

The background of the entire page is a blurred photograph. In the center, a person stands at a podium, likely giving a presentation. The scene is dimly lit with blue stage lights. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of an audience's heads are visible, looking towards the speaker.

mcm

Get bums on seats!
A guide to selling out
your next large scale
event

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Introduction

As the world begins to open up, you'll be starting to think about getting your large events and live conferences back on track. Whether that means remaining virtual, face to face or hybrid, there's no doubt you'll be wanting to get bums on seats.

Start by taking a step back and looking at how you're going to do that. To help, we've put together a quick guide on how you can guarantee selling out your next event, using our customer acquisition tips.

We'll show you the different tactics you should use to capture your audience by targeting them on the channels they use the most, from Google and LinkedIn to TikTok and Spotify.

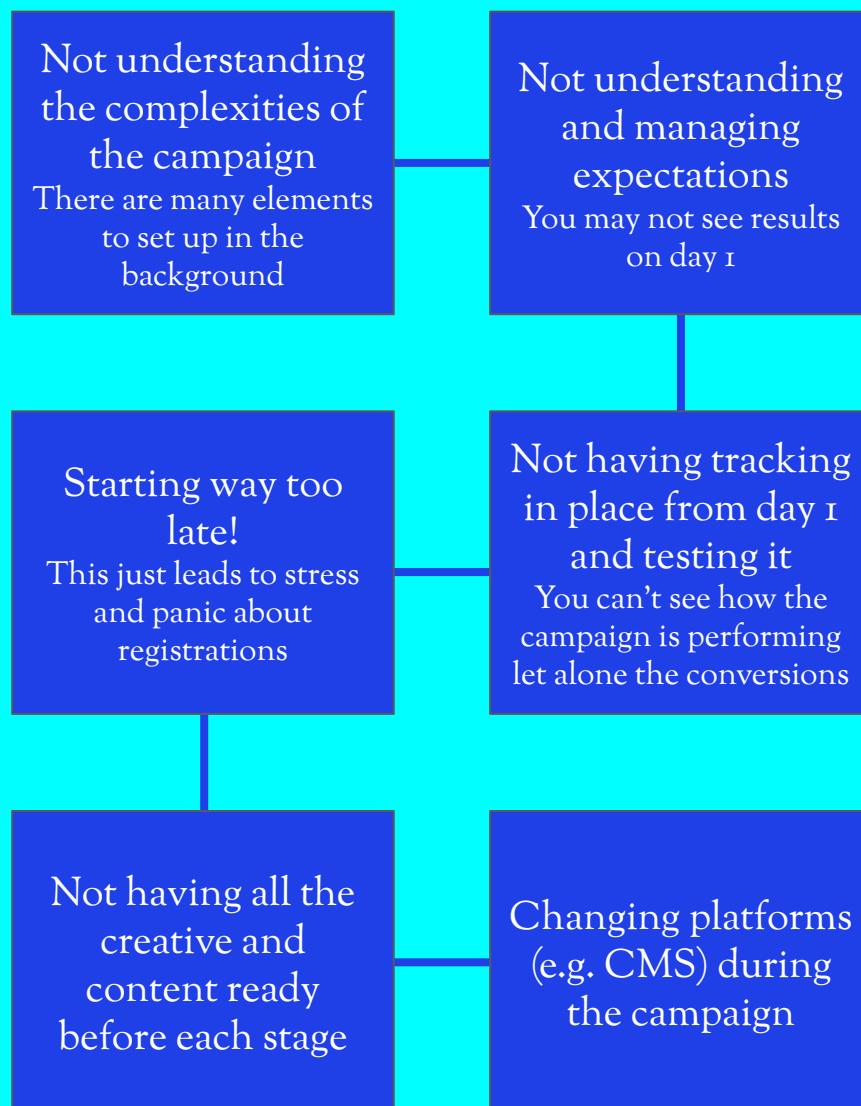
Our extensive experience tells us that the best time to be thinking about your customer acquisition strategy is at least **4 months** before your event, and promoting it should be the first thing you think about. However, we recognise that you don't always have the luxury of time, which is why this guide is so important.



