



# **The small business guide to investing in good SEM.**





# Introduction.



It goes by many names – PPC, paid advertising, Google Ads, Search Engine Marketing or simply SEM – and they all refer to the same niche in digital marketing.

This is the paid branch of digital marketing, where businesses pay search engines, such as Google, for an ad spot on the first page of search results. The amount of money spent on the ad is determined by how many times users click on the ad – which is why this form of advertising is known as pay-per-click (PPC).

[Google estimates](#) that for every \$1 businesses spend on PPC campaigns, they see an average of \$2 in return, making it a highly valuable investment for brands.

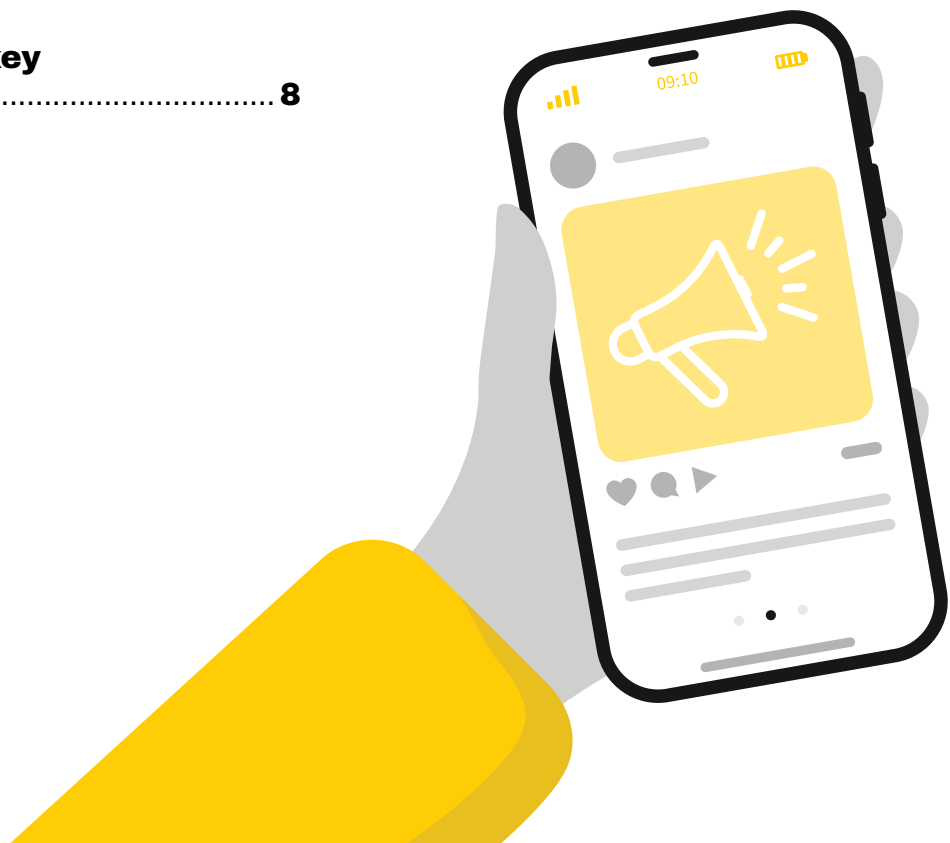
There is a real art to SEM for a small business as you'll be up against much larger businesses, so you'll need to be smart about how and where you invest your marketing budget.

**In this eBook, we'll cover the basics of SEM and its benefits and then launch into several strategies SMBs can use to get the most out of their SEM investment.**



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# What is SEM?

Search engine marketing is a part of digital marketing that uses paid ads to increase website traffic and conversions.

In short, a search engine places your ad at the top of the results page and you pay for every click on the ad that you receive.

Google is the preferred search engine in the western market. Well over [90% of Australians use Google](#) for searches and there are approximately 1.75 million searches in Australia every single week. That's why, when we think about SEM, we are generally talking about Google Ads, which is the tool that allows businesses to pay for clicks.

With Google Ads, a brand can place a maximum 'bid' on one of the advertising spots at the top of the search engine results page (SERP). There are only so many ad spaces in the search results, so the bidding refers to how much the brand pays every time someone clicks on the result, with the highest bidders taking one of those spaces.

You can bid on certain keywords or key phrases related to your business and, much like an auction, the most sought-after keywords or key phrases sell for much higher figures.

