

White Paper

10 Signs Your Agency is Mismanaging Your Paid Search Campaigns and What You Can Do About It Today



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Your work is too important for success to be undone by lazy campaign management

One of the most common ways we begin supporting hospitals and health systems is by conducting detailed audits of their campaign strategy, structure, and results to uncover opportunities to improve performance and maximize the impact of every dollar in-market. And, without fail, we find budget mismanagement.

For example, a recent review of a health system's paid search efforts in support of the Heart and Vascular service line uncovered more than \$75,000 spent on irrelevant keywords and inaccurate geographies over a year-long period. And this was just one service line.

Healthcare marketers are under too much pressure to maximize limited resources for campaigns to be set up and managed this way.

What follows is informed by decades of experience managing tens of millions of dollars in paid search budgets for hospitals and health systems across the country. Our digital advertising specialists have compiled some of the biggest red flags to watch for, the significance of those issues, and the specific actions you can take to remedy them.

We've organized these ten warning signs into five categories:



**Campaign strategy
and structure**



**Targeting
fundamentals**



**Optimization and
execution**



**Tracking and
compliance**



**Spend-draining
campaign defaults**

We hope these insights help you navigate the complexity of campaign structure with confidence and grant you peace of mind knowing your paid search budgets are being managed expertly.

But if you're left with more questions than answers or if any of these warning signs sound familiar, it's time for a second opinion. Don't let mismanagement drain your resources. Ask us about a free scorecard review to uncover exactly where your paid search dollars could be working harder for you.

Campaign strategy and structure



Patient Experience is at the heart of decision-making for hospitals and health systems. Shouldn't paid search campaigns — designed to engage patients in their pursuit of care — follow suit? Aligning structure to how patients search for specific conditions or treatments is crucial to driving qualified traffic that converts into patient acquisition.

When reviewing campaign strategy and structure, look out for:

1

Overly general campaign structure

A common misstep is grouping all subspecialties, such as various orthopedic or cancer services, into a single campaign. This overly broad structure limits budget control and suggests a lack of healthcare expertise and understanding of service line nuance.

WHY IT MATTERS:

Without granular segmentation, it's harder to tailor messaging, track results, or optimize budgets by program, which reduces the ability to drive meaningful ROI.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Break out campaigns by subspecialty or treatment area. A more structured approach helps focus dollars where there's greater access and potential for return.

2

Overuse of broad match keywords without proper guardrails

Broad match can expand reach, but in healthcare, it often drives irrelevant traffic and wastes spend — especially without strong negative keyword lists. It should only be used when budgets allow for testing, higher-funnel intent is acceptable, and all other options are exhausted.

WHY IT MATTERS:

Broad match opens search intent too widely, leading to poor patient experiences and overspending on low-quality clicks.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Prioritize phrase and exact match types, and maintain robust negative keyword lists to improve relevance and control spending.

Targeting fundamentals



As consumers, we demand relevant — if not personalized — experiences. Brands that fail to meet this expectation erode credibility and risk losing the trust of our constituents. Serving ads in non-operational geographies wastes budget, creates patient confusion, and raises concerns around misleading promotion of services.

When it comes to targeting, pay special attention to:

3

Spending budget outside target geography

A common mistake in campaign settings is selecting “presence or interest in” instead of the more accurate “presence in.” This can lead to a sizeable portion of the budget being spent outside your target market, often outside the U.S.

WHY IT MATTERS:

In healthcare, budgets are tight and every dollar matters. Spend that goes to the wrong locations can’t drive impact where it’s needed most, weakening campaign performance.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Audit your location targeting settings and confirm that campaigns are only serving ads to users physically located within your designated service areas.

4

Combining brand and non-brand keywords

Combining brand and non-brand keywords in the same campaign often results in branded terms being overshadowed. Since non-brand keywords typically require more budget, high-intent branded searches may not receive the visibility they deserve.

WHY IT MATTERS:

Branded keywords tend to drive stronger performance and higher conversion rates. If they’re not prioritized, you miss out on valuable, low-cost traffic.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Separate brand and non-brand keywords into distinct campaigns. Allocate enough budget to branded campaigns to ensure consistent visibility and maximize their impact.

Optimization and execution



Demand for healthcare often fluctuates with seasonality and referral cycles. A stagnant, unmanaged account isn't adjusting to these shifts. As a result, you risk over-delivering during periods of low demand and under-delivering when demand is highest.

To ensure your campaigns are actively managed and built for seasonality, consider:

5

Stagnant change history signals lack of optimization

If your campaign's change history shows minimal updates, it's a red flag that your agency isn't making regular optimizations. In digital marketing, standing still means missing out on opportunities to improve performance.

WHY IT MATTERS:

Ongoing adjustments based on performance data are essential to enhance results and respond to evolving market conditions. Without them, campaigns risk falling behind.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Request regular optimization reports that highlight updates to targeting, bidding strategies, ad copy, and budget allocation.

6

Missing or incomplete Ad copy and extensions

Advertisers often overlook simple opportunities to strengthen their ads, like filling all Responsive Search Ad (RSA) fields or using extensions such as sitelinks, callouts, and phone numbers. These are easy wins that can significantly boost performance.

