Creative That Clicks

Optimizing Search Ad Copy
to Increase Relevance

SEM Best Practices Series

Google

Introduction

Today's consumers scan the news on tablets at the breakfast table, email from their smart phones on the subway, work on their computers in the office, then head back home to shop on their tablets as they watch TV. They are constantly connected.

Many of the screens these consumers use are mobile, which creates billions of new marketing moments in new locations each day. A person searching for car rentals on her work computer at lunchtime might be researching pricing and offers; a person performing that same search on a smartphone at the airport at 4 pm probably wants to book a car right now.

Successful marketers need to deliver the right messaging for the right moment. Better creatives improve ad relevance and drive more qualified clicks. Better relevance and clickthrough (CTR) lead to higher Quality Scores, which in turn can lead to better positions, lower CPCs, or both. That leads directly to the bottom line: better returns for your ad spend.

In this white paper we'll show you how to improve the relevance of your ad creatives. We'll cover these best practices:

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No part of the search advertising ecosystem stands alone. People today expect consistency across their entire search experience, so the connections between keywords and creatives must be as seamless as possible. This connection will improve your ad relevance and in turn lift your ad's quality score.

Tie keywords back into your ad creative

Ads that contain phrases a user has searched for are more likely to resonate than those that don't. So if your keyword is *barbeque sauce*, a compelling ad might look something like this:

> Red-hot **barbecue sauce**
> www.example.com/
> Try Our Texas-Style **Barbecue Sauce**
> To Spice Up Beef, Duck and Tofu

The bonus: ad text that matches the keywords in the user's search is **bolded** *automatically to emphasize its relevance. That helps the ad really stand out.*

Consider using dynamic keyword insertion

Dynamic keyword insertion is an AdWords feature that dynamically updates your ad text to include one of your keywords when it matches a user's query. Note that the ad will include your matched keyword and not the original query that triggered the ad.

This means one ad could appear in multiple ways, depending on the keyword that matches the user's search term. Suppose you wanted to use the barbecue sauce ad above with related keywords like BBQ sauce and rib sauce. With dynamic keyword insertion, a user search for BBQ sauce would generate this version of the ad:

> Red-hot **BBQ sauce**
> www.example.com/
> Try our Texas-Style **BBQ sauce**
> To Spice Up Beef, Duck and Tofu

A search for rib sauce would generate this version:

> Red-hot **rib sauce**
> www.example.com/
> Try our Texas-Style **Rib Sauce**
> to Spice Up Beef, Duck and Tofu

Dynamic keyword insertion is best used with tightly-themed ad groups, where all keywords are perfectly relevant to the ad. For instance, a keyword like mild BBQ sauce wouldn't work with the "Red-hot" in this headline.

Take care that your dynamic insertions don't cause grammatical errors, like mixing plural phrasing with a singular keyword: "BBQ sauce are for sale."

❷ Write simple, compelling copy

So far, so good: your creative is tied closely to your keywords. Your next step: write ads that are compelling, useful, and effective.

Create a specific call to action

Use a call to action that is specific to your business and is directly related to what people can expect to see on your website, like *sign up today* or *try our barbecue sauce.* This gives users added information, which is a positive: those who click on the ad are much more likely to be pre-qualified leads.

Tie your call-to-action closely to your landing page

The best place to look for call-to-action phrases is on your own landing page. A good match will create a direct connection between your ad creative and your landing page copy, reinforcing relevance once again.

Include one unique selling point in each ad

An ad that tries to make five different points will succeed in making none. You've got 70 characters and a headline to work with: make them count by focusing on one point that will really impress your viewer.

Consider including prices or specifics like product IDs, restrictions and discounts. Effective selling points include prices, discounts, product names, customizations, and offers such as free shipping. A focused ad could read:

> **Design Your Own T-shirts**
> www.example.com/
> Create Your Own Fresh Designs.
> Over 1000 Design Templates.

For flighted campaigns, don't forget to call out seasonal selling propositions, like "Free shipping until Christmas."

Don't create ads like this which call out too many selling points (e.g., custom designs, fabric quality, pricing, free shipping):

> **Custom Tees, Ship Free**
> www.example.com/
> 50/50 poly-cotton. Hot colors! Bulk discounts, no hassles. Guaranteed!

