

Marketing your institution with Google AdWords

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Part 1 - Google AdWords and the “Recruitment 2.0” revolution

There's been a total change in the way that students learn about study opportunities which requires a revolutionary shift in the way colleges communicate with these prospective students. Many people in the education industry are now calling this the era of "**Recruiting 2.0**"

Recruiting 2.0 is where institutions engage prospective students for up to 2-3 years prior to actual enrolment. These students want colleges and universities to engage with them not market to them. And its not just the students, their parents need to be involved in the research and decision making process as well.

By using today's technologies to communicate with the millennial generation you increase your enrolment opportunities. These students love to use social networks (myspace, xango, facebook), google search and youtube etc, blogs, podcasts, personalized email, sms (text messaging) and instant messaging (IM) so you need to be using them as well.

Institutions that rely on traditional marketing methods such as student fairs, education agents, hard copy publications and other one way communication channels will find themselves behind the competition.

The internet and services such as Google's paid search feature – Adwords, allow institutions to promote your new Recruiting 2.0 channels easily and immediately. Google Adwords is a Pay Per Click (PPC) program of advertising on Google. The ads appear on the



right hand side (and sometimes on the top of the page) of the Google Search site depending on the keywords or key phrases that you enter. As an advertiser, you pay a small fee every time your ad is clicked by a potential customer.

This lets your ads connect with your customers, at the precise moment when they are looking for services like yours, and you only pay when the customer clicks on your ad and goes through to your website. Importantly you don't pay to place your ad, you only pay for the clicks which is why this form of marketing is called Pay Per Click Marketing (PPC)

Google Adwords is the biggest and best known pay per click marketing service in the world and has been acknowledged as being the most cost effective form of direct marketing currently available.

The search results that Google provides are broken into two categories. 1)Organic search results and 2)Paid (sponsored) search results.

The natural search results are shown on the main section of the Google search results page and the paid search results are shown under the Sponsored Links sections on the very top of the page and on the right hand column. (see below)

The screenshot shows a Google search for "Study in Australia". At the top, there are navigation links for Web, Images, Video, News, Maps, Gmail, and more. The search bar contains "Study in Australia" and a "Search" button. Below the search bar, it indicates "Results 1 - 10 of about 153,000,000 for Study in Australia. (0.20 seconds)".

The results are divided into two main sections:

- Organic Search Results (Natural):** These are listed on the left side. The top result is from "Experts on Education" (www.aussie-study.com) with the text "Study & Work, Low Prices, Professional Service, Free Flights". Below this, there are several search results from the official Australian Government website (studyinaustralia.gov.au) providing information about courses, institutions, and costs.
- Paid Search Results (Adwords):** These are shown in two columns on the right side. The top ad is from "ahm Student Health Cover" with the text "Low rates, highest cover, online claiming for overseas students!". Below it is an ad from "Explore Australia" (www.bond.edu.au) for "University short summer programs". Other ads include "Study & Work in Aust.", "Study In Australia" (academia21.com), and "Migration to Australia".

Large orange text is overlaid on the image, reading "These Are Free Organic (Natural) Search Results" on the left and "These Are Paid Search Results (Adwords)" on the right.

Using Google AdWords as a core marketing channel for higher education institutions is



almost a necessity these days as the savvy colleges realise that it is extremely cost effective and astonishingly targeted if they get their campaigns setup correctly.

Its especially important to remember that there are 100's of successful colleges that have been using adwords as part of their marketing mix, with extremely good results for several years now.

You can find detailed information about the Google AdWords program here <https://adwords.google.com/support>.

Google is an excellent marketing option because it lets you promote your courses and college at a low cost using the exact keywords and phrases that students are typing into their searches. You can pay as little as US\$0.05 cents per click with zero fees to actually list your ad. Plus you can deploy a campaign and have your ads being shown in Malta, Manila, Madrid, Melbourne or Maine in 10 minutes!

Traditionally to get great natural search engine results required a lot of work (it still does) to get high rankings for your specific keywords and there was no guarantee of appearing on the 1st page of the search results, even after months of optimization.

Google AdWords however does allow you to appear on the front page of the search results either on the top or the right column of the search results page for your chosen keywords. The hard part is making sure you are not paying too much for your click bids, your keywords are relevant, and your adcopy is appealing and has a high click through rate (CTR)

So why should institutions consider using Google Adwords?

FACT: Google Adwords is recognised as one of the most powerful direct marketing services ever developed. Using Adwords, you can reach out immediately to a global audience of more than 800 million internet users and acquire new clients from as little as \$0.05 per acquisition. The Google Network now reaches more than 80% of Internet users, which makes it the most effective search engine to place your advertisements.

