

V1.1 2010

> DOSSIER

BULLETINS FROM THE FRONT LINES
IN PAID SEARCH MARKETING



CRITICAL ADVISORIES

- > Bing-Yahoo Search Partnership
- > What Travel Can Learn from Retail
- > Multichannel Attribution Management
- > What's Hot: Mobile

LETTER FROM: GEORGE MICHIE

CO-FOUNDER AND CEO



"Where a new invention promises to be useful, it ought to be tried."

--THOMAS JEFFERSON

Living and working in the beautiful town that lays claim to Monticello, it is difficult to escape the shadow of our third President. Every once in a while one of Jefferson's oft-cited quotations really rings true.

When RKG decided to tackle the persistent problem of Attribution Management, we knew the result of our efforts could yield tremendous value for our clients.

Since so much of our work is already ROI-driven, and because our Analysts always have the green light to run data and test hypotheses, the quest to find a true "attribution solution" made complete sense.

What we didn't know at the outset was whether our efforts would be successful. Neither did Jefferson, most of the time.

We started by setting our sights high, seeking to create a solution that is comprehensive, robust, actionable and affordable. As you will read later, we are confident that we have hit the mark, knowing that our entire discipline is one of iterative, constant improvement and that we can always do better for our clients.

To that end, the following compendium represents the topics we are thinking about the most as we work our way through the spring and summer of 2010. From the big picture to the granular, we hope our insights provide value to you.

V111 2010

> DOSSIER

2 BING-YAHOO!
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4 WHAT TRAVEL CAN LEARN
FROM RETAIL IN PPC

10 THE MULTICHANNEL
ATTRIBUTION SOLUTION

16 WHAT'S HOT: MOBILE

18 EVALUATING YOUR
PAID SEARCH PROGRAM

21 LEVERAGING YOUR
INVENTORY DATA

24 ASK RKG

TITLE
TABLE OF CONTENTS



TITLE

RKG ANALYST REPORT

BING-YAHOO: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

By now, most everyone knows that the Bing-Yahoo partnership has long been approved by both US and EU regulators. The two search companies intend on completing the algorithmic and advertising transitions by the end of 2010. They may postpone transitioning the advertising piece if they feel it would interrupt Q4 search and the busy Holiday advertising season—hardly a delay if you consider that the deal is set to last ten years. If they delay the advertising piece of the transition, they intend to wrap it up in 2011, finalizing all aspects of the transition by early 2012.

We'll be learning more about what the transition means for advertisers (as well as agencies) in the coming months. Our early assessment sees the deal providing all advertisers two key benefits:

> First, combining traffic from both Bing and Yahoo into one data set will provide a more robust view of the search advertising landscape between these two sources. A more robust data set allows smart advertisers better analysis with more opportunities to slice the data before it gets too thin to be significant.

And these benefits won't only be realized by the paid side of search engine marketing. As Danny Sullivan, Editor of SearchEngineLand.com, has pointed out, "That will give us the first search engine for a very long time to be 'powering' enough searches other than Google itself to make engine-specific optimization something people will again be considering."

At an interview at SMX West, Steve Ballmer, CEO of Microsoft stated, "...it



means more eyeballs in one campaign, which is great, and from the standpoint of the user it means the opportunity to see more relevant ads; on top of that we think there's a huge advantage to scale, just in terms of our ability to get more signals, do more tests, improve relevance, all of the things that should be interesting, I think, to the folks who do search engine optimization."

> From a management perspective, reducing redundancy in a paid search program won't hurt. Having to launch promotional copy across all the major engines takes time. Dropping the total number of physical changes from three to two will reduce grunt work and allow search managers and analysts more time to focus on higher value analysis with the more robust data sets.

As the transition comes closer to fruition, we're encouraged that the Bing product development team has listened intently to our ideas for tools and controls. We expect

the targeting and campaign management features to give us even more control than we have through Google, particularly with respect to the syndication settings. When Yahoo first added syndication controls, early returns suggested that Yahoo may see a 15 - 30% lift in revenue from the advertisers and agencies attentive enough to take advantage of the tools. These opportunities exist because syndication partners typically don't perform at the same level as their core-domain counterparts.

Hopefully the increased competition created by this partnership will push both Google and Bing to further develop the advertiser toolsets, as well as developing the search features for the end user.

We expect the targeting and campaign management features to give us even more control than we have through Google, particularly with respect to the syndication settings.



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Paid Search: Lessons Travel Should Learn from Retail

The retail and travel industries are not all that different in the ways they think about their customers. Both are looking to target the right people at the right time. Both are looking to maximize lifetime value from each of those customers. And both retail and travel have an incredibly complicated mix of offline and online marketing efforts that may ultimately help to drive a sale.

When we put a magnifying glass to the paid search channel of both retail and travel firms, we often find core paid search practices that are overlooked or are simply misunderstood. More often than not, despite the travel industry's propensity to build and manage complex booking engines, and manage to elaborate metrics like Revenue per Available Seat Mile (RASM) and Revenue per Available Room (RevPAR), we find that paid search programs for travel tend to be less sophisticated than their retail counterparts.

Here, we present five essential paid search lessons for the travel industry to take from retail.

LESSON 1:

ONLY ADVERTISE ON THE PRODUCTS OR SERVICES YOU OFFER (AKA: THE 'SEARCH FUNNEL' IS A MYTH)

How often have you spoken with the search engines and had them trumpet the number of searches that are performed by a searcher before they become a buyer?

The numbers are sometimes staggering. For example, say I want to take a vacation, so I start searching for "family vacations", then I decide on Disney World, so I search "Disney Vacations" then I decide that I want to stay off property so I search "Orlando Hotel"...., etc, etc, etc.



This slide comes from Google's keynote presentation at Travelcom 2010 in Dallas. Contrary to the search engine's prescription, RKG advises travel advertisers not to pay to appear along all the points in the "search funnel." While the case for such an approach might sound compelling, we believe it simply leads to wasted search dollars.

The search engines and many agencies will encourage advertisers that it is optimal, if not necessary, to be seen in paid search "along every touch point in the search funnel" in order to be considered for purchase. Sounds compelling, right?

Except that it isn't true. Advertisers don't need to appear along all the touch points in the "search funnel" in order to be part of the consideration set for when a travel consumer chooses a final destination.

A perfect example of this was unknowingly provided by Google's keynote presentation at Travelcom earlier this year. As Google showed the click path seen above, it was explained that this was the search path that one consumer took to find a Puerto Rico vacation. According to Google, the searcher began by "searching for a Galveston Cruise." When it gets to the end of this sequence, the searcher has "settled on a Puerto Rico vacation", booked through Expedia.

Google went on to suggest that in order for a travel supplier or travel agent to be in the consideration set for this consumer, they should capture the customer's attention at

all these points in the search. Again, this is an assumption that needs to be challenged.

