



[Guide]

The No-BS Guide For Affiliate Marketers

The Secrets to Native Advertising Success





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Advertising, Without the BS

Affiliate Marketing has come a *long* way since its PC Flowers and Gifts inception circa 1989. Today, this digital powerhouse accounts for 10% of *all* eCommerce, globally.

Worth over \$6.8 *billion* in the U.S. alone, with a consistent annual growth rate of 10%, there are no signs of a downtrend in sight.¹

But as a savvy Affiliate Marketer, *you* already know this.

What you're *really* looking for is a way to expand your affiliate strategies, and ultimately, boost your profits. And we're here to help you do that.

Enter Native Advertising: A meaningful way to get your offers discovered by new, ready-to-convert audiences across the open web.

Now, follow along to gain the tactical secrets to native success — no BS.



¹ Forrester; Networks Help Drive Affiliate Marketing Into The Mainstream, February 2016

“Can I Run This on Outbrain?”

The most frequently asked question by Affiliate Marketers.

And hey, we hear you — Outbrain is certainly known to be on the *stricter* side when it comes to our [advertising guidelines](#). But as the wise Milton Hershey once said, “Give them quality; the best kind of advertising.”

High-Quality Ad Experiences → High-Quality Audiences → High-Quality Conversions

General Rule of (Brainy) Thumb: Don't cut content compliance corners.

Yes, You Can (Run This on Outbrain, That Is)

The beauty of advertising on the open web is that there are *no* limitations to the types of audiences at your disposal.

And with limitless audiences come limitless interests, giving you room to expand your offer opportunities.

Top Performing Offer Types:



Fashion & Retail



Search Arbitrage



Entertainment



Health & Fitness



Travel



Dating



App Installs



Insurance



Finance



Tech

Native Reminder:

Native ads are placed within the look and feel of the natural consumer experience.









Take advantage of this by building an original, attention-driven narrative with your content and offers — guaranteed to propel conversions and lifetime value.

Top-Performing Verticals

Vertical ad types matter! Take advantage by tailoring your content accordingly.

And remember, your offers may fit one category, but that shouldn't deter you from building content around related, high-performing categories.

e.g. Technology & Internet offer creating content about Health & Fitness wearable deals.

Highest CTRs	Highest Conversions
<div><div>Health & Fitness</div><div>Fashion & Retail</div><div><div>Entertainment</div><div>Technology & Internet</div></div></div>	<div><div><div>Business & Finance</div><div>Home Services</div><div><div>Health & Fitness</div><div>Fashion & Retail</div></div></div></div>

Imagery Insights

Imagery is *everything* as it's the first element to catch the consumers' eye. Attract attention with our by-vertical insights.

Recommended Image Size: 1200 x 800 pixels.

Business & Finance



Close-up images of money, women, secret strategies, and people taking control (i.e. cutting credit cards or in the driver's seat).

Health & Fitness



Lifestyle imagery emphasizing eyebrows, hair, and aging, as well as close-ups of healthy food, nature, and medication.

CPG



Detailed, up-close images of products in use (i.e. neck pillows for travel).

Media & Publishing



Money-saving and growing old inspirational moments, along with featuring accident-prone or cautionary themes.

Fashion & Retail



Self-care images, especially highlighting hairstyling, from coloring to blowouts, as well as high-contrast, colorful images.

Technology & Internet



Close-up images of products in use, car-related gadgetry, and software.

Keyword Insights

Looking for a way with words? Look no further.

Test these top-performing keywords in your headlines to maximize conversions.

“**[E-Book Download]** 5 Steps to Get Savvier With Your **Investing**”

Business & Finance	stocks trading e-books investing claims savings training
CPG	listicles (i.e. 10 Things to know) change test
Fashion & Retail	best kept secrets non-traditional new ways
Health & Fitness	experts doctors scientists food tips diets commands (i.e. Try this)
Media & Publishing	claims rebates market predictions win stocks
Technology & Internet	educational themes (i.e. Find out) listicles pets CBD



Brainy Tips:

- Call out your target audiences to resonate and gain the click (i.e. “Home Owners”).
- Negative keywords (i.e. “avoid”) perform better than positive.
- Utilize dynamic titles to highlight locations (i.e. city or state) for *extra* relevancy.

