

Step-by-Step Comprehensive

Outbrain TUTORIAL **FOR NEWBIE AFFILIATE MARKETERS**



By Amy Cheung, aka "Vortex"

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Amy Cheung, also known as “Vortex” on [STMForum.com](https://stmforum.com), has been working as a full-time online marketer since 2006. She joined [STMForum](https://stmforum.com)’s moderator team in 2015, and has been happily churning out tutorials for newbie affiliate marketers ever since.

To find more of her tutorials, [join the STM Forum](https://stmforum.com), the #1 Premium Affiliate Marketing Community since

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INTRODUCTION

My affiliate journey started with adult traffic, and then I mainly ran pop for a few years, and in the recent year started running FB traffic.

As far as paid traffic goes, I don't have much experience outside of these traffic types.

A few weeks ago, I connected with a representative from Outbrain - Lauren Pica, Head of Marketing North America (a lovely human being that knows her stuff!)

We got chatting and I found out something interesting I would like to share.

With the covid situation and its impact on the economy, some of the big brand advertisers have cut back on their advertising spend.

These are big brand advertisers that would normally spend large advertising budgets just to get their brands in front of as many people as possible, without expecting direct or immediate returns on their investment.

And because these companies didn't need to "make their offer back out" like we do, they could afford to bid higher to drive up the prices.

However, with the recent covid situation, the table has turned.

With the economy being the way it is, some of these big brands can no longer justify spending so much on ads. The priority has switched from growth to survival.

In stark contrast - Outbrain noticed that in spite of the changing economy, affiliate advertisers were STILL running profitable campaigns.

Outbrain was very impressed with how resilient affiliates were, in how quickly we were able to pivot to adapt to changes.

So they started reaching out to more affiliates, to find out how they could better serve our needs, in order to help more of us to succeed on native.

And what does that mean for YOU?

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As a direct result of the decrease in competition mentioned above, traffic prices have come down.

Which may not last long as more affiliates start running there, so now would be a good time to get in.

Moreover, Outbrain is in the process of [merging with Taboola](#), which means if the merger goes through, there will be more traffic to scale your campaigns in the future.

(I've just been made aware of the fact that [just Outbrain's reach alone already surpassed that of Facebook!](#) Can you imagine what kind of reach the merged network would have??)

And Outbrain's support team is now anticipating an influx of affiliates that want to sign up to their platform - fully prepared to provide any support they can.

Also worth mentioning is the fact that, if you're currently running on Facebook, you'll be able to cross-retarget (retarget Outbrain visitors on FB and vice versa).

If you're already running on other native sources, and would like to give Outbrain's traffic a test, simply go sign up here: [Outbrain's Registration Page](#)

If, like me, you're a Native Noob but would like to give native traffic a try, this tutorial would be just the thing to get you started!

If you've never run on Outbrain and/or native traffic, my tutorial should shorten the learning curve.

Here are a few other resources that can help:

1) Do watch the Outbrain webinar series for affiliate marketers! You can find it here:

[This Too Shall Pass: How to Manage Your Affiliate Ads Amidst Crisis, and Beyond](#)

2) Check out [Outbrain's "Affiliate Marketing Hub"](#) which has some good information.

3) Here a guide Lauren has co-authored that's specifically targeted at affiliates, it's a good introduction to what kinds of stuff you can/cannot run on Outbrain, and their campaign targeting options: [Outbrain's No-BS Guide for Affiliate Marketers](#)

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Expectations

I want to start by emphasizing that this is **NOT** a case study.

My original intention was to spend a little bit of money to get a feel for how Outbrain works, and then write a step-by-step guide on how to set up a campaign on Outbrain. For that purpose, a budget of \$1k was assigned, which would have been more than sufficient.

However, one thing led to another, and the plan evolved...

I thought it would be good to also describe how to use automation tools, namely Landerlabs and theOptimizer Native, because they can save people time and money.

But, in order for theOptimizer to start optimizing, I'd need to get at least **SOME** conversions. So, I had to do my research on Adplexity Native to choose lander(s) and offer(s) that had a very good chance of getting conversions.

Thus, the scope of this tutorial expanded - from a mere step-by-step on how to set up a campaign on Outbrain, to a full-fledged guide including spying and optimization.

Why is this important to know? Because I don't want you to read this tutorial expecting to see a wildly profitable campaign, because you won't.

The budget I had to work with was \$1k, and the geo was the US, plus I was (still am) a Native Noob, AND running on Outbrain for the very first time.

If I told you I was able to get this campaign profitable, you should be very suspicious. It would take a miracle to do without a whitelist of placements. (If any of you managed to do this - you have my utmost admiration and respect - I'd be eternally grateful if you would share some tips with the rest of us!)

