How to Create a Google Ads Campaign for your Therapy Practice

If you're like most private practice psychologists, you've experienced the pressure of an underfilled caseload. Every open spot in your schedule represents lost income, slower growth for your practice, and a missed opportunity to provide therapy to someone who could really mean it. And it's not easy to figure out what to do about this. Graduate school teaches you what to do in therapy, but not how to get clients into the therapy room in the first place.

The Pros & Cons of Google Ads

Fortunately, there's a tool that can help. It's called Google Ads (previously Google AdWords – I'll use the terms interchangeably), and it's Google's tool for letting advertisers reach customers in the search results. If you're based in San Diego and you treat depression, Google Ads allows you to show an ad for your practice at the exact moment that someone searches for "San Diego Depression Therapist." If someone clicks on your ad, you pay Google a fee and that person is taken directly to your website.

If set up correctly, this can be extremely powerful. Unlike other forms of advertising, Google Ads gives you the chance to reach people who are guaranteed to be interested in the services that you offer. It also gives you the chance to reach them right when they're considering signing up for your service, so you avoid the risk that they'll glance at your ad and then forget about later when they start researching a therapist.

However, if set up poorly, AdWords can make it very easy to lose money. Here are some of the mistakes that novice advertisers often make:

- Having their ads show for searches that are not relevant to the services that they offer (such as "physical therapy" or "how to become a counselor")
- Having their ads show for searches which are relevant but where the user is not interested in paying for services (such as "free counseling" or "depression hotline.")
- Bidding too much for their ads, which results in them paying way more than they need to (I'll explain bidding later on.)
- Bidding too little for their ads, so they never get any traffic.
- Failing to follow best practices, which gives their ads an unprofessional look.

How do I know all this? Well, let me introduce myself.

About Me

My name is Daniel Wendler. I'm the author of MarketingForTherapists.org, the book Clicking With Clients: Online Marketing For Private Practice Therapists, and a doctoral student in clinical psychology (expected graduation in 2019!) I learned all about Google Ads way back in 2011, when I started working at one of the best Google AdWords agencies in the country. I spent a few years pursuing a career in online advertising, but eventually realized that my true passion was mental health, so I began the journey towards becoming a psychologist instead.

However, I never forgot the skills I learned in my agency days. And when I started to meet my new mental health colleagues and realized how many struggled to market themselves online, I decided to help. That led me to launch MarketingForTherapists.org and begin offering my Google Ads services to

therapists. Since the site launched, I've personally helped over 100 therapists launch their advertising campaigns on Google – so I've learned a lot about what works and what doesn't. And my goal with this article is to help you build a Google Ads campaign that works.

Do-It-Yourself Vs Professional Quality

In just a moment, I'm going to give you a guide for a beginner-friendly Google Ads strategy. My guide will avoid the worst mistakes that novices make, and will give you more flexibility and performance control than a Google Ads Express campaign where Google makes most of the decisions for you.

However, there are three caveats we should go over before you dive in.

First, while my guide will tell you a basic strategy to implement, it doesn't teach you about AdWords in general – there's just too much material to cover. If you get stuck or confused, I highly suggest you refer to Google's own guide to Adwords, the Search Engine Land guide and the Search Engine Watch guide. They do a good job of helping you understand Google Ads terminology and how the system works, which will help you implement my strategy.

I also suggest doing a Google search anytime you're not sure how to do something – for instance, if you couldn't find the "create campaign" button that I mention below, just search for "How to create campaign Google ads."

Second, this guide is designed to help you build the "good enough" campaign – something that can get you started, and something that allows you to try out Google Ads without breaking the bank.

Of course, it won't perform as well or bring as much potential traffic as a professionally built campaign. Depending on your goals, that might not be a problem. If you're only planning on spending $100 - $250 per month on Google Ads, then I think this campaign will work great for you. However, if you want to spend more, then you will quickly reach the territory where hiring a pro saves you money compared to doing it yourself (because a pro will help your ad budget go a lot farther.)

