

PPC For Dummies – Part One Of Two

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For the beginner, understanding PPC (Pay Per Click) services can be utterly confusing. With so many search engines to choose from, and so many options within each one: different billing schemes, different terminology, and different techniques for ranking in the top spot, the learning curve is quite substantial. So why would anyone go to the trouble?

For quite some time now Google has been the primary source for web search. Nearly everyone who has ever use a computer has either used or at least heard of Google. But as the Florida update has shown us, free placements in the search engines are not as stable as we would like them to be. Sure after an algorithm change we can go back to the drawing board figure out the newest line of attack, re-optimize a site, and bring back that first page placement, but how much traffic and sales are lost as a result of the down time?

When it comes to most PPC campaigns you can be sure of one thing: Your rankings are stable. When you go to bed, you know that when you wake up the next morning you placements will still be there. Now, of course in many cases you may be out bid in overture and find your self slipping a couple of notches, but after a quick adjustment to your maximum bid, you're back in contention. This is a far cry from the potentially months lost after slipping, in some cases off the charts, into the dark abyss of positioning into the thousands.

Google is not going away any time soon, so it is still very important to optimize and try to get those top placements regardless of whether or not you wish to pursue a PPC campaign. If you are ranking well on Google, in many cases it is still well worth it to pursue PPC placements as well to get that extra exposure. With a PPC campaign its important to remember that it isn't always as simple as paying top dollar to dominate the number one spot. Regular tweaking and maintenance will be required.

So what is involved in achieving top spot in a PPC campaign?

Google Adwords

Your Google AdWords Ad is given a ranking value by multiplying your maximum Cost Per Click (CPC) with your current Click Through Rate (CTR) and ads are sorted according.

For AdWords you must constantly monitor the performance of your keywords and ads. If the CTR of your keywords begin to slip then your position will most likely drop, and its time to either re-write your ads to draw attention, adjust your max CPC, or a combination of both. What will work best, depends on a variety of variables; your CTR, current CPC, how competitive your keyword phrase it, and the wording in your competitors ads. Remember you want to stand out as the obvious best choice.

Looksmart

Looksmart has a PPC Service that is somewhat different than AdWords and Overture. With Looksmart you write your own title and ad text for your listing and pay a set rate of 15 cents per click. The ranking order for listings is "based solely on their relevance to a user's search as determined by LookSmart's proprietary search algorithm. Payment does not influence the appearance or rank of the listings in the Reviewed Web Sites section." - Looksmart

If you choose to use Looksmart, it is essential for your website to be properly optimized. The one main downside to Looksmart is that your payment of 15 cents per click is just to get you listed, and does not guarantee any positioning.

Overture

The ranking of your Overture listings is determined by one thing and one thing only. How much you are willing to pay. If your ad position drops, increase your bid and within seconds you are back to where you left off. Now remember, being number one is not everything. If people see no interest in your listing they will simply click on number two. Of course this doesn't cost you anything directly, but indirectly you may be losing the all so important sales. This is why it's important to have carefully written copy for your listing.

In the case of Overture, Looksmart and Google ads, the copy you choose does not affect your position, so you don't need to worry about the ad being 'search engine friendly,' but you do need to ensure it is searcher friendly. Carefully select the wording to use in your ad copy and be sure to include the keyword phrase in either the title or the beginning of the text. Say something that will jump out at the reader. You want them to see your ad as being highly relevant to their search, as well as being interesting and inviting. Remember; just because you dominate the top spot, does not mean you will necessarily draw all the traffic (although it does help!)

Before you get started with any PPC Campaign be sure to understand the billing practices of the search engine before you starting using it. Google AdWords charges a one time, \$5.00 setup fee, and after that you pay only for delivered traffic. Overture does not have a setup fee, but they do require a minimum charge of \$25/month regardless of weather or not your click through's have accumulated to that total. Looksmart bills 15 cents per click flat rate, and a minimum usage of Each Search engine has different billing plans, and its important to understand them so that you don't get burned.

Once you have selected what search engine, or engines, you wish to use start off by reading through their FAQ page, guidelines, tips pages, and absorb as much information as you can to get a good grasp on how their PPC system operates. If you are new all this, at first glance AdWords and Overture will seem extremely overwhelming, but you will find the more you explore, the better understanding you will develop. It doesn't take long to get a firm grasp of the various systems.

Coming Soon:

Scott Van Achte writes on how to choose your max bids and wording for your PPC campaign.