As a result, some key phrases can sell for just a few cents per click, while others can sell for several dollars each. An example of a potentially expensive key phrase to bid on would be 'best plumbers sydney' whereas 'leak repairs glebe' would be a more affordable choice.



## **An example of the keyword bidding process.**

An accountant in Sydney might bid on the key phrase 'accountant in Sydney', offering Google \$1.50 per click. If they outbid other accountants, Google will place their ad in a designated spot at the top of the page and they will have to pay Google \$1.50 every time someone clicks on it.

Brands can also set limits on how much they spend each day, or how much they spend on each campaign. So, if the accountant wanted to spend a maximum of \$750 on their campaign, they could set this limit and Google will automatically remove them from the results once that limit is reached.



## **PPC ads and Quality Score.**

Something known as the Quality Score (QS) of your ad will also factor into the ranking.

This considers the quality of the ad, the relevance it has to what people are searching for and the strength of the website or landing page that it leads to.

Essentially, your QS is Google's rating of how relevant and useful your ad is for searches. Google will use this score, as well as your bid amount, to determine where you'll appear on the search results page.

Overall, this means that, while your maximum bid is important, so too is the quality of the ad and your website. For small businesses, it's best to ensure your ad and your website landing pages have consistent branding and are user-friendly, as this plays a big role in your search engine marketing success.

Read [this article](#) to find out more about how you can improve your Google Ads Quality Score.



# The benefits of SEM for small businesses.



One of the main benefits of SEM advertising is [Google's estimated \\$2 return on every \\$1 spent](#), however there's more to search engine marketing than pure monetary returns.

For one thing, it's an extremely fast form of digital marketing. That is to say, you can set up a campaign and get your brand name in front of audiences within a day. Search engine optimisation (SEO), on the other hand, can take months to produce results, making SEM an appealing option for SMBs who want to start seeing results immediately.

Secondly, SEM is a great tool to improve brand awareness. Even if audiences don't click on your ad in the search results, they still see your business name and potentially read your ad. This introduces them to your brand as an option and they may remember seeing your ad the next time it pops up in their results.

Another key benefit of SEM – and one that's specific to small businesses – is that it levels out the playing field with much larger brands.

Even if you only launched your business this year and don't have anywhere near the same brand recognition, trust or following of more established businesses, with a solid SEM strategy, you can appear next to them in the search results.

**There are few other arenas in digital marketing where a new business can compete with major businesses from day one.**



# Goals, keywords and audiences.

For any small business just getting started with SEM, the first step is to outline three major factors: your goals, keywords and audiences.



## Set goals.

A SEM campaign without a goal is like a boat without a rudder. You'll float, but you probably won't get anywhere.

Your goals should cover what you'd like to happen once someone clicks on your ad. Ideally, it should be something measurable, such as time spent on site or conversions.

Are you simply working to improve brand awareness, therefore want them to explore your site, or are you hoping to get them to request a free trial, download an eBook or make a purchase?

Outlining your goals is essential as they will colour the tone of your ads and your calls to action (CTAs). Your goals will dictate which landing page the ad links to and they will give you a measurable result to assess over time.



## Find your keywords.

You also need to find the best keywords for your campaigns. They must be highly relevant to your business in order to be successful and they must be relatively highly searched in order to gain traction from your audience.

To start, create a list of the terms directly related to your products and services. Type these into Google and scroll to the bottom of the page to see 'related searches' for other similar keywords. Note these down as well.

The best free [Keyword Research tool](#) is provided by Google Ads themselves, allowing you to identify long-tail (multi phrase) and other related search queries that you can target with your next SEM campaign.

You can also use other free tools, such as [Ubersuggest](#), to grow your list of keywords. There are numerous paid keyword research tools as well, such as [SEMRush's Keyword Magic Tool](#), which you can look into for more ideas if you're interested in digging deeper.

Ultimately, you should have a list of keywords that are regularly searched and relevant to your business. These are the keywords that you'll be bidding on.



## Outline your target audience.

Knowing your target audience is essential, as you will use this information to design your ad and create your SEM campaign. For example, you can set your target audience to those with specific interests and behaviours, geographic locations and age ranges.

This means Google will target your ads at the audiences you have outlined. As a result, those who see and interact with your ads will be more likely to engage and ultimately convert.



# Consider localising your SEM.

For small businesses, one of the smartest strategies is to localise your search engine marketing efforts.

