

# Everything You Need To Know About Keywords

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# Introduction

**Short History of Google** – Keywords have been one of the oldest and probably the most written topic on Google Ads. Let's begin with a little history lesson. Google Search was created in 1997. Back then, Google was mainly just a little search engine without ads.

While the search engine is primarily tasked to answer whatever the user was searching, it soon dawned to the founders that they can actually *monetize* the search results with ads. At first, this idea didn't sit well with Larry Page, the co-founder of Google. He didn't want to bring intrusive ads into his product and saw no way of it becoming successful.

However, they still launched Adwords in October 2000 with just 350 advertisers. Their first monetization with ads was in 2000.

In 2002, cost per click was introduced to Adwords. Before that, Adwords was running on a CPM basis.

When Adwords first launched, it already came with advanced keywords targeting, (of course, not at the level of 'advanced' that we have right now, but still pretty good to have them call it 'advanced' back in 2000.)

Hence keywords can be considered the oldest thing in Google Ads (Adwords was renamed to Google Ads in 2018.) The first batch of advertisers on Google were already figuring out how to use keywords to show their businesses on page 1!



The Adwords program was initially launched on a CPM basis. Yes, you were charged based on impressions on the search results page. There was no Cost Per Click until 2 years later. Quote from Google in 2000 about their launch.

*“The AdWords program provides low-cost exposure on one of the industry’s leading search engines with CPMs from \$15 or 1.5 cents an impression, \$12 or 1.2 cents an impression, and \$10 or 1 cent an impression, for the top, middle, and bottom ad unit positions, respectively.”*

Sounds like they are selling fishes. Definitely not the way Google talks now but its still funny to include the quote.

Anyway, cost-per-click system was introduced on February 20, 2002, under an improved version of AdWords, called AdWords Select. This dynamic pricing plan allows advertisers to pay only when their ads are clicked on by users. Note that during this period was the beginning of Google enforcing against advertisers who show poor quality ads and only push their way to the top of the search result by outspending their competitors.

They are already advocating for ad relevancy back in 2002, and big spenders are not allowed to push their way to the top under the new Adwords Select system. The system then looks for click-through-rates and a host of other factors for ad performance. (Note that this is **not** Quality Score, which is another algorithm update coming in 2005 which will shake the game yet again.)



# The Foundation

Before we begin discussing deep into keywords, it is important to know the fundamentals, like why do advertisers need to use keywords in PPC. Google has billions of searches a day coming in from the world, just imagine – a large sea of searches coming in every second, every minute, and every hour.

A lot of these searches are just looking for more information, navigation to other sites, or plain curious seekers. Like “why do sharks have 5 rows of teeth?” These are not exactly helpful to advertisers.

Then there are also transactional searches, meaning people who are searching and willing to buy something.

That’s when advertisers come in. They see the potential of ranking on page 1 when users search for something with buying intent, and they supply it.

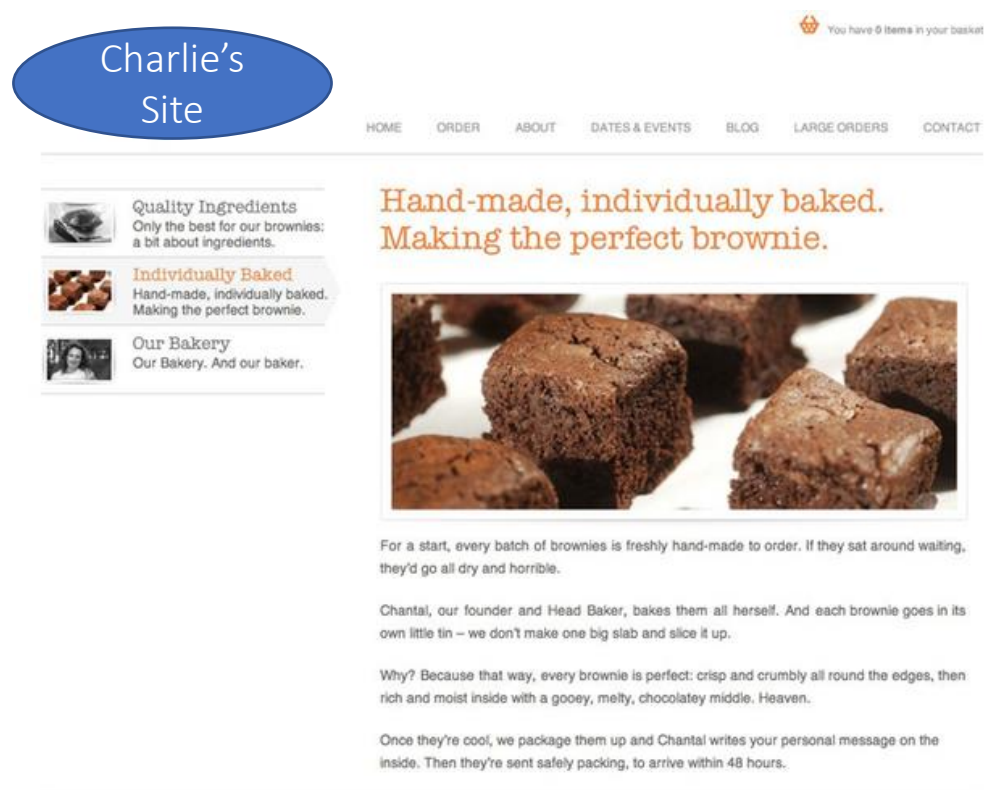
For example, Charlie bakes chocolate brownies every day, he sells them through his physical store but often has many leftovers, and he also wants to increase his sales per day. So he set up an online store to accept more orders from more customers.

Let’s call this [www.bestcharliebrownies.com](http://www.bestcharliebrownies.com). He is ready to go now. After some research, he found out that there are around 3000 searches per month for chocolate brownies near his area.



He wants to capture these searches. Because it is coming from users with the intent to buy now or at least in the near future. He wants to get their business.

He has to do it in a form of **keywords**, which are just words that you tell Google to show your ad when a user search matches the keyword. It does not have to be an exact match letter by letter, but the keyword serves as a guiding point to tell Google, “this is the kind of searches I want my ad to show up for.” And so Google will note that request.

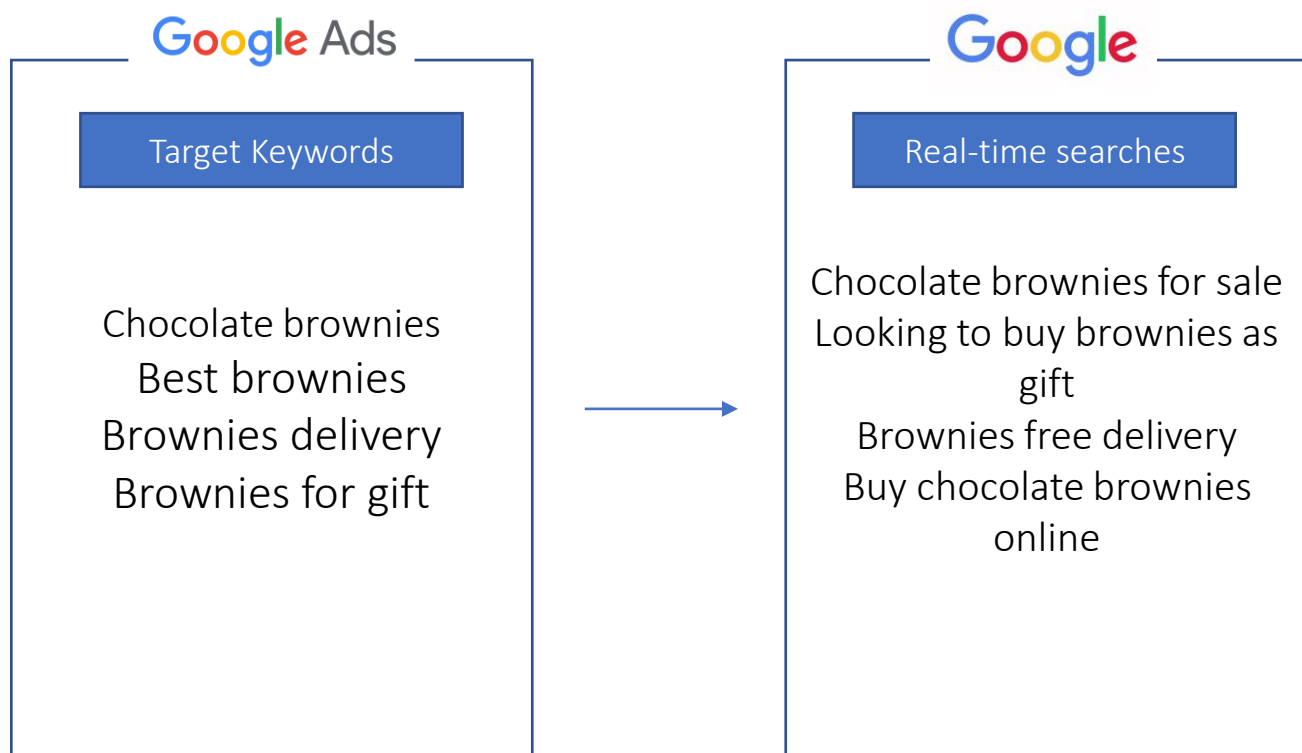


Charlie's site allows users to order in boxes of 30 pieces each. He is now ready to accept customers online and hopefully increase his daily sales.

He goes to Google Ads and creates his account, ready to setup some keywords in order to let Google know what searches to show his ad on.



“Ok Google, I want my ads to run on these related keywords.”



Charlie now ranks on top of page 1 for relevant searches during the day. More customers came in the following day via online orders. As a result, his sales actually increased by 300% by the end of next month. Hurray!

