

# Special Reports

Finding Actionable Insights through AdWords Reporting

# Introduction

We're closer than we've ever been to understanding which aspects of our marketing work. Impressions, clicks, conversions and more are all quantified and available for you to analyze. In most cases collecting the data isn't the problem — the challenge is making sense out of everything that's available.

Smart analysis and reporting in AdWords highlights what matters to you and your bottom line. That information can directly improve the performance of your account. This guide covers how to surface the right insights and turn those insights into action. We'll talk about important considerations as you analyze your AdWords performance, and then we'll cover how to turn your important analyses into truly special reports.

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Frame analyses around what success looks like for you .....	Page 4
Give analyses the appropriate context .....	Page 5
Tell a story that translates reports into action .....	Page 8
Tailor reports to be uniquely meaningful to your needs .....	Page 12
Reports Recap .....	Page 14
Conclusion.....	Page 15

## Frame analyses around what success looks like for you

- 1. Define clear and consistent success metrics.  
**Why:** *Without focusing on a clear goal it's easy to get lost in the details.*
- 2. Focus on insights that lead to changes that affect your success metrics.  
**Why:** *Understanding what's happening in your account and why it may be happening is crucial to replicating successes and eliminating shortcomings.*

## Give analyses the appropriate context

- 3. Detect anomalies in your account by being aware of baseline performance.  
**Why:** *The earlier you spot anomalies in your performance, the quicker you can take advantage of new opportunities or fix poor performers.*
- 4. Choose the right time periods when analyzing performance.  
**Why:** *Context is important. Seasonality, strategy changes and external market pressures can influence performance.*
- 5. Ensure that your ratios have the right amount of data to be legitimate.  
**Why:** *Early returns can be misleading. By waiting for enough data, you can be more confident that your changes are the right ones.*

## Tell a story that translates reports into action

- 6. Filter your analyses and reports to focus on high-value areas.  
**Why:** *Appropriately placed filters can direct your attention to the details that will ultimately determine your success.*
- 7. Segment your analyses and reports to highlight differences at every level of your account.  
**Why:** *Looking at your data at the top level may obscure important differences that segments can reveal. Find efficiencies to exploit and inefficiencies to improve.*
- 8. Create line, bar and pie charts to better visualize your data.  
**Why:** *Pictures are often easier to comprehend than spreadsheets. Use charts to turn your data into a story that anyone can understand and act on.*

## Tailor reports to be uniquely meaningful to your needs

- 9. Create custom columns that focus on what matters most.  
**Why:** *It's easier to focus on performance drivers if your reports are customized to include specific metrics that you care about.*
- 10. Save your important, recurring analyses as reports.  
**Why:** *Make it easy to repeatedly surface the insights that you find most valuable.*

# Frame analyses around what success looks like for you and your account

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An important first step toward successful analysis is knowing what success looks like for you. Use that as a guide as you navigate the entire analysis and reporting process.

## 1. Define clear and consistent success metrics.

Everyone has goals for their AdWords accounts — a crucial part of using those goals successfully is consistency. Make your goals well-defined and stable. You don't need the same goal for every single aspect of your account. Customize your performance goals based on what your desired outcome is.

Ground your analyses in those specific success metrics. That's not to say you should only look at cost-per-acquisition (CPA) if that's your specific success metric. Instead, you should include secondary metrics that directly relate to that success metric. Cost-per-click (CPC) and conversion rate are going to affect what happens to your CPA, so they should be a part of your analysis.

There are plenty of different ways to gauge success in AdWords. No matter what it looks like for you, focus on what matters most. For example, clickthrough rate may affect your performance, but don't let it or any other secondary metrics distract you from your measure of success. Understand the relationship between supporting metrics and success metrics.

## 2. Focus on insights that lead to changes that affect your success metrics.

Once you have a clear sense of what success is for you, you can create analyses in AdWords to identify ways to improve performance. Connect secondary metrics to your primary success metric, and create analyses that lead to action.

It isn't enough to find something that's interesting. Find something interesting that also leads directly to optimizations for your account. If you start by understanding what's happening in your account, you can dig into the available metrics to uncover why something may be occurring. From there, take steps to replicate successes and eliminate shortcomings.

