



First Rate

From 2006 to 2007, Bankrate.com used Google AdWords testing and targeting features to increase measured conversions by 102% and click-through-rate by 57%.

Who they are

- Bankrate.com
- www.bankrate.com
- North Palm Beach, Florida
- 264 employees
- An Internet consumer banking marketplace



What they needed

- To match their diverse content channels with customers
- To drive direct response growth
- To measure and improve their return on investment

What they did

- Began with **Google AdWords** in 2002
- Developed increasingly sophisticated campaigns by testing, optimizing, and tracking
- Utilized AdWords tools and features, including AdWords Editor, negative keywords, and demographic, geographic and site targeting
- Aligned AdWords campaigns with each business channel

What they accomplished

- **Improved clickstream:** Focus on targeted landing pages increased revenue derived from AdWords traffic by 66%
- **Increased conversions:** Measured conversions increased by more than 102% from 2005 to 2007
- **Developed highly-effective ads:** Constant testing resulted in a 57% increase in click-through-rate (CTR)
- **Improved return:** Increased its return-on-advertising-spend (ROAS) by 35% from 2006 to 2007

Bankrate.com's story is one of early adoption. Started 25 years ago as a newsletter for mortgage industry professionals, Bankrate acquired dot com status in 1994 – shortly after the browser was born – and shifted its focus to financial information for consumers.

“At the time, the idea of providing unbiased, objective, comprehensive financial information to the consumer was new,” says Michael J. Ricciardelli, Bankrate.com's senior vice president of consumer marketing. “That core idea hasn't changed. We now have 22 in-house editors and reporters and provide free rate information to consumers on more than 300 financial products.”

Online investments

The site and business evolved with the market. “We're not shy in trying new things,” says Rafael Zorrilla, director of interactive marketing for Bankrate.com. “In 2002 Google AdWords and the concept of cost-per-click (CPC) was new, but we had a diverse range of content that we knew some people weren't aware of. We thought Google was an excellent way to get in front of people looking for that information, be it mortgage rates or college planning.” By 2004, Bankrate.com was itself based on a cost-per-click model.

The more Bankrate.com worked with AdWords™, the more it was able to match various features to its needs. “We became very systematic in how we test our ad copy and messaging,” explains Rafael. “CD's are a great example. We mean *certificates of deposit*, not a *music CD*. Or an *ARM loan*, not *arm* the appendage. It's data driven, very easy to do in AdWords, and feedback is immediate. It's a great way to see if a message to a consumer resonates.”

“And what makes Google really unique is the quality score,” adds Petra Bowman, web marketing manager at Bankrate.com. Quality Score is a dynamic metric assigned to each keyword. It's calculated using a variety of factors and measures how relevant a keyword is to ad text and to a user's search query. “We pay close attention to it. It really helps us revise our lists.”

From 2006 to 2007, Bankrate.com's focus on testing and refining ad copy led to a click-through-rate (CTR) increase of 57 percent. And by lowering its CPC through careful budget management, it managed to increase click volume by 6 percent without increasing costs.

To manage the nuances of these ad messages and their keyword lists, Rafael's team uses different tools and features. “AdWords Editor allows us to easily make changes to our ad copy and keywords, saving us time, and negative keywords ensure we match to our target audience,” he says.

AdWords Editor is a free, downloadable application for managing AdWords accounts.



About Google AdWords

Google AdWords™ is a performance-based advertising program that enables businesses large and small to advertise on Google and its network of partner web sites. Hundreds of thousands of businesses worldwide use AdWords for text, image, and video ads priced on a cost-per-click (CPC) and cost-per-impression (CPM) basis. Built on an auction-based system, AdWords is a highly quantifiable and cost-effective way to reach potential customers.

For more information,
visit <http://www.google.com/adwords>

Advertisers can work offline and upload changes to campaigns, ad groups, ads, keywords, and sites quickly and easily. A negative keyword is a kind of keyword that prevents ads from showing on irrelevant search queries. Adding a negative keyword to an ad group or campaign means that the ad won't show for search queries containing that term.

By applying these strategies to its campaign development, Bankrate.com has increased measured conversions by 102 percent from 2005 to 2007.

Increasingly sophisticated

Bankrate.com's online advertising methodology mirrors its own business channels. "The sole purpose of our AdWords campaigns is direct response," says Rafael. "But we now match our approach to using AdWords to each business channel, on a channel by channel basis. We understand the seasonality of each channel. As a result, we're no longer throwing stuff at the wall. We've grown quite sophisticated."

This process involves understanding the clickstream – the actions potential customers take on the Internet as they search for information that Bankrate.com can provide.

"Google has a great handle on delivering relevancy, and that's what we strive to do: deliver the right message to the right person at the right time. For example, we pair all of our ads with appropriate landing pages so we can drop off our customers in the best place within the clickstream." – *Rafael Zorrilla, director of interactive marketing for Bankrate.com*

"We're looking for in-market consumers," he explains. "Google has a great handle on delivering relevancy, and that's what we strive to do: deliver the right message to the right person at the right time. For example, we pair all of our ads with appropriate landing pages so we can drop off our customers in the best place within the clickstream." By using targeted landing pages, Bankrate.com has increased revenue derived from AdWords traffic by 66 percent.

In addition to targeted landing pages, Bankrate.com now uses both demographic and geographic targeting, as well as text and image ads on Google's content network, which has helped increase its return-on-advertising-spend (ROAS) by 35 percent from 2006 to 2007.

Keyword ready

Michael and Rafael believe there are two key components to Bankrate.com's success. The first is trust. "A unique aspect of Bankrate.com is how we've established ourselves as a trusted resource with unbiased, free information," says Michael. "We've been online for a long time. We're proven."

The second is a willingness to evolve. "In the long term, we want to evolve to match consumers' needs," explains Rafael. "In the near term, if financial markets shift, we have to be keyword ready."

Their advice for companies developing their online advertising strategies? "We've gained knowledge, and it's not always black and white," Rafael continues. "There's a lot of learning to be done. But no matter what, you have to commit resources to test and try new ways to do stuff. That's what I love about Google – the constant innovation. It allows us to test and explore."

