

Paid Search Case Study: Luxury Apartment Community Developer

Background

The client develops and manages nearly 180 luxury apartment communities around the country.

Challenge

In many ways, apartment seeking is still an “offline” activity. Apartment seekers want to tour the apartment home, see the amenities, explore the neighborhood, and experience the leasing staff before signing a lease. But the majority of the client’s customers begin their search at www.theclient.com to learn more about its properties and initiate the rental application process. In fact, the client captures 59% of their leases from leads generated on the internet.

Prior to partnering with The Search Agency, the client could only track conversions from their paid search campaigns from those visitors that completed the “contact us” form. This metric was very low, however, because most visitors were using the site to get specific information and then either calling or visiting the property to initiate the lease process. In order to optimize their investment in paid search, client needed a more precise means of identifying those online visitors that were showing a high level of engagement and were most likely to convert offline.

Solution

The client partnered with The Search Agency (TSA) to redesign its conversion tracking and take its paid search program to the next level. TSA developed a customized data integration system and began optimizing the ads based on various “fractional” conversions. With a more granular bid optimization and data tracking system in place, TSA then expanded keyword groups, tested new creatives based on offline promotions, refined the bid management to include geo-modified keywords and day-parting, and introduced local business advertisements.

- **Defined online conversion metrics-** TSA immediately set to work to define a new methodology for measuring online conversions. If completion of the ‘Contact Us’ form represented a 100% conversion, there were other pages that also suggested a high level of user interest and could be counted as “fractional” conversions. Examples would be a visitor downloading a lease application, requesting directions, viewing the floor plan, or researching the apartment’s policy on pets. TSA’s account manager could then use these fractional conversions to optimize the bid management strategy.
 - **Data tracking-** This required a tight integration of client’s web tracking system with TSA’s AdMax™ bid optimization platform. The result was the client was investing more on those keywords that yielded more fractional conversions, and less on those keywords that produced a lower level of visitor engagement.
- **Optimized investment-** With a more precise data tracking system in place, TSA’s account management team went to work increasing total conversions and reducing the cost per acquisition. This was not a simple process, as separate campaigns had to be created for each apartment community, and each campaign had to be managed to a separate fixed monthly budget. At any given time, TSA’s account team was managing campaigns for 40 different apartment communities (and/or regions) and 100,000 different

keywords. An array of tactics kept the campaigns on budget and drove measured growth in the account's performance:

- **Introduced national campaigns with geo-modified keywords-** Rather than bidding on general, non-targeted keywords such as “apartments” or “apartments for rent”, TSA ran national campaigns on geo-modified keywords (e.g. San Francisco apartments). This strategy gave the client exposure both to local residents as well as apartment seekers looking to move to a new city. As this strategy proved effective, TSA expanded the keyword groups to include neighboring communities and broader regional descriptions (e.g. Northern California Apartments).
- **Created local business advertisements-** TSA took advantage of the search engine's local advertisement features to expand its local presence. This strategy allowed the client to increase visibility on high traffic keywords and drive conversions at a lower cost per click than the corresponding paid search advertisement.
- **Day-parting-** Close examination of the conversion data found that the most valued traffic came during regular business hours. TSA increased the maximum bids from 8 AM–6 PM in each time zone to capture this more valuable web traffic and increase total conversions.
- **Expanded ad groups-** The account team expanded keyword groups to include misspellings and neighboring towns for those campaigns with high conversion rates and available budget. Total number of keywords grew by 64% in the first 12 months.
- **Opted out of specific sites on Google content network-** Cost per acquisition (CPA) on this network began to trend higher than the traditional AdWords™ campaigns. The account team identified specific sites within the network with the lowest levels of conversions and opted out of those sites.
- **Connecting ad copy to latest promotions-** Based on a rigorous testing methodology, the account managers identified a core set of titles and calls to action that yielded a consistently high level of conversions. TSA was able to drive even higher conversion rates by calling out specific, time-sensitive promotions for each of the properties. This required close integration and frequent communication between TSA and the client in order to update ads with the right offer, for the right property, in the right timeframe.

Results

In the first sixteen months of the enhanced campaign, the client more than doubled the number of conversions per month and reduced its CPA by more than 200%. Furthermore, the client has expanded its search marketing investment across all 3 engines and has implemented a local marketing effort, including mobile and local business listings, to increase its reach with apartment seekers on the go.

