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CUT CAMPAIGN WASTE WITH KEYWORD MATCHING

Most advertising campaigns have an enormous amount of waste. With other channels you have to live with unwanted slippage, but not so in search because of a technique called *keyword matching*.

Keyword matching is an important method of cost control that allows you to refine your ad targeting and improve your returns. It works by eliminating unprofitable traffic from your ads showing up for searches not closely related to your offering.

Mastering this technique offers you some of the best return on time spent. You can audit a typical campaign in under an hour, and you shouldn't need to do it more than once every few months (if that). We've audited our campaigns twice in the past, cutting 70% of our spend after the first round and over 60% in the second. That's a 88% reduction in spend with no loss in sales. Excited yet?

BROAD MATCH

This is the default match setting. When you enter a keyword in AdWords without any additional punctuation, your ads will be served for all searches that contain that keyword, as well as any synonyms or plurals.

For instance, if you use broad match on the keyword phrase *plasma television* (without quotes), your ad will appear when people search for *plasma TV*, *plasma display*, *plasma televisions*, or even *buy 42-inch plasma televisions*.

We use broad match for most keywords in our campaign. However, it can sometimes generate unwanted clicks, driving up your total cost.

PHRASE MATCH

A useful technique for refining your targeting is to incorporate phrase match. Do this by surrounding your keyword phrase in quotes.

Your ads will then appear for searches that contain your target keyword. Additional keywords may appear before or after your phrase as well.

For instance, if you use phrase match on *plasma television*, your ads will appear for *buy plasma television* but not for *plasma 42" television*.

In practice, we find phrase matching to be of limited value and rarely use it, instead relying mostly on negative match.

NEGATIVE MATCH

This match type is used when you have a specific word you know you want to filter out. For instance, we broad match the phrase *keyword* in our advertising. This ensures that we show up when people search on phrases such as *keywords for dentists*.

However, it turns out that most of the traffic on this phrase stems from programmers looking for lists of reserved keywords—definitely not our target market. We found that we could filter out most of this traffic by negative matching the term *java* (a programming language).

To do this, you simply need to precede the unwanted term with a negative sign and add it to your campaign or ad group. In our case, it looks like—*java*.

Virtually every campaign can see a dramatic improvement in results by using this technique.

EXACT MATCH

There is one more well-known match type called exact match. To enable exact matching for a keyword, enclose it in square brackets. Your ads will then appear only when people type your exact phrase. Plurals, synonyms, or additional words will not trigger your ads.

In practice, this match type is not that useful unless you identify an exact keyword phrase that drives a lot of traffic to your site. In that case,

incorporating an exact match may result in a slight improvement in your ad exposure or costs.

NEGATIVE EXACT MATCH

Years ago, I discovered a technique that even my Google AdWords rep didn't know about—the negative exact match.

We discovered that over 99% of the conversions from the term *keyword* came only when there was another word in the search phrase. We wanted to see what would happen if we stopped advertising on the phrase *keyword* but continued advertising on longer search phrases containing that word.

We found that we were able to do this by adding the term—*[keyword]* to our campaign. The next day, our ad spend dropped by 50% while sales stayed strong.

SUMMARY

Keyword matching is a powerful technique you can use to eliminate unwanted impressions and clicks and thus reduce your costs. Make it a point to review your campaign data every few months to see if you can refine or eliminate unprofitable keywords.