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Getting Started with Pay Per Click (PPC) Advertising

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I'm writing this article with the understanding that you want to advertise on the search engines. I won't waste your time with why you should be doing PPC, but rather how to do it using best practices. Follow these simple to follow rules and you'll be on your way to more business without losing your shirt.

For the purposes of this article I'll assume you're a hotelier in the Caribbean. Let's also assume your hotel is located on the beach and it also has a golf course. The name of your beautiful slice of paradise if called is Tiki Island and the name of your resort is Rum Punch Resort. Non-hoteliers should be able to use this framework for their product or service as well.

Keyword Discovery

First you'll need to do keyword discovery. This entails gathering as many keywords, or phrases as you can think of to describe your product or service. Some of these keyword resources may seem obvious and others, not so obvious. Let's begin. Talk to the people around you at your business and ask them to describe your business in three or four word phrases. Next, look at your competitor's websites to see how they describe their business. Next, if you have access to your website's analytics or log files look in the search term referrals report to see what phrases website visitors are already using to find your website. Then, use free keyword discovery tools like Google's Keyword Tool to generate additional phrases.

At the end of this discovery one should have scores, maybe even hundreds of keywords. You'll notice that all your keywords possess some common denominators. Now, place all your keywords into buckets where each buckets reflects these common denominators. Your buckets would probably look something like this: Tiki Island Hotels, Tiki Island Resorts, Tiki Island Golf Resorts and Tiki Island Beach Resorts. Each bucket has many variations of the common denominators, such as plurals and singulars.

Writing Your Ads

With all your keywords in buckets or "ad groups" you'll need to write your ads. The most challenging part of PPC is writing compelling ads that make search engine users want to click on them. Here are two hints that will help: first, keep them as relevant as your keyword bucket and secondly, include your value proposition(s).

The search engines give you three lines of text for your ads, and each of these three lines have character limits. The three lines of text are described as the title, description line 1 and description line 2. Google's character limits are 25 for the title and 35 for each of the description lines. The display URL also has a 35 character limit. Finally, the destination URL, which is not viewable to the visitor, has a substantially longer character limit.

Sample Ads for the Tiki Island Golf Resort:

Title: Tiki Island Golf Resort (Relevant Ad Group)
Desc. 1: Robert Trent Jones Designed Course (Value Proposition)
Desc. 2: Four Holes Located on the Ocean (Value Proposition)
Display URL: www.RumPunchResort.com (Your Brand)

One should always be testing ads. Over time one of these two ads will outperform the other, either by click rate or conversion rate. Click rate is the percentage of users who click on your ad compared to the number of times your ad is displayed throughout the day. You should always be trying to beat your last best ads. Test language, value propositions and offers. Here's another ad with a special offer.

Tiki Island Golf Resort (Relevant Ad Group)
Robert Trent Jones Designed Course (Value Proposition)
Stay 7 Nights Pay for Only 6 Nights (Special offer)
www.RumPunchResort.com (Your Brand)

These two ads would run for your Tiki Island Golf Resort ad group. All your Tiki Island Golf Resort phrases your bidding on will result in one of these two ads appearing. The reverse being these ads wont appear for visitors bidding on your Tiki Island Beach Resort phrases.

Campaign Set-Up & Targeting

This is relatively easy, but there are a few traps you should be aware of. Let's say your monthly budget is \$1500. This equates to \$50 per day. Select your target market(s). Let's assume there is lift to Tiki Island from the UK, Canada and the US. Given this it would make sense to target your ads to these three countries. Do not target all countries, because there aren't any flights from Australia to this part of the Caribbean (Merely an illustration). One of the biggest traps I see clients fall into is advertising on the content network. Be sure to select only the Search network. I'm not opposed to the Content Network; actually I believe it is an excellent place to advertise. However, Content users don't have the same degree of intent Search users have. As such advertising on the Content Network requires a unique campaign, which can be easily done by simply copying your search campaign and targeting only the Content Network. Each campaign requires a unique budget.

To start advertising you'll need to give Google your credit card information. Once your campaign begins Google limits the display of your ads so you'll be spending only your indicated daily budget. You wont spend more than \$1500 a month. Once you've met your daily budget of clicks or visits, Google stops showing your ads until the next day.

Tracking Campaign Performance

You're getting all these visits you've paid money for. Now what? What do you want your visitors to do when they land on your site? Seems obvious, right? Well, is it? What may seem obvious to you isn't always obvious to your visitors. Remember your ABC's - Always Be Closing. This

means telling your visitors what to do next when they land on your target pages and be sure it is conspicuous enough so they are more apt to actually do it. "Visit our Rooms", or "Check out our Rates", or my favorite, "Make a Reservation" are all closing statements on your most important pages. Wanting your visitors to pick up the phone rather than completing a desired action on your website is the optimal scenario, but the reality is many visitors opt to complete a desired action on your website rather than talking to you on the phone.

The search engine paid platforms have tracking code that you or your webmaster can place on your conversion or thank you page. This is the page that appears after visitors have completed a form, be it a booking request form, or an actual online booking form. It is referred to as a conversion when visitors complete one of these forms.

In closing, it is important to note that this article covers only the basics of getting your own PPC campaign off the ground. However the "take aways" would be keep your campaign well organized, write compelling ads, test new ads, keep a tight leash on your targeting and track conversions.