

Finding the Right Mobile App Users: Google Best Practices

The Official Guide to Finding Mobile App Users.



So you've got an amazing app to share with the world. That's great. Only thing is - there are millions of other apps out there also trying to share the spotlight, or rather - phone screen. How will you find the right folks to download and use your mobile app?

This guide will help show you how to use Google AdWords to get as many of the right people to discover and use your app. So let's get started.

1. Track beyond the install

- **Track what users do in your app after they've downloaded it.**

Why: Understand what users are doing in your app that's valuable in the long-term.

Track beyond the install

Track what users do in your app after they've downloaded it

Once you've convinced someone to download your app, get an understanding of how they engage with it: what they're doing in your app, and which of those actions signal long-term value.

With a website, you don't stop measuring after the first visit. You want to understand how your site's visitors convert into paying customers. It's the same for your mobile app.

How to set up tracking

When tracking in-app events driven by your AdWords campaigns, you can use:

- [Firebase analytics](#)
- Server-to-server integration with your analytics system for [Android](#) and [iOS](#), or
- Third-party apps conversion tracking for [Android](#) or [iOS](#)

Tip

If you're using third-party tracking, make sure you pass all in-app events and not just the events attributed to Google AdWords to avoid reporting discrepancies between AdWords and your third-party conversion tracking solution.

Tip

If you're promoting an Android app, [link](#) AdWords with Google Play for codeless conversion tracking of installs and in-app purchases.

2. Decide what's valuable to your app

- **Start thinking about the long-term value of a user who completes an in-app action.**

Why: Determine what kind of users you'd like more of.

Decide what's valuable to your app

Start thinking about the long-term value of a user who completes an in-app action

Before starting a campaign, you should decide what you want more of:

- New users for your app, or
- New users likely to complete in-app actions that you select

When optimizing for in-app actions, make sure to pick an event that happens **more than 10 times a day per campaign with at least a 5% conversion rate**. This will give AdWords enough data to work with.

If the final purchase event in your app doesn't happen often enough, pick the closest in-app event that's higher in the funnel but still a good predictor of long-term value. For example, in a gaming app, it could be anyone who reaches level 5 who's likely to become a high value player in the long term. For a shopping app, it could be someone who's added a bunch of high priced items into the shopping cart who's likely to become a frequent and loyal customer. That's why it's key that you track multiple events along the purchase funnel.

Note

Start thinking about how your in-app conversions can be predictive of the long-term value of a user who completes that action. Let's take a look at how you can define value for in-app conversions with an example.

Say you're promoting a news app that sells subscriptions to its users, but you run into the challenge that subscriptions don't happen frequently enough to give you enough data. What can you do to optimize for value?

Step 1: Take a look at three events that lead up to a subscription (worth \$100 over time), and their respective conversion rates along the funnel:

- Opens the app for the first time: **100% of users**
- Registers to become a member: **80%**

- Starts a free trial: **20%**
- Converts into a subscriber: **4%**

In other words, for every 100 new users of your app, you can expect 4 paid subscriptions or \$400 in revenue.

Step 2: Use your funnel's ratios to distribute the long term monetary value of the subscriptions to the other events.

- An app open is worth \$4
4 out of 100 users who open the app become a subscriber so $\$400 / 100 = \4
- A registration is worth \$5
80 out of 100 app opens register to become a member so $\$400 / 80 = \5
- A free trial is worth \$20
20 out of 100 app opens become a free trial user so $\$400 / 20 = \20

Understanding how much an in-app conversion is worth can help you determine the maximum you can pay for a user while still remaining profitable.

3. Promote your app with universal app campaigns

- **Create a universal app campaign to find more of the users that you want.**
Why: Save time by setting up an automated campaign that promotes your app across all of Google and its networks to find more of what you want.

Promote your app with universal app campaigns

Create a universal app campaign to find more of the users that you want

The [universal app campaign](#) is a campaign type that helps you automatically find more of what you want for your app: whether that's users who will likely install your app or complete in-app actions you select.

With just [four inputs](#), you can reach all potential users in the moments that matter – whether they're searching on Google Play or Google Search, watching on YouTube, browsing sites or using mobile apps on the Google Display network. The campaign automatically optimizes your bids, targeting, and ad creative to find more of what you want across all these traffic sources – within your budget and target CPI (tCPI). It does this by using hundreds of different types of signals at the same time to predict whether someone is going to be the user you're looking for.

Note for iOS apps:

The universal app campaign is now available for iOS apps. Ads for your iOS app will show across the Google Display Network (mobile apps and sites), YouTube and the Google Search App.