Here's a helpful example for an account that is all about driving growth. This account wants more leads. They've been adding keywords and exploring other channels like Display, but they think that their CTR could stand to be better on their existing search terms.

Report: Identify a high-value ad group in the account and run an ad report segmented by keyword:

Ad	Search keyword	Clicks	Impressions	CTR
California Fine Dining Fine Dining with a California Touch Great Food, Wine & Atmosphere. <a href="http://www.example.com">www.example.com</a>	+north +ca +restaurants	35	8,705	0.40%
California Fine Dining Fine Dining with a California Touch Great Food, Wine & Atmosphere. <a href="http://www.example.com">www.example.com</a>	+northern +california +restaurants	24	664	3.61%
California Fine Dining Fine Dining with a California Touch Great Food, Wine & Atmosphere. <a href="http://www.example.com">www.example.com</a>	+northern +california +fine +dining	22	406	5.42%

This report will show which keywords are performing well with the current creatives and which ones aren't. After reviewing this you can update your ad rotation settings or even break out a new ad group to house the keywords that are below-average performers.

This is only one example, but it should help with the larger point. Start with your overall success metric (growth), create a report that illuminates a certain facet of that metric (CTR & growing your clicks from existing impressions), and use that report to drive action (creating new ad groups with more relevant ads).

## Give analyses the appropriate context

Along with being actionable, analyses should be grounded in the overall context of your account. Consider the world that your account is operating within.

### 3. Detect anomalies in your account by being aware of baseline performance.

Anomalies in performance, either good or bad, help you decide what actions you need to take. In order to detect outliers, you'll need awareness of what standard performance looks like. It's also important to understand the significance of those anomalies — are they one-day blips, or indications of a larger trend?

The more history you have, the more familiar you should be with typical performance. There are natural ebbs and flows to performance due to things as simple as day of the week.

A particularly useful visualization to use when identifying baseline performance is time comparison on a line chart. Use it to focus on your most important metrics and see how performance is trending. Here's an example of the last 14 days [compared to the previous 14 days](#):



**TIP:**  
Remember to factor in time lag when you're establishing baseline performance for conversion metrics. If it typically takes seven days for users to convert, wait at least seven days to review performance.

Of the last 14 days in this example, 11 of them drove more conversions in the comparison time period than in the more recent two weeks. There was a holiday over that time period (Memorial Day in the US), but there might be something bigger going on. Set a baseline via time comparison and use that to identify anomalies that require more investigation. You can look at this week vs. last, this month vs. last, or the last 14 days as we did here. Once you identify anomalies, see what secondary metrics might be changing along with conversions and further understand why performance is trending differently from the baseline you've established.

**TIP:**  
The [top movers report](#) will detect large changes in your account, some of which you may expect based on seasonality. Keep an eye on it to maintain awareness alongside your own viewing habits.

Familiarize yourself with your performance, especially in the context of what you've done in the past and whatever external climate you may be in. The earlier you spot anomalies in performance, the quicker you can take advantage of new opportunities or fix poor performers.

#### 4. Choose the right time periods when analyzing performance.

AdWords accounts are almost like living, breathing entities. They interact with the world around them and are affected by things like seasonality and external market pressures. Don't overreact to something that could actually be a result of a temporary, external event.

Although it's impossible to control for all changes at any given time, there are things that pop up time and again:

External forces	Intra-company considerations	AdWords account changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seasonality</li> <li>Competition enters the market</li> <li>Days of the week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotions</li> <li>Other online/offline channels</li> <li>Broken site</li> <li>Broken conversion tracking</li> <li>Tracking/uploading CRM data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ad changes</li> <li>Bid changes</li> <li>Budgetary ramp up or down</li> <li>New targeting methods</li> <li>Conversion delays</li> </ul>

Awareness of the different external or internal pressures that could be affecting your numbers will allow you to choose the appropriate date ranges for running your analyses. As an example, if you're on a monthly budget, week-over-week comparisons won't be especially useful when you're ramping spend up or down the first and last weeks of each month.

A particularly valuable analysis to help understand external pressures is Auction insights. When you segment Auction insights by month you can get a view into what other advertisers are doing and how it overlaps with your own internal account changes. Use this analysis to stay on top of your competitive landscape. You can keep an eye on their aggression via bid changes, and you can also make changes based on who's entering or exiting the auctions that you care about.