Charlie now invests heavily in online advertising such as Google Ads, in order to accommodate for the increasing online presence of users now.

The scenario above is an example of how a business runs its ads on Google. And how their selected keywords serve as targeting criteria for Google to filter out the sea of irrelevant searches in order to show searches for their business. As a result, businesses are able to increase sales.



# History of Keywords

**History of Keywords** – To show their businesses on Google search results, but not just any part of search results, but on page 1, advertisers had to struggle with something called: *keywords*.

Back then, the technology and general knowledge of it were low and mostly basic. You type into Adwords whatever keywords you want show your ads for. If you sell landscaping services, then you bid for keywords like ‘landscape company’ and ‘lawn mowing’.

Advertisers had to manage large database of keywords, and it is not unusual for accounts with hundreds of keywords in an ad group and thousands inside a campaign. Accounts soon became fairly hard to manage. And advertisers increasingly had to find ways to gain skills in Excel, pivot tables, and AdWords Editor (released 2006) in order to keep up with their client’s growing keyword base.

Why was it this way? To be frank, back then, keyword matching sucks. The bidding algorithms were still in its infant stages, and the majority of advertisers had to “place their hands on the wheel of the car”, aka manually operate their accounts all the time.

There was no smart bidding behind it, and there was no semantic or meaning matching. Exact, broad modifiers and phrase matches were the norm, so accounts grows massive lists of keywords. Each keyword is even recommended to have all 4 variants inside an account!





For example, if you were to bid for the keyword “landscaping company”. You had to use all 4 variants of the keyword. So you would end up with something like this. (Note that Broad Match Modifier was not introduced until 2010.)

Landscaping Company  
 “Landscaping Company”  
 [Landscaping Company]  
 +Landscaping +Company

Imagine if you had 100 keywords to bid, and you would automatically have to use 400. Most large advertisers end up with thousands if not tens of thousands of keywords in their accounts, so it is not uncommon that keywords become unmanageable.

Keywords was the only way of gauging ‘user intent’ back then. There was no audiences, no remarketing, no data from Google properties, and all these millions of signals that Google Ads leverages on now.

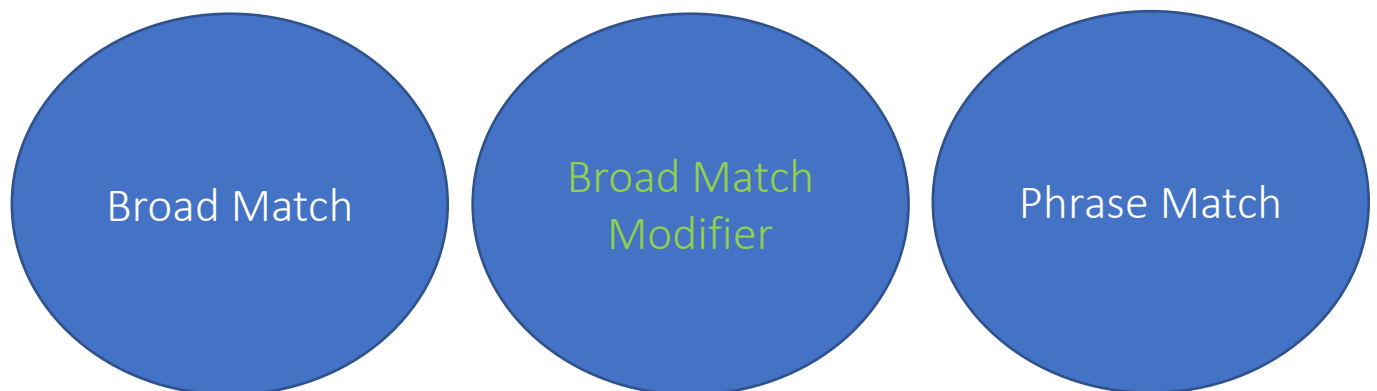
Keyword	Competition	Keyword Monthly Searches	Aug-10	Jul-10	Jun-10	May-10	Apr-10	Mar-10	Feb-10	Jan-10	Dec-09	Nov-09	Oct-09
1. landscaping	0.7%	670000	180000	201000	201000	201000	201000	201000	201000	201000	201000	201000	201000
2. "landscaping"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
3. [landscaping]	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
4. +landscaping +company	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
5. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
6. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
7. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
8. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
9. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
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12. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
13. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
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15. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
16. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
17. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
18. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
19. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
20. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
21. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
22. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
23. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
24. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
25. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
26. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
27. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
28. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
29. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000
30. "landscaping company"	0.6%	50000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000	21000



# Broad Match Modifier

Before I continue with the current state of keywords in the recent years. I like to explain Broad Match Modifiers (BMM) so that we can clear it out of the way.

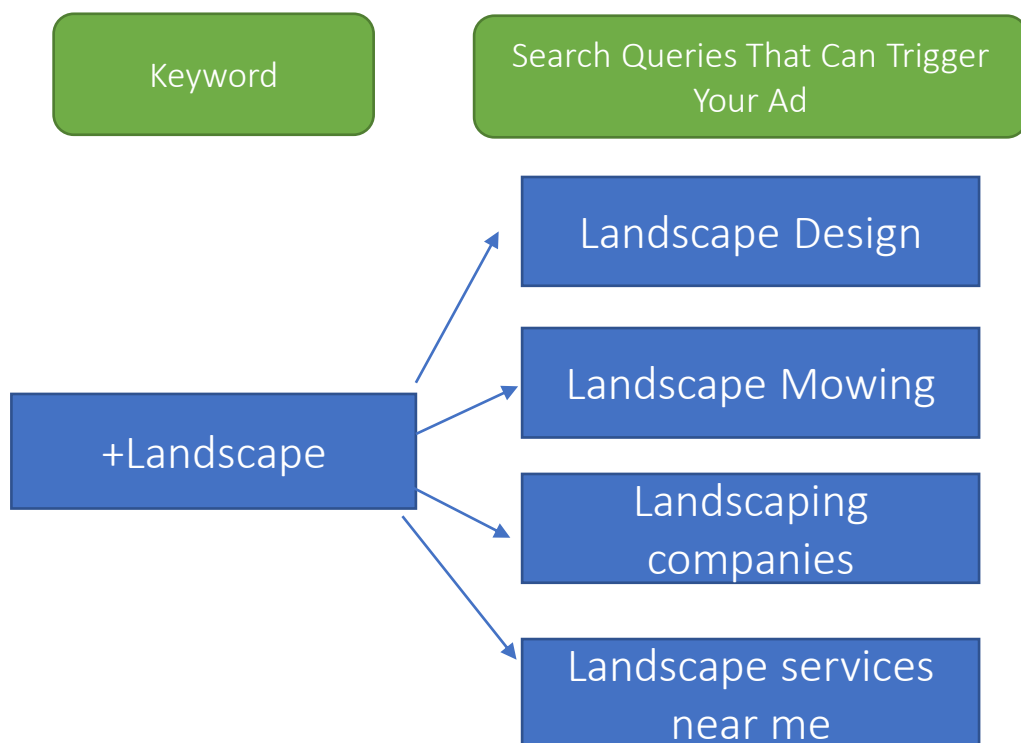
As most of you know, BMM was recently been sunset. Google has announced that phrase match will take its place and match into more relevant queries. BMM was introduced on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2010, around 10 years ago. Its goal was to create an alternative match type to advertisers. It is pretty sad that it has been retired after 10 years of service. But maybe this was a signal toward a smarter and more flexible keyword targeting structure.



When it was introduced, broad match modifier sits right between broad match and phrase match, giving users some form of additional restriction from broad match but also flexibility from phrase match. Most advertisers welcome this. To use this, all you need to do is just add a “+” before any keyword.



Google will know that you want to bid for this keyword in broad match modifier. It will ensure that your ad only shows when that keyword is present. For example, in the landscaping business, I could choose the word +Landscape and have it match for queries like “Landscape services near me”, “Landscape mowing”, “Landscaping companies”.



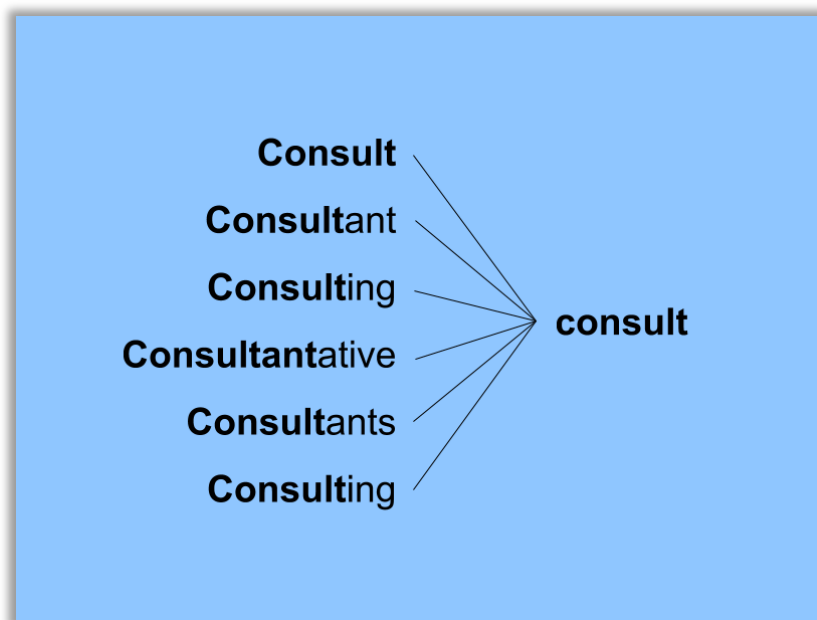
You can add multiple “+” keywords in a line, each additional “+” restricts the queries you match further, as now the keyword has to match multiple requirements.