TIP: *keep the message simple. Stay specific and focus your creative on just one offering per ad.*

Make effective use of your character limits

While keeping the message focused, don't be afraid to use every character you have (25 for the headline, 35 each for the two lines of text) to convey your selling point and messaging. More "ink" makes your ad more likely get noticed. That goes for your URL, too. Create a display URL that reinforces your message, like **example.com/custom-tees**. Remember that the display URL in your search ad is like a vanity URL; it's completely customizable and gives you another opportunity to mention your keyword, which helps to reinforce relevance.

Include your brand or company name

Users click more often when they see a brand they recognize, like "Acme dog food." If your brand isn't a well-known one, you should still test to see how effective mentioning your brand can be (and don't be surprised if mentioning the brand wins those tests).

If your brand terms are trademarked, adding ® or ™ after your brand name can make an even stronger impression. Adding the term "official site" can also be a plus — especially if your brand is well-known.

Use title case in your ad creative

Title case capitalization throughout your headline and body text can help your ad stand out visually.

*Google Stat: Our data indicates that adding the term 'official site' alone **lifts CTRs on average by 2.4%.***

*Google Stat: Ads with title case capitalization and a keyword in the headline **lifted CTRs 62% of the time.***

❸ Tailor ads for mobile searchers

Mobile searches are inherently different from desktop or laptop searches. The *mindset* of mobile searchers is different: they may be on the go, less patient, more task-driven, and closer to the end of their buying journey. They may be especially interested in things like directions, store hours, one-click checkout or mobile apps.Here are some approaches to consider, especially if mobile makes up at least 20% of your traffic.

TIP: When developing mobile-preferred creatives, try using the AdWords Editor's find-and-replace function to swap in those mobile calls-to-action across all ads in a campaign.

For example, you might globally replace "Buy it online" with "Buy on your phone."

Add at least one mobile-preferred ad for each of your ad groups

You'll get better results if mobile users see an ad that's very relevant to them, with a mobile-specific call to action like "Call us now." Make sure you have one or more of these 'mobile-preferred' ads in each ad group.

Send users to a mobile-optimized landing page

Mobile users don't have much patience for pinching and scrolling full-sized pages that don't fit a mobile screen. For best results, send your users to a mobile-optimized

*Google Internal Data: Statistics are from January 2012 based on Google data and applies to top ad slot after controlling for keyword, time, URL, and campaign or ad group.

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landing page that makes it easier for them to scan, shop and buy on their smaller screens. Doing so will improve mobile conversion rates.

If you have a mobile-optimized landing page, make sure your ad's display URL conveys that fact. Remember your display URL is completely customizable so you need not use the entirety of your destination URL. A simple way to show that a mobile-friendly experience awaits the searcher is by adding "/phone" or "/mobile" at the end of your display URL.

Write mobile calls-to-action

To continue that theme: If your business has a mobile-optimized landing page, say so in the text. Use phrases like "View this on our mobile site" or "Shop our mobile site."

Focus on calls to action that are especially suited to someone searching from a smartphone, like "Call to book a table," "Find nearby stores," or "Buy from your phone".

CASE STUDY: Schuurman Schoenen

Background: Founded in 1951, the retailer Schuurman Schoenen — that is, Shuurman Shoes — now has 44 shoe stores across the Netherlands. The company added ecommerce to its website in 2009. Now Schuurman Schoenen has a mobile-optimized site and uses a multi-screen strategy to embrace all the types of devices used by its target audience.

The company writes mobile-preferred creatives so that smartphone searches generate ads with short, easy-to-read text. These mobile-preferred creatives also feature concise sitelinks to the pages most relevant for on-the-go users. A special mobile display URL assures smartphone users that they'll find a mobile-friendly landing page when they click.

This thoughtful approach helped Schuurman Schoenen increase CTR by an average of 50% while decreasing its average CPC by more than 10%.