The specificity of the interstitial searches were never discussed in the keynote, but therein lies the crux of the issue. Looking more closely at this sequence, we see that the searcher doesn't begin to search for anything related to "Puerto Rico" until the eighth search of this sequence. Once the searcher has searched (and apparently decided) for a Puerto Rican vacation, the search queries begin to look very similar: "All Inclusive Puerto Rico", "Puerto Rico All Inclusive", "Puerto Rico Hotel" all lead to the searcher being converted on a Puerto Rican Vacation on Expedia.com.

We'll note that at no point earlier in the sequence did Expedia appear for Galveston Cruise. None of those previous searches converted. Therefore, if Expedia had advertised on any of those earlier searches, it would have been wasted money. In fact, anyone advertising in paid search on Galveston Cruise for this searcher would have wasted money.

Retailers have understood this to be the truth for years.

When it comes to paid search, what really matters is advertising the products or services you offer in all the manners in which your customers might search for you. You need to be there when the customer makes that decision, typically within one search of the order.

In many cases, we find that instances of multiple, non-brand keyword touches occur in less than 15% of orders. While that's not zero, it's really not prevalent to the extent that the search engines would have you believe. More often than not, when we see multiple paid search touches before an order, the searcher has either performed the same search twice or performed a non-brand search (eg: "Puerto Rico Hotel") followed by a brand search (eg: "Marriott").

What's even more interesting is that the number is actually LOWER when we look exclusively at travel data, which really stands to reason. If a consumer is preparing to take a flight, rent a car, or book a hotel, that individual more than likely knows where she is going. She is not likely to search for or purchase a flight to New York if she is headed to Hollywood for the week.

For one airline that we researched, over 95% of the sales were booked after one or two non-brand ppc searches. Of the orders that were seeded by two or more non-brand ppc clicks, less than 3% of those orders occurred as a result of a more general non-brand search (eg: "flight" or "airlines") being followed by a specific non-brand search (eg: "MCO to LGA" or "flights to Dallas").

KEY TAKEAWAY

Build a robust keyword term list that encompasses all the various ways that your customers will search for your products or services, and bid each of the terms to their own economic merits.

LESSON 2:

GEO-TARGET YOUR SEARCH

In addition to using geographic modifiers in your keyword terms (eg: "Cleveland flights", "NY car rental") the search engines provide controls which allow you to target keywords to specific geographic regions, essentially allowing differentiation on the same search that occurs in two different geographies.

For national retailers with a bricks and mortar footprint (retail locations) it's accepted as best practice to overlay local, geo-targeted campaigns in addition to a robust national campaign. This is essential for customizing and testing ad copy for regions where the brand name may be more powerful or for testing regional offers and channel spillover into those brick and mortar stores.

Most geo-targeted campaigns should be run in addition to a national campaign. Even though the search engines have become much more effective at identifying where a given search is coming from, about 5-15% of the time there are still IP addresses and searches for which the engines cannot associate a geographic location. In many of these cases, advertisers may still want a version of their ad to appear when searched. A national campaign will be sure to capture these searches.

So what about travel?

For the travel industry the approach is similar, but not quite as clean-cut. For example, very few airlines would want general words like "flight" or "flights" running in a national campaign, because they likely don't service every airport in the U.S. An airline would be better served by targeting departure cities where they offer services. Airports where they offer direct routes flying to popular destinations may look different than the geographies around routes where they offer flights with a layover.

So, a search for "Cleveland flights" or "direct Cleveland flights" in Seattle, WA could reveal a geo-targeted Continental paid search ad. The ad could offer ad

copy that includes, “Daily Direct Flights to Cleveland” or “Easy, Non-Stop Flights to Cleveland”. The same searches in Salt Lake City should not reveal the same ad for Continental.

Likewise, hotels near a regional theme park or attraction may know that a large percentage of their guests typically come from a similar geographic area. For instance, perhaps hotels around Sea World in San Antonio tend to attract a higher percentage of overnight guests from Houston than from Austin. It may make sense for their geo-targeted campaign around Houston to appear on searches for “Sea World” and test ad copy like, “Located minutes from Sea World. Only a three-hour drive from Houston!”

For car rental firms, the approach is much the same. Unless there’s a geographic modifier in the search query, it should be assumed that the searcher is looking to find a nearby car rental company. Targeting product-specific searches around business areas (like “towncar rental” or “rent luxury suv”) may make sense, as well.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Running geo-targeted campaigns in addition to a national paid search campaign ensures that your ads are appearing on the most relevant keywords and serving the most targeted ad possible.

LESSON 3: LEVERAGE EXISTING INVENTORY KNOWLEDGE

Retailers have been using inventory levels to inform their paid search program for years. When you consider that you have a consumer actively searching and show-

ing intent (not to mention paying for that click to your site)—a “product unavailable” or “out of stock” message could lead to a less-than-optimal impression of your store.

For travel advertisers, there are implications beyond “sold out” or “out-of-stock”. Travel inventory for a given time and geography is finite. Once it’s sold out, it’s not typically going to be available again (at least at any level of scale). There typically aren’t options for customers to “back order” travel or come back to purchase later when it’s in stock, as there is for retail.

Thus, it is crucial for the travel industry to leverage inventory knowledge to inform the paid search program.

For instance, nearly every hotel chain has an understanding of the forecast demand for a given geographic region for a specific period of time for a hotel or group of hotels. The challenge is that unless the searcher is indicating their intended timeframe with an event-oriented search like “Indianapolis 500 hotel”, we may not know exactly when they intend to stay in a specific area. But, through other research (either understood by the hotel chain or through year-over-year seasonal observations in the paid search program) we can come to an understanding of when customers searching for a hotel in a specific geography are likely to book their hotel.

For example, if an advertiser is selling hotel rooms for folks who are attending the Indianapolis 500 and knows that customers are most likely to search for hotel rooms in the 12-16 weeks prior to the event, that advertiser should consider bidding down the terms for that geography if it is close to or already sold out.

Conversely, if one of the few hotels in the Indianapolis area that still has hotel rooms available that 12-16 weeks out from the event is launching a campaign, it may be advisable to increase bids on those terms, knowing that the hotel remains one of a dwindling few choices left for weary

Indianapolis 500 travelers. Therefore the ads should convert at a higher-than-average rate.

Another point worth considering is how to approach time-specific searches. Perhaps you consciously don't want to appear for a search for "Super Bowl hotel" or "spring break panama city" because you are certain, without advertising, that your hotel will sell out during the targeted event. Why pay to generate traffic that will come anyway? In this case advertising only cuts into profitability.

