

# Ultimate Guide To Google AdWords' Quality Score

Everyone is familiar with the Quality Score available for individual keywords in your Google AdWords account – this is the visible keyword-level Quality Score. What a lot of people fail to recognize, is that there is more at play here than meets the eye. Most of the time, you can't solve a Quality Score issue with just the keyword level QS available to you in the AdWords interface. There is more to investigate, and can require a bit of digging on your part to solve the overall issue. This guide will help you understand the different types of Google Quality Score, why they're important, the misconceptions about Quality Score, and it will provide you with a checklist of actions you can take to help raise your Quality Score.

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# Chapter 1: Types of Quality Score

## Account-Level Quality Score

Account-level Quality Score is the result of the historical performance of all keywords and ads in an account. Google doesn't confirm this Quality Score's existence, but it's generally accepted that there are different levels of Quality Score other than the visible keyword-level Quality Score.

If you have a large number of low QS keywords and low click-through rate (CTR) ads with poor historical performance in your account, they will drag down your account's total Quality Score, and make it more difficult to introduce additional keywords, as they'll start out at overall lower Quality Scores.

Account-level Quality Score is also where we can discuss Google's favoritism for older accounts versus new ones. An account with a long history and good performance is going to perform better than a new one. It can take months to see improvement in a poor-performing account once effort has been made to improve Quality Score, and it might be tempting to start fresh with a brand new account. However, starting over is against AdWords policy, so you need to "start over" within the existing account by restructuring and abiding by keyword, ad, and landing page relevance guidelines.

Most people have different opinions regarding how to handle low Quality Score keywords. Some will say you should delete them as soon as it's obvious that they won't perform well, and others are of the mindset that you should just pause them. Either option is plausible for low-quality keywords, as they will stop accumulating data and eventually play a less significant role in your account-level score once you pause or delete them. However, you need to consider how much search volume and return those keywords have generated for you before you make the decision to delete. When you delete keywords from your account, the system will have issues with turning them back on later, as Google will see them as duplicates. Therefore, before you make the decision to delete something, make sure it's something you can really afford to lose to avoid a hassle.

## Ad Group Quality Score

Ad Group-level Quality Score is a way to determine which areas you need to work on within a campaign. For instance, if you have a low keyword QS in one ad group, but your overall average is a 7, versus an ad group with an average of a 4, you get a clear picture of where you need to focus first. Working on your lowest average QS areas first helps you achieve a better ROI.

You should look for ways to restructure your campaigns and ad groups, and edit low CTR ads to boost ad group QS. Restructuring your ad groups is a good way to improve your account structure. Your visible history is erased when you move things around, but the history for calculating your Quality Score is preserved.

## Keyword-Level Quality Score

This is the Quality Score that Google issues your keywords, and it's visible in the AdWords interface. A keyword's Quality Score is scored on a scale of 1 – 10 with 1 being poor and 10 being great. Your keyword-level score is calculated by the performance of search queries that exactly match your keyword. Therefore, your Quality Score will be the same for a keyword, regardless of match type. It's important to note that keyword's QS is based on their historic performance on Google.com until they achieve a significant number of impressions in your account (significant means a high number, in the multiple of thousands). This is referred to as the impression threshold. Once the keyword receives significant impressions, its QS will start to reflect how it's performed in your account, and historic performance will be a lesser factor. This is important if you have a lot of keywords in your account that

have very low impressions: these keywords will not be evaluated based on their **own** QS in the account. Until keywords reach the impression threshold, there's little that can be done to influence their QS.

Here are some recommendations to boost impressions:

- **Analyze impression share data.** Impression share represents the percentage of times that your ads were shown out of the total available impressions for which your ads were eligible to appear. If your impression share is low, you can improve performance by increasing your daily budgets or boosting bids to rank in higher positions.
- **Loosen up restrictive match types or add broad match keywords.** Running keywords only in phrase and exact match will result in slow impression growth and extended ramp up times in terms of QS. In order to roll this out strategically, start with ad groups or keywords that have the highest click-through rate (CTR).
- **Loosen up the themes so keywords are not so niche.** You want to be sure keywords are not too specific so that no one is searching for them. The Opportunities Tab in the AdWords interface is a good place to find new keywords relevant to add to your current ad groups.

For campaigns whose keywords *have* received significant impressions, look to CTR as an indicator of performance. If keyword CTR is low and so is the ad CTR (less than 1.5%) then this is an indicator that users are not finding the ad relevant to their query, and the ad can be more specific to the ad group theme.

## Ad-Level Quality Score

The ads you have running in each of your ad groups will have a different click-through rate, which is a factor that helps to determine Quality Score. If you have a lot of low CTR ads in your ad groups, they could be contributing to a low Quality Score since AdWords considers all of your ads when calculating your scores.

