10 TRICKS TO GET THE CLICK: STRATEGIES FOR WRITING EXCEPTIONAL ADS

WordStream

INTRODUCTION

If you want to sell products or generate leads online, a user-friendly, conversion-optimized website is essential. But if nobody ever sees your website, it doesn't matter how much A/B testing you've put into it. For this reason, writing exceptional ads is the most important thing you can spend your time on in paid search; it can also be extremely aggravating, even for pay-per-click (PPC) copywriting veterans.

With PPC advertising, your text ads appear above search engine results when someone, somewhere makes a query that corresponds to a keyword you're bidding on. This is an extremely effective means of driving qualified traffic to your site — one that more than pays for itself, if you're doing it right.

If you fail to follow best practices, however, the countless qualified people just waiting to become your next client or customer won't click on your ads — they'll choose a competitor, and your gorgeous landing pages will only ever play host to bots and spammers.

"But won't writing great, clickable ads end up costing me a ton of money?"

Even though you have to pay every time one of your ads is clicked, having a good click-through rate (CTR) is important. CTR — the ratio of clicks to impressions — represents the percentage of people who see your ad and then click through to your website. Lots of impressions without a lot of clicks is a sign that your ad isn't resonating the people who see it. This *could* be because you're bidding on the wrong keywords. But in almost every scenario imaginable, **you can significantly increase CTR (...and conversion volume … and ROI) by simply writing stronger ad copy**.

Now, getting prospects to click your ads instead of your competitors' is a relatively simple proposition. You just need to do two things: follow the best practices you're about to read and pay attention to the minute details everyone else in your industry is neglecting.

In this guide, we'll share 10 tricks for crafting compelling, clickable text ads. You'll learn how to write:

- Eye-grabbing headlines and descriptions that scream "I'm relevant to your needs!"
- Specific calls to action that reinforce desires and create urgency
- Well-structured copy capable of earning high Quality Scores without feeling spammy

Once we've covered some basic copywriting tips, we'll dive into some advanced (and unusual) strategies you've probably never thought about using in your paid search ads (they really work, we promise!).

But before we get started, a quick crash course on Expanded Text Ads...

What Makes Expanded Text Ads Different from Standard Text Ads?

Released in mid-2016 (and the industry standard as of January 31st, 2017), Expanded Text Ads offer you more characters to share your message with prospects. The WordStream blog is chock full of resources that explain the strategic differences between writing copy for old text ads and writing copy for Expanded Text Ads.

Now, if you're not too familiar with them, here's a visual breakdown of what an Expanded Text Ad looks like:
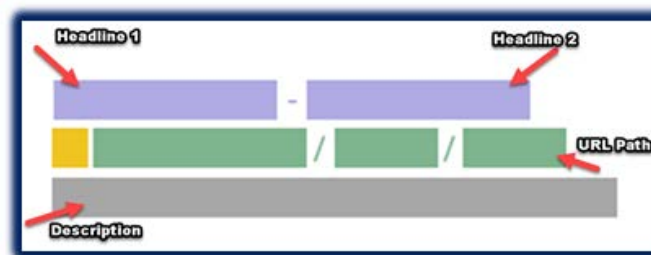
As we dig into the 10 tricks to get the click, we'll touch on how you can make the best possible use of the extra space available to you, but first, this is everything Google changed:

The increase in headline character count and the addition of the second headline are by far the biggest changes to come about; as a result, the majority of your ad-writing energy should be spent ensuring your headlines:

- Address the search query
- Allude to your Unique Sales Proposition (USP)
- Provide some direct address (either through the use of the word "you" or a more specific Call to Action)

It would be naive to assume that every searcher reads every add in its entirety. But headlines, with their big, bold lines of copy, are difficult to skip over; this makes them exceptionally valuable. If you take one thing away from this guide, make it this: **including CTA's in your headlines instead of burying them in the description is essential to improving CTR's, conversions, and your happiness**.

....

Including CTA's in your headlines instead of burying them in the description is essential to improving CTR's, conversions, and your happiness. 🐦

....