The success of Adwords advertising is that your ads are targeted to the people who you are most interested talking to. You set the keywords and phrases that will trigger your ad as soon as your potential client searches for them. If for example you have a particular education course you want to promote you simply create an Adword campaign specifically for that study course and you will reach students who are interested immediately. It doesn't matter if you are trying to reach a student in Sydney or Tokyo, Google Adwords allows you to decide which country, state, metropolitan area, or even a specific geographical radius where your ads will appear in.

Pay Per Click explained



With Pay per Click marketing, you only pay when a customer actually clicks your ad and visits your site. You do not pay to list your ad. There are very few other forms of advertising that allow you to do this. Click costs start from US\$0.05. However it's important you don't overspend your budget. Google Adwords lets you to set the maximum amount you want to pay for a click as well as the maximum you want to spend each day. With this feature you won't ever spend more than you want.

Google Adwords includes excellent management and reporting tools that let you to measure how successful your campaigns are running as they happen. You have access to very detailed traffic statistics, ad group tracking and click costs. Using these analytical tools allows you to see which keywords and phrases are working well, the volume of clicks you are receiving and how many of them are converting to new enrolment.

With Google Adwords you can even stream in your Google Adwords campaign data directly into your institution's enrolment management software. (available in most cases).

New Market Opportunities

Google Adwords allows you to tap into markets you may have wanted to target for years but have never been able to. If you run an english language school in Australia and want more students from Norway you would normally have to get an agent to represent you, paid a local marketing firm to assist you, outsourced your marketing to a professional education consultancy firm, purchased advertising on a number of other educational related websites that promise you they have lots of Norwegian students or perhaps you may have even had to visit Norway and attend a student fair to promote your college.

Now you can simply create an Adwords account, write your ads and keywords, target Norway only and activate your campaign. Your ads will begin showing almost immediately in Norway by your potential new students.

You can even have the ads written in Norwegian and create a new Enquiry page on your site that is in Norwegian. This will increase your conversions dramatically as you are talking to your prospect in their language. Remember "Recruitment 2.0" !

Adwords Challenges

Although it is quite easy to setup and Adwords campaign, it is much harder to run and manage your campaign effectively on an ongoing basis. The costs you are charged by Google are determined on a combination of your Cost Per Click (CPC) and your Click Through Rate (CTR) for every keyword that you use. Google has created this formula in order to promote effective advertising for all of its users and more importantly to get rid of ineffective ads. So it's not as simple as just bidding more for increased clicks as this will not guarantee you a higher position. Google may even suspend your ads if they are not performing well. Therefore you really need to have a good understanding of how Adwords works in order to use it successfully.

Costly Mistakes Can Happen

If you are an inexperienced user it's very easy to make costly mistakes. This can happen when your ads are not optimized or your keywords are not correct. For example we were recently optimising a campaign for a Sydney institution who only wanted students from Sydney, yet they were serving up their ads right across Australia. In other words they were wasting literally thousands of dollars every month on untargeted ads that were being clicked but for which they would never receive a single new student. Big mistake but easily fixed immediately within 10 minutes.

Time Consuming

Adwords is not something you can setup and forget. You need to find the right keywords, create your ads, get your account settings in place correctly, and deploy your campaign to begin with. You must then monitor and optimise your campaigns so that they maintain a high click through rate and high ranking placement. To do this you need to fine tune your entire ad groups, keyword lists as well as undertake weekly (if not daily) maintenance.

In Summary

Google Adwords is one of the most powerful new advertising services available today. It can help you reach new customers more effectively than any other form of advertising. However setting up an effective Adwords campaign is not easy. It requires learning, time, dedication and a high level of expertise. In a nutshell, Adwords has an initial steep learning curve that rewards experienced users. However if you don't know what you are doing you can make costly mistakes and lose thousands of dollars very quickly.

Why Search Engine Marketing is so Powerful

The 3 biggest search engines are Google, Yahoo and MSN respectively and they are used by the vast majority of prospective students to find and research educational opportunities and destinations. Just observe the following statistics on the number of times these keywords below were used on Yahoo search in January 2007:

Number of Searches	Search Terms
20,687	study abroad
2,178	Australian university
1,445	study in Australia
188,278	online university
171,753	university
114,545	college and university
3,444	study abroad program
15,788	higher education

What does the term Relevant Keyword mean?

A relevant keyword is one used by prospective students when searching for higher education opportunities. Each institution will have different relevant keywords as you will be offering different courses in different locations. Let's take the example of a university in Melbourne, Australia called RMIT. Here is an abbreviated list of keywords for RMIT assuming they would want to attract more applications and students to their 4-year undergraduate program via Google search advertising.

