# The Search Agency POV: Image Ad Extensions in AdWords

Recently, Google introduced a new ad extension feature that enables advertisers to display images within paid search advertisements on the search engine results page (SERP). Image Extensions ads are currently in beta for the United States.

Image extensions lend a powerful visual component to standard text ads, increasing visibility on the SERP, which in turn can produce higher click-through rates, increased conversions, and better ROI.

What are Image Extensions?

Image extensions allow advertisers to display three separate images above text ads at the top of the SERP. Image extensions are easy to implement and can help advertisers occupy more valuable space on the SERP. Based on Google's guidelines, image extensions only appear with ads that consistently maintain the first position for a given keyword.
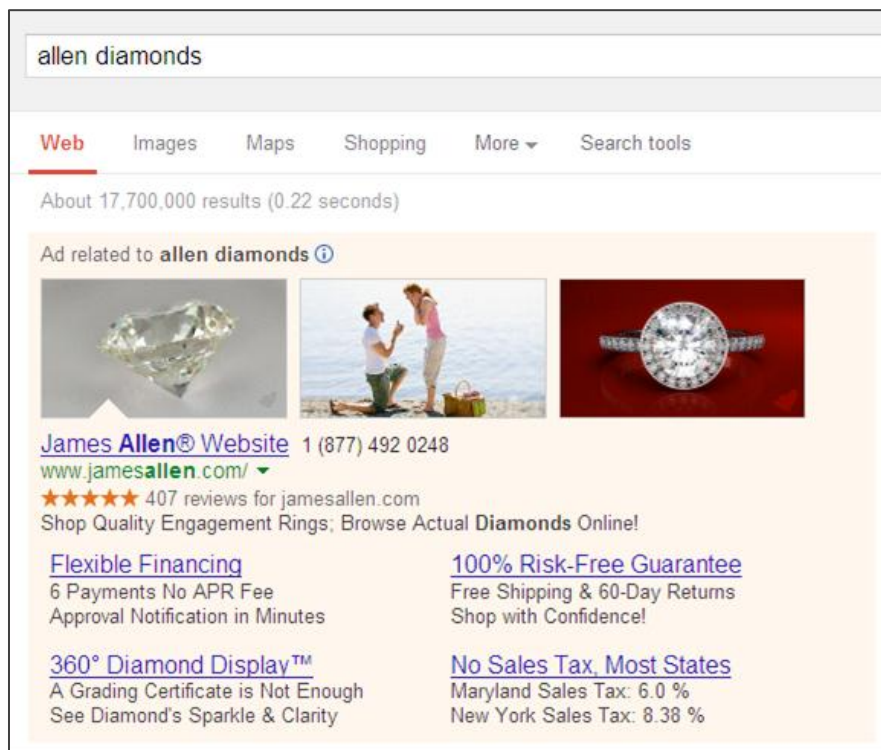

Example: Image Ad Extensions for the brand search "Allen Diamonds"

How do Image Extensions differ from Product Listing Ads and Product Extensions?

As Google continues to experiment with new visual elements on the search results page, it is important to distinguish between image extensions, Product Listing Ads, and product extensions.

Image extensions, very simply, are images that display alongside a text ad. They are not accompanied by product names, descriptions, or prices. Although they can show multiple features of a single product, they are typically used to show groups of products, products in action, or even photographs and illustrations indicative of a business. This provides an opportunity for manufacturers as well as businesses not involved in e-commerce to present visually engaging, image-based ads on the search results page. Moreover, image extensions focus less on individual products and more on brand-defining images.