Now, let's get started!

1. THE FOUNDATION OF EVERY AD: FEATURES, BENEFITS, AND A KILLER CTA

The most effective text ads have three components. They:

1. Convey features
2. Promote benefits
3. Feature a call to action (CTA)

No amount of keyword stuffing (inserting the search term you are bidding on into the ad and landing page as many times as possible) or other tomfoolery can replace an ad that sells compelling benefits and has a strong call to action.

Creating an ad that does this, however, isn't as easy as just sitting at your computer with an open spreadsheet and hoping inspiration strikes. It takes an in-depth understanding of your business, what your prospects are looking for, and your unique selling proposition.

A great way to uncover your USP and the strongest points to convey in an ad is to use a Feature-Benefit Matrix.

The Feature-Benefit Matrix looks like this:

	Feature	Benefit a	Benefit b	Benefit c	CTA List
1					1 _____
2					2 _____
3					3 _____
4					4 _____
5					5 _____

To complete it, simply list your key features to the left, then, to the right of each one, list out three benefits. Once you've got this down-pat, consider what kind of call to action would be most compelling. Consider what you're asking your prospects to do and how it relates to the features and benefits you've listed, but don't feel limited by character counts just yet.

With ETA's, you've got 47% more space to tell prospects why your offer is infinitely more compelling than whatever your competitors are peddling. Use it.

. . . .

With ETA's, you've got 47% more space to tell prospects why your offer is infinitely more compelling than whatever your competitors are peddling. Use it. 🐦

. . . .

The Feature-Benefit Matrix can make dreaming up interesting if not completely new ways to describe features, benefits, and your CTA simple. Once it's been completed, identify your 2–3 strongest combinations and start crafting killer text ads!

Instead of...	Try...
Immediatley pitching your product	Starting a conversation
"Used Text Books for Sale!"	"Why pay full price? Buy used and save today!"
Attempting to create vague FOMO	Using a Countdown Ad
"Sale Ends Soon!"	"Sale Ends in {=Countdown("yyyy/mm/dd hh:mm:ss, "language.daysBefore}"
Including a meaningless Call to Action	Highlighting your Unique Sales Proposition
"Check us out," "Learn more"	"Easy, paperless onboarding. Anywhere. Any time."

2. MAKE FULL USE OF THE URL PATHWAYS

One important aspect that changed with Expanded Text Ads was the URL that appears alongside your ad copy. In the past, we recommended creating a keyword-rich display URL; this was a fantastic way to leverage extra space in a PPC ad to increase relevancy, like this:

domain.com/**search-term**

With Expanded Text Ads, though, you've got two 15-character URL Pathways at your disposal. Oh, the possibilities!

The obvious way to leverage the additional space would be to include keywords, just like you'd have done with standard text ads. And this is a completely viable strategy. But what happens when the corresponding keyword fits in a single pathway? Do you leave the other one empty?

No way. Empty space is opportunity wasted!

Instead, we suggest using any additional URL pathways to convey:

- Relevance, through tangentially related keywords
- Your brand, by including extra branded terms
- A secondary Call to Action
- Your USP

Think about which make the most sense in the context of the campaign and ad group in question.

Take a look at this ad for a top online coding bootcamp:

As you can see, they've chosen to double down on the keyword for which the ad is showing ("learn to code") in the first URL Pathway and hammer home their USP (the job guarantee) in the second URL Pathway. These subtle changes, though small, can work to improve your Quality Scores, lowering your average Cost per Click.

3. SPEAK TO AUDIENCES ON ALL DEVICES

It's no secret that audiences using mobile devices operate differently than their desktop counterparts. The exact same prospect searches one way on their computer at the office, and another way entirely standing in line or waiting for a train. And the unfortunate perception is that mobile searchers are less likely to complete, say, a form on a landing page; this makes them inherently less valuable to B2B advertisers, right?

Not necessarily!