Nevertheless, I am confident that this post will shorten your learning curve considerably. If you read this tutorial with the attitude "*I'm going to save time, minimize test budget to get results faster using the tips in this tutorial*", you'll get a lot more out of it than with the attitude "*I'm going to rip this campaign and expect it to be profitable from day 1*".

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Finally: I won't be revealing the exact landing page, offers or ads I was using, because I'd be doing all of you a disservice. Why? Think: Hundreds of people running the same ads + lander + offers on the same traffic network - we all know what would happen.

Plus, because I was operating on a small budget, I decided not to split-test landers or offers (I only tested multiple ads), so what I was running probably wasn't the highest-converting anyway. I hope that all of you will do split-testing from the start - it will benefit your campaigns in the long-run.

However, I promise to point you in the right direction - the lander and some of the best ads I was running can be found on Adplexity, and I'll even give you the search link.

Sorry for the long intro - let's get to the details!

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LIST OF TOOLS

Outbrain for traffic. (Sign up link is [here](#).)

Adplexity Native for spying. ([Here's the discount sign up link for 30% off lifetime!](#))

Voluum for Tracking. (Sign up link is [here](#). STM-exclusive discount can be found [here](#).) Of course, please feel free to use any other tracker you're subscribed to - as long as you have a rudimentary understanding of how tracking works, you should be able to figure out how to integrate your tracker with Outbrain, theOptimizer, and LanderLab.

Optional: **LanderLab** for lander hosting and modding. (Free service until further notice - [sign up here](#).)

Optional: **theOptimizer** for automatic campaign optimization. ([Here's the discount signup link for 70% off first month!](#))

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SIGNING UP TO OUTBRAIN

Please sign up to Outbrain if you haven't already. (Again, the link is [here](#).)

Worth mentioning: **A \$10k to \$30K ad spend commitment will get you a dedicated account manager.** If you're planning on spending at least \$10k on Outbrain, do reach out to request for one by emailing support@outbrain.com. Having a rep to provide guidance can make a big difference!

If you're planning on using the Optimizer, you'll need to request for API access for your Outbrain account. If you don't have a rep, you can either reach out to the support team (support@outbrain.com), or submit the [API Request Form](#).

If/when you do get a rep, there are a couple of things you can start by requesting:

1) Ask for a blacklist of publishers that probably won't convert well for what you're promoting.

2) Ask for the performance network to be turned on. The performance network is a list of publisher sections that have good conversion rates. Not everyone on the self-serve platform will get access, but it wouldn't hurt to ask!

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SPYING WITH ADPLEXITY NATIVE

First, I needed to get a good idea on what kinds of stuff was doing well on native traffic.

Initial Requirements

I went to Adplexity with some initial ideas on what I was looking for:

-**Low-payout offers, probably lead-gen or app offers.** Even when I was running pop traffic, I liked to use low-payout offers to cut placements for cheap, then test higher-payout offers. (Think: How much it would take to test 1000 placements even at 1x payout/placement, for a \$5 lead-gen offer vs. a \$50 ecom offer.)

I also knew based on "keeping my ear to the ground" - by talking to affiliate managers and the other affiliates - that insurance offers have been doing well even in spite of (or because of?) the covid situation. **Particularly car and life insurance.**

-**Preferably targeting a tier 3/4 geo, where traffic would be cheaper.** In the end I chose some US offers based on AM recommendations, but this tip can potentially help if you can find suitable offers in tier 3/4 geos.

-**Advertorial+Listicle landers.** I've read quite a few threads on STM where native traffic veterans have recommended them.

-**Offer verticals and landers must be allowed by Outbrain's advertising policies - [which you can find here](#).**

Adplexity Search Criteria

So I went to Adplexity and did a search using these criteria:

-**Date filter = last 7 days.** I needed to make sure the data was very recent, which is always a good idea, but especially important at that time to see which campaigns were STILL running in spite of covid.

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-Days running = 10-30 days. 10 days is long enough to assume campaigns at least showed promise (or they would have been paused before the 10 days). 30 days to exclude branding campaigns - [according to this Adplexity Native Tutorial](#).

-Language = English. I didn't feel like getting landers translated for initial testing.

