



GUIDE

30 WAYS TO OUTSMART THE COMPETITION IN PPC

 **WordStream**

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INTRODUCTION

We've got good news and bad news. First, the bad news: We're almost positive your AdWords account needs work. If you're like most advertisers, you don't spend enough time optimizing your account, and your performance suffers as a result. In fact, we've found that half of small businesses don't even log in to their AdWords account once a month!

So what's the good news? The bar is incredibly low — and that means YOU have the opportunity to step up, do some work, and become the clear stand-out in your niche. Since so many advertisers let their accounts fall into neglect, you can beat them out with better ad positions, more clicks, higher Quality Scores, and lower costs — just by doing a little clean-up work!

There's plenty you can do, but the hardest part is figuring out where to you start. Use this list and start checking off things one-by-one. Here are 30 ways to help you get a jump-start on beating your competitors with a better-performing PPC account.

1. DELETE DISPLAY CAMPAIGNS THAT AREN'T WORKING

Sort through the Display Keywords tab in AdWords by status. Set the date range to year to date. Do you see a lot of keywords that haven't really accomplished anything in the last year? Take a deeper dive into them. Really investigate if there is any reason to keep them around. Did they work at some time and you want to try them out again? Are they seasonal keywords in an ecommerce account? If you have a good reason for keeping them around then leave them alone for now. If not, delete them!

2. REVIEW POOR PERFORMING DISPLAY TARGETING METHODS

Do you have placements that have had zero clicks for the past year? Review them and check if you could make change to help them perform. If the placement did well at one time and you have the ability to bid more on the placement, try increasing the bid and giving it a new chance to succeed. Otherwise, get rid of it.

3. DISCOVER NON-CONVERTING AUTOMATIC PLACEMENTS

Pull a placement report, then filter automatic placements that haven't converted within the last year. Anything that has spent over goal should be excluded. It's really easy to miss placements that spend just a little at a time, but exceed your goal over a longer period of time; this is your chance to find them.

4. REFINE DISPLAY CATEGORY EXCLUSIONS

Review all of the categories available and check performance by category. Some content may not spend enough for you to worry that it isn't converting when you review it every other week, but in the past year it's spent way over your goal. Go ahead and exclude it. A huge part of the impact on your spring cleaning should be looking for those low-spending parts of your account that spend here and there, so they never show up on a weekly or even monthly report, but that show up within longer time ranges and are just not doing you any good.

5. REDUCE WASTED SPEND

Do an audit on your account to see if/where money is being wasted. Try looking at SQRs for negative keywords, keywords with excessive spend, and zero to very few clicks and conversions.

6. ADJUST AD SETTINGS

Looking into ad rotation and delivery method is always a good place to start when cleaning out your account. Make sure all the new Ad Groups and Campaigns that you have added over the past year are running the way that most benefits your account and that there aren't any settings that are slipping through the cracks. In addition, look at any day parting or ad scheduling settings you have in place. When was the last time you pulled this data to make sure the current settings are the best choices? Review and adjust as needed.

7. CONCLUDE AD COPY TESTS

It can sometimes take longer than you think for your ads to produce statistically significant data during testing cycles. This can cause ad copy tests to be forgotten. Make sure you take the time this spring to check through and conclude any tests that have accumulated enough data.

8. TEST YOUR AD EXTENSIONS

This may be something you think you have kept up on, but you might have given extensions less attention than they deserve. Make sure you are testing and rotating your ad extensions just like you would your ad copy. Make sure that when you move things around, or update your structure, that you also update your extensions. Sometimes extensions change, whether you change your website or your address. Now with Enhanced Campaigns, you can also add them on the Ad Group levels instead of just the Campaign level. Now that sitelink extensions are considered individual extensions and not just one whole extension, you can review individual stats and determine which one is working better than the others. You can A/B test which extensions works better and use the results to keep only those extensions that are performing well. Extensions are there to help your account, whether in the auction or by giving those searchers access to more of your information, so use them to your advantage and add any and all that apply to your account. It's also beneficial to be tracking the results of the tests to see what the added benefits are in both AdWords and Bing.

9. CONDUCT NEW AD COPY TESTS

After wrapping up any ad copy tests that had a statistically significant winner, it's time to add in a new round of copy! Come up with creative and compelling copy to cycle in with the previous winner. Remember – keep ads brief, and emphasize the benefits of your product or service to the user first.