As a metaphor, the campaign I'll teach you to build is kind of like a bicycle. It will work fine for getting you to the grocery store down the street, and you could maybe push it to visit your friend across town if you needed to. But if you're planning a cross-country trip, another form of transportation is probably in order.

If you're curious to learn more about what a professional campaign might look like, check out my page on my Google Ads for therapists services. Of course, there are other Google Ads professionals out there, and one of them might be a better fit for you – but you can use my services page as a general guide for what a professional can offer.

Finally, Google Ads is constantly changing – it was just three months ago that they changed their name from Adwords to Google Ads. So, while the general strategy of this guide should stay accurate for a while, the screenshots or other specific steps might become outdated.

Whew! Okay, now that we're done with the informed consent portion of the guide, let's jump forward to the actual nuts and bolts.

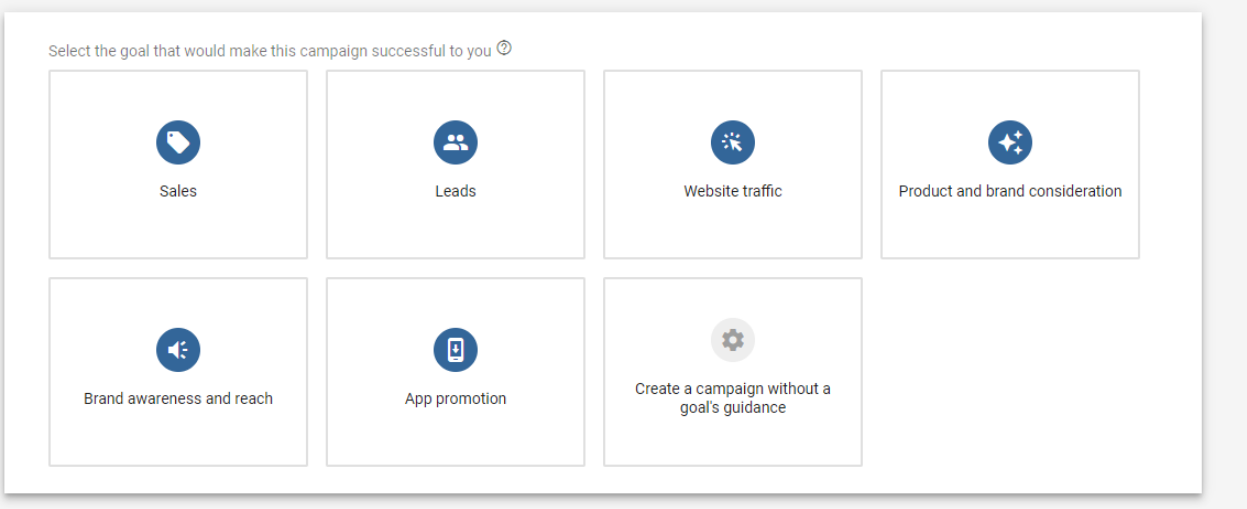
Step One: Creating Your First Campaign

First, you need to make sure you have a Google Ads account. Go to the Google Ads homepage, sign up, and enter your billing information. If they try to steer you towards Google Ads Express, say no.

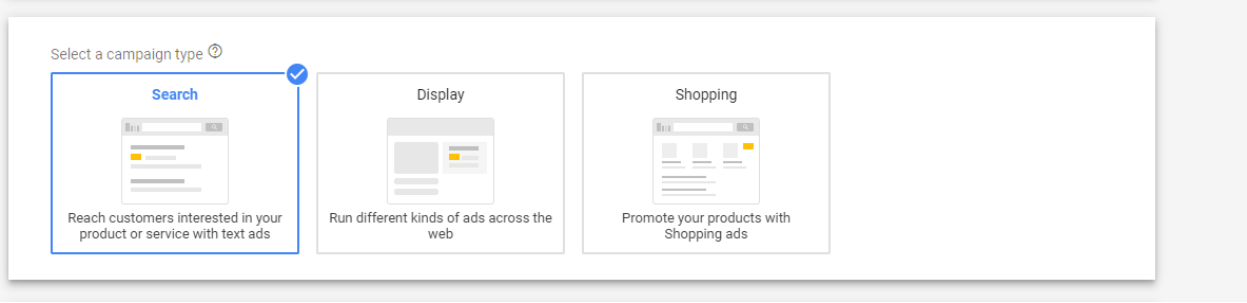
Then you'll be in your new AdWords account. Make sure you are in the "Campaigns" tab, and then click the big blue circle with a plus sign in it. You can then choose to create a new campaign.