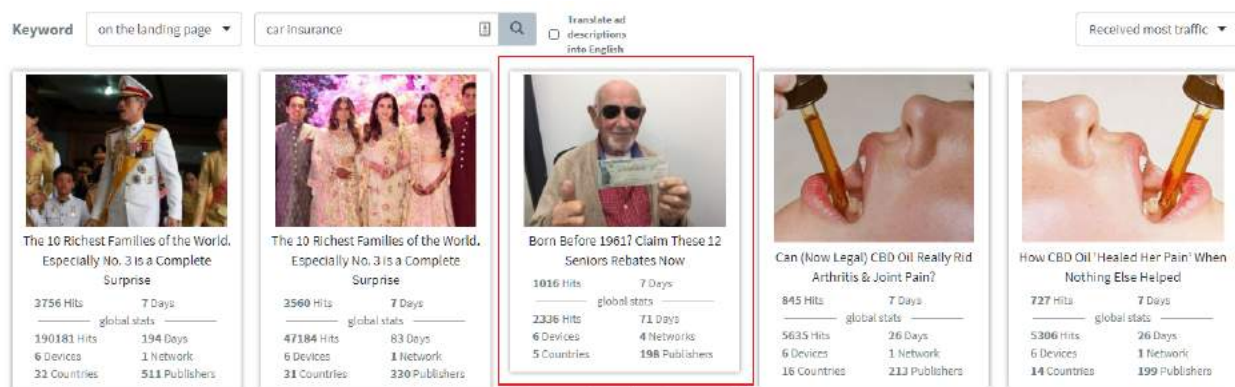
-Searched "BY KEYWORD" and "on the landing page", the keyword "car insurance".

-Selected "Received Most Traffic" from the dropdown.

Here's the link to paste into your browser without having to set these criteria manually:

https://native.adplexity.com/search/keyword?from=-6d&to=0d&days=10-30&q=car%20insurance&q=keyword.lp&order=volume_desc&ln=:en

I browsed the first 100 or so search results - skipping those that obviously weren't selling insurance - and for the relevant results I noticed that a number of them were targeted at seniors - including this one which was in the very top row:



So I decided to give the seniors angle a shot.

I refined my search by searching for the keyword "senior" - but still got a lot of irrelevant results. So I retried the search, but this time searching on "in AD info" instead of "on the landing page", because I noticed that most of the relevant ads had this word in their titles. Here's the search link:

https://native.adplexity.com/search/keyword?from=-6d&to=0d&days=10-30&q=senior&q=keyword.ad&order=volume_desc&ln=:en

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BAM! Results were way more relevant!

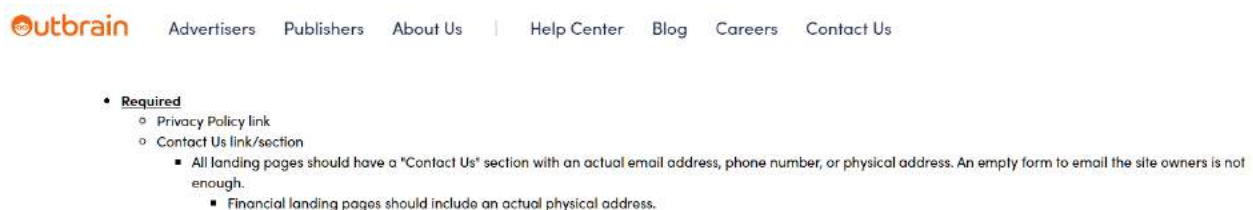
Getting Intel From Relevant Results

I then opened up every single one of the search results in new tabs, checked out their landers, and closed the tabs of campaigns that weren't using listicles.

From the remaining search results, I picked out a lander that included the types of offers I was planning on promoting (based on AMs' recommendations), including a car insurance offer and a life insurance offer. (This lander also contained a lot of offers I wasn't about to promote, which I later deleted.)

I clicked "DOWNLOAD THIS LANDING PAGE" to download the index page and corresponding files. (I bookmarked the details page of the Adplexity result I chose to download my lander from. Please do the same in case you need to find it again.)

Also: Outbrain requires that a landing page site contain at least a "privacy policy" page and a "contact us" page, with actual contact information that may include: Phone number, email, and physical address. (Again, do read [their advertising details](#).)



The good news is that most landers already contain the necessary information - we just need to customize them for our use. So I went back to the Adplexity result where I downloaded the lander, clicked on "Show more" to open the "Landing Page Details popup, then clicked on the last link in the "Redirect Chain" section to go to the actual, live url of the landing page:

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Redirect Chain

```
https://td-usa.mhfdann.com/click/VFTyeSD9-bCjMpe8Dw8S4GyLjYDf8vq9inr5eh5la2756dt9R4m06d4-nhr9eq4gP9axz_1icfWTka...  
https://td-usa.mhfdann.com/wl_cb/click/VFTyeSD9-bCjMpe8Dw8S4GyLjYDf8vq9inr5eh5la2756dt9R4m06d4-nhr9eq4gP9axz_1icfWTka...  
https://kva.wildgenus.com/series/index.php?aff=1581&sub=4F85_Series_TW&code=700723-7346-4851-8ec3-5ab52a3687e
```

I was lucky that the actual landing page was still live (yet another reason to search only on recent results)! **I found the privacy+contact+terms pages, clicked on each to open them, and downloaded each page.**

I use windows, so I right-clicked anywhere on the page and chose "Save As". If unfortunately the landing page is no longer accessible, you can either find a landing page that still is and download that instead, or recreate the privacy+contact+terms pages yourself - by using the index page as a template, deleting the content, and copying + pasting + rewriting/customizing content from a similar lander site's privacy+contact+terms pages.