Landing Page Tips

Gaining the conversion requires more than an enticing ad — you have to keep up the enticement throughout the post-click experience.

And just because your landing page works on social or search platforms doesn't mean it'll work for native.

Focus on creating *new* landing page experiences for the new, discovery-driven audiences you'll be interacting with.

Here are a few tips to turn *lands* to *leads*:



Use Clear CTAs

Provide clear CTAs that are easy to navigate. And make every link count, driving the consumer further down the funnel (otherwise, lose the link!).



Get Personal

Address the reader as “you” to add a personal touch.



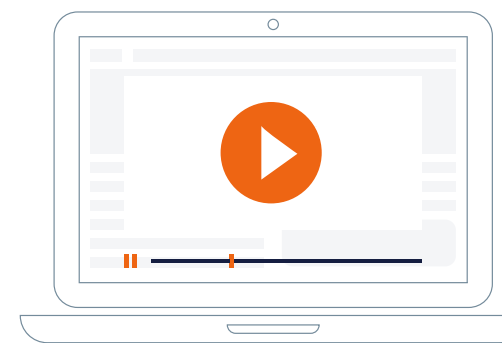
Get to the Point

Keep it short and sweet — big fonts and short paragraphs perform well.



Create a Narrative

Don't direct straight to product pages — build a narrative through content-first landing pages and advertorials.



Make It Interactive

Use interactivity to innovate and ignite interest such as videos, quizzes, or calculators.



Break Out Campaigns

Be sure to separate landing pages per campaign to get honest A/B test data.

Avoid (Content) Rejection

Did you know 5% of all our Affiliate-led ads were rejected in 2019?

Let’s avoid this with *your* content. After all, no one likes being rejected.

Top Spender Spotlight Tips	
All Affiliates	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid sensational messaging such as “Claim Now” or “Shocking”.• Use <i>identifiable</i> imagery; avoid zoomed-in shots of objects or body parts.• Look out for absolute words such as “Cure” or “Prevent”.• Avoid <i>extra</i> excitement, such as all-caps words like “WOW” or continuous exclamation marks like “!!!!”.• Refrain from the use of celebrity or politician inclusions.• Don’t use claims or statistics unless they’re fact-based with linked sources or references to prove it.
Health & Fitness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refrain from side-by-side “Before & After” images.• Include proper health disclaimers, where necessary.
Business & Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For Government-backed mortgage offers such as HARP and FHA, there <i>must</i> be mention of participation qualification.• Include proper financial disclaimers, where necessary.

Affiliate Marketing Site?

Be sure to *clearly* disclose any financial relationship between the site and sponsoring advertiser per governing guidelines.

Reap the Rep Benefits

Account Management: Content Compliance *with benefits*.

There are *countless* perks to working with a dedicated Outbrain Account Rep, from strategic campaign oversight to advanced targeting capabilities.

Though for Affiliates, the *number one* advantage is direct Content Compliance support.

- Fast-tracked assistance.
- Expedited campaign launches.
- Avoided (ad) rejection.

After all, Affiliates *without* Reps experience *double* the amount of ad rejections — 50.4%, to be exact (ask our BI team!).

Without Account Rep:



Incredible Device to Melt Away Back Pain Takes NYC by Storm

Sensational Alert!

- × Melt Away
- × Take by Storm



With Account Rep:

New Back Pain Relief Device Everybody in NYC is Talking About

Hang Up Your Black Hat (And *Not-So-Invisible* Cloak)

Affiliate-driven rejections often fall into one of the below buckets.

Avert the black-hat, misleading offers — white hat only, please!

Website Redirects

e.g. Sending consumers to third-party webpages or swapping URLs, not originally approved.

