

# Search Ads for B2B Software

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# Introduction

Paid search ads give B2B software companies an unparalleled opportunity to reach prospects at the exact moment they are searching for solutions. Unlike display ads or social media, where users may not have immediate intent to buy, search ads put your brand in front of users who have already expressed intent through their search queries. This makes paid search highly efficient for capturing demand and converting high-quality leads.



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## B2B Intent vs. B2C Intent

To run an effective paid search campaign, B2B software companies must ensure that their budget is directed toward search terms that indicate a business use case.

Identifying the right search terms requires a deep understanding of how prospects search for solutions in a professional context. Business buyers often use industry-specific language, reference team-based functionality, or look for solutions that integrate with existing enterprise systems. These searches tend to be more detailed, reflecting the complexity of B2B purchasing decisions.

A strong keyword strategy also involves eliminating irrelevant searches that may attract B2C users. Negative keywords play a crucial role in preventing ad spend from being wasted on terms that indicate personal rather than business intent. Regularly reviewing search query reports helps refine targeting, ensuring that ads appear only for relevant, high-intent searches.

By maintaining a clear focus on B2B intent, software companies can increase the likelihood of reaching decision-makers and drive higher-quality leads, improving overall campaign efficiency and return on investment.

A critical aspect of running a successful B2B paid search campaign is identifying search terms that indicate a strong business use case. Unlike broad, high-volume consumer searches, B2B software-related queries tend to be more specific and have lower search volume. These searches come from business decision-makers or teams actively researching solutions for their organization.

When analyzing search terms, it's essential to recognize the difference between B2B and B2C intent. B2B searches often include industry-specific terminology, references to enterprise needs, or mentions of integrations and scalability. On the other hand, B2C searches tend to be more generic, attracting individuals looking for personal-use solutions or service providers rather than software products.

A common challenge in B2B search advertising is the significantly higher search volume of consumer-oriented terms. Without proper keyword refinement, a software company can end up spending a large portion of its budget on unqualified traffic, leading to low conversion rates and wasted ad spend. To prevent this, companies must carefully structure their keyword targeting, use negative keywords to filter out irrelevant searches, and continuously analyze search query reports.

By staying focused on B2B intent and avoiding high-volume consumer searches, software companies can ensure that their budget is used efficiently to attract high-quality leads who are genuinely interested in purchasing a business solution.

In this example, you can see a range of search terms that potential buyers use when looking for 'event management software.' Notably, none of these terms exceed 2,000 searches per month.

 **B2B Intent** 

Search Term	Avg. monthly Google searches
event management software	1,900
event planning software	1,300
event management tools	720
event registration software	590
event signup software	590
event planning platforms	480
event management system	390
event scheduling software	390
event management solutions	320
event booking software	260
conference management software	170

In contrast, other search terms indicate B2C intent or suggest that the searcher is looking for a service provider rather than a software solution.

These consumer-focused searches tend to have significantly higher search volumes than the B2B software-related terms in the previous table. Without careful keyword targeting, a software company risks spending its budget on these less relevant searches, leading to wasted ad spend.



## B2C Intent or Service Provider



Search Term	Avg. monthly Google searches
wedding planner	90,500
event management companies	33,100
wedding planners near me	14,800
event planners near me	12,100
event planning	8,100
event planning coordinator	6,600
event management	5,400
wedding planner cost	5,400
certified event planner	2,900
event organizer	1,900

## More Specific Intent

Search ads enable B2B software companies to align their messaging with a prospect's intent, ensuring that the ad copy and offer resonate with what the searcher is looking for.

For example, a prospect searching for “best ERP software for manufacturing” is likely evaluating options. An effective ad should highlight why a specific ERP system is the right choice for manufacturing businesses.

On the other hand, a search for “NetSuite ERP pricing” suggests that the prospect is focused on cost and close to making a decision. Here, the ad should emphasize competitive and transparent pricing.

By matching ad messaging to search intent, software companies can engage prospects more effectively, leading to higher click-through and conversion rates.

# Good vs Bad Keyword Variants

Google’s use of keyword variants can be both an opportunity and a problem in B2B paid search campaigns. While targeting close variations of a keyword helps capture relevant searches that may not have been anticipated, it can also result in ads appearing for consumer-focused or irrelevant queries. This can lead to wasted ad spend and lower-quality leads.