In Sublime Text, I "fixed up" the landing page. I deleted listicle items that weren't relevant to my offers, customized wording and logo etc. I customized the privacy+contact+terms pages by replacing the contact info with mine. I also fixed the links from the index page to the privacy+contact+terms pages.

I also made some notes on the types of images and ad titles that were used in these relevant Adplexity search results (more details to come in the "Creating Ads" section of this tutorial).

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SETTING UP TRACKING

Tracking - a boring but essential step. I'll try to make this as painless as possible.

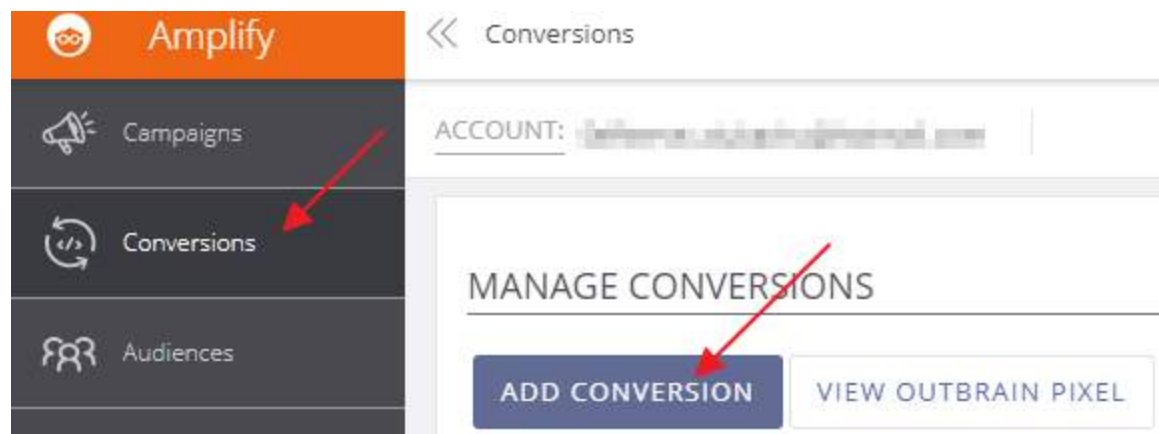
Registering Landing Page Domain

If you don't yet have a domain to use for your advertorial page, now would be the time to register one - as you'll be needing a url to set up Voluum.

Just register a domain. No need to point the nameservers to anywhere yet.

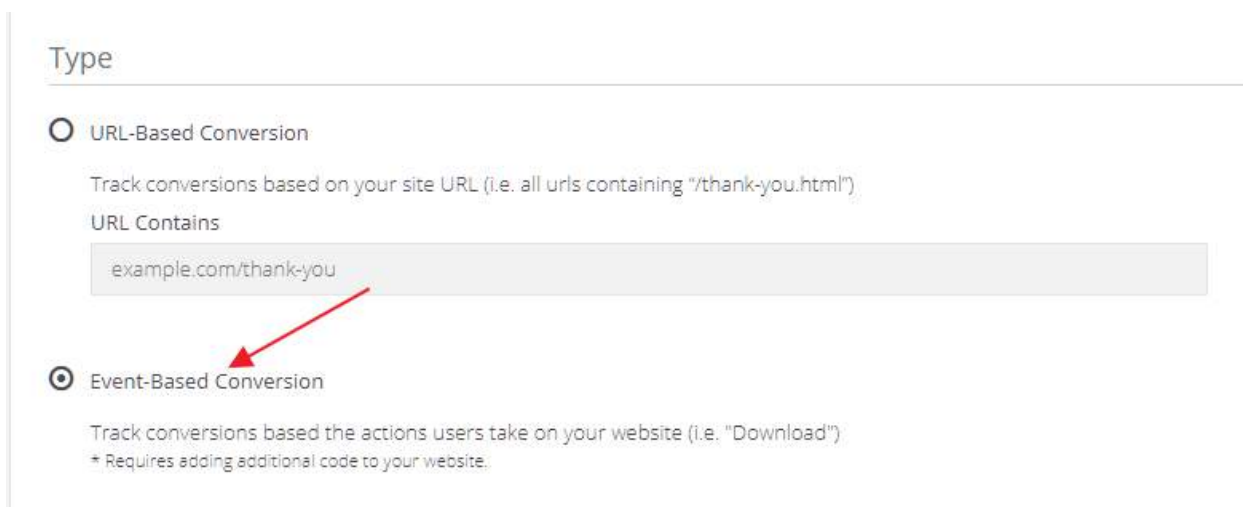
Setting Up Outbrain's Conversion Tracking

-Log into Outbrain > click on "Conversions" in left menu > click "ADD CONVERSION".



