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## Google AdWords advertising in higher education marketing

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## GOOGLE ADWORDS ADVERTISING IN HIGHER EDUCATION MARKETING

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### Introduction

Technological advancement has caused us to take for granted the changes that only a dozen or so years ago seemed truly revolutionary. Ways of seeking business partners, products and services or even searching for opinion in the purely social dimension have all undergone a profound transformation. Practically anyone looking for, say, a toy for their child or a new stationery supplier for their business first sits in front of a computer. The very first action is to use Google or any other search engine. Thanks to computer technology we now have a range of possibilities at our disposal to find the information we need: communicators, e-mail, chat services, social networking sites. By using these it is now possible to run extensive and detailed research concerning any subject.

This “silent” revolution consists in customer attention being drawn to companies which do not have huge budgets at their disposal and do not attract clients by means of TV commercials or large-scale outdoor ads such as billboards. Instead, companies which draw customer attention are those which offer interesting content in the Internet. Today, an attractive form of presence in the net is of key importance for every business.<sup>1</sup>

The forms of communication mentioned above need an active approach to searching information. Inbound marketing tools were developed in response to this need. Inbound marketing is a form of incoming active marketing with a global reach whose tools are available regardless of any social, cultural or economic constraints.

As opposed to outbound marketing – a traditional form of communication based on sort of pushing the information out in the form of an advertising message targeting a potential buyer, inbound marketing undertakes such activities in the net that allow potential clients to locate the searched contents by themselves. By following the contents they are interested in, potential clients are led to the message sender. Inbound marketing makes use of the elements of Internet marketing which serve to entice clients inside the zone of marketing operations. Inbound marketing departs from the belief that the effectiveness of marketing activities is determined by financial resources.

<sup>1</sup> W. Świeczak, *Inbound marketing jako forma marketingu internetowego*, [in:] *Marketing instytucji naukowych i badawczych część 2*, ed. W. Wiśniowski, Wydawnictwa Naukowe Instytutu Lotnictwa, Warszawa 2012, p. 187.

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Anyone who has something to say or offer may reach out to other people, including prospective buyers, via the Internet.<sup>2</sup> The already mentioned silent revolution is freeing us from the tyranny of a system which forces us to disturb the daily life of other people in order to sell them something. Instead of earning client attention by means of expensive advertising campaigns, attractive and useful content may be placed in the Internet and subsequently presented in detail to viewers who are interested in it. What's more, those interested may be targeted directly and if we tell our story right, other people willing to do business with us will surely find us themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Inbound marketing is actually an art of being findable in the net through active presence on the web pages that are every day visited by hundred millions of users searching information they need. The rapid growth of the Internet practically inundates with information. This situation creates certain problems as it might be hard to find the content we are looking for in the deluge of other information. That is why the power of traditional forms of advertising is waning. Every day the client becomes immersed in a mass of information about products and services, a vast majority of which he does not need at all. Yet another piece of obtrusive advertising is bound to trigger a defence mechanism: "they want to sell something to me again". Clients don't like being sold things to, but they love buying. It is a pleasure to make your own shopping decisions. Our marketing operations should keep up with the spirit of the times and today is the time of the Internet.<sup>4</sup>

According to one definition internet marketing is "conducting marketing activities via the world net"<sup>5</sup> The Internet is perceived as a new marketing tool, which complements rather than replaces traditional solutions. The main advantage of internet marketing is the possibility to address marketing activities to target clients or groups of clients.<sup>6</sup>

Given easy access to data, no geographical constraints and unlimited information resources offered by the Internet it should be expected that both popularity and use of this tool for information and promotion purposes will continue to grow. For communication purposes, the Internet can be used in the following forms:<sup>7</sup>

- websites,
- direct communication via e-mail,
- monitoring of the internet content to keep abreast with new developments in the subject of interest,
- as a tool for promotion and information activity meaning direct access to target groups.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 188.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 188-189.

