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The Season for Generous Management of Pay-Per-Click Campaigns

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From the peak of summer to the quieter days of autumn, any Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising campaign* will follow the flow of seasonal variations. Undoubtedly, the holiday season, spanning October through January, is one of the most demanding periods for online marketing and paid search management. But when non-profits carefully plan and control their PPC programs, this already prime time for fundraising benefits from a lofty boost in donations.

Below are recommendations to aid your organization's PPC efforts in making an impression, garnering clicks and receiving the donations it needs during the season of giving.

1. Generate new keywords early, and monitor them closely. Because the holidays can account for the bulk of a non-profit's annual donation tally, this time of year keywords should get the attention they deserve. Not only will you have to generate more keywords than usual, but competition for them will be stiffer since many will be more generic than usual. For example, many non-profits will bid on phrases like 'holiday donation,' and all kinds of organizations will drive up the cost for less-targeted keywords like 'unique gift.' Carefully track keywords for metrics such as click-through rate (CTR), cost, donation, and most importantly, cost per donated dollar. Reserve your budget for keywords that are converting well. You'll log significantly more hours on the management of your campaign than usual, but it's worth it. The funds so critical to your organization's mission are the payoff.

2. Segment out campaigns for cleaner metrics. Perhaps the greatest advantage of an online marketing campaign is its measurability. The data you glean from running the campaign will help you optimize it as it's running and will impact how you spend next year's marketing budget. Keep in mind that your PPC program might have more than one goal and therefore consist of multiple campaigns. For example, one campaign might be focused on acquiring donations and have creative that stresses the types of donations requested or how funds will be used, while another is implemented with brand visibility in mind and utilizes more generic keywords. By calculating metrics separately, you set meaningful benchmarks and facilitate daily donation comparisons in future campaigns.

3. Up that budget. Unless you have other seasonally-related or critical fundraisers throughout the year, reserve the vast bulk of your PPC-designated funds for the holiday season. Your audience is in the giving mood. On a daily basis, increase the budget for keywords that have proven successful in the past or on days you anticipate a lot of traffic. Refer to your website analytics as a guide to the busiest days, and see what terms visitors have been searching for in your site's search box data to help guide which keywords get the most allocated dollars. When working with a limited budget, you can use ad scheduling features to 'pause' your campaign on days or at times of day you know don't produce.

4. Warm up your messaging and creative. Infuse your PPC ad copy, including titles and calls-to-





action, with words that evoke compassion, and also consider tailoring the website or landing page where searchers will land upon clicking with a holiday theme. Even more importantly, the most user-friendly landing page will include clear information about your organization and the actual donation form, rather than having it buried within lower levels of navigation. Finally, matching your messaging and creative to other marketing collateral (such as your press releases, catalogs, brochures and direct mail pieces) makes for a cohesive campaign that potentially impresses your audience through more than one touchpoint.

5. It ain't over until...? Don't assume that New Year's Day will mark the end of the busy season. Plan for belated donations once everyone is back to their regular routines, and if your non-profit prefers a secularly sensitive approach to fundraising, consider a 'New Year's Resolution' campaign. Wait until February to do your holistic analysis of campaign results, so that you have a sense of how activity tapers through January.

Follow these tips, and find that managing a successful holiday PPC campaign can be your most rewarding activity of the year.

*For those unfamiliar with the term, Pay-Per-Click Advertising, also called paid search, is the search engine marketing tactic that requires companies to pay a fee every time someone clicks on a sponsored search result in a search engine, such as Google, Yahoo! or MSN. In other words, with the hopes of welcoming more visitors to its website, an organization pays for each click on any of its ads that appear on search engine results pages.

