



Writing Effective Ad Copy for Your Paid Search Campaigns

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Writing effective advertising copy is one of the most important tasks for a direct marketer to master. In any direct response marketing, ad copy is often the difference between success and failure of a campaign.

On the internet, great ad copy is critical because effective ads have a higher Click through Rate (CTR). CTR is defined as the percentage of time that an ad is clicked on for every one hundred times it is shown. In modern Cost per Click (CPC) ad server systems, such as Google AdWords and MSN AdCenter, the CTR on an ad is a major factor used to determine its "ranking", or its position on the search results page. The formula to determine rank in this system is CPC multiplied by CTR. It's easy to see that an ad with a lower CPC can rank higher than another ad with a higher CPC, if the lower CPC ad has a higher CTR.

Given the importance of the CTR, advertisers must keep a sharp eye on ad copy, as the qualitative factors of an ad greatly influence the CTR. This begs the question: How do I write effective ad copy?

MoreVisibility's expertise lies in writing ad copy for Google, Yahoo, and MSN search engine marketing systems, so this white paper will focus on writing effective ads that capture the attention of serious searchers and savvy consumers who use these search engines.

Search Engine Ad Copy Guidelines

First, it is important to understand the basic editorial guidelines for writing ad copy in a search engine marketing system. A reading of the Google AdWords editorial guidelines reveals the two basic principles of good ad copy for search engine ads:

- Clearly and accurately describe your site.
- Emphasize the unique benefits of your product or service.

The guidelines go on to define the restrictions for ad copy in Google AdWords:

- 25 characters for the headline
- 35 characters per text row
- 3 rows per ad (of which, one is the destination URL)
- No pictures
- No colors

Google emphasizes use of proper capitalization, grammar, spelling and punctuation. They also insist that advertisers adhere to Google's content policy . They remind you that you cannot use superlatives such as the #1 or "Best" when describing your product or service, nor repeat words.

Google's editorial guidelines adhere to a de facto industry standard. It is expected that Yahoo's will tighten its guidelines as it completes its planned upgrade to bring its SEM system into rough compatibility with the CPC / CTR ranking system used by both Google and MSN. MSN has also adopted similar guidelines to Google. It is best to become intimately familiar with these standard guidelines before beginning to write your ad copy.

With all of these rules in hand you are ready to start writing your ad.

9 Steps to Write Effective Search Engine Marketing Ads

These steps apply to ad copy for a search engine, but they are derived from the steps professional advertising copywriters have used for years in radio, TV, and print. If you follow these simple steps, you will attract more attention, and hopefully convert your captive audience into buyers.

1. Use keywords in your ad (Keyword Insertion).

A great technique for ensuring that your ad is relevant to the keyword is to use keyword insertion. In Google AdWords and MSN AdCenter, keywords found in the text of your ad get bolded, which helps them stand out on the page. Using keywords in your ad also enhances the ad's relevancy. Writing ads that are relevant to the keyword is paramount to achieving a high CTR - the more granular you get the better.

2. Make a unique and immediate call to action.

Tell the viewer what to do. Good examples would include:

- "Order now and get Free Shipping"
- "Sale ends in 5 days!"
- "For Free Information, fill out the Request Form"

The call to action should be strong and clear – inviting the user to click on the ad. It must do more than pique the user's interest in your product or service - it must get them to respond now. If they feel like they can do it later, they may wait and never come back.

The call to action should also be unique to your product or service. According to the AdWords editorial policy, "Your ad cannot contain universal call-to-action phrases such as "click here," "link here," "visit this link," "this site is," or other similar phrases that could apply to any ad, regardless of content. " If a competitor is already using a given call to action, try using a better one so that you stand out and become the first choice.

3. Use a sharp "Hook"

You should use hooks that make your offer stand out and lower the user's risk such as: a discount, a free trial, free shipping, a low price guarantee, or a money back guarantee if they are not satisfied. Per Google's editorial guidelines, you should keep in mind that if your ad includes a price, special discount, or 'free' offer, it must be clearly and accurately displayed on your website

within 1-2 clicks of your ad's landing page. MSN requires that the special offer be restated on the landing page itself.

