

# *Bing and Yahoo! Search Alliance...One Year Later*

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Looking back now, it's hard to believe that we once managed Paid Search Advertising in two separate user interfaces for Yahoo! and Bing. Search marketers everywhere were anxious to say the least when the Yahoo!/Bing Search Alliance was announced the summer of 2010. Even more concerning was the announcement that this alliance would take place in Q4, right in the middle of holiday season planning!

Some of the concerns churning a year ago include:

- Will my client(s) lose traffic?
- Will they lose conversions?
- Will Google be able to make up for any losses?

Worried questions gave way to welcome relief when the transition to the Search Alliance was completed smoothly. Marketers who previously managed two separate campaigns in Yahoo! and MSN found that they could manage Yahoo! and Bing campaigns from one unified marketplace. Even so, many marketers are still not investing in it, and are most likely losing out. Here are some reasons to consider taking the dive into this marketplace, if you have not already:

- **Search Alliance Increases Marketshare** After the transition, the Search Alliance made small gains in marketshare attributable to product innovations and algorithmic updates while Google, the Search engine leader, experienced slight declines. From a PPC perspective, the Search Alliance offers a large portion of clicks at a lower cost-per-click (CPC) than that of Google. The share of Search increase created a more consistent performance model in comparison to Google. Now, marketers are saving time managing PPC, analyzing performance, and making performance adjustments.
- **Search Alliance Increases ROAS** Most advertisers are experiencing lower CPCs and higher conversion rates which builds a solid case for significant investment in the engine. Looking at our own PPC campaign managed in MSN adCenter, the average CPC is 14% lower than Google. MSN makes up 12% of our clients' total conversion while, total spend is at 17%.
- **Timing is Everything** Because the Search Alliance's market share is increasing every day, new advertisers are entering the space at the same rate. Advertisers on Bing are enjoying the lack of qualified competition, which allows some of the lowest CPCs, but as more advertisers enter the space, CPCs have nowhere to go but up. Now is the time to begin your campaigns and learn the ins and outs of the Search Alliance, before the competition heats up.

It's clear that the new unified marketplace is working much better than Bing and Yahoo! did on their own. From a priority perspective, it's easy to understand why Search engine marketers focus less on the Search Alliance, but this won't be the play for long. Moving into 2012 and beyond, we should expect the Search Alliance's market share to increase along with impressions, clicks, and cost.

### Tips for Your Bing Search Campaigns

In order to get through the changes made by the Bing/Yahoo Search Alliance, marketers needed to test and explore the system and identify best practices to optimize their Search programs. After a full year of testing and successful implementation, we discovered some Bing/Yahoo specific optimizations that you should consider when utilizing these search engines.

- **Quality Score and Filtering:** Bing will filter out all of your campaign terms from serving if the algorithm deems that a keyword(s) in that campaign is irrelevant. As a result, maintaining a strong quality score should be a top priority. There are many other ways to ensure a strong quality score that you should also research and understand.

In order to find ad groups that could be causing the filter, you can pull a report and select "Low Quality Impressions". Once you find which campaigns/ad groups have low impression shares, you can pull a keyword report that highlights "Keyword Relevance", "Landing Page Relevance", and "Landing Page User Experience." This report will help you determine whether the landing page simply needs adjusted, or whether the keyword needs to be moved to a more relevant campaign.

- **Keyword Parity & De-duping Keywords:** There are several things you can do to optimize your keyword list. One of which is to keep in mind that Bing has a normalization package which finds plurals, common misspellings, and reverse word orders that you should also purchase. Previously in Yahoo!, these keywords were being matched on the backend to terms that you were purchasing. This is not the case in Bing's ad serving algorithm.

Also, you can use Bing's functionality to de-dupe your account to remove what the engine considers "noise words." "Noise words" are usually keywords that contain special characters, which are disregarded by the engine algorithm. For instance, you may be purchasing the terms "widgets\" and "widgets." However, the engine ignores the "\", which means that you are actually purchasing the term "widgets" twice and causing interference when the engine serves that keyword.

