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PAID SEARCH

# The PPC Playbook.

What nine years and $32 million of Google Ads taught us about outsmarting competitors instead of outspending them. One client, five ideas that transfer to any account.

12 pages

14 min read

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# What’s inside



## Budget buys attention.
## Only the offer turns it into a sale.

Every tactic in this book worked because it changed what the visitor was offered, not how much was bid for them. That is the part a competitor with a bigger budget cannot copy by spending more.




# The campaign

Our client was a small solar energy retailer with no clear offer and a modest budget. They engaged us to test whether paid search could generate leads at all. We built their first landing page around a proposition that later became the company's selling point, and the test worked well enough to keep going.

Over the following nine years we managed about $32 million of Google Ads spend for them. In 2016 and 2017, paid search combined with the client's offline marketing produced 30% more sales than the largest non-renewable energy retailer in Australia. A small business had outsold the incumbent, and the incumbent had far more money.

**$32M**

of Google Ads spend managed over nine years for one client.

**+30%**

more sales than Australia's largest non-renewable retailer, 2016 to 2017, measured by independent industry reports.

**$420 → $66**

cost per enquiry, before and after. An 84% reduction, or 6.4 enquiries for the price of one.

**369%**

year-on-year rise in conversions after the landing pages were rebuilt around what customers said they wanted.

### Five things that transfer

Most of what we learned was specific to solar. Five ideas were not, and they are the rest of this book: scarcity, social proof, urgency, recovery, and reach beyond the click. Each chapter says what we did, what it produced, and where it stops working.

**ABOUT THE NUMBERS**

All figures come from the client's Google Ads and analytics accounts and from industry reports used for competitor comparison. The client is not named at their request. Percentages describe the best-performing campaigns where stated, not the account average.

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CHIUSENJI LAKE, AT NIKKO.



# How it was planned

The first engagement was small: about $50,000 of spend over three months, against simplified landing pages. Before any ad ran, the research went through five stages, and the same five have opened every account we have run since.

**01** **Who buys**
Customer personas built from sales conversations and existing customers, not from assumption. For solar this split sharply by home ownership, bill size and postcode.

**02** **What they actually want**
Rarely the product. Here it was a lower bill, a known price, and confidence the installer would still exist in five years.

**03** **What competitors offer**
Every competing ad and landing page, catalogued. Where they all said the same thing, that was the opening.

**04** **What the client should change**
Recommendations to the offer itself: packages, pricing, guarantees. Advertising a weak offer well is still advertising a weak offer.

**05** **The words customers use**
Regional terms, misspellings, brand names used generically. Ads and pages were written in that language, not the industry's.

WORKING WITH GOOGLE

Google ran usability research on the site with us, including a persona test. Its key finding: the target audience preferred our client's site to every competitor shown. Design changes followed from that, and new offers were tested in the ads using price as the variable.

WHY THE SEQUENCE MATTERS

Steps one to four change the offer. Step five changes the ad. Most accounts start at step five and wonder why the click costs so much. The 369% conversion rise came from the first four.

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100 STONE IMAGES, GANMAN AT NIKKO.



# Scarcity

A solar system is a considered purchase. Left alone, a household will research for months. Scarcity gave them a reason to decide this month rather than next, and it did so without touching the price.

## What we did

- Offers ran for a week, a fortnight or a month, then genuinely ended. The next offer was different.
- Offers were limited by postcode. “Twelve installations available in 3150 this month” outperformed the same offer stated nationally.
- The limit was tied to something real: installer capacity in that area, or stock of a particular panel.

## Why it works

- It converts a vague intention into a dated decision.
- Local limits feel personal. A national limit feels like marketing.
- Rotating offers give returning visitors something new to respond to, which matters when the research phase is long.

### APPLY IT TO YOUR ACCOUNT

Find the constraint you already have: appointment slots, delivery windows, cohort sizes, stock. State it in the ad and repeat it on the page. Change the offer on a schedule and keep to it.

### WHERE IT STOPS WORKING

When it is false. An offer that “ends Sunday” every Sunday trains visitors to ignore it, and invented limits are misleading conduct under Australian Consumer Law. Only claim a limit you would be comfortable proving.