Initial settings

You'll be presented with a choice of campaign goals. You don't want any of them – choose to create a campaign without a goal's guidance. (The goals automatically fill out settings for you, and we want to choose our settings manually.)



After you choose that, Google will ask you what kind of campaign you want. Choose search



Google will try again to get you to choose a goal, by asking about your desired results. Again, if you choose this it will just give up control, so ignore it.



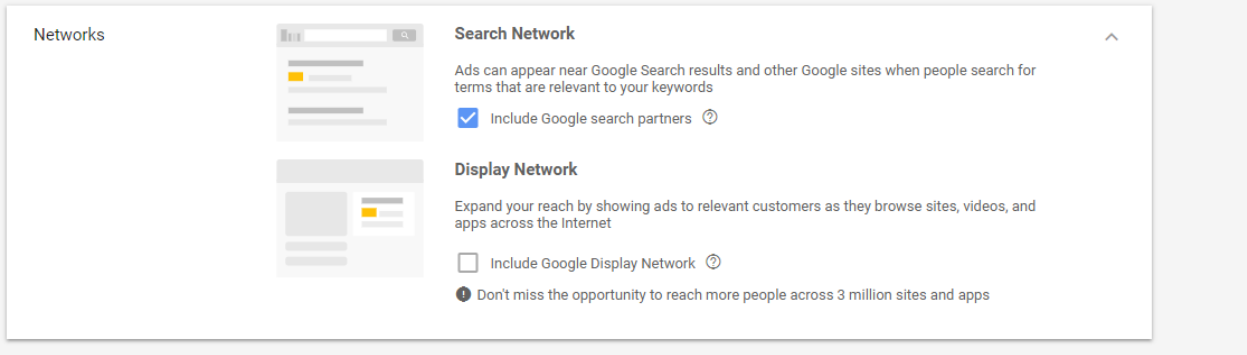
Now we're on to the next page.

Campaign Name

You can name your campaign whatever you want.