A way to give your account a natural CTR boost is including Dynamic Keyword Insertion (DKI) ads for your Search Network campaigns. DKI ads will show a user's exact search query within the ad, provided it doesn't exceed the ad character limits. While you have to be very careful utilizing these ads, it is more likely that your DKI ad will receive a click than a non-DKI ad because it appears more relevant to the user's search. However, you'll want to be careful to look for ads that aren't converting despite a high CTR so that you aren't ruining your ROI. You can pause poor performing ads without hurting your Quality Score, but editing an existing one will delete its history.

Quality Score is also a factor when AdWords determines if your ads will show extensions. First position shouldn't necessarily be your goal for all of your ads, since a lot of the time, it isn't the most profitable location, but if you want to take advantage of extensions like sitelinks to help your click-through rate, you'll need to have a competitive bid and good Quality Score. Google also recently began testing adding the domain in the first line of the ad, but an ad must reach the top position to qualify.

## Landing Page Quality Score

Google always touts their big three landing page quality factors: relevant and original content, transparency, and navigability. Google wants to force advertisers into making quality websites that Google users will find useful and relevant, which is why they're the top dog search engine. Landing page quality shouldn't only be important for Google, it should be important for advertisers too. Adhering to the guidelines for a good landing page is also more likely to help an advertiser turn visitors into customers and improve ROI.

The interface will tell you if there is an issue with your landing pages when you hover over the speech bubble for a keyword's Quality Score. Google doesn't openly state that there is a Landing Page Quality Score (although we have come across this term in older Google help articles), but landing page quality is a factor in your keyword's Quality Score.

In addition to following Google's landing page guidelines, remember that your landing pages are also being evaluated by a real person, and this happens more than once. Therefore, there's always another chance to make an improvement, and having great usability and a fast load time are especially important.

## **Display Network Quality Score**

Your Quality Score on the Google Display Network works a bit differently than the Search Network. AdWords will consider your ad's historical performance on the site you are eligible for and similar sites. Ad and keyword relevance to the site are still important, as is the quality of your landing page. The Display Network has different bidding options, and the factors contributing to your DN Quality Score will depend on which one you choose. If the campaign is using a CPM model, QS is based on your landing page's quality, but if it uses CPC bidding, historical CTR of the ad and the landing page quality are the factors considered.

Testing different ad types can help you to improve your Display Quality Score. You may find that image ads are going to do better on certain sites than a text ad, and you'll want to cover both bases in case a site doesn't allow for images. The more options you have and the more tests you run will help to improve your CTR. Remember: the Display Network is an entirely different beast, and you'll need to target your ads to the appropriate sites and demographics with the tools available to you. We also recommend separating your Search Network campaigns from your Display Network campaigns so you can better manage them.

Another way to improve your DN Quality Score is to review your relative click-through rate. Evaluating this metric will help you understand how your ads are performing against others on the same websites. AdWords has an optional column available for the Campaign and Ad Group tabs for this metric. Relative CTR is a simple calculation of the DN campaign's CTR divided by the CTR of the other ads running in the same places. A low relative CTR can hurt your DN Quality Score. If yours needs to be improved, start by reviewing for potential exclusions, using site and category exclusions, revamping your ads, including negative keywords, and utilizing contextual targeting.

## **Mobile Quality Score**

Mobile advertising is growing quickly, which leads to questions about how Google handles Quality Score for mobile devices. Google states that Quality Score is calculated the same way, regardless of which device platform you choose (computers, iPad and smartphones, etc.); however, the system does take distance between the user and business location into consideration, when available, for mobile ad Quality Score by using device location and location extensions data.

Mobile devices with full Internet browsers and computers treat ads the same in terms of calculating a Quality Score, but your ad will have a different QS for its mobile and desktop counterparts. If you separate a combined campaign (targeted to All Devices including computers, mobile phones, and tablets) so that mobile is separate from desktop (recommended structure from Google) you may see an increase or decrease in your Quality Score in either campaign after the migration, but nothing has actually changed. Your combined campaign was a combination of the Quality Scores for the different platforms, and after you separate them into separate campaigns, you'll see what each Quality Score actually was.

## Chapter 2: Why Quality Score Matters

From Google's point of view, Quality Score matters because it is representative of the relevance of your ads to users' search queries. Google is the top-dog search engine and they want to keep it that way, and Quality Score helps them ensure that the ads users are seeing are relevant to their search queries.