Common pitfalls

We've gathered together the most common mistakes people make when running their campaigns, so you can avoid them.

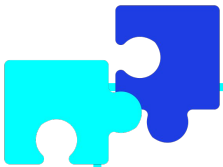
Either by taking more time to plan ahead of go live or teaming up with a third party to ensure a guaranteed ROI.



Key challenges you're facing



Understanding and leveraging the different tools available



Content diversity



Ability to monitor and optimise campaigns continuously



Time available to run effective ad campaigns

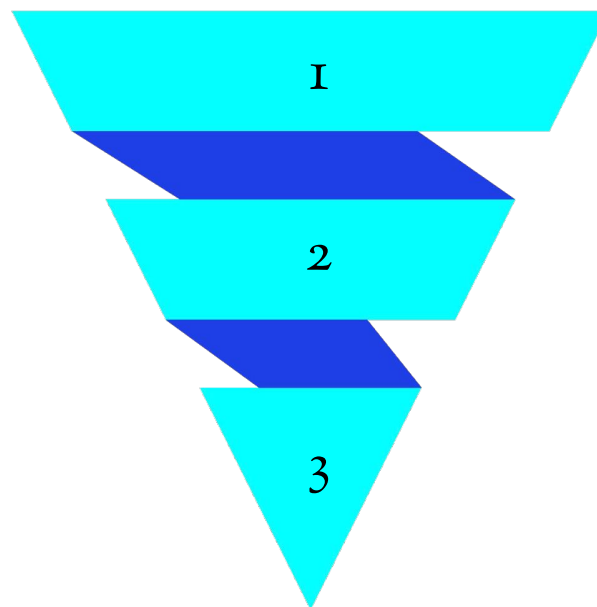


Understanding and leveraging the different tools available

The marketing funnel

“In the digital marketing industry, the sales funnel is one of the core concepts which can take your business from the unknown to a multi million pound marketing machine.”

What is the best process for promoting my event and securing registrations? Firstly, you need to think about the marketing funnel and understand where your target audience sits.



1. Awareness

- Generate recognition
- Generate an audience for the next phases
- Informational content with soft CTA

2. Consideration

- Educate
- Keep the user base engaged
- Educational content with soft CTA

3. Conversion

- Retarget users who have interacted in the first stages
- ‘Sales based’ messaging with strong CTA (i.e. register now)
- Drive users to take an action

Who are you targeting?

If you are targeting a cold audience they'll be starting at the top of the funnel, so awareness activity will be really important (hence the longer build up as recommended.) Ideally, you'll target these users through social channels, such as Facebook where you look at their behaviours and interests.

While these users might be relevant, they are not necessarily actively looking for your event, so if you're pushing ads in front of those people, your initial aim must be awareness and education about your brand and event. They need time to get to know you. What is this event about? What does it offer? Is it right for them? Laying the foundations and moving your audience through the funnel is what takes time, but you will reap the benefits later.

The golden rule here is that the first time a user encounters your brand, you shouldn't be trying to sell to them. That relationship takes time to build. Imagine if you were targeted an ad for a shirt, but you've never heard of the brand or seen the shirt before, you probably won't purchase that tomorrow. You'll need a couple of weeks of understanding who the brand is, their story and if the shirt is right for you before deciding if you want to make the purchase.

TOP TIP

Be very clear on your target audience and how it breaks down. What are your target personas. Are they cold users? Are they warm? How will you use different stages of the funnel and the right channels for each?

The timeframe of the funnel can differ depending on your data starting point. If you have significant first party data which is segmented with past delegates, enquiries, info pack downloads, etc., then you can rely less on cold audiences. You can use this data to create lookalike audiences across social channels looking at users' age, demographic, gender, search habits, behaviours etc and find the relevant people for your event. Then the funnel can be focussed more towards the consideration and conversion phases, making it a lot shorter.