Search & Display

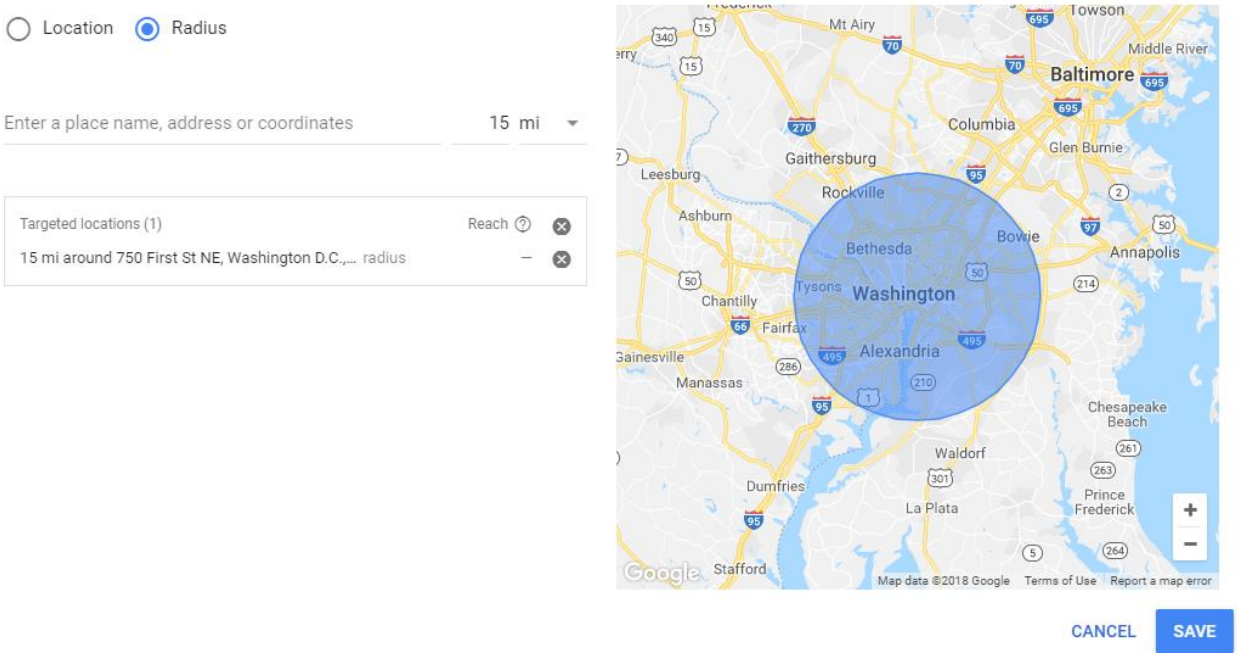
What's this? Even though we chose search, Google by default has checked both search and display. Sneaky Google. You absolutely do not want display, so make sure you uncheck that. Google will pop up a warning saying "Don't miss the opportunity to reach more people" but Google just wants more of your money and you should ignore them.



Locations

Then, it's time to choose your locations. I usually recommend a radius of 15 miles around your clinic's location. Click on "advanced search" and then "radius." Change 20 miles to 15, and then paste in your address. Make sure you don't have things like your suite number or it won't work. When you're done, it should look like this. (I used the address of the American Psychological Association – figured they wouldn't mind!)

Make sure that you hit "Save" – if you hit cancel, your location will not be saved and you will target the entire USA.



Audience & Languages

You can safely ignore audiences and languages, unless you provide therapy in multiple languages. In that case, you should create a separate campaign for each language, so people who speak one language don't see ads in another language.

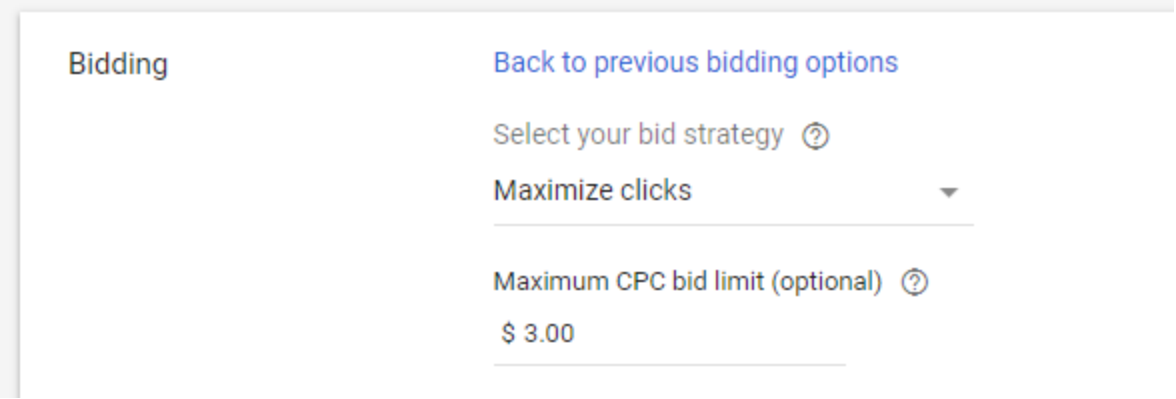
Budget

You will need to set your budget. AdWords budgets are per day, so choose the amount you want to spend per month and divide it by 30. For instance, if you want to spend $250 per month, you would put $8.33 as your daily budget.