One of the biggest risks in B2B search advertising is allowing too much of the budget to be allocated to searches with B2C intent or other unrelated queries. Because Google automatically matches ads to similar phrases, it may include terms that do not align with a business use case. If not closely monitored, this can significantly dilute the effectiveness of the campaign by attracting clicks from users who are not in the target audience.

To prevent this, B2B software companies must implement strict keyword management strategies. This includes continuously reviewing search query reports, refining keyword lists, and using negative keywords to block irrelevant traffic. Campaign managers should actively adjust targeting settings to maintain focus on searches that indicate strong business intent while minimizing exposure to inappropriate variants.

By staying proactive in managing keyword variants, businesses can ensure that their budget is used efficiently, improving lead quality and maximizing return on investment.



Even when a company carefully selects B2B-intended keywords, Google's broad match and close variant targeting can cause ads to appear for high-traffic consumer searches that seem relevant but are ultimately inappropriate.

This creates a major risk for budget waste. Since B2C search terms often generate far more impressions and clicks than niche B2B queries, an unoptimized campaign can quickly spend the majority of its budget on consumer-driven traffic that is unlikely to convert. Many paid search campaigns fail simply because too much of the spend is allocated to these high-volume, low-quality searches rather than being concentrated on true business-use cases.



## B2C Intent or Service Provider



Search Term	Avg. monthly Google searches
wedding planner	90,500
event management companies	33,100
wedding planners near me	14,800
event planners near me	12,100
event planning	8,100
event planning coordinator	6,600
event management	5,400
wedding planner cost	5,400
certified event planner	2,900
event organizer	1,900

# Preventing your ad from appearing for B2C and other inappropriate searches

The first tactic for ensuring a B2B paid search campaign stays focused on business-related searches is to use Phrase Match or Exact Match keywords. These match types give advertisers more control over when their ads appear, reducing the risk of showing up for irrelevant consumer searches.

Exact Match ensures that ads are only triggered by searches that are the same as or very close to the specified keyword, minimizing unwanted traffic. Phrase Match allows for some variation but still maintains relevance by requiring the search query to include the meaning of the chosen keyword. This prevents Google from applying overly broad interpretations that could lead to wasted budget on consumer-driven searches.

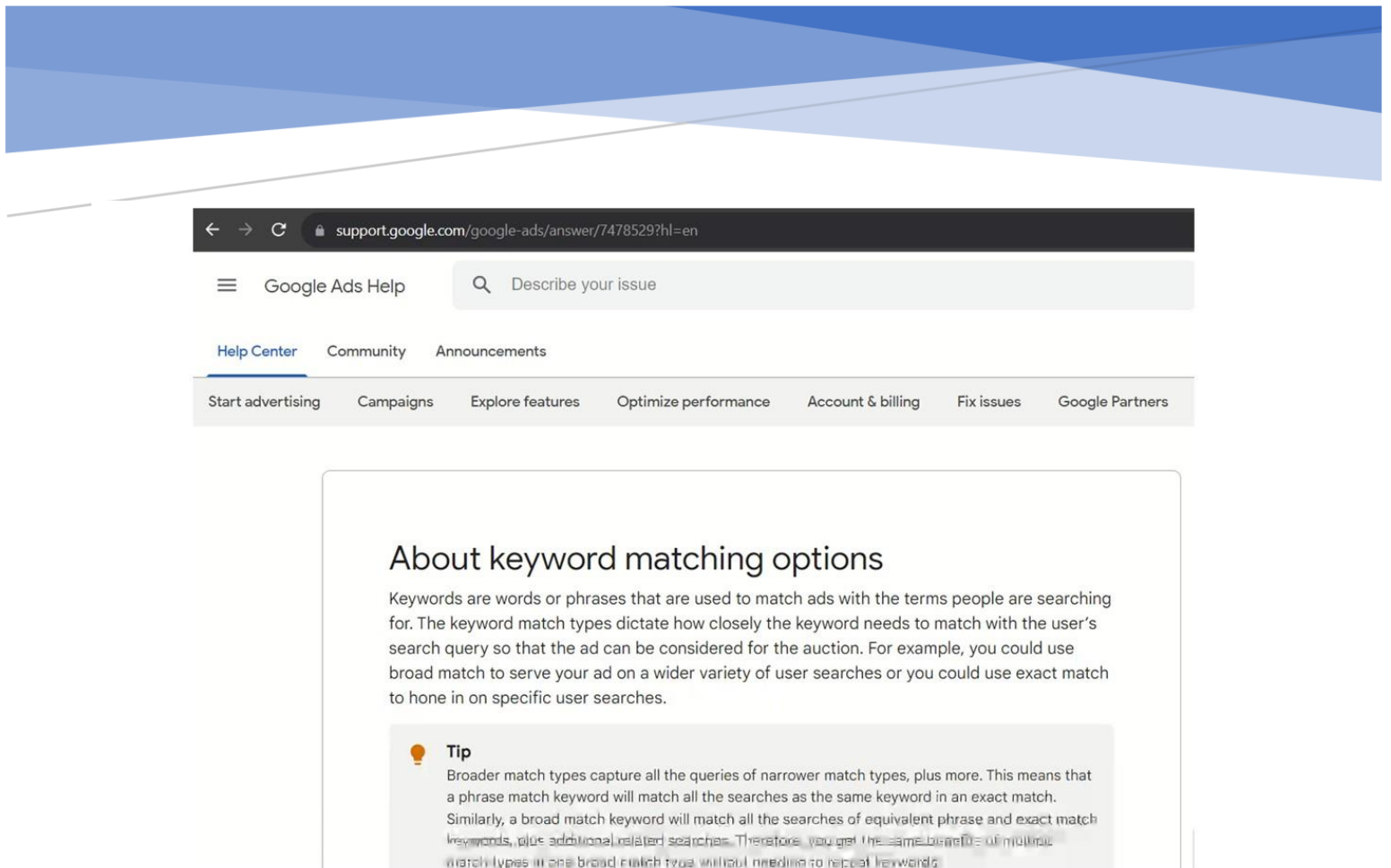
By avoiding Broad Match, which allows Google to match ads with loosely related queries, B2B advertisers can significantly reduce the likelihood of their budget being spent on high-volume, low-quality consumer searches. Implementing Phrase and Exact Match ensures that campaigns remain focused on reaching business decision-makers who are actively searching for software solutions.