*(Note that at this period of introduction, namely 2010, “Close variants” has already been given consideration. Hence +landscape matches to the query ‘landscaping companies’.)*



Close Variants are described as misspellings, singular/plurals, abbreviations and acronyms as well as stemming. So, “landscaping” or “landscapers” may trigger your keywords as well, because they are variants of the word “landscape”.

A lot of users don’t know what is stemming. Basically, it means the root word of the keyword. In the example below, any of the keywords on the left you choose will automatically match its root or ‘stem’ variant ‘consultant’.



Of course, Google has changed their matching policies throughout the years. In the last few years, most keywords have already included [semantic](#) and [synonyms](#) matching. Google has been steadily marching towards a more ‘relaxed’ way of keyword targeting and allowing keywords to match to as many variants and meanings as possible.

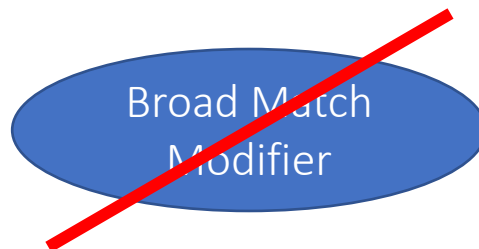
Whether or not this was well received by the community is another topic. For most non-PPCers, just know that Google Ads, like any other advertising platform, is a fast-moving industry.



Google is changing how they do things frequently, most of the time towards more efficiency and results. As I have mentioned above, semantic and synonyms matching is the latest 'add on' to keywords. And we will discuss this in the future chapters ahead.

Google is likely to continually update their matching capabilities, so don't expect this to be final. We may expect to see even wider matching in the future with the advent of machine learning and AI.

Goodbye BMM,



Unfortunately, the news broke in February 2021. Google will pull the plug on Broad Match Modifiers. The reason? Simplicity.

Google states that the reasoning for this is that both phrase match and broad match modified keywords *"often serve the same use cases, and that you can reach more of the right customers through a combination of the two."*

The second reason was ease of management. Google is continually trying to make their API easier and more friendly to use.

Why? Because if it is easy to use, more people will be inclined to start advertising with Google.

Google has been consistently at the top in terms of its platform difficulty. The ceiling curve for a newcomer to use Google Ads efficiently is so much higher than on any other ad platforms.



The move of deleting BMM keywords help make the interface more user-friendly, and it is definitely a move welcomed by most non professionals, and even professionals.

2 years after the introduction of BMM, in [April 2012, close variants from BMM have been added to phrase and exact matches](#). The trend of 'loosening' keyword matching is finding its initial momentum here.

In 2012, synonyms matching were still not used in their platform. Note that users were also allowed to opt out of close variants within their campaign settings. (*This is no longer the case now as close variants are applied to all match types with no option to turn them off.*)



## 2017 – 2019 Keywords

Between the more recent years, keywords has undergone subtle but not minimal changes, mainly to their matching ability. There was no new keyword match type, but Google is steadily making changes to how keywords matched during this period.

The trend has been towards the more liberal matching style and cutting off the existing 'chains' on keyword matching.



Why did Google do this? The main reason is to make it easier for its advertisers to use their product. Why would they want to make it any harder? Google is aware of advertisers still building out excessively large keyword sets into excel sheets and using pivot tables to analyze them.

With Google's growing technology and increasing revenue from their ad platform, they are able to 'help' us by reducing the load on our shoulders. We shall see more of these cases shortly.



## 17<sup>th</sup> March 2017 – ‘Loosening’ of Exact Match Keywords

News broke out on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2017, Google has yet again decided to further release their ‘brakes’ on keywords. This time it was only for exact match keywords. Close variants now get added to exact match keywords. Re-wording, re-ordering and function keywords can be matched to exact match keywords now.

What does this mean? Google claims that this move helps “*make it even easier for you to reach more of your customers*”.

Let’s look at the example below.

Keyword	Query	Why it matched
jobs in united states nike shoes women	jobs in <b>the</b> united states nike shoes <b>for</b> women	Function words added
parks <b>in</b> san diego paint for <b>a</b> deck	parks san diego paint for deck	Function words removed
news <b>from</b> today bahamas cruise <b>from</b> miami	news <b>for</b> today miami <b>to</b> bahamas cruise	Function words changed

Function words that do not change the meaning like “from”, “to”, “for” etc. will now be ignored and allowed to match your exact match keywords.

Keyword	Query	Why it matched
running shoes men’s dress shirt	shoes running dress shirt men’s	Words reordered

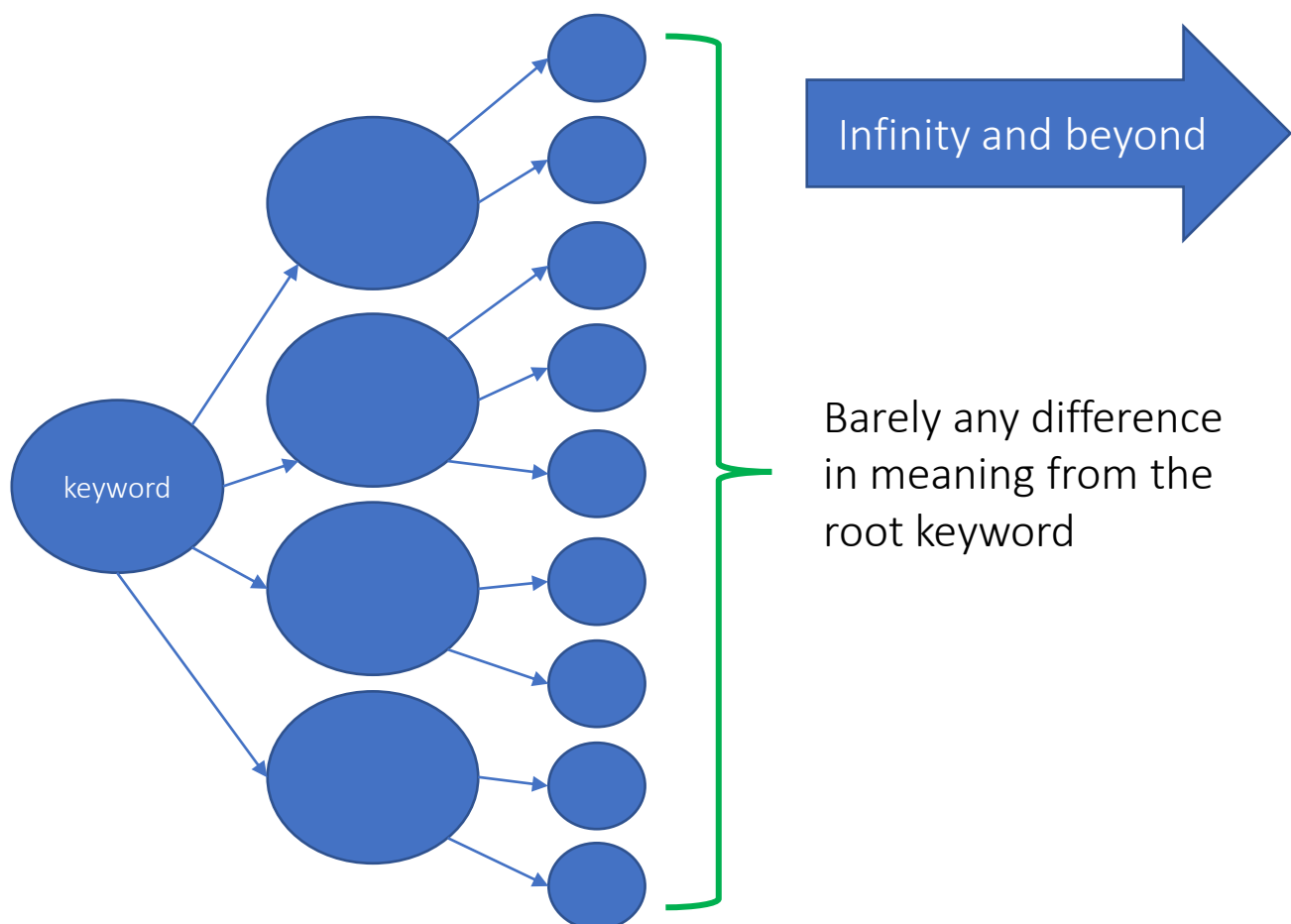




Ordering of the keywords was also ignored for exact matches. This proves to be a more shocking to advertisers, who before this were used to exact match keywords to match exactly what they written down, giving them full control.

This form of granular control literally vanished in this update. Advertisers had been building large lists of keywords like this, all with minimal difference from one another. Does it matter to have multiple of the same keywords with different match types, different order, propositions, close variants?

Despite receiving bad publicity for this update mainly from advertisers who do not embrace change, Google is actually reducing all that fuss for us.



## 6<sup>th</sup> September 2018 – Exact Match Update (again)

Another news broke out on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2018. At the front of Google's news writes "Exact Match will begin including close variations that share the same meaning as your keyword."

This is the introduction of synonyms, which basically means same meaning from the keyword. Exact matches are no longer 'exact'.

Keyword	Query	Why it matched
yosemite camping	yosemite <b>national park ca</b> camping	Implied words
	yosemite <b>campground</b>	Paraphrase
	<b>campsites in</b> yosemite	Same intent

This is the biggest 'brake release' by Google so far. **Exact match no longer need to respect the keyword as long as another word share its meaning.**

Despite the outrage in the community, this is quite expected. During this time is when Google had started making leaping progress in their machine learning capabilities. Smart bidding was also recently introduced.

Google's reason for this update? They found out at **roughly 15%** of searches everyday are new.



“With so many new queries, there’s a good chance people are searching for your products or services with terms you haven’t discovered.” – Google blog.