Illegitimate Offers

e.g. Offers that can't actually be fulfilled.

Deceptive Practices

e.g. Images pretending to be a system warning.

Targeting & Optimization

Your compliance foundation is officially *certified*.

Now, onto the nitty-gritty of targeting and optimization.

After all, as an Affiliate, your most scarce resource is time.

We hear you, which is why our automation-driven performance tools are *crucial* to maximizing ROAS.



Targeting & Optimization | **Native Necessities**

Before you get started, there are **two crucial steps to take**.

Analytics Tracking

UTM tracking is *UT-Mandatory* for accurate and trustworthy campaign data. Without this, it'll be difficult to *truly* understand and optimize your campaign performance.

But don't fret — your UTMs can be changed at *any* time.

Recommended Tracking Code:

```
utm_source=Outbrain&utm_medium=Discovery&utm_campaign=insert_campaign  
_name&utm_content={{ad_title}}&utm_term={{publisher_name}}_{{section_name}}
```



Brainy Tips

- Only add UTM parameters in the Tracking section of your Campaign Creation page (not within your submitted URLs!).
- Avoid backslashes “/” at the end of submitted URLs.
- Always use spacers between dynamic parameters — i.e. {{publisher_name}}_{{section_name}}.

Targeting & Optimization | **Native Necessities Cont.**

2

Conversion Tracking

Rip the **Pixel** bandaid off, Affiliates!

Outbrain's lightweight pixel is an absolute *necessity* to track conversions and access advanced targeting features (like Conversion Mode and Lookalike Audiences).

And we can *promise* you — your data will never (ever!) be shared.

Not convinced? Well, this tool will allow you to...

1. Avoid tedious, constant campaign tinkering.
2. Bypass inaccurate performance tracking.
3. Gain strategic recommendations from a dedicated Account Rep (if you're ready to move up to a Managed Service!).

Get the pixel, in the "Conversions" section of the dashboard.

Can't place the Javascript pixel or looking to track offsite conversions?

No problem — server-to-server to the tracking rescue.

Try these quick FAQs on for size:

