



## Who they are

**CAROLINA**  
*Rustica*

www.carolinarustica.com  
Concord, North Carolina  
12 employees  
Offline and online  
Hand-forged iron furniture

## What they needed

- To establish their business on the Internet
- To market effectively with limited resources
- To grow their customer base
- To improve their site and purchasing experience

## What they did

- Began with **Google AdWords** in 2002
- Added **Google Analytics** tracking to their website
- Installed **Google Checkout** as a payment processing option
- Established two feeds for **Google Base**
- Began with a basic approach, then developed increasingly sophisticated campaigns
- Used Analytics in conjunction with AdWords to test, optimize, and track campaigns
- Maximized their marketing spend based on data from Google products
- Improved site design based on Analytics usage data
- Lowered costs by using Analytics and Base, both free

## What they accomplished

- **Increased sales:** 50% year-on-year growth
- **Boosted conversions:** Conversion rates increased by 20%
- **Lowered transaction costs:** Google Checkout lowered cost-per-transaction by 2.5%
- **Increased traffic:** Approximately 30% of traffic is driven by AdWords advertising

# Striking While the Iron's Hot

Carolina Rustica used Google AdWords, Analytics, Checkout, and Base to increase its conversion rate by 20% and overall sales by 50%.

## Getting a life

Richard Sexton had never thought of himself as an entrepreneur, much less a furniture gallery owner. But following an MBA and four years in the corporate world, he'd become increasingly discontent with his career. Finally, during a trip to Nepal, Richard decided to make some major changes in his life. Upon his return, he quit his job, moved back to his hometown in North Carolina, and opened up a small home furnishings shop. Then he sat down to learn how to sell home furnishings.



"It sounds corny, but it was a real 'what do I want to do with my life' epiphany," says Richard. "I didn't have any experience in running a retail operation. We just carried what we liked: a mix of American classics – like wrought iron beds – and Asian imports. It was definitely trial by fire. Or, in our case, fires. Our learning curve had its fair share of mistakes, but also some good decisions. Bringing my pet parrot Magoo into the office, going online early, and choosing to use Google products were three of our better moves."

## Ironclad marketing

Richard launched a site for his store in 1998 and began offering some of the better selling items online, such as the iron beds. "Sales took off," he recalls. "We soon needed dedicated staff for the site, and due to demand, we launched Carolina Rustica as a standalone site in 2000 to focus on iron furnishings. Through the Web, we could reach a much larger audience, and we began to invest in marketing activities that could connect with potential customers. By we," adds Richard with a smile, "I mean me."

With his marketing department of one, Richard opened a Google AdWords™ account in 2002 and continues to run the account himself. "We saw immediate benefits from our investment in AdWords," Richard says. "Over time, I learned how to refine the effectiveness of our ads, to manage keywords carefully, and to be specific. I'm very happy with the results. Our sales have increased by 50 percent year on year. And it seems every time I log in to AdWords there is a new feature that helps me better manage my account."

Richard then signed up with Google Analytics™, a free tool that offers comprehensive analysis of a variety of important site metrics and works with AdWords to track how visitors arrive at and interact with the Carolina Rustica site. The combination provides him with useful insight into how better to construct the site and convert those visitors into customers. "As we collect information, we refine our strategy and rebuild our site around what we've learned," Richard says. "We know the value that each page and each AdWords ad delivers, and we can continually improve our marketing across the board. Now I've gotten spoiled with this type of marketing because I can measure my return on investment so quickly, and it's helped us boost our conversion rates by 20 percent."

"So far with AdWords," Richard continues, "there's no ceiling to what we are

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## About Google AdWords

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Google AdWords™ is a performance-based advertising program that enables businesses large and small to advertise on Google and its network of partner websites. 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://adwords.google.com>.

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## About Google Analytics

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Google Analytics™ is a free, powerful web analytics tool. It precisely tracks visitors, referrals, search engine performance, email promotions, and even offline initiatives. Featuring visually enhanced reports, Analytics helps users focus their marketing resources, improve site navigation, and achieve a higher ROI. It measures the success of both AdWords and non-AdWords advertising campaigns, revealing which ads and keywords convert the best. For more information, visit <http://www.google.com/analytics>.

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## About Google Checkout

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Google Checkout™ is a fast, convenient checkout process. Online merchants use Checkout to process orders and charge their customers' credit or debit cards. Shoppers can make purchases quickly and securely, using a single username and password. Checkout also works with Google's search advertising program, AdWords, to help merchants increase sales and minimize expenses throughout the online sales and marketing process. For more information, visit <http://checkout.google.com/sell>.

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willing to spend, because it is so effective. I could say the same thing about Analytics, but it's free."

### Forging trust

In the process of adding improved functionality to Carolina Rustica's site, Richard began using Google Checkout™, which offers a faster, safer, and more convenient checkout option. "Checkout has grown tremendously," he says. "We feature it on our homepage and it was amazing how quickly we were able to get up and running. And as far as working with AdWords goes, with free processing, Checkout couldn't be any more cost efficient – it saves us money."

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**"The Google suite of products has been as critical to our success as any other part of our business." *Richard Sexton, founder, president, and CEO, Carolina Rustica***

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He also recently began posting products through Google Base™, which helps people find Carolina Rustica when they search on Google. "I really like Google Base – it ties in easily to our AdWords activity. We have two separate feeds, one national and one local, and it's a great free way to increase our exposure."

By using Google AdWords, Analytics, Checkout, and Base in concert, Richard saves time and money, and makes marketing decisions that support his customers. "The Google suite of products has been as critical to our success as any other part of our business," continues Richard. "The combination helps me tie the entire chain of events together. From clickthrough, to landing page, to site navigation, to purchase, we want our customers to have as consistent and flawless an experience as possible. It's the best way to establish trust with your customer."

### Fully furnished

Carolina Rustica continues to look for new ways to provide a shopping experience that leaves customers wanting more, including designing its own line of furniture. It's all part of Richard's plan to be a multi-channel retailer. "We've worked hard to manage the growing complexity of the business, to reinvest for growth, and to roll everything out on a step-by-step basis: from three to four suppliers and a few hundred SKUs to 70 suppliers and 15,000 SKUs; from a small storefront to a large shipping warehouse; from relying solely on suppliers to carrying our own line; and from 100 percent of our sales coming from the offline world to 85 percent coming from the online world."

Carolina Rustica proves that at least one path to success runs from Nepal to North Carolina, is paved with iron, and involves a parrot. "I couldn't have imagined that things would have unfolded this way," says Richard. "But we have a clearer and clearer picture of the future, and I'm positive Google's going to help get us there."

