

Complete Guide to AdWords Matching Options



A WordStream White Paper

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Selecting targeted keywords is the first step to setting up a PPC campaign in Google AdWords, but the keyword matching options that you use can also have a large impact on your success. There are five AdWords match types: Broad Match, Modified Broad Match, Phrase Match, Exact Match, and Negative Match. All match types have advantages and drawbacks, so we'll discuss each in detail to help you choose the most advantageous options for your goals.

For our discussion of the different AdWords matching options, we'll use "Gel Batteries" as the example keyword to illustrate how different options affect when your advertisements will be displayed.

Broad Match

Broad match is the default matching option for keywords used in your AdWords campaigns. A broad match keyword will be entered as Gel Batteries into your keyword list, without quotes, brackets, or other symbols.

When using the broad match option, your advertisement may display whenever someone enters your keywords into the search box, regardless of what order they appear in or what additional words are added. For example, the search queries "do gel batteries leak" or "do car batteries contain gel" could trigger your ad. This match option will also allow your ad to show for terms that Google interprets to be relevant to your keyword phrase, even if the search query does not include the exact keyword. So in this case your ad could also be displayed for a closely related term such as "car battery" or miss the mark completely with a term such as "AA batteries" or "hair gel."

Keyword	Match Type	Potential Matches
Gel Batteries	Broad Match	gel batteries, what are gel batteries, batteries gel based

Broad match phrases are best used when your goal is to bring in the maximum amount of visitors possible. Since the advertisements will display for a broad variety of search terms, your ad will be visible to a large number of people in a short amount of time. This can be very desirable with a sufficient advertising budget and can quickly increase your exposure. In addition, you'll be able to discover long-tail phrases that you never could have anticipated. (A healthy portion of search queries are completely unique and have never been searched on before.)

The immediate drawback of using broad match phrases is that while you will get a larger volume of traffic to your site, this traffic will likely not be as targeted and therefore has a lower chance of converting. You have limited control over what search terms your ads are displayed against, and you may not agree with what Google interprets as being relevant to your ad and your business.

This can easily lead to high advertising costs with low or no return on investment (ROI) in the short term. If you do make use of broad match in your AdWords campaign, be sure to read the section below on negative keywords, as these are essential to filtering out unwanted traffic and reining in costs.

Modified Broad Match

Modified broad match is a newer matching option that provides a little more control than standard broad match. To use modified broad match, append a plus sign to one or more terms in your keyword phrase to force Google to only match your ad against search queries that include that term.

For example, if your keyword is +Gel Batteries, Google will only match your ad against queries that include the word “gel” (or a very close variant), but they query needn’t contain the word “batteries.” So your ad might match against a search for “gel cells” but not “cell batteries.” If your modified broad match keyword is Gel +Batteries, on the other hand, your ad will only display in response to queries that contain the word “battery” or “batteries.”

Keyword	Match Type	Potential Matches
+Gel Batteries	Modified Broad Match	gel batteries, gel, gel cells
Gel +Batteries	Modified Broad Match	gel batteries, rechargeable batteries, car battery

The benefit of using the modified broad match option is that you have more control over how frequently your ad is displayed, so your traffic will be more targeted. However, narrower targeting will also reduce the overall traffic you bring in from those keywords.

Phrase Match

The phrase match keyword option offers a much more targeted approach than broad match, but still allows flexibility for Google to match your ads to more queries than your exact keyword phrase. When using the phrase match option, your advertisement will appear for searches that include your keyword phrase in the correct order, but can still display for queries including additional words.

To use the phrase match option in AdWords, enter your keyword phrase in quotation marks. Entering your phrase as “Gel Batteries” indicates to Google that your advertisements should only appear when someone has entered a search term that includes this exact phrase, but additional terms in the query are OK. For example your ad might match against queries such as “gel batteries for motorcycles” or “used gel batteries.”

Keyword	Match Type	Potential Matches
“Gel Batteries”	Phrase Match	gel batteries, used gel batteries, gel batteries boston

Phrase match allows you to be more targeted with your search terms but still capture additional traffic from keyword phrases that you did not think of when building your list. It’s one of the best ways to expand your keyword lists and find more targeted phrases to use in your campaigns. This match type will not usually bring in quite the volume of traffic that the broad option does, but it is more targeted to your niche. It can also be handy when bidding on keywords that change in meaning depending on the order of the terms (such as “camera store” and “store camera”).

