Take a peek into PPC routines during Cyber Five week

The so-called Cyber Five days – Thanksgiving to Cyber Monday – are nearly upon us. In a year unlike any other, we wondered what marketers have planned for their PPC routines this week through Cyber Monday.

What will paid search and paid social marketers be looking for, monitoring, launching, adjusting this week? What have they learned from past years about how to manage their time and successful campaigns? Are they planning to do anything differently this year? Here's what we heard.

Not everyone will be trying to manage multiple holiday promotions. "I don't have many clients that are doing significant discounting this year, so my routine will be the opposite of most people," said paid media consultant Pamela Lund. "I'll be monitoring conversion rate and CPA daily and reducing spend or pausing campaigns altogether if we see a decline in performance while people are deal-seeking. Other than that, my schedule isn't changing much this week."

Lund says her clients do MAP pricing and have resellers that they allow to discount, "so there's no market reasons that they aren't discounting." For other brands, the pandemic has changed their approach to sales this holiday.

Feeling the effects of supply chain disruption

Shipping and warehouse challenges have led many retailers to start holiday promotions earlier than in past years. Many Black Friday sales are now well underway, which means holiday management routines have kicked in, too.

“Most of our retailers have pulled promotions forward to help with constraints on distribution centers, so we pulled all of our holiday monitoring forward to start last week. This includes our hourly campaign capping reports, promo messaging, and competitive monitoring cycles,” said Keri Boerner, associate SEM director at digital agency PMG.

“The biggest difference this year is brands launching promos earlier than last year or in years past. We used to launch on Thursday/Black Friday and now this year some brands we work with launched Sunday or Monday,” said Duane Brown, founder of performance agency Take Some Risk. “We are in the accounts and looking at sales, revenue and performance. How is our targeting going, can we spend more money on X, etc?”

Ongoing supply chain challenges from the pandemic mean there is less inventory to sell this season and more stock-outs are expected. “Some clients are not doing any BFCM sales and we support that move,” said Brown.

For those brands, there may not be daily flash sale campaigns to manage this week, but there are other considerations.

“Due to COVID this year, stock is definitely a piece we will be monitoring more closely,” said Shannon Cross, senior manager of eCommerce at Nestlé Purina North America. “We’re also focusing solely on larger pack sizes to ensure higher returns [on investment] and catering to the stock-up behaviours of consumers.”

Cross’ attention will largely be on Purina’s Amazon search campaigns this year. “Our focus this week and going into Cyber Five will be Amazon search. We are glued to our screens monitoring stock status for both our products as well as competitors, monitoring CPCs for priority keywords, ROAS above 100% and share of search to ensure we are the dominant share of voice in our category. We will be busy making agile adjustments, swapping ASINs in and out throughout the weekend

as competition and stock status changes.”

For the company’s Google search campaigns, said Cross, “I don’t anticipate needing to make too many adjustments to our strategy, however we will be monitoring CPCs, impression share and top performing brand campaigns.”

Ready for the payoff after weeks of audience build up

“Our strategy was to build reach in the weeks leading up to the sales to maximize the audience that we can address with the sale message directly: broadening audiences in display, social and search, spending more on DABA [Facebook Dynamic Ads for Broad Audiences], discovery and video formats, and allowing for a lower ROAS on search and shopping campaigns,” said Nathalie Bojkow, global team head performance marketing for shoe brand PUMA SE. (Bojkow will be speaking on “Aligning Brand And Performance For Full Funnel Success” at SMX on Dec. 9.) The team also launched “lead gen campaigns for early sale access to provide additional direct reach for direct targeting, as well as similar audiences and lookalikes.”

“Now with the sales going on,” said Bojkow, “we are able to make up for the ROI impact of the previous weeks and for higher CPCs by prioritizing our spend by audiences first, tightening and accelerating our retargeting cycles. Optimization routines focus on audiences as well, budgets are monitored more closely and we also need to keep an extra eye on stock levels and adjust spend dynamically as options sell out at a very fast rate.”

Ad features, alerts, bidding prep

are done

Early preparation for successful Cyber Five search campaigns is detail-oriented. That includes having “everything needed to set up automated rules, Shopping promotions, Promotion extensions, ads with dedicated landing pages set to go live, etc. before this week even gets here,” said Kirk Williams, founder of search agency ZATO Marketing.

Earlier this year, Google rolled out more badges and annotations for curbside pickup and in-store availability. “Depending on client availability, we ensured that all relevant badges and call outs were applied to our campaigns,” said Keri Boerner. The team also launched more dynamic search ad (DSA) campaigns ahead of this week “due to the increase in variation of searches and decreased visibility of search queries that could limit our ability to mine keywords,” and more clients are using auction-time bidding solutions this year than last.

Additionally, Boerner said, some client brands “have also focused on diversifying inventory through partnerships such as Narrativ and Yelp to expand search footprints and efficiencies into additional avenues.” That means the teams are managing more channels, making clear processes even more important.

Accounting for last-minute scrambles and problem solving

When all the prep is done, “this week is preserved for the inevitable changes or last-minute troubleshooting, and you really do magically have the time for those things without overworking yourself,” said Williams. “Overall, we have found with earlier preparation, creating space, and focusing on only what actually needs to be done, this week is one filled with excitement and not unnecessary stress.”

