

Are YOU Getting Your Money's Worth When Buying Traffic from PPC

Engines?

By Robin Nobles

Are YOU Getting Your Money's Worth When Buying Traffic from PPC Engines?

Robin Nobles
robin@searchengineworkshops.com

Search Engine Workshops <http://www.searchengineworkshops.com>

Are YOU getting your Money's Worth When Buying Traffic? . . .
The beginner's guide to tracking click-throughs and ROI from pay-per-click engines.

by Robin Nobles and Dave Barry

If you're just beginning to try your hand with the pay-per-click engines, one thing you need to know is the importance of setting up tracking URL's so you're better able to track click-throughs and sales.

Why go to the trouble? Because if you don't set up some sort of tracking system, you'll never know if your keyword purchases are really working for you. And if you don't know if they're working for you, you won't be able to make an educated decision on whether or not to discard a keyword campaign, expand it, choose different keywords, etc.

There are some excellent software programs and services on the market that will track individual keyword purchases and determine your ROI (return on investment), and we'll name some of them at the end of this article. For those who purchase large numbers of keywords, such programs are crucial.

But this article is for those who are just getting started and who don't want to invest in a software program yet – they just want to purchase a few keywords and get their feet wet with the pay-per-click engines.

Using a Tracking URL to Track Traffic

Overture claims that 95 percent of all Overture traffic comes from their partner sites, such as Yahoo and MSN. So, it's important to track your Overture traffic so you can be sure how much traffic you're getting for each of your keyword purchases.

Let's say that your URL is <http://www.english-bulldogs.com> . To add tracking capability to such a URL, you'd tack on:

?source=Overture

...so your URL would look this:

<http://www.english-bulldogs.com/?source=Overture>

If the keyword phrase you're tracking is english bulldog puppies, here's the tracking URL you would use:

<http://www.english-bulldogs.com/?source=Overture&kw=english+bulldog+puppies>

Change the URL you have listed with Overture for that keyword phrase to the tracking URL by going to Overture's Managed Listing Section of the DirecTraffic Center.

If the URL already has a question mark in it, you will have to add &source=Overture to the end. For example:

From: <http://www.english-bulldogs.com/search.cgi?q=dogs>

To: <http://www.english-bulldogs.com/search.cgi?q=dogs&source=Overture&kw=english+bulldog+puppies>

If the URL has a # character, the ?source=Overture will need to be inserted prior to the # sign. For example:

From: <http://www.english-bulldogs.com/#oscar>

To: <http://www.english-bulldogs.com/?source=Overture&kw=english+bulldog+puppies#oscar>

Be sure to test the new tracking URL to verify that the modified URL works as well as the original, and don't use the tracking URL for anything other than tracking your pay engine traffic.

After setting up the tracking URL's, you should be able to look for source=Overture in your server log files to see how much traffic you're getting from Overture for each of your keyword phrases. Your log analysis software, depending on which one you use, will be able to compile that information for you.

But How Do You Know Which Traffic Converts to Sales?

Determining your conversion rate is easier if your site supports some type of user session tracking, such as cookies, server-side scripting, etc. If you create a user session (or set a cookie) when someone visits your site, then you can count how many user sessions contained a successful page view that will let you know that a desired action has been completed, such as a receipt of goods sold or signing up for your newsletter. You can then analyze the referral source for each of your user sessions to count how many conversions came from Overture based on each keyword phrase.

How Can You Set up User Session Tracking?

Editors note: These instructions will apply to those of you already running your web sites on Microsoft's IIS.

Dave Barry of SmartCertify explains:

Session Tracking is made possible by using .asp (active server pages) on your Web site. There are several ways in which to accomplish this. One is by assigning a query string value to your link or

using the referrer information to assign a proper code to track. In the asp environment, there is a large collection of information that you have access to, including the exact page the visitor came from, and if a search engine, the keywords used to find your site.

Let us look at these two options.

Assigning a query string value to your link.

This method can work in pay-per-click engines, but when working with other engines and links, it can become cumbersome and not always work. By assigning a query string, you are adding a value to your URL that will appear in your server log files allowing you to search for it to see how effective it is working.

Example line from log file:

```
2002-12-23 19:25:10 192.168.20.14 443 /Default.asp
TrackingQueryString=TrackingCode 32
Mozilla/4.0+(compatible;+MSIE+6.0;+Windows+NT+5.0;
+Hotbar+4.1.5.0;+.NET+CLR+1.0.3705)
```

Please note that right after the page name, Default.asp is the query string that was attached to the URL. Also note the browser type, time, and date are included as well. You can set your logfiles to log the information you want. This is done at the server level. If your ISP is in charge of your server, consult with them to make the changes.