Display url domain <sup>?</sup>	Impression share <sup>?</sup> ↓	Avg. position <sup>?</sup>	Overlap rate <sup>?</sup>	Position above rate <sup>?</sup>	Top of page rate <sup>?</sup>
example.com	22.55%	3.4	27.35%	13.82%	51.04%
Week of Apr 13, 2015	43.28%	2.7	45.37%	17.93%	60.91%
Week of Apr 20, 2015	29.85%	3.3	30.70%	11.67%	52.46%
Week of Apr 27, 2015	< 10%	5.9	8.85%	3.28%	15.64%

## 5. Ensure that your ratios have the right amount of data to be legitimate.

An especially important piece of establishing context for your analyses is being confident that the insights you're generating are legitimate and reproducible. Are your numbers stable, or are they inflated/deflated because you haven't collected enough data points? This is going to come down to two key components:

- Do you have long enough time periods to have substantial data?
- Have you incorporated supporting data into your analyses? (Things like time lag for conversions)

It's important to use analyses to drive action, and it's equally important that your analyses drive the right actions.

Early returns can be misleading. By waiting for enough data, you can be confident that the changes you make are corroborated by the facts. A new keyword may convert on the very first click that it drives (giving it a 100% conversion rate). That doesn't mean that it's now one of your top performing keywords. Sustained performance is what will determine that keyword's long-term value.

For example, imagine that you're testing out bidding a handful of your keywords to the top of the page for the first time. You'll want to wait on a couple of things: until you have enough clicks to make an informed decision, and also until your standard conversion time lag has passed before reviewing results.

**TIP:**

Keep in mind that conversions are back-dated to the day that the click happened. For example, if someone converts on May 21st, that conversion would be recorded when the ad was initially clicked on May 6th.

Search keyword	Top vs. other	Clicks	Conversions	Conv. rate
	Google search: Top, Google search: Other	>= 10		
tennis lessons	Google search: Top	34	0	0.00%
tennis coach	Google search: Top	32	4	12.50%
private tennis lessons	Google search: Top	20	0	0.00%
learn to play tennis	Google search: Top	11	2	18.18%
tennis school	Google search: Top	11	0	0.00%

Analysis generated on June 1, 2015

Search keyword	Top vs. other	Clicks	Conversions	Conv. rate
	Google search: Top, Google search: Other	>= 10		
tennis lessons	Google search: Top	34	3	8.82%
tennis coach	Google search: Top	32	6	18.75%
private tennis lessons	Google search: Top	20	2	10.00%
learn to play tennis	Google search: Top	11	2	18.18%
tennis school	Google search: Top	11	1	9.09%

Analysis generated on June 15, 2015 (after standard two week conversion time lag)

Wait until you have the right information on hand before determining the final outcome.

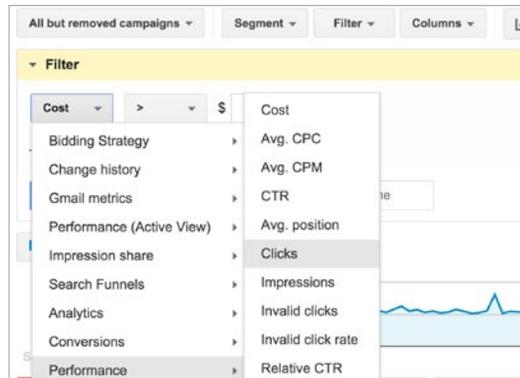
## Tell a story that translates reports into action

Your reports need to be both actionable and compelling. If you have someone that signs off on your AdWords strategy, make her decision easy by creating the right kinds of reports: those that tell a story.

## 6. Filter your analyses and reports to focus on high-value areas.

AdWords has an incredible amount of data, and a big part of good reporting is making sense of everything that's available. There's a fine line to walk between detailed insights and a data dump. Filter your reports to focus your reader's attention.

Think about what you and your managers or clients care about, and filter out everything else. Elevate your main takeaways by resisting the urge to be exhaustive. Your main report should cater exactly to what matters.



At nearly every level within AdWords you can apply thoughtful filters to shed new light on your performance. Filters based on volume remove clutter. Filters based on things like campaigns or networks can make your insights more meaningful. Whatever your needs are, there are filters that can help make your reports more straightforward.

