

Optimize Google Ads to Bring More Traffic to Your Website

Bring your message straight to the people who are searching for nonprofits like yours.

By Patrick Wicker

Running ads that appear in Google search results can be a bonanza for your organization. When people search Google for terms related to your nonprofit's mission, your ads will capture their interest. Clear calls-to-action will improve your ad performance, so think carefully about what your ads ask users to do.

Through the Google for Nonprofits program, organizations may apply for a Google Ad Grant – an in-kind program that awards \$10,000 a month of online advertising to qualifying 501(c)(3) organizations to use on the Google Ads advertising platform.

Here, we'll explain what you need to know to run a successful Google Ads campaign.

Before You Start Your Google Ads Campaign

Any monthly Ad Grant “dollars” that go unused won't accumulate, roll over, or be refunded, so getting the most out of your budget is key. Google requires certain qualifications to keep your ads active. So someone on your staff – or an outside marketing firm – will need to keep your Google Ads campaign targeted and current. Google also requires your ads to meet certain performance goals such as clicks and conversions.

Get Website Approval

Your organization's website must be approved by Google's Ad Grants to ensure that your organization is abiding by its rules. Your site must have a description of your organization and mission and describe how donations are used (such as with an annual report). Commercial activity must not be the main purpose of your website. In other words, your site can have ads but only if they're related to your mission. Websites may not host Google AdSense ads or affiliate advertising links.

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Pick Good Keywords to Target

Google offers a Keyword Planner that can help you choose keywords that are relevant to your mission and your ad's purpose (mightycitizen.com/insights/tools-and-training). Some key lessons:

Use phrases instead of single words. It's easier to target phrases to attract a niche audience. Displaying your ads to people who simply search the word “volunteer,” for example, won't work because “volunteer” is a highly competitive keyword and it doesn't distinguish your organization. Many single keywords are prohibited, but some are still allowed. Choose carefully.

Don't plan on bidding on “branded” terms that aren't your own. For example, if your organization recruits volunteers to help senior citizens, you can't bid on “Volunteer at Meals on Wheels” to attract more ad clicks when your organization isn't affiliated with Meals on Wheels. Make sure the keywords accurately reflect your nonprofit's mission in order to be approved.

Be Aware of Spending Caps

As of January 2018, Google eliminated the \$2 cap on AdWords smart bidding if you use Google's Maximize Conversions bidding strategy. To take advantage of the Maximize Conversations bidding strategy, you must set up conversion tracking on your website. Keep in mind, the \$2 maximum keyword bid still applies to all other bidding methods.

Use Geotargeting & Sitelinks

It's a good idea to use geotargeting (targeting a specific geographic area). Doing so will take your ad dollars further by showing your ad only to people in specific locations. Geotargeting also gives your organization more detailed insights into your demographics, allowing you to adjust your location-based ad bidding. You can target it in a variety of ways: city, state, zip code, and country.

You'll also get more bang for your buck by enabling sitelink extensions (letting a single Google ad take people to many different pages on your site). Sitelink extensions will likely boost your click-through rate (CTR), too.

Keep Building Ads

Don't just create a Google Ads campaign and forget about it. Keep building ads to keep those click-through rates high.

After the first 90 days, Ad Grants accounts must maintain a 5% click-through rate each month *at the account level* (not the individual ad level). If your account falls below that threshold for two consecutive months, your account may be deactivated. Your keyword quality scores have the greatest impact on this statistic, so you should make it a habit to pause or delete keywords that aren't performing well on a regular basis. You can find those low-performing keywords by filtering keywords that have high impressions with zero or minimal clicks within the past month and pause or delete any that fit that criterion.

Google Ad Grants are meant to improve the overall performance of Pay Per Click (PPC) ads placed using the Ad Grants program. The net effect is that you'll be better able to promote action from your audience using innovative advertising tools to reach people where they are. 

Patrick Wicker is digital marketing manager at Mighty Citizen (mightycitizen.com). Mighty Citizen transforms mission-driven organizations through branding, marketing, and digital communications. Their team helps nonprofits and foundations increase their impact and revenue by creating deeper connections with their audiences. A complete guide to Google ad grants is available on their website.

Your Website Is the Key

Online giving is the choice for today's donors. It all starts with having the right website to encourage donations. You'll find the advice you need in articles such as these at NonprofitWorld.org:

Simple Tips to Nail Your Online Fundraising (Vol. 38, No. 1)

The Five Biggest Website Mistakes Nonprofits Make – and How to Avoid Them (Vol. 29, No. 5)

Using E-Mail & the Web to Acquire & Cultivate Donors (Vol. 21, No. 1)

The Peer-to-Peer Fundraising Evolution (Vol. 30, No. 6)

Planning for Digital Longevity (Vol. 34, No. 1)

Wow People with Your Digital Material (Vol. 34, No. 2)

Top 10 Things Donors Want from Your Website (Vol. 38, No. 4)

Increase Donations with Google Ad Grants (Vol. 39, No. 3)

How to Measure Online Fundraising Success (Vol. 26, No. 1)



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