The second key tactic for keeping a paid search campaign focused on B2B intent is to include B2B-specific keyword modifiers that distinguish business-related searches from consumer ones. These modifiers help filter out general or B2C traffic by ensuring that the search terms reflect a professional use case rather than an individual or personal need.

B2B modifiers vary by industry and business type, but one of the most effective ways to reinforce intent is by specifying that the search is for software. Including words like software, system, platform, and solutions ensures that the ads target users looking for a technology-based product rather than a service or consumer-oriented tool.

Other modifiers may reference business size (enterprise, SMB, corporate), industry-specific terms (HR, supply chain, finance), or functional needs (automation, integration, compliance). Using these targeted keywords helps refine ad targeting, ensuring the campaign reaches the right audience while preventing budget from being wasted on high-volume but inappropriate consumer searches.





Another effective way to refine a B2B paid search campaign is by including comparison-focused modifiers that indicate the user is actively evaluating different vendors or solutions. These modifiers signal strong purchase intent, as they suggest the searcher is beyond the initial research phase and is now weighing specific options.

Common comparison-related modifiers include terms like best, top, vs, alternatives, competitors, reviews, and comparison. These words indicate that the searcher is looking for insights to help them make a decision, rather than casually browsing or seeking a consumer-focused solution.

By incorporating these types of modifiers, advertisers can attract highly engaged prospects who are more likely to convert. This approach also helps eliminate low-intent traffic, ensuring that the campaign budget is allocated to users who are serious about finding the right B2B software solution.

## ✓ Modifiers - Software ✓

Search Term	Avg. monthly Google searches
event management software	1,900
event planning software	1,300
event management tools	720
event registration software	590
event signup software	590
event planning platforms	480
event management system	390
event scheduling software	390
event management solutions	320
event booking software	260
conference management software	170

Another powerful way to refine a B2B paid search campaign is by targeting alternative and competitor-related modifiers that indicate the searcher is actively looking for a replacement or comparison to a specific vendor. These searches typically come from high-intent prospects who are dissatisfied with their current solution or are exploring better options before making a final decision.



## Modifiers - choosing, comparison



Search Term	Avg. monthly Google searches
how to choose a CMS	480
CMS comparison	320
CMS system comparison	320
CMS software comparison	320
headless CMS comparison	50
how to choose the right CMS	50
content management system comparison	40
how to choose a content management system	40

Common modifiers in this category include alternative, equivalent, replacement, competitors, similar to, and compare. These keywords help capture prospects who already understand the software category and are deep in the decision-making process.