Exact Match

When using the exact match option, you enter your keyword phrase with brackets around the words: [Gel Batteries]. The exact match option is the most targeted option available and will only let your ad display when people search for the exact phrase in the exact order in which the phrase is entered. For example, if you bid on [Automotive Gel Batteries] your ad would not appear for “auto gel batteries” or “gel batteries.”

Keyword	Match Type	Potential Matches
[Gel Batteries]	Exact Match	gel batteries

Using this technique imposes strict limits on your ads and will drastically reduce the frequency that your ad is displayed. This is not necessarily a bad thing, though; by only showing your ad to people who are searching for exactly what you are offering, you can dramatically increase your chances of a conversion. You can also reduce your overall costs, since you'll be paying for fewer clicks.

The drawback to using this match type is that you will not be able to capture long-tail data to expand your keyword list. In addition you may miss a lot of traffic that is relevant to your keyword.

Negative Match

Negative keywords are not a stand-alone match type; rather they are used in conjunction with the broad and phrase match options. As mentioned above, when using broad and phrase match keywords, there is a risk of generating a large amount of traffic that is not truly relevant to your offering and unlikely to convert. These clicks can quickly become costly and deplete your budget. So it's crucial to use negative keywords to keep ROI high while employing the broad and phrase match options.

Designating a negative keyword prevents Google from ever displaying your ad in response to that keyword. To create a negative keyword, place a minus sign in front of the term. For example, if you only sell new gel batteries, setting "used" as a negative keyword (-used) will prevent your Gel Batteries ad from displaying when someone searches for "used gel batteries." Setting "disposal" as a negative keyword will prevent you from paying for clicks from people looking for "gel battery disposal services."

Keyword	Match Type	Prevented Matches
-hair	Negative Match	hair gel
-watch	Negative Match	watch battery

Businesses frequently add words like "free" to their negative keyword lists, since they indicate non-commercial traffic that won't convert. However, it's impossible to think up all the possible terms that are irrelevant or useless to your goals (just as it's impossible to create a complete keyword list by brainstorming). To find negative keywords, try using a negative keyword tool as well as regularly consulting your search query reports in AdWords to see what your ads are matching against.

How Do Match Types Affect Your AdWords Results?

Match types can have a major impact on your account's performance: they're the control you use to determine exactly which search queries you're bidding on. As you determine which match types to use for each keyword, there are a few key components to consider:

- **Performance to Date** — How a keyword or similar keywords have performed can give you insights into which match type will provide the best return on your investment – we'll walk through how to evaluate which match type to use based on performance data in the next section.
- **Competitors** — How your competitors bid on certain terms and structure their own accounts, as well as how their accounts have performed historically will all impact the return you see from certain match types.
- **Bids** — Cost per click and cost per conversion are heavily impacted by bids – often advertisers employ various methodologies for manipulating bids and frequently bid more or less aggressively based on the match type – this can strongly influence which match type is most appropriate.
- **Ad Text & Account Structure** — Many advertisers will break out a “money” keyword and run it on broad, phrase and exact match types – perhaps even segmenting those match types out and writing specific ads for each. The way an advertiser structures an account can also have a massive impact on performance for different match types.

Now let's take a look at how to determine when to use the various match types, and how to implement them.

Match Types Best Practices – Using Match Types to Maximize ROI

The most important thing to understand about match types is when to use which matching option, and the best way to determine this is to leverage your own data. We'll walk through a great three-step process for determining which parts of your account need work. For the example we'll leverage some of WordStream's advanced data filtering and campaign editing tools.

Step 1: Look at Cost and Conversion Data

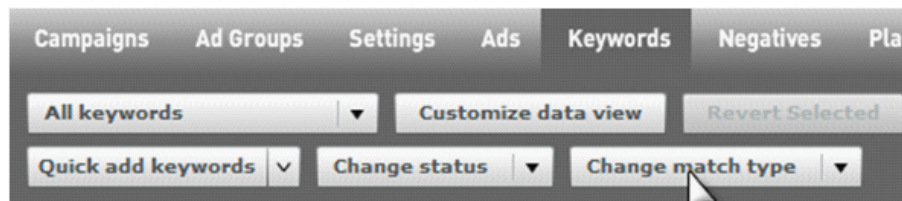
First you want to understand where the opportunities for improvement lie – you want to ferret out the keywords where you may be using the wrong match type. Using some data filters you can quickly see where the highest costs per conversion lie:

<input type="checkbox"/> Keyword	Campaign	Status	Avg. QS	Cost	Conv.	Cost/ Conv.
<input type="checkbox"/>		Active	3.6	\$360.24	1	\$360.24
<input type="checkbox"/>		Active	6.6	\$261.54	1	\$261.54
<input type="checkbox"/>		Active	6.8	\$243.12	1	\$243.12
<input type="checkbox"/>		Active	7.0	\$215.23	1	\$215.23
<input type="checkbox"/>		Active	6.3	\$405.06	2	\$202.53
<input type="checkbox"/>		Active	6.0	\$187.20	1	\$187.20

A high cost per conversion means that there's potential with these keywords (they've converted) but that the price isn't quite right. As a result they may be good candidates to try a different match type on. One approach is to try to get better control of the traffic coming from these keywords, which we can do in two additional steps.