As an example, let's say you're running an ad group report. Depending on your structure you may have thousands of ad groups, which makes it hard to focus. If you take that report, filter out Search Partners and Display Network performance to really focus on your Google.com ads, and then further filter to show ad groups with 1,000 impressions, you'll suddenly have a clearer sense of what actions you might want to take. It'll also be easier for you to prove your main point to anyone else who sees the report.

A screenshot of the AdWords report table. The table is titled 'Network (with search partners): Google search.' and shows a list of ad groups. The columns are 'Ad group', 'Clicks', 'Impressions', 'CTR', 'Conversions', and 'Cost / conv.'. The 'Impressions' column is filtered to show only ad groups with 1,000 or more impressions. The data is as follows:

Ad group	Clicks	Impressions	CTR	Conversions	Cost / conv.
Handyman	1,489	115,759	1.29%	164	\$34.88
Electrician	1,943	55,328	3.51%	128	\$42.40
Repairman	224	3,901	5.74%	44	\$22.55

## 7. Segment your analyses and reports to highlight differences at every level of your account.

While you use filters to eliminate unnecessary data points, use segments to unpack differences in performance that may be hiding in larger, aggregated numbers. Through segments, you can identify efficiencies to exploit and inefficiencies to improve upon. Segments are a great way to avoid interpreting data incorrectly. Averages and totals can be instructive, but they can also obscure a true, actionable insight that is buried in a bigger set of data.

### TIP:

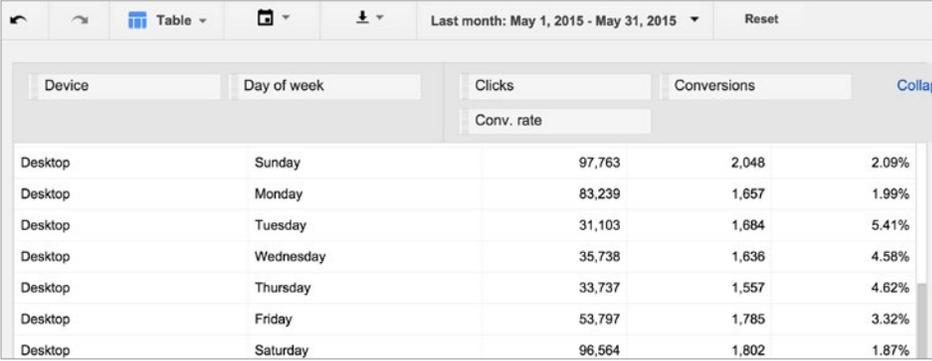
If you want specific, self-defined buckets within your account, [create labels](#) for keywords, ads or campaigns. Labels are a great way to slice your data into custom dimensions.

Highlight the differences that exist across different segments, and use those differences to craft a story about what steps to take next.

There are lots of available segments to add to your reports, and each of them can be uniquely insightful depending on which report you've added them to:

- Time (day, week, hour of day, day of week, etc.)
- Conversions (name or category)
- Network
- Device
- Top vs. Other
- And more

If you're trying to understand people's device usage based on their surroundings, you can take a look at a device report segmented by time – in this case we'll use day of week. This report will show you how performance varies depending on what people are more likely to be doing at that moment. The differences you uncover can tell a specific, actionable story to your audience about how to update your strategy to get even more positive results. The middle of the week sees the best conversion rates on desktop, so you can be more aggressive at those times. You can also investigate different promotions to run to try and entice weekend users to convert more often.



The screenshot shows a report interface with a table of data. The table has columns for Device, Day of week, Clicks, Conversions, and Conv. rate. The data is segmented by Desktop device across the days of the week from Sunday to Saturday. The conversion rates are: Sunday (2.09%), Monday (1.99%), Tuesday (5.41%), Wednesday (4.58%), Thursday (4.62%), Friday (3.32%), and Saturday (1.87%).

