Google Ad Grants vs. Microsoft Ads for Social Impact

How do they compare? New platforms, new features, new strategies

Presentation at Nonprofit Technology Conference #23NTC

Jason King

Jason King…

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Google Product Expert—active in Ad Grant, Google Ads & Search forums

Trainer—Google Ads, Microsoft Ads, Google Analytics 4

Homestead in rural France—14 acres of woodland and pasture, orchards, food forest and edible hedges, sheep, and Gauloise Saumon Doré chickens

warning—there's jargon ahead!

Based on data from

26 Google Grant accounts

9 Microsoft Ads for Social Impact accounts

Stats from 1 June 2022 - 31 March 2023

The Google Ad Grant in 2023

The program is 20 years old

It puts your ads into Search results on Google

The rules changes of five years ago have led to better managed accounts

Average Click Through Rate (CTR) is far higher than it used to be

Average monthly spend is higher than it used to be

But Cost Per Click (CPC) has risen a lot over the last few years, so more spend doesn't necessarily mean more clicks

Generally less useful for donation revenue than it used to be, but still useful for awareness

In 2023 your Google Ad Grant should be using

Responsive Search Ads (RSA), not Expanded Text Ads (ETA)

Image extensions (now called assets)

Business name assets

Business logo assets

A conversion-based bidding strategy

Conversion tracking set up in Google Analytics 4 (only a few months left to transition)

Microsoft Ads for Social Impact

New program, started on 1 June 2023

Can be spent on Search or Display ads (Google only allows Search)

Shown not just in Bing but also Yahoo, AOL, Outlook, MSN and other places

Initially available to multiple countries, then restricted to US only

Initially offered $3,000 per month's worth of ads, but recently reduced to $1,000

Paused to new applications from April 2023 and still paused as of January 2024

The interface is very similar to Google Ads and you can even auto-import campaigns from Google Ads

Some interesting and unique types of extension, such as action extensions

Ad Grant Bingo

Download the worksheet:

https://bit.ly/3ZV2sd1

Use it to define your advertising goals and the audiences you want to target, then find out whether Google or Microsoft Ad Grants might be the more appropriate platform to use.

How generous are they?

GOOGLE

$10,000 per month

A few nonprofits still have the legacy $40,000 per month, but that's not been available to new applicants for several years

Impossible to over-spend

MICROSOFT

$1,000 per month

But if you spend $800 of your own money per month, they will raise it to $3,000

Until April 2023 it was $3,000 for all

Possible to over-spend, so set the daily budget carefully

How competitive can your ads be?

GOOGLE

Free ads shown below paid ads

Free and paid ads in separate bidding auctions

Impression share <10%

Can bid as high as necessary if you use a conversion-based bidding strategy

MICROSOFT

Free ads and paid ads are not bundled separately

In the same bidding auctions

Impression share 7% - 44%

Can bid as high as necessary, regardless of bidding strategy

Ease of spending the daily budget

GOOGLE

Difficult for niche keywords

Difficult for donation keywords

Difficult for organizations with only a local reach

Impression share <10% except for brand terms

MICROSOFT

So very easy!

Therefore put only your priority ads on Microsoft (donations, signups)

Don't be afraid to target precise audiences

Conversion tracking

GOOGLE

Relatively easy due to integration with Google Analytics

Google Analytics 4 deadline is approaching fast!

GA4's flexible conversion tracking methods *might* make Google Tag Manager unnecessary

MICROSOFT

Not so easy, depending on what you need to track

Tag needs to be added to website

But you are not required to use a conversion-based bidding strategy, so it's less vital

And you can still see conversions via Bing in Google Analytics

How does Cost Per Click (CPC) compare?

GOOGLE

Lowest account average: $1.62 (cerebral palsy)

Highest account average: $9.92 (international aid)

Cost Per Click (CPC) has risen each year for the last few years, see upriseup.co.uk/blog/latest-google-ad-grant-data-trend/

MICROSOFT

Lowest account average: $0.23 (reason: brand ads only)

Highest account average: $3.78 (cerebral palsy)

Low CPC coupled with ease of spending, means the budget goes further than you might think

Click Through Rate (CTR)

GOOGLE

Lowest account average: 6.31%
(international aid)

Highest account average: 25.14%
(cerebral palsy)

Overall average: 10.57%

Minimum allowed: *5%*

MICROSOFT

Lowest account average: 1.64%
(international aid)

Highest account average: 3.53%
(cerebral palsy)

Overall average: 2.3%

No minimum CTR rule

Demographic differences

GOOGLE

Younger

More international

More computer literate

More likely to volunteer or get involved in activism

MICROSOFT

Older

In the US

Higher level of education

Higher income

Bigger spenders online

More likely to be parents

More likely to donate, and donate higher amounts

Donations (example: a UK mother and baby charity)

GOOGLE		MICROSOFT	
One-off donations:	10	One-off donations:	34
Avg. amount:	$35	Avg. amount:	$170
Monthly donations:	2	Monthly donations:	7
Avg. amount:	$7	Avg. amount:	$10

Near-identical campaigns ran on each platform

Remember that during this period the Microsoft Grant budget was < one third of the Google Grant

Audience targeting methods

GOOGLE

Age, gender, household income

Interests

Industry

Remarketing

But using too-narrow targeting can flatline impressions

MICROSOFT

Same as Google, plus…

Job roles

Working in specific companies

Can often get a high level of traffic even with narrow targeting

Remarketing

GOOGLE

Only available in Ad Grants since early 2018

Limited in its reach because of impression suppression

Easy to set up audiences using Google Analytics

Useful for bigger-spending nonprofits with well-visited websites

MICROSOFT

Available

Ads are likely to be shown to a niche audience

Not such a straightforward process to set up custom audiences

You might be able to run an entire campaign using competitive keywords and a sizable remarketing audience

Do your audiences work in healthcare or education?

There are identical targeting options to reach people working in specific industries or with specific interests, which include:

Education, healthcare, nursing education, medical education, medical jobs

But these are much more effective in the Microsoft Ad Grant. Why?

- Impressions are not suppressed, so niche targeting can reach more people
- Microsoft products including Bing are prevalent in colleges, hospitals, surgeries etc.
- There are also job roles you can target for those industries

LinkedIn Ad Grant

For nonprofits that are focused on the following areas:

- Racial and gender equity
- Economic opportunity for professionals facing barriers
- Environmental sustainability

Opens a couple of times a year for new applications for short-term projects.

socialimpact.linkedin.com/nonprofits

Also… paid ads

Ad Grants are not the only way to advertise.

Google requires you to run paid-for ads in a separate account to the grant. Generally you will get very different results as a paid account enables more competitive advertising.

Microsoft allows you to run paid and grant ads in the same account. Generally you will get similar results in both.

An advantage of paid ads in both platforms is that you can use other types of ad.

It's a whole different conversation…