Step 2: Refine Your Targeting

From here we want to limit our targeting to the core keyword and variations, so we might switch from broad to phrase or exact. We can quickly do that with all the keywords that fit our "have conversions but cost too much" qualification:



Step 3: Expand and Refine Your Targeting Some More

Keyword expansion may seem counterintuitive, since we just told you to refine your targeting and home in on a more targeted collection of search terms, but the idea here is to keep the relevant volume (the conversions and the potential conversions) while aggressively trimming the fat. We can do this in two ways:

- Add specific variations of relevant keywords
- Utilize negative keywords

This is where two of WordStream's advanced pay-per-click management tools come into play. First, you can use the software's keyword suggestion tools to either mine search query data or discover new keyword opportunities from the tool's trillion-keyword database. Here is a list of proactive suggestions:

Add Keywords

Top New Keyword Opportunities [Learn More](#)

We've mined our database and your Search Query Reports to find the top keywords for you to add at this time. We estimate that by adding all of the following keyword(s)

Take Action: Review the suggested 10 keywords and select the ones to add to your account.

Show only suggestions from my Google Search Query Report

Estimates from last 30 days

Keywords to be added	Match Type <small>click to edit</small>	Est. Monthly Search Volume	Competition	Max. CPC <small>click to edit</small>	Ad Group <small>click to edit</small>	Accept	Reject <small>(optional)</small>
adcenter quality score	Broad	46	Low	\$1.06	Quality Score > Quality Sc...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
adwords quality score checker	Broad	46	Low	\$2.51	Quality Score > Quality Sc...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
google quality score range	Broad	46	Low	\$2.51	Quality Score > Quality Sc...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
how to get a high quality score in adwords	Broad	46	Low	\$2.51	Quality Score > Quality Sc...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

[Add Selected Keywords](#) [Cancel](#)

And here is a list of keyword suggestions from your existing search query data (real keywords from real site visitors):

Add Keywords

Top New Keyword Opportunities [Learn More](#)

We've mined our database and your Search Query Reports to find the top keywords for you to add at this time. We estimate that by adding all of the following keyword(s) you may see **0 more clicks** per month

Take Action: Review the suggested 10 keywords and select the ones to add to your account.

Show only suggestions from my Google Search Query Report

Estimates from last 30 days

Keywords to be added	Match Type <small>click to edit</small>	Est. Monthly Search Volume	Competition	Max. CPC <small>click to edit</small>	Ad Group <small>click to edit</small>	Accept	Reject <small>(optional)</small>
						<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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[Add Selected Keywords](#) [Cancel](#)

Similarly, leveraging negative keywords to help confine your targeting to search terms that convert is a great way to make converting keywords with high costs per acquisition work harder within your accounts.

Why Understand Matching Options?

Understanding the fundamentals behind how matching options work is core to a successful search campaign. Ignoring match types is like saying you don't care about where your ads show or how much you pay for different types of advertising. Meanwhile carefully implemented match type strategy can have a powerful impact on the effectiveness of your campaigns. And understanding how matching options work is the first step to gaining that edge in ROI.

About WordStream

WordStream is a provider of innovative, integrated keyword management solutions that simplify complex search marketing processes. Our patented software provides search marketers with a private, scalable online workbench for efficiently and continuously conducting PPC and SEO tasks including keyword research and negative keyword discovery; search query analytics; keyword grouping and organization; search marketing workflow and prioritization; and relevant ad copy and Web content creation.

WordStream believes that organizing, prioritizing, coordinating and executing PPC and SEO efforts around a comprehensive, well-researched and up-to-date taxonomy is the key to achieving search marketing success. The benefits of using WordStream solutions include increased productivity and greater relevance, enhancing the value of both paid and natural search marketing efforts. For more information about WordStream keyword management solutions and to sign up for a free trial, visit <http://www.wordstream.com>.