<sup>5</sup> E. Frąckiewicz, *Marketing internetowy*, Wydawnictwo naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> J. Nogiej, *Szkoły wyższe wobec wyzwań marketingu internetowego*, [in:] *Marketing w szkole wyższej, Przemiany w orientacji marketingowej*, red. G. Nowaczyk, D. Sobolewski, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Bankowej, Poznań 2011, p. 309 - 310.

<sup>7</sup> S. Jarosławska-Sobór, *Rola strategii informacyjnej w programie promocji jednostki naukowej. Zmiana formuły funkcjonowania PR – doświadczenia praktyczne Głównego Instytutu Górniczo-energetycznego*, [in:] *Marketing Instytucji Naukowych i Badawczych, Prace Instytutu Lotnictwa nr 208*, Wydawnictwa Naukowe Instytutu Lotnictwa, Warszawa 2010, p. 66.

An example of a tool for promotion and information activity is Google AdWords. This is an advertising system developed by Google which places ads in the area of the Google search results as well as on web pages associated with Google within the partner network.<sup>8</sup>

This paper sets out to give a detailed presentation of Google AdWords in promotion of very specific products, i.e. educational services offered by universities. As other types of services, educational services have the following features: intangibility, diversity, inseparability and impermanence.

Intangibility means that education services are not typically connected with producing material goods. They cannot be touched, seen or tasted prior to the purchase.

Diversity means that education services are nonstandard, varied and not uniform. When making material products we are able to maintain a given product standard. In the case of services it is much more difficult, often due to lack of objective criteria. Quality is not always consistent with the existing standards and very often does not measure up to the expectations of young people about to embark on university degrees.

Inseparability means that in the client's mind it is impossible to separate the service provider from the service provided. To obtain a university degree, one needs to choose a university. If for some students the level of teaching turns out to be too high and, consequently, they don't finish studies, obviously they will be disappointed with the service provided. The service is bound to be evaluated through the prism of the university that offers it.

The very act of service provision is synonymous with service consumption. Impermanence means that services, as opposed to products, cannot be stored.

## Marketing of universities

In response to changes occurring in their environment, higher education institutions have begun to implement a market approach to education. Universities are facing up to challenges posed by marketing and have started to actively use marketing tools. Higher education marketing has begun to be understood as discovering and satisfying the educational needs, wants and expectations of students through offering degree courses and other forms of education.<sup>9</sup> Besides traditional marketing tools, universities have begun to reach for nonstandard measures meaning first and foremost the possibilities offered by the Internet. The Internet is a natural environment of young people, who are potential students. By using this communication channel universities hope for a more effective way of reaching out to the target group.<sup>10</sup> It is also important to note that higher education advertising activity is seasonal because connected with periodical recruitment actions. Consequently, the peak of promotion activity comes during the recruitment period when universities compete with one another in trying to attract candidates.<sup>11</sup>

8 M. Gąsiewski, *Kurs Google AdWords – materiał szkoleniowy niepublikowany*, p. 8.

9 A. Pabian, *Marketing szkoły wyższej*, Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, Warszawa 2005, p. 25.

10 J. Nogieć, *Szkoły wyższe...*, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

11 A. Janiga, K. Barcińska, *Reklama szkoły wyższej*, [in:] *Marketing szkół wyższych*, ed. G. Nowaczyk, M. Kolański, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Bankowej, Poznań 2004, p. 303.

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## The advertising campaign of a university

The preparation of any advertising campaign consists of several stages one needs to become familiar with in order to run an effective advertising campaign. The subsequent part of this paper will outline the most important phases of an advertising campaign in the higher education context.

The first stage of any advertising campaign is setting its goals. Goals should be clearly defined and measurable so that it is possible to say whether they have been reached or not. Goals are usually defined at three levels:<sup>12</sup>

**Marketing objectives** – e.g. launching a new service. It should be noted that the goal formulated as “raising recruitment levels” is not clearly defined unless specific numbers are given.

**Advertising objectives** – they result from marketing goals, e.g. informing 1 000 people about the promotion or raising brand awareness by 15 %.

**Media objectives** – they result from advertising goals, e.g. building up a given level of exposure to an advertisement.

