Choosing a PPC Management Platform: When AdWords Isn't Enough



A WordStream Guide

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There is an ever-growing list of technology options for anyone looking to better manage their paid search marketing campaigns. The question is, when is it time to start considering your options? Is your business ready to move beyond AdWords to invest in a pay-per-click (PPC) management platform?

In this guide, we'll outline a methodology for PPC advertisers and agencies to identify the software solution that best suits their PPC management needs. To work through this process, we'll raise a few key questions:

1. Do you need the added functionality that PPC software provides? In other words, is the investment warranted?
2. What resources and level of expertise do you have at your disposal?
3. What areas of your campaign are deficient?
4. How do you map tools, software, and processes to your specific resources and needs?

This step-by-step guide aims to arm you with a means of answering these questions as they pertain to your specific business and your paid search campaigns.

Key Questions to Choosing a PPC Management Platform

1. Do you need the added functionality that PPC software provides? In other words, is the investment warranted?

2. What resources and level of expertise do you have at your disposal?

3. What areas of your campaign are deficient?

4. How do you map tools, software, and processes to your specific resources and needs?

Question 1: Do you need a PPC software platform?

Given that AdWords Editor is free, why would any business take on the additional cost of a third-party PPC management platform? In many cases, businesses find the added benefits to be worth the cost. These benefits include:

- ***More automation*** — PPC software can automate many of the more time-consuming manual tasks involved in search marketing, such as keyword and negative keyword discovery, keyword grouping and Quality Score management.

- ***Increased productivity*** — When the repetitive tasks involved in PPC get done faster, you have more time for higher-level strategy and campaign expansion – not to mention the rest of your job.

- ***Greater cost efficiencies*** — PPC software can help you uncover and eliminate wasted spend as well as improve metrics like Quality Score that have a big impact on your bottom line, all of which means the right platform could essentially pay for itself.

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However, it only makes sense to invest in a PPC management platform if your monthly AdWords spend is a significant business expense. For example, if you only spend $300 a month on AdWords advertising, you're probably not ready to purchase a platform that will cost at least that much.

The AdWords interface offers a lot of flexibility and functionality in its own right, but some additional questions to consider are:

- Do you have the resources and expertise to master AdWords on your own?
- Does AdWords offer the specific functionality that you need to improve your campaigns?

This leads to our next question.

Question 2: What resources do you have at your disposal?

Being an AdWords expert is a full-time job, so if you don't have an expert at your disposal, you likely need a software solution to automate certain PPC best practices.

For most small to mid-sized advertisers who don't use an agency and don't have at least one full-time dedicated PPC manager, the answer to the first question ("Do you have the resources and expertise to master AdWords on your own?") is probably no. AdWords is changing at a remarkably rapid rate. As of June 1st, less than halfway through the year, the official AdWords blog had posted 80 updates through 2011, a majority of them focused around new features, policies, and functionality surrounding AdWords. Being an AdWords expert is a full-time job, so if you don't have an expert at your disposal, you likely need a software solution to automate certain PPC best practices.

The question then becomes: Which processes and best practices should your software be automating? This depends on the current state of your campaigns.

Question 3: What areas of your campaigns are deficient?

Even an expert (and certainly a novice) needs to ensure they have access to the right features and tools for their campaigns. The AdWords interface offers a lot of different tools, but many of these settings and features are either irrelevant to your campaigns or are designed to maximize profits for Google rather for you, the advertiser.

To identify the areas where pay-per-click software could help your campaign, you first need to be able to identify your goals. What specific objective do you want to achieve with PPC? If you're not even sure what your goals should be, it probably makes sense to take advantage of our free AdWords assessment to have a seasoned PPC veteran help you understand where your focus should be.

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Resources:

- AdWords Assessment
- Quality Score Toolkit
- AdWords Tune-Up

Another great self-assessment tool lies in our free Quality Score Toolkit — there's a free Quality Score Worksheet within the toolkit which allows you to quickly import your AdWords data and get a view of how your campaigns and ad groups are performing.

Alternatively, if you know what you're looking to accomplish — whether it's more leads, lower costs per lead, or lower costs overall — you can leverage a series of posts from the WordStream blog to help you understand which levers you should be looking for your PPC software to pull. Read on to learn more.

Question 4: How do you map tools, software, and processes to your specific resources and needs?

For this part of the puzzle, you'll want to think about the tools and features you'll need to accomplish the goals you've set for your campaign. However nuanced your specific marketing goals, at a high level, most of your objectives probably boil down to some combination of increasing leads and sales and lowering costs.