This means focusing on your geographically local market, both in your targeting in AdWords and with your copywriting and landing page. As an example, a Bondi based florist would set their ad's location to a certain radius in and surrounding Bondi. The targeted keywords would include areas in the Bondi region, rather than broader location terms, such as 'sydney florist' or 'florists in australia'.

Almost half ([46%](#)) of all searches on Google are for local businesses and 88% of those who make a search with local intent [take action within a day](#).

Therefore, focusing on local SEM can be a lucrative strategy for any business, but especially so for a small business with a limited budget.



## Recommended articles.

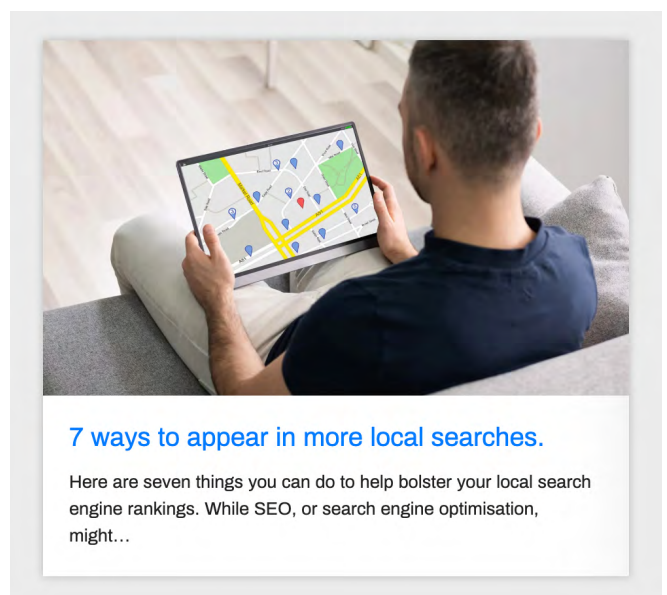
We recommend reading the following articles if you are looking for more information on how to capitalise on local searches as part of your SEM campaigns.



### What's the best SEO strategy for small business?

If digital marketing is on your radar, you'll know that search engine optimisation (SEO) is a valuable tool for getting noticed online...

[Read article](#)



### 7 ways to appear in more local searches.

Here are seven things you can do to help bolster your local search engine rankings. While SEO, or search engine optimisation, might...

[Read article](#)



# Focus on long-tail key phrases.



Small businesses may also be better off focusing their efforts on long-tail key phrases. This involves bidding on more specific, longer key phrases rather than shorter, generic ones.

For example, a short, generic key phrase might be 'coffee beans', whereas a long-tail version might be 'organic fair trade coffee beans'.