Bids

Next, Google will ask you to set your bids. I promised I would explain bidding, so here we go. Essentially, Google Ads works like an auction. If you and your competitor both want to show up for a certain search, Google will look at how much each of you are willing to pay per click, and gives priority to the one who is willing to pay more. They look at other factors too (such as ad quality), so it's possible to win an auction even if you have a lower bid, but for the most part the more you bid, the more likely your ads are to show up.

With bidding, your basic strategy is to bid just high enough to spend your full budget, without bidding so high that you're spending more than you need to. You get the best results if you manage this yourself, but learning how to do that is complicated and beyond the scope of this article, so you should just choose the "maximize clicks" strategy to let Google do this for you. You might also want to set a maximum bid so that Google doesn't get too crazy - $3 is probably good.



Ad Extensions

Next, you can set up Ad Extensions if you want. This is optional, but it will usually help your performance if you're willing to put in the time to figure them out. This guide will help walk you through the strategy for each extension.

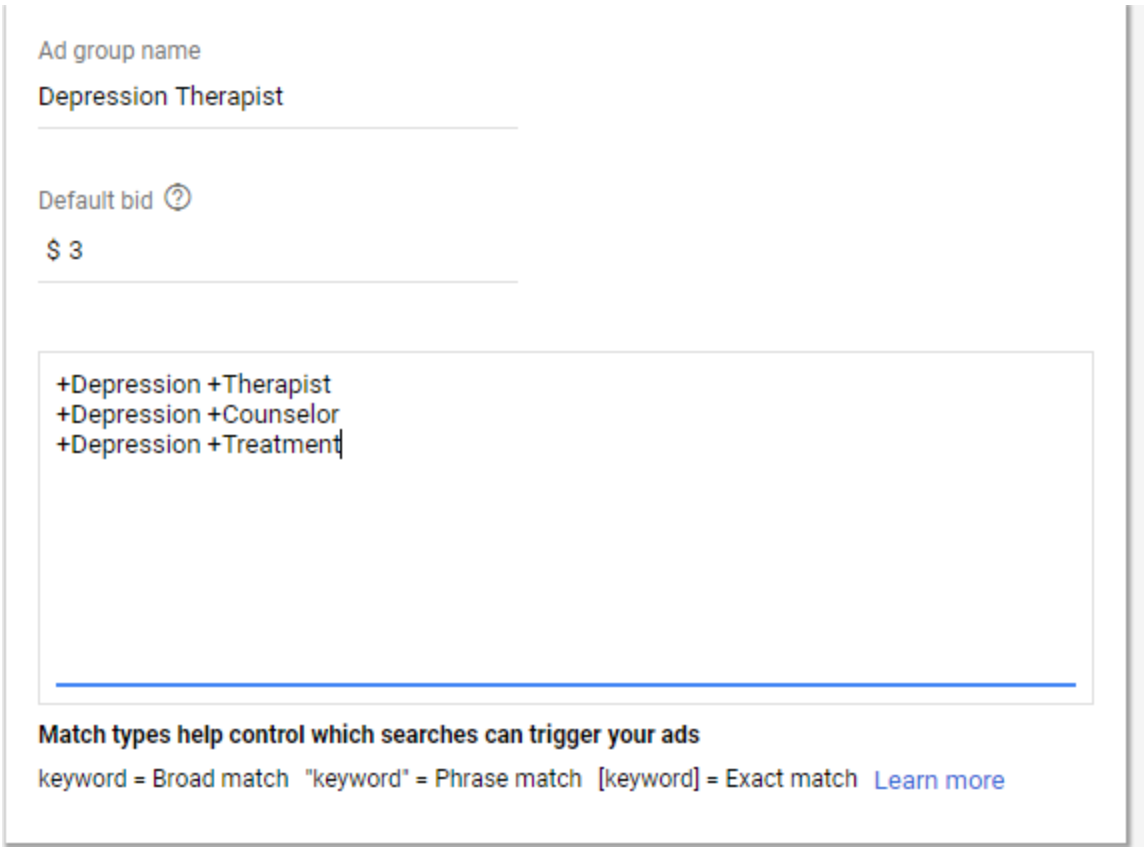
Once you're done, hit save and continue. You've made your first campaign – but you need to fill it with ads now!