In contrast, Product Listing Ads (PLAs) appear to the right side of the SERP or below the ads and include an image of a product along with its description, price, and domain name. Product Listing Ads are not associated with keywords or cost-per-click bid information. Instead, PLAs are shopping results, displayed when a user enters a search query related to a product in your Google Merchant Center account. Unlike traditional text ads, you will only be charged for Product Listing Ads when a user clicks on your ad and completes a purchase on your site. Product Listing Ads are useful for e-commerce sites that want to display particular products with images and prices.
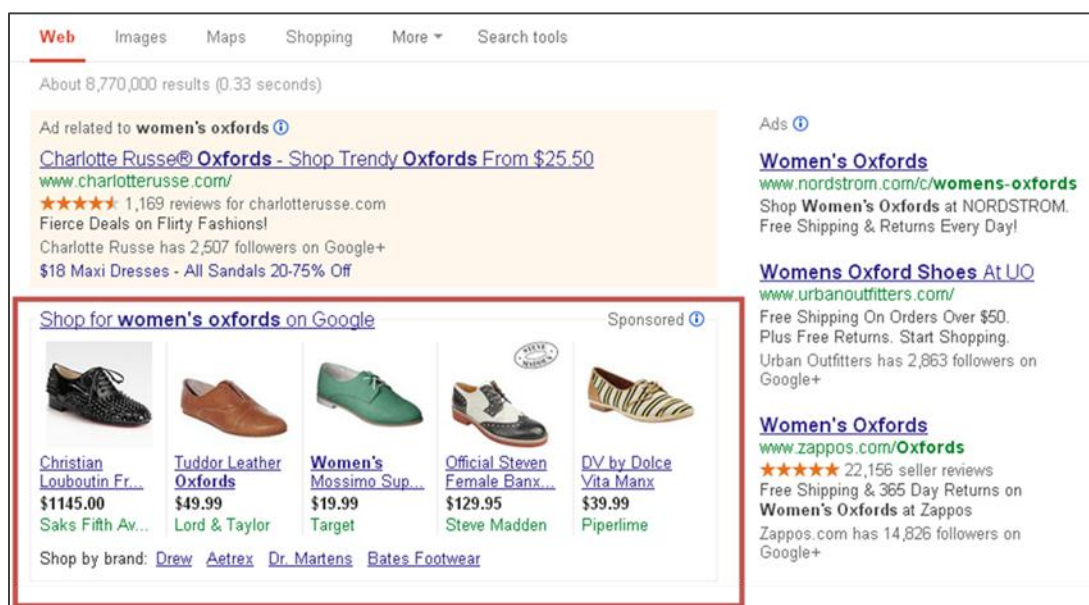
Example: Product Listing Ads within the SERP

Product extensions, on the other hand, *were* one way to display images of products *within* a text ad, along with price and descriptive information. Unlike Product Listing Ads, product extensions were directly associated with your search campaign keywords and your Google Merchant Account. However, because product extensions were so similar to Product Listing Ads, Google is discontinuing them, and

they have gradually disappeared from the SERPs[1]. With the removal of product extensions, advertisers no longer had a way to display images *within* their search ads until the introduction of image extensions.
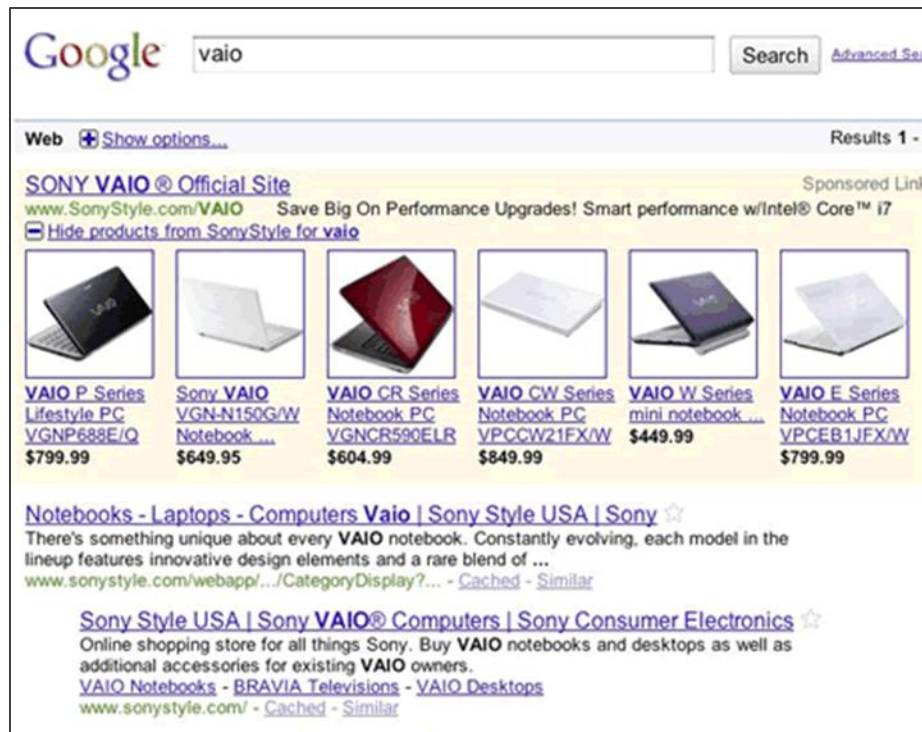
Example: Product Extensions via Word Stream