10. DON'T FORGET ABOUT BING ADS

Sometimes Bing can get put on the backburner because it isn't performing as well as AdWords is for your account. Fix that this spring! Copy all of your latest work over from AdWords to Bing Ads. Not everything will work exactly the same, but it makes sense to try them on both engines in order to see what Bing can really do.

11. CLEAN UP YOUR NEGATIVE KEYWORDS

Spring is a great time to check that none of your negatives are blocking terms that could be beneficial to your account. Also, try pulling a search term report for the past year and see if any search terms aren't doing much damage week-over-week, but are taking up spend in the long run. Add them as negatives now!

12. DELETE PAUSED POOR PERFORMERS

So you have something that used to work, then it stopped working one month and was paused. Maybe it has been through this cycle a few times and never seems to be a great investment. Download a report for paused keywords with the time range of the last year, segmented by month. Then run a pivot table to see how CPL changes over time. Use that data to investigate the specific periods of when each keyword stopped working. Either find a way to fix it or delete it!

13. FINISH LOSING EXPERIMENTS

Part of maintaining an efficient, optimized account is trying out new things to see what works. A lot of tests don't yield any actionable results, and when you know what something doesn't work, you should get rid of it. Spring cleaning is the perfect time to close the door on experiments that you know have ended poorly.

14. ACCOUNT FOR TACTICS THAT HAVE CHANGED

Tactics can change a lot from year to year, like accounts with complicated geographic strategies that get scrapped after deep analysis. Whether it be countries that you no longer ship to or states that you're no longer interested in advertising to, now is the time to get rid of them.

15. OPTIMIZE LANDING PAGES

After making all of your keyword and ad copy changes, make sure all of your landing pages are still relevant and will maintain a good Quality Score. You could also test different landing pages for ads as one of your new spring-cleaning ad copy tests.

16. CHECK GENERAL CAMPAIGN SETTINGS

There are many campaign settings and some get less attention than they deserve throughout the year. Check language settings, daily budgets, geographic settings and status changes. Make sure you are all of your campaigns are on the right track to hit your goals and something as simple as a general campaign setting isn't holding them back.

STOP WASTING MONEY IN ADWORDS

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Wasted Spend ⓘ

\$49.81 in projected 12 month wasted
\$12.45 already wasted in the last 90 days

33%

of Negative Keywords Added

What does it mean?
You're falling behind similar advertisers, who added an average of 18 keywords in the last month.

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GRADE YOUR ACCOUNT

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17. REMOVE DUPLICATE KEYWORDS FROM YOUR ACCOUNT

It's nearly impossible to maintain a PPC account that is free of duplicate keywords, particularly if you have multiple managers working in one account, or are frequently adjusting match types and account settings. However, it is imperative to your business (and your bank account) to check for duplicates in the account on a monthly or quarterly basis. Duplicates are keywords with the same match types that are within the same ad group, campaign, or differing campaigns, across your account.

There are a lot of different ways to truly define a duplicate keyword but that would be the most universal definition. There is one caveat to this definition, which comes into play with broad match keywords. Be cognizant that broad match keywords are duplicates if they contain the same words, even in different orders. For example, "cheap window screens" on broad match and "window screens cheap" on broad match would be considered duplicates.

18. REFRESH YOUR AD COPY

If you optimize your account and never look at your ads, you could be in big trouble, especially if you have been doing some restructuring of your account but you haven't updated your ads. It is important to refresh your ads at least on a monthly or quarterly basis. You can determine a threshold of time that works best for you, but in general, every quarter is a good start. Go through your account Ad Group by Ad Group and identify those ads that are either not showing up at all, or when they are shown, have few to no clicks. Refreshing your ad copy is a great way to help identify other areas in your account that may be underperforming or not structured properly as well.

19. IDENTIFY COSTLY KEYWORDS

Costly keywords are not always those that have a higher cost-per-clicks; they can also be the keywords that aren't yielding any return on ad spend, or offer very poor returns. At the first sign of something costing too much or not providing a return, your first reaction may be to pause, but take a deeper look. Taking the time to investigate could allow you to make some tweaks and turn that costly keyword into a money-making keyword!

20. RESEARCH LOW PERFORMING KEYWORDS

Under performers are usually easy to pick out and get rid of, but just like your costly keywords, you may want to do a bit of research before you take action when it comes to low-performance keywords. A lot of spring cleaning is getting in there and doing the dirty work you have been putting off all winter. It will take some time, but the results will be great for the account.

