

Is First the Optimal SEM Brand Position? A Guide to Brand SEM Marketing

It's a common conversation across SEM marketing – do brand keywords always need to be in position one? If there is a strong organic presence, do we need to bid on brand keywords at all? A commonly held “best practice” of PPC marketing is that one should always appear in position one in any given brand search. However, there is also the opinion that if a user is searching for a specific brand, then it's safe to assume that their intent to visit the website of said brand is high enough that they will click any listing that leads directly to the site, whether it is at the top of the page, or whether it is paid or organic.

Why Bid On Brand?

We often discuss optimal brand strategy with clients, recommending a solid SEO strategy alongside a prominent PPC brand presence based on results we've seen across multiple clients and verticals. Recently, we tallied the data across a sample client to measure the relationship between Organic & PPC brand search position. Our sample client has two main features:

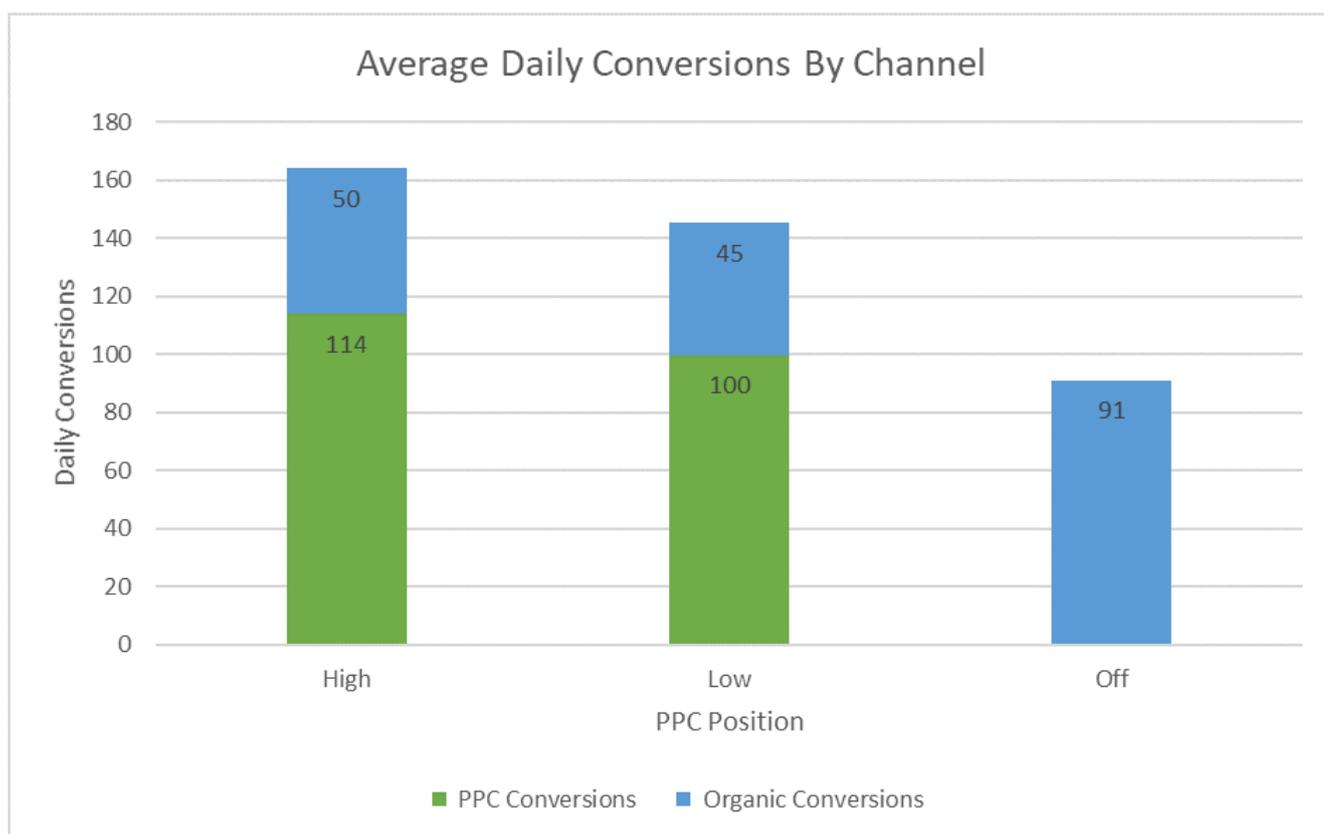
- There is high competition on pure brand terms (at least 2 other PPC competitors showing for Brand searches)
- They are an acquisition-focused client (lead generation)

High competition is an important factor, as it affects the options that a consumer is faced with when searching your brand, as well as the cost-per-click (CPC) you pay for each

visitor. Acquisition was a focus, as supposing that competitors were taking traffic from our brand queries as people researched the options in front of them, was this enough to significantly reduce conversion volume?

To ensure a fair comparison, organic traffic was only considered when the search query contained an exact brand term – no generics here. We defined three categories of PPC position and analysed the data by day over three months. The three PPC average position “categories” were:

- High (Position 1.0 – 1.49)
- Low (Position 1.5 – 2.19)
- Off (No PPC activity)



PPC, Organic, And Brand Competition

Two conclusions can be drawn from the data above;

- Brand PPC does cut into the total amount of Organic conversions; this is relative to the position of the PPC ad
- Appearing in Organic results alone does not make up the

deficit from removing PPC

Not only does attaining top position for Brand PPC ads lead to a higher volume of PPC conversions, but ensuring that the top position was not taken by a competitor actually has a slight positive flow-on effect for Organic!

So from this, can we conclude that appearing in the highest PPC position possible must be the best option? Well, not necessarily; we haven't yet factored the cost of appearing in position 1 into the equation.

The Price Paid For First Place

The below graph shows just how much difference in CPC & cost there is from dropping just a few average position decimal points:

When bidding to a "Low" position, overall conversion volume drops 11%, however, cost drops 58%. At this point, the decision to bid to a high or low position must align to the clients' objectives;

- Is ROI or pure volume the clients' primary goal?
- Is a brand lead worth the same amount as a prospecting lead – are new customers more valuable to the business, or is customer retention more important?
- Can the money saved be effectively reinvested into prospecting activity?
- Is it a quiet period for conversions, or is there high volume opportunity that shouldn't be missed?

Both a strong PPC & Organic presence are necessary for a comprehensive digital Brand marketing strategy when contending in a competitive market, however, due consideration should be given to how necessary it is to bid for the highest brand positioning based on the clients' individual needs and goals.

So with that being said, we'd encourage you to fully understand all aspects that we've discussed above, and where your specific brand may benefit from different paid positions. If you're not sure, get in contact with us – we'd love to help!