In the evaluation of paid search strategy around events, it also makes sense to take pricing into consideration. You might be more willing to pay for clicks to attract a customer at rack rate (typically closer to the time of the event) rather than far in advance of the event, when the rate on the room could be as high as 50% off of the rack rate. (Note: A smart approach to paid search bidding will automatically take seasonality like this into account in the second year. Absent the data from a first year of management, even the smartest bid platforms have to be "educated" for seasonality and variable pricing—which is why smart human oversight is essential.)

A similar concept applies to car rentals and other forms of transportation like airlines. An airline with routes from college towns to popular spring break destinations may already take for granted that between January and March those routes will fill up. Why offer those routes through an additional paid marketing medium when those routes will fill without any incremental effort? Paying to fill those routes up earlier may provide you with peace of mind, but you'll be trading away profitability.

Alternatively, if a hotel exists in an environment where there's plenty of demand, but also plenty of inventory from your brand and others (eg: popular tourist destinations like Orlando), any room that can be filled at a given cost of marketing may represent an incremental win; therefore advertising through paid search may make sense.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Leveraging seasonal information and inventory knowledge for paid search will make the program more profitable and ensure that you're not leaving money on the table.

LESSON 4:

IT'S NOT JUST THE ORDER THAT MATTERS

Our Attribution Management product evaluates the multiple marketing touch points that may occur before an order takes place, but what about the other revenue-driving conversion events that may be taking place on your site, aside from an order or a booking? Can your website customers click on a revenue-generating ad on your site? Do you get qualified traffic that you can then pass on to business partners for a fee?

For example, many of the retail marketplaces like Sears or Amazon have activities aside from product orders that directly generate revenue for the business, including on-site ad clicks or the addition of non-core services.

These additional sources of revenue should be used to drive the evaluation of the paid search program.

Same is true for the travel space. In many instances, there may be ads for a rental car company on an airline booking page - or other cross-sell opportunities to book hotels when air travel is booked.

Are these revenues/profits being tied back to the click that seeded that conversion? They should be, especially if you're driving a program for profitability.

[A quick note on profitability - for travel industry firms that don't directly book revenue, we take a modified approach to managing paid search. We may drive

the initial ad bid and ad click to the only information that's available to us at the time - projected revenue. Because a hotel stay may occur a number of months after booking as opposed to immediately when an order is placed, we'll work with our hotel clients to accept a feedback loop, to better understand how paid search is actually impacting the revenue that the website is driving.]

For our clients, we can include these revenue numbers as a secondary metric, or include them directly at their full value by using a margin-based bidding approach.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Not all returns are immediate. Accounting for all the ways that a marketing channel like paid search is driving incremental revenue helps to drive better lifetime value from your customers.

LESSON 5:

POSITION BASED BIDDING IS THE WRONG GAME TO PLAY

The value of traffic on a given search engine results page doesn't vary by position. Careful study on our part, confirmed by University Statistics research and confirmed by Google's Chief Economist Hal Varian has proven that the conversion rates (orders per click), average order sizes, and margin percentages do not vary by position on the search engine's results page.

In other words, the people who click on ads at the top of the page behave the same way on their visit as the folks who click on

the same ad in the middle of the page or at the bottom of the page. The quantity of traffic is much greater at the top, but the quality is almost exactly the same. (In fact, the quality in position 1 tends to be slightly lower than the quality of the traffic in position 2, and the quality improves slightly for the ads toward the bottom of the page - these are small effects that can be ignored for practical purposes.)

What does this mean for your paid search program? The value of traffic times the percentage of value the advertiser can afford to spend on marketing equals the proper paid search bid. Maximizing the top-line within some efficiency constraint is "simply" a matter of measuring the value of traffic on each ad and bidding according to the above formula. That will place the advertiser's ad as high on the page as they can afford to be, capturing the most traffic for each ad within their efficiency needs.

The critical mistake that most advertisers make is adhering to the flawed assumption that it is the position on the page that produces the efficiency, when in fact the position is a coincidence of the value of traffic and cost of a particular position lining up at a given time.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Bidding to a position on the page allows your competitors to control your PPC program because your cost-per-click rises as those around you bid more, without an associated increase your conversion rate. Bid to an economic return instead, letting your ads fall on the page as the bid dictates.



LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT TRAVEL CAN LEARN FROM RETAIL IN PPC TODAY. CONTACT
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TITLE

THE MULTICHANNEL ATTRIBUTION SOLUTION

When a customer interacts with more than one marketing channel how should credit for the order be parsed? Smart marketers all over the world are wrestling with this difficult question, and for good reason.

Efficient marketing demands that we understand which ad buys are productive and which are less so. Perfect understanding would allow us to generate sales, new customers, and leads with maximum efficiency. Unfortunately perfect understanding is impossible, but we think reasonably good understanding is not far off.

RKG is wading into the fray with what we hope will be a game-changing solution in terms of flexibility, sophistication, and affordability. Before we talk about the range of solutions, let's lay out the challenges we face.

> CHALLENGE : DATA COLLECTION

Any data-driven process depends on having reasonably accurate information. Part of the challenge is collecting data on all the interactions a buyer has with different marketing initiatives.

Even for an online pure play, this is not trivial.

- > What is the value of a display ad impression, and can we tie them to an order number?
- > How should we think about "unopened" emails?
- > How much information do we lose due to javascript tracking?
- > For advertisers with significant direct mail activity more challenges arise.
- > Can we match the mailing history to web orders dynamically at the time of checkout? Yes for many cases, but no for folks with very recent address changes or people on prospect mailing lists.

- > How do we fold in match-back information? Since we often can't link the person who placed a web order to our mailing list dynamically, we have to back-fill this information later. This creates a need to re-calculate the attributions for effected orders.

For advertisers with a wide brick-and-mortar footprint, who mail circulars, do TV and radio spots, have store signage, etc. we enter the realm of impossibility.

Clearly, perfect is impossible, the challenges are material, but getting closer to the truth still carries significant potential benefits.

> CHALLENGE : MARKETING CONUNDRUMS

The data is imperfect and messy, but once we have that data how we handle it is not trivial either.

We have to think about the following.

- > Can we distinguish between brand and competitive/non-brand search for both natural and paid?
- > Can we fold in results of lift tests for display ads, catalog mailings, email?
- > How should we handle multiple interactions with the same ad? This is particularly important with display ad impressions.
- > Should organic search on competitive phrases count as a marketing channel for this analysis?
- > Over what time period should ads be active? Hard windows seem odd: the ad gets 100% credit if it's within 30 days but at 31 that drops to zero? At the same time if the only ad touch was 82 days ago, should it get credit for the whole order? Part of it? If part, what gets credit for the rest of the order?

Some channels cannibalize sales from others. With affiliates, control tests are impossible. That is, we'd like to know what fraction of folks who get to an affiliate site by typing in "[My brand] Coupon" would have bought from us at full price, with no commission, in the absence of that ad. Absent that test, how much should we depreciate those types of orders?