All goals must logically follow from one another. Marketing goals determine advertising goals and these in turn dictate the media objectives.<sup>13</sup>

In the initial phase of planning an advertising campaign it is necessary to define its target group. The target group to which advertising message is going to be directed needs to be described as precisely as possible. The easiest way to characterise a target group is by identifying common social and demographic features such as age, education background or a place of living while behavioral traits are more difficult to describe. It is important to remember that a university directs its message to a number of groups depending on an educational service it offers. The target groups of undergraduate or graduate studies differ substantially from addresses of advertising message aimed at postgraduate or MBA students. This difference should be reflected in the arguments, language, themes and images of advertising. Another consideration is the fact that advertising may be also directed to people who are not interested in starting higher education but influence those who are, e.g. parents of prospective students.<sup>14</sup>

Higher education institutions must deal with a certain specific difficulty – they cannot count on regular customers happy with the brand. An education service by definition is a product purchased once in a lifetime. Obviously, satisfied undergraduate students are prospective graduate or postgraduate students. In general, however, higher education advertising is every year directed to a new group of people making their education decisions.<sup>15</sup>

Google AdWords offers rather restricted possibilities of reaching out to a narrowly defined target group. On the one hand, this tool is directed to people actively searching information who in all likelihood are either entitled to study or are related to future students e.g. parents of future students, which reduces the risk of paying for contact with people uninterested in the university's offering, provided appropriate

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12 A. Czarnecki, P. Korsak, *Planowanie mediów i kampanii reklamowych*, PWE, Warszawa 2001, p. 19.

13 *Ibidem*, p. 20.

14 A. Janiga, K. Barcińska, *Reklama szkoły wyższej...*, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

15 *Ibidem*, p. 291.

keywords are used. On the other hand, advertising audiences are targeted based on the location criterion only, e.g. an ad may be displayed in the area within 20 or 30 km away from the university, in order to avoid paying for clicks by people from distant cities or voivodeships who are looking for higher education offerings but are unlikely to use this particular one due to travelling expenses among other reasons.

The next step concerns setting a budget and allocating resources to the activities related to creation, production and the media respectively. The costs in the last category are the highest because they represent the costs of placing advertisements on chosen carriers.<sup>16</sup>

Good planning of expenditure is essential. The key decisions concern choice of carriers and times of displaying of or exposition to an advertisement.

Google AdWords enables a strict control of budget execution. It is even possible to assign each educational service to a given marketing task to control the related expenses on a regular basis. The system allows negotiating the rate per click separately for each task. Moreover, it is possible to set frequency caps on the number of impressions allowed per day, week or month, depending on the needs of people responsible for performing particular tasks or those managing the entirety of marketing activities. This feature allows for considerable cost reduction compared to an overwhelming majority of classical marketing solutions. An additional advantage is on-going cost monitoring.

The next step in planning an advertising campaign is to develop a creative strategy, which determines the overall shape of an advertising message, its role and desired effect. An advertising message may appeal to arguments both rational and emotional, persuade and highlight main or additional advantages of an education service.<sup>17</sup>

Its impact is easier to understand if advertising is represented as a process of mass communication with the purchaser, in which information is transmitted to a large number of relatively unknown recipients within a specified period. The sender selects and combines certain symbols, images and sounds to create an advertising message transmitted to its audiences via the mass media. The recipient decodes or recreates the meaning contained in the symbols, signs etc.<sup>18</sup>

A university is responsible for making sure that the marketing message it sends is decoded in a way that guarantees its correct perception. The message sender must ensure proper decoding, understanding, interpreting and evaluating the utility of the offer by the recipient. An advertising message which is encoded properly is synonymous with the message received by its addressee<sup>19</sup>. The AdWords system requires a proper selection of keywords. Keywords are words or phrases that define features specific to higher education as well as to particular education services. Keywords are used by Internet users to search products and services via search engines<sup>20</sup>. In this respect, Google AdWords gives a number of possibilities not only by providing a selection of phrases combining the user queries of interest, but also by enabling

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>17</sup> A. Czarnecki, P. Korsak, *Planowanie mediów...*, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> A. Janiga, K. Barcińska, *Reklama szkoły wyższej...*, op. cit., p. 292.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>20</sup> M. Gąsiewski, *Kurs Google AdWords...*, op. cit., p. 10.