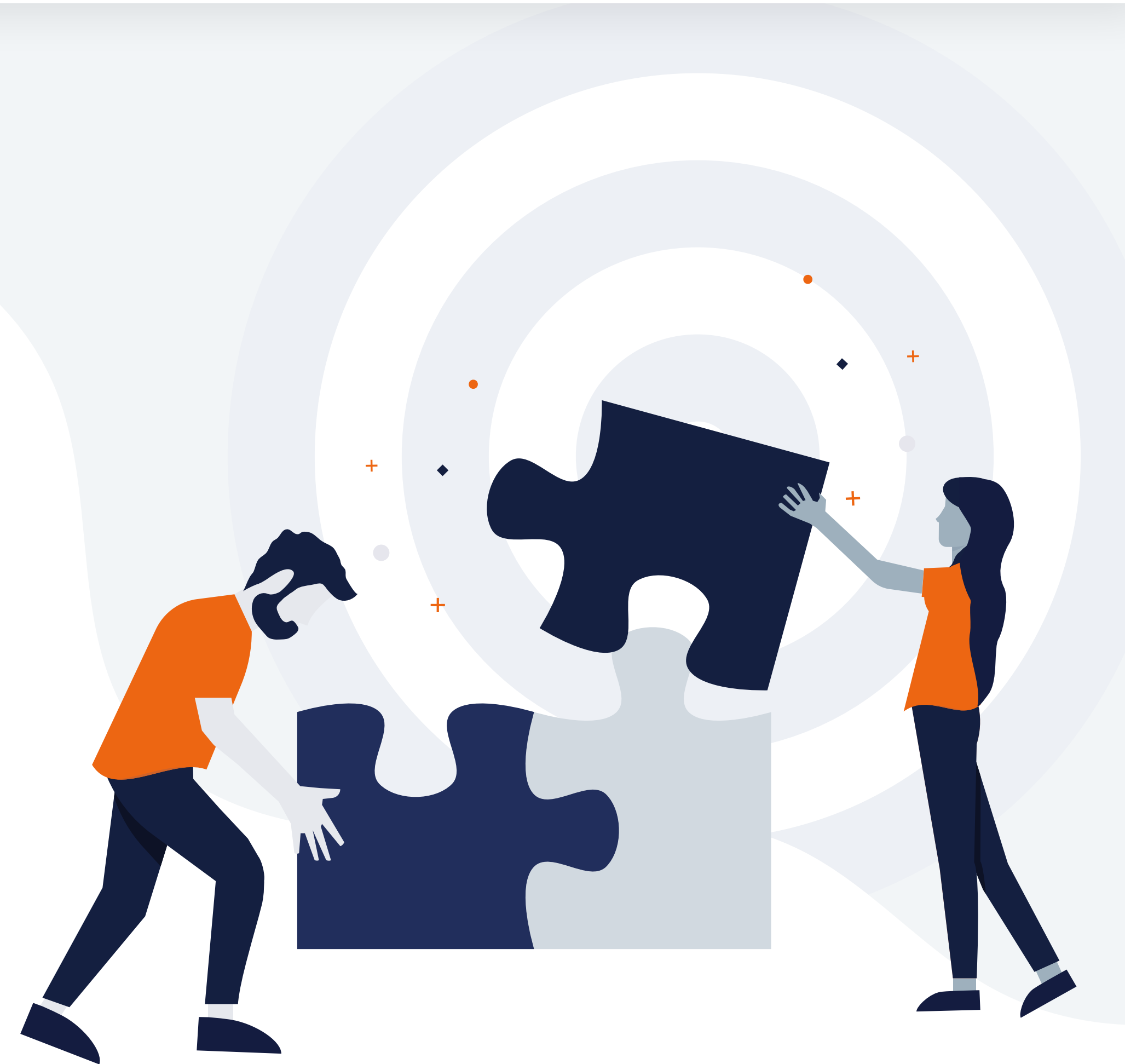
1. [Adding UTM Tracking](#)
2. [Tracking Multiple Conversions](#)
3. [Setting up Server-to-Server Integrations](#)

Targeting & Optimization | **The Fundamentals**

Two necessities down, five fundamentals to go.

The Fundamental: There are ultimately two levers that'll determine your scale – CTR and CPC. The higher either are, the higher the scale.

Now, onto our fundamental listicle.



Targeting & Optimization | **The Fundamentals Cont.**

1

Keep It Granular.

Always apply optimizations at the *campaign* level.
Account-level adjustments are restrictive, unless absolutely necessary.

2

Don't Get *Too Eager*.

Try not to get *too* optimization-happy *too* soon.

Before adjustments are made, spend about 3x your CPA goal to ensure you have enough data to justify your campaign changes.

3

Optimize Toward CPA.

CPA: Cost Per *Action*.
Though actions can take *many* shapes and sizes.

- Clicked to Landing Page
- Time On-Site
- Watched % of Video
- Email Submitted
- Lead Generated
- Sale

Be sure to track all relevant conversion points, both soft and hard.

Soft Conversion: Form Dropout
Hard Conversion: Purchase

Targeting & Optimization | **The Fundamentals Cont.**

4

Look Back... Window.

Set your look-back window to *at least* seven days, though 30 days is ideal for longer conversion windows (if your budget allows for it!).

- Smaller budgets require longer windows given slower data accumulation.
- Consider looking back 60 or 90 days as well to track meaningful performance trends.

5

Extra Savvy? Use the API.

If you have the technical resources or prefer to utilize *your own* tools, then the Amplify API can be used to directly manage your campaign optimizations and reporting.

It's as easy as [signing up](#).

Targeting & Optimization | **On-Target Targeting**

Let's solve time scarcity with automation, eh?

Here, we'll home in on the three must-use (automated!) targeting features — unique to the native ad experience — that'll cut through the BS and lead you straight to conversions.



