them around.

Manage Match Types for Growth and Control

4 Use broad match to capture long tail queries, reserve exact match for your primary volume and value drivers.
   Why: Maximize coverage on queries relevant to your business while keeping account management reasonable.

5 Don't create minute variations of phrase/exact match keywords.
   Why: Close keyword variations will cover this traffic for you, so you don't need to worry about creating additional keyword clutter in your account.

Find New Targeting Opportunities

6 Use Dynamic Search Ads to streamline account management.
   Why: Avoid the need for continual updates to your keyword lists every time you make a change to your site.

Expand the Reach of Existing Keywords

7 Maximize the presence of your keywords by improving their Ad Rank.
   Why: Adding new targeting options isn't the only way to grow volume. A more aggressive bid coupled with higher quality ads can drive volume on existing keywords.

8 Extend your reach to users that aren't on Google.com by targeting search partners.
   Why: Get more volume from the same set of keywords in your account.

Refine Your Traffic with Negative Keywords

9 Make negative keyword additions a regular part of account maintenance. Use the Keyword Planner or your search terms reports to find the most impactful negatives.
   Why: Save money by avoiding clicks from people that aren't going to become customers.

10 Just like your main keywords, focus negative keyword management on the places that will do the most good.
   Why: Your account's health depends on adding impactful, not exhaustive, negatives.

❶ Align Keywords with Your Business Goals

Key Takeaways

- Think holistically about the different ways that customers could reach you
- Align your keywords and their management with your overall business goals
- Delete your low search volume keywords

Identify the Right Keywords to Target

For most advertisers, their AdWords accounts are powered by keywords. There are a host of different sources available to you to find the right ones. Regardless of the sources that you use to generate your keywords, you should think holistically about all the different ways that potential customers could reach you.

Here are the biggest sources you should consider when determining how to find new keywords:

Your Website

TIP: Don't forget to include brand URLs as keywords. Some people search for URLs on Google if they only recall the brand and not your exact website.

Stay on top of your site's offerings. Find any gaps between your site's content and your keyword list.

Your Products

Be sure that you're bidding on core product keywords. When your audience is at the end of the buying cycle they'll be searching for a specific product or service. If you're a retailer, things like product names and models can make for high-performing keywords.

Your Brand

Remember the value of your branded terms as well. If you deal with multiple products, add keywords that are combinations of your brand name and high-volume products that people often search for in the same query.

The Research Process of Your Customers

TIP: Beware of bidding on terms that include qualifiers like "free" or "discounted." If you do, make sure that you have free trials or discounts that actually meet the user's expectations.

What are all of the different ways that they could potentially search for what you're offering? Map out their research process and be sure that you're present at every step.

Pay particular attention to keywords that are rich with commercial intent (a common example is terms with "buy" in them). Think of words in your industry that can reveal a similar act-now mindset.

Other Advertisers in the Market

Research other sites in your vertical and see if there are any concepts or themes that you aren't currently taking advantage of in your own keyword list.

Google Stat: *When looking for new keywords, remember that long tail can sometimes be too long. Compared to shorter keywords (those with two to four words), keywords that contain five words or more drive* **less than half the volume of clicks and impressions on average***. It's a similar story for keyword character length — keywords with 30 or more characters (including spaces) also drive* **fewer than half the clicks and impressions on average** *than shorter keywords. Longer keywords take more effort to define and deliver less than half the volume, so spending time on them may not be in your best interest.*

Manage Keywords to their Distinct Goals

Organizing your keywords into well defined groupings often makes it easier for you to manage and maintain your account. This may correspond to the customer's journey, for example grouping upper funnel vs lower funnel keywords. You may group keywords by performance targets, such as cost-per-acquisition, margin or profitability. Alternatively you may want to group keywords by business structure, such as product line, brand or geography.

Keywords are often grouped at the campaign level for greater budgetary control. For the budget constrained, your account structure should allow you to maximize the number of clicks and conversions for your most important keyword groups.