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to exclude some combinations, which may limit contact prompted by error clicks, e.g. in using the phrase *real estate management* it was necessary to exclude from search results the words *real estate* as occurring on their own because there were many clicks by users looking for real estate sales or rent opportunities.

### **Measurement of the effectiveness of an advertising campaign**

Measuring its effects is an essential element of an advertising campaign. The process of measuring the effectiveness of advertising starts much earlier than at the moment when the campaign is launched in the media. Neither does it end with defining the results achieved. In fact, it is an on-going process. The planning stage of an advertising campaign must include planning the measuring of its effectiveness. Of crucial importance is defining right at the beginning goals, if possible, related exclusively to expectations of the advertising activity.<sup>21</sup>

Besides periodical surveys involving current and prospective students, a good way of measuring the effectiveness of advertising in higher education is a phone interview. Each person calling the recruitment department should be asked about the source of information about the university.<sup>22</sup>

The forms of internet marketing such as SEO or PPC can record internet activity very precisely: the user uses a search engine, say, Google, Yahoo!, the search engine returns search results; the user clicks on a link, is transferred to a certain web page and either takes some action or returns to the search results or gives up searching all together. These three options should be considered as tangible results based on which it is possible to assess the effectiveness of marketing efforts aimed at making a user take a desired action or achieving a particular goal.<sup>23</sup>

In this respect, Google AdWords is a very precise and transparent tool. It provides a statistical solution which enables comprehensive, on-going reporting on separate advertising tasks as well as on the entire campaign. It is easy to diagnose errors in assumptions of particular tasks since task statistics can be broken down into individual phrases of the keywords.

### **Conclusion**

In principle, inbound marketing does not differ from other marketing forms such as e-mail marketing, billboards, direct mail or TV advertising. All these areas require carefully developed strategies and monitoring. The very first attempt at developing an advertising strategy may be daunting. Finding a place in the web frequented by target group members does not have to be difficult. It needs to be remembered however that users do not limit their activity to one service or portal or even a given type of services.<sup>24</sup>

One important factor that decides about positive perception of inbound marketing is its unobtrusive character. Interested users simply want to become involved in marketing activities. This is a radical departure from traditional advertising where users are inundated with information they want to skip

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21 A. Janiga, K. Barcińska, *Reklama szkoły wyższej...*, op. cit., p. 298.

22 *Ibidem*

23 W. Świeczak, *Inbound marketing...*, op. cit., p. 190.

24 *Ibidem*.

as fast as they can.<sup>25</sup>

As far as measuring of the effectiveness of advertising is concerned, inbound marketing in many respects resembles traditional forms of marketing. Indicators controlled in the PR area include the number of mentions of the company and brand recognition. In the case of TV and radio advertisements the most significant parameter is the number of people reached. Measuring the success rate and comparing it with activities undertaken in the area of marketing turns out to be difficult though. With the advent of online marketing and software analysing traffic generated on a website or viewers' activity it has become much easier to measure the success rate. The concept of monitoring online activity seems to be well-grounded and is of great significance for measuring the success rates achieved owing to implementing marketing strategies.<sup>26</sup>

In terms of budget execution, it is clear that the measurement tools listed above enable precise cost monitoring while active involvement of people supervising the campaign helps to make considerable savings as compared to methods and channels generally used for communicating marketing messages just several years ago.

AdWords is particularly useful in advertising more complex products such as services - intangible goods which are difficult to compare and purchased relatively rarely and with more prior deliberation than staple food products for example. Because of its general availability to potential clients and advertisers as well as its global reach the AdWords solution can benefit even low-budget organizations.

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<sup>25</sup> A. Podlaski, *Marketing społecznościowy, tajniki skutecznej promocji w Social Media*, Onepress.pl Helion S.A. Gliwice 2011, p. 122 and further.

<sup>26</sup> W. Świeczak, *Inbound marketing...*, op. cit., pp. 191-192.