Did you know?

Social channels, in particular LinkedIn, allow detailed look alike profiling, using first party data. You can go into very specific detail about the type of person you want to target from thousands of categories, to really pinpoint your audience. You can even choose to target the top 1% of that demographic or take it wider depending on how broad you want to go.

It's also great for remarketing, targeting those profiles that are similar to those who have already taken an action with you.

The more data you can bring to the table, like previous event attendees or people loyal to your brand, the shorter the funnel and the quicker the conversions. Before you dive into a totally cold audience, take a step back and reflect on the data that you already have and can work to your advantage.

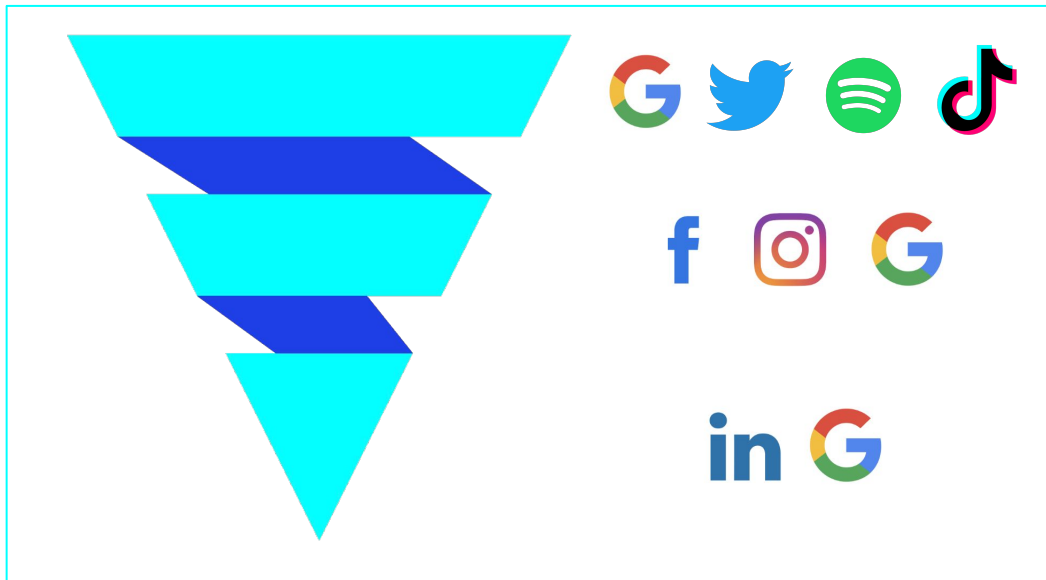
Our typical funnel experience

For awareness phases, you need to look at the lowest CPM (cost per 1000, impressions). You want to generate the most relevant traffic for the lowest cost.

The channels we would typically suggest using for these purposes are [Google Display](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#) (just like how you received this guide, watch this space for future content!). Moving onto the consideration phase, we'd suggest starting to introduce Facebook and Instagram as well as continued [Google Search](#). Finally, for conversions, [Google Search](#) and [LinkedIn](#) are your go-to. [LinkedIn](#) has a rather high cost per click in comparison to the other channels, but the conversion rates are significantly higher, making it well worth it. Of course, every campaign is slightly different with varying goals, but this gives you an idea of how you can utilise your channel choices for the best return.

Did you know?

LinkedIn can be expensive because usually the users that you're targeting are senior and decision makers. It's a crowded market so to reach them you have to go into an auction to bid. This drives the cost per click up. However, audience conversion rates are higher as the ads are so targeted, guaranteeing interest. So, it's definitely worth it!



We've found that almost all conversions will occur in that last period just before the event. This highlights just how important it is to allow for those awareness and consulting stages to embed and trigger the final conversions. Don't get disheartened if you don't see many conversions during the awareness phase - you're not asking users to commit at that stage.