We recently put together a series of posts offering specific advice for accomplishing each of these goals — by looking at the list of suggestions for how to get more leads and lower your PPC costs, you'll be able to generate a nice list of feature requests for a potential PPC vendor.

Do you need more leads?

If you're looking for more leads, we outlined five ways to get more leads from PPC, namely:

1. Keyword Expansion
2. Content Campaigns
3. Trying New Ad Platforms
4. Increased Click-Through Rates
5. Testing New Offers

To learn more about each method, read the full post.

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Do you want to pay less for the leads you get?

We also outlined five ways to lower your CPA:

1. Lower Your Bids
2. Find More Specific Keywords to Target
3. Increase Quality Score
4. Analyze Your Offer Types
5. Qualify with Your Ad Text

Read the full post to learn more.

Do You Want to Lower Your PPC Costs?

The final post in our series on accomplishing specific PPC objectives offered five ways to lower your overall AdWords costs:

1. Weed Out Underperformers
2. Slow Down Underperformers
3. Increase Quality Scores
4. Stop Experimenting
5. Look at Networks, Day Parting, & Geo Targeting

Click here to read the full article.

If you're thinking, "I'd love to get more leads, pay less for the leads I get, *and* lower my overall PPC costs," you probably want to focus on some of the common themes wrapped throughout the list of suggestions, such as:

- Increasing click-through rates and Quality Scores
- Discovering more and more specific keywords
- Leveraging tools to help you identify wasted spend within your accounts

Since each of these toolsets — particularly Quality Score enhancements, negative keyword tools, and other tools to help you identify wasted spend — aren't necessarily in Google's best interest financially (remember, Google wants you to spend more, not less!), you likely want to identify the best PPC software vendors to help you execute against each of these objectives.

Good ways to evaluate whether a vendor offers the tools best suited for your objectives include:

- ***Trial and demo their products*** — Most paid search products offer either a trial version of their product or at the very least a product demonstration. Pay close attention to which features seem to be more prominent and which functionality is most emphasized in the demonstration to see if your functionality is a core focus for the vendor.

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- ***Read their white papers and product descriptions*** — Again the focus by the vendor in both their thought leadership pieces and in the things they emphasize most about their products will tell you if your main focus is also their main product focus.

- ***Speak to their sales reps*** — Once you've demoed, trialed, and researched the products go directly to the source and ask pointed questions about the functionality a particular software product offers, and compare their answers to alternative products.

If it's still not obvious where the best match for your needs lies, you can consider asking your network for their experience with the various products, or ask the vendors themselves for client references. Once you understand what your needs are, you'll be armed with the right questions for potential PPC vendors, and you'll likely be able to quickly identify which product will best bridge the gap between your current paid search accounts and your objectives.

PPC Platform Selection Checklist

You can use the checklist on the next page to determine what needs and features are most critical for your business and to help you evaluate prospective PPC platforms. Just check the appropriate column depending on whether a given need/feature is critical, desirable or unnecessary in order to meet your paid search goals.

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PPC Goals	Features/Tools	Don't Need	Nice to Have	Must Have
Do You Need More Leads?				
Keyword Expansion	Keyword Research Tools			
Content Campaigns	Campaign Creation Tools			
New Ad Platforms	Multi-Platform Integration			
Increased Click-Through Rates	Ad Text Tools, Negative Keyword Tools			
Testing New Offers	Conversion Rate Optimization			
Do You Want to Pay Less Per Lead?				
Lower Your Bids	Bid Management			
Find More Specific Keywords to Target	Keyword Research Tools, Ad Group Tools			
Increase Quality Score	Quality Score Management			
Analyze Your Offer Types	Conversion Rate Optimization			
Qualify with Your Ad Text	Ad Text Tools			
Do You Want to Lower Your PPC Costs?				
Weed Out Underperformers	Reporting Tools			
Slow Down Underperformers	Reporting Tools			
Increase Quality Scores	Quality Score Management			
Other goals				
Get Help with Implementation	Services/Support			
Rapid Growth	Scalability			

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About WordStream

WordStream Inc. is a provider of software and services that help search marketers maximize the performance of their PPC and SEO campaigns, driving traffic, leads, and sales for lower costs. The company's easy-to-use PPC management software facilitates more effective paid search campaigns by increasing relevance and Quality Scores in Google AdWords, automating proven best practices, and delivering expert-level results in a fraction of the time. WordStream also offers a best-in-class Keyword Research Suite for finding and organizing targeted, profitable keywords for use in paid and organic search initiatives. In addition, WordStream provides full-service PPC management and other value-added services to help advertisers who are new to AdWords or strapped for time get stellar results from pay-per-click marketing. Learn more at www.wordstream.com.

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