Perhaps the most important piece to consider: What actions can we take based on the information?

Regardless of the credit given to email, because it is so cheap, do we even care what's incremental and what isn't?

If it turns out that affiliates should only get 40% of the credit they're currently getting, can we pay them accordingly or is it an all or nothing proposition?

The levers over which we have complete control and for which we spend significant dollars seem to be paid search, display advertising and direct mail. Shifts in the views of these programs have the greatest potential for improved resource allocation. If some of the other channels are stealing credit from these programs or vice-versa, the opportunities for impacting the P & L become meaningful.

> SOLUTIONS: GOOD, BETTER AND BEST

To summarize our challenge: the data is inherently incomplete; integrating data from various sources is messy; and finally, what to do with that data isn't obvious.

Looking ahead, a simple, basic solution may make sense for many, complex heuristic models will make sense to some, and more advanced statistical models may be worthwhile for others.

We know that our dashboard view of web sales is wrong. Those who have offline marketing activities must realize that much of their online business is attributable to those efforts, and few advertisers see that attribution through their web analytics system. Moreover, cannibalization between marketing channels resulting from last touch attribution means that even online pure plays don't have an accurate view.

The goal of an attribution management system is to at least give us a reasonably accurate and actionable view of how much business is truly driven by each marketing channel so that advertisers may allocate resources appropriately.

The systems described below will serve this need for better or worse, and should be chosen based on the size of the problem and the cost of the solution.

GOOD

THE BASIC SOLUTION

Any system that prevents two marketing programs from taking credit for the same sale is a great start. If each marketing manager or vendor drives only by their view of sales, double counting is inevitable.

A first touch model is conceptually attractive. Giving credit to the first exposure a person had to your brand makes sense. The trouble is defining "first." If someone first came to your site on an organic search for a "lamp" two years ago, should that touch get credit over the same person's comparison shopping engine ("CSE") click which immediately preceded their order? If we place a time limit on credit, say 30 days, are we then really giving credit to the "first" touch?

A last paid touch credit model can make a great deal of sense, particularly if the system recognizes “brand” paid search as a separate beast. For most advertisers last touch on a brand link, whether paid or organic should never be credited with driving a sale. That one savvy wrinkle to a last-touch system can tremendously clarify the picture.

Careful thought should be given to whether competitive organic search and social media activities should be classified as “paid channels.”

STRENGTHS

- > Simplicity. It doesn’t take a ton of coding to pull this off.
- > Giving all the credit to the last paid ad is clean, not crazy, and prevents double-counting.

WEAKNESSES

- > Affiliates and emails tend to cannibalize sales from other channels as users look for coupons before they make a purchase.
- > Giving all the credit to those coupons ignores the channel that drove the person to the site initially. We’ve seen this cause advertisers to underspend on search and CSE’s which causes not only a drop in sales from those programs but also sales from the cannibalizing channels since the initiating visits drop off.
- > Completely ignores offline media, which for many firms represents the lion’s share of their marketing.
- > In cases where more than one channel played an important role in generating the order only one gets the credit.

BETTER

SOPHISTICATED HEURISTIC RULES-BASED SOLUTIONS

More sophisticated modeling should get us closer to the unknowable truth. Any sophisticated approach should include the following functionality.

FLEXIBLE CLASSIFICATIONS

The ability to apply different rules to navigational brand searches than competitive non-brand searches, both paid and organic, is important. There are also other important sub-channels to define like separating display ad impressions from display ad clicks, and perhaps splitting offer emails from email newsletters would be important. Perhaps splitting emails sent from email click-throughs would be valuable. Having the flexibility to break up channels is essential.

DATA IMPORTS

The more data fed in, the more accurate the picture. A good heuristic model should be able to incorporate data from display ad platforms on view-through impressions which on-site tags can’t capture. Folding in direct mail history gleaned post-order adds even more valuable insight.

DATA EXPORTS

The system should be able to feed information out to other systems/vendors at the order level, so that all marketing programs drive by the same view of reality.

Parsing credit between paid marketing channels based on a complex set of heuristic rules is one way to tackle this in a controlled fashion. Rules can take many forms, but a few seem obvious.

TIME

It may make sense to give less credit to ads as they age. Say Fred makes a purchase today. Fred came through a paid search ad an hour before making the order, and two days before that came through a CSE ad. Sally also placed an order an hour after clicking through on a competitive paid search ad, and previously visited the site after clicking on a CSE link, but her CSE visit was 25 days ago, not two. Some time devaluation formula would allow Fred's and Sally's orders to be parsed differently.

ORDER

As discussed previously, some marketers may wish to place more value on the first touch than the last, others might see it the other way. Ordering rules allow advertisers to define a function that describes their preference. More credit to first touch AND last touch with less to the middle? Sure. How much more? Complex functions are possible with varying degrees of cursing from the engineering teams.

SPECIAL CASES

For those channels likely to cannibalize orders, special rules can be concocted to ignore or devalue touches if they follow another paid touch within X minutes.

STRENGTHS

Flexibility and control: The advertiser can value conversion paths as s/he sees fit.

Comprehension: It's easy to understand why credit for a given order has been split the way it has, and if scrutiny reveals unexpected and unwanted effects, the model can be adjusted easily.

Fractional credit makes sense, and should provide a better picture than simple first touch or last touch systems.

WEAKNESSES

On what basis are the rules defined? Marketing intuition is a pretty good starting place, but many folks would look at the above controls much like the dashboard of a submarine and with about as much confidence in what buttons they should push.

These types of systems are complex, and not easy to build. If they also don't give us confidence that they're "right" we might question the value of the effort.

BEST**UTILIZING SOPHISTICATED STATISTICAL MODELING**

Building a mathematical model to "solve" the problem can be done. Using Hidden Markov Chains and other more flexible dynamic Bayesian networks, we can build unique models for each advertiser that assesses the influence of each ad on an order.

STRENGTHS

The modeling eliminates the need for intuitive judgment required by a Heuristic model.

Confidence in the methodology leads to action.

WEAKNESSES

Fancy models can provide a false sense of precision. Statistics is as much art as science, and in the wrong hands powerful techniques can produce lousy results.

Because of the complexity, it is often hard to spot problems with a model's design. Answering the question: "why was this order attributed in this manner" can result in the frustrating answer "because the model says so...don't question the model!"

The return on the extra investment may not be worth it. Building custom models takes

time, know-how, and often a good bit of computing horsepower. If the results aren't very different from a much more straightforward model it could be wasted effort.

> FINDING YOUR BEST SOLUTION REQUIRES THREE CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The best, most reliable and accurate information on the ROI of a marketing program comes not from attribution modeling but from hold-out tests. By running carefully designed tests we can very accurately determine the lift produced in online orders by a catalog mailing, an email blast, and display advertising. Indeed, feeding the results of those tests into the models and using them as "tuning forks" is imperative.

