

Marketing

By Welton Hong



Pay-Per-Click Advertising

Understanding PPC Ads' Influence on Organic Search Rankings

Pay-per-click advertising is one of the most powerful tools available to any local business for growing leads and conversions – and funeral homes are no exception.

These paid ads can be beneficial for generating preneed clientele, but they're especially powerful for targeting at-need cases. Because they essentially allow your funeral home to “jump to the top” of search engine results for top keywords (e.g., *funeral*, *burial*, *cremation*, etc.) in your area, they're a great way to capture contracts in at-need situations.

PPC is also one of the most cost-effective ways of marketing your funeral home, because you only pay when someone actually clicks on the ad, tak-

ing that searcher to your website. And PPC ads can be tweaked on the fly, going “live” almost immediately, ensuring you're never “locked in” to an ad that isn't sufficiently effective.

With that said, I sometimes hear clients inquire whether advertising through Google's AdWords – the main type of effective PPC advertising out there – will necessarily help their funeral home website rank higher in organic (unpaid) results.

In other words, Google's local search function is supposed to rank websites for a given keyword based upon how valuable it believes that website is for searchers. But does it give a little extra love to its paid advertisers?

Here's the short answer: No.

Google won't grant your website a better organic ranking just because you're advertising with it. That's an area where Google wants to be abundantly clear. It wants the websites with the best content and most authority to get the top rankings, regardless of whether they choose to pay for ads.

Excellent SEO gets you better organic rankings. Having spectacular reviews of your funeral home (and a high quantity of them) gets you better organic rankings. Packing your site with high-quality, entirely original content gets you better organic rankings.

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With all of that said, while there's no *direct* connection between investing in Google AdWords and getting high organic ranks, here's the reality: If you do go the PPC route, you very likely will see an improvement in unpaid search rankings.

That's not something Google does to reward businesses who advertise with it. Instead, it's an *indirect* effect – an *organic* one, in every sense.

When you contract with Google AdWords, in addition to all the benefits you get from PPC, the following things occur:

- Searchers who happen to notice a PPC ad for your business are *much more inclined* to click on your organic listing. The PPC ad alone creates authority in the searcher's mind, and even if that person usually avoids clicking on a

paid ad, they might well click on your "standard" (organic) link.

- Paid ad clicks very often lead to an increase in links, sharing, citations, etc., for your funeral home website. All of these developments improve your funeral home website's *authority* with Google, and thus create an improvement in its organic ranking.

- People who have previously encountered a PPC ad for a business site are far more inclined to engage and convert with that site, even when that engagement is through your organic listing.

Essentially, while Google doesn't game the system in any way to take better care of websites that invest in PPC ads, your site almost certainly *will* get a better organic ranking if it's run a PPC campaign, just in a roundabout way.

That's another reason why I

strongly recommend PPC advertising through Google AdWords to my funeral home clients. Not only is PPC one of the best ways to drive at-need contracts by itself, but it also has a real, albeit indirect, effect on your organic search rankings.

Anything you do to build your funeral home's brand, generate more customers and increase online reviews is going to superpower your site's SEO, and thus your organic ranking. PPC advertising does all of that.

It's not an alternative to having a site with great content and great SEO; if you want to rank highly in organic results (and you certainly do), you must invest in the techniques that deliver high rankings. But PPC's indirect effect on rankings, along with its own inherent advantages, definitely helps. •