

Google AdWords: Using negative keywords

25% all of searches are totally brand new

If you advertise through search engine pay per click and use nothing but exact matches you will be running a very tight ship but you will also be missing out on a lot of potential (and relevant) traffic from keywords you haven't thought of. With 25% of all searches thought to be completely unique (i.e. they have never been used by anyone ever before) you can't possibly cover every single search term as an exact match.

Spending time to build up your negative keyword list will:

- Save you a lot of money!
- Increase your click through rate
- Increase your quality scores
- Increase your ROI

Use a combination of match types

On the other side, if you use broad match and phrase match keywords you run the risk of seeing your advert triggered alongside a keyword that isn't actually related to your site. For example, if you bid on 'web banner design' as a phrase match you would also be shown for 'FREE web banner design'. Common sense may suggest you change it to an exact match but you would then miss out on 'GOOD QUALITY web banner design' etc. Negative keywords act to prevent this from happening and don't be surprised to find your negative keyword list is much larger than your keyword list (for one of our campaigns we have just under 400 negative keywords).

Finding your negative keywords

When it comes to finding your negative keywords the first step is to think of the situations you don't want to have your advert shown with:

- You don't offer that service e.g. 'Free'
- You don't want your advert to be associated with that keyword e.g. 'porn'
- You don't want to be shown at the research stage of the buying cycle e.g. 'reviews'
- You don't trade in that region e.g. 'Sheffield'
- Etc.

A lot will come from common sense and your own industry experience. For example, amongst our own no brainers here at Heart Internet were 'free', 'sex' and 'adult'. But don't just stop there. Others will be less obvious (and some positively bizarre) and require you to use keyword research tools.

Google's keyword tool

From within your AdWords account simply run the report using your most generic keywords (e.g. ours would be 'web hosting' etc) and from the list it generates pick out those you do not want to be shown for and add them as a negative keyword (e.g. 'adult web hosting').

Microsoft's keyword mutation

It may sound like a zombie version of one of their products but it is in fact a really useful tool which shows you [common misspellings and pluralisation of keywords](#). For example the keyword "Messenger" comes back with 35 different ways people spell it including ones you couldn't guess at (e.g. "messemer").

Microsoft's keyword group detection

Another nifty tool from Microsoft. This one shows [keywords that are related](#) or similar to your keyword. For example "web hosting" brings back results for "dedicated hosting", "domain hosting", "isp" and "conference calling".

Google analytics (GA)

One of the reports with GA shows you the searches used to find your web site. You can split these out in to 'paid' and 'non-paid'. Scrawl through the 'paid' list and pick out any keywords you spot you don't like the look of.

Google suggest

A recent graduate of their labs, this tool offers search suggestions for you to choose from. From this list you can jot down some more negative keyword ideas. Follow these instructions to [turn on Google suggest](#) (at the time of writing this is only enabled on google.com and not google.co.uk).