PPC platforms offer an amazing array of specific optimization opportunities. Once many details have been optimized, a "mature account" (it can take over five years for an account to reach that stage, especially as the competitive landscape and other circumstances change) might not require as much detailed optimization than during the earlier building and learning phases.

There are several exceptions to that rule, however. One of them is that your assumptions must change – sometimes radically – during hot and cold seasons.

Why, though? If you're at least intermediate level at the PPC game, you know more than beginners know – that is, that you don't necessarily have to "go out and find new visitors" during hectic seasons, or "stop advertising on certain words," during slow times. Search volumes (read: consumers' interest level) should take care of that, so much of the need for sudden budget expansion or restraint is baked into consumer behavior.

There are still key reasons to worry about this. In your weak season, first of all, consumers will spend more time "thinking about it." The avidness of their intent has changed. "Thinking about it" may turn into "prepay the mortgage," or "buy something completely different." Essentially, people's deferred purchases turn into "never." It's quite a tough call, which makes marketing and advertising so interesting: you might find it reasonable to keep advertising through slow seasons if it's still a good deal, you're playing the long game, and your offering has a long sales cycle with impressive, high-ticket purchase behavior potentially emerging down the road. On the other hand, many businesses would just as soon conserve budget for later, when the impact is more obvious.

Secondly, your competitors may be exhibiting timid behavior. Some may even overshoot, pausing large sections of their accounts instead of smoothly backing off. What happens when competitors exit the auction, or at least decrease their impression shares? Remember, it's an auction, and now, you're "winning"! You surge ahead in terms of ad position and impression share; you might suddenly be "enjoying" a boost surge in traffic… at a price you're not willing to pay. No harm done – if you "get out of Dodge." It might take several rounds of bid drops before significant competitors moving in that same downward direction decide they've reached the optimal level to once again hit their KPI targets. This dynamic (and it is dynamic!) doesn't occur to people if they're examining small bits of data or looking at their own situation divorced from the realities of seasonality and competitor behavior.

No season created equal

The most likely mistake account managers can make when it comes to seasonality is to be lulled into a false sense of security: assuming continuity of conditions. If one hasn't witnessed an account with "sharp seasonality" before, one's adjustments will in all likelihood be too gradual. The resulting ROI (or total profit) will be suboptimal.

This mistake happens in either direction. During a holiday bonanza, gradually warming to the opportunity can lead to a major opportunity missed. See you next year. On the other side, being too slow to deal with the slow season can lead to wasted budget.

(Not quite on point for this example, – but in my mind, a very useful device to describe the mental frame that people can bring to problems involving risk and action – is Nassim Taleb's contrast of the "usual" regime of fluctuations with one that is highly *un*usual. Sometimes he renders analysts' outlook on the problem in front of them as "living in *Mediocristan*, not realizing they live in *Extremistan*." *Mediocristan* is a regime where numbers fluctuate safely and predictably within a range. We aren't always living in Mediocristan.)

Instead of normal optimizations, then – let's say, adjusting keyword bids, finding pockets of waste, analyzing ad tests, and looking at certain additional details like demographic bid adjustments – in a situation of sharp seasonality, you need to think about making swift, global bid adjustments to raise or lower the overall level of aggressiveness.

Here are three ways to handle this.

1. **Campaign structure.** First, it helps if you design your campaign structure in such a way as to facilitate seasonal adjustments. If Back to School strongly impacts 15% of your product line, but not the rest, it won't do you much good to have those types of items sprinkled throughout numerous campaigns. No category structure is perfect, but if you make it easier on yourself to be nimble around key seasonal themes, you'll do better (and save yourself hours of work, potentially).
2. **Labels.** Campaign structure isn't always a panacea. To the rescue: something we can call "attributes"! Or in Google Ads, what we refer to as Labels. The nice thing about Labels is that they can be applied at any level – the keyword, ad group, campaign, ad creative, etc. Say you have a large campaign that contains 15% holiday-rush themes, and it's not practical to move these items to another campaign, or multiple campaigns (aaack!). If you label them, you can filter by Label, and bid up and down aggressively – or of course, pause the labeled segments. Again, this will improve performance and save potentially hours and hours of work in a larger campaign.
3. **Big, global bid adjustments.** Finally, pick your favorite mechanism by which to rapidly adjust the bid aggressiveness of your campaigns. Mobile bid adjustments are an obvious choice. Say your mobile bid adjustment for a campaign is set to -30%. You might bump it to -40% on the first day of the slow season, and then to -48% a couple of days later. Daily monitoring is a good idea, although you typically won't see even directionally accurate performance numbers for two to four days, due to baked-in latency in conversion tracking. That doesn't preclude all the ongoing detail work that is still helpful to account performance. Big moves and little moves should complement one another.

How sharply should bids be adjusted? In a normal environment (not keyword bids, but across-the-board changes in stance), I and many of my Page Zero colleagues are in favor of gradual tweaks in the 1-5% range. But in a situation of sharp seasonality (I will not even *try* to give you concrete numbers for Black Friday Week and Cyber Monday), let's say you're moving device bid adjustments by 8-12% at a time, and you do this three times spaced out over six days. What's the worst that can happen? (That's not a rhetorical question – it's really what you should ask yourself.) If your experience tells you that the business leans towards budgetary caution, you'll be fine with a significant reduction in volumes and average CPC's; the worst that can happen is that around Day 5 or 6 you'll notice that you tightened up too much, and you move back in the other direction a bit.

If, on the other hand, the business errs on the side of growth and market share, and you're in a tightening situation, the worst that can happen is … pretty much the same thing. You avoid overpaying for clicks in a down period, and if you tighten too much, you unwind the tightening a bit. Throwing caution to the winds is never wise, no matter what the business. You don't want your competitors bid jamming you and laughing up their sleeves, do you?

Thinking about an expansion scenario, missing the holiday season can be much more of a risk than a slight miscalculation over the slow season – that's likely because the nature of keyword search is that it should always have pretty decent intent. Once again: if a business misses its hot season, it could literally be "see you next year." Black Friday is really far off right now. Plenty of time to ponder your strategy, so no excuses if you bork it in 2020!

In short, you should have a plan for your PPC campaign management to address the most obvious bursts of seasonality in your business. Along with that general plan, you should also have an execution style for PPC bidding that you're comfortable with. As I've suggested here, gradual changes – while intuitive and adequate when living in Mmediocristan – aren't always healthy or even safe for the business.