

Laserlike

Free Ideas. Just Add Execution.

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Startup Marketing Advice.

Posted July 16, 2008

Filed under: [ideas](#) | Tags: [a/b testing](#), [adwords](#), [google marketing](#), [market positioning](#), [marketing](#), [messaging](#)

I would like to thank Google's [AdWords](#) for this title. You will see why in a bit.

One of the key things you can do to dramatically improve your marketing is to target your messaging.

Whether you are marketing a consumer web service or an enterprise hardware appliance, good messaging can make a big difference. In large organizations, most messages are shaped by someone in the marketing department — they're in marketing so they should know, right? In many startups messaging is an afterthought — something some engineer figures out just before shipping product. In both cases, messaging is treated as art (or annoyance) rather than science. While there is a place for art, there is also a place for science...

One of my favorite tools for doing fast and cheap empirical message testing is Google AdWords. For example, I created an AdWords campaign in about 10 minutes to A/B test eight titles for this post.

First I inserted the description, the display URL, and the target URL. Since we are A/B testing the title of this post, everything else was held constant. You can get into testing multiple variables at once, but let's keep it simple for now.

Create an ad

Create ad: [Text ad](#) | [Image ad](#) | [Local business ad](#) | [Mobile ad](#) | [Click-to-play video ad](#)

Example:
A/B Test Your Marketing.
Free Ideas.
Just Add Execution.
www.laserlike.com

Headline: Max 25 characters

Description line 1: Max 35 characters

Description line 2: Max 35 characters

Display URL: Max 35 characters

Destination URL: Max 1024 characters

< Back Reset Ad Continue >

I also went into “Edit Settings” and changed ad serving to “rotate” from “optimize” — we are simply trying to test messages here, so an equal messages distribution is ideal here.

Advanced Options	
Keyword Bidding:	Maximum CPC bidding View and edit bidding options
Ad scheduling:	Off. Ads running at all times. Turn on ad scheduling ?
Position preference:	<input type="checkbox"/> Enable position preferences ?
Ad serving: ?	<input type="radio"/> Optimize: Show better-performing ads more often <input checked="" type="radio"/> Rotate: Show ads more evenly

I then wrote this post and went to sleep. When I got up in the morning, this is what I found.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Variations	Actions	Clicks	Impr.	CTR ▼	Cost
<input type="checkbox"/>	Startup Marketing Advice. Free Ideas. Just Add Execution. www.laserlike.com	Edit	3	540	0.55%	\$2.57
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marketing with AdWords. Free Ideas. Just Add Execution. www.laserlike.com	Edit	4	1,302	0.30%	\$3.42
<input type="checkbox"/>	A/B Test Your Marketing. Free Ideas. Just Add Execution. www.laserlike.com	Edit	3	1,340	0.22%	\$2.01
<input type="checkbox"/>	Market Messaging. Free Ideas. Just Add Execution. www.laserlike.com	Edit	1	498	0.20%	\$0.94
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rapid Marketing. Free Ideas. Just Add Execution. www.laserlike.com	Edit	1	572	0.17%	\$1.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	A/B testing with AdWords. Free Ideas. Just Add Execution. www.laserlike.com	Edit	1	1,075	0.09%	\$0.93
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rapid Market Research. Free Ideas. Just Add Execution. www.laserlike.com	Edit	0	544	0.00%	\$0.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	Target Your Message. Free Ideas. Just Add Execution. www.laserlike.com	Edit	0	75	0.00%	\$0.00
Total: Text ads on content network			0	0	-	\$0.00
Total: Text ads on search			13	5,946	0.22%	\$10.87

It cost us \$10.87, 15 minutes of work, and less than 10 hours of testing (much of it while I was sleeping) to run this test. You should clearly spend more time than I did in crafting your messages. You should run the test for a longer period of time and test more variations on the messaging. And you should be thoughtful about the keywords you select to test them. This need not be the only source of data in making your decision about messaging and positioning.

The goal of this experiment was to show you how to leverage the hundreds of millions of Google search consumers and hundreds of millions of engineering investment by Google in Search and AdWords to run a very cheap market positioning and messaging experiments. Thanks GOOG!

5 Comments so far

1.  [Peldi](#) on July 16, 2008

Thanks for the tip Mike, I will try it! 😊

2.  [sabyberry](#) on July 16, 2008

Great post Mike!

3.  [damian](#) on July 16, 2008

Great tip. This would have saved us a few hours a few weeks ago.

4.  [zooie](#) on July 16, 2008

nice!

it would be interesting to also try this experiment on something like mechanical turk. ask each worker to choose the best title from a randomized list (should be small) of candidates. after k users have voted, take the most popular one as your answer.

would be interesting to compare the results, costs, and time it takes to reach some metric of statistical significance on each platform.

– vik

5.  [Stanislav Shalunov](#) on July 16, 2008

Testing messaging is a great idea.

In this case, however, all the CTRs are very low — perhaps because the keywords were insufficiently relevant. This is the sort of CTR you might get on a social network, not on a search engine.

When using AdWords for message testing, one would need to control for position. Position is determined by max bid and quality score. I presume you used the same max bid. Quality score has a zillion factors, but one is simply the occurrence of keywords in the ad. So, if you bid on keywords that like startup, marketing, and advice, the ad would have higher QS and higher position and higher CTR just because it has these words.

One could use position preference to try to put the ads in the same position. Position preference, however, is unreliable and starts working only after a few days. Further, if the position you choose is 1-3, quality score can still shift the ads between top and right, where CTRs are different regardless of the ad text. And if you choose a lower position, it'll take ages to collect enough clicks for statistically significant results. (The test in this post would need to run longer.)

Note that Facebook's social ad platform has none of the problems: you don't need to choose keywords, you can control ad position, and you don't get rewarded or penalized for having the keywords in the ad (as there are no keywords). You can also run the experiments faster.

Facebook ad platform gotchas: disable social actions; fix position on the side; choose a demographic you actually care about.

Leave a reply

name (required)

email (will not be shown) (required)

website

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