That being said, some advertisers decide to skip mobile text ads entirely. Other use remarketing to advertise to mobile visitors later; following up with them when they return to a desktop environment or serving Gmail ads directly to their inboxes can both serve as excellent strategies. There are also plenty of mobile-specific ad formats available on other platforms, like Facebook.

Now, there are ways to advertise on mobile with PPC effectively. They just take a slight shift in strategy.

This might mean using call-only ads. Check out these two separate sales funnels, that show the impact call-only ads can make:

While call-only ads might represent great value, for some businesses they simply aren't a good fit. That's where mobile-specific text ads come in. Unfortunately, though, since Google removed the option to designate text ads as mobile-only in the ad creation UI, figuring out how to create and use mobile-only ETA's can be tricky.

But it isn't impossible.
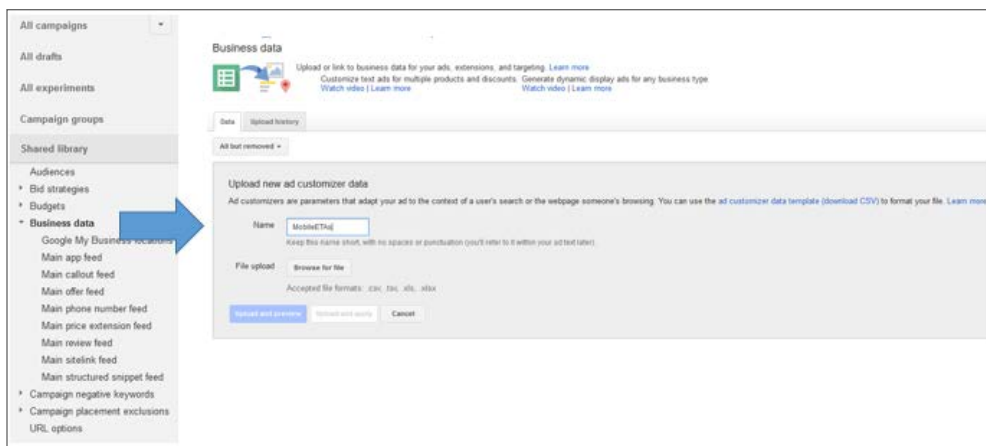
To create mobile-specific Expanded Text Ads, navigate over to the "Business Data" section of the Shared library. From there, you can upload a feed.

To create a feed, you're going to want to make a spreadsheet that references the necessary fields. To keep things simple, let's assume we want to alter the headline in one campaign so that it changes on mobile SERPS. To do this, you're going to name one column "Headline1," then reference the target campaign and ad group, respectively, followed by the device preference.

In the example above, we're changing the first headline ("Headline1") for ads served on mobile devices, so that the copy makes reference to the fact that a prospect can call for a free quote.

To push these customized ads live, simply open a bracket — just like you would if you were using DKI—type "=", then the name of the feed (in this case "MobileETAs") and the field that will change ("Headline1"), separating the two with a period.

· ·

Try to consolidate your target keyword, CTA, and either an emotional appeal or value proposition into your headlines so that prospects can quickly determine whether you might meet their needs. 🐦

· ·

In terms of copy for these ads, consider the techniques discussed in the first trick. Try to consolidate your target keyword, CTA, and either an emotional appeal or value proposition into your headlines so that prospects can quickly determine whether you might meet their needs.

Don't be afraid to advertise on mobile; instead of ignoring opportunity, optimize for it!

4. CONCLUDE YOUR TESTS

Ad testing always starts out with the best of intentions. You know you want to see a lift in CTR or conversion rate so you take a look at your current ads, gather some ideas on unique selling propositions, and write 1–2 new ads for every ad group. You go into your account, pause your lowest performing ad, upload the new ads and sit back and wait for the new and improved results to roll in.

Over the next few weeks, or even months, you check back, sometimes pausing an ad that is under-performing, but never really concluding your test. Over time, you realize that you have a few ad groups that have been running an "ad test" for 6 months. Sometimes it is longer.

This is not testing. This is missed opportunity.