15% of searches everyday have never been seen before in Google. This may be hard to believe, but it is entirely possible. They may not be entirely ‘new’ searches like Google has said. But any typo, misspelling, close variants, synonyms of a search can qualify it as a ‘new search’.

Not to mention the cultural and racial differences, geographical differences, languages differences, and just different social standards in many parts of the world. All this can cause users to use a different way of finding the **same thing**.

Google’s internal data has shown that in 2016, they saw people search for deodorant in more than 150,000 unique ways.



The full extent of this update is more than just synonyms. Adwords is now powered by machine learning bidding algorithms. Exact match can now match with “the intent of a search, instead of just the specific words. And this will include implied words, paraphrases, and other terms with the same meaning.”

This is a lot to digest. Let’s break it down.

1. Intent of a search, instead of specific words.
2. Implied words
3. Paraphrases
4. Other terms with the same meaning

Number 1 means that the search query do not have to match to your specific keywords, instead the similar intent or meaning can trigger it.

This is why the advertisers community is complaining about. Exact match (EM) has lost its previous intent. I believe that change is not necessarily bad. Instead, it is crucial and part of evolution. Advertisers must learn to adapt and update their skills regularly to avoid being left behind in a fast-moving industry such as online advertising.

Let’s look at number 2; implied words. What is the meaning of this? Let’s pull out the dictionary. *“The definition of implied is something that was hinted at or suggested, but not directly stated.”*

This means that user search queries that hint or suggest your keyword indirectly is eligible to trigger your exact match keyword.



Now, let's examine an example of an implied scenario. If someone in class is looking at his phone during lesson and yawning multiple times, we can imply that the person is likely to be bored with the lesson.

The person do not have to stand up and announce to everyone, **"Hi class, I am very bored of this lesson. I can't wait for lunch!"**. His actions indirectly hints you at what he thinks. And Google's machine learning is able to **imply** search queries to your keywords and see if they have any correlation.

Let's move on to the 3<sup>rd</sup> example; paraphrases. From [yourdictionary.com](http://yourdictionary.com), "Paraphrasing involves taking a passage — either spoken or written — and rewording it. Basically, you are writing something in your own words that still expresses the original idea."

Let's take a look at an example of a paraphrase.

**Original:** Her life spanned years of incredible change for women as they gained more rights than ever before.

**This is a paraphrase:** She lived through the exciting era of women's liberation.

Now, the final scenario. Other terms with the same meaning is basically self-explanatory. Whatever keywords you bid, if they are other words that implies the same meaning, it will be used to trigger your keyword. This is also called **synonyms**. For example; bunny, rabbit, hare. They are used to describe the same thing. Hence they are called synonyms, or other terms with the same meaning.





Bunny



Rabbit



Hare

## 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019.

You may be wondering. All these new changes to exact match. How about the rest? Do they still retain the original targeting? The update of exact matches caused a [temporary loophole in Google keyword matching where phrase matches are more tight than exact matches!](#)

This was revised on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019, when Google officially extended everything they did to exact match, to broad match modifiers (now unseated) and phrase matches.

Broad match modifier keyword	Matched queries before the update	Matched queries after the update
<a href="#">+lawn +mowing +service</a>	services to mow my lawn	grass cutting and gardening services
	lawn mowing and edging service	rates for services that cut your grass

New broad match modifier matching (now unseated)

Phrase match keyword	Matched queries before the update	Matched queries after the update
<a href="#">"lawn mowing service"</a>	lawn mowing service prices	grass cutting service near me
	seasonal lawn mowing service rates	local lawn cutting services

New phrase match



Do not worry about the exact implications of each match type. The key here is to understand that Google is moving into a smart advertising ecosystem, where **meaning** and **semantics** takes precedent over “word-for-word” now.

This is a world of difference compared to what was available to advertisers 20 years ago.

Google has also addressed how keywords selection should work in times of “overlap”. Let’s say if you have 3 keywords that are eligible to trigger for the query, the one closest to the keyword will be given priority to match.

For example, if someone searches “lawn mowing service near me.” and you have these 3 keywords inside your account.

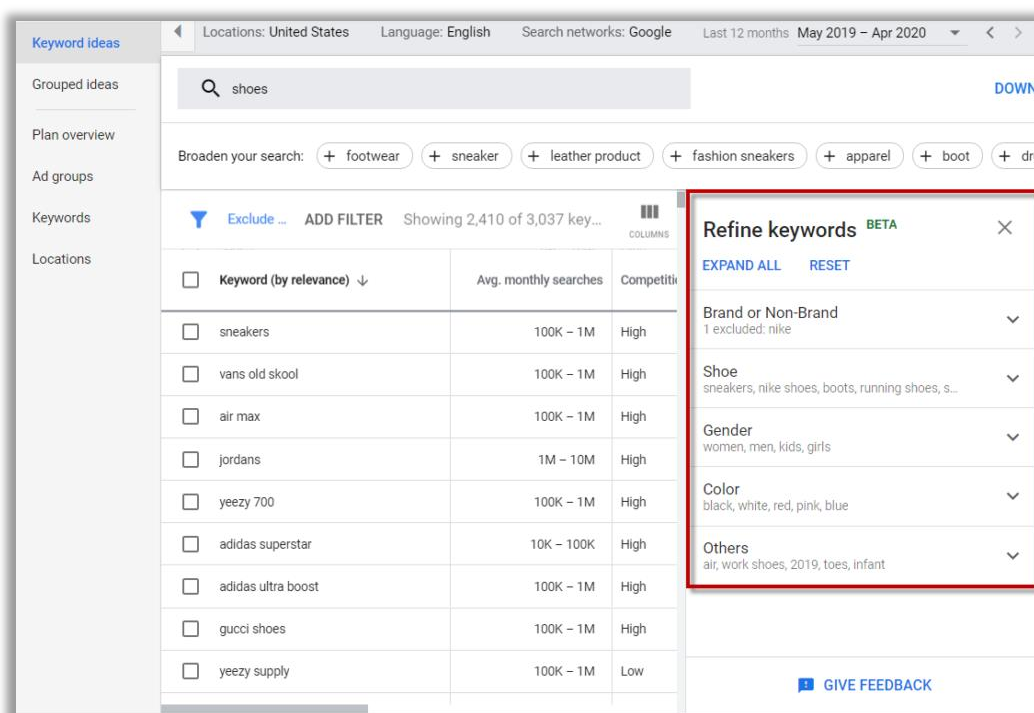


In this case, all 3 keywords are eligible to match. Google will give the priority to the strictest match type and the closest word. In this case, “lawn mowing service” keyword will trigger over the rest.



# 2020 – 2021 Keywords

There really isn't much happening to keywords in 2020. Most notably was that they updated the *keyword planner* to now include refine keywords section. It is a mainly welcomed update by advertisers, as it allows us analyze large keyword sets in thematically related groups.



In the example above, you can see that a search for a generic keyword such as 'shoes' will probably produce a lot of keyword suggestions within the Keyword Planner.

Showing a refine keyword section at the side panel helps advertisers to cut to the meat and pick out what we most want. More about refine keywords in the [official documentation here](#).





In the past, you would've had to sort through thousands of keyword ideas within the Keyword Planner. Now, you can just filter attributes and view them together based on the attributes of your product or service—like color, size, and more.

## 2021 – Current

**The biggest news of 2021 relating to keywords (at least of the first half of the year) was the removal of Broad Match Modifier keywords.** Google promised that by the end of July, advertisers will no longer be able to use BMM keywords.

I have already explained BMM's rise and fall in the earlier sections. If you just skipped to this page, I advise you to go back and read them first.

What about the current BMM keywords in existing accounts? Well, Google said that the existing BMM keywords will continue to serve using the updated phrase matching behavior. You'll be able to edit attributes of your BMM keywords like bid or status, but if you want to edit the keyword text you'll be prompted to change it to phrase match.

In short, you will no longer be allowed to create new BMM keywords. Any existing ones you have in your account will be matching as though it's a phrase match.

If you do remove your BMM keywords, you will still be able to view the performance metrics of your removed BMM keyword in the interface. However, the new keyword's statistics will start fresh. It is pretty assuring to advertisers who have used BMM for a long time that they will not be losing the historical data of their keywords.



Why? Because data about your customers is extremely valuable in Google Ads, or any platforms that supports machine learning and AI for bidding.

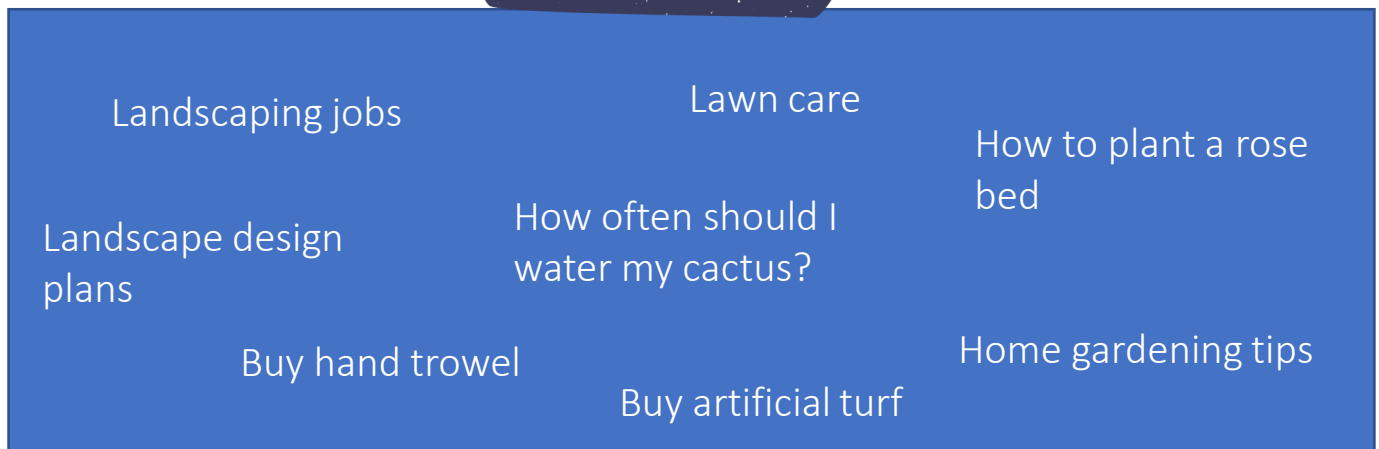
Google's machine learning looks at large sets of data and signals they have on your customer, and actively predicts in real time their chance of converting on your site, before setting a bid on your behalf.