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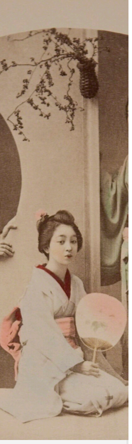
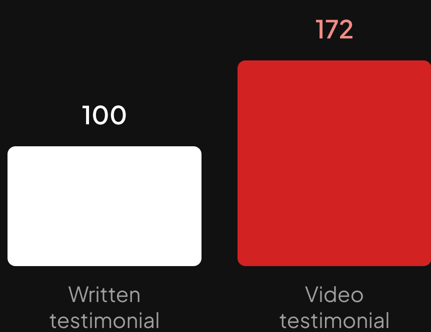


# Social proof

A household spending several thousand dollars with a company it has never heard of wants to know that someone like them did it first and is glad they did. Visitors shown that evidence took action; visitors shown product specifications did not.

CONVERSION RATE BY TESTIMONIAL FORMAT, INDEXED




Landing pages with a customer on video converted 72% better than the same pages with written quotes.

### What made the proof work

- / **Real people, named and located.** A suburb next to the visitor's own is worth more than a celebrity.
- / **A number in it.** "Our bill went from $640 a quarter to $90" does the arithmetic the visitor was about to do.
- / **Matched to the ad.** A visitor who clicked a battery ad saw a battery customer, not a generic one.
- / **Third-party reviews alongside.** Google review counts and independent ratings sat next to the client's own testimonials, because visitors trust what the company does not control.
- / **Unpolished.** Phone footage of a customer in their kitchen outperformed anything produced.

APPLY IT

Ask every satisfied customer for sixty seconds on their phone. Get permission to use their first name and suburb. Put one on every landing page, above the form, matched to what the page sells.

WHERE IT STOPS WORKING

Stock footage, first-name-only quotes with no detail, and any testimonial that could have been written by the marketing team. Visitors can tell, and now so can the review platforms.

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Chionin Large Bell at Kioto.



# Urgency

Scarcity says there is not much. Urgency says there is not long. Together they outperformed either alone, and the effect showed up before the visitor reached the site: it was in the click.

## What we did

- Ad copy carried the deadline: “Offer ends Friday”, “Last 8 systems at this price”, “Install before summer rates.”
- Landing pages carried the same deadline with a countdown, so the ad and the page agreed.
- Deadlines were tied to external events where possible: a rebate change, a tariff date, the end of a quarter. Those needed no explanation.
- Ads with and without urgency ran side by side in every ad group so the uplift was measured, not assumed.

**+8%**

average click-through uplift for ad text with an urgency cue, against the same ad without one, across the account.

## Why a click-through gain matters more than it looks

Google rewards ads people click. A higher click-through rate raises quality score, which lowers the cost of every subsequent click and improves position for the same bid. An 8% lift in clicks compounds into cheaper traffic for the whole ad group. This is one of the reasons cost per enquiry fell from $420 to $66 without the budget falling.

APPLY IT

Pick one real date a quarter and build the offer around it. Write two versions of every ad, one with the deadline and one without, and let the data decide. Keep the page consistent with the ad.

WHERE IT STOPS WORKING

Countdown timers that reset on reload. Permanent “sales”. Urgency on a purchase the buyer cannot possibly make quickly, such as a B2B contract with procurement; there it reads as pressure and lowers trust.



# Recovery

Most paid visitors leave without acting, and the click has already been paid for. Recovery is the work of getting a second chance with them at a fraction of the first click's cost. The mechanism we built was a saved quote.

**01 SAVE**

The visitor configures a system and gets a price. To keep it, they leave an email. That is the whole ask; no phone number, no call.

**02 RETURN**

The email carries a link back to their exact quote. Many came back on their own within a few days, often from a different device.

**03 RECOVER**

If they did not, a second email followed with a discount code to complete the quote. Small, time-limited, and tied to the saved system.

## Why it worked

- It asked for less than a lead form. Saving a quote feels like a favour to the visitor, not a commitment.
- The follow-up was specific. "Your 6.6 kW quote" is not spam; a newsletter is.
- An email costs cents. A second paid click costs dollars. Recovered enquiries pulled the blended cost per enquiry down hard.

## Apply it

- Give visitors something worth saving: a quote, a shortlist, a configured plan, a calculated result.
- Two emails, not ten. The first returns them to their work; the second gives one reason to finish.
- Feed the outcome back into Google Ads as an offline conversion so bidding learns which clicks recover.

**WHERE IT STOPS WORKING**

When the discount becomes expected. If every saved quote earns 10% off, visitors learn to save and wait. Vary the incentive, cap it, and sometimes send the second email with no discount at all.