Creating your first ad group

An ad group is basically a bucket where you put your ads and your keywords. If a search matches to one of your keywords, then Google will choose one of the ads in the keyword's ad group to show. So it's important to make sure that each of your

Here's the basic strategy to making a successful ad group:

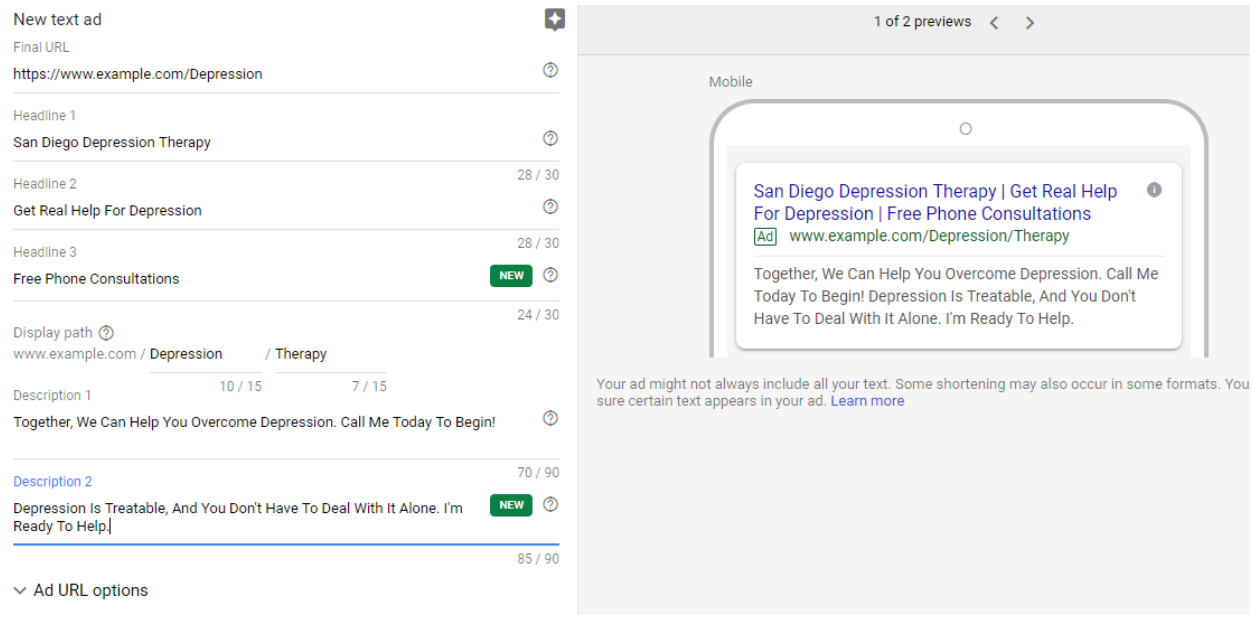
- Think of a phrase that someone might type to search for your services. Keep it simple ("Depression therapist" not "Amazing depression therapist who lives right next to the blue line metro station.") Also, make sure that your phrase indicates that the person is looking to hire a therapist, not just looking for information (so "depression counselor" would be a good phrase, but just "depression" would not be.) This phrase will become a keyword
- Name your ad group after this phrase, and then add this phrase as a keyword. When you add it as a keyword, put a plus sign in front of each word (+Like +This.) The plus sign signifies modified broad match, which means that Google will only show your ad to searches that include all of the words in your phrase. This limits the number of irrelevant searches that could appear.
- Think of a few synonyms for this phrase (such as "depression counseling" and "depression treatment.") In a perfect world, you would want to put these synonyms in their own ad group – and that's what I do when I make an account professionally – but that takes a lot of extra time, so for our purposes it's okay for you to put the synonyms in the same ad group.
- Hit save and continue. You will then have the chance to create an ad.