The more (clean) data you accumulate on your account, the better the system can perform. Once again, machine learning is very adept at finding valuable correlations and trends within large data sets.



# Broad Match

We have now covered the history of keywords, let's now take a deep dive into each of the 3 existing keyword match types. Starting with Broad Match, the biggest catch of them all.



When you use broad match, **you are casting the widest net possible in the ocean of traffic**. You are telling Google to bring you as many relevant traffic to you as possible. You will initially receive a lot of irrelevant searches that you just don't offer. That is why **Google recommends using broad matches along with smart bidding**.



Why smart bidding? You ask. **Because smart bidding leverages Google's machine learning capabilities to bring you results at your desired goal, be it impression share, click volume, or the more commonly; Cost Per Acquisition (CPA) and Return on Ad Spend (ROAS).**

A lot of advertisers whine at giving Google the 'full reins' by letting them match to whatever keyword they please, they think that they can make better decisions than 'machines'. But the opposite is true. When you give smart bidding a task, like a \$20 CPA or 400% ROAS, you are telling it to use your money and go to work, and to return with these target results.

The machine is not a human, it doesn't have emotions or personal benefits in mind. It's programmed to try its best to bring you back the results you designed it to achieve.

When you pair up broad match keywords with smart bidding. **Google machines had to learn and figure out the best way to work with these keywords in order to bring you the return you ask for.** It may not always succeed, especially if you set an unattainable goal, for example let's say 2000% ROAS when your industry averages 400%.

All it is going to do is become so conservative that it will not dare to enter into any auction and as a result, you have an inefficient machine. The key is the right balance. It is not my intention to explain in-depth about Google's smart bidding capabilities in this e-book, but here is just a brief description.

But let's say you set a reasonable goal for machine learning. It will then look at the queries and a multitude of factors in real time to decide if this is a good or bad bid to enter for your ads.




Increasing your CPA or lowering your ROAS means you are letting the machines bid more aggressively. Because you are telling them that you are 'OK' with a higher acquisition cost. The same is true for the opposite.

## Broad Still Matches With Phrase or Exact Match of the Word

Note that when you use broad match, it will automatically match the phrase or exact version of that keyword. Bidding for a broad match keyword such as 'landscaping services' means you are automatically eligible to match the phrase and exact version of that keyword.

[So, you do not have to create duplicate keywords with the same match type.](#)



Broad match keyword:	Ads may show on searches for:
<b>low-carb diet plan</b>	<div>carb-free foods</div> <div>low-carb diets</div> <div>low calorie recipes</div> <div>Mediterranean diet books</div> <div>low-carbohydrate dietary program</div>

The example above is by Google. A broad match doesn't require any additional syntax, unlike phrase match (" ") and exact match ( [ ] ). Just typing the keyword tells Google that you are using broad match.



Below is an excerpt from Google on the definition of broad matches.

“Ads may show on searches that are related to your keyword, which can include searches that don't contain the keyword terms. This helps you attract more visitors to your website, spend less time building keyword lists, and focus your spending on keywords that work. Broad match is the default match type that all your keywords are assigned as if you don't specify another match type (exact match, phrase match, or a negative match type).”

I also like to bring you to a point about the current broad match targeting that most advertisers may have missed. [Google is taking 3 additional scenarios into account when you use broad match.](#)

- [The user's recent search activities](#)
- [The content of the landing page](#)
- [Other keywords in an ad group to better understand keyword intent](#)

I will explain the 3 scenarios in detail. But first take note that this 3 additional scenarios as described by Google, only applies to broad match keywords.

Meaning that the other 2 match types would not be leveraging these signals.



- **The user's recent search activities**

Broad match not only looks at your keywords, or semantics and similar meanings, but it may also add new weightage on signals like the user's search activities.

Let's say that Google found that the user was actively searching for landscaping equipment few days ago, and steadily getting more precise in his search, may trigger your ad even if the most recent search did not have similar meaning to your keyword.

- **The content of the landing page**

Reading the content of your landing page seems to be the job of a dynamic search ads. But this seems to be applicable for broad match keywords as well. Google may crawl your landing page to understand your landing page relation to the searcher's query.

- **Other keywords in an ad group to better understand keyword intent**

This is an interesting factor. Google may look at other keywords *within the same ad group* and give weightage whether to trigger your ads or not. Let's say you have 3 broad match keywords inside an ad group.

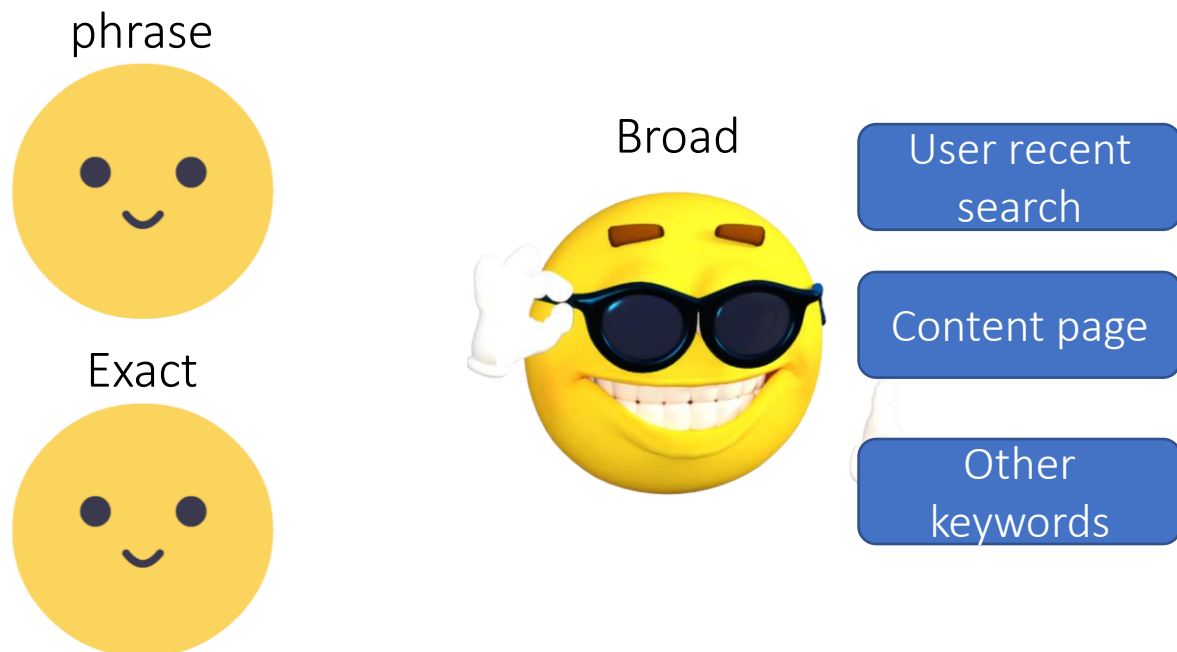
1. Landscaping Services
2. Lawn cutting
3. Lawn treatment against weed

My understanding is that the context of these keywords are now understood within each other and may help to trigger your ads on auction time.



Why are these *additional factors* only available for broad match? You may ask. As of time of writing this e-book, there is no official answer from Google. But from my understanding, *the nature of broad keywords are the most suitable for these adjustments.*

Applying it on phrase and exact just wouldn't make sense. They do not have the luxury of targeting like their fellow brother broad match does.



I am not surprised if Google extends this additional factors to phrase and exact match in the future. I hope by now you know that online advertising is a fast-moving industry. Google doesn't like sitting still, they thrive on creating new and exciting stuff for us to test and work with.

Once again, *Google has been advocating tirelessly to use smart bidding with broad match keywords.*





The Smart Bidding system sets a bid for each individual auction of each query and bids up or down depending on how well the query is likely to perform. And there is nothing more suitable than using broad match with it.

My advice for you is to test it. Keywords are different for every industry, and also depending on your budget. **If you have a sizeable budget, I recommend you go with broad match and babysit the search terms report for the first few weeks.**

Now that we have covered broad match, let's continue to the next one.



# Phrase Match

Phrase match allows you to trigger search queries that include the meaning of your keyword. The meaning of the keyword can be implied, and user searches can be a more specific form of the meaning. Phrase match is more flexible than exact match but is more targeted than the default broad match option. With phrase match, you can reach more customers, while still showing your ads to customers who are most likely searching for your product or service.

Remember that the order of your keyword no longer matters. The main focus is now on **meaning and semantics**.



The 'sea' is narrower this time



Phrase match keyword:	Ads may show on searches for:	Ads won't show on searches for:
"tennis shoes"	<div>shoes for tennis</div> <div>buy tennis shoes on sale</div> <div>red tennis shoes</div> <div>comfortable tennis sneakers</div>	<div>tennis rackets and training shoes</div> <div>can you wear running shoes for tennis</div>

The above is the official documentation from Google. In this case the phrase match keyword 'tennis shoes' cannot trigger search queries like:

1. Tennis rackets and training shoes
2. Can you wear running shoes for tennis

Because Google believes the meaning is different now. Running shoes, training shoes and tennis shoes should be treated differently.