21. ADD NEW EXTENSIONS

You may also want to add new ad extensions when they apply. If you have never used them before (or never had a reason to use them), now is the time to do so; extensions are now a contributing factor in the ad auction. So, not only do they help with your click-through rates, but they also help you get a better position in the ad auction. Test them out, try them, and monitor the results to see what works best.

22. MODIFY BID ADJUSTMENTS

With Enhanced Campaigns, you can now add bid adjustments to certain areas or settings of your account that can help your account's performance during that time. Ensure that bid adjustments for postal codes or specific cities are still relevant, and that your ads are being displayed at the desired times on certain days, if applicable. Review your Analytics data to see that device bid adjustments still make sense – if a majority of your mobile traffic is coming from a specific type of device, make sure your bid adjustments reflect these trends accordingly.

23. CHECK CONVERSION TRACKING

Another aspect of your account you should evaluate during your spring cleaning is the effectiveness of your conversion tracking. Over time, changes to ad copy can lead to varying click-through rates and conversions, so it pays to monitor how well (or not) your previous strategies are performing now. If a cluster of keywords that used to perform strongly is no longer yielding any real returns in terms of conversions, get rid of them.

24. MONITOR BID SETTINGS

Something else to consider is your current bid settings. Some advertisers ignore their bid settings, but keeping a close eye on your CPC vs. click-through rate and other aspects of your bid settings can really pay off. Similarly, if you've been relying on automatic bidding, it may be worth considering taking a more hands-on approach by switching to manual bidding.

25. IDENTIFY LOW QUALITY SCORE KEYWORDS

Quality Score is one of the most important AdWords metrics. Poor Quality Score keywords should definitely be eliminated during your spring cleaning. Run a keyword diagnostic test to check your ratings for expected click-through rate, ad relevance and landing page experience. If any of your keywords have low Quality Scores, either delete them or improve them to make sure they're not hurting your ROI.

26. TIDY UP YOUR ACCOUNT STRUCTURE

A poorly structured AdWords account isn't just harder to manage effectively, it can also have a negative impact on your Quality Scores. While you're spring cleaning, make sure that your account has separate campaigns for different product lines or services, and that individual campaigns are centered on general themes. Once you've restructured your campaigns, ensure that each campaign consists of logical Ad Groups that focus on one specific product, service or theme.

27. LOOK THROUGH SEARCH QUERY DATA

Just because you think your potential customers will behave in a certain way doesn't mean that's what's going to happen. Spring is an excellent time to take another look at search query data to see what terms your prospects are using to find your business (or your competitors). Base your decisions on hard data – don't rely on assumptions, or you could miss out on valuable opportunities to serve your ads to potential customers. You may also discover new ways to reach your audience that you might not have previously considered.

28. UPDATE DISPLAY AND DESTINATION URLS

You may think that the copy of your ads is the be-all and end-all of your campaigns' success, but your URLs can have an impact on click-through rates, too. As you tidy up your campaign this spring, take a look at your display and destination URLs. Do your display URLs give potential customers a fair idea of the type of site they'll visit if they click on your ad? Do your ads still direct traffic to dedicated, highly optimized landing pages? This is low-hanging fruit, but is all too easily overlooked – especially in larger accounts.

29. SET UP OR ADJUST REMARKETING

Remarketing can be a powerful way to reduce potential lost business. However, many businesses don't bother with remarketing, or fail to implement it correctly. Make sure you're using the remarketing technique that suits your business and audience. Are you remarketing to the Display Network, or search ads? What about mobile ad remarketing? These are all important questions to ask, particularly if you haven't thought about the impact your remarketing efforts have had for a while.

30. DEFINE YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE BY AD GROUP

You can further refine the types of users that could see your ads by excluding audiences. This can be done if you're running the following campaign types:

- Display Network Only – Remarketing
- Display Network Only – All Features
- Search & Display Networks – All Features

Modifying the types of audiences that are excluded from your campaigns can reduce the likelihood that individuals who do not match your business' ideal buyer personas will see, and subsequently click, on your ads. You can exclude audiences by interest categories, remarketing lists or a combination of the two. Examine these settings and see if you can further refine the type of people who will see your ads.

CONCLUSION

The above checklist is a great way to get started on optimizing your PPC account, but these certainly aren't the only things you can do to help your account. Don't wait — you may discover changes that are very easy to implement yet make a huge difference. The sooner you start, the sooner you can start edging out your competitors on the search results page.

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