Creating your first ad

Now you get to write an ad! If you're not sure what all of the parts of the ad do, you can read about it here. Keep in mind that each part of the ad has a limited number of characters, so you'll need to be succinct in how you write it. Also keep in mind that Headline 3 and Description 2 are new additions, and Google still doesn't show them for many searches. So it's okay to skip those lines if you want.

You want your ad to relate to the specific keyword that you just chose, so in this case we're going to write an ad about a depression therapist. Here is my example ad.



As you can see, I followed several best practices:

- I mentioned the keyword (depression therapy) multiple times in the ad.
- I chose a final URL that took people to a specific page on my site which talked about depression.
- I included a call to action (call today)
- I highlighted a unique offering (free phone consultation)
- I used complete sentences to make my ads look professional.

Your ad might sound different, but you want to make sure you follow these best practices whenever you write one.

Continuing to fill your account

If you've followed these steps, you've created your first ad group, complete with an ad and some keywords. Congrats! Your ads can now appear in the search results.

However, a single ad group is probably not going to get you very much traffic. So you want to go back and add some new ad groups. Navigate to the ad groups tab, click the blue circle with the plus sign, and add another ad group – for instance, you could try adding "Anxiety Therapist" or maybe "San Diego Therapist" (or whatever city you live in.) I suggest starting with at least five ad groups, making sure to follow the best practices I listed above every time. You can keep adding more ad groups down the road as time allows or if you add new specialties to your practice. I suggest finding some parts of your ads that you can repeat across your different keywords in order to save time when you write your ads.

Adding negative keywords

Okay, so one final step. Once your account starts getting clicks, you'll want to see the exact searches that are triggering your ads. You do that by going to the keywords tab, and then clicking on "search terms." If you don't see anything, check the date range in the top right corner and make sure it's set to the past 30 days.

You can then see the exact searches that matched to your ads. Read through them and see if anything seems amiss. If it does, check the box next to the search term and add it as a negative keyword. That will prevent that search from ever matching to your ad again.

You can also do this proactively, by adding words that you know you don't want to match to your ads (such as "free" or "massage.") To do this, click on the "negative keywords" option under the keyword tab, and then add whatever negative keywords you want to your new campaign.

It's usually a good idea to check on your account once a month and look at the search terms that you're getting, and add negative keywords as needed. When the account is brand-new, you might want to check more like once a week just to get started on the right foot.

You did it!

Okay, so to summarize:

- Create a new campaign following the settings suggestions I listed above.
- Create 5 ad groups for five different ways that someone might search for your services
- In each ad group, include +modified +broad +match +keywords and make sure they indicate interest in therapy. Make sure that all keywords in each ad group are closely related to one another.
- Write ads for each ad group which closely relate to the content of the keywords.
- Proactively add some negative keywords to your campaign, and then review your search terms periodically to add new negative keywords.

I know this is a ton of information, but the good news is that you don't have to have it mastered right away. If you need extra help, go back and read the guides I mentioned earlier (Google's own guide to Adwords, the Search Engine Land guide and the Search Engine Watch guide.) You might also find that these content makes more sense as you start trying to apply it – AdWords is easier to understand when you're using the interface firsthand.

My hope is that if you follow this guide, you will end up with a solid basic Google Ads campaign that can help you grow your practice. This new campaign will provide a good foundation if you decide to learn more about AdWords and continue to improve and optimize it over time. It will also work great as-is to provide some extra traffic each month, or serve as a way to test the waters before considering professional Google Ads help. Whichever pathway you choose, I hope you find AdWords an invaluable part of your therapy practice's marketing strategy. Good luck!