From an advertisers' viewpoint, Quality Score is extremely important for many reasons. This metric determines whether a keyword is even eligible to enter an auction and, therefore, whether your ad will show for a user's query on the Google Search Network. Additionally, Quality Score, along with CPC bid, determines ad rank, and this is very important – especially for advertisers with a limited budget. The ad rank formula for the Google Search Network is as follows:

$$\text{Ad Rank} = \text{CPC bid} \times \text{Quality Score}$$

With Quality Score as a factor in determining ad rank, advertisers with small budgets can work hard to optimize their accounts and can end up in top ad positions, even if their bid is lower than a competitors' bid with a lower Quality Score. Quality Score also affects ad placement on the Google Display Network. The ad rank formula for keyword-targeted ads is as follows:

$$\text{Ad Rank} = \text{Display Network bid} \times \text{Quality Score}$$

For placement-targeted ads on the GDN, Google considers your bid, either for the ad group or for individual placements, and your ad group Quality Score. The ad rank formula for placement-targeted ads on the Google Display Network is as follows:

$$\text{Ad Rank} = \text{Bid} \times \text{Quality Score}$$

Ultimately, Quality Score affects your account health and success. If your keyword-level Quality Score is too low, your keyword might not even be able to enter an auction, meaning your ad won't show and get to compete for a searcher's business. If your Quality Score is low, your ad rank will be low, likely meaning less traffic to your site and a lower ROI.

## **Chapter 3: Quality Score Misconceptions**

We've laid out the different types of AdWords Quality Score and why Quality Score matters in an account. The next subject we'd like to tackle is Quality Score misconceptions.

### **Changing Match Types Alters Quality Score**

Google essentially measures Quality Score without considering keyword match type. Therefore, if you have a broad, phrase, and exact match of the same keyword in your account, all three will have the same Quality Score. Google will determine a keyword's QS based on an exact match with a query. For example, the broad match keyword pink slippers will have the same Quality Score in relation to the search query pink slippers as it would if it were an exact match. Therefore, changing a keyword's match type does not directly alter keyword-level Quality Score.

### **Quality Score Suffers when Ads or Keywords are Paused**

Pausing ads or keywords doesn't affect Quality Score because it is based on how well your keywords and ads perform. If they aren't active and, therefore, aren't entering the auction or being shown, there is not a Quality Score to accrue.

### **Display and Search Quality Score Affect Each Other**

As explained earlier in the guide, these Quality Scores are separate and do not affect each other. First, the criteria for determining these Quality Scores are different. Second, the search and display networks are so different that it would be almost impossible for Google to have them affect each other. Your performance on one will not affect your performance on the other.

### **Higher Ad Positions Benefit Your Quality Score**

On the surface, this would seem to be true, but Quality Score is actually adjusted to compensate for ad position differences. Google considers the fact that higher positions naturally generate a higher CTR than lower positions, so they compensate for this by adjusting their formula to break up the self-reinforcing nature of those higher positions.

### **Deleting or Restructuring Low QS Elements Erases Their History**

This is not true. According to Google, whether you pause, delete or restructure an account element, their historical performance will still affect your account history. Even though adjusting these items won't erase an account's history, Google still recommends that you delete poor performing keywords and ads because it will prevent them from further negatively affecting your account history in the future. As more performance data is accrued over time, the negative affects of these poor-performing elements will decrease – but they won't ever go away completely.

## Chapter 4: Has Your Quality Score Tanked?

Below are some potential low Quality Score culprits. Be sure to go through this checklist when trying to boost your Quality Score:

**1. Check your destination URLs.** Have you made recent changes to your landing pages? Are any of the destination URLs broken? Do they all lead to working landing pages? Below is a list of symbols that could break your destination URLs and what you can replace them with:

- Forward slashes (/) and backward slashes (\); replace them with a blank space or a dash
- Commas; replace them with a blank space or dash
- Apostrophes; replace them with nothing
- Parentheses; replace them with nothing
- Ampersands; replace them with a blank space or dash

**2. Check your site speed in Webmaster Tools or Google Analytics.** Google considers a slow load time to be the regional average plus three seconds, and if your page's load time is below this threshold, it could be negatively affecting your Quality Score.

- Read about factors that contribute to a slow load time.
- Check out Google's page speed Chrome & Firefox extension.

**3. Rewrite low click-through rate ads.** Google considers a low CTR to be <1.5%.

**4. Ensure top-performing keywords are in your ads.** Put one keyword in your ad title and one or two keywords in your ad text.

**5. Consider incorporating Dynamic Keyword Insertion (DKI) ads to boost CTR.**

**6. Conduct an account audit and restructure where needed.**

- Consider pausing keywords with a CTR <1.5% with few or no conversions.
- Create smaller, more tightly themed ad groups.
- Make sure the landing pages for each ad group are highly relevant.
- Consider adding in broad match keywords if you have none. When you add in new keywords to your account, they are given a baseline Quality Score based on the account's history. A new keyword only starts showing a Quality Score that is uniquely its own once it reaches impression threshold. Therefore, if you're only running with phrase and/or exact match, consider adding in broad match to help the keywords reach the impression threshold so they can begin accruing their own unique Quality Score.