If you were using broad match instead, the 2 queries above would be eligible to trigger your ad.

**My take - Phrase matches are my current go to for clients with moderate budget and want to see performance.** Even though we are using smart bidding and Google still recommends broad match, we can always slowly expand to broad match gradually when the account is stable.

If Google was more transparent about their search terms report, I would have shifted my clients keywords to broad match earlier. (I have covered search terms report extensively in my blog page.)

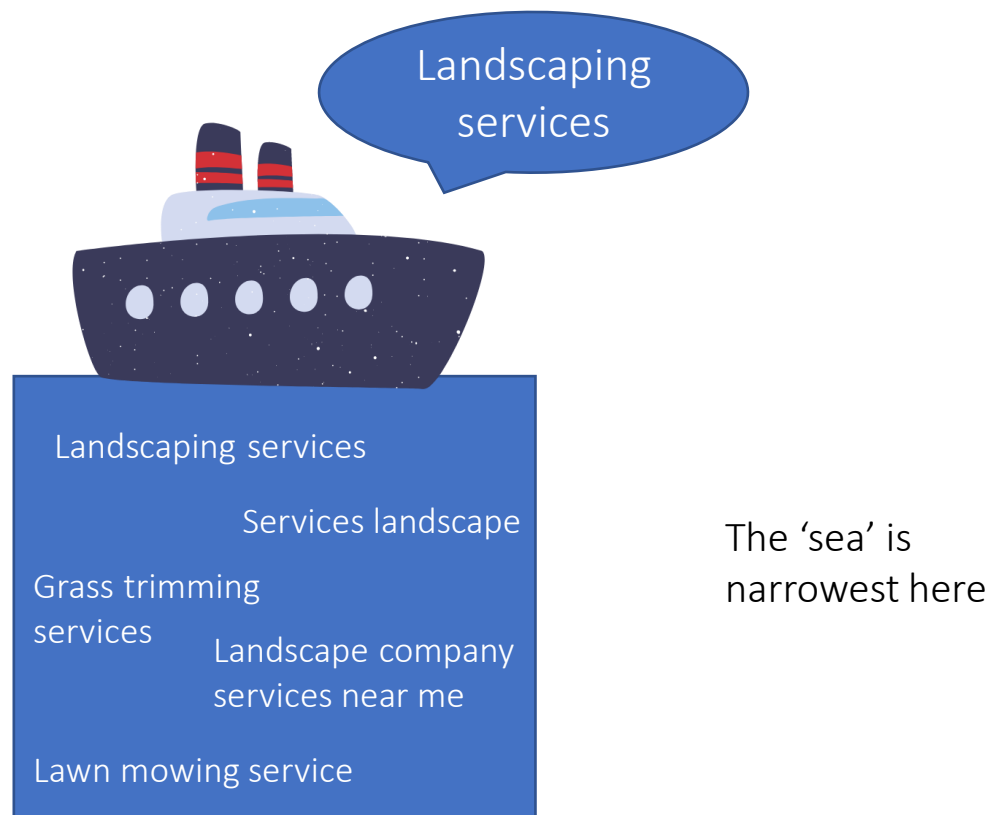


# Exact Match

Finally, the last one, but not the least. **Exact match is Google's strictest keyword match type**, even though not as strict as in the early 2000s. That wasn't good either. By the standards of today, it was simply inefficient in the past.

Manually building out thousands of keywords with similar meaning is not what marketers should be doing or striving to spend their time on.

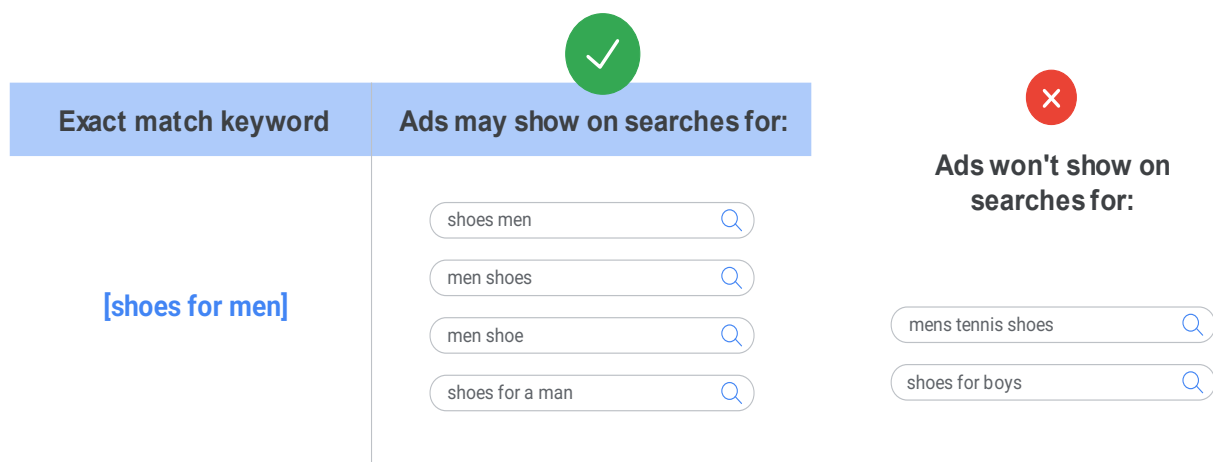
The series of changes to exact match throughout the years was definitely done to address this problem.



If you wanted absolute control while holding tight to the meaning of your keyword, use exact match. It is built for that purpose.

Ads may show on searches that are the same meaning or same intent as the keyword. Of the three keyword matching options, exact match gives you the most control over who sees your ad.

Exact match is designated with brackets, such as [red shoe].



The example above is from Google. An exact match keyword of [shoes for men] will trigger searches when the meaning is intact. **But it will not trigger if the meaning is different.**

In this scenario, 'mens tennis shoes' and 'shoes for boys' will not trigger the keyword [shoes for men]. In the first case, the user is searching for tennis shoes. In the second case, the user is searching for boy's shoes, indicating that the wearer is probably a child.

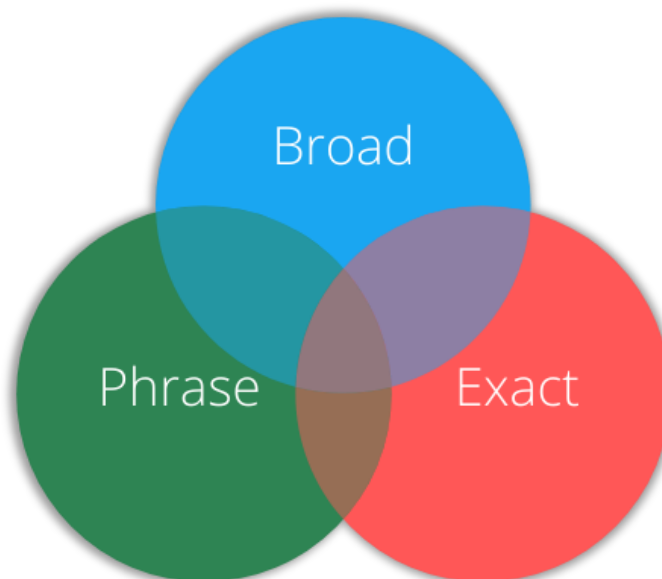
It is important to understand the distinctive factors that separate exact match from the other match types.



# Close Variants

**A Unified Rule** - I want to include this section because I hope that every reader become clear from now on. When I wrote of the history of Google Ads keywords in the earlier sections, there all have different rules back in the 2000s and 2010s they are clearly differentiable.

Most advertisers say that the lines between them are blurred now.



The reason why they their lines are blurred now is because they now all share a unified rule, across all match types. That unified rule is called: Close Variants.

Do you remember close variants that I have described in the earlier sections? It is the same thing. Google has clearly listed out every condition that can qualify a search term to be considered 'close variant'.



## Close Variants List-

1. Words with closely related syntax
2. Reordered words with the same meaning
3. Adding or removing function keywords
4. Implied words
5. Synonyms and paraphrases
6. Same search intent

The point of this is to understand that your keywords, regardless of match type, is now based on semantics and meaning. Through the past few years, Google is no longer looking at your keyword and 'matching it' like a teacher would examine a student's paper against the answer sheet.

### It is not:

'Oh this is right! This is wrong! This shouldn't match, no that should match!' If your agency is still treating your keywords like this, I seek you to elevate their thinking.



### It is now more like this:

'Does this make sense in this context?'

'What is the user trying to ask?'

'Can I further understand the context of your chosen keyword by looking at other keywords in your ad group?'

'Let me understand more by looking at the user's search history.'



Google believes that **close variants help reduce the need to build out exhaustive keyword lists to reach these customers at every search.**

Once again, by default all keyword match types are eligible to match to close variants. There is no way to opt out of this.

The lines between various match types may be blurred now, but it is in no way same. Using a broad match will make you eligible for way more searches than an exact match. I prefer to look at it this way:

**Use exact match** if you want to keep the *meaning* of the keyword exactly.

**Use phrase match** if you want to keep the *meaning* of the keyword, and don't mind it being part of a larger or another query.

**Use broad match** if you want to reach the highest possible searches for your keyword, even those that may be outside of the original meaning.

If you use broad match, **I highly recommend (and Google does too) to layer it with a smart bidding strategy.** In this way, you can aggressively appear in the search results while still having a safety net of machine learning optimized toward campaign performance.





# Negative Keywords

**The Rules Don't Apply** – Before I start going in depth on each of these negative keyword matches, let me give you a brief overview of negative keywords. **First, they are the opposite counterparts of your normal keywords. In a sense that they are there to *exclude* you away from searches, instead of include.**

It helps define and sharpen your targeting. The second thing, and **this is probably the most important, the rules from positive keywords don't apply to negatives.**

For example, the rules of broad match is not the same as negative broad match. None of them matches negatively for close variants.

