

SIX-STEPS FOR SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING LEARNING

Kai-Yu Wang, Brock University

AXCESSCAPON TEACHING INNOVATION COMPETITION TEACHING NOTES

Google AdWords is considered to be the most important digital marketing channel, causing firms to consistently increase their budget in this area (Hanapin Marketing, 2016). Paid search advertising expenditures in the US are predicted to reach \$45.81 billion by 2018, making up 42.7% of the total expected digital advertising expenditures in the country (eMarketer, 2018). One of the key challenges in teaching digital marketing is determining how to help students learn digital marketing strategies with actionable tactics that they can directly apply to the real digital business world. Thus, a six-step process was proposed and used in my internet and social media class to address this pedagogical problem. Students learned search engine marketing (SEM) through in-class assignments and a SEM campaign for a local organization.

1. *Local Businesses (i.e., community partners)*: Before the semester began, a call for service-learning project participation was sent to a pool of local community partners. Among the 24 interested community partners, nine from various industries (e.g., wine, construction, auto repairs) were selected to work with my internet and social media marketing class. In week two of the semester, nine teams (five students per team) were formed and randomly assigned one local business to work with on the project. Each team was required to schedule a meeting with its community partner in the following week. The purpose of this meeting was to understand the partner's products/services, current marketing strategies, and digital marketing problems.

2. *AdWords and Keyword Planner*: In week five Google AdWords and Keyword Planner were introduced in class. Another free keyword research tool Keywords Everywhere (Axeman Tech, 2018) was also introduced to and used by the students. An in-class team assignment was designed to help the students become familiar with these tools. This assignment required student teams to use the Keyword Planner to create lists of keywords to be used to promote their partners' products/services. Rationales for the keyword selections were required (e.g., search volume, cost-per-click, and competition).

3. *Buyer Personas (BP) and Pay-per-click (PPC) Text Ad*: In week eight a series of videos entitled "Introduction to Buyer Personas" by HubSpot Academy (2018) were presented to the class. In addition, students were instructed how to create effective text ads. An in-class team assignment was designed that required the student teams to develop two BPs for their partners by using a template offered by HubSpot (2018). The teams were also asked to write a PPC text ad targeting each of the BPs. This process was completed using a free text ad preview tool created by Blast Analytics & Marketing (2018). With the text ad preview tool, the student teams were able to develop the text ad complying with the Google AdWords format and character limits.

4. *Simulation*: Mimic Pro Simulation, a paid simulation provided by Stukent, allows students to gain hands-on experience related to keyword selection, keyword bidding strategies, PPC text ads, and landing pages. The students were asked to complete five rounds of simulation individually before implementing the real SEM campaign for their partner. A review session was given after each round in order to help the students to improve their performances.

5. *Implementing SEM Campaigns*: In week 10, a session was scheduled to present the Google AdWords and Google Analytics account setup with the partners. Each team and its partner were informed that they had a budget of \$300, sponsored by a teaching innovation grant from the university. Each team was fully responsible for the SEM campaign activities, including making daily budgets, keyword selections and bidding decisions as well as writing the PPC text ads over the two week period. In order to implement the SEM campaign successfully and obtain meaningful results, several things should be noted. First, the community partners had to provide the student teams with permission to create the accounts. Second, the student teams were provided instructions on how to link the

AdWords and the Analytics. Third, the student teams were provided with instructions on how to make sure tracking codes were properly installed on their websites.

6. *Report and Presentation*: In week 12, the student teams presented the SEM results and turned in reports to their partners. The report included four parts: (1) problem definition, (2) target market and BPs, (3) SEM campaign plan (e.g., keyword lists, PPC text ads, and A/B testing), results (e.g., metrics), expenses, and (4) discussion.

At the end of the semester, feedback on this SEM service-learning project from students and partners were obtained. The students reported that the keyword selection and the BP and PPC text ad assignments were very helpful in regard to implementing the SEM campaign, and that the implementation of the SEM campaign was valuable to their digital marketing learning. On the other hand, the partners all agreed that the SEM campaign was valuable to their organizations and that they were willing to allocate a small budget (ranging from \$50 to \$200+) to the student teams if a grant from the university was not available. They would like to participate in a similar project again and would recommend this service-learning partnership to other businesses. An even encouraging result is that most of the partners indicated that opportunities existed for them to hire the students as a result of this project.

One of the problems encountered by two student teams in setting up the SEM campaign was ad disapproval by Google AdWords due to malicious or unwanted software. The teams worked with the website manager/developers in order to address the issue. The other potential problem was to use partners' credit card information in order to set up the AdWords account. Communicating with partners and obtaining their trust resolved this problem. This six-step process for SEM learning was used in an internet and social media marketing class over a 12-week semester. The assessment of the project can be determined by instructors' focus of the course. This process is adaptable for experiential learning in other digital marketing courses (e.g., email marketing and social media marketing). In order to use the process in other typical marketing courses (e.g., consumer behavior, integrated marketing communication), the keyword selection and simulation assignments could be replaced with other assignments that fit the focus of the course (e.g., promotion plan, ad copy design). In addition to enhancing the students' experiential learning related to digital marketing, it also expands the scope of the university's community involvement with local businesses and provides value to the local community.

REFERENCES

Axeman Tech (2018). Keywords Everywhere: Free search volume, CPC & competition data for almost all the keyword research tools out there! Available from <https://keywordseverywhere.com/>.

Blast Analytics & Marketing (2018). Google AdWords expanded text ad preview tool. Available from <http://www.blastam.com/expanded-text-ad-preview-tool/>.

eMarketer (2018). US search ad spending 2018-2022. Retrieved from <https://forecasts-na1.emarketer.com/584b26021403070290f93a59/5851918b0626310a2c186ac8>.

Hanapin Marketing (2016). The state of PPC 2017-2018. Retrieved from <https://www.hanapinmarketing.com/ppc-library/industry-reports/state-ppc-2017-2018/>.

HubSpot Academy (2018). Introduction to buyer personas. Retrieved from <https://app.hubspot.com/learning-center/4121474/lessons/33/38>.

HubSpot (2018). Persona templates: Easily organize your audience segments and make your marketing stronger. Retrieved from <https://offers.hubspot.com/persona-templates>.

For further information contact:

Kai-Yu Wang
Goodman School of Business, Brock University
1812 Sir Isaac Brock Way
St. Catharines, ON L2S3A1
(905) 688-5550, kwang@brocku.ca