Brainy Tip

Be sure to break out campaigns by platform, and think mobile-first.

Mobile-specific spend makes up half of total Affiliate spending though drives **65% of clicks** at a **48% lower CPC**.

Take advantage of those cost-efficient clicks!



Targeting & Optimization | On-Target Targeting Cont.

Conversion Mode

Bid adieu to high CPAs and say hello to Bid Strategy.

Or, as we like to call it, Conversion Mode — given that’s *exactly* the Affiliate State of Mind this feature grasps, strategically auto-optimizing campaigns toward conversions through dynamic CPCs.

Before you can utilize this tool, you’ll need to...

- ✓ Set up the Outbrain Pixel or Server-to-Server Tracking.
- ✓ Have *at least* one active conversion set up.
- ✓ Select either “App Installs” or “Conversions” as your Campaign Objective.

Then, it’s as easy as selecting your conversion(s) within the Budget section of your Edit or Create Campaign page.



Brainy Tips

Data, Data, Data

The more data available, the better. And hey, if “hard” conversion data is limited, optimize toward “soft” conversion points and allow our algos to optimize.

Automated Bids

Important to note, Conversion Mode auto-optimizes section-level and ad-level bids — campaign scheduling (i.e. dayparting) is up to *your* by-performance savviness.

A/B Test

Click “Run Experiment” to automate an A/B test between your bid strategy and a control group of standard traffic.

Targeting & Optimization | On-Target Targeting Cont.

Lookalike Audiences

Discover (and target) *new* audiences who look similar to your *existing* customers — the people most likely to convert. And higher CVRs and CTRs while you're at it — efficiency, at its finest.

Not to mention, for Affiliates, utilizing Lookalikes boosts conversions 3x and drops CPA by ***at least 35%***.

Similarly to Conversion Mode, you *have* to have tracking and one active conversion setup to utilize this conversion-friendly feature.

All of which can be done in the Custom Audiences section of your dashboard by quickly adding a Conversion Segment.



Brainy Tips

Simplify: Duplicate

Duplicate an existing, successful campaign with the addition of a new Lookalikes segment.

Unique Segments

Consider a range of segments based on unique pages, from website visitors to purchasers.

Target *and* Retarget

Create a pool of consumers that have visited a certain page (or combination of pages!) but did not convert, to stay top of mind and drive the sale.

Size Matters

Test an audience size of 15% to cast a wider net. Remember, smaller audiences are costlier to reach.

Launch with a 25% higher CPC than average to reach a lower percentage Lookalike segment.

First-Party Data

Give your first-party data a go by uploading your CRM data via our DMP partner platforms. Keep in mind, the use of first-party data costs an additional \$0.02 per click.

Targeting & Optimization | On-Target Targeting Cont.

Interest Targeting

Outbrain's *secret* sauce: **Interest-based targeting.**

a.k.a. Providing consumers with discovery experiences they *actually* care about — all while getting out of the confines of Search (intent-based) and Social (share-based).

This truer form of targeting will garner higher CVRs and LTVs and lower CPAs, and is as simple as including (or excluding!) Interests or Attributes directly in the Advanced Audience Targeting section of your Edit or Create Campaign page.



Brainy Tips

Patience Is Pivotal

Wait a few weeks of live campaigns to gain enough meaningful data for optimized use of this feature.

Keep It Relevant

Ensure your ad content and click-through experience speak well to the audiences you're targeting.

Popular Demand

The most common Affiliate-used Interests are Business & Finance and Health — get CPCCompetitive.

And? Or?

Be careful with your and/or conditions. Click + AND for the customers to match *multiple* interests.

Watch Reach

Keep an eye on the Reach Estimator to watch how your targeting affects your campaign's potential reach.

Categorize

Select an entire Interest or Attribute category or sub-category (or mix & match!).

Targeting & Optimization | Offer Optimization

Necessities: Check! **Fundamentals:** Check! **Targeting:** Check!

Now, onto optimization. Keeping with our love for listicles, here are five indispensable optimizations to oversee.