I have already thoroughly described close variants in the preceding section and throughout this e-book. If you still do not understand, please go back and read it again.

Quote from Google:

“Negative keywords won't match to close variants or other expansions. For example, if you exclude the negative broad match keyword flowers, ads won't be eligible to serve when a user searches red flowers, but can serve if a user searches for red flower.”



The most difficult part for understanding negative keywords is enclosed inside the previous quote by Google. Once you understand it, creating negative keywords for your search campaigns will become very intuitive.



There is no such thing as 'negative broad match modifier'. This is not due to the news of broad match modifier being removed in February 2021. There isn't one in the first place, and it doesn't make sense to have it.

**Be More Thorough For Negatives-** because of the inability to match to close variants, which includes even singular/plural form, you need to be extra thorough when excluding keywords.

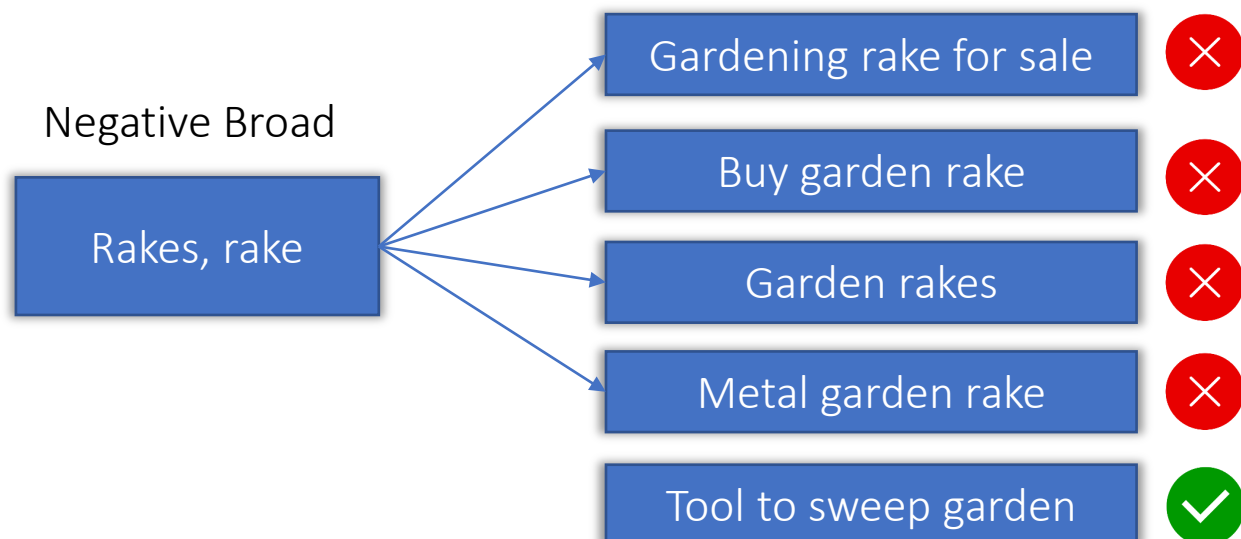
If you are a landscaping company but do not want users searching for garden rake, you may want to exclude 'garden rake' as a negative broad match. But you need to exclude 'garden rakes', 'gardening rake', 'gardening rakes' as well.

**Now this is where I do not agree with Google.** They should have expanded close variants into negative match types. Many people in the advertising community believe that it is Google's way of trying to exclude you in less searches in order to make more revenue.

Whatever the reason may be, **the bottom line is that you need to be more thorough when dealing with negative keywords. And this is why I almost always advocate advertisers to use negative broad match as much as possible.**



In the earlier example, to fully exclude all forms of 'garden rake' searches, the easiest way is to exclude 'rake' and 'rakes' as a negative broad match and leaving out 'garden'.



The reason why I always advocate for negative broad whenever possible is because **we can exclude the most number of searches as possible**. Like its positive counterpart, it covers the widest range compared to other negative match types.

This does not mean that you can just skim through negative keywords when using negative broad match. In the example above, **the keyword above excludes the first 4 searches but *not the last one***.

Until the day Google expands its close variants matching ability to negative keywords, we have to be vigilant and be thorough when excluding keywords.

Now let's begin with the 3 negative match types.'



# Negative Broad Match

**Covers The Biggest Range**— Negative broad match is the default for your negative keywords. For negative broad match keywords, your ad won't show if the *search contains all your negative keyword terms*, even if the terms are in a different order. Your ad may still show if the search contains only some of your keyword terms.

Example	
Negative broad match keyword: running shoes	
Search	Could an ad show?
blue tennis shoes	✓
running shoe	✓
blue running shoes	✗
shoes running	✗
running shoes	✗

In the example above from Google, whenever the word 'running shoes' appear anywhere and in any order within the search term, it is automatically excluded. The key is to remember that *all words inside your negative keyword must appear on the search query to be excluded*.

For example, the first query 'blue tennis shoes' was not excluded because, while 'shoes' is showing, 'running' is not.



**My take-** I always favor negative broad because of its wide reaching capabilities. When I want to exclude a search query for my clients, I want it to remove all possible searches of this term. Negative broad is most powerful when used with a single word. Remember to exclude plural and misspelling forms as negative matches ignore close variants.



# Negative Phrase Match

For negative phrase match keywords, your ad won't show if the search contains the exact keyword terms in the same order. The search may include additional words, but **the ad won't show as long as all the keyword terms are included in the search in the same order.**

The search may also include additional characters to a word and the ad will show even when the rest of the keyword terms are included in the search in the same order.

Example	
Negative phrase match keyword: "running shoes"	
Search	Could an ad show?
blue tennis shoes	✓
running shoe	✓
blue running shoes	✗
shoes running	✓
running shoes	✗

An example above from Google, whenever the phrase 'running shoes' appear anywhere and in any order within the search term, it is automatically excluded. **When the phrase match keyword appears in the exact same order as in a search query, your ad will not be eligible to serve.**



Negative phrase matches are different from their positive counterpart (by now you should already know.) While the order doesn't matter in the positive word, it does matter in negative phrase matches.

**My Take-** phrase matches are useful when negative broad match cannot fulfil its purposes. An example will be when you still want to show for that negative keyword, but just not in a particular format or order.

Let's use the shoe example from Google and say that you sell running shoes, but not kids running shoes. Excluding the keyword as a phrase match 'kids running shoes' will help you exclude searches for that.

You may ask, well Cyrus, why can't I just exclude the keyword 'kids' as a negative broad match? Yes you can, and you should as a first choice.

But what if the user also sell some kid's boxing gear in his shop? Excluding the word 'kids' entirely wouldn't be feasible, as it would exclude searches for 'kid's boxing gear'.

This is what negative phrase matches are for. Sometimes you will get into a tricky situation like this, and instinctively you know you should employ negative phrase match.

Negative phrase match helps you block out certain keywords, but you still get to show for the keyword if it is searched in a different format or order.



# Negative Exact Match

Finally, negative exact match. The strictest exclusion type of the 3 matches. *I will tell you that I have almost never used this match type. It is just not that useful.*

For negative exact match keywords, *your ad won't show if the search contains the exact keyword terms, in the same order, without any extra words.* Your ad may still show if the search contains the keyword terms with additional words.

Example	
Negative exact match keyword: [running shoes]	
Search	Could an ad show?
blue tennis shoes	✓
running shoe	✓
blue running shoes	✓
shoes running	✓
running shoes	✗

An example above from Google, whenever the exact match [running shoes] appear exactly as the search term, it will not serve your ad. Note that the search term has to be exactly as written in your keyword, 1:1.

**My Take-** This is reason why I don't find it to be very useful.





Still, let's examine and see on which rare occasion should you employ negative exact match keywords in your account.

- You only want to exclude that exact search term and nothing else.

It's that simple. I hope Google will make this match type more useful in the future. Right now, pretty much 99% of search terms can be covered by both negative broad (my favorite) and negative phrase matches.

### Keep In Mind

1. Negative keywords do not match to close variants so your ad might still show on searches or pages that contain close variations of your negative keyword terms.
2. Be careful of what you exclude as a negative keyword. If you employ it carelessly, they may overlap with your positive keywords and cause them to be ineligible to show.