The Benefits of Image Extensions

Because image extensions are still in beta, only a handful of advertisers are currently able to utilize them. When image extensions become more widely available, advertisers will have to determine if the new ad format makes sense for their business and how best to integrate it into their existing paid media campaigns. Advertisers looking to sell individual products may benefit more from PLAs because they have the ability to display more detailed product information including prices and descriptions, designed to capture the traffic of consumers further down the purchase funnel.

On the other hand, image extension ads may be more beneficial for certain industries and businesses that do not offer the kinds of products that can be displayed with PLAs.

---

[1] Certified Knowledge: "Google is Sunsetting Product Extensions"
http://certifiedknowledge.org/blog/google-is-sunsetting-product-extensions/

For instance, automobile companies typically do not sell cars over the internet through an e-commerce model and therefore are not able to take advantage of Product Listing Ads, which display particular products for purchase. Likewise, travel companies do not have modular products that can appear in Product Listing Ads. This does not mean that these industries lack images that could appeal to potential customers – on the contrary, many advertisers have found their display campaigns achieved greater results than their paid search campaigns, which suggests how important the visual component is to driving conversions. Image extensions provide an opportunity for lead-gen or service-based companies, which lack "typical" products, to present engaging images associated with their business in a prominent location on the SERPs.

Best Practices: Selecting and Formatting the Images

Properly Format the Images

Google requires that any images submitted to appear in image extensions must meet 5 basic specifications:

1. Image dimensions: the image must be 320 by 180 pixels minimum, but the ideal is 640 by 360 pixels.
2. Aspect ratio must be 16:9.
3. Maximum file size is 5MB per image.
4. The file format must be in JPEG.
5. The color space must be RGB.

Ensure You Have the Legal Right to Show the Images

You can only submit images for which you own copyrights, trademarks, permission, or rights. Ideally, the images should be visible or available on the website that placed the advertisement.

Match the Images with the AdWords Ad Group

The images you choose should accurately reflect all the ads and keywords within the relevant AdWords ad group. This is to ensure that the images accurately represent the content of the ad text below them. The image must also accurately reflect your business or website. For an accounting firm, you cannot simply submit an image of a large smiley face, or of two people shaking hands, even if these concepts are tangentially related to your business. The images must be directly relevant and indicative of your services, and Google reserves the right to reject any submitted images.

Submit High Quality Images

Google will not accept images that are blurry, pixelated, or poorly edited.

Submit Three Distinct, Representative Images

The three images must be substantially distinct, meaning each image should serve a different purpose. For instance, the images should not show the same item from three slightly different angles, or three photos each with a different color filter.

Fill the Space

Images with excessive blank space in them are not permitted – use the space that is allotted. The aspect ratio (listed above) for these images is 16:9. Images that do not fit will be rejected.

Submit Family-Friendly Images Only

Google will reject images that feature adult content or suggestive images.

Images Should NOT Be Interactive

Simply put, the images should be nothing more than images. Do not include call-to-action buttons or animation in the images.