5. Emphasize the benefits.

The best way to formulate benefits is to write down a list of all the features of your product or service and then turn each of these features into a benefit for your customer. It is important that you emphasize the benefits, not the features, of your product. If you manufacture skin products, don't tell the consumer that the product "Contains powerful antioxidants" (which are features), tell them how these features are going to benefit them "Makes your Skin Look Younger and Healthier." Since space is limited, the best way to determine which benefit of your product is most important to the customer is to write a few different ads, with each one showcasing a different benefit (See "Testing Your Ad" below). You should make sure that you specifically include any benefits that differentiate your product or service.

6. Consider your display URL as part of the ad.

This is one of the most often overlooked tools in search engine marketing. Make sure you use your URL as part of the brand recognition of your ad. Capitalize the first letter of each word in your domain for more impact. "MoreVisibility.com" makes more of an impact on the user than www.morevisibility.com, and this display URL format is allowed by Google AdWords.

7. Seal the Deal on Your Landing Page.

The destination or landing page that the user sees after clicking the ad should also be as relevant to the ad and keyword as possible. If the ad describes a specific product manufactured by Sprocket Manufacturing Company, the user should land on a page where that product is featured, and can be easily ordered. If the ad asks the user to try an online demo or fill out a form, they should be able to do that right on the landing page. You should reiterate and expand on the benefits of your product and service, and offer more hooks and calls to action to seal the deal

with the visitor. This will not help your CTR, but will help you convert your clicks to leads or buyers.

8. Write the ad to your target customer.

Your ad should pre-qualify users by making sure they are ready for your landing page. Your ad should “weed out” non-qualified users. For example, if you are selling a DVD for a poker movie called “Sharks”, your ad should be designed in a way so that fisherman looking for shark tackle won’t click on it. Also, if you are selling a software product that may be available as freeware somewhere else, making sure you include the word “buy” would help reduce clicks from freeloaders.

9. Use Words That Sell.

Books have been written on using words that sell. You can buy one of these books or just leverage the principles that are commonly used by advertisers to attach personality and emotion to your ad. Words such as “You” and “Your” are imperative in ad copy, because they make the ad personal.

Words that appeal to basic human emotions (ie. fear, greed, guilt, exclusivity, salvation, or flattery) sell products. Imagine an ad for a security system. It always shows something bad happening like a burglar breaking into your house, or even worse your house catching fire. But the actor in the ad always ends up unscathed because he had an alarm. This type of ads appeals to a customers fears and presents the product as a salvation.

Consider those ads that claim you will make money beyond your wildest dreams if you just use their proven system. This type of ad appeals to human greed by showing the “new you” sporting a fancy sports car. Ads for pharmaceuticals show how they will make your life better by solving your health problems. Weight loss ads make you feel guilty about being in a bathing suit in your current condition.

You have to appeal to people's self interest in order to sell them something. You have to give them a promise of saving time, saving money, making money, saving them from some terrible ailment, making them exclusive, or otherwise improving their life. Pay close attention to how this is done the next time you are watching TV and its time to sit through a round of ads. You will notice a common thread in all successful ads. The same philosophy applies in search engine marketing.

Testing Your Ad

Once you have written a few variations of copy, try them and compare the results. Only by testing variations will you be able to maximize your CTR and find the most effective ad for your business. Over time, the advertising server will give higher weight to the ad with the highest CTR, and that ad will receive the majority of impressions. You need to keep a sharp eye on your ads and how they are performing. Whether an ad or a group of ads is or isn't performing, you should make adjustments until you feel that performance is maximized. The formula is slightly different for each product or service, and only through testing will you find out the exact formula that works for your business.

Conclusion

If you follow the simple principles of writing good ad copy and apply common sense qualitative analysis, you can maximize the CTR of your campaign and attract targeted buyers to your product or service. These skills definitely come more natural to some over others and require practice to master. In our Search Engine Marketing practice, we employ these methods every day to ensure our client's campaigns perform to maximum ROI.