

Search: Paid Results & Seasonality

Higher Risks, Greater Rewards

9 April 2019

EXCERPT

The Full Report is Available to Gartner Clients Only.



Executive Summary

Search remains a key channel across the digital funnel, from raising awareness to driving conversions — but many brands have failed to keep pace with its rapid evolution. Best-in-class brands actively manage their investments across an ever-expanding search ad landscape, while laggards either underinvest or unnecessarily cede the channel to either the competition or wholesale retail partners.

An actively managed search investment strategy requires brands to judiciously select and manage a keyword list to effectively maximize brand site traffic and conversions. Leading brands use a diverse set of baseline skills — including consumer sentiment analysis and diligent advertising technology management — while also experimenting with advanced search strategies, like programming and machine learning. While advanced tactics may be best left to partners, marketers must ensure effective search strategies by forgoing “set it and forget it” tactics, instead utilizing a test-and-learn mindset that continually fine-tunes strategies to improve traffic and sales.

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Gartner L2 research is based on data-driven analysis. Our findings, rankings and recommendations are objective, unbiased and independent of membership.

Key Questions

1. What factors should brands consider when planning their keyword bidding strategies?
2. How should brands capitalize on shopper behavior during seasonal time periods?
3. What can brands do to capitalize on specific product queries and develop a cost effective bidding strategy?

Key Findings

1. **Refresh Keywords Often:** Actively track and identify trends and consumer sentiment related to your brands that may impact how they search for products within your category, including trends like new product categories, potential use cases or existing product stages in the consumer journey.
2. **Align Seasonal Keywords With Brand Identity:** Seasonality, on average, accounts for 31% of paid keyword lists, and is a natural cadence for brands to refresh keywords and check in on evergreen terms. Make sure to bid on brand-relevant terms that happen annually — including holidays, seasons and consumer-defined time periods like back-to-school, sports seasons and local events.
3. **Seek out Long Tail Terms to Extend Relevancy:** Keyword strategies need to evolve with consumer behavior: trends like increases in local search on mobile devices and natural language search on voice assistants lead to more long tail opportunities for brands to carve out ownership on search result pages.

Search: Impact of Seasonally Relevant Terms on Site Traffic

2018, n = 24 Specialty Retail Brands With >2000 Paid Keywords

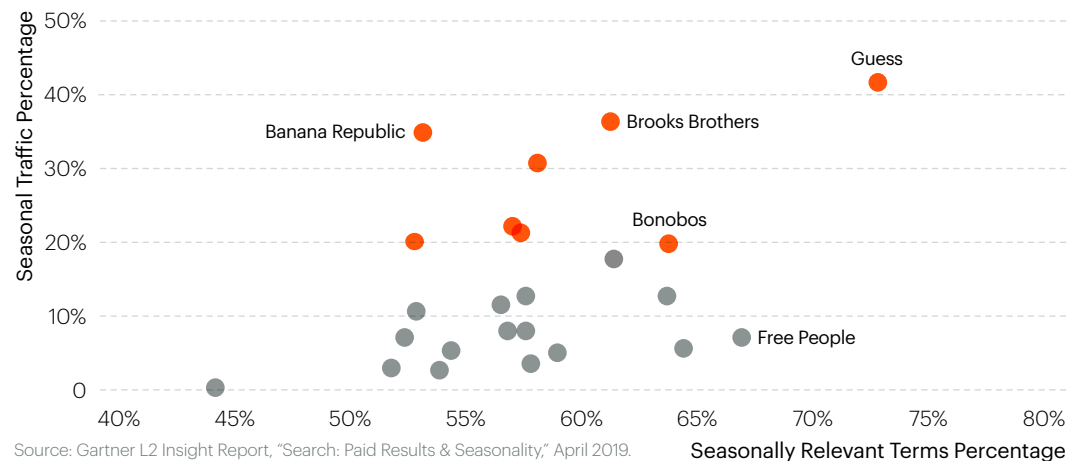


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Tailor Search to Brand Assets

Best-in-class brands go beyond simple brainstorming on relevant keywords, or accepting whatever their Google Keyword Planner and/or other vendors suggest, pulling from a range of both primary and third-party research to build and maintain relevant, topical keyword lists. In this report, Gartner L2 identifies three strategies that can help differentiate best-in-class brands from peers.

