Angie’s List optimizes search bidding and lowers the cost per acquisition by up to 58% with Adobe Media Optimizer for Search

In 1995, Angie Hicks teamed up with Bill Oesterle to offer a new breed of customer review site, targeting trustworthy professional services. Specializing in local service providers, such as handymen, mechanics, and healthcare providers, Angie’s List stands apart from competing online sites by offering trustworthy ratings and reviews from registered members. The company prohibits anonymous reviews and employs a highly structured accountability process to help ensure reviews are as fair and reliable as possible. That means members can feel confident that they are being guided by the voices of real customers, just like them.

Bolstered by television and print advertising campaigns, Angie’s List has quickly established itself as one of the most well-known and respected names in recommendations and reviews across the United States. As part of its unified marketing efforts, the company’s digital marketing team also works to maintain strong search rankings when customers search for brand keywords such as the company name. At the same time, Angie’s List competes with other review sites and businesses for non-brand keywords to capture the attention of potential audiences.

“We know our core referral and review services stand out from the competition, but we also realize that an effective online search strategy is essential to our success,” says Brett Westerman, manager of search marketing at Angie’s List. To help boost membership and lower cost per acquisition (CPA), marketers at Angie’s List looked to improve paid search with best-in-class solutions. Having already achieved success with the Adobe Analytics and Adobe Target solutions within Adobe Marketing Cloud, Angie’s List turned to Adobe Media Optimizer for Search.
Using Adobe Media Optimizer for Search, Angie’s List is automating bid optimization to reduce CPA on thousands of keywords and eliminate the need for staff to manage campaigns manually.

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Brett Westerman, manager of search marketing, Angie’s List

Lower costs, higher conversions

Using Adobe Media Optimizer for Search, Angie’s List is working closely with Adobe to automatically optimize bidding on search keywords. The company’s paid search campaign uses tens of thousands of keywords to help customers connect with the Angie’s List brand. Previously, marketers optimized their spend through manual keyword bidding—a labor-intensive process that took up much of a marketer’s time.

By tapping into powerful algorithms in Adobe Media Optimizer for Search, Westerman and the digital marketing team can automatically analyze both spend and performance to calculate the optimum bid for keywords in thousands of ad groups. Unlike other search management solutions, Adobe Media Optimizer for Search optimizes campaigns on a portfolio basis, making thousands of complex calculations to determine the best way to allocate advertising spend. The result is that Angie’s List can uncover new opportunities for conversion and distribute limited search dollars as efficiently as possible.

For Angie’s List, the advantages are evident not only in decreased costs and increased conversion, but also in freeing staff to spend more time on higher-level campaign strategies. For instance, rather than spending time looking at numbers and changing bids, search marketers can focus more on driving long-term growth, optimizing campaigns or landing pages, and reaching new customers.

The bid simulation tool is a particularly helpful way for search marketers to look at trends and forecast future investments.

After optimizing bids for only one month, Angie’s List experienced significant improvements to both CPA and conversion rates. “Our overall CPA decreased by 35%, while our conversions increased by 11%,” says Westerman. Angie’s List also successfully shifted the focus of the portfolio to high-value conversion traffic, including seeing the number of registrations go up with a 25% lift to the conversion rate.

“We were surprised by the dramatic results with Adobe Media Optimizer, particularly for nonbranded keywords,” adds Westerman. “We managed to increase conversions while decreasing the costs of acquisition by 58%.” Inspired by the success after optimization, Angie’s List plans to expand on its nonbranded keyword portfolios by further analyzing which types of keywords perform strongly and using this information to add new keywords and combinations to its paid search campaign.

Leveraging integrated analysis and testing

Angie’s List enhances its Adobe Media Optimizer for Search implementation by integrating the solution with Adobe Analytics. Adobe Media Optimizer for Search pulls real-time conversion data directly from Adobe Analytics to instantly view performance and send back keyword information to enhance analysis. Adobe Analytics also helps clarify customer journeys through the website, enabling search marketers to determine where customers are coming from, where they stopped on the site during the signup process, and what other information they viewed before registering. With a clear view into how customers engage on the site, marketers can better guide visitors to conversion.
Adobe Analytics is also used alongside Adobe Target at Angie’s List to improve ongoing testing on the site’s many web pages. By testing digital images, written offers, call-to-action buttons, page layout, and other page elements, Angie’s List can provide customers with the best experience possible.

In particular, by optimizing landing pages, the digital marketing team is seeing that they can further increase conversion from keyword searches. In addition to A/B tests, Angie’s List is beginning to take advantage of more complex multivariate testing in Adobe Target, using the tests to sift through thousands of page content iterations to determine the best combination of on-screen elements.

The integrated Adobe Marketing Cloud solutions are empowering the company’s marketing team to drive further recognition of the Angie’s List brand and increase registrations. “By quantifying our marketing campaigns using Adobe Marketing Cloud, we’re becoming even smarter about allocating funds and how we’re communicating the returns to others throughout the company.”

Brett Westerman, manager of search marketing, Angie’s List

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