Using the referrer information to code your visitors.

When a user clicks a link that leads to your site – whether coming from a search engine or not – they arrive carrying luggage with them that you may not know about. This “luggage” is called the “Server Variables Collection.” With this information, you can track exactly where each visitor came from and what search words they used to get there.

To find the Server Variables Collection enabling you to track where each visitor comes from along with the search words they used, add the following code to an asp page and view it in your browser:

```
% For Each Item in Request.ServerVariables
Response.Write(Item.Name & " -- " & Request.ServerVariables(Item
& "br") Next %
```

Dave has set up a video file that will help explain tracking in more detail. To view it, go to: <http://www.smartcertify.com/seo/jan/tracking.asp>

Remember: The number of sales from Overture for a particular keyword phrase divided by the number of visits from Overture (or its partners) for that keyword phrase is what constitutes (equals) your conversion rate.

And, the profit generated from your Overture campaigns per keyword phrase divided by the amount spent at Overture per keyword phrase is your return-on-investment (ROI).

Using Your Affiliate Program to Track Sales

If you have an affiliate program, you can also track sales by using your affiliate software. After all,

most affiliate programs, such as MyAffiliateProgram.com, will track your traffic as well as sales, which will give you your conversion rate.

How does it work? Simply set up a new "affiliate" for each keyword you purchase through the pay engines.

For example, you would create a short URL that you would list with Overture. That URL would be nothing more than a redirect page that redirects to the affiliate link you've assigned for the keyword.

For example:

<http://www.english-bulldogs.com/puppies.html>

...would only be a redirect page that takes your visitors to

<http://www.myaffiliateprogram.com/u/dogs/t.asp?id=1925> ,

...which is the real page of content. Affiliate ID #1925 would be set up specifically to track traffic for the keyword phrase, english bulldog puppies, that you've purchased through Overture. You wouldn't send any other traffic through that page, and you would list the puppies.html page at Overture's Managed Listing Section of the DirecTraffic Center.

Other Benefits of Tracking Click Data

Though each of the pay engines do everything they can to prevent click fraud, it does happen. By setting up a tracking system to track click data and monitoring the click patterns carefully, you'll be able to spot any possible click fraud and can report it immediately to the pay engine.

Helpful Software Programs and Services

Keyword Tool: KeywordTool's tracking service tracks the conversion or sales performance of keywords on search and pay-per-click engines, showing which keyword phrases are actually converting into customers and from which search engines. It is not a visitor tracker; instead, it determines keyword performance. <http://www.keywordtool.net/>

GO TOAST: One of GO TOAST's components, ProfitBuilder, is a ROI service for any advertising campaign. GO TOAST is an Overture approved bid management service. <http://www.gotoast.com/>

WebTrends Reporting Center's Enterprise Edition: Besides basic log analysis, the Enterprise Edition will track users through your web site in order to pinpoint visitor behavior through critical processes, such as checkout and registration. It will also analyze marketing campaigns by determining how much revenue each campaign is generating.

<http://www.netiq.com/products/wrc/enterprise.asp>

Overture has an ROI Calculator and a CPM Calculator that will help measure your return on investment: <http://www.overture.com/d/USm/adcenter/tools/index.jhtml>

Final thoughts...

You'd be amazed at the number of people who set up keyword campaigns but have no idea whether or not the campaigns are making them money because they don't have tracking systems in place. So, regardless of whether you are just beginning or even if you've been purchasing keywords for a while, be sure to set up tracking for keywords and user sessions. Doing so will enable you to

know for certain which keywords are working. And, that's the best way to maximize the return on your keyword investments.

Robin Nobles, along with partner John Alexander, teaches 2-, 3-, and 5-day search engine marketing workshops through Search Engine Workshops (<http://www.searchengineworkshops.com>). Robin also teaches online search engine marketing courses (<http://www.onlinewebtraining.com>), and her latest books, Web Site Analysis and Reporting and Streetwise Maximize Web Site Traffic, can be ordered through Amazon.

Dave Barry is a professional Webmaster, Web designer, programmer, security expert, and search engine optimizer, all rolled up into one amazingly talented man who works for SmartCertify Direct. (<http://www.smartcertify.com>) He has also begun working with Search Engine Workshops to put on "hands on" search engine marketing workshops at locations across the globe. Dave recently set up Computer Concierge International, which is a full-service networking and Internet solutions company. (<http://www.seo-concierge.net>)

[Get-Articles.com : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.](#)

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)