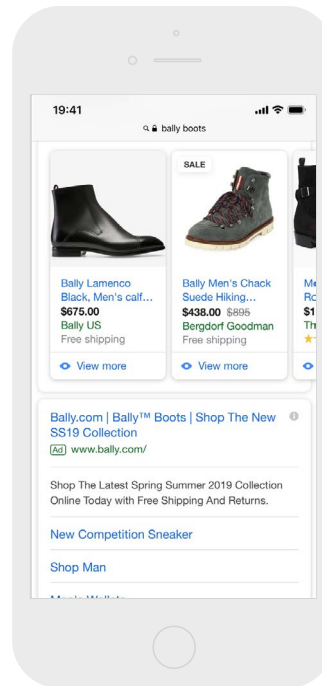
The first is to adjust keywords on a seasonal basis. Seasonality can include everything from holidays, natural seasons (i.e., weather-related terms), sports and consumer-made buying patterns (e.g., back-to-school) that follow consumers’ general information search behavior. This very top-of-funnel tactic can often introduce products to users, taking advantage of instincts from gift giving to periodic purchasing.

The second is to deploy location-based keywords, which can multiply potential keywords by concatenating location terms onto brands’ bids. This strategy is particularly effective on mobile devices, stepping into the purchase path of users looking for products and services on the go.

To produce unique keyword combinations, product-centric strategies can take advantage of brands’ product names. These can be mixed and matched with the prior two strategies, producing strings of four or more keywords to add to a brand’s broader paid list. This is also where using natural language keywords — such as questions where products or services may be potential answers — can help boost long tail search bids and lower overall cost-per-click.

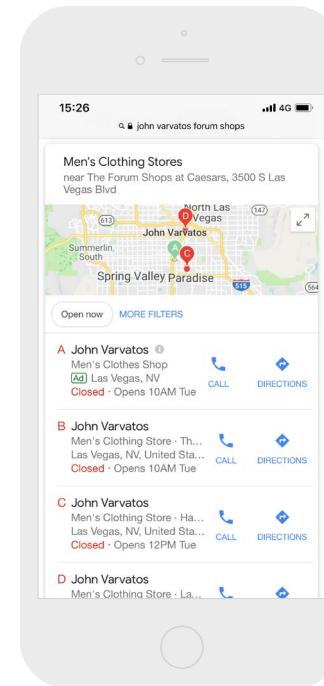
BALLY

Seasonal



john varvatos

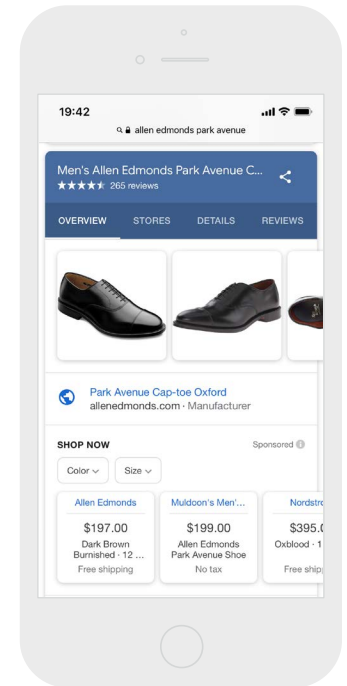
Location-Based



Allen Edmonds

AN AMERICAN ORIGINAL

Product-Centric



Divide and Conquer Keywords

Eddie Bauer

While TOMS holds a serious advantage from its brand recognition, many brands must also augment their paid strategies with both competitors and seasonal content. Brands such as Eddie Bauer demonstrate this well, bidding on both seasonally relevant keywords category terms and competitor brand names to conquest paid placements on search engine result pages (SERPs).