Remove Low Volume Keywords

Watch out for low search volume keywords. These terms often haven't driven a single impression in months or even years because people aren't performing searches on them (not because your bid isn't winning any auctions). Delete them if you have other keywords that could potentially cover that traffic should search volume ever pick up. It'll make your account more streamlined and easier to manage.

❷ Manage Match Types for Growth and Control

Key Takeaways

- Use broad match to capture long tail queries, reserve exact match for your primary volume and value drivers.
- Don't create minute variations of phrase/exact match keywords.

Your keywords target users' queries, and your match types are intended to control the targeting logic of those keywords. Understanding match types and their role in your account is essential to crafting your keyword strategy.

Semantic vs. Syntactic

The main difference across the keyword match types is the meaning of a user's search (semantic) vs. the order of the words in a user's search or close variations of the specific words in that search (syntactic).

Type of Matching	Keyword	Matched Queries
Semantic	flower arrangement	flower arrangement floral arrangement arranging flowers (+ others)
Syntactic	[flower arrangement]	flower arrangement

Broad match uses Google's long history of deciphering the meaning of queries to answer a question (semantic), while the other match types describe the words that users type and the order in which they type them, independent of the intention of those words (syntactic). As 15% of queries each day on Google haven't been searched before, broad match gives you the best chance to capture anything that's semantically relevant.

In your account, think about deploying keywords to match this behavior. Broad match exists to uncover and capture a wide range of queries based on user intent, while the other match types should be used (with varying levels of control) to capture actual queries that you know are occurring in high volumes.

Refine Match Types for High-Value Queries

You can have more control over bids and creatives if you target queries with more specific match types, but targeting via phrase and exact shouldn't be the dominant strategy across your entire account. Don't overcomplicate your account and its management while missing out on valuable traffic from broad match terms.

Focus syntactic match types on high-value and high-volume queries where you will experience the benefits of more control over bids and creatives.

Syntactic Match Type	Use Case
Exact	You know that a specific query is being used with enough frequency that you'll benefit from managing those queries using a specific keyword.
Phrase	There's a set of words repeated across a number of different queries, and you want to manage all of the traffic that's appearing in those queries. The order of the set of words matters. For example, you see performance differences between "flower bouquet" and "bouquet of flowers."
Modified Broad	There's a set of words repeated across a number of different queries, and you want to manage all of the traffic that's appearing in those queries. The order of the set of words does not matter. For example, there are no performance differences between "flower bouquet" and "bouquet of flowers."

Look for the places in your account where there's enough query volume to justify creating a separate syntactic match type keyword. To do this, sort your search terms report based on click or conversion volume. Remember, getting specific with creatives will require you to put these keywords into a new ad group so you can tailor messaging.

Don't spend a lot of time building out minute or obscure variations of your exact and phrase match keywords. Let close keyword variations cover that traffic for you. Misspellings, singulars/plurals, acronyms, abbreviations, accents and stemmings are all included in the matching behavior of your keyword. (Synonyms are not included.)

Expand Match Types for High Value Keywords

Going from broad to exact allows you to better manage traffic for valuable terms. Conversely, going from phrase/exact match to broad match can increase your volume.

Sort your phrase/exact keywords based on click, conversion or assist conversion volume. For high-performing terms that are only running on phrase or exact, consider adding a broad match or broad match modified version (these cases will also be surfaced on the Opportunities Tab for you).

As you expand your reach, you'll want to maintain an acceptable level of performance. To do this, consider adding negative keywords or enabling bid automation for your broad match terms.

❸ Find New Targeting Opportunities

Key Takeaways

• Use Dynamic Search Ads to streamline account management.

You may be able to grow your business by expanding your targeting in AdWords.
There are a couple of key ways to think about expanding your targeting: Dynamic Search
Ads & automated tools in AdWords.