Do NOT Form the Images into a Collage

The three images should not fit together to form a larger image. Each image should be an independent, standalone picture or photograph.
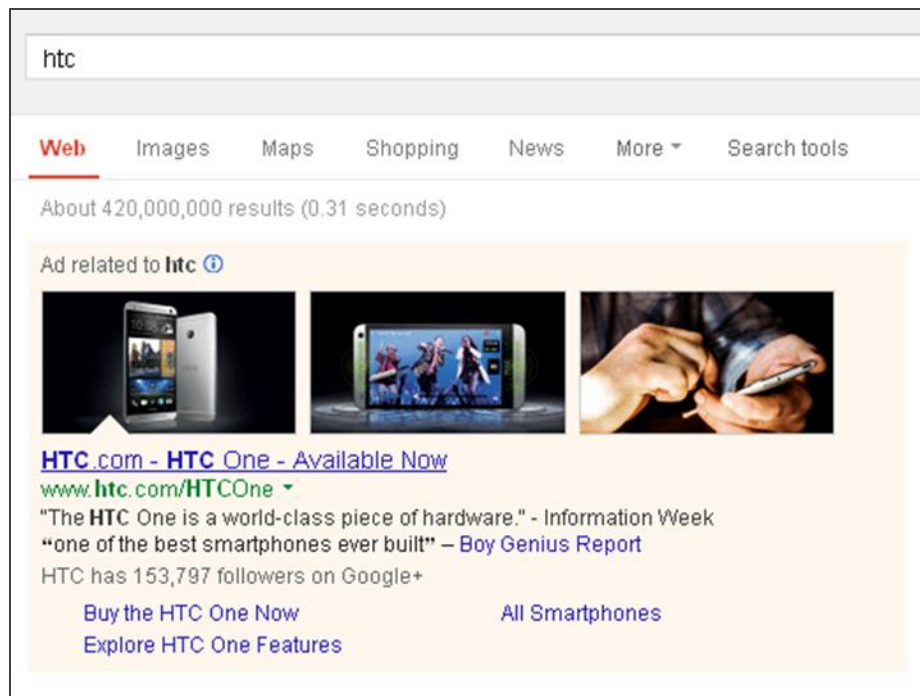
Do NOT Include the Brand Logo

Logos should not be included within the images. The only permissible use of brand logos is if the logo is part of the actual item depicted in the image. For instance, a laptop may have the company logo stamped on the back – this use of a logo is supported. Superimposing the logo on the image or using an image of the logo itself will be rejected.

Do NOT Overlay the Image with Text

Do not overlay text of any kind on the images. The only permissible use of text is for text that appears on actual items or products that appear in the image.

Now let's consider two good examples of brands that have implemented image extensions by successfully satisfying the aforementioned image guidelines. A branded search for "HTC" produces the following ad:

The images necessarily fit the appropriate specs. All the images are high quality and aesthetically pleasing. The images fill the space allotted to them and do not include text overlay or brand logos. While the three images all feature the same HTC phone, each image is distinct in precisely how it displays that item. For instance, the first image is a vertical view of the product, the middle image shows the product's video function, and the third image shows the product's human interactivity. HTC's image extensions fulfill all the image requirements and represent a successful implementation of image extensions for a particular product.