A colleague once told me that the first thing he did to increase an account's performance was pause all ads in every ad group except the top performer. He did this because concluding the ad test is so often forgotten long after statistical significance is reached — the ads continue to run side-by-side, sharing at least a portion of the impressions, and wasting potential leads and/or sales.

This is especially important to keep in mind as you roll Expanded Text Ads out across your account. Obviously, with the new format comes a bit of a learning curve; this means more frequent split testing. One of the best ways to remember to conclude an ad copy test once statistical significance has been reached is to use labels at the ad level.

Label your Expanded Text ads with the date they are set live and then check performance incrementally; AdWords makes it simple to sort by label, so you can quickly compare performance and determine whether a test should be continued or concluded.

Label your Expanded Text ads with the date they are set live and then check performance incrementally. 🐦

Don't forget to eventually declare a winner so you can claim all those extra clicks and leads (and start testing something new)!

5. DON'T REPEAT YOURSELF

Beginner ad writers don't always know how to make the best of the limited space available in a PPC text ad. This was true with standard text ads, but it's even more apparent in the newer expanded format. 170 character is a ton of space, after all.

Here's what's available to you as an advertiser:

Field	Max Characters
Headline 1	30
Headline 2	30
Description	80
Path 1 (optional)	15
Path 2 (optional)	15

There's a trick to learning how to say what you need to say without berating your prospects: write like a human being, not a marketing machine. The extra space afforded by ETA's means you can lift some of the copy from your landing pages and text it in your ads. You can work keywords into complete thoughts instead of dropping them into a standard (often incoherent) ad template.

For example, don't feel obligated to put the name of your business in your ad's headline. Instead, use that valuable space to show relevance to the keyword you're bidding on. If that keyword is "web design," your headline might be "Expert Web Design." It's crucial that users see that keyword quickly if they're going to click. In addition, that show of relevancy contributes to a higher Quality Score. Your business name is less important to users than knowing what you can offer them. Similarly, don't simply repeat the keyword three or four times — make sure you're providing some additional information to help guide the user's decision.

Your business name is less important to users than knowing what you can offer them. 🐦

Too often, PPC marketers state the same information over and over again in a text ad in the name of improved Quality Scores. But guess what? Working your keywords into the headline and the URL Pathway is more than enough.

Use the rest of the available space to convey your unique solution to a prospect's problem and you'll have no problem standing out on the SERP.

6. USE ACTIVE VERBS

Strong verbs make for better story-telling, and they make for better ad copy too.

When writing your PPC ads, imagine that the search engine user is thinking "I want to.…"

When writing your PPC ads, imagine that the search engine user is thinking "I want to.…" It's your job to complete that sentence. 🐦

It's your job to complete that sentence. Ideally, you'll be able to do so in one of your ad's two headlines. If you can manage to address a problem in the first headline and provide a solution in the second, your description line is just gravy.

Take a look at this example from the WordStream account:

Fix Your Costly AdWords Errors - Use Our Simple & Free Tool
Ad wordstream.com/AdWords/PPC_Grader
Find Your AdWords Errors in 60 Seconds! Get More Clicks & Lower Your Costs.

In the first headline, the ad presents a problem ("costly AdWords errors") and the opportunity for a searcher to deal with it ("fix"). The second headline offers a solution to the problem (and uses the all-powerful F word, "free," for good measure). The description line, though chock full of value propositions (I count four), does little work outside of supporting the claims present in the headlines; this, too, begins with a verb.

By deploying action words alongside the other traits of a great, clickable text ad, your prospects can see themselves performing the desired action; what better way to

encourage clicking than making prospects (and not your product) the most important part of your copy.

7. TRY AN UNEXPECTED CALL TO ACTION

Making sure that you include a call to action — telling prospects what you want them to do — is a basic best practice that you should follow in all your ads. Frequently, though, advertisers resort to something like "Buy Now" to create urgency (also known as "asking for the sale"). While there are instances and industries where this may prove effective, in most cases "Buy Now" will cause your copy to blend in with everybody else's.