By incorporating these terms, B2B advertisers can position their product as a strong alternative and directly engage with potential customers who are primed for conversion. This approach ensures that the campaign reaches high-value leads while minimizing waste on irrelevant or low-intent searches.



## Modifiers – competitors, alternatives



Search Term	Avg. monthly Google searches
Workday competitor	1,000
Workday alternatives	260
ADP competitors	1,000
ADP alternatives	210
ADP payroll competitors	30
BambooHR competitors	170
BambooHR alternative	90
BambooHR alternatives	90
Paylocity alternative	30

Another key way to refine a B2B paid search campaign is by using industry- and business-type-specific modifiers that indicate the searcher is looking for software tailored to their sector or company size. These modifiers help ensure that ads reach the most relevant audience by aligning with the specific needs of different industries and business types.

Industry-specific modifiers include terms like construction, healthcare, finance, retail, manufacturing, or education, which signal that the user is searching for a solution designed for their field. Business-type modifiers such as enterprise, SMB, startup, small business, or nonprofit help differentiate between large-scale corporate solutions and tools designed for smaller organizations.



## Modifiers – Business Type/Size



Search Term	Avg. monthly Google searches
small business accounting software	12,100
free accounting system for small business	5,400
financial software for small business	720
simple accounting system for small business	590
bookkeeping system for small business	480
self employed bookkeeping software	720
accounting software self employed	590
accounting software for startups	590
bookkeeping software for startups	480

## Negative Keywords

The third tactic for keeping a B2B paid search campaign focused on the right audience is to use negative keywords. Negative keywords tell Google not to show ads when certain words or phrases are included in a search query, helping to eliminate unqualified traffic and reduce wasted ad spend.

One of the most important uses of negative keywords is filtering out searches that do not align with the business model or offer. Words like "free" and "open source" are common examples, as they attract users looking for no-cost solutions rather than enterprise software.

Regularly updating the negative keyword list based on search query reports ensures that new irrelevant terms are continually filtered out. This ongoing optimization helps maintain ad relevance, improve conversion rates, and ensure that the budget is spent on high-quality B2B prospects rather than consumer-driven or mismatched searches.

## Negative Keywords: “free” and “open source”

Search Term	Avg. monthly Google searches
<del>free</del> CRM	5,400
<del>free</del> CRM for small business	3,600
best <del>free</del> CRM for small business	1,900
<del>open source</del> CRM	1,600
<del>free</del> lead management software	260
<del>open source</del> CRM software	260

Negative keywords can also be used to avoid vague or low-intent searches that do not clearly indicate a business-use case or a strong intent to purchase. Broad, generic terms like "CRM," "customer support tools," or "CRM programs" can attract a wide range of searchers, including those who are simply researching or unfamiliar with the software category.

Vague searches can apply to multiple use cases, many of which are not relevant to a company's target audience. When a user searches for a broad term like "CRM" or "customer support tools," they could be looking for anything from basic definitions to personal-use software, training or support tools, or academic information.

Since many of these use cases do not align with the ideal customer profile, allowing ads to appear for these searches can lead to unqualified traffic and wasted ad spend.



## Vague or Lacking Intent



Search Term	Avg. monthly Google searches
CRM	165,000
customer relationship management	60,000
CRM software	40,500
CRM system	14,800
CRM tools	8,100
CRM data	2,900
CRM programs	1,900

It's also important to filter out searches that lack purchasing intent and are primarily informational or research-based. Queries like "what is CRM" or "how to use Salesforce" suggest that the user is looking for definitions, tutorials, or general knowledge rather than actively evaluating software solutions.

These searches are unlikely to generate high-quality leads because the user is not yet in the buying process. Clicking on an ad from an informational search may lead to high bounce rates, low engagement, and wasted ad spend. Instead, B2B software advertisers should focus on high-intent searches that indicate interest in comparing vendors, exploring pricing, or requesting demos.