What about businesses without modular products to sell? A brand search for "Hilton Hawaiian Village" generates one excellent example:
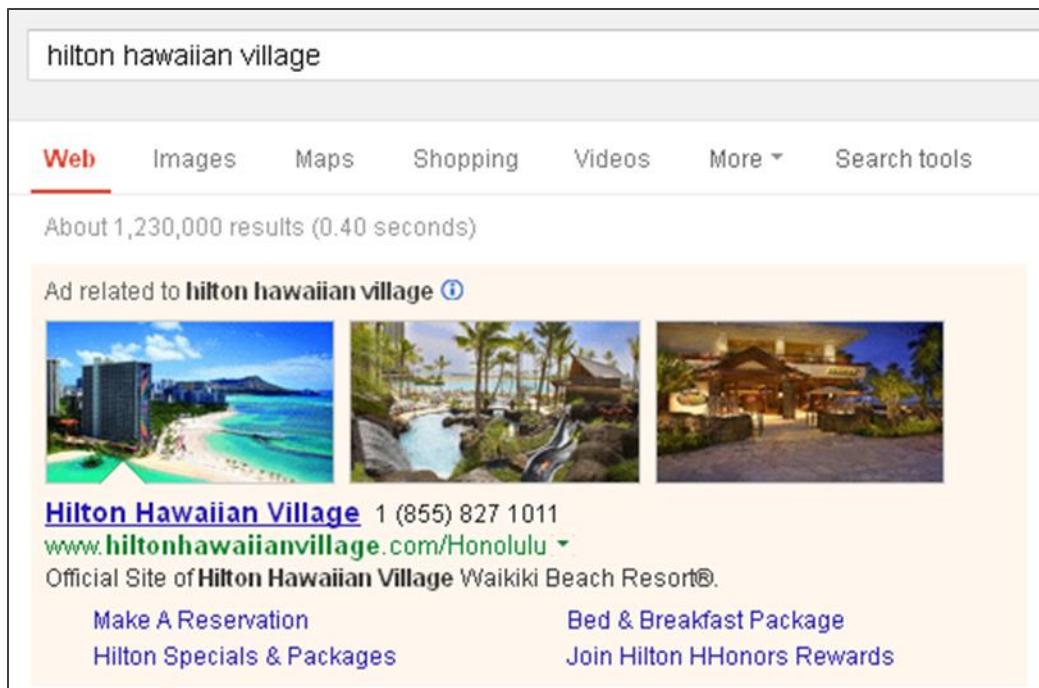
Once again, the images fulfill the basic spec requirements. All three images are high quality and aesthetically pleasing. All three fill the space allotted and do not use text. Most importantly, all three images are distinct, both in their composition and in what they depict. In this case, each image shows a different view of the hotel. This is a good example of a brand taking advantage of the visual impact of image extensions on the SERP despite lacking "traditional" products.

Best Practices: Choosing Ads and Keywords for Image Extensions

When selecting ads to include image extensions, the most important factor to remember is that image extensions will only appear for ads that consistently remain in the first position on the SERP. Therefore, good candidates for image extensions are ads with high click-through rates (CTR), high Quality Scores, and most importantly, consistently rank in the first position for particular keywords.

This means that image extensions are unlikely to appear with your ad for highly competitive terms. Because image extensions require first position, advertisers usually select them to appear for branded keyword searches, for which the particular brand's ad will most likely appear in the top position. Image extensions are not limited to brand searches, however. Some brands have vanity terms (or ego terms) that do not contain the brand name in the search but consistently place the ad in the first position. These are terms that are highly associated with a particular business, or are keywords in which the brand is an authority. In these circumstances, image extensions may be used. For smaller, less established businesses, however, image extensions may only be possible with branded keywords.

Aside from branded terms, choose keywords that summon image searches. Image extensions are more likely to appear when the majority of keywords within the ad group are associated with an image search. In other words, the keywords when entered as a search query should generate a search for images along with the other results, such as "Samsung televisions," as opposed to "Samsung reviews" or "Samsung prices."

Best Practices: Using PLAs with Image Extensions

Advertisers that currently use Product Listing Ads can still take advantage of image extensions by using the two in conjunction. Displaying both PLAs and image extensions on the same SERP demonstrates to consumers the authority of a particular business. However, advertisers should be aware that the images used in PLAs may not be acceptable for image extensions because PLA images generally have too much white space around them or are the incorrect size. It is important for advertisers to diversify their images within the SERP to display the multiple facets of their business instead of simply reusing the same images from Product Listing Ads in image extensions.

Summary

Image extensions are an intriguing new advertising option for businesses of all types. Significantly, they present an enhanced advertising opportunity to businesses that don't sell traditional products, enabling them to display compelling images at the top of the search results page. Image extensions also provide a great opportunity for manufacturers and retailers to command more space at the top of the SERP, promote branded product elements, and potentially improve click through and conversion rates. Because image extensions only work for ads in the first position, most of the terms that will generate them will be branded keywords. However, the full range of practical uses for image extensions is yet to be seen until this new feature becomes available on a broader scale.