Trend Alert: Changes to PPC You Should Know in 2016

A lot of interesting things happened in 2015: millennials overtook baby boomers as the largest U.S. generation, world poverty hit an all time low, and mobile searches surpassed those done on desktop computers. Of course, this is just a snippet of last year's benchmarks, but in its briefness, it illustrates just how rapidly things can change.

The PPC industry is no exception. In fact, 2015 was a very exciting year for PPC, propelling 2016 into flux. With so many additional features rolling out from almost every digital marketing service, one study by Forrester estimates that by 2019, $103 billion more will be spent on search marketing, social media marketing, and email marketing than on TV advertising.

That's a huge paradigm shift for everyone—and not just digital marketers. To prepare for this growth, and ensure that we make the most of the time we have with the tools available, let's look at some of the most important changes to PPC positioned to impact our digital marketing efforts in 2016.

Persona-Based Targeting

This year, knowing your buyer isn't just about knowing factors like age, gender, and income. There's a lot more information available to PPC and digital marketers this year that make it easier to zero-in on your audience with persona-based targeting.

To recap, personas are fictional representations of the goals and behaviors of a group of customers. We use them to understand the behavioral patterns, motivations, skills, and attitudes of a potential buyer. Thanks to some new tools, we can seek out these characteristics with more precision than ever before.

Last year, Adwords released Customer Match, which lets you do something formerly only available on channels like Facebook and Twitter. With Customer Match you can now target CRM lists using email addresses directly in Google.

Email marketing is highly effective and still one of the most successful online marketing tactics employed as part of a comprehensive strategy. Now, thanks to Customer Match, PPC gets to share the benefit, using email to target PPC efforts; and the matching rates of this new tool are highly impressive.

Microsoft also rolled out some new audience insight tools for Bing. For example, Bing Ads now let you set specific criteria, like age, gender, time of day and zip code, which are controlled by Microsoft's Entity Hierarchy and Limits. If you've got a good handle on your target demographic, this is a great way to focus your ads, and easily make adjustments as the campaign unfolds.

Facebook also got a bit of a facelift last year; we now have a lot of new tools and insights to help develop our personas, target our audience, and reach the right people, at the right time, with the right messaging.

Moreover, as each of these targeting features gets used (whether successfully or not), the data returned is a valuable asset to your ever-evolving personas. Use new data to modify old personas, use your new personas to fine-tune your targeting.

Mobile First

As mentioned early, searches on mobile devices have [surpassed searches](#) performed on desktop computers, a fact that is big news for search marketers.

A few years back, everyone was talking about mobile-responsive websites that convert their interfaces to be more mobile friendly when accessed by a smartphone.

So, now that mobile-responsive sites are common, if not expected, what else is there to do?

Mobile-responsive websites were, in some ways, supplementary (at least in the beginning). They supported a portion of users that only occasionally engaged the sites via mobile, and nothing more was done to satisfy these customers' journeys.

That's not the case anymore. In fact, in 2016, it's important to understand that 'mobile first' isn't just a catchy euphemism used to describe the proliferation of cell phones. Rather, it's a call to action for PPC and digital marketers to reimagine the customer's journey specifically for mobile.

Mobile PPC should be on this beat in 2016. This means developing mobile strategies that rely on mobile first thinking, at every stage of the buyer's journey—from search and discover, all the way to completed purchase.

Today, mobile is the first place many consumers will interact with a brand, whether it's on social media or when browsing customer reviews. The use of mobile for lead generation, in this capacity, is still very much underused, but this fact will likely change.

This year, Facebook has provided us with some tools to help capture this bounty. For example, [Lead Ads on Facebook](#) allows users to fill out a form with just a few clicks. The form is really just an ad, but combined with targeting options in [Facebook's Ads Manager](#), you can achieve better return on your social media time and investment.

Remarketing Audience Targeting
Remarketing is a powerful brand-building tool. To summarize, remarketing or retargeting for search ads engages users that have previously been in contact with

your website. Instead of focusing on things like keyword targeting, market segments and so on, remarketing tools allow you to spark up a conversation with customers that have already shown some interest in your products.

In 2016, this is a powerful tool for a few reasons. First, several new features have been rolled out to make this skill easier. [Bing Remarketing For Search Ads](#), [Remarketing List for Search Ads for Adwords](#), as well as Adwords Customer Match, all have features to help retarget potential customers.

