



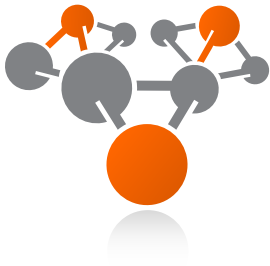
SCALE YOUR PAID SEARCH

5 Opportunities to Standardize and Grow

According to eMarketer, the U.S. paid search market will grow by 12 percent in 2013, reaching almost \$20 billion in annual spend.¹

As the paid search market continues to grow, you need to plan on growing your paid search spend as well. Otherwise, you risk becoming uncompetitive among consumers who are already searching for goods or services you sell. But to grow your paid search spend effectively, you need to optimize your campaign fully. You also need to make sure that your team of search engine marketers (SEMs) is running as efficiently as possible.

Perhaps the simplest and most systematic way to ensure your paid search efforts are running on full steam is to standardize both your processes and your paid search assets. Most marketers treat paid search as a craft, shaping paid search campaigns primarily by the know-how and subjectivity of individual SEMs. Without standardization, your paid search campaigns are at risk of becoming a hodge-podge that is difficult to maintain, scale, and evolve with your changing business. Balancing SEM know-how with standardization ensures the long-term scalability of your paid search efforts.



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In general, your paid search campaign and SEM team will benefit from standardization in the following ways:

- Standardization can **reduce training time** required for new SEMs. Having standardized names and campaign structures prevents new SEMs from needing to decode what a campaign asset is or why it was structured in a certain way, making training much more coherent and efficient.
- Standardization can promote **cross-training among SEMs**. With more standardization, almost any SEM can work on almost any part of your paid search account. This means better coverage during vacations and illness. SEMs aren't pigeon-holed to one campaign or account, leading to higher job satisfaction and less SEM turnover.
- Standardization helps to **institutionalize knowledge** in the SEM team. If and when an SEM leaves the organization, the rest of the SEM team knows exactly how that campaign was created/organized.

eMarketer, 9/20/12, "US Digital Ad Spending to Top \$37 Billion in 2012 as Market Consolidates"

- Standardization can enable **better insights**. Rather than reporting on just a bunch of keywords, standardizing your campaign assets enables you to spot trends faster.
- Standardization can result in a **lower error rate, less rework, and fewer fire drills**. All of this means an SEM team that is more satisfied and less stressed out.
- Standardization can **improve the efficiency** of your SEM team. Your SEM team can spend less time toiling over non-standardized campaigns and more time with more value-added activities.
- Standardization can help you **grow the reach** of your campaign. More consumers who are searching for the products or services you sell will see your ads.
- Standardization can help you **convert more** visitors into customers. With better insights, more efficient processes, and lower error rates, your SEM team can deliver more relevant ads and landing pages to searchers, which will result in more conversions.

In the pages that follow, we're going to highlight some of the most common areas of opportunity for standardization in SEM campaigns.

Opportunity #1: Standardize How You Expand Your Keywords

There's often a lot of emphasis placed on having thousands—or even millions—of long-tail keywords active in an paid search campaign. For most SEMs, the challenge isn't about having enough keywords deployed in their SEM campaigns—it's about having the enough of the right keywords deployed in their campaign. "Right" keywords are keywords that produce qualified traffic for a marketer.

Everyone has his or her own way of doing keyword discovery and creating a large set of keywords. Yet no matter what the keyword discovery methodology, it's impossible to predict every single keyword that's going to drive qualified traffic to your site. So every good SEM has a number of broad match keywords, and regularly reviews converting queries in the broad match query report. Slowly but surely, you will be able to promote or "harvest" converting queries to become exact match keywords, and your number of keywords will expand. What's wrong with that, right?

What seems like a standard way of expanding keywords is actually a very piecemeal, unsystematic way of expanding keywords. By simply promoting a converting query to an exact match keyword, advertisers regularly miss out on creating large numbers of related "good" keywords—keywords that are both highly relevant and traffic producing. In other words, using unsystematic methods of expanding keywords leads to "keyword gaps."