It seems no matter how early you try to prep, marketers who are running display and paid social campaigns face the perennial challenge of getting last-minute ad creative set up and approved.

Monday and Tuesday “are really making sure everything is ready/scheduled as a lot of our clients haven’t launched yet, so it’s hectic briefing and reviewing final creative and copy and building out the campaigns, which is a lot more work than I think clients realize (or they wouldn’t send creative at the last minute!),” said Gil David, founder of Run DMG, an agency specializing in Facebook advertising. “Then as every sale launches it’s like sending your kids off for their first day at school.”

“The key really is that for our accounts running bigger sales, the prep actually started months ago and now is where we reap the benefits of investing in building large warm audiences in Q3 and early Q4. So it’s very satisfying seeing that pay off,” said David.

Be flexible, have back up plans

The build up to this point has often been months in the making, but we know about the best laid plans. One of the key lessons David said he has learned from prior years “is the need to be flexible and adapt quickly to performance, no matter how much you predict and plan, things won’t always go that way and you have to roll with it,” he said.

Not every Facebook Ads promotion catches on or performs as you anticipate. “And although most sales start off hot, even if they don’t you shouldn’t panic,” said David. “Try to see why it’s not going as expected, and we always make sure we have backup copy/creative/strategy ready to go. Plus if ads start burning out in retargeting you need to be quicker to act than you would do in ‘regular’ times.”

“If sale campaigns do start hot, we’ll usually let them run for half a day at least before touching them, then if performance holds we will start scaling budgets to really try and max the BFCM opportunity out,” David said. “For us, this means checking in every 3-4 hours and kicking budget up by anywhere from 20-50% multiple times a day (or down a little if performance is dropping off). Automating this to some extent using rules and especially to cut unprofitable ads takes some of the weight off our shoulders and means I can sleep a little easier! This is where it’s really important to have set clear goals with clients for what success looks like and what kind of returns we should either be scaling or bailing at, not forgetting to factor in delayed attribution which is worse this time of year than any other.”

Create breathing room for yourself

This is a busy week for many marketers, but it doesn’t have to be chaotic. “For many of us working in e-commerce or with DTC brands, this is the single biggest week of the year in revenue as well as workload,” said Kirk Williams, founder of paid search agency ZATO Marketing. “However, over the years I have learned that it doesn’t have to be exhausting, even though it is still a lot of work. The key is to (1) create space, (2) invest your time wisely, and (3) for next year, prepare even better in previous weeks.”

Williams said he and his team have been able to create space in their schedules this week “by moving our normal optimization procedures to the weeks before and after. We, of course, will still make any decisions ad hoc as needed, but we’re holding off on most ad testing, large bid adjustments, audience experiments, etc. for these four days (the fifth being a holiday that we do, actually, take off as a team). We also block out this week from non-emergency scheduled meetings, and limit our own internal meetings. It is surprising how much these things take up in a work-week, and

what you will find is that removing these suddenly frees you up with hours you weren't aware you needed. This creates space, for the inevitable last minute Black Friday requests, disapprovals, ad changes, etc. that are sure to occur."

This allows them to spend time on the critical tasks of the week and be able to spot and react quickly to problems. "When a client promotion has an issue on the website which suddenly causes a Shopping Promotion to become disapproved, we now have the space to focus our time on getting that back up and running instead of now having to choose between this non-urgent meeting and that sale," said Williams. "Too often in agencies, that looks like the employee having to do both and then making that time up by working later and longer hours over this week."

A sample daily PPC routine

At PMG, over the next few days, the search and social teams will be "focusing on agility and identifying trends that have shifted from our forecasts. This includes responding to shifts in search volume, reforecasting and reporting updates for clients, and working to capitalize on opportunities as they arise throughout the week," said Boerner. They'll be relying heavily on the agency's internal automated solution, called Alli, for a streamlined alerting process to help teams prioritize issues as they arise.

The daily routine at PMG this week will look something like this:

- Team members are logging on in the mornings and updating trackers, checking alerts for any concerning areas and updating team members as needed via Slack.
- All teams have a morning stand-up to discuss any shifts/priorities for the day and align for any updates that need to be made.
- QAing creative changes that are scheduled and making any

necessary changes for changes in promotion strategy from clients.
- Afternoon pacing checks to ensure effective pacing to daily budget flights, making necessary bid changes and checking on competition.
- The rest of the day is spent monitoring alerts and responding to any client questions that come up outside of the daily updates provided in the mornings.

“We are working with clients to increase fluidity of budgets between November and December due to the holiday timing and the strong performance that we are seeing going into this week,” said Boerner. “We anticipate that performance will drop off more dramatically later in December and are working to maximize coverage for early shoppers.”

Looking ahead

This week, keep notes of how processes are working, how communication flows, problems that arise, hours worked and other thoughts that come to mind. This will help you capture the moments when it’s time to reflect and plan for improvements next year. Should you start earlier? Should you consider diversifying to more channels? What else can be automated? Was your reporting efficient and useful? Did you “create space,” as Williams suggests, to be able to respond to changes and issues effectively?

Good luck this week and may you have many happy returns on investment.

About The Author

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