Second, even though retargeting has been around for a while, this year, Google and Bing made adjustments to their respective retargeting tools and made them available on shopping campaigns (PLAs) and Local Inventory Ads (LIAs).

A good way to optimize your efforts with a retargeting tool is to use audience data in an Adwords campaign. This tactic makes a lot of sense because users that were previously on your site should convert at a higher rate than cold leads.

With these new tools, users that visit your site are put into a list that will see your retargeted ad in the event that they search for your site, or a similar site, up to 180 days after the first site engagement.

To maximize the efficacy of this tool, the creative should address a few features unique to these retargeted lists: for example, it should focus on providing information about the business and relevant content that interests the user, which will push the buyer further along in the journey.

Social Media

Digital marketing on social media will [grow faster](#) than on any other channel during the next three years.

According to [one report](#), social media takes up more than a quarter of all time users spend online, and a third of all Internet usage. In fact, the average user has as many as five channels he frequents nearly every day. This isn't so much a trend as it is a truth that digital marketers and PPC professionals must pay attention to in 2016.

There's a lot of opportunity to convert on social media, especially now that we're seeing new social 'Buy Buttons' and [Lead Form Ads](#).

In previous years, social media was perceived to merely compliment your brand—it increased awareness, engaged users in a common community, and let them explore aspects of a brand in new and innovative ways.

But now, social media channels are equipped with just as much conversion power as most websites, and they're particularly useful from a mobile perspective.

For example, Facebook's new Lead Ads allow users to sign up for a business' newsletter, emails, quotes, and offers with just a few clicks. Again, this is very relevant in the mobile era, when filling out traditional forms may not be so easy to do on a small, sensitive screen. Plus, Facebook has customization options that allow you to capture leads for just about everything.

Last summer, Pinterest launched 'buyable pins'; shortly after, Instagram released a similar feature, the 'Shop Now' button. Facebook and Twitter have also experimented with this idea, and it's possible that in the coming year we will see a lot of action in this online space. Digital marketers and PPC companies should take note and learn to use social media to their advantage.

Creative Content

In addition to smart targeting or retargeting efforts, good creative is the name of the game in 2016. There are a couple important updates to address in this section.

First, ad extensions—these are the extra bits of information about your business within the text ad—offer numerous benefits, including improved visibility. The result is increased CTR by providing users with more relevant information.

Ads with extensions have a higher cost-per-click similar to ads that enjoy a higher position in searches—but, it's well worth it. Here's why:

First, you can choose extensions that are best suited for desktop or mobile. For example, call extensions work better on mobile than they do on desktop, and seller ratings work better on desktop than they do on mobile. So, depending on your personas, and how well they're fleshed out, this information is very practical.

Extensions also include Social Annotations, which reveal info about a business' fans and followers on social media. You can also add an App Extension if you're trying to get downloads and even offer coupons right these in the search network. Add images, drop-down navigation, maps and more, all with these nifty extensions.

Next, ad customizers with real-time updates help deliver these creative ad extensions to the right people, at the right time. For Adwords, ad customizers are set parameters that deliver dynamic text when triggered by a user. This works on any text ad on the search or display network, except for the URL fields.

This feature is particular useful if you're running a sale, managing large inventory, or selling similar products in multiple cities or regions. With customization, you can add a countdown or timer to a sale, so users get a sense of urgency; display particular products searched specially by a user; or give users in a specific area access to information about your nearby retail store.

Lastly, video is a popular content choice, even for PPC this year. This trend is uniquely tied to some of the PPC changes we previously discussed, particularly social media, where videos can get a user's attention. Combine with 'Shop Now' buttons or ad forms, and you've got a nice lead generator.

This feature ties in nicely to retargeting: if a user clicks on your video, and the video takes him to your site, the user will get put on your list for retargeting. Plus, Adwords lets you track CTR for clicks on the video, as well as each view. Interestingly, for video ads, you only get charged for the views, and not for the website clicks.

There's no doubt that 2016 will be another year of adjusting measures and features for PPC. However, it's also certain that these trends and changes can help make a difference today, while we're still moving towards the future.

Take advantage of what's outlined here and keep pace for upcoming changes. With these trends in particular, there's never been more opportunity for a PPC campaign to succeed.