- 1) RMIT
- 2) RMIT university
- 3) Australian university
- 4) Study in Australia
- 5) Australian universities

It's recommended that to create a good list of relevant keywords you should have between 50-100 keyword phrases. There are many online tools that can help you create these lists such as KeywordElite.com

For keywords 1 and 2 above, we are targeting prospective students who already know that RMIT exists. For keywords 3 - 5, you would be targeting students searching for a college in certain geographical region location such as Australia who may or may not be aware that RMIT exists.

How Google AdWords works from a financial point of view:

Once you have created your list of keywords, you next need to analyse how much it will cost you to bid on them and also how many clicks you expect to get. As mentioned earlier you only pay when someone actually clicks on your ad, not to list your ad.

Google charges you on a Pay Per Click basis so you need to work out what amount you can afford to pay per click. As a rule of thumb the more you bid on a keyword, the higher up in the page your ad will appear. The cost to appear at the top will vary depending on the demand of the keyword (how many other advertisers are bidding on the same keyword).

Your next step once your ads are running, is to accurately measure the traffic coming to your site and what kind of conversions (enrolments) you are getting. However a very important part of this equation is your website. The next section covers the attributes of a good site that will help you create a relationship with your prospective student.

Part 2 - Making Sure Your Institution's Website Works

The Australian higher education industry has never been so competitive particularly with the rise of full fee paying courses. Virtually all educational institutions rely on strategic marketing campaigns to maintain or increase their annual student enrolments. More and more the survival of an institution relies on how well it can recruit students locally and internationally. Without sufficient yearly enrolments, revenues decline bringing unsatisfactory financial results and ongoing cashflow problems, combined with decreasing marketing budgets.

The way institutions recruit students has changed significantly over the last 7 years with traditional marketing methods such as student fairs, education agents, direct mail and offline advertising, that have traditionally been used to market to prospective students, becoming more costly and time consuming for enrolment teams.

As an example, if there are 5,000 prospective students visiting a student fair in Hong Kong, how many of this student group would go onto enrol at one of the participating institutions over the following 12 months? To be more specific (and I have personally done this on behalf of dozens of institutions and publishers), what's the actual return on investment (ROI) to attend one of these trade shows?

The real costs of attending an overseas student fair or trade show

Trade show stand and other related media participation	= AU\$4,000
Airfare and transfers for one admissions officer	= AU\$1400
Salary for same admissions officer over 1 week	= AU\$1300
Marketing and promotional materials handed out	= AU\$1200
Accommodation for one admissions officer	= AU1000
Other related costs eg Per Diems	= AU\$1000
Total	=AU\$9,900

If several students are recruited at these fairs, then a good ROI can be achieved. However if none are enrolled and the institution is attending up to a dozen such events each year it quickly becomes a major outgoing. Whilst there's no doubt student fairs will continue to be a key recruitment tactic, more institutions have been turning to the web to be able to better quantify their marketing expenditure and there's no doubt the Internet has fundamentally changed the way educational institutions recruit students.

A recent US study shows that more than 85% of students surveyed said that gathering information from the institution's website was their key research tool. Utilising the World Wide Web as a channel for reaching prospective students has now become a core activity. With its 24/7 worldwide presence and interactive media, the web offers multiple forms of marketing strategies that can successfully be deployed including:

- Institution website
- Paid search engine marketing such as Google Adwords
- Organic search engine optimisation (SEO)
- E-mail marketing
- Advertising on third party Web sites
- Hiring lead generation companies

Engaging with your prospects

Nowadays the very first contact a prospective student has with a college or university is on the web is visiting the website. Institutions need to take extra care to design and create a website that accurately portrays its brand and doesn't over market to the prospects.

Today's youth don't want to be 'targeted' and are much savvier when it comes to college marketing campaigns. They want interactivity and to be able to know more about their choice of institution by engaging with current and past students at places like www.FaceBook.com, www.Friendster.com, www.StudentsReview.com and even www.SecondLife.com.

They want to do their own research and perhaps visit a number of current student's blogs, watch videos of the college on YouTube or MySpace, and even listen to podcasts. In a nutshell your prospective students are a lot savvier than 10 years ago and know how to get information about institutions very quickly from places you are probably not even aware of.

So your website needs to effectively communicate your brand and vision to your prospects. You need to think about how your site portrays your image and brand. What's your prospective student's perception? Are you target marketing them or does your website say "we want to engage with you and develop a relationship"

As you are spending money marketing your site you should ensure that it has these features:

- **A unique section on your site for your prospective students** – You need to think inside your prospective students head. Provide them with their own space on your site that lets them know you value them and want to communicate information that is beneficial about your institution and what it can do for them. You should allow them to make their own profile that lets them access extra features such as forums, blogs, podcasts and videos.
- **Add an easy-to-use, but detailed, enquiry form which may offer an incentive to the prospective student, and also allows you to capture their details including their e-mail addresses** – Students visit dozens of sites in their quest to research the right institution. You need to build credibility so they will enter their details as you are creating further opportunities to communicate with them via a variety of means including email, videos, podcasts and blogging.