## Informational/Research



Search Term	Avg. monthly Google searches
what is CRM	27,100
what is Microsoft Dynamics	1,600
what is CRM in marketing	1,600
what is customer relationship	880
how to use Salesforce	880
how to use a CRM	320
what is Hubspot CRM	210
what is CRM integration	140
what CRM software does	90

Without careful negative keyword management, B2B search ads can appear for related but inappropriate searches that do not indicate interest in purchasing software. Queries like "CRM stock price" suggest the user is looking for financial information about a publicly traded company rather than researching CRM solutions. Similarly, "CRM integration" may come from IT professionals seeking technical documentation rather than decision-makers evaluating new software.



## Related but Inappropriate

Search Term	Avg. monthly Google searches
CRM stock price	18,100
CRM database	2,900
relationship management	2,900
Tableau Salesforce	1,300
CRM services	1,000
healthcare CRM	880
CRM integration	880
integration in Salesforce	880
customer experience automation	720
marketing with Salesforce	720

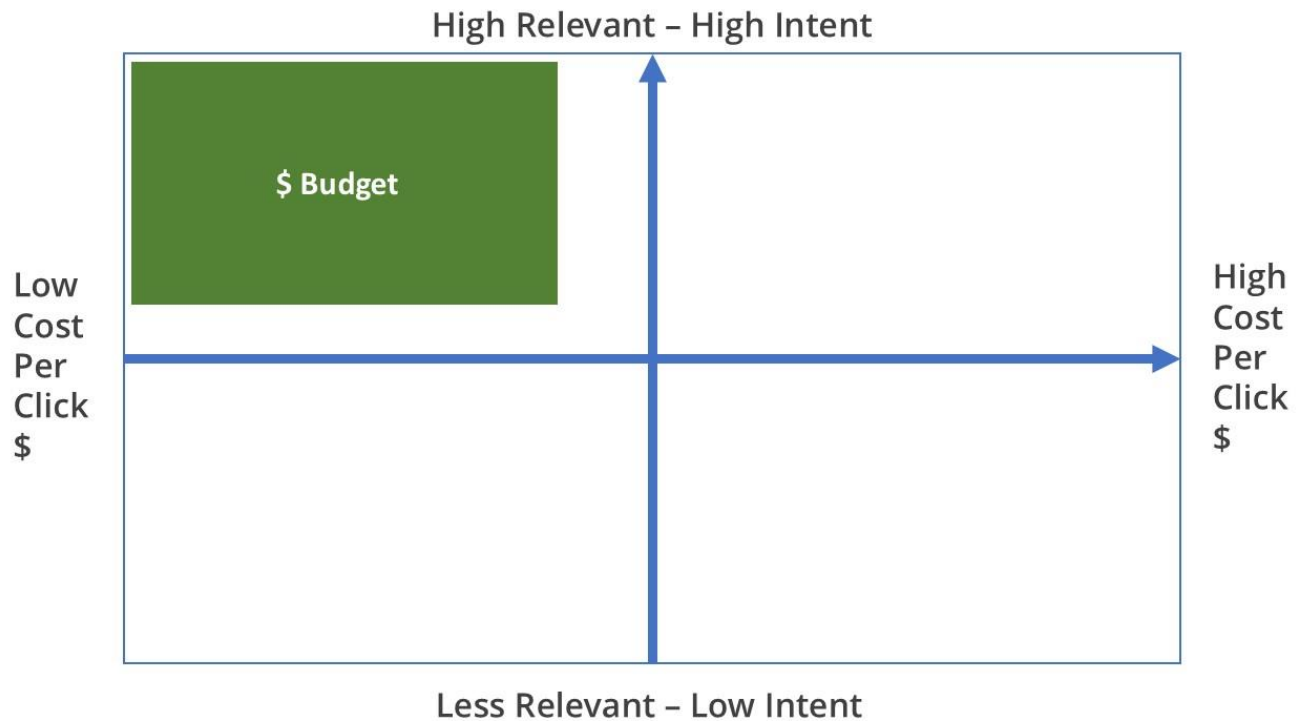
## Create a comprehensive list of high-intent keywords

Creating a comprehensive list of high-intent keywords is essential for maximizing the effectiveness of a B2B paid search campaign. Since relevant B2B searches typically have lower volume, advertisers must ensure that they capture as many high-quality opportunities as possible while keeping costs manageable.

To understand why this is important, imagine all searches or click-thrus from ads fall within a two-axis grid...

**Relevancy & Intent Axis** – How closely the search aligns with your software and whether it indicates strong purchase intent.

