How Google Ads' new keyword selection preferences work

With last week's announcement that it will extend same-meaning close variants to phrase match and broad match modifier, Google said it would be changing keyword selection preferences to help prevent keywords from competing against each other. This doesn't mean there still aren't times when keywords compete with each other on Ad Rank. To clarify how Google Ads' keyword selection preferences are designed to work with same meaning keywords, we've mapped out several scenarios.

Existing preferences trump new same-meaning matching. In the initial announcement, Google said of the changes to keyword selection preferences: "If a query currently matches to an exact, phrase, or broad match modifier keyword that exists in your account, we'll prevent that query from matching to a different phrase or broad match modifier keyword that's now eligible for the same auction as a result of this update."

In other words, Google won't suddenly pick a different phrase or BMM keyword deemed to have the same meaning as a keyword that's already triggering on a query. This is how the preferences already work for exact match same-meaning close variants.

The example Google gives is that the query *lawn mowing service near me* will continue matching to the phrase match keyword "lawn mowing service" even though another keyword in your account, "grass cutting service," could also now match to that query based on same-meaning matching.

Same-meaning exact match keywords. The example above is how the preferences already work for exact match same-meaning close variants. Within exact match, the keywords that are closest to the query generally take precedence over the other

eligible exact match keywords. This has not changed.

For example, the query *grass cutting services* should trigger the exact match [grass cutting services] not [lawn mowing services] if both are active in an account, regardless of Ad Rank.

New keywords with the same meaning as existing keywords. What happens when you add new keywords to your account that may match more closely to queries than your existing keywords?

For example, if the phrase match keyword "lawn mowing service" is matching the query *grass cutting service near me* in your account and then you add two keywords, "grass cutting service" and +grass +cutting.

They all have the same meaning, but the new keywords are closer word matches to the query than the original keyword. They will prevent "lawn mowing service" from triggering on related *grass cutting* queries.

However, the two new keywords will compete against each other on Ad Rank to determine which triggers the ad.

In other words, the previous matching preferences will take precedence over same-meaning matching.

[Ad Rank is a calculation of max CPC, quality score (expected CTR, ad relevance, landing page experience), the expected impact of ad extensions and ad formats as well as other contextual factors like location and device. It determines if your ad is eligible to show and where it appears on the page relative to other ads.]

Adding a phrase match or BMM of an existing exact match. Let's say we have the exact match [lawn mowing service] in our account. Because of same-meaning close variant matching, it triggers on the query *grass cutting service*. If you add the phrase match "lawn mowing service," will it compete with the

exact match?

Again, it shouldn't. The exact match and it's close variants will take precedence because the new phrase match would only eligible based on the new preferences (i.e. same-meaning). Again, the previous matching preferences will supersede the new same-meaning matching for phrase match and BMM.

Adding an exact match of an existing phrase match or BMM keyword. This is the inverse of the previous scenario. If I have the phrase match "grass cutting services" in my account already and add the exact match [grass cutting services], will the exact match trigger for the query *grass cutting services*. Will it compete against the phrase match?

Since the query is an identical match for the exact match keyword, the exact will be preferred. However, *if the keywords are in different ad groups*, and the phrase keyword has a lower bid and higher Ad Rank, it can be used instead.

Caveats to note. Keep in mind, these systems aren't perfect, particularly when it comes to nuances. Don't expect your idea of "same meaning" and the system's to always align. Have a routine for monitoring your search terms reports and adding negative keywords.

These factors can also cause same-meaning matching to kick in when it otherwise wouldn't:

- **Match types in separate ad groups.** Given that match type variations of keywords in different ad groups will compete on Ad Rank, that's something to keep an eye on and consider grouping under one ad group for eaiser management.
- **Paused keywords.** All of the scenarios above assume the keywords are enabled. If you pause a keyword in your account, it becomes invisible to the auction system and won't be included in the keyword selection process. To the system, it's as if it's no longer in your account at

all. This means if you pause a keyword the other same-meaning keywords in your account could now trigger on the queries the paused keyword had matched to. For example, pausing “lawn mowing services,” will shift *lawn mowing services near me* queries to trigger “grass cutting services.”

- **Limited budgets.** Limited budgets can throw a wrench in your matching. Google says, “While we do our best to match existing traffic to your keywords, there may be infrequent instances where this will not be the case. For example, if a campaign is budget constrained it may not be eligible to show on all queries.

About The Author

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