

Marketing

By Welton Hong

FIVE Paid Search Trends to Watch

I've been banging on the "paid search" drum for years now for good reason: It works.

You know better than anyone how competitive death care has become over the years, with no sign that trend will change anytime soon. The bottom line is if you want to separate your funeral home from the competition and rise above the fray, you need to step up your marketing efforts.

Pay-per-click advertising and other forms of paid search continue to offer a lot of bang for the buck in regard to marketing your funeral services, especially for at-need cases. By now, we can safely say that paid search is not a fad. It's here to stay and should be looked at as a staple in your digital marketing campaigns.

But even though paid search is a consistent performer, the field itself is ever evolving, leaving no room for complacency. In addition to all the

changes we witnessed last year due to the pandemic, Google added a few changes itself to its ad platform, namely new ad extensions and audience targeting.

If you weren't paying attention, you fell behind, and your strategy and budgets might have suffered. That is why it's important to stay up to date and be ready to adjust tactics when the landscape changes. It's also why it's important to pay attention to trends in paid search so you can adjust and get a leg up on your competition.

Keep an eye on the following five trends for the remainder of this year. There might come a point in time when you should consider dipping your toe in these waters if they are not already a part of your marketing plans.

SEM Diversification and Google Discovery Ads

Last year, advertisers were diversifying their paid search portfolio by testing and investing in relatively new ad products besides traditional PPC and display ad campaigns. Don't be afraid to test new products, especially when these ad types fit in with your funeral home's overall goals.

One of last year's standouts was Google's Discovery campaigns. Like Facebook's carousel ads, Discovery ads are visually oriented and designed to grab attention with interactive content where you swipe images to the side.

These ads can be found on someone's Google Discover feed, mobile YouTube feed, and in Gmail under the social and promotions tab.

Although Discovery might not be the best choice to drive at-need calls,

it can be quite effective to deliver more preneed leads with the ability to tell a story through a strategic use of multiple images, along with the right marketing copy. It can also be used to retarget those who have visited your funeral home website in the past but clicked away without inquiring for more information.

Dynamic Search Ads

Since Google made changes to the search query report this past September, limiting it to the most popular search terms, it's now more difficult for firms to gain insight into lower volume keywords (the kind that can drive additional traffic and leads), which can leave gaps in targeting potential calls. Dynamic search ads can fill in those gaps and complement your existing search campaign.

Here's how it works: Google crawls through your site's content to dynamically generate the headline and link the ad to an existing page on your site after matching it with someone's search query. This can be especially helpful on unique, long-tail search terms.

Unlike Discovery ads, dynamic search ads can be a powerful tool to help generate at-need calls. Instead of creating multiple unique ads to market all your funeral home's assortment of services, a dynamic search campaign can handle all of it and create unique ads to match someone's search on Google.

But again, I recommend using dynamic search ads to complement your existing keyword-based search campaigns and not replace them. If you only use dynamic

search ads, you risk attracting too broad of an audience, which can get expensive over time.

YouTube Continues to Grow

Expect YouTube video ads to continue to grow in popularity. YouTube is another effective channel for generating preneed leads, as well as strengthening your funeral home's brand identity.

YouTube reaches 91% of the online population in the United States, and 68% of users watched YouTube to help make a purchase decision. There's no reason to believe this trend will reverse itself anytime soon.

What a YouTube ad can do for your funeral home is to combine the interactivity of traditional PPC and social media ads with the ability to build brand awareness to position your funeral home as the "go-to" firm in your community, just like TV broadcast ads.

One YouTube ad format to consider: instream True-View ads, which are skippable and would run during the stream of other popular YouTube content. A viewer can skip after five seconds, and you only pay if the viewer either watches at least 30 seconds, the end of the video (if less than 30 seconds), or clicks on the ad. In many ways, it acts just like a PPC ad.

Don't Give Up on Desktop Yet

For years, there's been a call to focus more on mobile when it came to creating content. And although views on mobile have gained considerable ground over the years, what we've seen during the pandemic is an increase of desktop usage as well as an increase in desktop conversion rates.

One report stated that paid desktop traffic was up 60%, while mobile traffic dropped 7% compared to the pre-COVID era.

In other words, you shouldn't sleep on desktop when developing your ads or managing your bidding strategy.

Content Is King ... Even in Paid Search

Ensuring your ad, website and landing page copy are relevant, customer-centric and up to date is now more important than ever. The secret to making your paid search campaigns work is to make sure your content clearly addresses the needs of those families in search of your service.

Dynamic search ads only work if your website or landing page content is relevant to someone's search. A YouTube ad gets watched (and eventually clicked) only if the ad provides value to the viewer.

Ask yourself what questions you're typically asked and be sure your content answers those questions. Google is constantly updating and fine-tuning its algorithms, which makes it pointless to try to game the system. The way you beat the system is to constantly strive to create high-value content.

Paid search has consistently proved to be a top performer not only in digital marketing but in marketing campaigns in general. But paid search is never something you can just set and forget. Stay on top of the changes and trends and you'll be in a better position to stay in front of your funeral service competition. •

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