



Staying a step ahead of
agency paid search trends



The paid search landscape is changing fast, and keeping current with its rapid evolution is an ongoing challenge for agencies of all sizes.

To help you keep pace, we spoke with digital agencies across the country about how they stay on top of best practices to boost program success, client satisfaction, and overall agency success.¹



Best practices for innovating with paid search

Embrace campaign automation

Forward-looking agencies are actively taking advantage of automation. Specifically, they are differentiating themselves by using it strategically, including to:

- ✓ Manage and boost activity during clients' seasonal peaks and promotional events.
- ✓ Set bids in real time that deliver maximum clicks, conversions, or other results within a set budget.
- ✓ Create or buy add-on automation "scripts" to automate even more of the tasks the agency would have handled manually.

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“We’re going to see continued adoption of shopping campaigns and automation ... clients will continue to rely on their agency for analysis, strategy and reporting.”

Large, full-service agency based in Maryland²

Keep pace with privacy regulations

With GDPR serving as an indication of future limitations on data tracking, top agencies are preparing for a reduction in the use of remarketing. They also recognize that with increased privacy, less relevant ads may be delivered to prospects. As a result, proactive agencies are:

- ✓ Starting conversations with clients to prepare them for changes.
- ✓ Working to understand clients' customer journeys and touchpoints to support more nuanced targeting.
- ✓ Building skills to help clients improve the precision of their ad copy.



Rely on artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML)

AI and ML automate many of the repetitive tasks search teams used to complete manually. Savvy agencies are embracing AI and ML to work more strategically. For example, they are:

- ✓ Analyzing campaign results to find ways to make them more cost effective.
- ✓ Assisting with client-side refinements to landing pages and other assets to boost engagement and close sales.
- ✓ Taking part in paid search services' beta programs to test new features and capabilities.

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“Our reps loop us in on beta programs, and if we want to test something, 75% of our clients are eager to try it. They turn to us to put their budget toward new and innovative opportunities.”

Large, full-service agency with offices in Pittsburgh, Chicago, Miami, and Boston

Test Responsive Search Ads (RSAs)

With RSAs, the best message is served to different searchers depending on the search terms and device they use, as well as their past browsing behavior. As with any new paid search tool, agencies are testing the RSA waters to find the best results. The steps they are taking include:

- ✓ Creating more unique headlines and descriptions than the minimum required to maximize testing insights.
- ✓ Analyzing the performance of unique offers, calls to action, and benefit statements.
- ✓ Using ad engine tools such as the Microsoft Advertising ad strength widget to generate recommendations for creating better ads.



“We are learning to work with it and not against it. It’s some trial and error during this learning phase.”

Small, digital agency based in Texas³

Use V-commerce

Voice search is growing in popularity, especially for paid search advertisers who want to drive foot traffic to brick-and-mortar locations. Because voice searchers typically use more words than someone typing a query, agencies are focusing on long-tail keywords. Other strategies they're using to boost performance include:

- ✓ Using more-natural language to mimic how people talk.
- ✓ Deploying for geographically targeted campaigns, since much v-commerce is local.
- ✓ Analyzing searcher profiles along factors like age and setting (home, car, etc.) to see how they affect what people are looking for.



Three ways to bring more expertise to your paid search clients

Your agency's paid search services are only as strong as your weakest link. Use this peer agency advice to share information across your team and improve the quality of every client touchpoint in the agency.

Organize by expertise

Pair each team member's know-how with an area of innovation. Task them to stay up to date on the latest headlines and share highlights across the team.

"We go to work as a team for our clients and pair what we know with best practices. This has got to be a team effort. No one has enough time to keep up with everything."

Large, full-service agency with offices in Denver and San Diego

Focus on industries

Some agencies make client site visits, going to their restaurants, stores, and offices to gather insight into their vertical industry challenges. Other agencies invest effort in finding go-to experts to work with at key junctures.

“Whoever in our agency has prior industry experience is brought into onboarding, even if they are not going to be on the account every day. This helps us understand seasonality needs particularly.”

Large, full-service agency with offices in Pittsburgh, Chicago, Miami, and Boston

Keep an eye trained on reliable information sources

Partner portals, account representatives, and user conferences are great places to learn about the latest strategies for using new features and tools effectively. High-quality, search-related podcasts and blogs can also help.

“We have dedicated account representatives at paid search services, and sometimes we talk to them hourly. They are on our chat systems. They tell us what they are seeing and loop us in on beta programs.”

Large, full-service agency with offices in Pittsburgh, Chicago, Miami, and Boston

Tools for search insights

Staying up to date on new search-related tools and emerging features is critical to proactive account management. Put these offerings to work for your agency and clients.

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“The search environment fluctuates. If conversions are down, we look at the competition tab to see competitive metrics. It’s very useful. It allows me to tell clients why their ads aren’t performing and backs up our recommendations. For example, if competition is increasing, they may need to increase their budget or optimize for another word.”

Large, full-service agency based in Dallas



Microsoft Advertising competition tab

This tool offers insight into competitors' ad performance and advice for adjusting campaigns to do better. It has two helpful features:

✓ AUCTION INSIGHTS

Auction Insights helps you evaluate how well your ads are performing compared to other advertisers in your auctions. You can see how often your ad gets served compared to competitors, how often your ads overlap, and which position each of your ads appears in. Slice and dice this information for a fresh view into your results. For example, you might discover that other advertisers are targeting a different type or size of customer, which means you can boost performance by adjusting your targeting or updating your ad copy.

✓ RECOMMENDATIONS

Microsoft Advertising competition does legwork for you by using Auction Insights data to recommend ways to improve campaign results. It can suggest new keywords, geographic targeting, and bid adjusting strategies. It also shows how specific actions might affect results.



Keyword planner

This free Microsoft Advertising tool uses historical trends and competition insights to help you choose keywords and evaluate costs. Describe your offering, or enter your URL to get keyword suggestions, and then experiment with bid levels, budgets, and geographic targeting. When you find the right balance between cost and results, save it to an existing or new campaign.



Experiments

This A/B testing feature helps you evaluate campaign performance across different ad campaign settings. For example, you can compare how your campaign would perform if you shift a 24-hour ad schedule to a 9 a.m.–5 p.m. window. Based on test results, you can apply the new settings to the campaign you're testing or use them to create a new campaign.



Microsoft Shopping Campaigns

As the new place for product ads, Shopping Campaigns give you more control. You can prioritize campaigns, add custom labels, and organize products to drive sales. New features include a flyer carousel that encourages clicks; local inventory ads that link online efforts to brick-and-mortar sales; and improved processes for managing bidding, ad processing, and campaign refinement.



Microsoft Advertising. Intelligent connections.

1. 200 ad spend decision makers at U.S. search agencies with 500 or fewer employees interviewed between August 27 and September 4, 2019, and one-on-one phone interviews with fast-growing search agencies from January - March 2020. 2. Large companies have 75 or more employees. 3. Small companies have 1-20 employees.

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