- **Param1 Review:** Checking your landing pages should be a standard best practice for all engines. Since Bing allows you to pull keyword reports that rate the relevance of landing page and the user experience on the page, you can easily see when you want to reevaluate or change your landing pages. This is a quick optimization that you can complete to make sure that you are able to serve on all of your terms.

- **Param2 Optimization:** It is a best practice to use Param2 instead of Keyword Insertion in Bing ad copy. This is because the Keyword Insertion is setup to display the query exactly as the user inputs it. It can display with misspellings, special characters, or in all lower case. This can cause your ad to look unprofessional or untrustworthy to searchers. If you specify how the keyword should look in the Param2 field, you ensure that the terms will be capitalized properly and all of the words will be spelled correctly. The syntax is the same for Param2 as it is for Keyword Insertion, so it is an easy Find and Replace that can be completed within the adCenter Desktop Tool.
- **Negative Keywords:** You should also be checking that your negative keywords are not blocking your bidded keywords from serving. Especially since Bing negative keywords have all been defaulted to Phrase match until recently, when Bing added Negative Exact keywords. This will help alleviate the number of instances where you are blocking bidded terms. However, it is still important to ensure that you have visibility on all of the terms that you are purchasing.
- **Blocked Domains:** Domain blocking is a function that came over from Yahoo!. Similar to Google, Bing also has a network of other sites that also display their Search results. They can show you the performance of these sites for all engine metrics, including engine conversions (if you use them).

The Search Alliance changed our view of how Bing uses its backend algorithm to determine when and how ads are being served. It also made us take a second look at Bing and Yahoo!, which have been overshadowed by Google in the last several years. These easy optimizations will ensure that your Bing account is serving ads to qualified users, as well as generating conversions efficiently. The key to all of these tips, of course, is that you are continually evaluating your campaigns. Not only is it important to make sure you are utilizing these tips, but also in making sure you are quickly identifying and adapting to the multitude of changes that Bing/Yahoo has in store for us over the next year.

### Where Are We Heading

In spite of the limited volume in comparison to Google, the Search Alliance is making significant strides in innovations to attract search engine marketers and searchers alike. Many modifications and updates have been announced for Q4 2011/Q1 2012.

While some updates are making Yahoo! and Bing more like Google, other updates are truly innovative and will have a lasting impact on the future of Search. As the “runner-up” to Google in terms of size and market share, Yahoo! and Bing appear to be changing focus to position themselves as an industry front-runner in leveraging innovative technologies and strategies. Here are the updates that the Search Alliance has announced:

- **Improvements to Matching Algorithms:** Search marketers will enjoy more traffic from plurals, improved matching in long-tail terms, and ad copy relevance to be used for matching and ranking. Contrary to previous management tactics, advertisers will have much more qualified traffic, similar to what Google offers.
- **Global Targeting:** Advertisers will be able to target their users by physical location or intent, derived from either the search query or the domain visited by an end user.
- **Cascading Match Types:** One of the biggest inconveniences of Yahoo! and Bing is their odd match type strategy of tripling every term on each match type when loading new terms into the engine. Rumored to occur in Q4, this tactic will disappear and advertisers will be able to manage their keyword set more similarly to Google, saving time and maintenance.
- **Negative Keyword Management:** Search marketers will be able to specify negative keywords as “Exact” rather than the default Phrase match. Negatives hierarchy will be cumulative instead of cascading.
- **New Ad Formats:** In 2010, Yahoo! introduced their Rich Ads in Search (RAIS) program that allowed the advertiser to insert an image and deep links to accompany their paid search. This program temporarily disappeared during the transition, but now that the migration is over, the program is back and better than ever. Now advertisers can utilize an image or a video which helps drive clickthroughs for branded queries. Although no new ad formats have been announced for 2012, the Search Alliance may just make a move soon to compete with Google’s ever changing ad formats.

The bottom line is that Search Alliance is constantly innovating and changing. This time next year, we should expect to see even more volume available on Yahoo! and Bing.