Dynamic Search Ads (Website targeting)

Dynamic Search Ads (DSA) offers an automated option for targeting. This can save you time,
while providing an effective option for expanding reach. If you're thinking about launching
new markets, languages, countries or products, DSA also gives you a chance to test without
the need to construct full campaigns.

Dynamic Search Ads automatically targets queries and generates customized headlines
based on the content of your website, then delivers users to the appropriate landing
page for each query. It can be run alongside (and doesn't require any changes to) existing
keyword campaigns.

CASE STUDY: 3M

3M, self-described as a global innovation company that never stops inventing, used Dynamic
Search Ads to increase their speed to market for new products. Staying one step ahead of
their own innovations, they used their site to generate their targeting for them, and saw a
3% lift in incremental sales and a 12% lift in CTR within eight weeks of launching DSA.
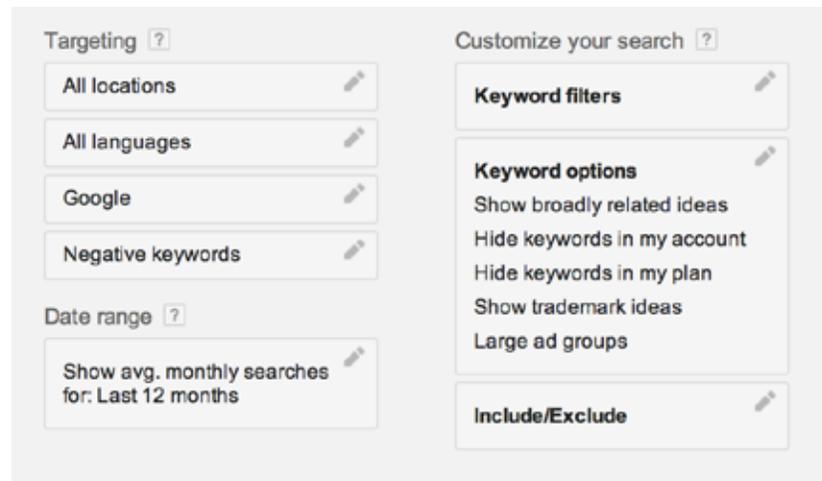
Tools in AdWords

The Keyword Planner provides a number of different venues for possible expansion.

Specify your product or service, your landing page or domain, or your product category in order to get a list of keyword suggestions.
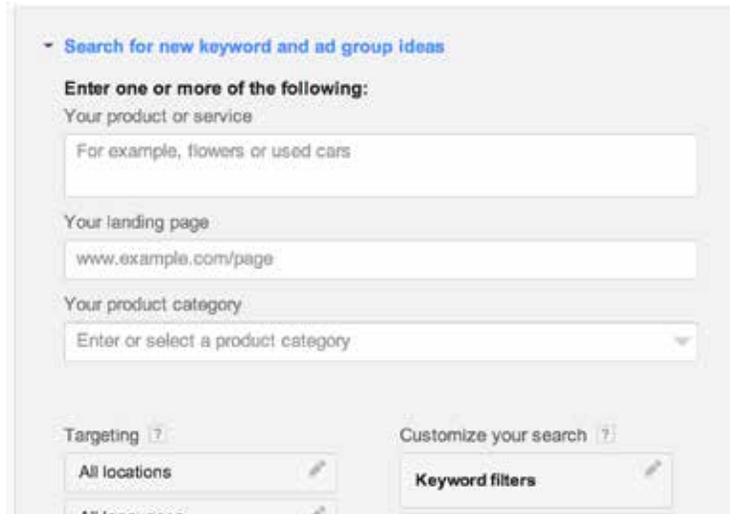
Remember to customize your targeting options to get the best possible volume estimates for your new keywords.

The Opportunities Tab is another venue for expansion. Look for new keywords or keywords that could expand their volume by broadening their match type.