-On the "Create Conversion" page, choose "Event-Based Conversion".

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-Under "Details", assign a name to the conversion (any name; I just put in "Voluum1"), choose a conversion category (would usually be "Lead" or "Purchase", or whichever is suitable in your case - I just chose "Purchase"), assign the "Window" to an attribution window of your choice - if you're not sure, leaving it at 60 should be OK (I did). Leave "Value" blank as Voluum would pass that back automatically. Checkmark "Include in 'Total Conversions'" to be able to see conversions on Outbrain's dashboard later. Optional: Choose "Create an Audience Segment" if you wish to target converted users later on (wouldn't hurt to). Click "Save".

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Details

Name
 Create a unique, descriptive conversion name, which will be displayed in the reporting section of your dashboard.

Category
 Select a category that best describes your conversion

Window
 The maximum number of days between click and conversion.

* View through conversion lookback window is 1 day. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Value
 To better track your content ROI, attribute a value to each conversion. Note, Default Value works best with static conversion values. To learn how to set up Dynamic Values visit our [Help Center](#)

Include in 'Total Conversions'
 Check this box to include your conversion data in the 'Total Conversion' column of your reporting dashboard.

Create an Audience Segment
 Check this box to create an audience segment of all users who performed an action on your site which triggered the conversion pixel in the past 30 days.
[Read more for mobile app conversions](#)

-You should now see this new conversion in the list.

MANAGE CONVERSIONS For more details about your Conversions, visit our [Help Center](#)

ADD CONVERSION VIEW OUTBRAIN PIXEL No pixel? No problem. We support server to server tracking. [Learn more](#) [GUIDE ME](#)

Status	Type	Name	Category	Tracking Status	URL Contaire	Value	Conversion	Include in Total Co	Collecting data into
	Event-Based	Voluum1	Purchase	Waiting for Pixel			60 Days	Yes	No

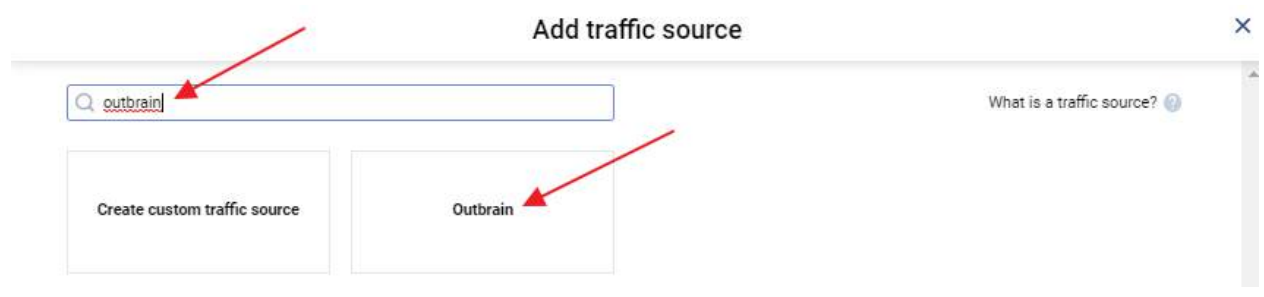
-Copy the name of the conversion ("Voluum1" in my case) - you'll need to paste this into Voluum in a minute.

Setting Up Campaign in Voluum

-Make sure that all affiliate networks are added to Voluum, that all offer are added to Voluum, and that Voluum's postback url is added to each affiliate network. I won't repeat the steps here as you should be familiar with these if you've been working with Voluum. If you need a step-by-step, please check out my [40-day tutorial on the forum](#).

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-Add "Outbrain" as a traffic source to Voluum. "Traffic sources" > "+ New traffic source" > type "Outbrain" into search field > click "Outbrain" to select template > click "Next".



-In the "Add traffic source" window, leave all the tokens alone, scroll to the bottom to section "Passing conversion info to traffic source", toggle "Traffic source postback URL" to on, and paste the following Outbrain postback url **BUT REPLACING "Voluum1" with the name of your Outbrain conversion** and the "currency" value if the payouts that will be passed from the affiliate networks to Voluum are in a currency other than USD:

```
https://tr.outbrain.com/pixel?ob\_click\_id={externalid}&name=Voluum1&orderValue={payout}&currency=USD
```

-Click "Save".

-Still in Voluum: Go to "Lander" > "+ New lander" > "lander". Assign a name, a lander url (that domain registered in the previous step; use the secure "https" format as LanderLabs will take care of that for you; I added "/index.html" too just to be safe which probably wasn't necessary - obviously you'd put whatever you named your index file). Set the "Number of CTAs" to the number of offers you'll be promoting on that landing page. Specify a "Tracking domain". Copy one of the "Click URLs" and save it somewhere as we'll be pasting that into the lander later. Click "Save".