**Cost-Per-Click (CPC) or Bid Price Axis** – How expensive it is to compete for the keyword in Google Ads.



You want your budget to be focused on the top-left quadrant, where search terms have high relevance and intent but lower CPCs. These searches represent the best return on investment because they attract qualified leads at a manageable cost.

Since volume in the top-left quadrant (high intent, low cost-per-click) is often limited, it can be challenging to spend an entire budget there. To ensure as much of the budget as possible is allocated to these valuable searches, advertisers need to build a comprehensive list of high-intent keywords that captures every relevant opportunity.

When building a comprehensive list of high-intent keywords, the first step is to identify a list of seed words, which includes all of the words and phrases that prospects might use to describe your product, its functionality, and its utility.

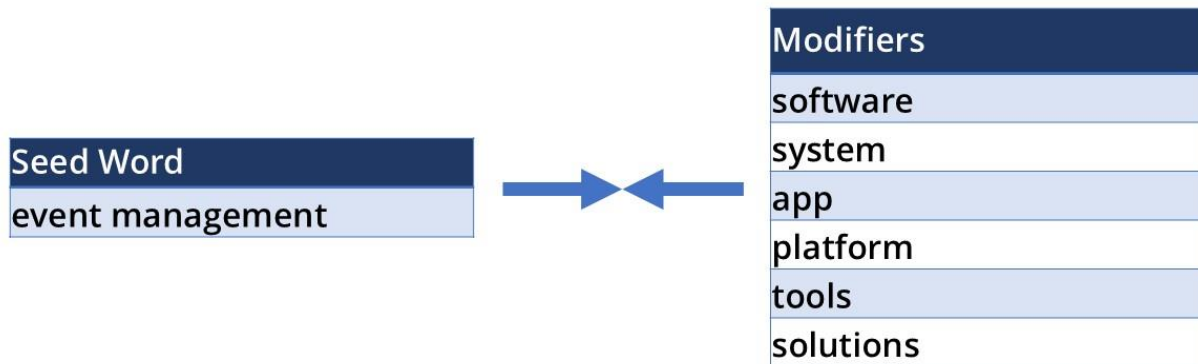
# Seed Words – Describe the product function/utility

Seed Word
event management
event planning
event registration
event signup
event planning
event scheduling
event booking
conference management

Once the seed phrases are established, the next step is to create a list of B2B modifiers that refine targeting and ensure the searches reflect business intent.

By combining the seed phrases with B2B modifiers, advertisers can create an expansive yet highly targeted keyword list. This approach maximizes coverage of relevant, high-intent searches, ensuring that the budget is spent efficiently on prospects who are actively evaluating solutions.

## Combine Seed Words with Modifiers



After combining the seed words with the B2B modifiers, the next step is to use Google's Keyword Planner to generate related keyword ideas. This tool helps identify additional search terms that prospects may be using, ensuring the keyword list is as comprehensive as possible.

By entering a core term like "event management software", Google's Keyword Planner provides a list of related searches, uncovering variations that may have been overlooked. These related keywords can include:

- Synonyms and alternative phrasing (e.g., "event planning software" or "conference management platform")
- Industry-specific terms (e.g., "event software for corporate events")
- Feature-based searches (e.g., "event registration and ticketing software")
- Transactional searches (e.g., "best event management software pricing")

This process expands the keyword list while keeping it focused on high-intent, relevant searches. By systematically reviewing and selecting the best keywords from Google's suggestions, advertisers can maximize their reach within the top-left quadrant, ensuring that the budget is spent efficiently on qualified prospects.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Keyword (by relevance)	Avg. monthly searches
Keywords you provided	
<input type="checkbox"/> event management software	1,900
Keyword ideas	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> event planning software	1,300
<input type="checkbox"/> event software	590
<input type="checkbox"/> siem software	590
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> event management system	390
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> venue management software	320
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> event management app	590
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> event registration software	590
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> event planning app	880
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> event booking software	260
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> event management platform	480

After generating a list of related keyword ideas from Google’s Keyword Planner, the next step is to review and filter them based on relevancy and intent. Any keywords that align with the target audience and business use case are added to the keyword list for targeting.

For keywords that are both highly relevant and distinct from existing terms, we take an additional step—plugging them back into Keyword Planner to generate a new round of related searches. This iterative process helps uncover even more long-tail, high-intent keywords that may have been missed initially.