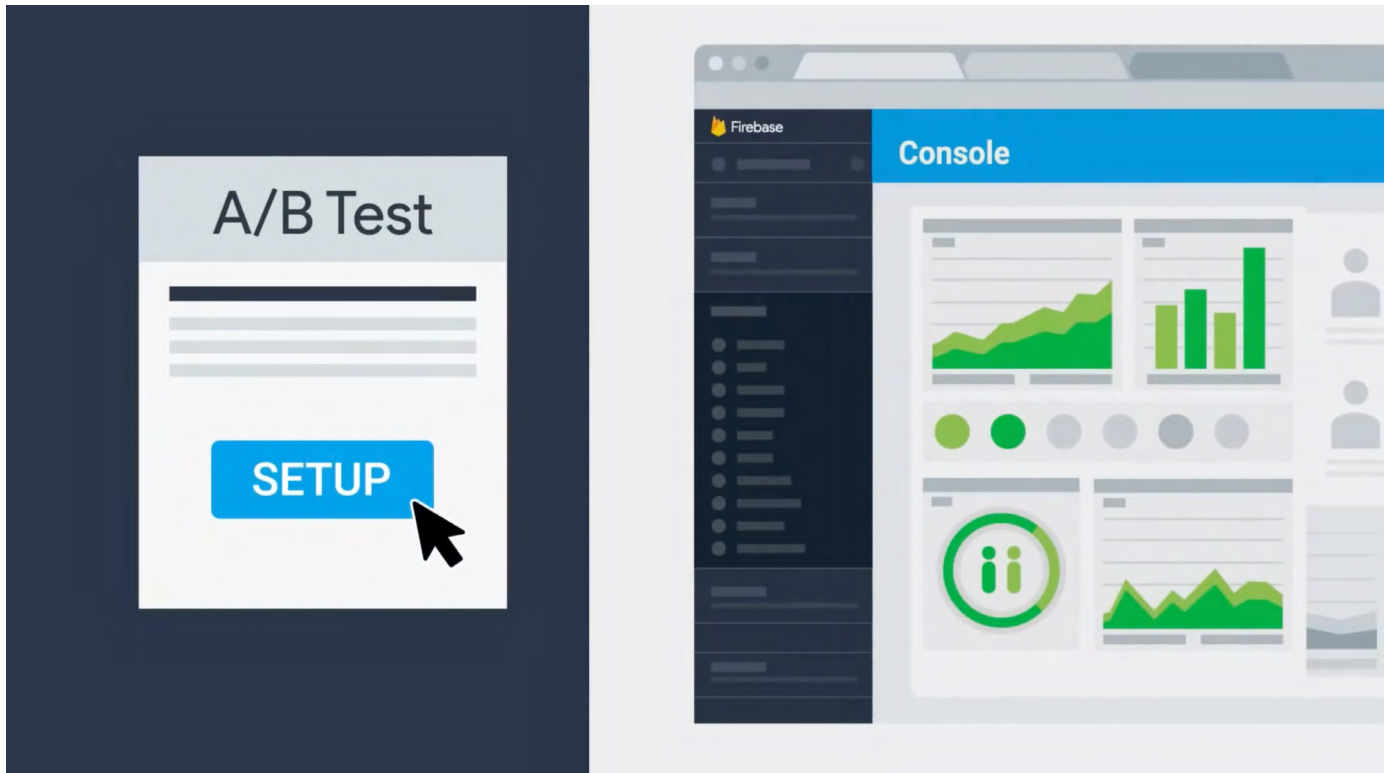
The number of searches for the short-tail key phrase will undoubtedly be higher, but so too will the competition and the cost. By focusing on long-tail key phrases, small businesses may be able to pay less per click and enjoy higher quality leads.

**In the long-tail key phrase space, small businesses may also face less competition from the major players in the field, allowing them to get a foot in the door and start capturing some of their target market.**





# Do A/B testing.



A/B testing (or split testing) is where you offer two versions of an ad for the same product or service.

For PPC, the difference could be the ad headline or the description, elements of the landing page the ad links to or the keyword itself.

Through A/B testing, you can find the best variations of your ads in order to get the most out of each click.

**Fortunately, there are tools you can use to run these tests, such as [Firebase A/B Testing](#), that are integrated with Google Analytics and are designed to help you find ways to improve your website (not just in terms of SEM either).**



## Bid on the competition.



As bizarre as it sounds, one common strategy for small businesses is to bid on their competition.

What this means is, you choose your biggest competition's brand name and bid on it as one of your keywords.

For a small business, this means your name popping up right next to the big guns whenever someone searches for your competitor's name in Google.

For example, a new bank could bid on the keyword 'Westpac bank'. Even though people typing in those words are likely looking to visit Westpac's website, they will also see the new bank's name and ad right next to it, building the new bank's brand awareness in the process.

Keep in mind, you only pay Google when someone actually clicks on your ad, so this strategy can be a low-cost method of getting your name out there.

**Of course, don't forget to bid on your own brand name as well to stop your competition from doing the same to you.**



# Protect yourself from click fraud.



Unfortunately, click fraud has become a common issue.

Click fraud is when bots click on your ad, causing you to pay Google for the click when those bots have zero interest in visiting your website or engaging in your content.

One estimate suggests that as many as 11% of clicks on search ads are fraudulent and over a third (36%) of clicks on display ads are fraudulent.

For small businesses, where every click counts and every cost must be accounted for, click fraud can represent a real loss to your bottom line. The same estimate found that SMBs lost an average of \$14,900 each in 2020.

While Google actively works to combat these bots, you can also use click fraud prevention programs such as Click Cease and PPC Shield. These tools can help you detect fraud, create reports and block malicious IP addresses.

Read [this article](#) for more information on click fraud and how you can protect yourself and your ad campaigns.



## New to Google Ads?

If you're new to Google Ads and want to start a campaign with a limited budget, check out [this article](#) on how to create and optimise a campaign from as little as \$100 a month.



## Ready to grow your business with paid search marketing?

Yellow Pages' specialist SEM team can set-up and manage your ad campaigns to ensure you get the most out of your investment. We offer a number of plans to suit the level of support you need. [Get started with SEM today.](#)