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# Beyond the click

Paid search captures people who are already looking. It cannot make more of them. The biggest step change in the account came when the client, on our recommendation, spent outside it.

### What we recommended

- Sponsor a football team for a full season, so the name was in front of the same households every week.
- Put recognisable cricketers in the television ads, and time the paid-search offers to the same weeks.
- Treat the paid-search account as the place where that offline attention is caught, not as the source of it.

### What happened

- Brand searches rose. Those clicks are the cheapest in any account and convert best.
- Generic-term ads converted better too, because the visitor had heard the name before they saw it.
- The combined return in those years beat the sum of what each channel had returned alone.

> Paid search is a net.
> Something else has to put fish in the water.

APPLY IT

Sponsorship and television are not the point; reach is. For a smaller business it might be a local club, a podcast, a trade publication, a founder posting on LinkedIn. Whatever it is, watch brand-search volume in the account as the scoreboard.

WHERE IT STOPS WORKING

When the paid-search account is not ready to catch the demand: no brand campaign, offers that do not match the TV creative, landing pages that load slowly on a phone during the ad break.



# Inside the account

The five insights were about the offer. The account itself was run with a level of attention that most are not, and that attention is where the cost savings came from.

**~20%**
conversion rate on the best campaigns: one visit in five became an enquiry.

**~45%**
click-through on the best ads, mostly brand and offer-led. Two percent is normal for an account.

**5,000**
keywords tracked by hand, including regional variants and their seasonality.

**< $200K**
of paid search produced the enquiries that had previously cost about a million dollars to obtain.

### Bidding by hand, then by machine

For years every keyword was bid manually, which is how we learned which terms were worth what in which month. Google's automated bidding is now better than a human at the arithmetic, but only if it is fed real outcomes. Import sales, not form fills, and it optimises for revenue. Feed it clicks and it buys clicks.

### Seasonality

Solar demand moves with power bills, weather and rebate deadlines, and it moves differently in Perth and Hobart. Budgets and offers shifted by region and month. Every category has a version of this; most accounts run a flat budget through it.

### Testing what matters

We tested button colours and layouts because everyone said to. They moved nothing we could measure. What moved conversion was the offer, the proof, the price shown, and how fast the page loaded on a phone. Test those first.

### The sales process kept up

More enquiries are worthless if nobody answers the phone. The client rebuilt call handling, quoting and installation scheduling as volume grew. Marketing found the ceiling; operations raised it.

WORKSHEET · PRINT THIS PAGE

# Your first 90 days

The sequence we ran for our client, compressed. Tick each item as it is done and write the owner's name beside it.

**Days 1 to 30**
Research and offer

- [ ] Write three customer personas from real sales conversations
- [ ] Catalogue every competitor ad and landing page; note where they all agree
- [ ] Decide the offer, the price shown, and the real constraint behind any scarcity claim
- [ ] Record five customer video testimonials on a phone

**Days 31 to 60**
Build and launch

- [ ] One landing page per offer, with proof above the form and a sub-3-second mobile load
- [ ] Two ads per ad group: one with a deadline, one without
- [ ] Conversion tracking on enquiries and sales, imported back into Google Ads
- [ ] A save-and-return mechanism with a two-email follow-up

**Days 61 to 90**
Learn and widen

- [ ] Read the search-terms report weekly; add negatives, promote winners
- [ ] Rotate the offer on schedule; measure the click-through and conversion change
- [ ] Pick one reach channel outside search and start it; watch brand-search volume
- [ ] Report cost per sale, not cost per click, to whoever approves the budget

COST PER ENQUIRY TODAY

$ ____________________

TARGET AT DAY 90

$ ____________________

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FINAL WORD

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# Outsmart.
# Don’t outspend.

The incumbent our client overtook had a bigger budget in every one of those nine years. What it did not have was a better offer, real proof on the page, a reason to act this month, or a way to bring back the people who left. None of those cost more to run. They cost more to think about.

START HERE THIS WEEK

01

Open your account and find your real cost per enquiry. Write it at the bottom of page 11.

02

Look at your top landing page on a phone. Is there a real customer above the form? Is there a reason to act this month?

03

Do the four day-1-to-30 items. They need no budget, only a week.

## Want us to look at your account?

Get your free PPC audit →

mojodojo.io/au/strategy-form

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