

Like Snatching Keywords from Competitors: Why Content Matching Could Give You SEM Advantage

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Article Summary

- Finding highly-qualified buyers is the key to successful pay-per-click
- Searchers interested in “competitor” terms are often highly-qualified
- Traditional techniques for buying “competitor” terms on Google are risky and have been rendered largely in-effective
- Content Match campaigns can surmount these problems and provide cost-effective (though incremental) access to qualified leads using competitor targeting.
- Issues with Content-Match quality make monitoring essential

Finding Qualified Buyers

The success of Pay-Per-Click (PPC) campaigns is largely determined by the precision with which you can place your ad in front of qualified buyers. For mass marketers, the emphasis is more on buyers – since almost everyone is potentially qualified. But for companies occupying a smaller niche, finding highly-qualified eyeballs is critical.

This is especially important when a web site is lead-generating – not converting. The cost of an unqualified lead to a web site that handles conversion is generally only the cost of the initial click. When a web site generates leads, however, the cost is often precious time lost handling or identifying useless leads. This cost can dwarf the initial PPC charges and can make a PPC program untenable even when it might be working on a straight cost-per-qualified-lead basis.

Competitive Terms are Inherently Well-Qualified

It's a generally accepted fact in Search Engine Marketing that your own brand words will convert particularly well on your site, versus more generic keywords. But what about your competitor's brands? Until earlier this year, buying competitor words was a relatively cheap way to get good conversion rate. After all, you are pre-selecting customers you know are savvy enough about your industry to know who the main players are, and thus these potential customers are ahead of the curve when it comes to search browsing. And again, these words tend to be much cheaper than generic words, “buy stocks” being much more expensive per click than “Scottrade”.

Traditional Buying Techniques Have Become Less-Effective

However, many of the search engines don't allow you to purchase competitor terms – and new rules on Google make purchasing competitor keywords much less attractive than was once the case. Google's Minimum Bid Pricing in effect places a minimum floor on your per click costs. Since your click rates are usually quite low when buying competitor brand terms, you will almost certainly be asked to bid more for the placement than the actual auction will warrant. The net result is that you can no longer buy exposure (and clicks) on competitor search terms for the nickel or dime that it used to cost.

In addition, there is always some risk when buying competitor names – both of confused branding and the threat of litigation for trademark infringement. Most companies are rightly conservative when it comes to exposure to the legal system. Whatever the right or wrong of this type of advertising, nobody ever wants to be sued!

Content Match Campaigns

Fortunately, there is another method of targeting competitors using Search Engine Marketing that – while not nearly as precise – can generate a significant volume of “competitor” qualified leads without running afoul of Minimum Pricing Rules or potential legal sanctions. The essence of this method is to build Content-Match campaigns constructed from Competitor “branded” terms.

What are Content-Match campaigns? Both Google (especially) and Yahoo have two very different ways to drive click-volume to your site. The most common method is Search – this is what everybody thinks about when they think about buying Search Engine Marketing and Google.

However, Google also maintains a huge network of content affiliates. These are sites with original content who – instead of (or in addition) to selling advertising themselves – add Google ads to their pages. When a visitor clicks on a Google ad, part of the revenue goes to the Publisher and part goes to Google. Because this makes it easy to manage and sell advertising, an enormous number of web sites ranging from very large publishers to very small independents support Google Content Match advertising.

So how does Google choose which ads to display on which sites and pages? That is the essence of Content-Match; Google uses the keywords you enter into your campaign to match to appropriate sites. Most users of Content Match simply take all the Keywords they are buying on Search and convert them into a Content-Match campaign. But you don't have to do it that way. You can create a separate Content-Match only campaign and stuff it with whatever keywords you desire – including brand names, product names, and any other tasty terms that are highly-qualifying for your business.

The result of this type of Content-Match campaign is that your Google ads will be matched with content that contains references to your competitor's brands and products – providing a highly qualified content match set that can often be obtained for very little per-click cost.

And keep in mind that your Content-Match strategy is completely black-box and invisible to anyone on the outside – there is no way for anyone to tell what terms you are using to Content-match. What's more, unlike Search, you aren't actually responding to a user who entered a copyrighted or trademarked term. It's really more like you bought an ad in a magazine with an article about your competitor. No harm. No foul. And common enough practice in the print world.

Clearly, any blog, article, or content site sufficiently saturated with any number of competitor names is going to be relevant to your industry. And since users are simply browsing content and not specifically naming your competitor as in Search, CTR on Content should be relatively normal. Finally, since competitor names usually are less in-demand than generic words, this campaign will be cheaper on a CPC basis than a campaign focusing on generic words for which there is more competition.

Content Match Issues

One thing that any user of Google Content-Match should be aware of is that search term to content matching is hardly seamless. Best results are obtained when you monitor the source of leads from a Content Match campaign and immediately eliminate sites (explicitly by domain or using negative keywords – words a target page must not contain) that are poor matches. The broader your set of words, the more important this becomes. It's a bad mistake to assume that Google is consistently doing a good job of matching.

Summary

Targeting competitor brand terms using Content Match can be a surprisingly affordable approach to Search Engine Marketing that generates quality leads without infringing on competitive trademarks or brands.

This is a strategy that's viable for improving almost any PPC campaign. But it's especially appropriate for advertisers interested in breaking into any space occupied by larger, better known and more talked about competitors.