

Tips on How to Raise Your Google Quality Score

By Kurt Anagnostopoulos

Paid search is not “set it and forget it” media. If you want optimal results from paid search, you must build fundamentally sound campaigns, monitor their progress at every opportunity and continually tweak, tweak, tweak.

Sure, having that sort of discipline is tough to sustain in a game like paid search, where data flows like rivers, change is constant and multitasking is standard operating procedure. Regardless of those challenges, however, discipline remains the way to win. And how can you win anything if you don't maximize your scoring power?

That's the reason Google calls its relevancy metric “Quality Score.” The higher your ad scores, the higher your ad ranks in every search auction. The higher your ad ranks, the more likely clicks will become sales. In other words, a high score increases your likelihood of winning business through paid search campaigns.

So how do you raise your Quality Score? Let's start by understanding how Google determines Quality Score.

Quality Score is the algorithm Google uses to estimate how relevant your ads, keywords and landing pages are to a person seeing your ads. A high Quality Score means Google's systems consider your ads, keywords and landing pages relevant and useful to users searching a particular topic.

Google is protective of its algorithms, so we can't say exactly how it's done, but we can reveal the five most important factors:

Clickthrough rate (CTR): CTR is a user-influenced attribute, therefore Google gives it the most weight. The theory is that large numbers of users clicking your ad must correlate to a positive experience. Therefore, high CTR drives Quality Score higher.

Ad relevancy: Both closely related relevant ad copy and having the actual keyword within ad copy improve Quality Score.

Keyword relevancy/campaign structure: Google looks for keyword relevancy across ad groups. When keywords within an ad group are closely related, Quality Scores go up.

Landing page relevancy: The more relevant the landing page, the better the Quality Score.

Account history: The length of time a keyword has been active in an account impacts Quality Score. However, even more important than length of time is how the keyword has performed over time.

Knowing the five most important factors leads us to three ways you can build and adjust your paid-search campaigns to drive higher Quality Scores:

1. Improve CTR: As the most important factor in Quality Score, CTR should receive the most attention. Four simple adjustments can improve CTRs and drive up Quality Score:

KEYWORD NEGATIVES: Continually add new negatives to eliminate unwanted queries. Run your search query reports weekly to identify opportunities and reach beyond eliminating bad clicks. Look to eliminate irrelevant high-impression terms that can drive down CTR.

MATCH TYPE BREAKOUT: Segment keywords by match types and separate match types by campaign or ad group. This will further group not only like terms, but like match types, increasing CTR on better-performing exact match groups. In addition, shy away from broad match and focus on broad match modifiers to improve CTR.

SITE LINKS: Add site links to all campaigns and use ad group site links when possible to deliver more relevant site links. Traditional site links may increase CTR by 15 percent, and enhanced site links may increase CTR by 20 percent.

TARGETING: Eliminate poor-performing targets for greater CTR by using all the targeting options available, including geo-targeting, ad scheduling and bid modifiers.

2. Landing pages: Since Google crawls landing pages to determine how relevant they are to each keyword, picking the most relevant, granular landing pages possible is imperative. When possible, regularly adjust content on landing pages and/or create specific paid-search landing pages that align with keywords to improve Quality Score.

3. Build quality history: Set up every campaign the right way every time and manage each and every campaign on a regular basis. That's the only way to build the account history Google seeks to reward with high Quality Scores. This is where discipline comes into play; if you can't execute a campaign the right way, than maybe that campaign shouldn't launch.

Overall, never forget your lessons from Paid Search 101. Dedication to SEM best practices always will lead to higher Quality Scores. In short, create a logical campaign structure, craft tight ad groups with similar-themed keyword clusters, develop granular ad copy using keyword themes within copy, and, most importantly, continually test and tweak, tweak, tweak.