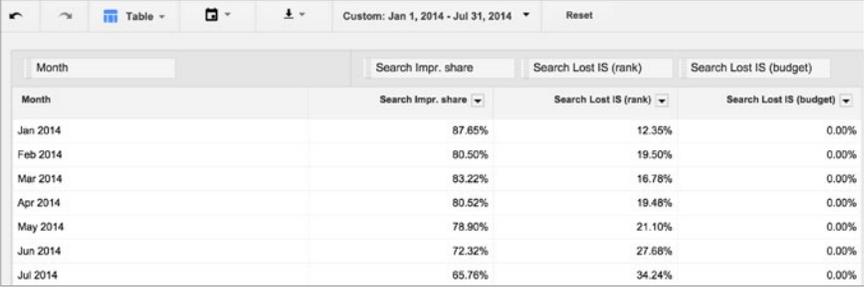
Device	Day of week	Clicks	Conversions	Conv. rate
Desktop	Sunday	97,763	2,048	2.09%
Desktop	Monday	83,239	1,657	1.99%
Desktop	Tuesday	31,103	1,684	5.41%
Desktop	Wednesday	35,738	1,636	4.58%
Desktop	Thursday	33,737	1,557	4.62%
Desktop	Friday	53,797	1,785	3.32%
Desktop	Saturday	96,564	1,802	1.87%

## 8. Create line, bar and pie charts to better visualize your data.

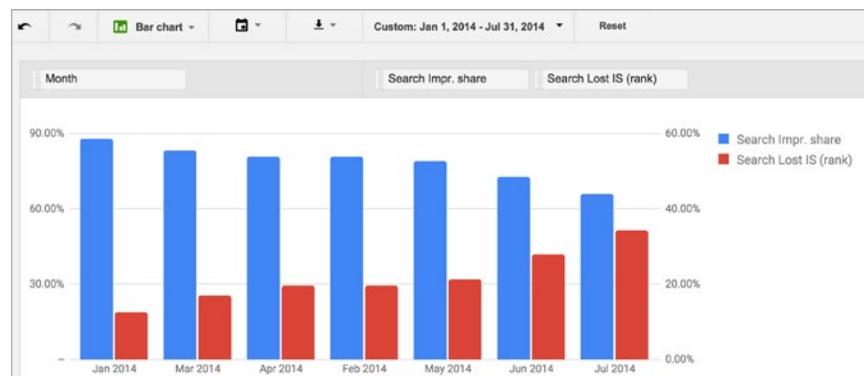
While the numbers in the AdWords interface or a spreadsheet may have a certain undeniable appeal to those who spend all day working in their accounts, different audiences are going to have different expectations about what looks nice.

Adding visualization can be a crucial step when it comes time to prove a point. Take what may be immediately apparent to you in a data table, and transform it into something with universal appeal.

Use charts to turn your data into a story that anyone can understand and act on. Consider the difference between these two reports:



Month	Search Impr. share	Search Lost IS (rank)	Search Lost IS (budget)
Jan 2014	87.85%	12.35%	0.00%
Feb 2014	80.50%	19.50%	0.00%
Mar 2014	83.22%	16.78%	0.00%
Apr 2014	80.52%	19.48%	0.00%
May 2014	78.90%	21.10%	0.00%
Jun 2014	72.32%	27.68%	0.00%
Jul 2014	65.76%	34.24%	0.00%



You may look at the first table and think something is happening that you should keep an eye on. But if you look at the second chart you know that something is definitely occurring to erode your place in the auction.

Use the Report Editor to create line, bar and pie charts — all of which are going to be easier on the eyes than a spreadsheet. Make your report that much more compelling.

Not only are charts good for communicating insights you've discovered in a table, they can also be a great place to start the diagnosis process. Any differences or trends will be more likely to stand out. For example, if you make a table looking at clicks by device by month, it might be hard to see that mobile is on track to overtake desktop. If you put it in a line chart, though, you're likely to see that type of insight instantly.

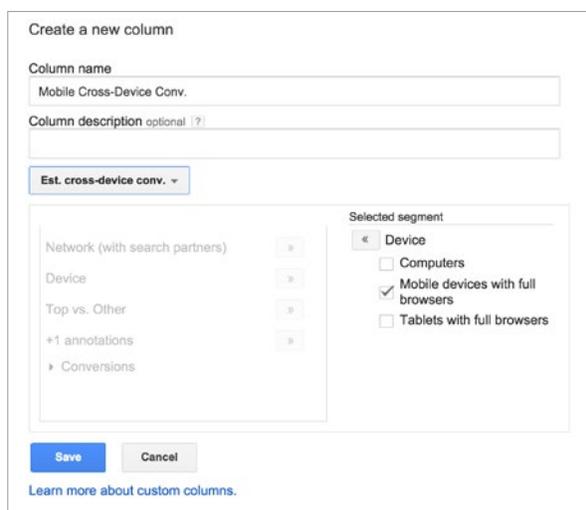
# Tailor reports to be uniquely meaningful to your needs

Customizing the reports that you develop will increase your efficiency and save you time.