The implications of #1 include the notion that at the end of the day, the attribution system is really just trying to determine the incremental value of competitive paid search, CSEs, affiliates, social media efforts and organic search efforts. Likely the investment in social media and organic search are small compared to the others. If the system helps identify affiliates adding less incremental value than their costs, then that's an actionable piece of information. If paid search is getting more or less credit than it deserves, that is actionable information. But display, email, and direct mail should be evaluated on their own.

#2 leads us to the conclusion that the cost of this system probably shouldn't be too high. If the principal value turns out to be identifying affiliate cannibalization and fine-tuning credit and/or efficiency targets for paid search programs, large ongoing service fees may not make sense.

> THE RKG SOLUTION

As we see it, an attribution management system needs to meet the following criteria:

- > Comprehensive, incorporating information from all tracked marketing initiatives
- > Sufficiently robust, giving directional confidence
- > Clear and tangible, providing actionable insights
- > Reasonably priced

COMPREHENSIVE

The RKG Attribution Management System tracks across all media using the advertiser's existing web analytic system tracking parameters. It smartly parses organic traffic into brand and non-brand buckets, and ties into our paid search reporting and bid management at the most granular level.

Additionally, when appropriate we incorporate data from display advertising platforms for view-through data and offline direct mail programs to better understand the interplay between marketing channels.

ROBUST

RKG provides both a flexible heuristic system, and custom-built statistical models for those who feel the need for the latter.

The solution works through a sales-based reporting interface, with interesting path analysis reporting, detailed attribution reporting, and "what if" scenario modeling for those using the heuristic controls. At this point, we do not intend to fold cost data into the reporting interface as pulling in redundant information would add significantly to the price tag without materially improving the product.

ACTIONABLE

A beautiful dashboard that controls nothing is a waste of time and money.

We see no value in staring at attribution data day-in day-out. The attribution data should be fed to the platforms that actually manage marketing programs so that the focus can remain on the core marketing activities, not on the data correction mechanism.

We believe the actionable insights will be limited to paid search, comparison shopping engines, and affiliate programs. Direct mail, display advertising and email already have much more accurate mechanisms for testing their value, namely hold-out tests. The results of those tests can help tune the model, but the models probably shouldn't replace a sound testing regime.

The RKG system exports order-level attribution to advertisers and their agencies at the most granular level provided by the web

analytics tags. This allows the managers of those programs to drive by the appropriate metrics.

With our friend Kevin Hillstrom of www.minethatdata.com, we can also offer consulting projects to provide forward-looking guidance on more complex questions of marketing mix.

AFFORDABLE

Because the principal value of an attribution system will be derived in the first 180 days, and because the attribution system itself manages nothing, we don't think huge ongoing fees for the SaaS are justifiable.

As of today, we're offering attribution service to our paid search clients for \$750/month per site. We will charge a one-time \$5,000 model-building fee for custom statistical models, but no additional fee for the heuristic approach. Additional consulting projects are to be priced by the job.



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE RKG MULTICHANNEL ATTRIBUTION SOLUTION TODAY. CONTACT
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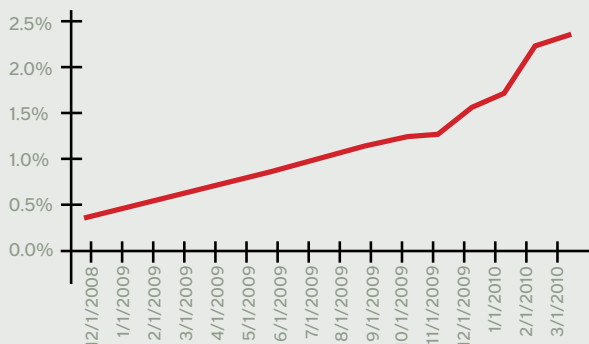
WWW.RIMMKAUFMAN.COM

TITLE

WHAT'S HOT: MOBILE

Growth in mobile device traffic has continued unabated since we last published our data on this topic in January. While still a small percentage of our clients' paid search advertising clicks, mobile traffic share grew 48% from Q4 '09 to Q1 '10. In Q1, we identified 2.1% of clicks as coming from mobile devices compared to 1.4% in Q4. In March of 2010, mobile's share had risen to 2.4%.

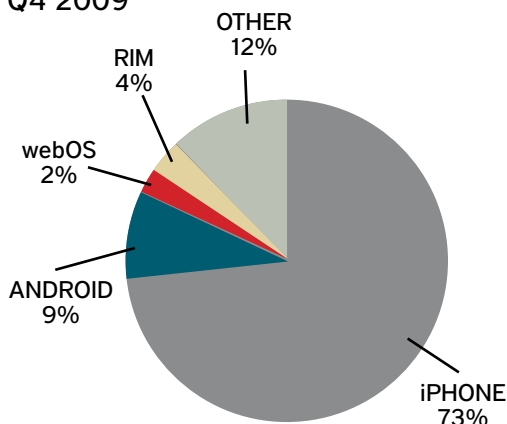
> MOBILE SHARE OF PAID SEARCH CLICKS



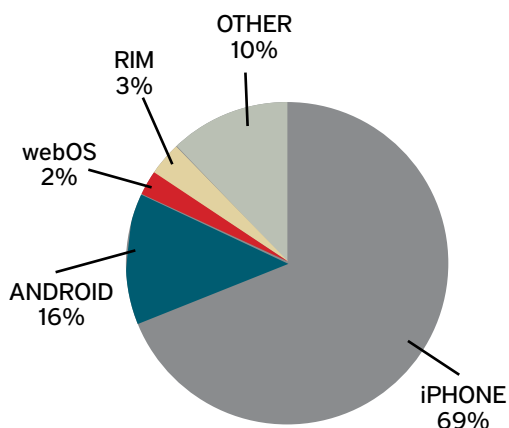
We are again looking at click traffic from mobile devices that would trigger standard PPC ads from browsers capable of displaying full web pages. This is an important distinction to make. There is plenty of mobile traffic to pages using the WAP standard or to built-in or downloaded apps that we do not see in this data. Also, looking at ad clicks rather than impressions likely depresses mobile's overall traffic share while elevating the mobile share of devices that have more capable browsers and engaged user bases.

> SHARE OF MOBILE PPC TRAFFIC FOR SELECT DEVICES:

Q4 2009



Q1 2010



At the device level, the iPhone continues to be dominant, but Android traffic is rising. From Q4 '09 to Q1 '10, iPhone traffic rose 40%, although its share of mobile traffic fell from 74% to 69%. Meanwhile, Android traffic rose 166% from Q4 to Q1 and its share jumped from 9% to 16%.