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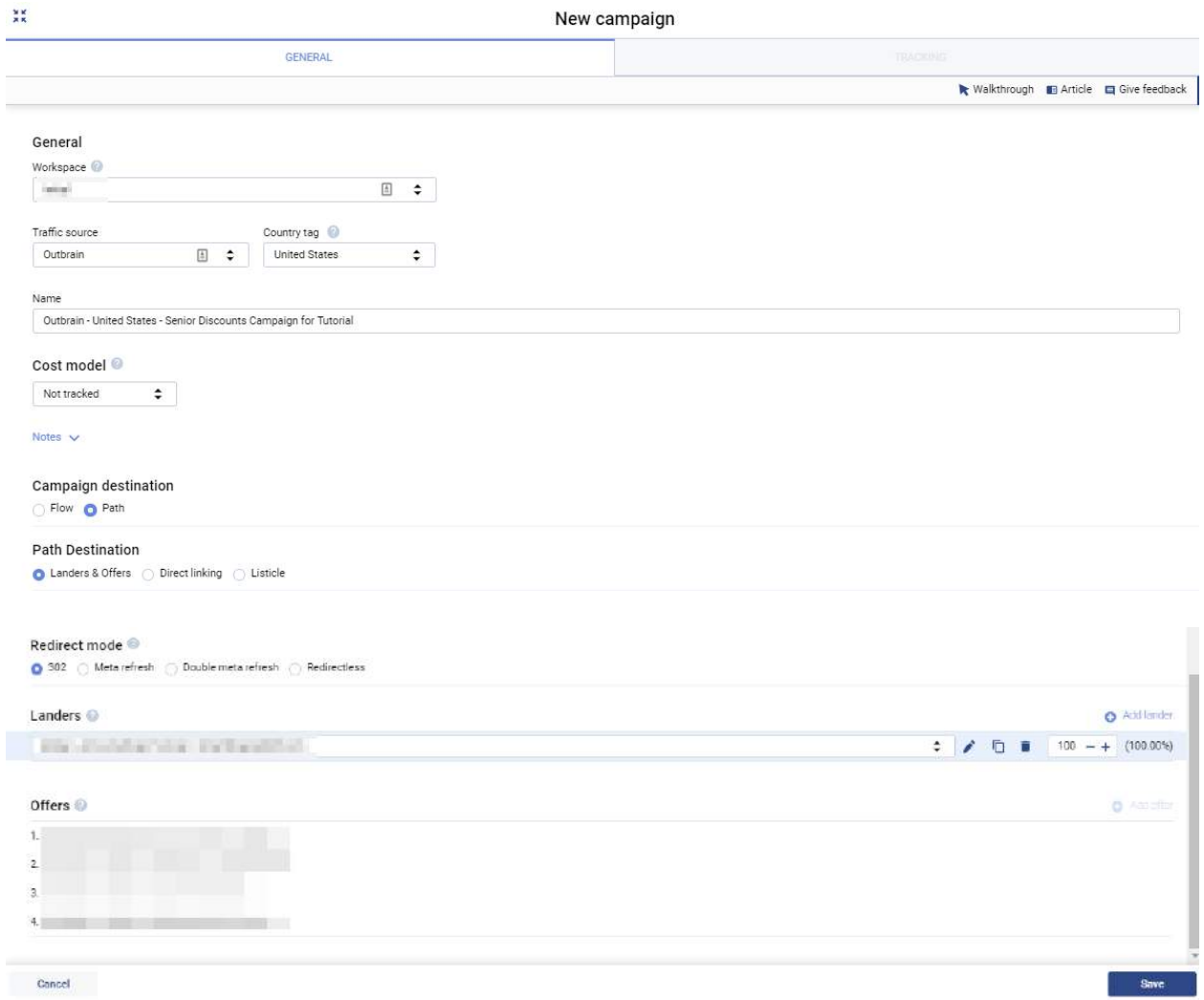
The screenshot shows a 'New lander' form with the following fields and sections:

- General**
 - Workspace: Public
 - Country tag: Global
 - Name: Global - Senior Discounts Lander 1
 - Tags: Type or select tags from list
- Lander URL**
 - URL: https://discounts4seniors.com/index.html
 - Available URL tokens: (dropdown)
- Landing page setup**
 - Number of CTAs: 4
 - Tracking domain: (dropdown)
 - Click URL(s): (input field) with a 'Copy' button next to it, highlighted by a red arrow.