Case study

Raise awareness and drive ticket sales for this major event. We split the campaign into three phases; Early Bird, awareness and conversion, pushing the largest portion of spend towards platforms that generated the best ROI in the conversion phase. We found success across multiple channels, however, we found the greatest level of success within LinkedIn where we generated an ROI of 8.

6.2m

Users
reached

4.1

Overall ROI

90k

Users driven
to site

Key platforms

Now you've considered the different stages of the marketing funnel, the next piece of the puzzle is to consider which platforms will work best. We've broken down those we know work well for driving event ticket sales and registrations.



Paid social is not intent driven, but discovery driven. Rather than someone coming to search for your event, you're able to put your message out in front of people who may not even know that they want to attend your event yet. For this reason, paid social plays a crucial role in pushing users into the top of the funnel and is fundamental for the awareness stage.

This also offers a unique opportunity to catch users at different times of the day, when they're not necessarily thinking about events. For example, at night when they are browsing Facebook or maybe at lunch while they're browsing LinkedIn, it can be a nice way to catch their attention.

How to - Paid Social

Follow that traditional marketing funnel, taking people through the awareness phase; a cold user who knows nothing about your event. To the consideration phase, where you're educating your user, and telling them the benefits of your event, how much your ticket costs, when the event is etc. And finally, the conversion phase right at the end, when we push them over the line to purchase a ticket.

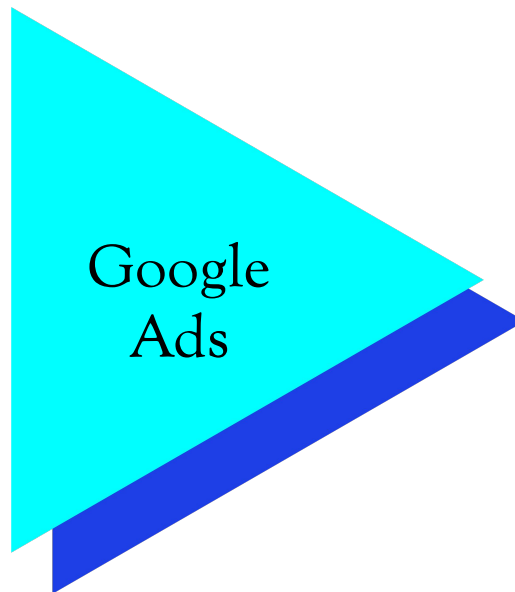
Each channel will be better served at different parts of the funnel. Facebook and Instagram are great for awareness, whereas LinkedIn is better saved for converting users and pushing them over the line.

This is also the case for audience types. We find LinkedIn has the highest conversion rate, but if your event is specifically targeted at a younger audience then it may work better being advertised on TikTok or Instagram. This is why testing, learning and optimising are really important. Utilising that extra time taken in the run up to the event to nail the right combination will make all the difference to your campaign results.

TOP TIP

DATA DATA DATA - check the size of your database

Social channels offer really powerful tools around look-alike audiences so any data you feed into the platform will match to users of a similar profile, avoiding media wastage and time spent on experimenting. The bigger your data set, the more powerful your audiences will be.



Google Ads is split up between Search, Display and video through YouTube, meaning you can cover three forms of media through one advertising platform. Allowing you to meet and reach users at the right time or at the point of intent when they're actively looking for you, with minimal effort.

Google Search allows you to reach existing users either for brand search or the types of audiences you're hitting, including cold users as well. This is a tool for reaching users that know your brand and are searching for terms that are related to your event, as well as those who are visiting your competitors' websites.

Google Display can be used in two ways. The first option is by using customer intent audiences to find those in the market for your style of event, and the second option is remarketing to those people that visit your websites but haven't yet converted.

YouTube is great for reaching new audiences through video content as this raises a much higher awareness of your event in a compelling way to engage the audience.

How to - Google Ads

Depending on your organic rankings we suggest setting up a campaign separately for your brand. If you have high rankings already, you can utilise this approach in the final 2 weeks of your campaign. Countdown headings work particularly well here, especially as they dynamically update.