## 9. Create custom columns that focus on what matters most.

Your success metrics should always be front and center in your reporting. It's easier to focus on your performance drivers if the data in your analyses and reports is customized to what you care about. A particularly powerful way to customize is to create your very own columns.

Through [custom columns](#), you can tailor the presentation of your data so you can benefit from the information that is most important to you. Depending on the context of your report, you can create different custom metrics.



The screenshot shows the 'Create a new column' interface. At the top, there's a title 'Create a new column'. Below it are two input fields: 'Column name' containing 'Mobile Cross-Device Conv.' and 'Column description optional ?'. A dropdown menu is set to 'Est. cross-device conv.'. The main area is divided into two panels. The left panel, 'Selected segment', shows a tree view with 'Network (with search partners)', 'Device', 'Top vs. Other', '+1 annotations', and 'Conversions'. The right panel shows a list of segments: 'Device' (selected), 'Computers', 'Mobile devices with full browsers' (checked), and 'Tablets with full browsers'. At the bottom, there are 'Save' and 'Cancel' buttons, and a link 'Learn more about custom columns.'

For example, if you are doing a detailed analysis of cross-device performance, you could create columns that contain cross-device conversions by device. That way your analysis will keep your key insights front and center, focusing on what you care about most.

## 10. Save your important, recurring analyses as reports.

Hold onto all of the actionable insights that you're driving. Make smart reporting a recurring process.

Just as there are lots of ways to customize your reports, there are also a lot of ways to [save those reports](#):

- Save different sets of columns on the Campaigns tab
- Schedule and email reports to yourself or anyone else in your account
- View customized, saved reports on the Reports tab
- Create higher-level reports across multiple accounts with [manager account reporting](#)

If you decide to email yourself certain reports, be sure that you're thoughtful about what to send. Make what you send valuable enough that each time it's delivered you feel justified when you open it. That's a good litmus test of a good report, too — would you open this report if it was emailed to you? If the answer is no, consider trying to improve what you're including in the report.

While we can't be sure what reports will be most important for you, there are certain ones that we see advertisers use often. They're the type of reports that you can rely on when you're performing standard maintenance in your account.

- [Search terms report](#)
- [Geographic report](#)
- Device report
- Hour of day report
- [Campaign details report](#)
- [Ad group details report](#)
- [Paid & organic report](#)

# Reports Recap

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We've mentioned a lot of different reports throughout this guide, and here's a list of all of them. Use them as inspiration for the different reports that will be uniquely valuable (and actionable) for your own account.

Report to run	Action to take after reviewing report
Ad report segmented by keyword.	Give keywords that would benefit from further customized ad text their own ad groups.
Line chart for your main success metric.	Jump in to diagnose and fix any issues that are out of the ordinary.
Top movers report.	Know what's changing in your account and what some possible causes could be.
Auction insights segmented by week.	Adjust your bidding and messaging based on the changing competitive landscape.
Keyword report segmented by top vs. other.	Decide whether or not being more/less aggressive on targeting the top of the page is driving the right kind of traffic (after accounting for the appropriate conversion delays).
Ad group report filtering out Search Partners and Display, also filtered for 1,000 impressions.	Decide ad tests based on performance on Google.com ads specifically.
Device report segmented by day of week.	Be more aggressive during high conversion rate days. Consider promotions intended to increase conversion rates during slow times.
Bar chart with search impression share and lost IS by month.	Communicate the effects of different tests to non-AdWords audience. In this case, diagnose and fix any impression share losses.
Maintenance reports that should be set up & regularly emailed to you.	Make monthly optimizations centered on the recurring insights you find most valuable.

# Conclusion

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Creating good AdWords analyses and reports requires a deep understanding of what you want to know about your account. Once you understand what you're looking for, you can translate those insights into action and continue to improve performance.

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