To combat SERP invisibility, try to use an unexpected call to action. Doing so can drive great results, especially if your goal is to generate leads rather than drive e-commerce sales directly.
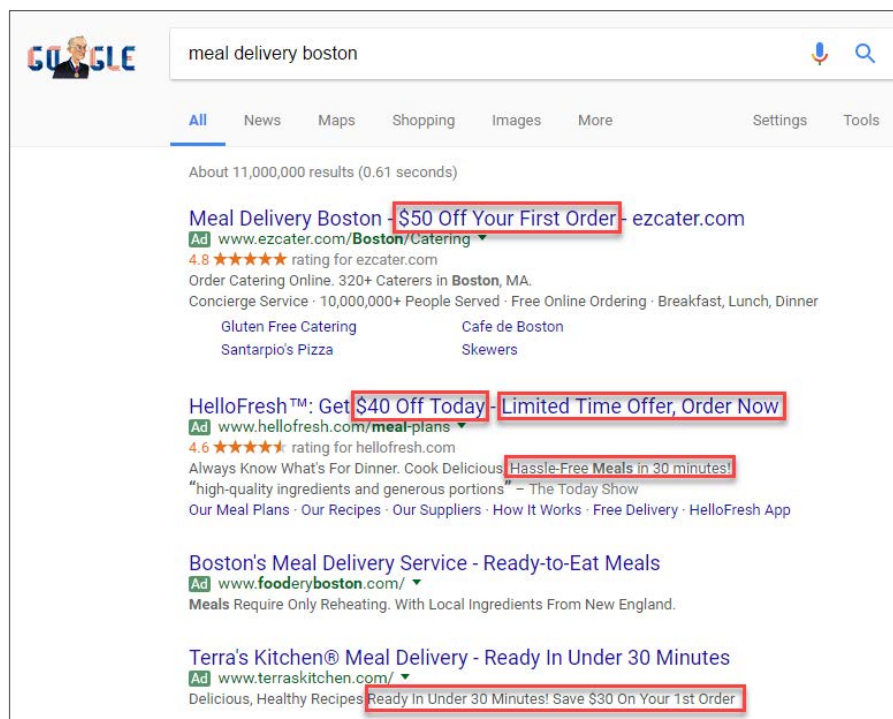
To jumpstart your unique-CTA brainstorming, here are a few approaches outside of the standard handful of strategies your competitors are leaning on:

- Tell prospects exactly how much money they can save by taking advantage of your offer. People notice dollar signs and percentages; if your competition is using vague copy, using numbers can be a powerful differentiator.

- Brag about a high-profile client or show off reviews and testimonials. While you can do this with review extensions, using notable consumers of your product in your copy is a great way to induce FOMO or create the sense that your product is proven.

- Offer some form of instant gratifications, such as live chat with an expert, a demo, or a complementary consultation.

- Make a bonus offer that falls outside of simply saying the word "free" somewhere in your copy.

And remember: Be. Original!

8. USE PROVOCATIVE LANGUAGE

When examining PPC ads that get high click-through rates, we often see patterns — for example, use of the word free, well-executed ad extensions, and particularly potent headlines all correlate to a higher-than-average CTR.

Another common trait of high-CTR text ads is provocative language. Being provocative is a way to grab people's attention. Obviously you don't want to go so far as to offend anyone, but a subtle challenge can get people interested.

Catch Cheating Husbands - Enter His Email Address
Ad spokeo.com/**Cheating-Husband**-Search ▾
3.5 ★★★★ ★ rating for spokeo.com
Find Pics & Profiles From 70+ Social Networks
...a perfect vehicle for users searching for someone – Daily News
Identify Unknown Numbers - Find Cheaters By Userame

Consider your prospects for a moment. They're people or businesses who are searching for new solutions to a specific problem because either a) it's new, b) they have some doubts about themselves, or C) their current solution just isn't working.

Remember the Feature-Benefit Matrix from the first tip? Break it out again. Think about how the features and benefits of your product or service solve specific problems faced by your prospects. Once you've generated some ideas, align them with the various

campaigns in your account and start testing new, provocative language against the copy you've been running.