It's a simple, automated solution that keeps you in the driver's seat by:

- Giving you control over what key performance indicators (KPIs) you'd like to optimize for – whether that's reaching users likely to install your app or users likely to complete in-app actions
- Saving you time from having to manage and optimize separate campaigns for each network

Setting up your campaign

Create one campaign focused on either installs at scale or users who are likely to complete in-app actions. For the latter, remember to pick an action that will give AdWords enough data to make decisions (happens >10 times a day and has >5% conversion rate).

Tip

If you're managing multiple AdWords accounts for your campaigns, [link](#) them to avoid double counting in-app events.

Managing your campaign

It's important to note that the campaign typically needs up to 7 days to test and find what works for your specific app. Expect this "learning period" to last up to 1 week – or less with more conversion volume.

Once you've set your bids and budgets for the campaign, give the campaign 1 week to learn before making any changes. Make sure to account for conversion delays if you're evaluating performance based on in-app actions.

When you do make tCPI bid changes, don't adjust bids by >20%, and try to wait until you've received 100 conversions at your new bid before making additional changes.

Things to keep in mind when you're optimizing for users likely to complete in-app actions:

- **You pay for what you get.** Set a tCPI that's higher than what you bid for standard installs. Calculate your new bid based how much more an engaged user is worth to you.
- **Uncap your budgets.** Since you're increasing bids, make sure campaigns don't run out of budget so that your ads keep showing to all potential users.
- **Your tCPI is not your tCPA.** Back into your tCPI from your target cost-per-action (tCPA) by calculating how many installs perform the desired action.

Tip

You'll need to start a new campaign if you'd like to start finding new users likely to complete a different action than the one you've been optimizing for. AdWords will need to collect new information to make decisions on how to optimize your bids, targeting, and ads for this new action.

4. Customize your ads for who you're talking to

- **Create the best ads to show for your universal app campaign.**

Why: Give users a reason to download and use your app.

Customize your ads for who you're talking to

Create the best ads to show for your universal app campaign

Refine how you tell your app's story to the people you're trying to reach.

Example: Travel app

Say you're trying to get users to install your travel app. You can highlight that it's free to download or mention that you offer great travel deals. If you're trying to find paying or highly engaged users, you may want to show an ad with popular destinations or talk about your app's trip planning features.

Here are some things to keep in mind for your creatives:

- **Text ideas (for the Google Search and Display Network)**

- Write standalone sentences because AdWords will automatically combine these to create the best ad.
- Keep it short and sweet: limit each line to one unique selling point.

- **Video ads (for YouTube and video ads in the Google Display Network)**

- Take advantage of this format by showing off the most engaging parts of your app in motion.
- Use a 15-30 second long video and really make the first 5 seconds count since folks on [YouTube](#) can skip your ad after that.
- Include a call-to-action early on. Be clear what you want the user to do (example: Download or Install).
- Test different videos. Make sure there's at least one in landscape mode and another in portrait mode. You're allowed to upload up to 5 videos. AdWords will automatically choose the best one from the bunch to show for a particular ad placement.
- If you don't have a video and AdWords will automatically create one for you using parts of your app's listing page if it predicts that a video will help with campaign performance.

- **Images (for the Google Display Network)**

- For the greatest reach use all 10 image slots that are available to you. AdWords will automatically choose the best image for the ad placement size. Here are some important sizes:
 - 320x480
 - 1200x628
Upload 2-3 variations here since this is the only size for landscape mode
 - 320x50
If possible use 640x100 here since that's a higher quality image that AdWords will also serve in the 320x50 ad slot
 - 300x250
 - 320x100
 - 336x280
 - 1024x768 and 768x1024 for tablets.
- Think about the screen size where the ad will appear. Keep the design simple, picking one image that best represents your app and brand.
- Minimize the amount of text on the image and make sure it's easy to read on a mobile screen.
- Use high quality images (72 dpi) alongside call-to-action buttons with colors that contrast the background.

- Add the app store badges to your images, like the one for [Google Play](#) (and don't forget to include them in your videos too).

Tip

Optimize your app's listing page. Think of it as the landing page for your app ads. You can run [experiments](#) in Google Play to find the most effective graphics and text for your app.

In a [2015 Google study](#), a majority of app users surveyed said that the app description, reviews, and ratings influence their decision to download. Focus on optimizing these components of your app listing.

5. Promote your mobile app on the Google Display Network

- **Create a Display Network app installs campaign.**

Why. Reach people as they're engaging with other mobile apps and browsing mobile websites across the Google Display Network.

Promote your mobile app on the Google Display Network

Create a Display Network app installs campaign

Step 1: Enable target CPA bidding.

Target CPA is an automated bid strategy that takes into account up to hundreds of signals to adjust your CPC bids in order to meet an average cost per conversion. Using the reported conversion data in your AdWords account, it automatically finds users similar to those that have converted well in the past. It's designed to save you time from having to manually adjust your bids.

When you create your **display** campaign, choose **Marketing objectives**, and under "Drive action" select **Install your mobile app**. Next, pick the bid strategy that will **"Focus on installs"** to use **CPA bids**.