Looking at a monthly breakdown, Android's growth is even more impressive. From October 2009 to March 2010, Android share more than tripled from 6.3% to a little under 20%.

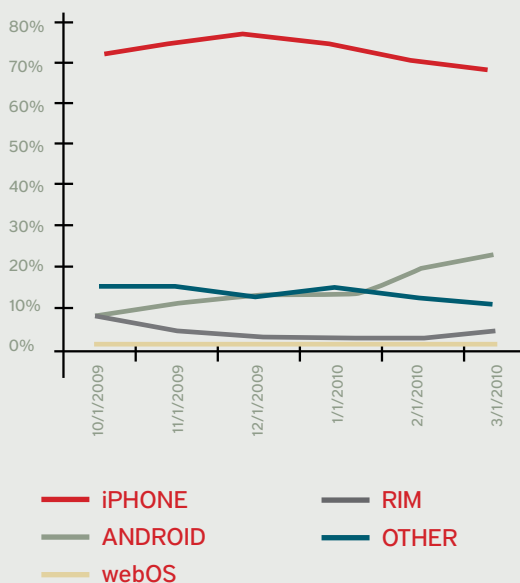
While a lot of recent press has been devoted to the woes of Palm and its webOS powered

Recently Admob put out a detailed set of mobile metrics and it is interesting to see where our numbers differ. Most notably, Admob shows Android nearly overtaking the iPhone in mobile share during February, putting Android at 42% vs iPhone's 44%. Like RKG, they are limited by their purview (in their case, ad impressions on mobile websites and applications) and it would be interesting to see how Admob's figures looked if they focused on ad click traffic on the full web.

While Android clearly still has a lot of momentum in this race, a potential 4G iPhone in the next few months could easily shift things back in Apple's favor, particularly if the iPhone finds its way to Verizon in the near future. Later this year, devices with Microsoft's new Windows Phone 7 OS could shake things up, but after a number of delays it may be too little too late to catch the new big two.

For paid search advertisers, the growth in mobile makes it increasingly important to track this traffic accurately and to set bids based on its own value. We have found conversion rates tend to be much lower on mobile devices and this can have a meaningful impact on ROI targets if not handled properly. If there is a statistically significant difference in performance, it also makes sense to parse traffic at the device level. Currently, Google provides this option for the iPhone, Android and WebOS devices.

MONTHLY MOBILE PPC TRAFFIC SHARE



phones, their share of mobile traffic has held up better in recent months than that of RIM's Blackberry devices which fell from 3.9% to 3.2% from Q4 to Q1. WebOS saw its share cut from 1.6% to 1.5%, but it will be interesting to see how HP's purchase of Palm may impact these figures. Blackberry traffic had a bit of a resurgence in March though, coming in at 3.6%.

Read more statistical analysis "Mobile Paid Search Data: iPhone Dominant, Android Rising" at RKGblog.com.



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TITLE

EVALUATING YOUR PAID SEARCH PROGRAM

In arguably the fastest growing marketing segment on the planet, complacency can kill.

Perfecting paid search is an iterative quest, and one that - for better or worse - has no real end in sight. Every day, more people spend more dollars on products and services identified through paid search in an ever-expanding set of vertical markets.

Those who are wringing every last drop of ROI from their paid search program are the leaders, at various levels throughout the corporate structure, demanding constant evaluation of the core strategies, tactics and refinements driving their campaigns.

Here we describe a layered approach to evaluating a paid search program. The top level view might be the right view for the C-level execs who can't get too deep in the weeds. The day-to-day management team should reflect on the high-level view, but also needs to be able to roll up their sleeves and get dirty to make sure they're getting the most out of the channel.

> IT'S ALL ABOUT THE COMPETITIVE ("NON-BRAND") KEYWORDS

The clear and actionable view of paid search at any level of detail comes from studying the performance of the competitive search program separated entirely from trademark/brand search. People searching for the advertiser by name aren't driven by search, and paid search ads on those brand terms, already at the top of the page, can neither create more brand traffic, nor materially create incremental business from that cohort.

"Brand" ads primarily cannibalize organic and affiliate links and managing those brand terms takes little effort. The real effort and the real incremental value of paid search is

in the competitive (aka "non-brand") side of the game, hence that is where the focus needs to be in the evaluation at every level.

THE 10,000 FOOT VIEW

Is Competitive Paid Search hitting efficiency targets? If not, go no farther, the program is wasting money and heads should roll. Spending the budgeted amount for media regardless of the ROI is the wrong way to approach search. * *see LinkList #1*

Is the Competitive Paid Search program (herein after referred to as "the program") growing in sales volume? If the efficiency targets are being hit and the program is getting bigger, that's a positive sign. It isn't a definitive sign one way or the other. The recession shrunk many well-managed programs; and programs can grow simply from channel shift without being particularly well handled.

Is the program growing as a percentage of total site sales? Much more telling than #2, growth as a percentage of the whole site shows that paid search is an increasingly important marketing channel which speaks well of its management. Again, shrinkage in this regard doesn't necessarily mean the program is run poorly; having a huge percentage of site sales coming through paid advertising isn't necessarily healthy in the long run. Repeat customers are key to profitability, and they don't typically come through competitive paid search ads.

Is the program growing relative to competitive natural search? One probably shouldn't pit the SEO team against the paid search team as though they're rivals, since great progress by one doesn't necessarily imply the other isn't doing well too, but it's a metric to watch.

THE TEN FOOT VIEW

Take a keyword-level performance report from Google for the previous 60-90 days. Note: whether this is first touch data, last touch data or some other allocation scheme doesn't make much difference. The key is to be sure that the allocation remains consistent for the time period you're evaluating.

Do the high traffic terms each meet the efficiency objectives within reasonable tolerance for statistical noise?

In category/subcategory groupings do the lower traffic keywords meet their efficiency targets in aggregate?

In other groupings meaningful to your business (eg: colors, materials, manufacturers, etc...), do the lower traffic keyword meet the efficiency objectives?

Clustering by traffic volume, do the aggregates still make sense efficiency wise?

Bid management and analysis is half the battle, and the most complex half by far. This view will reveal the most damning evidence of problems if there are problems with the program. Do not accept "Buying cycle" arguments as an excuse for poor efficiency.

If the program looks good from each of the perspectives above then your paid search managers are handling at least the fundamentals of bid management well.

THE TEN INCH VIEW

How large is the list of active keywords on Google? There are exceptions to every rule, including this one, but 5 to 10 keywords per product on the site is a pretty good benchmark. The Long Tail is valuable for almost every program, and broad match is no replacement for a comprehensive list. * see *LinkList #2*

What's the quality of the keyword coverage? Spot check some random sub-categories to see if all the obvious and not so obvious permutations are covered.