An example of a keyword gap would be this. Let's say an advertiser has the keyword "evening gown" on broad match, and the query "prom dress" converts. The more systematic and standardized way of expanding the keyword set would be to duplicate almost all keywords where "evening gown" occurred and replace with "prom dress." For example, "red evening gown" would become "red prom dress," and "strapless evening

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gown” would become “strapless prom dress.”

The more simple strategy would be to convert “prom dress” to an exact match keyword. This simple strategy, however, misses the keywords “red prom dress” and “strapless prom dress,” creating a keyword gap.

Each of these expanded keywords would probably be relevant to the advertiser. In addition, unlike many other keywords, these expanded keywords are materially similar to a query that has already converted. As a result, these keywords will probably not only generate additional traffic, they also are much more likely to generate additional conversions.

One potential keyword expansion strategy would be to exhaustively concatenate every converting query with every possible modifier (individual words and phrases). But this is impractical because there are an infinite number of modifiers, and you don’t have infinite resources.

Rather than trying to expand your campaign to every possible keyword, you need to focus on the keywords that are going to drive conversions for you. These keywords are constrained by 1) the products or services you sell, and 2) the queries consumers enter when searching for those products and services. Your existing keywords should reasonably reflect the products and services you sell. Mining converting broad match queries and expanding them with existing keywords keeps your campaign up-to-date with changing consumer queries.

By standardizing how you expand your broad match queries into relevant keywords, you can maximize your exposure to searchers and continue to grow sales in the most efficient way possible.



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Opportunity #2: Standardize Your Match Type Strategies

One of the lowest-hanging fruits of expanding the reach of your paid search campaigns is to standardize match type strategies across keywords. Too often, we find a broad match keyword active, but the exact match version is inactive. Similarly, an exact match keyword may be active, but the phrase match and modified broad match versions are not. These are all lost opportunities for extending your reach across your target audience.

We strongly recommend putting each keyword in your portfolio on all match types: broad, modified broad, phrase, and exact. To some, this might seem like creating a lot of unnecessary work and clutter. Broad match maximizes the exposure of any given keyword. All queries that match an exact match keyword will also match the same keyword on broad match. The same is true for phrase match and modified broad match.

Why not just put all of your keywords on broad match and call it a day?

Broad match does maximize the exposure of any given keyword, but it also handicaps your ability to be more competitive on keywords that really matter to you. As an example, let's assume you only sell purple dresses.

- For consumers who search for "purple dress," you stand a high probability of converting a visitor, so you place a high value on these visitors.
- For consumers who search for "floor length purple dress," you might stand a lower probability of conversion (assuming you only carry only a few floor length dresses), so you value these visitors a bit less.
- For consumers who search for "purple shoes" or "pink dresses," you can't convert at all, so you place little to no value on these visitors.

Deploying the keyword "purple dress" on broad, modified, phrase, and exact match allows you to calibrate your bids according to the value of these different visitors.

Conversely, if you deploy keywords only on broad match, you can only assign one bid to the keyword. As a result, you will be uncompetitive on higher-value visitors, too competitive on lower-value visitors ("purple shoes" and "pink dresses"), or both.

Having a consistent, standardized match type strategy across your entire keyword portfolio maximizes your reach within your target audience. It also allows you to adjust your bids according to the quality of traffic you're receiving, and maximize Return on Ad Spend (ROAS).

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Opportunity #3: Standardize Your Naming Conventions

You can name accounts, campaigns, and ad groups anything you want. This can seem like a blessing, but it can also result in highly inconsistent names, depending on which SEM created or managed a given campaign.

You should think of your account, campaign, and ad group names as almost like a UPC code. By looking at the name, almost anyone on your SEM team should know "where" to find that asset in your paid search campaign, and what that asset contains.

At the same time, your asset names should be human-readable. If you have codes or IDs contained within your asset names, you will have to regularly update that mapping, and that invites more work, or more errors, or both.

To the extent possible, your naming conventions should reflect your overall business, not just your paid search campaign. If your asset names reflect how you organize the rest of your business—for example, department, sub-department, brand, gender, sport, etc.—the more intuitive and understandable your account will be to a new SEM (or an outsider not familiar with paid search).