....

Think about how the features and benefits of your product or service solve specific problems faced by your prospects. 🐦

....

To get you started, here are some examples of direct, provocative language you can work into your ad copy:

- Email Isn't Dead
- Your Credit Score Should Be Higher
- You Need This Software!
- Your Backup Process Is Wrong
- Your Doctor Isn't Good Enough
- Stop Wasting Time

The vast majority of PPC ads use dull, generic language, so giving your own ads some attitude and personality can go a long way toward increasing CTR.

9. RESPOND TO COMMON OBJECTIONS BEFORE THEY ARISE

Even if you're operating in a crowded market, oftentimes the choice between you and a competing business will come down to one of two objections:

1. **How much does it cost?**
2. **How much of a hassle will it be?**

Fortunately, you can preempt both of these common obstacles with a little forethought and some smart copy.

Take a look at these example ads for the search query "home insurance":
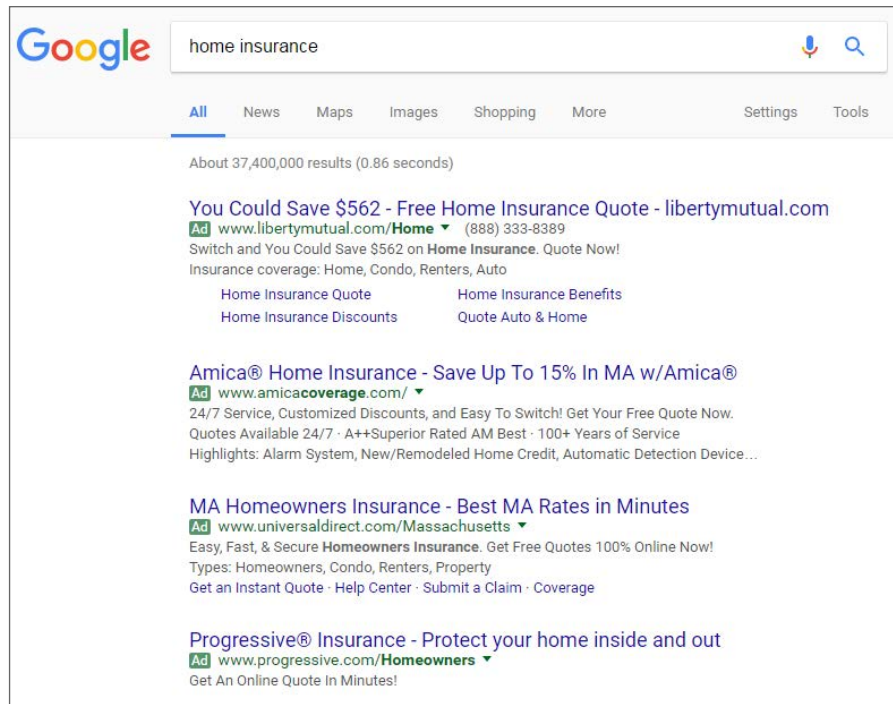
Obviously there are dozens of very large companies offering home insurance, and so differentiating yourself in this particular market could be pretty tricky. However, Liberty Mutual has done a pretty good job of making this ad compelling by addressing the first objection. While repeating the cost-savings in the first headline and the description might be a means of affirmation, ultimately this is space that could have been used to address the second common objection. Amica, on the other hand, addresses the potential savings (in the headline) and speaks to the fact that switching to their offering is easy (win!) and can happen any time ("Available 24/7").

Which offer is more compelling?

Personally, I think the answer is neither. But a hybrid of these two ads would be exceptional. By pairing the tangible dollar amount we see in the Liberty Mutual ad with the availability and ease evident in the Amica ad, we'd likely see a notable jump in CTR.

Don't let your prospects say no before they ever see what you can do for them: use your ad copy to say something compellingly clickable by brushing initial objections to the side!