Are the keywords machine generated gibberish? Machines do a lousy job of generating lists: leaving gaping holes, creating dangerous untargeted and inappropriate phrases and generating thousands of valueless phrases of more than 4 words. When evaluating the length of the list these should be ignored.

Are the landing pages appropriate? Placing visitors on a page equal in depth to their search improves conversion rates.

Linking more general phrases to product pages leaves opportunity on the table. Only SKU-specific keywords should land on product pages. Ask for a Keyword - Ad Copy - Landing Page spreadsheet ranked by traffic volume descending. Check the landing pages for the highest traffic keywords, and spot check others down the list. * see *LinkList #3*

Is the ad copy compelling and sufficiently specific? The goal is to sell the advertiser's website, not the product. The user has already expressed interest in the product via their search, the goal is to convince them that your site is the best place to shop for it.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- > A paid search program should be evaluated on the basis of the traffic driven by competitive ("non-brand") keywords. Traffic driven from your brand terms is typically driven by other marketing channels.
- > The paid search program should make sense at every level, from the overall goals to category performance to the keyword-level detail.
- > In paid search, the "Buying Cycle" should never be an excuse for poor efficiency.

THE MICROSCOPIC VIEW

If the first three successively closer inspections reveals a healthy program, congratulations, you're in the minority! Your program is healthy, but not necessarily in peak condition.

Peak fitness comes from applying the most sophisticated techniques in paid search, and executing them at the highest levels.

- > Smart use of negative associations developed from user search strings. Proper databasing of referrer data and use of Google's research tools should reveal opportunities to trim fat and raise bids on broad matched keywords.
- > Creating separate campaigns for exact matched and broad matched keywords and bidding more on the exact match versions based on calculated performance differentials makes a material difference in performance.
- > Placing the exact match version referenced above on Google.com only and pushing those bids more based on the syndication effects researched previously also produces positive returns on the effort. Using syndication partner exclusions on Yahoo while we wait with baited breath for their bidding differential option to go live will achieve the same effect. ** see LinkList #4 and #5*
- > Anticipatory bidding based on seasonal shifts and shorter term promotions helps take the most advantage of those hot periods. ** see LinkList #6*
- > Day parting done smartly (using the time of the click, not the time of the

order) to exploit intra-day variance in performance values requires good analysis and superb tools.

These fine tuning mechanisms create the competitive advantages needed in a tough market place.

Still passed the test? Fantastic! Your paid search program is ripped!

But the fact that the program is managed beautifully doesn't mean your business is getting all it can out of paid search.

- > Are the managers aiming at the right targets?
- > Are they factoring in returns and cancels?
- > Are they measuring call center spill-over? ** see LinkList #7*
- > Are the targets set based on margin data? Handling co-op advertising dollars?
- > Are lifetime value considerations factored in? By the type of first purchase? ** see LinkList #8*
- > Is the tracking system catching all the sales? ** see LinkList #9*
- > Is the cookie window sensible? Is it based on measured latency in your click-to-order timeframes?
- > Is attribution between channels handled correctly? ** see LinkList #10*


If you don't know the answers it's time to start asking why and when. Paid search remains the number one mechanism for generating incremental business online; even if it's no longer new and sexy doesn't mean it can be safely ignored.

LINKLIST

See these blog posts on RKGblog.com to take a deeper dive.

- 1 - Budgeting Search: What's the Point?
- 2 - How Important is The Tail, an Empirical Study
- 3 - PPC Landing Pages: Choose Wisely

- 4 - PPC: The Syndication Networks
- 5 - The Problems with Syndication Networks
- 6 - Holiday Bid Management Tips
- 7 - Discovering Untracked PPC Sales
- 8 - Lifetime Value and Online Marketing
- 9 - The Gaping Hole in Analytics Tracking Packages
- 10 - Multichannel Impact on Paid Search



Leveraging Your Inventory Data For Paid Search

Are you using what you already know about your inventory and stock levels to inform your paid search campaigns? If not, you may be missing significant opportunities to expand your term list, tighten up your ad copy, and improve your bidding efficiency.

Product feeds are excellent resources for expanding keyword creation, adding inventory numbers in bidding rules, and including item prices in dynamic text ads.

Google has recently expanded the way it incorporates the data from product feeds into search results. RKG has long utilized this data to improve our clients' paid search campaigns. Here's how.

EXPANDING KEYWORD CREATION

Product feeds provide a wealth of information about your products that can be extremely valuable when building out keyword lists. Including fields such as size, color, and material to the SKU, model or catalog numbers are all great ways to build out product-specific terms that convert.

But it's not as elementary as it might

seem. Many of these numerical identifiers may include a zero as the first digit, spaces or dashes. These are great opportunities to include multiple permutations both with and without these characters, especially for those in the hyper-competitive consumer electronics vertical.

For catalogs, the big question is whether the catalog description is included in the feed, which could again generate opportunities to strengthen keywords. For instance, if the catalog team refers to items using different information or descriptions, this may lead to additional ways to refer to the products in



Google has recently expanded the way it incorporates the data from product feeds into search results. RKG has long utilized this data to improve our clients' paid search campaigns.

the keyword list. These descriptions provide wonderful options for synonyms to include when building out product-specific terms.

UTILIZING INVENTORY MANAGEMENT TO ADJUST BIDDING RULES

Beyond merely creating terms from a product feed, inventory is an important consideration when bidding on terms in paid search, particularly product-specific terms. The last thing you want to do is bid on keywords for products that are no longer available. If the buyer can't add the item to their cart, they will probably just click back and go to one of your competitors. So you're receiving all the costs, without gaining a sale.

With hundreds or even thousands of different products and SKUs - including varying sizes, colors, and materials - keeping up with inventory and using it to maintain your keyword list may seem daunting.

But this is a service RKG offers and manages for many of our clients. With the use of a product feed that is updated daily or weekly, we are able to incorporate our clients' stock availability in our bidding.

As new items appear in the product feed, we are able to partially automate the addition of new keywords from these products. On the flip side, as products are removed from the product feed we are able to bid down those terms so they are effectively paused. These are great time and money saving tools for our clients.

TECHNOLOGY AND HUMAN EXPERTISE COMBINE TO PROVIDE THE SOLUTION

Using fully-automated tools can be tempting, but will certainly cost you money and time down the road. Robots and spiders do not refer to products the same way a person would and inevitably will create terms that will not make sense for your products. Too often you will not realize this

until one of these terms has jumped to the top of your cost reports without any sales.


RKG routinely adds complex rules as the client requires. For example, if a product is removed from the feed for five days or more, that might mean the item has been discontinued or our client will never receive more stock. If the item bounces in and out of the daily feed, that might indicate that the item is backordered and the client would still like to bid on those terms.