By continuously refining and expanding the keyword list through this method, we can ensure that we are capturing every available high-intent search. Eventually, after repeating this process multiple times, we will exhaust all viable search term variations, ensuring that our keyword list is as comprehensive as possible before considering expansion into lower-intent or higher-cost searches.



# Location and Demographic Targeting

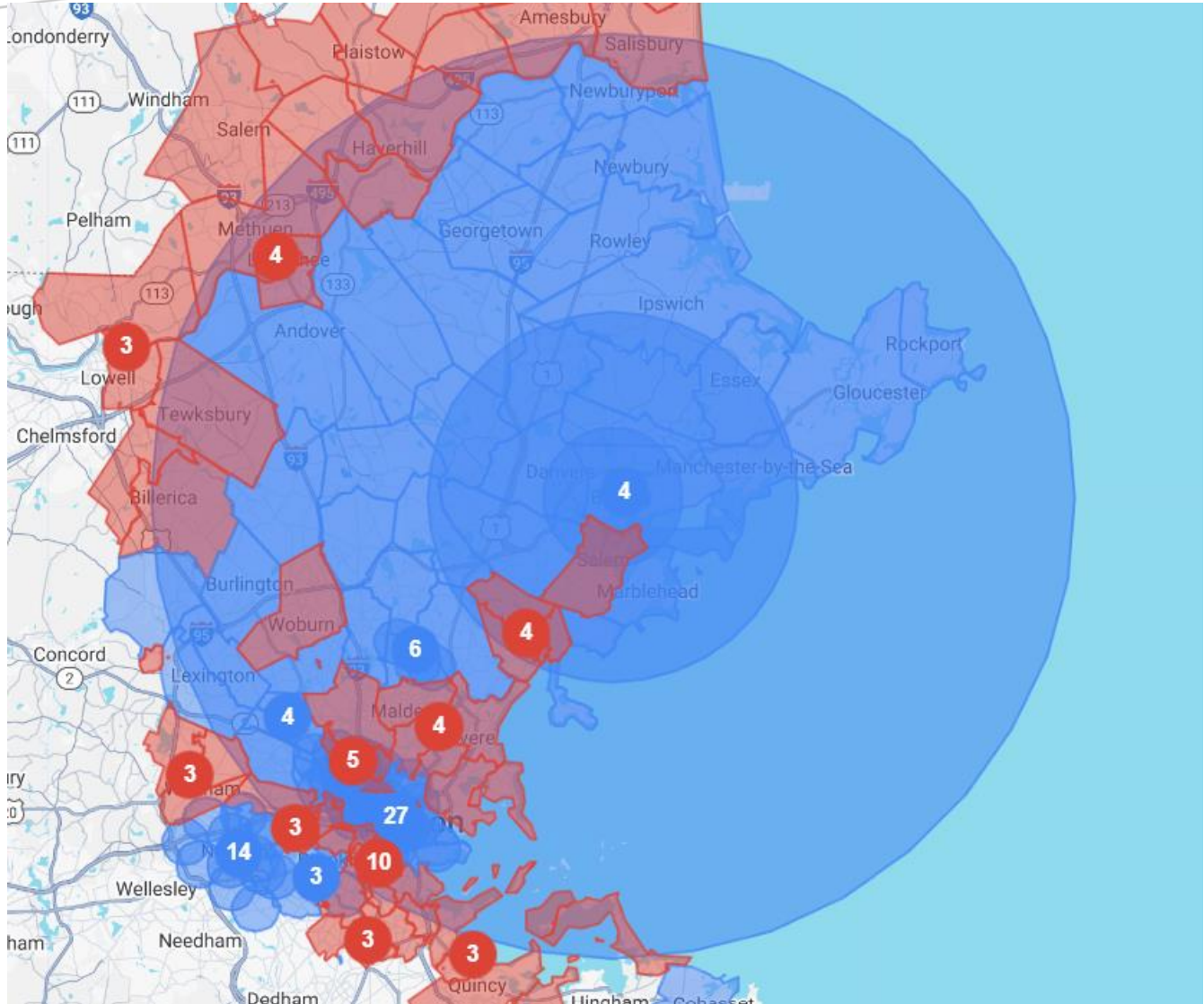
While keyword targeting ensures that ads reach users searching for relevant terms, layering location and demographic targeting allows B2B advertisers to further refine their audience. These additional filters help ensure that ad spend is directed toward the most relevant prospects, improving efficiency and lead quality.