Targeting your brand keywords using Google Search makes it nice and simple to protect your core terms. Make sure to also set up campaigns for each of the types of terms you're targeting so everything is kept really separate. Then you can easily see what is performing well or not so well and shift budget over with a few simple clicks.

What platform to use?

When using Google Ads, the platform will depend on your objectives as well as the budget you have available. If you've got a small budget e.g. £500, you are restricted and limited to spending on Google Ads, so we would look to push that through just Google Search because that is where you're going to find the highest quality of user as they've already got intent to find you or search for terms related to you. If you've got a slightly larger budget e.g. £1500, then you can start venturing out into more awareness platforms like Google Display in YouTube. However, be aware you don't want to spend all your budget on finding and remarketing to users that aren't necessarily as qualified as they would be through Google Search. Strive for a constant balance and analyse consistently to ensure you're putting your budget in the right place for the conversions you want.

TOP TIP

Make sure your structure follows the marketing funnel.

Ensure that you're not aiming for that last click. Reach users at the top of the funnel, nurture them through to the point of conversion.



Content diversity

“More than 85% of today’s brands use content marketing, but less than half of them do content marketing the right way”²

You wouldn’t be alone in under-appreciating the amount of creative diversity that’s needed in order for the campaigns to perform. It doesn’t have to be Shakespeare, but a little time and thought put into this and ensuring the audience is served something different and engaging at each stage, can make all the difference.

We’ve all heard of the phrase ‘content is king’ but when it comes to the marketing funnel it couldn’t be more true. Your content is at the heart of your campaign. You need to consider what your audience is looking for and when.

TOP TIP

Offer different content during the different stages of the funnel to keep your audience engaged. We’ve found the below combination works the best to drive engagement and conversions