- **Think about using Skype with your contact details** – As well as prominently displaying your email address, contact form and institution location think about adding a skype address or any other instant messaging/VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) form of telecommunication. Students are using IM (Instant messaging), skype etc so you need to show you can communicate with them on this level.
- **Online enquiry and application process** – There are a number of vendors that offer college application software or you can develop this in-house (not recommended). Either way by having this system in place you will streamline operations and provide students with an easy method to apply (and eventually enrol) to your institution. This will save time and money for both students and your enrolment team
- **Forums, blogs, discussion boards and other online community features** – It's a great idea to allow your prospective students to connect with your existing students. By putting these features in place you gain trust from them whilst allowing them to communicate with each other before they arrive on campus. The more relationships your community creates the higher chance the prospective students will return to your site. Your site should be a place for communication and dialogue and not somewhere you simply post your courses and brochure online.
- **Virtual college tour** – Virtual tours are an interactive way for you to show off your campus facilities, its environment, and the people that habitate it. If your multimedia is good then it's literally almost like a physical campus visit. This is especially important for marketing to international or interstate prospects.
- **Site search engine** – Having a search feature on your site is a must these days. Your visitors want information fast! If you make them wade through lots of menus and selections to find the course or module they want then you are in trouble. [Google offers a simple and free site search tool here](#). Remember to review your server statistics to view what keywords and pages they are viewing most.

Your website and online campaigns won't currently replace your agents, brochures, open days and other traditional marketing efforts, but as these trends continue to develop they will soon become one of your most effective recruitment tools.

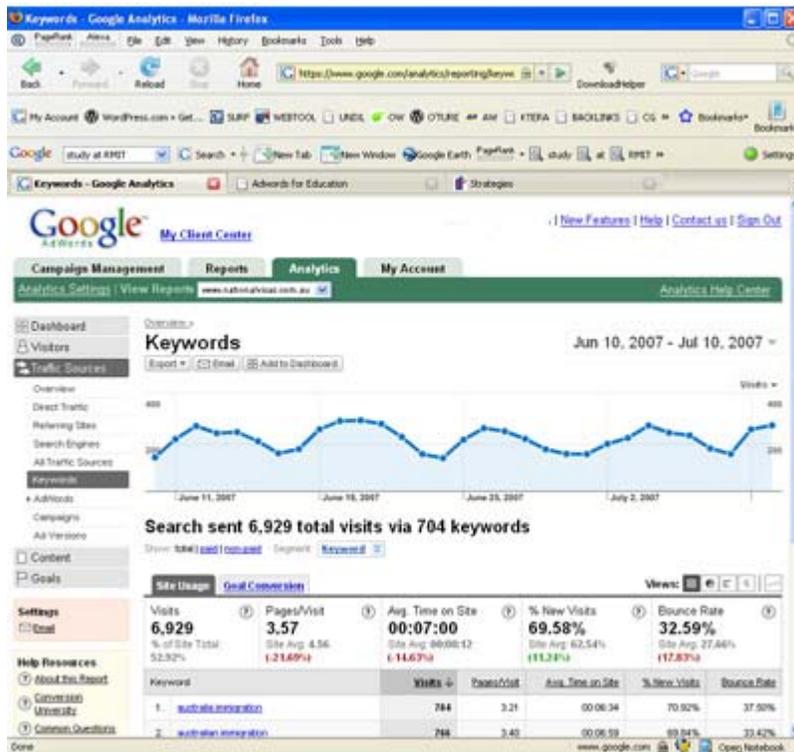
Institution sites are a primary channel for reaching prospective students and the effective use of the internet can help keep you a step ahead of your competition.

It's important to remember that whilst you can pour a lot of money and resources to your site it won't reach its real potential until prospective students find you in their search results.

The next section explains more about the Google search engine and ways you can increase your exposure in their organic (natural) search results, and their paid search service which is called Google AdWords.

Part 3 – Successfully measuring your marketing campaigns

Google Adwords offers account holders powerful reporting tools.



You can track virtually any action you want. Including:

- How many visitors came to your website last month compared to the previous month?
- How many of these visitors went to your main admissions section and again compare?
- What keywords that you are bidding on are generating the most click through to your site?
- How many pages are your visitors viewing and are they more than the previous month?
- Are you current visitors requesting brochures or applying online for entry to your institution?

The beauty of using Google Adwords is that by adding a small piece of code to your website you can track all of the actions above very easily and then login to your Adwords accounts and create easy to understand reports that allow you to see the results of your marketing efforts.

In summary, these new groups of prospective students are more online savvy than any other sector in history, so you are engaging with them the way they know best. Good luck! For an Adwords quote [click here](#), and for an Outsourcing quote [click here](#)