Location and demographic targeting can be customized based on a company's ideal customer profile. Since B2B software companies often have specific geographic markets, industry focuses, or company size preferences, these settings allow for more precise targeting.

## Location Targeting

B2B software purchases are often influenced by regional demand, regulatory requirements, and language preferences. Advertisers can tailor campaigns by:

- **Targeting specific countries, states, or cities** where their ideal customers are located.
- **Excluding regions** that are not relevant due to business restrictions, limited service availability, or low conversion potential.
- **Using radius targeting** to focus on key business hubs or metropolitan areas with high concentrations of target customers.



## Demographic Targeting

Demographic filters allow advertisers to refine their audience based on factors such as:

- **Age** (you may want to avoid advertising to college students and junior employees)
- **Company size and revenue** (when integrated with LinkedIn Ads or intent data tools).
- **Job titles and functions** (to focus on decision-makers like CTOs, CFOs, or IT directors).
- **Industry segmentation** (to reach businesses within specific sectors, such as healthcare or finance).

- **Education Level** Targeting is useful for solutions that require a high level of technical expertise or are commonly used by professionals with specialized degrees (e.g., engineering, legal, or medical software).
- **Income bracket** targeting can help reaching senior employees and decision-makers, who are often responsible for approving or influencing B2B software purchases.
- **Homeowner vs. Renter** Targeting is relevant for businesses that serve specific industries, such as real estate, home services, or construction software. If a software solution is geared toward property managers, real estate investors, or home improvement professionals, targeting homeowners may increase relevance and lead quality.

## Recent User Behavior Targeting

In addition to keyword, location, and demographic targeting, B2B advertisers can refine their campaigns by targeting users based on recent online behavior. This includes Custom Intent Audiences and Remarketing (Retargeting), both of which help focus ad spend on prospects who have already shown interest in relevant topics or products.

### Custom Intent Audiences

Custom Intent Audiences allow advertisers to target users who have recently searched for relevant keywords or visited industry-specific websites. This helps capture potential buyers who are actively researching solutions but may not have searched for your exact product yet.

Benefits of Custom Intent Audiences:

**Reaches high-intent users** who are actively researching similar products.

**Expands audience** reach beyond exact-match keyword targeting.

**Increases conversion likelihood** by engaging users at the right moment in their buying journey.

### Remarketing (Retargeting)

Remarketing focuses on users who have already visited your website but did not convert. Since these prospects have already shown interest, retargeting them with search or display ads reinforces brand awareness and encourages them to return.





Benefits of Remarketing:

**Re-engages warm leads** who are already familiar with your product.

**Improves conversion rates** by staying top-of-mind throughout the decision-making process.

**Allows segmented targeting** based on specific actions (e.g., visited a pricing page but didn't sign up).

## Advanced User Behavior Strategies

**Segment remarketing audiences based on specific behaviors (e.g., engaged visitors vs. bounced users).**

Not all website visitors have the same level of interest or intent, so customizing remarketing efforts based on their behavior allows for more relevant and impactful ad messaging.

**Engaged Visitors (High-Intent Users):** Users who spent significant time on the site, visited multiple pages, or interacted with key content (e.g., pricing page, demo request page). Your ad and landing page should reinforce urgency with offers like free trials or live demos.

**Bounced Users (Low-Intent or Unqualified Traffic):** Visitors who left the site after viewing only one page or spending very little time. You may want to exclude this audience from seeing your ad since they've already demonstrated a lack of interest.

**Optimize ad messaging based on audience to align with user intent**—educational content for new users and stronger calls-to-action for returning visitors.

Ad messaging can be tailored based on audience segments and their level of engagement. New visitors require a different approach than returning users who are further along in the decision-making process.

**New visitors** are typically in the research phase, so ads should provide informational content such as whitepapers, case studies, or webinars to build trust and awareness.

**Returning visitors** have higher intent, especially if they've engaged with pricing pages, feature comparisons, or product demos. These users are closer to converting, so ads should emphasize CTAs that encourage sign-ups, demos, or direct purchases.



## **About the Author** [\[back to top\]](#)

Gregg Kellett has more than 20 years of experience in digital marketing and 17+ years of experience with Google Ads and Google Analytics. This includes 10+ years working for Bloomberg and 4 years for MarketResearch.com where he managed multimillion-dollar advertising budgets for both companies. He holds current Google certifications for Google Ads Search, Google Ads Display, and Google Analytics.

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