Additionally—and most importantly—your naming conventions need to be flexible. Your business is definitely going to change. As a result, your paid search campaigns will need to evolve with your changing business. When developing a naming convention, leave room for change and future extensibility. If you don't, your campaigns may quickly

outgrow your naming conventions, and you'll need to dedicate precious time and resources to revamp them.

Creating consistent, standardized, human-readable, and flexible naming conventions that can span all your paid search campaigns may require some up-front investment and ingenuity. But good naming conventions create easier and intuitive performance monitoring, less confusing workflow for your SEM team, and fewer errors. They should also facilitate the growth of your business, rather than be an impediment to growth.

Not having a standardized account structure will cause more errors and more rework, limiting the productivity of your SEM team.



Opportunity #4: Standardize Your Account and Targeting Structures

Your account structure is probably the most important aspect of your SEM campaign. A solid campaign structure enables you to:

- Manage the relevance of your ads flexibly
- Make granular optimizations to quality score
- Create meaningful hierarchical performance reports, and gain insight from them
- Effectively leverage publisher controls, like geo-targeting and content targeting
- More easily navigate your account, filter it, and make changes to it
- Evolve and scale your campaign as your business changes and grows

Just as important as having a good account structure is using a standardized account structure uniformly across your entire account. Not having a standardized account structure will cause more errors and more rework, limiting the productivity of your SEM team.

For example, assume an advertiser sells athletic clothes and shoes across two campaigns. The clothes campaign has all match types for a given keyword in the same ad group, while the shoes campaign has different match types for a given keyword in different ad groups. In such a situation, the simple task of adding or deactivating a keyword is tricky. By virtue of different campaign structures, SEMs are more likely to forget some (or many) match types when adding a keyword.

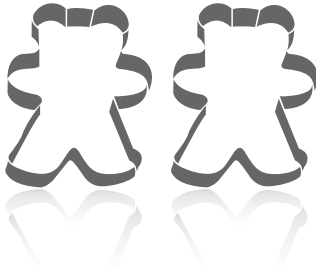
A standardized account structure makes managing large campaigns easier and more efficient. Conversely, an inconsistent account structure invites errors, omissions, and inefficiency.

Opportunity #5: Standardize Your Ads

Writing paid search ads that are compelling may seem like an art. But if you standardize your ads by breaking them down into templates, you can benefit in two ways.

First and most obviously, you can use templates to publish more targeted, customized ads across a large number of ad groups. It's much easier to take one template and publish it to 1,000 ad groups, rather than manually write 1,000 different ads, one for each ad group.

Second, by standardizing your ads and by breaking your ads down into components, you can start to learn more about what parts of your ad drive clicks and conversion. For example, which call to action works the best: "buy," "shop," or "find"? Which brands are more compelling to show in the ad? Which product features are more compelling? By having more standardized ads, you can collect more conversion data faster across your campaigns, make faster inferences, and improve your ads sooner.



It's Never Too Late to Start Standardizing

Perhaps you've grown your SEM campaigns in a grass-roots manner from the ground up. You've never really thought about creating standards, and your account is a mish-mash of keywords, match types, and ads. Is it too late to start thinking about standardizing?

The good news is, it's never too late to standardize. All the standardization opportunities we've discussed above are independent of one another, so you don't have to approach standardization as an all-or-thing proposition. As your business changes, you'll need to update your SEM campaigns. Each update gives you an opportunity to establish and implement new standards. You don't have to standardize all at once. Standardize what you can, when you can. In fact, you should continually look for opportunities to standardize.

There's certainly a short-term cost with standardization. You have to slow down, define a standard, and implement it across all of your campaigns.

But as the saying goes, you have to go slow first to go fast. Standardization helps your SEM campaigns and SEM team run at maximum efficiency. The short-term cost of standardization is more than paid back in the medium- and long-term with more efficient SEM teams, more effective SEM campaigns, and a much more scalable SEM channel.

About Adchemy

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ADCHEMY, INC.
1001 E. Hillsdale Blvd., 7th Floor
Foster City, CA 94404
1-877-ADCHEMY (1-877-232-4369)
www.adchemy.com