How to build a paid search plan that works for your business

Paid search has become a core channel for many businesses that want to appear in front of potential customers at the exact moment those customers are looking for what they sell. Unlike organic search, which takes time to build and depends on algorithm updates, paid search offers a way to appear prominently in search results almost immediately. But getting it right requires more than setting a budget and writing a few headlines. A well-structured approach can make the difference between a campaign that generates leads and one that quietly burns through money.

Understanding what happens behind the scenes of a search engine's advertising platform helps you make better decisions. When someone types a query, the platform runs an auction in milliseconds. It considers your bid, the relevance of your ad copy, the quality of your landing page, and other signals to decide which ads to show and in what order. This system rewards advertisers who take the time to align their ads with what searchers actually want. The better your alignment, the less you may pay per click, and the more likely a visitor is to take action once they arrive.



Start with the right foundations

Before writing any ad copy, it pays to understand what your audience is searching for. Keyword research is the process of identifying the terms people use when they are looking for products or services like yours. This is not about guessing or listing every possible variation. It is about finding the terms that have genuine intent behind them. Someone searching for "cheap running shoes" is in a different mindset from someone searching for "best marathon trainers 2025". The first may be price-sensitive; the second may be ready to invest in quality. Your keyword list should reflect these differences so you can tailor your messaging accordingly.

Once you have a solid list, organise it into tightly themed groups. Each group should contain keywords that share a common idea. For example, all keywords related to "emergency plumbing" can form one group, while "bathroom renovation" forms another. This structure lets you write ad copy that speaks directly to the searcher's need. A generic ad for "plumbing services" will not perform as well as one that calls out "emergency call-outs" with a headline that matches the search. The platform's quality score rewards this kind of relevance, and a higher quality score can lower your cost per click.

Write ads that feel human

Ad copy is often the first impression a potential customer has of your business. It needs to be clear, specific, and free from marketing fluff. A headline that simply says your business name and a generic tagline does little to persuade someone to click. Instead, consider what your customer wants most: a solution to a problem, a quick answer, or reassurance that they are in the right place. Reflect that in your headlines and descriptions. If you offer free consultations, say so. If you have a fast turnaround, mention it. Every character counts, so avoid vague statements like "we are the best" and focus on concrete benefits.



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Ad extensions are another way to add useful information without extra cost. These are additional pieces of content that can appear with your ad, such as phone numbers, site links, call-out text, or structured snippets. A site link extension can direct users to your contact page, your product categories, or your testimonials. Call-out extensions let you highlight features like "24-hour support" or "certified technicians". Using relevant extensions can increase your click-through rate because they give searchers more reasons to choose your ad over a competitor's.

The first required use of the phrase "Google Ads campaign" appears here. A well-planned Google Ads campaign will also include a clear measurement framework. Without knowing which clicks lead to valuable actions, you cannot know whether your budget is being spent effectively. Conversion tracking is the tool that answers this question. By placing a small piece of code on your website, you can track what happens after someone clicks your ad: did they fill out a contact form, make a purchase, or call your business? This data lets you see which keywords, ads, and audiences are driving results and which are draining your budget without return.

Choose the right bid strategy

The platform offers several bid strategies, and the one you choose depends on your goals. If you want to maximise clicks within a set budget, you might use a manual cost-per-click (CPC) bid or an automated strategy that targets a certain cost per click. If your goal is conversions, you can use a strategy that optimises for those actions. Each approach has trade-offs. Manual bidding gives you more control but requires regular attention. Automated strategies can save time but may not always align with your specific definition of a valuable conversion, especially if your conversion data is limited. It is often wise to start manually, gather data, and then consider moving to an automated strategy once you have a clear picture of what works.

Quality score is a metric that influences how often your ads are shown and how much you pay. It is based on the expected click-through rate of your ad, the relevance of your ad copy to the keyword, and the quality of your landing page. A high quality score can reduce your cost per click and improve your ad position. Improving your quality score involves making sure your ad groups are tightly themed, your ad copy matches the search intent, and your landing page loads quickly and provides a good user experience. A page that is slow, hard to navigate, or unrelated to the ad will hurt your score and waste your traffic.



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Landing pages matter more than you think

Driving traffic to your website is only half the battle. Once a visitor lands on your page, they need to find what they expected from the ad. If your ad promised "same-day delivery" but the landing page talks about standard shipping, the visitor will likely leave. This mismatch increases your bounce rate and reduces the chances of conversion. Your landing page should be an extension of your ad, offering the same promise and making it easy for the visitor to take the next step. That means clear headlines, a simple layout, and a prominent call to action. Remove distractions such as excessive navigation links or unrelated offers that might pull the visitor away from the conversion goal.

Testing landing pages is a continuous process. Small changes, such as moving the call to action above the fold or changing the colour of a button, can sometimes have a noticeable effect on conversion rates. But avoid making multiple changes at once, because you will not know which one caused the improvement. Instead, test one element at a time and let each test run long enough to gather statistically meaningful data. Patience here pays off.

Monitor, adjust, repeat

Managing a paid search account is not a set-it-and-forget-it task. Search behaviour changes, competitors adjust their strategies, and your own business goals may evolve. Regular monitoring allows you to spot trends early. If a keyword that used to perform well suddenly has a high cost per click and low conversion rate, you may need to pause it or adjust your bid. If a new ad copy outperforms your control by a wide margin, you can expand its use. The second required use of the phrase "Google Ads campaign" appears here. Every Google Ads campaign benefits from a routine of reviewing performance data, testing new ideas, and cutting what does not work.

One common mistake is focusing too much on cost per click and not enough on return on ad spend. A high cost per click can be acceptable if the conversion rate is high and the average

order value makes it worthwhile. Conversely, a low cost per click means nothing if the traffic never converts. The metrics that matter most are the ones that tie directly to your business goals, whether that is leads, sales, or phone calls. Keep your eye on those numbers and let them guide your decisions.



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Another mistake is neglecting negative keywords. These are terms you tell the platform not to show your ads for. For example, if you sell premium products, you might add "cheap" or "free" as negative keywords to avoid clicks from people who are not your target audience. Regularly reviewing your search terms report can reveal unexpected queries that triggered your ads. Adding irrelevant ones as negatives helps you focus your budget on the searches that matter.

Paid search is a skill that improves with practice. The more you understand the platform's mechanics and the behaviour of your audience, the better your results will become. Start with a solid foundation of keyword research and ad group structure, write clear and relevant ad copy, use conversion tracking to measure what matters, and keep refining based on data. Over time, this approach builds a channel that delivers consistent, measurable value for your business.