And remember, if you step up spend to gain an Account Rep, you can *amplify* these optimizations (and discover new tricks!) tenfold.

Affiliates utilizing Managed Services see 47% higher CTRs
— yes, it's worth it.



Targeting & Optimization | Offer Optimization Cont.

1

Low CTRs and No Conversions? Pause Ads.

While it's essential to launch new campaigns with 5 to 15 ad variations, it's important to know that your campaign spend will likely be driven toward the top 3 to 5 performing ads.

Keep your campaigns competitive.

Over 2k-10k Impressions?

After every ad has served 2,000 to 10,000 impressions, pause ads with lower-than-average CTRs.

The *one* exception is if you already know which ads are top-performers from previous tests.

Under 0.02% CTR?

Pause any ad with a CTR of 0.02% or below. And if your CTRs remain this low, test new variations to continue driving up your CTR.

2

High CPA? Bid Down or Block Sections.

Since you've implemented Conversion Mode (right?!), the tool should take on much of the heavy lifting.

But, it never hurts to keep an eye on your publisher and section mix to ensure you're maximizing ROI.

If CPAs are high, consider lowering your bids before blocking publishers or sections entirely.

Sectional Spend > \$150?

If your by-section spend is greater than \$150 with a CPA 3x+ higher than goal, bid down *significantly* — 30% to 50%.

Sectional Spend > \$200?

If your by-section spend is greater than \$200 without any conversions, then it's fair to block the section entirely.

Targeting & Optimization | Offer Optimization Cont.

3

Below Set CPA? Increase Section Bids.

Again, Conversion Mode should be rockin' the performance clock for you here. Though if you see *continuously* high-performing publishers or sections, don't shy away.

Increase by 25% to 50%

For top-performers, increase bids by 25% to 50% to increase the competitiveness of your campaign within the network and win more traffic.

Proceed with caution! Keep an eye out to ensure your higher bids don't negatively impact your CPA.

4

No Sessions? Bid Down or Block Sections, Part II.

Just because this metric doesn't (currently) exist within the Outbrain dashboard, *doesn't* mean you shouldn't be tracking it — especially if you have limited test budget and conversion data.

Google Analytics to Perfection

And if consumers aren't making down-funnel progress, then down-bid those underperforming publishers or sections.

5

Want Lower CPCs? Run Longer.

#FunFact: Affiliate campaigns that run for six months or more have 20% lower CPCs.

Longevity → Cost-Efficiency

If you have the budget to maintain longer campaign durations, and your offers have open-ended timelines, consider always-on campaigns to watch costs dwindle.

The No-BS Affiliate Advantage

ROI. Scale. Quality.

All limitlessly available to direct response-driven marketers like you, natively.

And with the highest digital audience reach in the world (surpassing Facebook!)¹, Outbrain is the go-to native partner, guiding the digital discoveries of *billions* of consumers.

[Get started](#) creating your own native narrative (or take your campaigns a step further, if you're already amplifying).

Questions? [Get in touch](#) — we're always here to help.

Happy Amplifying, Affiliates!



88% U.S. Digital Population Reached



5.7x Higher Impressions Than Social



20M Gained Conversions Per Day



55+ Countries in the Network

Keep the Secrets Coming

The secrets *don't have* to end when this guide does.

Subscribe to [our blog](#) for *constant* informative content (like these highly-trafficked articles!).

How to Get the Most from Attending
Affiliate Marketing Conferences



5 Types of Content That *Every*
Affiliate Marketer Can Use



Top Affiliate Conferences
to Attend in 2020





Authors:



Lauren Pica

Head of Marketing, North America

As the brains (and voice!) behind much of the Outbrain brand communications, Lauren spends her days of marketing scrappiness doing everything in her power to gain and retain happy customers.



Bryan Hernandez

Director, Customer Success, North America

Putting the success in Customer Success, Bryan spearheads digital marketing strategies by day, and whips up homemade ice cream in NYC by night.