Awareness = Video (less than 30s) or carousel ads

Consideration = Static and Gif, with benefit led copy

Conversion = Static images

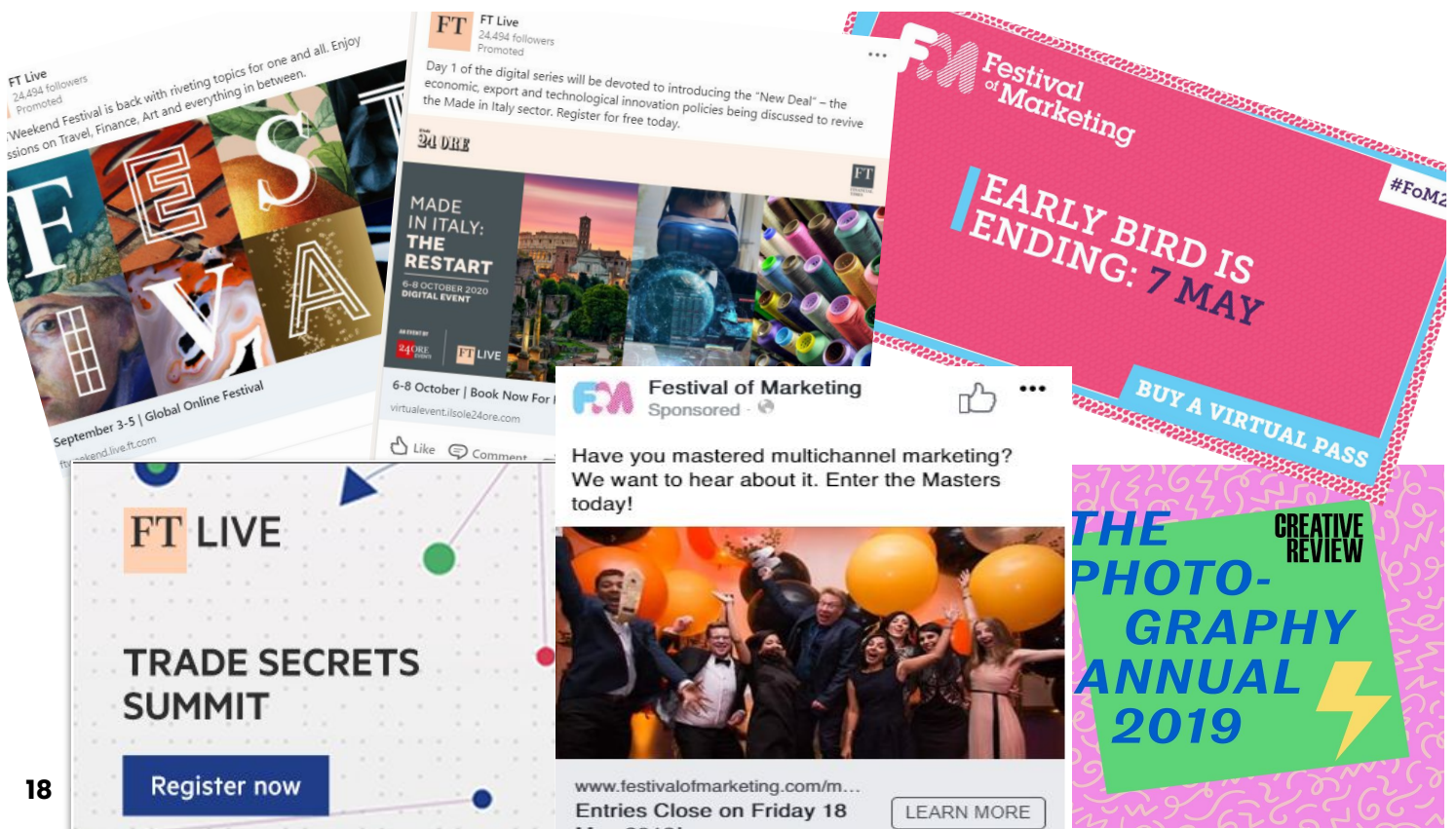
² [How Leading Marketers Redefining The Marketing Content Experience? \(martechseries.com\)](https://martechseries.com/how-leading-marketers-redefining-the-marketing-content-experience/)

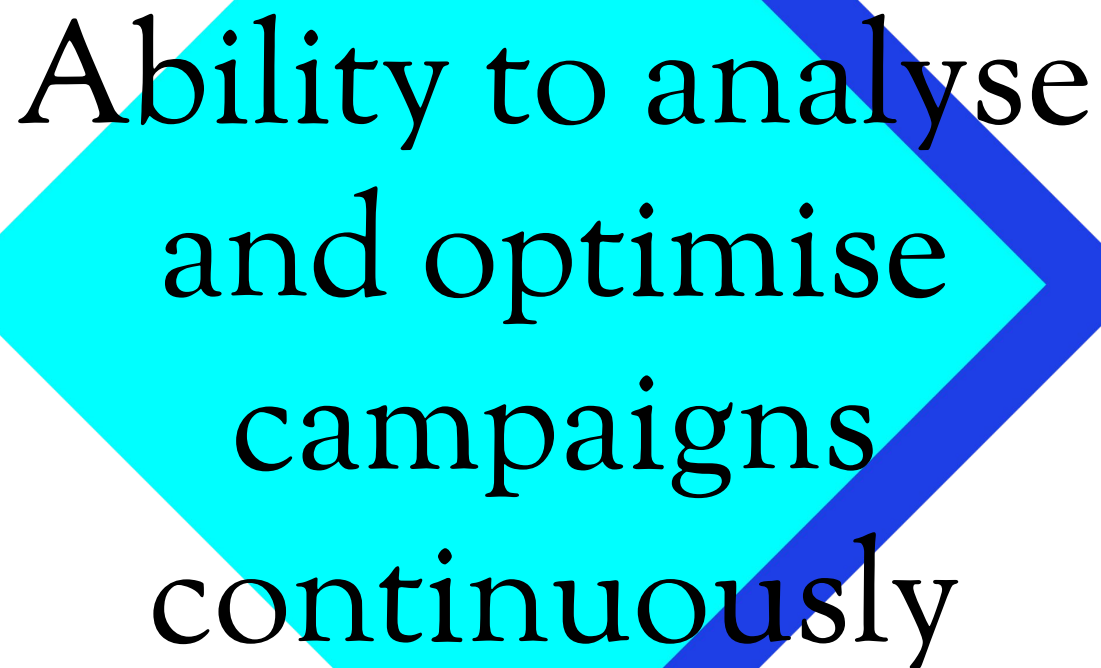
If you look at the funnel stages, awareness content needs to be very different to the conversion stage and you need to be clear on this. It also means your content will be different depending on the platform you choose to use. In paid social for example you'll start at the awareness stage, covering the benefits and using a more gentle approach, not 'Buy ticket now!' whereas with Google Ads your audience is already doing relevant searches so you can be a bit more bold with your messaging.