10. INCLUDE EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS IN YOUR COPY

Nothing spurs people into action quite like a powerful emotional response — especially online. This principle is what makes clickbait so effective; people read something, experience a strong emotional reaction to it, and then click through. When combined with the rest of the strategies we've covered, this is one of the most powerful PPC ad copy techniques at your disposal.

The emotional responses you can try to provoke will depend on what you're offering and the desired effect you want this emotional reaction to have on your prospects. Negative emotions, such as anger, disgust, and fear can provoke an incredibly powerful response in the reader, but it can be a challenge to balance this reaction with the rest of your messaging — you don't want the negative emotional reaction to carry over into perceptions of your products or brand.

Similarly, positive emotional triggers, such as affirmation and humor, can be highly effective at prompting people to click on your ads — but they can be tricky to implement well due to the subjective nature of these emotions (especially in the case of humor).

But just how powerful can leveraging the power of human emotion in your ad copy be?

In a word: very.
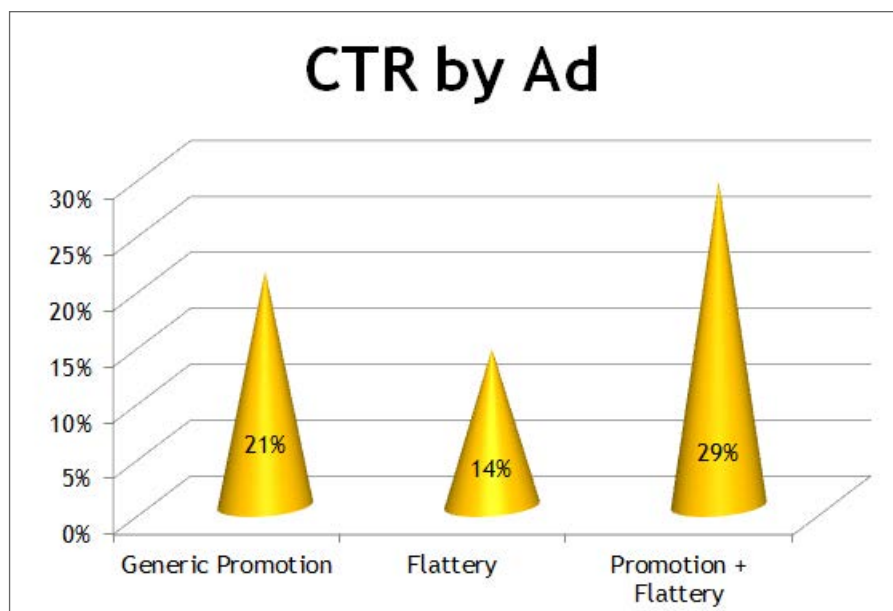
In a study conducted by one of our PPC Strategists, it was determined that ad copy that combined a promotion with some form of flattery improved CTR by 29%. Only including the promotion or the aspect of flattery alone didn't move the needle as much as combing the two!

· ·

Ad copy that combined a promotion with some form
of flattery improved CTR by 29%. 🐦

· ·

IN CONCLUSION

Your Expanded Text Ads are just one of many moving parts in the complex machine that is your PPC campaign — but they're an important component, so don't treat your ad copy like an afterthought. A combination of best practices and a little creative flair can lead to highly effective ads that drive qualified leads and a great return on your PPC investment.

And remember, you don't have to craft the perfect ad on the first try — craft your copy, test constantly, and watch your click-through rate and conversions go through the roof!

ABOUT WORDSTREAM

WordStream Inc. provides software and services that help marketers get the maximum results from their online marketing efforts. WordStream's easy-to-use software allows for more effective paid search and social campaigns with the 20-Minute Work Week, a customized workflow that guides marketers through steps that can greatly improve their AdWords, Bing, Yahoo, and Facebook campaigns, plus tools for call tracking, keyword optimization, and more. WordStream also offers an award-winning free PPC tool, the AdWords Performance Grader, which evaluates users' Google AdWords accounts and provides valuable tips for improvement. WordStream is a Google Premier Partner.