

# Conversation Marketing Basics

## Pay Per Click Marketing

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Pay per click (aka PPC marketing) is a great online marketing venue: It's controllable, testable, and agile. This checklist should provide basic guidelines for a solid campaign.

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## **Before You Do Anything Else, Know the Room**

### **Research the market: What sells?**

No matter what you sell, you're really selling services and promises. You need to figure out what folks really want: A guarantee? A free sample? A product developed by the foremost experts? A faster car? Pull together the right promises into a compelling story, and you'll have a winning strategy from the start.

### **Research your product: What can it earn you?**

Make sure you know what you can afford to spend per sale. PPC marketing is a numbers game, first and foremost. If you can get 1000 visitors at \$1 each, that's \$1000 spent. If 10% of those visitors become customers, that's 100 customers. If each of them buy your product, earning you \$3 in profit, you earned \$300. Which means you actually lost \$700. Oops. It pays to figure this out ahead of time.

## Lay the Groundwork

### Select target PPC engines.

There are a lot of engines out there. Google Adwords is most of the market. But there are great deals to be had on networks like Ask, Yahoo and second-tier engines like Findology. Some PPC engines specialize in news-related sites. Others deliver to search engines that are more consumer- than business-focused. If you did your homework in the first few steps, this step can help you find unexploited niches.

### Select an analytics tool.

If you don't already have a way to track how folks come to your site, and which of those visitors become customers, look around and find one. There are great free tools out there now, from Google Analytics to Mint. Just make sure that the system you use will let you tag each ad and track sales.

## **Offers & Copy: Dress Appropriately, and Sound Smart**

### **Brainstorm offers.**

How will you present that service? Yelling "We are the best" rarely works. Customers want specifics. If it tastes better, show the taste test. If it's safer, show the data. If it's endorsed by a leading expert, quote her.

### **Brainstorm headlines.**

What headlines will you use in ad text? How about on landing pages? Headlines are 80% of the battle. Figure them out now, before you pick keywords. Make sure they make marketing sense, first.

### **Write ad text.**

Different PPC engines have different rules for ad length, etc.. But you can likely come up with some basic ad text that will work well, and then adapt it to the different rules. Use the headlines you brainstormed in part 1 as a starting point.

## **Observe: Prepare for Testing**

### **Plan ad variations.**

On Google, you can place multiple ads in rotation for the same keywords. Do it. Mix headlines and text into different combinations. See which ones deliver the best clickthru rate, the best return conversion rates, and the best return on investment. Make sure every variation is tagged (see above), so you'll know which ones work and which ones don't. On PPC engines besides Google, you'll have to create multiple ads. It's still worth it.

### **Develop landing pages.**

This might mean cleaning up existing pages on the site. One way or another, though, it means you need to make sure that when folks come from an ad, that page needs to make sense in the context of the ad from which they came.

### **Create destination URLs. Track everything.**

How will you know exactly which ads generated sales? Which headlines? Measured advertising, even if it fails, is never a total loss - you've learned something. Use the tagging mechanism your analytics tool provides, and use it well.

## **Keywords & Bids: Brag Modestly**

### **Select keywords.**

It's very easy to see this as the biggest part of your PPC campaign. It is important. But look at this checklist. It's just one step. Right? There are dozens of tools out there that can help you select keywords. Keep it simple: Start with a phrase that describes your product or service, and then use the keyword refinement and selection tools built into the pay-per-click engine(s) you're using. If you do have access to better keyword resources, great - use 'em. But if not, start with what's readily available.

### **Set your bids.**

PPC advertising is dangerously addictive. It's tempting to start with an extravagant bid. Don't. Start at 50% of what you can afford, assuming that 5% of all clicks become customers. Be conservative. You can increase the bid any time. But you can't get your budget back if you blow 1/2 of it in one day.

## **Launch: Dot the I's, Cross the T's**

### **Spot test.**

Check all your ads. Make sure they go where they should. I learned a very hard lesson recently: We changed the capitalization in the URLs for a client's campaign. That shouldn't have made any difference - who in the age of Web 2.0 builds a site that can be broken by a capital 'L'? But it did, and about 4,000 clicks went to the wrong page on their site. Test your ads, even when the things for which you're testing seem ludicrous.

## **Test: Observe and Adjust**

**Review ad copy and headlines.**

Which ads and headlines are generating the most clicks? The most customers? For the least money?

**Review landing page performance.**

Which landing pages convert the most visitors to customers?

**Now combine them.**

Put them together. Which ads and landing pages, in combination, are your best sellers?

**Develop theories.**

Why did these combinations work so well/poorly? Develop testable hypotheses for why something worked or didn't.

**Test the theories.**

Modify the worst performers to try to make them better. Modify the best performers to make them even better than that. Add new ad variations into the mix. Add new landing pages. Don't ever stop doing this.

## What Now?

That's it. You've got the essentials. Now go put them into practice.

If you don't already have a pay per click account, think about visiting [adwords.google.com](https://adwords.google.com) and setting one up. It takes no more than 20 minutes to create your account and your first PPC ad.

If you have any comments or questions, please e-mail me at [ian@portentinteractive.com](mailto:ian@portentinteractive.com).

Oh, and if you like what you've read here, you may want to buy my book, *Conversation Marketing*, at:  
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