Tip

Create separate Display Network campaigns if you're targeting different languages or operating systems (iOS vs. Android).

Tip

For iOS apps, you'll have to start with CPC bidding. You won't be able to switch over to CPA bidding until 24 hours after your campaign is registering conversions.

Note that app conversion tracking for [Android](#) or [iOS](#) must be enabled for your account before you can use this. For Android apps, you can track downloads codelessly. Keep in mind that codeless conversion tracking only tracks app downloads as the conversion event.

Tip

Use the [Firebase](#) SDK for a more comprehensive tracking solution, that allows you to track across networks, and events like the first open of your app and other in-app conversions across both IOS and Android. After implementing the SDK, you'll be able to see these conversions in your AdWords campaign reports by simply [linking](#) your Firebase account to your AdWords account.

Once you've enabled the target CPA bid strategy, avoid changing your bids or budgets in the first 3-5 days. The bid strategy takes a few days to learn and to account for conversion lag. If you make drastic changes during this "learning period" of 3-5 days, the tool will have to relearn. Once the learning period is over, you should see your effective CPI and volume stabilize after one week.

Once the 3-5 day learning period is over, avoid changing your bids or budget more often than every 3-5 days and never by >20%. If you do have to make drastic changes to your campaign, e.g. optimizing for a new conversion type, you should start a new campaign (and pause the old one). The bid strategy will learn these new changed conditions quicker this way.

Tip

Set a daily campaign budget that's at least 50x¹ your CPA target. To improve the likelihood that the Target CPA bid strategy will achieve your CPA target, it needs to learn by having data from at least 100 installs in the first week.

Step 2: Create a single, broadly targeted ad group.

When creating an ad group for your campaign, choose the option: "Show my ads to all potential app users."

Note for Android apps:

The option to "Let AdWords automatically find new customers, around your current cost per app install" has been pre-selected for your campaign. By checking this box, you'll give your campaign access to the mobile websites in the Display Network in order to find more potential users for your specific app.

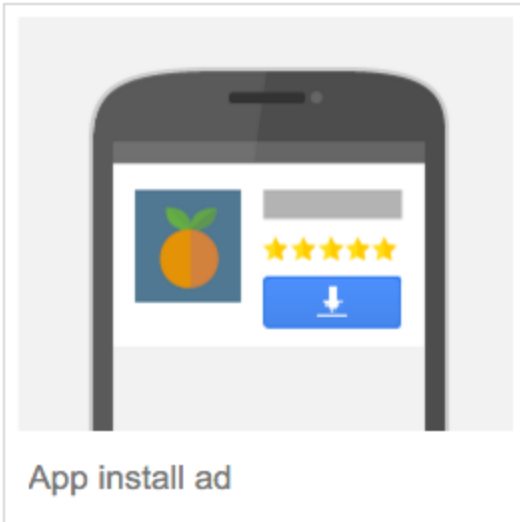
Choose how to target your ads

- Show my ads to all potential app users ?
- Interests & remarketing – show ads to people based on their interests.
- Placements – show ads in specific categories of apps.
- Use a different targeting method

Targeting optimization

- Let AdWords automatically find new customers, around your current cost per app install ?

Step 3: Use the App Install Ad template to help you create ads.



The **App Install Ad template** pulls data directly from your app store page (icon, ratings, screenshots, cover picture) creating ads that automatically render across all available ad sizes on the Display Network (including interstitial sizes). That means your ad will automatically change size based on where it's eligible to appear.

Tip

You'll also encounter two other ad templates that you can use for the Display Network:

- **Image app install ad template** allows you to use your own images to create ads that promote your app. Make sure to upload graphics for [all available sizes](#) so that your ad can show for every eligible placement across the network. Test your custom image ads against the app install ad template mentioned above and see which drives better performance.
- **Video app install ad template** allows you to show video ads on the Display Network by providing a link from your YouTube account or uploading the video file directly. This template also allows you to run video ads in both portrait and landscape mode to promote your app.

Tip

Test several ads in one campaign. Create ads that hone in on one unique selling point (e.g., Easy to use) and include a clear call-to-action: (e.g., Install Now).

6. Promote your mobile app on the Google Search Network

- **Create a Search Network app installs campaign.**

Why. Reach potential users who've expressed intent for what you offer on Google Search and Google Play.

Promote your mobile app on the Google Search Network

Create a Search Network app installs campaign

Step 1: Use the Keyword Suggestion Tool to find keyword ideas.

This tool can be found when you're creating a search network app installs campaign and is specifically fine-tuned for apps. It shows you keyword ideas based on the top search terms used by people looking for your Android app on Google Play.

The tool relies on what's called "seed keywords" that you'll enter into the tool so that it can output a set of recommendations. It's important to find as many of these "seed keywords" as possible.