TIP: *Creating mobile-preferred ad text.*

To create new ads with mobile-specific calls to action, it's best to start from scratch with the "Mobile Preferred" option. Follow this path in your AdWords account: ***Ads Tab > New Ad > Text Ad > Device Preference > Mobile.*** *You also have the ability to upload mobile-preferred ads in bulk in the AdWords editor. Keep an eye out for the "Device preference" setting on the Ads tab (or the "Device preference" column in your spreadsheet upload) and select 'Mobile'.*

Here are a couple more examples of strong mobile-preferred creatives and mobile-optimized landing pages.
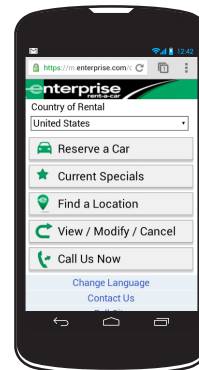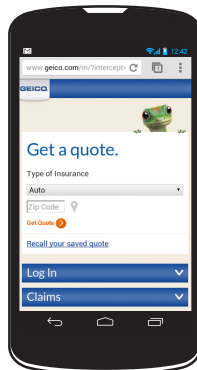
Make every character count in your mobile search ads

Your ad extensions may show instead of the second line of ad text (description line 2) on your mobile search ads. Description line 2 may or may not show, depending on how well it's expected to perform.

Keep these mobile ads best practices in mind: 1. Ensure that your most important information is in the first line of ad text (description line 1) to address customer needs right away. 2. Enable all relevant extensions to help consumers find information faster and increase CTR.

④ Use ad extensions

Ad Extensions can provide users with additional info about your business and more reasons to engage with your ad. They also make your ad more visible by expanding its visual footprint which can increase CTRs.
Ad extensions comein several formats:

Ad sitelinks are direct links to deeper parts of your website that run below your text ads. For a clothing retailer, for instance, they might link straight to a page for boys' jeans. Benefit: Consumers click more often when a link is exactly what they need. Some AdWords users have seen a CTR increase of 20% or even 30% after adding sitelinks.

Review extensions recently became available and showcase positive third party reviews, rankings, and awards from reputable sources in your ads. Seeing a review from a credible source gives users valuable info that builds trust in your business. El Al, a leading airline in Israel, tested the extension last month and saw a 10% increase in CTR.

Call extensions add your business phone number to your ad. Benefit: You'll win more visits and sales when customers can call you the moment they find you. We've seen call extensions improve CTR by 8% on average.

Location extensions add a link to directions to your business, and may also show users how close they are. Benefit: Users are more likely to click the ad and explore your business. We've seen location extensions lift CTR by an average of 10% over ads without them.

App extensions put a link to your mobile or tablet app directly below your ad. Benefit: Users discover your apps much more easily, leading to more downloads and new users.

TIP: *Each mobile-preferred sitelink should be no more than 15 characters, otherwise, it will likely be truncated when viewed from a smartphone.*

TIP: *Create 6 mobile-preferred sitelinks for each campaign. The most mobile-preferred sitelinks that can be served is 3 for any given ad, so 6 will ensure you have variations to test and optimize for.*

Prioritize your creative testing

It never hurts to be reminded: prioritize the most important parts of your campaign. Start by testing campaigns with the highest-volume ad groups to maximize the returns that creative optimization can bring you. Then prioritize the ads that have the most room for improvement. Look for these red flags:

- ads serving against keywords with low Quality Scores
- ads with underperforming clickthrough rates
- ads with underperforming conversion rates

Create and test multiple ad variations

Once you've prioritized the ads you want to optimize, it's time to set up multiple versions of those ads for testing purposes. Here are some best practices for test creatives.

- **Create 3-4 ad variations in your high volume ad groups and 2 ad variations in your lower volume ad groups.** More test creatives mean more chances to discover higher-performing versions of your ads. At the same time you want to be able to reach statistical significance and conclude lower-volume tests in a reasonable time frame.

- **Limit test elements.** Simplify the testing process by working in tightly-themed ad groups with closely-related keywords. By controlling for keywords, you'll be able to isolate the impact of changes to ad copy, like different calls to action and offers.

For example, consider these two ads:

Both the headline and first line of text stay the same, so this variation will be a clear test of which offer consumers prefer: free shipping or a second-pair discount.

Try Our Blue Jeans
www.example.com/phone
Buy Jeans From All Famous Makers.
Free Shipping On Orders Over $50!

Try Our Blue Jeans
www.example.com/phone
Buy Jeans From All Famous Makers.
Get 50% Off Your Second Pair!