We know creating various forms of content takes time, but it's worth it. Campaign requirements like these are often underestimated, so take a step back and think about this.

Content inspiration

Below are a few great examples of creative that have worked really well. Use of bright and bold colours as well as strong statements tend to stand out and generate the most engagement.

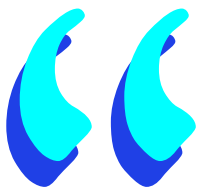




Ability to analyse
and optimise
campaigns
continuously

Analyse and optimise

Let's recap: you've got your funnel mapped out, a direction of the channels and platforms you'll use for each stage and a good idea of the target data you have to use. But the main thing that will guarantee success is tracking and ongoing analysis.



Not having conversion tracking or the site tagged correctly, to see how your campaigns are performing in terms of user behavior, can have drastic effects on the success of your campaign.



Paid advertising going live is just the start, this is where you learn what works and more importantly, what doesn't. Analysis helps you to keep your campaign efficient so that you spend money when conversions are more likely to happen. It can help you delve deeper into the demographics that convert so you can increase engagement rates from those who are most likely to buy, saving you money.

It isn't an exact science either, every week or even day something is going to change in your users' behaviour, something as simple as the weather can have an impact. The more eyes you have on how your data is trending the better, to optimise proactively. We see certain regions and areas performing well one week versus another so understanding what's trending means you can pivot your budget to the best place to improve and increase conversions.

If you are unsure how to correctly set up tracking or can't find the time in your already busy schedule to monitor your campaigns effectively, then it's well worth considering an extension to your team through a third party, like MCM. We can help take the stress out of this so you can get back to concentrating on making the event the best it can be.

Case study


The challenge was to increase registrations for an upcoming B2B show with a relatively niche, professional audience. The company were looking to utilise various channels to reach ideal customers.

In a short 4 week period we were able to generate 600k impressions through paid advertising.

670
Conversions

600K
impressions

£5.50
Cost per
registration



Time available
to run effective
campaigns

Time available to run effective campaigns

This could refer to the (short) time available before your actual event or actual time you as a marketing team have to put towards digital advertising and the process that comes with it.

Firstly, timing is crucial. We've seen it before where people have pushed campaigns live a couple of weeks before the event. Unless you have a pretty airtight data list, it's tricky to get the results you want in this timeframe. If you're really late with this, sometimes you have just missed the boat and it's worth stepping back and taking stock for next time round. Because often what we see is if it's conversions that you're looking at improving at the last minute, it simply doesn't work.