Tip

Here are some potential sources for finding additional seed keyword ideas:

- Core app tasks
- Meta data from your developer's console
- User reviews (how users are referring to your app)
- Standard search campaigns

Tip

Launch your keyword suggestions on [broad match](#) or [broad match modifier](#) in order to match your ads to as many relevant searches as possible. It'll also be a good way to discover new keywords and learn how your users are searching for things related to your app.

If you're using broad match modifier, only the most important keywords need a modifier to avoid restricting traffic (e.g. for the term: local taxi booking, add the keyword: local +taxi booking.) You do not need to append the term "app" with each of your keywords.

Revisit the Keyword Suggestion Tool for new ideas every few weeks since the tool may suggest new ideas based on more data gathered from Google Search and Play. Along with your original set of seed keywords, evaluate your app install campaign for high performing keywords and plug those into the tool for even more suggestions.

Step 2: Split your brand and generic keywords into different ad groups.

Create one ad group for branded terms and another ad group for broader terms.

Example keywords for the Google Maps app

- **Branded ad group:** Google Maps, Google navigation app
- **Generic ad group:** navigation, map, gps

Tip

Test 3-4 different ad variations in each ad group. Focus each ad on a single, compelling message explaining the value of your app and include a call-to-action.

Step 3: Enable the "Target CPA" bid strategy for your campaign.

Choose the campaign type **Search Network Only** and select the option for mobile app installs. This network is composed of both Google Search and Google Play. Your ads will be distributed across both.

Set your bid strategy to **Target CPA**. This will let AdWords automatically adjust your bids to get as many installs as possible at your target cost-per-install.

Remember, you'll need to turn on [app conversion tracking](#) before you can use Target CPA bidding. For Android apps, you can track downloads automatically. If you're using a third party tracking solution, work with your third party provider to post installs back to AdWords for optimization.

7. Promote your mobile app with video ads on YouTube

- **Create a YouTube TrueView for app installs campaign.**

Why. Reach potential users with the power of sight, sound and motion as they're engaging with content on YouTube.

Promote your mobile app with video ads on YouTube

Create a YouTube TrueView for app installs campaign

This campaign allows you to use the [TrueView ad format](#) to promote your app. With this format, you pay only when a viewer clicks on your video or watches your video (either the user clicks "install" or watches at least 30 seconds of your video ad, whichever comes first). That helps you make sure your ad dollars go to those who are really interested.

Step 1: Enable the "Target CPA" bid strategy for your campaign.

Choose the campaign type **Video - Mobile app installs campaign** and select the option for mobile app installs. Your ads will be shown to users watching video and engaging with content on YouTube.

Then use the **Target CPA** bidding strategy. As with all the other networks, you'll need to track app conversions for [Android](#) or [iOS](#) first before you can use this bidding strategy. You can track downloads codelessly for Android apps.

Step 2: Create ad groups with broad targeting.

TrueView ads come in two formats: [in-stream](#) or [video discovery](#). In-stream ads run on videos served on the YouTube app. Video discovery ads consist of an image thumbnail and up to three lines of text and also run on the YouTube app. Create an ad group for each ad type and test what works for your specific app.

Target broadly for each ad group. By default, your ads will show to all viewers and potential users of your app. This will give AdWords a chance to test and learn what's going to work when showing ads for your specific app across YouTube.

Run the campaign for at least a month before making any changes so that there's enough conversion history for the flexible bid strategy. You should evaluate your results after 14 days. YouTube users often continue watching other videos and remain in their YouTube session after viewing an ad – which can lead to them installing later on. Give your campaigns enough time to report these conversions before assessing performance.

Step 3: Create a compelling video ad.

Video ads are a chance to show your app in action. Consider them to be like theatrical trailers promoting your blockbuster.

Here are some best practices for creating a compelling video ad:

- **Make the first 5 seconds count.** After this, the user can skip your ad. Convince them to keep watching and ultimately download your app.
- **Test different videos and see what works for your specific app.** When setting up your ads, pick the option to “Optimize for views” so that you can engage with as many potential users possible.
- **Be relevant locally** – if promoting your app internationally, try to use the local language in your ad. Check out YouTube’s [language tools](#) to help with translation.
- For best practices around creating video content, refer to this [YouTube Creator Playbook](#) or check out the [YouTube Ads Leaderboard](#) to see what video ads people are choosing to watch each month.

What’s next

Once a good number of installs start rolling in and you’re starting to see active users in your app from Google Search, Google Play, YouTube, and the Google Display Network – it’s time to assess your campaign results. Stay tuned for more best practices covering how to analyze your campaign data and optimize for customer lifetime value.

But getting your app discovered is only half the journey. Once you’ve convinced users to install and open your app, you’ve got to keep them coming back for more acorn boosts and fluffy tail power ups!