Buttons: Cancel, Save

-Go to "Campaigns" > " + New campaign" > "TRK Simple". Assign "Workspace", "Traffic source", "Country tag", "Name". "Campaign destination" = "Path". "Path Destination" = "Landers & Offers". Choose the lander we've just added to Voluum, then specify the "Offers" - **in the order they'll be listed in the listicle** (don't do this and you'll see how confused you'll be later!) Click "Save".

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-Lastly, right-click on the new Voluum campaign you've just created and choose "Copy URL" and save this somewhere. We'll be pasting this into Outbrain later.

Setting Up Facebook Pixel

This is entirely optional, but if you're also running on Facebook, it would be silly not to build an audience from the Outbrain traffic for retargeting on FB later!

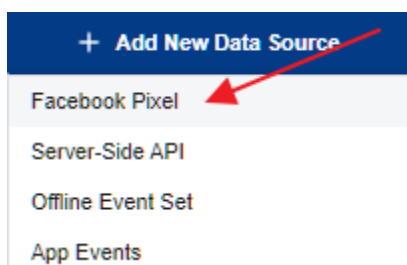
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After all, you're paying for this traffic - may as well get all the value you can! Adding this tactic of multi-channel retargeting may just turn a profitable campaign into an even more profitable one!

Here's what you do:

-Go to <http://business.facebook.com/>, select business of your choice, open the "Business Manager" menu (sandwich in left corner) and go to "Pixels" under "Events Manager".

-Click "+ Add New Data Source" > "Facebook Pixel":



-Specify a pixel name and click "Continue".

-Click "Manually add pixel code to website".

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-Click the base code to copy to clipboard, then click "Continue". Paste the code into your lander, right before the </head> tag.

-This is where it gets interesting: **We can add some code to the lander, so that users that click on the outgoing links of EACH offer are tracked separately, so you'll be able to target them separately on FB later.**

Within the FB pixel code, right before the <noscript> tag, insert one of these snippets per offer on your lander:

```
function Name1() {  
  fbq('trackCustom','Name')  
};
```

Of course replacing "Name" with anything that describes the offer. For my lander, because I was promoting car insurance and life insurance, my code looks like this:

```
<!-- Facebook Pixel Code -->  
  
<script>  
  !function(f,b,e,v,n,t,s)  
  {if(f.fbq)return;n=f.fbq=function(){n.callMethod?  
n.callMethod.apply(n,arguments):n.queue.push(arguments)};  
if(!f._fbq)f._fbq=n;n.push=n;n.loaded=!0;n.version='2.0';  
n.queue=[];t=b.createElement(e);t.async=!0;  
t.src=v;s=b.getElementsByTagName(e)[0];  
s.parentNode.insertBefore(t,s)}(window, document,'script',
```

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```
'https://connect.facebook.net/en_US/fbevents.js');  
fbq('init', '123456789012345');  
fbq('track', 'PageView');  
</script>  
<script>  
  function AutoInsurance1() {  
    fbq('trackCustom','AutoInsurance1')  
  };  
  function LifeInsurance1() {  
    fbq('trackCustom','LifeInsurance1')  
  };  
</script>  
<noscript></noscript>  
<!-- End Facebook Pixel Code -->
```

(I had other, minor offers in the listicle too but only showing car and life insurance for simplicity.)

-Finally, add onclick="Name()" to all your outgoing links to the offers. For example, for the links going out to my car insurance offer, I would modify this original link from this:

Save On Auto Insurance

To this:

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```
<a href="https://trackerlink.com/click/1" onclick="AutoInsurance1()">Save On Auto Insurance</a>
```

Of course, take care to reference the same function names assigned in the pixel code in the header. Don't forget to save changes!

And that's it! This will enable me to create Custom Audiences for users that clicked into EACH offer, and target them with similar offers on Facebook! For example, I'll be able to build a custom audience from users that clicked into the auto insurance offer, and target them with other auto-related offers. Or, if I was running a home warranty offer, I'd be able to build a custom audience from that, then hit them with other offers for home owners, such as mortgage refinance, roofing, solar, windows and doors...see the power of this yet?

To verify you've set up this FB pixel tracking correctly, simply browse to your Voluum campaign url and click on the outgoing links, then check your pixel data on FB to make sure you see those clicks appearing there.

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SETTING UP LANDER IN LANDERLAB

If you don't have your own server, Landerlab is simply the easiest and fastest way I know of to get landers ready for action, so I want to give you this option

Finish Fixing Up Lander

Remember that CTA link you copied from Voluum? Time to replace the lander links in the correct way, in the correct order as how you specified it when creating the Voluum campaign.