TOP TIP

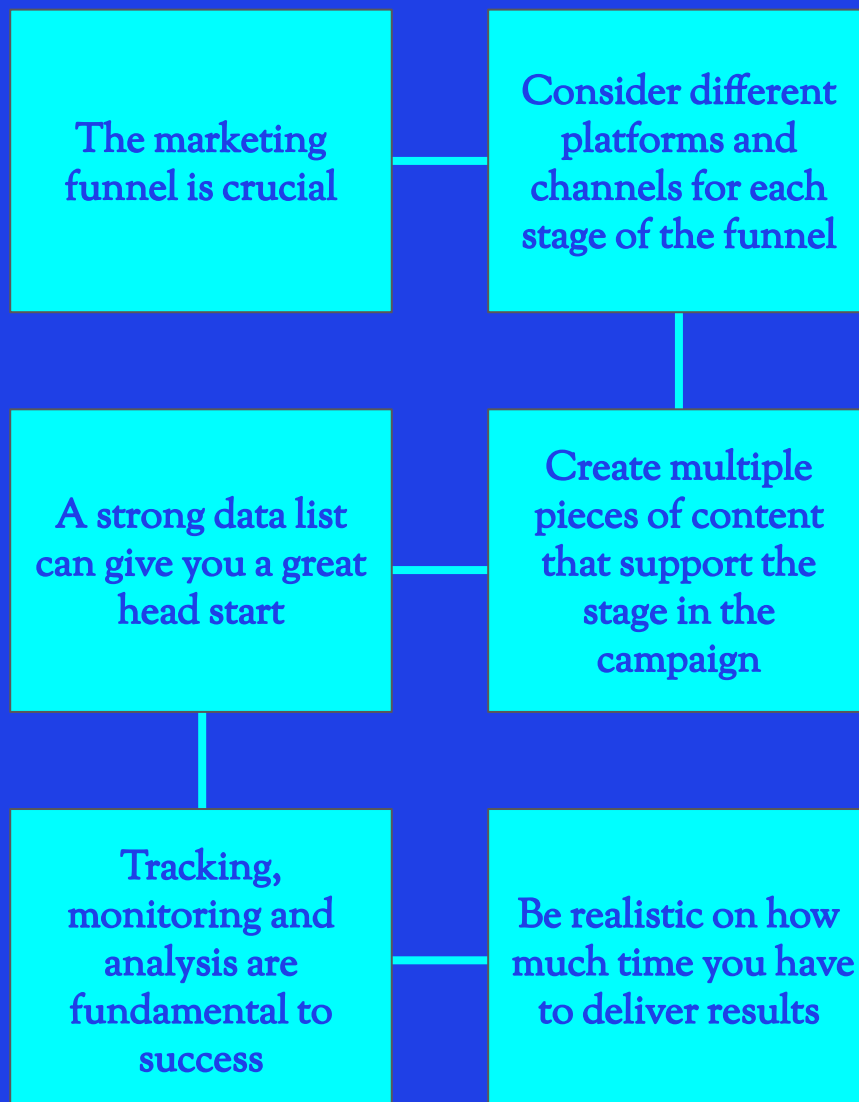
If you are thinking about using an agency remember **time** is golden to benefit from their ability to optimise. Every channel has a learning period which means their algorithm needs to learn and there is often a degree of fluctuation.

During the learning phase you can't optimise, so remember to leave enough time to establish a sensible learning period, in order for the team to optimise effectively and get those conversions!

On the flip side, if you are months out from your event and you're busy planning everything to the last detail, perhaps you don't have time within the team to take on the digital advertising aspects. This is when it might be worth considering an extension to your team through an external agency. We've covered the importance of getting it right, and to achieve that it requires time and knowledge to really take advantage of the platforms available.

Key takeaways

We hope this guide has helped you to identify the best way to use paid advertising techniques to get bums on seats at your next event!



MCM is a customer acquisition agency who go further to reach the customers your brand was made for, with strategy-led PPC and social campaigns.

For over 20 years, event and publication brands like you have trusted us to grow leads and sales by getting them in front of customers who really want what they've got to offer, with content that is matched to their real desires.



If you need help to get bums on seats at your next event, then let's chat. We can work with you to deliver an increase in registrations whilst maximising your ROI throughout.

We're your customer acquisition partner.



Start the next conversation

Let's start conversations with your customers
that deliver an exceptional ROI.

Get in touch

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Location
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