WHY IT MATTERS:

Incomplete ads limit your visibility on the Search Engine Results Page (SERP) and reduce engagement with potential patients.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Maximize your presence by using all available RSA fields and ad extensions to create more comprehensive, clickable, and patient-friendly ads.

Tracking and compliance



This won't surprise anyone in healthcare: to be successful, you must prioritize compliant tracking to meet legal standards and maintain trust with patients who expect their data to be handled with the highest care.

To ensure your agency is appropriately prioritizing compliance and patient privacy, watch for:

7

Non-compliant conversion tracking

If your agency is still using Google Ads or GA4 for conversion tracking, it's a strong indicator they haven't adapted to OCR guidance. These tools are not HIPAA-compliant and pose serious compliance risks.

WHY IT MATTERS:

Using non-compliant tracking can expose your organization to regulatory issues and compromise data integrity, leading to inaccurate performance insights.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Move away from ad platform tracking and GA4. Instead, adopt HIPAA-compliant analytics solutions. We have seen clients find success with solutions like Adobe Analytics, Piwik PRO, and custom server-side tracking.

8

Inaccurate or incomplete conversion tracking

Inaccurate data can result in faulty performance reporting, misallocated spend, and missed opportunities for growth.

WHY IT MATTERS:

Incomplete ads limit your visibility on the Search Engine Results Page (SERP) and reduce engagement with potential patients.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Test all conversion actions in a controlled environment, such as a test campaign, before going live to ensure tracking is firing accurately and consistently.

Spend-draining campaign defaults



Default platform settings are suitable for general use cases. Healthcare is anything but general. Strategic and intentional configuration is required to reflect real patient behavior, intent, and sensitivity.

Signs that your agency is operating with campaign defaults enabled include:

9

Google search partners enabled

Search Partner traffic is often of lower quality, sometimes even bot-like, and can artificially inflate metrics like CTR while reducing CPC, making campaigns appear more efficient than they really are. Some agencies leave this setting on by default, which can result in significant budget waste.

WHY IT MATTERS:

Search Partners can drive irrelevant or low-quality clicks that distort performance data and reduce overall campaign effectiveness.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Disable Search Partners for all campaigns, especially non-branded ones, to protect budget efficiency and maintain accurate performance reporting.

10

Phone call tracking not enabled

Too often, advertisers fail to track phone calls from ads or landing pages, missing a key conversion opportunity, especially in healthcare where calls can be as valuable as form fills.

WHY IT MATTERS:

Without phone call tracking, insight is lost into a major patient engagement channel and risk underreporting true campaign performance.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Use a third-party call tracking provider with AI-based intent signals or duration-based filtering to ensure call quality is accurately captured and measured.

When every dollar counts, trust us

The impact of mismanaged paid search campaigns can be significant: hundreds of thousands of dollars wasted and confusion for patients and their loved ones.

Unfortunately, too many agencies rely on generic strategies that fail to account for the regulatory, geographic, and service-line complexities that define healthcare. IQVIA is different. We specialize in healthcare performance marketing, bringing precision, compliance,

and strategic insight required to deliver real results. That's why our seven-year average client tenure is more than double the industry average.

If even one of these red flags is apparent in your campaigns, now is the time to act. Don't let outdated tactics or overlooked details stand in the way of achieving your goals.

Don't risk wasted dollars or patient confusion. Request an expert-led paid search scorecard to reveal the gaps and opportunities in your paid search campaigns.

[Request a Free Scorecard](#)

Contributors



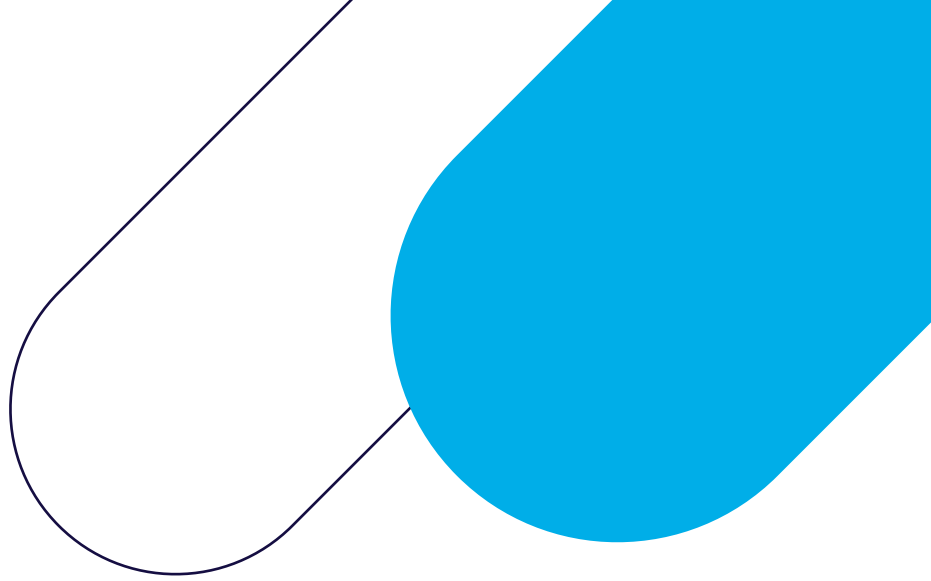
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