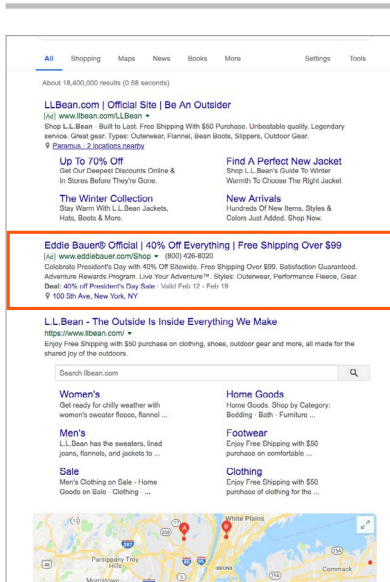
For the term “womens winter coat,” Eddie Bauer invests in both paid and organic tactics, overtaking two prime shopping ad slots and appearing as one of the top brands within Google’s “Refine By” filters. The filter, a Google feature allowing users to explore additional relevant content toward the end of search engine result pages, directs users to search results for Eddie Bauer-specific products. The outerwear manufacturer

dedicates 66% of its seasonal terms to fall-winter, and is rewarded with one-third of site visits coming from these terms.

The outerwear brand attempts to siphon off searches by appearing against other well-known brands with high search volumes, like L.L. Bean and Burlington Coat Factory. Bidding against other brand terms can be an expensive endeavor, but a strong strategy for brands confident in their value proposition, relative to their competitors. The search term “ll bean” drives over three times more traffic to Eddie Bauer’s site compared with its own brand term, but also holds over twice the search volume compared to Eddie Bauer’s term. Eddie Bauer’s team capitalizes on branded search trends, making it more nimble if a new product category begins trending on Google search.

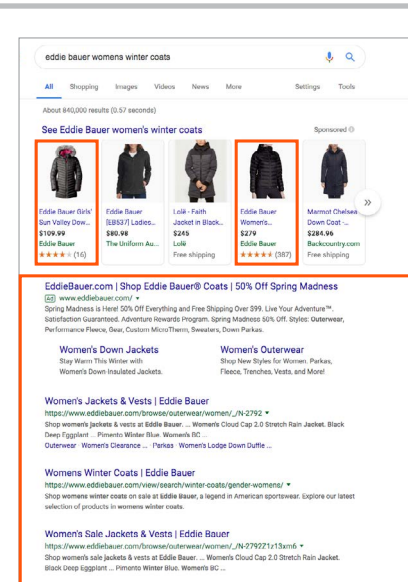
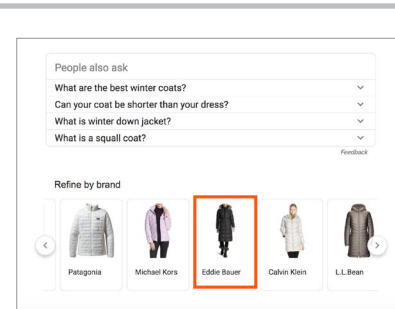
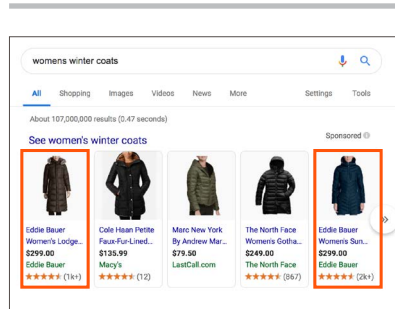
L.L.Bean®

Query: “llbean”



Eddie Bauer®

Query: “womens winter coats”



Eddie Bauer’s conquering of L.L. Bean’s brand terms collectively yields almost four times more traffic than its own brand term.

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