We also have clients send us a product feed with a "stock status" column, including different flags such as, in stock, out of stock, back ordered, and low stock. Each of these flags would correspond with different bidding rules based on the client's needs. Backordered or low stock products may flag those terms to be bid down slightly while out of stock items are bid to pennies to become effectively paused ads.

RKG can apply a scale as provided by the advertiser to further improve our bidding processes. Common and uncommon sizes scale with stock. We use the client's preferences based on inventory to improve our bidding efficiency and conversion rates.

A great example of this is with shoes: if an item is in stock but only the less common sizes or widths are available, it might not be worth continuing to bid on those terms. If the only sizes left in stock for the 'new balance 993 running shoes' are in women's size 5 narrow or men's size 16, these product terms will be less likely to convert and therefore less valuable.

We can create rules based on stock levels. If we receive inventory quantities and those numbers remain above a preset threshold, we could increase bids to become more aggressive in bidding to try and move those items. We can also create rules based on how quickly the stock is moving. If a client normally sells 100 widgets per week across all channels and inventory is down to 50, it might not be worth continuing to advertise on those terms. The remaining stock will probably be depleted before the end of the week.



The last thing you want to do is bid on keywords for products that are no longer available.

APPLYING INVENTORY CRITERIA TO TRAVEL INDUSTRY PAID SEARCH

Similarly, for the travel industry, because each route or hotel location is considered a fixed inventory, as those rooms/locations/routes begin to fill, suppliers should be pulling back in paid search ads.

Why continue to pay to sell the inventory when you know it will fill up?

In some ways, it's the exact opposite of seasonality for major holidays between travel and retail. For retail, we want to be sure that we're proactively increasing bids as we're approaching peak selling seasons. Consumers are looking to buy and we want to be sure we're there as conversion rates are increasing.

In the travel industry, it's a different consideration. For inventory fully expected to sell out (i.e. hotel locations around football games, airline routes from large school locations to popular spring break destinations) why would a company continue to pay to fill that inventory?

INCLUDING ITEM PRICES IN DYNAMIC TEXT ADS

There are so many ways to incorporate inventory and stock status to expand the keyword list and improve the efficiency of your PPC bidding tools.

Once all these product specific keywords are created and only bidding on those in stock, now you can use your product feed to include dynamic pricing in the ad copy – further adding to your competitive edge.

Google's new API allows for up to two dynamic parameters to be included in the ad copy. With tightly targeted ad groups, this should be a relatively easy update to include in your existing ad copy. This dy-

namic text field can include numbers such as prices, quantities or discounts, likely to greatly improve both click through rates and conversion rates.

At the product level, we can monitor the incoming product feed for price changes. As prices change on the incoming feed, we can push those updates into the parameters in the ad copy for Google and Bing. (Bing has allowed for dynamic parameters in ad copy for some time. Fortunately with Bing driving Yahoo search based on the new partnership, advertisers will have the same flexibility with PPC ads on Yahoo in the near future, as well.)

Even for category and sub-category keywords that may or may not be represented in a data feed, we can include pricing in ad copy in an automated fashion. Clients include additional category and sub category urls with minimum or maximum pricing mapped to the specific url. Any ad that is associated with that url would then appear with ad copy to the effect of "Prices starting at \$XX.XX" or "All [product] less than \$XX.XX".

Many of the details are worked out based on how the client would prefer to provide us the data.

Your existing inventory data may be a powerful tool hiding just under your nose that could quickly expand and improve your paid search campaigns.

Using fully-automated tools can be tempting, but will certainly cost you money and time down the road. Robots and spiders do not refer to products the same way a person would and inevitably will create terms that will not make sense for your products. Too often you will not realize this until one of these terms has jumped to the top of your cost reports without any sales.



LEARN MORE ABOUT LEVERAGING INVENTORY DATA TODAY. CONTACT

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TITLE

ASK RKG

> DO YOU HAVE A PAID SEARCH EXPERT AVAILABLE TO EXPLAIN THE NUMBERS AND PROVIDE AD-HOC ANALYSIS?

FULL-SERVICE.

RKG provides full-service paid search management. From keyword generation to copy-writing to testing and ad hoc analysis, the people managing your account are smart, proactive, and experienced. The RKG Analysts you speak with on the phone are the people studying your data, crunching your numbers, and running ad-hoc reports.

TEAM STRUCTURE.

Every Analyst is part of a team supervised by a Senior Analyst. Senior Analysts serve as a second set of eyes and ideas for their teams' programs. Every Analyst, Senior Analyst and Client has direct access to the Director and VP of Client Services.

EXPERIENCE.

RKG Analysts are more than just friendly liaisons. They are "left brain / right brain" people, hired on their superior communication and quantitative analytic skills. They are well versed in paid search, power SQL and Excel. They work hard to learn your business and clearly communicate what they see in the data. You'll view them as important members of your marketing team providing you more insight, more nimbleness, greater accountability—and better results.

> HOW DOES YOUR AGENCY PROACTIVELY LOOK FOR NEW WAYS TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE YOUR CAMPAIGNS?

PROACTIVE CAMPAIGN MANAGEMENT.

New products? Your Analyst will add keywords and copy, deploy landing page tests, and query your results to provide ad-hoc analyses, quickly turning raw data into actionable marketing information.

INDUSTRY LEADING INSIGHTS.

Our quantitative approach makes us sought after speakers, contributors, and consultants for Shop.org, Internet Retailer, Search Marketing Expo (SMX), Search Engine Land, the DMA, and many others. RKG is one of a select group of firms invited to serve on Google's SEM Advisory Council.

> DOES RKG PROVIDE CLIENT ACCESS TO ALL ACCOUNTS, REPORTS, AND DATA?

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS.

You have full access to your data at every level of detail, and full access to engine logins and passwords.

DETAILED, FLEXIBLE REPORTING.

Your RKG Analyst delivers weekly reports, as well as custom and ad hoc reports upon request. Online reporting access is available 24/7.

READ RKG

RKGblog.com is home to one of the most popular and influential online marketing blogs in the business. Launched in 2006 and regularly updated with multiple posts per week, RKGblog.com provides insight, research and analysis unrivaled in paid search.

RKGblog.com is also a member of the Advertising Age Power 150.

GO AHEAD.
TAKE A DEEP DIVE.
VISIT RKGblog.COM TODAY.



MEET RKG

PhoCusWright TRAVDEX 2010 / Atlanta / May 5-7

Net.Finance 2010 / Chicago / May 11-12

RKG Client Summit / Charlottesville / May 18-19

DMA Retail Marketing Conference / Orlando / May 24-27

Internet Retailer / Chicago / June 8-10

eTail East / Baltimore / August 9-12

Shop.org Annual / Dallas / September 27-29

PhoCusWright / Phoenix / November 16-18

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