

Targeting Usage Demographics to Increase Paid Search Conversions

During conversations with web business professionals about pay-per-click search engines, "traffic volume" is always a hot topic. Over the last year or so, Google Adwords has emerged as the pay-per-click (PPC) search engine most enamored for driving "traffic volume".

Indeed, with Google Adwords providing paid listings for Google Search, the #1 search engine in the world, as well as American Online (e.g. AOL), Ask Jeeves and MySearch.com, the fourth, fifth, and seventh spots, respectively, for the most popular search engines per a 2004 study by Neilson/NetRatings, it deserves strong recognition.

However, successful web marketers understand that "driving traffic volume" is only a means to an end - the "end" being *website conversion*.

Website conversion is when a visitor takes action (ideally your most wanted action) on your website after clicking through your ad. It is important because it leads to financial results for your web business and generates a return on your advertising spend (ROAS).

Every web business consists of unique characteristics created by their market demographics, psychographics and product/service benefits. A PPC search engine that generates visitors who convert well for one web business may fail miserably for another. Therefore, when developing your PPC strategy consider the search engines' "usage demographics."

Usage demographics are the profiles of Internet users who prefer one search engine over others based on their perceived functionality, content, and search result placement and relevance. By understanding usage demographics for the search engines Google Adwords and Overture supply paid listings to, a web marketer can develop a relevant message and target an ad placement that most effectively connects and converts their most qualified buyers.

Although Google Adwords and Overture's partner networks consist of thousands of content and search-based websites, the highest percentage of their traffic originates from the five most popular search engines. Among these, Google Adwords supplies paid listings (i.e. Sponsored Results or Listings) to Google Search, Ask Jeeves and American Online (AOL) while Overture supplies Yahoo! and MSN.

Below are the primary search engine usage demographics to consider when developing your PPC strategy:

A. Gender: Male versus Female

A May 2004 study by Hitwise showed that "55% of women prefer MSN Search while a majority of men favor Google Search". Yahoo! Search was split even on gender with a greater focus on people 18-34 in age.

A 2004 MarketingSherpa study indicated that MSN's user profile consisted of time-limited, married females who searched less frequently yet performed greater e-commerce searches. While Google Search was favored by professional males who performed greater news, media, entertainment and education searches with a lesser intent to purchase.

For AOL and Ask Jeeves, AOL is favored by women with less buying intent than MSN Search while Ask Jeeves is preferred by children.

Furthermore, an April 2004 iProspect study uncovered that, "women found paid ads to be more relevant than men did when searching across Google, Yahoo!, MSN and AOL."

These statistics are startling when considering their influence on your PPC strategy since women represent roughly 75% of major household purchases and as stated in a Women.com study, control 80% of all purchasing decisions.

B. Relevancy: Paid versus Organic Listings

Another usage demographic to consider for your PPC strategy is “perceived relevancy” of paid versus organic listings. Ads perceived as having greater relevancy lead to higher website conversions.

The iProspect study referenced earlier also discovered that “Internet users are more likely to click on an organic search link on Google, and a paid search result on MSN.” Organic listings on Yahoo! were considered 61% more relevant than paid listings while AOL was split 50/50.

C. Age: Young versus Adult versus Seniors

A third usage demographic to review is age. Preferences among the top five search engines are fairly mixed among age groups; Yahoo! is a strong favorite with 18-34 year olds; while MSN and AOL have a stronger preference among the 35-55+ age group. As stated earlier, AskJeeves is favored by teens and adolescents which is growing in their buying power within American households as stated in a recent BusinessWeek research study.

So what does this all mean for your PPC strategy?

First, it is highly recommended to run Google Adwords and Overture campaigns *concurrently* using keyword-level tracking systems to determine which PPC search engine generates the most cost effective and best converting visitors. Usage data generated from your website is the best market research.

Second, consider your writing style. By understanding the common characteristics of your customers and writing PPC ads best suited to the search engine’s usage demographics, you will increase your probability of connecting with your audience and improving your website conversion. Also make special note that women have a stronger propensity to buy AND a higher “perceived relevance” for paid listings on MSN Search.

Third, although Google Adwords accesses a larger traffic pool, Overture’s partner network, mainly MSN Search, has the highest perceived relevancy for paid listings and the highest propensity for purchasing. Although counter-intuitive to current conventional thinking, Overture may deliver better “converting visitors” than Google Adwords.

In closing, a greater focus on the search engines’ usage demographics when writing your PPC ads, targeting PPC channels and developing corresponding landing pages will enable your marketing strategy to ultimately achieve stronger financial results for your web business.

Kevin Gold is co-founder of Enhanced Concepts, Inc., specializing in turning your website visitors into sales or leads. Receive “at no charge” a 5-week email course on how to convert Pay-per-Click visitors into sales or leads by visiting www.enhancedconcepts.com. Kevin is the author of FroogleMaximizer™, the first comprehensive Quick Start Guide to maximizing your results from Froogle™.