❹ Expand the Reach of Existing Keywords

Key Takeaways

- Maximize the presence of your keywords by improving their Ad Rank
- Extend your reach to users that aren't on Google.com by targeting search partners

By now you should have your set of keywords and you should have a good sense of how they work together. To build on that success, there are some simple changes within your account that can expand those keywords' collective footprint.

Making Keywords More Competitive

To start, you can expand your keywords' reach by increasing their Ad Rank. However you decide to do it, improving the Ad Rank of your keywords will make them more competitive in the auction and will generally increase their volume of impressions.

There are three ways to increase Ad Rank:

- Increasing bids
- Increasing ad quality
- Enabling or improving your ad extensions

Increasing bids can help you get additional traffic from your keywords. While your efficiency may decrease, you should seek to maximize reach for keywords that perform.

The bid simulator can give you a good estimate of how an increased bid can increase the number of impressions on which your keyword can appear.

The Keyword Planner can show you more specifics about the traffic that you could gain by increasing impression share. Put your keywords into the planner and filter your results by ad impression share and average monthly searches to see where you would benefit from being more competitive.

The AdWords Help Center and blog can provide detailed recommendations for increasing ad quality and enabling and improving ad extensions.

Search Partners

You can choose to target search partners (sites that partner with Google to show ads on their search results) at the campaign level. This is a fast way to boost impressions for your existing keywords.

In order to view your performance, just segment your reports by "Network (with search partners)."

Search partners provides a new venue for your keywords, and it may result in reduced CPCs and better CPAs due to different competitive dynamics than the Google.com search auction. More importantly, search partners allows you to extend your reach to users that may not be on Google.com.

❺ Refine Your Traffic with Negative Keywords

Key Takeaways

- Make negative keyword additions a regular part of account maintenance. Use the Keyword Planner or your search terms reports to find the most impactful negatives.
- Just like your main keywords, focus negative keyword management on the places that will do the most good.

Negative keywords are an essential part to a well-rounded keyword strategy. You can increase your profitability and better control the flow of traffic in your account by using negative keywords to the fullest.

Adding the Right Negatives

On the most basic level, negative keywords prevent you from showing ads to people that are less valuable to you or less interested in what you have to offer, even though their queries may be syntactically related to the keywords in your account.

There are two main tools that you can use to find negative keywords: the Keyword Planner and the search terms report. Look for terms that don't fit your business model among the queries where you've received traffic, or in the keywords suggested to you in the course of planning. In addition to reviewing the stats in these reports, also look for the intent behind a search.

When looking for negatives, don't worry about adding negatives for terms that are unlikely to match to your current keywords. A lack of relevance will usually prevent you from showing on those queries.

Negative Match Types

As with your positive keywords, you can add negatives as broad, phrase and exact match. While matching behavior is largely similar with your negative types, there are a few key differences.

The biggest difference is that negative broad match won't exclude queries that are synonyms or close variations of the negative keyword. It will only exclude queries that include all words within a keyword, irrespective of the order in which the words appear.

Another difference is that queries that are close variations of phrase and exact match negative keywords won't be excluded. Because of that matching behavior, you'll need to add poorly performing queries that would be considered close variations of positive keywords explicitly as their own negative keywords.

Managing Negatives Efficiently

Approach your negative keywords as you do your main keywords. Focus your efforts on the places that will do the most good (or, in this case, save the most money).

Look for recurring themes in queries that aren't showing a strong return, and spend time looking at what drives traffic that you don't want. Instead of reading through every single query that triggered your ads, it's more efficient to focus on negatives that occur with reliable frequency.

As you go about finding negative keywords, create negative keyword lists in your shared library. If you find keywords that will never fit with your brand, add them to a list and exclude them across all of your campaigns.

Conclusion

Understanding your keywords can unlock previously untapped potential in your account. Connecting with user queries via thoughtful keywords is what search advertising is all about within AdWords. Your customers are constantly connected — be sure that your keywords account for all the different paths that their journeys take.