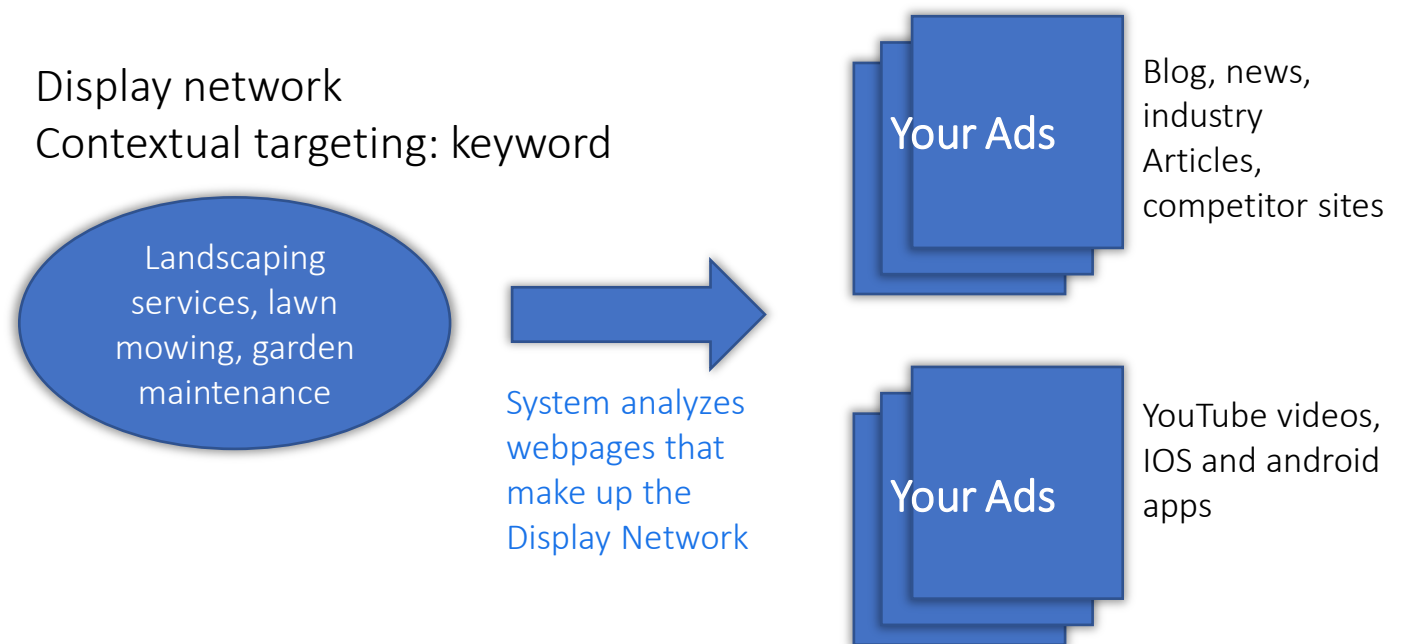
# Display Network

You may think that this is over. Keywords only apply for search campaigns isn't it? Someone searching for something and we use keywords to decide whether to show our ads or not. Wrong.

You also work with keywords inside Display campaigns, but in another way. Keywords are one of the various contextual targeting methods within Display network.

Keywords in Display network helps you target relevant *site content, base on the keywords you choose*. Site content can include videos on YouTube and apps as well.

Google recommends you to create a set of 5 to 20 keywords that relate to your audience in that ad group. And two to three-word phrases tend to work better.



How does the Google Ads system analyze what pages to show your display ads on?

Through these 4 methods.

- Text
- Language
- Link Structure
- Page Structure

Based on this analysis, the central theme of each webpage is determined, and if it is relevant to your keyword, your ads will be eligible to serve on those site content and apps.



# Custom Audiences

Custom audience is another place where you get to add keywords in Google Ads. The point of this is to **target relevant audiences**.

Of course, like the previous example with Display network, it is not the scope of this e-book to cover about display network or custom audiences. Both require much more in-depth analysis and breakdown that will not be possible to include within this e-book. [I have written extensively on these topics on my blog posts.](#)

The point of this section (and preceding one) is to show you where else you can use keywords outside of the usual search campaigns.

**By default, Google provides a lot of 3<sup>rd</sup> party audience data that they collect with their cookies, so that you can make use of them whenever you run a campaign.** Advertisers use custom audiences when they are looking for something that Google's preset audiences don't provide. For example, you may find the audience within Google for 'swimming enthusiasts', but not for 'water polo players'.

Custom Audience allows you to target audiences in 4 ways. (Google docs state only 3, but there's actually a 4<sup>th</sup> one called 'places visited')

1. Keywords
2. URLs
3. Apps
4. Places visited



### Custom audience inputs

Reach people based on	Inputs	Audience type
Interest or behaviors	Keywords	<p>Enter interests, in the form of keywords or phrases, that represent your ideal customer. Your ads will reach people likely to be interested in or with purchase intent for your keywords based on their behavior and activities, such as apps they use or the type of content they browse or search for online.</p> <p>When you enter interests or behaviors, you have a choice of how Google should interpret the inputs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People with any of these interests or purchase intentions (This is the default)</li><li>• People who searched for any of these terms on Google properties (such as Google.com and YouTube). Only on campaigns running on Google properties. On other campaigns, they will be used as interests or purchase intentions.</li></ul>

We are only going to dive into the first option, as it's the only option out of the 4 that works with keywords.

“Enter interests, in the form of keywords or phrases, that represent your ideal customer. Your ads will reach people likely to be interested in or with purchase intent for your keywords based on **their behavior and activities, such as apps they use or the type of content they browse or search for online.**”

Google is pretty clear on how they intend to make use of your keyword input to match relevant audiences. It basically boils down to their online behavior.

After you enter your keywords, you are given 2 options of targeting.

1. People with any of these interests or purchase intentions
2. People who searched for any of these terms on Google properties



The difference between the two targeting options is that the first option is a more relax, 'broad' way of targeting. The second is a stricter option. Because for Google to include the audience base on the second targeting method, they have to first perform a search on any of the Google properties.

This includes Google search and YouTube. **One good way to choose keywords to add as custom audiences is to look at your top performing keywords and search terms, and then target them.** These are where you should be looking first when you want to expand your audience targeting within Google Ads.



# Final Words

You have learnt just about everything you can possibly do with keywords within Google Ads. We have walked through from the history of Google ads, the earliest period existence of keywords until present time.

If you have read till here, I want to congratulate you. You have come a long way. You are definitely serious about being proficient with Google Ads, and that's good. I hope you learn a lot from this e-book.

**However, Google Ads is just a piece of the online advertising puzzle. And if you do it well, you get to reap the rewards for your company (or clients).**

As a precaution to readers; Google Ads is a fast-moving industry (so with any online advertising). You cannot afford to be close minded to changes happening in and around the field. Unfortunately, that is how a lot of people are. Many are still trying to manage large excel keyword lists for clients and relying on manual CPC bidding. If you have read until here, you would know how fruitless that is.

Knowledge is a gem, but only becomes powerful when you apply it.

**Once again, I thank you for reading to the end.** The next few pages are dedicated to some common questions our community have regarding keywords.



## Q&A-

### Q. Do you think Google will fully remove keywords in the future?

I will not be surprised given the rate that our technology is advancing. Based on Moore's law, computing power doubles nearly every 18 months. Will Google be 'keyword-less' in the next 3 years? I don't think Google is prepared to fully give up on keywords this soon.

There is already an existing ad format that doesn't rely on keywords to serve your ads, and that is Dynamic Search Ads. Currently I feel that DSA is pretty accurate at bringing relevant search terms but lack the targeting ability of a human input keyword. This is because DSA primarily depends on [understanding your landing page content, then matching it up with user query. And currently, Google sees DSA as a supplement rather than a replacement of normal ads.](#)

And to answer the question, it is fully possible. But I just don't think it will happen soon.

### Q. Do you think there will be new keyword match types in the future?

I don't think so. The primary reason why Google dropped BMM in the first place is to make their API simpler to use. If it looks easy, (its not, really) it will attract more advertisers. Seeing how ads is Google's biggest revenue source, there should be rapid advancement in advertising technology in the verticals of machine learning and AI.

All these can make manual input less needed. So the answer is no, I don't believe there will ever be a new keyword match type.





## What about SKAGs?

Single Keyword Ad Groups (SKAGs) are heavily touted by PPC professionals. And still is. The whole point of SKAG is *control* of what users see. Basically, you have a ton of ad groups running with 1 keyword each. It looks sophisticated and all, but completely redundant in the face of machine learning.

**The goal of the 'SKAG community' is trying to serve more hyper-targeted ads to users**, hence increasing their QS and lowering their CPA ,and increasing revenue in the process. In the process they create 1 campaign with **literally hundreds** of ad groups. Think about how much sense that makes.

**The solution is this: ad customizers. Ad customizers are released on September 25, 2014.** And I have also written extensively on how to use [ad customizers for your business](#). If they caught on, it should be 7 years ago. But currently I am still seeing agencies swearing by SKAGs.

You don't need to take the stairs to the 50<sup>th</sup> level of a tower when there is a lift.

## How many match types should I use inside an ad group?

As many or as little as it makes sense to your business.

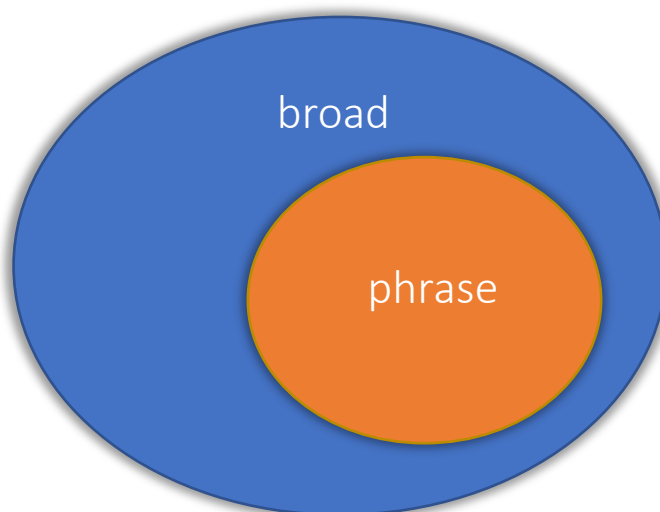
Once you understand what the different match types do, you will know how to implement them to your keywords. Unfortunately, there is no right or wrong answer...



...Google recommends no more than 20 keywords per ad group in order to keep them relevant. This I agree, I may personally bump it up to max 30. And I treat this number as unique keywords. So if you have a keyword

1. Landscaping services
2. “Landscaping services”

It should still count as 1 to the suggested limit. But here's the thing; Knowing that broad match will match to all of phrase and exact as well, do you want to have duplicate keywords of a different match type?



I suggest picking the best match type that will fit your business goals, and avoid duplicating keywords within the same ad group, especially of different match types.

*(The only exception we do is for brand keywords, where we use both PM and EM for the same keyword. Even though we know PM will contain all of EM, we use EM primarily for the reason of auction insights, so we know which competitors are bidding for our client's name. 😊)*



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