



Call Tracking For AdWords

A Case Study

Introduction

Online marketing has always had the advantage that the majority of interactions can be tracked.

When people click on an ad, complete a form on a website, or click on a link to email a business, these are all interactions that can be monitored online by various methods.

Improved online tracking allowed companies to monitor performance (and optimise) on a greater scale than ever before in order to identify how effectively their online presence was generating business for the company.

However, despite the ever increasing level of digital interaction among potential consumers, one critical action prompted by online marketing remained largely untrackable. Phone calls.

A phone number on a website is an indispensable inclusion for a number of reasons, but remained one form of contact that was, at best, difficult to track.

The rise of the smart phone phenomenon only increased the urgency of being able to track calls from online sources, as people became more likely to use the same device to carry out research, and to make contact with potential suppliers.

In the attempt to monitor marketing driven interaction with businesses on as many levels as possible, Call Tracking was developed in order to assist businesses in accurately identifying which marketing methods (both online and offline) were proving most effective in terms of generating leads.

Executive Summary

A limited case study investigating the prevalence of telephone contact resulting from AdWords advertising across a sample of Call Tracking clients making active use of online marketing to drive both B2B and B2C leads between January 2015 and end March 2015.

- 78% of the sample received 50% or more of their leads via telephone.
- 85% of the sample received 60% or more of their phone leads via AdWords.
- On average, 58% of all leads were received via phone.
- Calls accounted for 2.85 times more leads than form completions on average.
- 24% of AdWords inspired calls were made directly from the AdWords call extension with no click made.

The Challenge

In these cases, the challenge was two-fold.

First, to be able to attribute phone calls made as a result of AdWords advertising as an AdWords conversion, in order to correctly identify the total number of leads generated by AdWords, and not just the leads which could be tracked by traditional methods, such as a form completion.

Second, to identify the extent to which Call Extensions in AdWords could generate leads which did not rely on a click, and therefore were not technically considered as part of the usual AdWords reporting.

Using Call Tracking For AdWords

In order to determine the relative performance of various means of trackable contact options associated with AdWords advertising, it was necessary to set up and implement Call Tracking solutions which were integrated with client Analytics and AdWords accounts.

Call data is pushed to the Analytics account as events, triggering relevant goals which are imported into the AdWords account automatically.

AdWords attributes these calls to AdWords campaigns in the same way as a form completion is tracked, while in Analytics, it is possible to drill down to the keyword level and identify the search term a visitor used which triggered a call.

The ability to attribute phone leads at the keyword level allowed for a more effective optimisation process, enabling the evaluation of AdWords keywords to be made on the basis of all associated leads, rather than only form completions or emails.

The Importance Of Phone Leads

According to market research firm BIA Kelsey, in 2013 mobile search generated more than 25 billion inbound sales calls to US businesses.

In the same year, Google commissioned independent research firm Ipsos to carry out a similar study, which showed that 70% of mobile searchers called firms directly from the search results.

Our own data shows that this trend holds true in South Africa, albeit at slightly lower levels.

Study Data – Calls vs Forms vs Email

Over the course of the period in question, clients used in the sample for the Calls / Forms / Email comparison received the following:

Action	Total Number	% of Total Goals
Total Calls	904	57.58%
Total Form Completions	513	32.68%
Total Emails	153	9.74%
Total Goals	1570	

As can be seen from the above data, phone calls accounted for the majority of website leads by a significant margin.

Based on this it is easy to understand our contention that to optimise AdWords for email and form completion leads is to ignore as many as half (and often more) of the leads your AdWords campaign is actually generating.

Tracking calls for AdWords provides a far more comprehensive picture of the performance of your campaigns.

AdWords Call Extensions – Unexpected Benefits

The accumulation of Call Tracking data for AdWords accounts produced an unexpected result when analysing calls generated by AdWords.

Using a unique number in the AdWords call extension field demonstrated that a surprising proportion of leads are generated directly from the ad, with users dialling the call extension directly from the results page.

Intrigued, we provided a sample of clients with a Call Tracking number dedicated to their AdWords call extension.

Study Data – Calls vs Site Links

Using a separate sample of clients, we sought to determine the prevalence of users making calls directly from the SERPs, by way of the AdWords Call Extension.

This number, which can be displayed inside the ad, is visible to users without requiring a click, and therefore calls made to this number are not registered by AdWords except in the event of visitors using click to call, in which case only the click is registered, but not whether a call was actually completed.

From a sample of clients making use of the Call extension, between January and March 2015, we compiled the following data:

Action	Total Number	% of Adwords Calls
Total Calls	860	
AdWords Calls From Site	651	75.70%
Sitelinks Calls	209	24.30%

Based on this admittedly small sample, we are able to estimate that almost 25% of AdWords generated calls occur without a click being made on the ad.

This is effectively a free AdWords lead if it originates from desktop, which can be attributed as an AdWords conversion if desired. (On mobile search the call extension displays as a button, not as a visible number, so mobile clicks are registered and charged.)

Phone Calls And User Intent

Given that a phone call is generally considered a sign of more serious intent on behalf of the user, whereas emails for example are often information gathering enquiries, the ability to determine the number of calls your marketing generates (not only for AdWords, but for all marketing mediums and channels, online and offline), can be critical in making decisions around what forms of marketing, and even what marketing messages, should be employed.

If user intent makes a phone call a more valuable lead, then optimising your marketing based on inbound phone calls as well as more traditionally tracked conversions provides a far more detailed level of data around which to make marketing (and budgetary) choices.

AdWords Keyword Tracking

Although outside of the scope of this particular study, Call Tracking also offers the ability to refine campaign optimisation even further by tracking calls on the keyword level.

This allows agencies or advertisers to determine which *keywords* generate calls from users and optimise their campaigns accordingly. We have already found several instances where a keyword may not generate any form completions or emails, (which would suggest removing that keyword), but which does generate calls.

In Conclusion

Although of relatively limited duration and scope, this study nonetheless supports our conclusion that the volume of telephone leads generated by websites in general, and online marketing in particular, is such that to fail to take these leads into account when optimising advertising, and calculating ROI is a grievous error on the part of marketers.

It seems as though a significant percentage of people would rather phone a business than communicate via emails or on-site forms, and as such, inbound calls may contribute a previously unrealised (and unattributed) amount of value to any campaign.

We have seen that AdWords clients in the sample are receiving on average 2.85X more phone calls than form completions.

This trend seems particularly pronounced among B2B businesses, with the highest receiving 9.33X more calls than forms.

57.58% of all leads received by clients in the sample were phone leads, and the ability to break down this data in order to determine the campaigns, ad groups, and even individual keywords and matched search queries that generates the calls allows an unprecedented level of control over campaign optimisation.

As mentioned previously, the fact that more than half of AdWords leads are received via inbound calls means that optimising only on the basis of standard AdWords conversions results in ignoring at least 50% of actual conversions.