- **Use Keyword Segment reporting.** This is a fast way to find high-performing ads and phrases. To do so, go to the Ads tab in your AdWords account, click "Segment" and pull down to "Keyword / Placement." You'll see the performance of each ad against each keyword. If you find that ad X performs great with keywords A and B, but ad Y performs better with keywords C and D, then consider splitting out those ad groups accordingly.

- **Use AdWords Labels.** Labels let you organize elements of your account into meaningful groups so you can filter and report on the data that is of most interest to you: for example, all ads with certain words or phrases like "10% off." Running reports by labels will help you analyze the performance of phrases in different lines of the ad text. You might discover, for instance, that ads that read "free shipping" tend to perform better than those that say "10% off." In that case, you might try adding variations on "free shipping" and then throttle or pause all ads that say "10% off."

- **Optimize your best-performing ads with slightly modified versions.** Even your best-performing ads can use improvement. For these ads, try using a test version that includes a slight creative variation.

- **Try something new.** In addition to optimizing your best performing ads, periodically test a new version with a significantly different headline or offer. This might uncover a new approach to your creative that also works well with customers.

- **Refresh and renew.** As you run tests, return to the ad group periodically and refresh it with new creative variations. Make sure that any new products or offers are reflected.

Automate your creative optimization

Improving ad creatives is a trial-and-error process. With many ad tests running, it may be hard to keep track of all of those moments when statistical significance is reached. Let the system identify those moments for you, but always be sure to check back and see which creative is getting the majority of your impressions.

If you prefer to manually test your creatives, remember these best practices:

Try Adwords Campaign Experiments, which lets you test changes on a specified portion of your campaigns. This requires more setup, but gives you full control over how much traffic you allocate to each test.

Reach statistical significance and stop. Don't be a slave to the calendar. If ryou test for a fixed period of time, regardless of sample size, you lose the chance to switch to a higher-performing creative sooner. When you reach statistical significance with your test, typically around 1,000 clicks, stop and take action.

Verify "even" rotation settings are still valid. In setting up manual creative tests, choosing "even" rotation will give you balanced samples across each of your test groups. The big risk here is losing track of test groups that have actually concluded but continue to evenly rotate in lower performing ads. Make sure you regularly audit all ad groups that are running on "even" rotation. For those tests that have concluded, pick the winners and pause the other test creatives.

Recap: A creative checklist

Here's a recap of creative best practices covered in this paper. Every search engine marketer should consider these points to maximize ad relevance and ROI.

1 Tie keywords back into your ad creatives
   Why: Consumers tend to engage with ads that appear most relevant to their search. Consider dynamic keyword insertion for a more automated approach.

2 Highlight unique selling points.
   Make full use of your character limits and use specific calls to action.
   Why: Users are more likely to engage with ads that help them self-select before they click. That means more qualified clicks and conversions for you.

3 Include one or more mobile-preferred creatives per ad group.
   Why: Mobile creatives are a better experience for mobile users and draw the best possible results from them.

4 Use mobile-specific calls-to-action for your mobile preferred creatives
   Why: Messages like "call now to book a table" give mobile users new ways to take immediate action, especially when they're on the go.

5 Set up a mobile-optimized site; have your display URL clearly indicate your landing page is a mobile-friendly one.
   Why: Mobile-optimized sites make life easier for mobile users and improves conversion rates. A mobile-friendly display URL shows users that by choosing you they'll be getting the best possible mobile experience.

6 Use ad extensions to improve relevance.
   Why: Ad extensions typically lift CTRs. They add useful info for searchers and help your message get noticed.

7 Prioritize your creative optimization efforts.
   Why: Starting with the highest-volume ad groups allows you to maximize the returns that creative optimization can bring you.

8 Create 3-4 ad variations in your high volume ad groups and 2 ad variations in your lowervolume ad groups.
   Why: Multiple versions let you test and optimize for the best-performing versions.

9 Consider setting your ad rotations to optimize automatically.
   Why: Improving ad creatives is a trial-and-error process. With many ad tests running, it may be hard to keep track of all of those moments when statistical significance is reached. Let the system identify those moments for you, but always check back and see which creative is getting the lion's share of your impressions.

10 If you prefer to test manually, stay on top of your tests.
   Stop when you reach statistical significance. Regularly audit ads on "even" rotation to make sure you haven't lost track of ads that have concluded.
   Why: Manual creative testing offers more control but you may be rotating in lower performing creatives longer than you need to.