For example, I had 4 items in the listicle promoting 4 offers, and when setting up the Voluum campaign I selected the offers in the same order they appear on the lander. The outgoing links would be in this format:

<https://trackerlink.com/click/1>

<https://trackerlink.com/click/2>

<https://trackerlink.com/click/3>

<https://trackerlink.com/click/4>

Look through your index and privacy+contact+terms pages to make sure everything looks good and all the links are correct, then zip all the lander files into a single zip file - making sure the file folder organization corresponds to the domain directory organization before doing the zipping. (For example, the index page needs to be in the root. If you're linking from index.html to about.html via "./about.html", then both pages need to be in the same folder. And if the index file references images in a subdirectory, then the image files will need to be in the corresponding folder with the correct name. Etc.)

Upload Lander to LanderLab

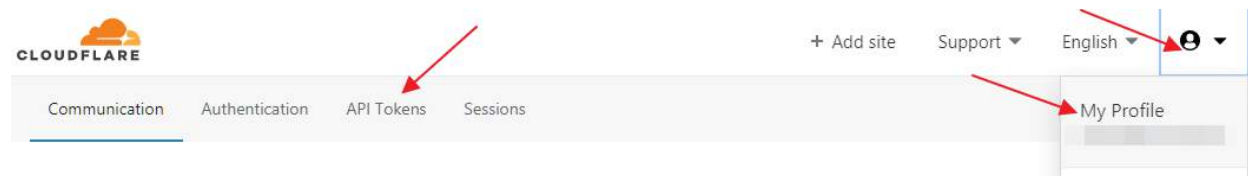
Next step is to upload that lander!

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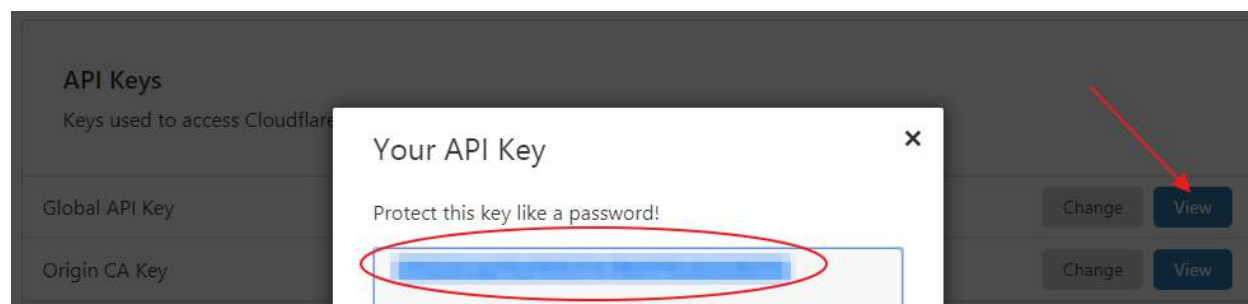
-Register for a free LanderLab account [here](#).

-Register for a free cloudflare account [here](#) (unless you have one - in which case just use that).

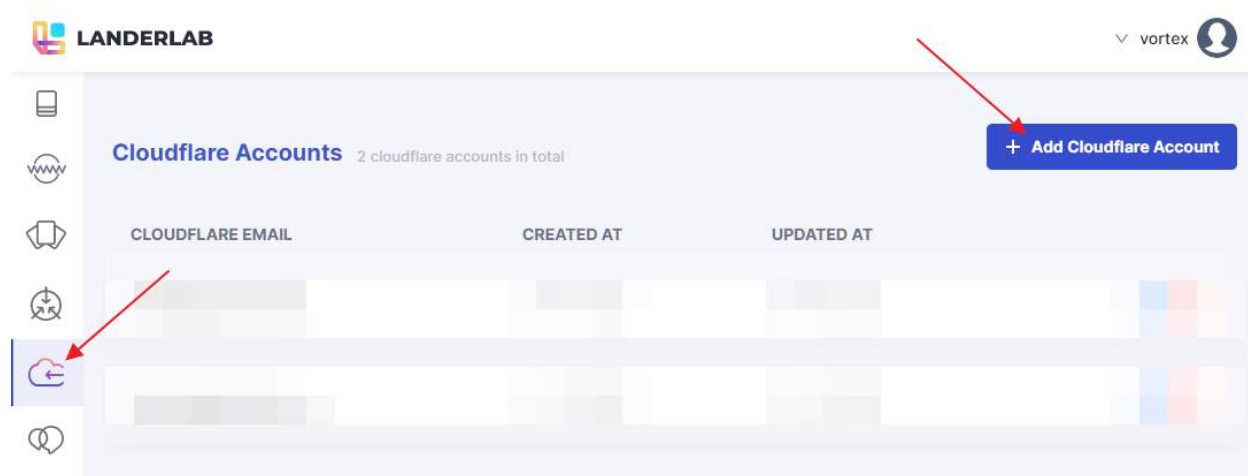
-Log into cloudflare, click on the profile icon > My Profile > API Tokens tab:



-Click "View" for "Global API Key", put in password and captcha verification, click "View", copy the API key.

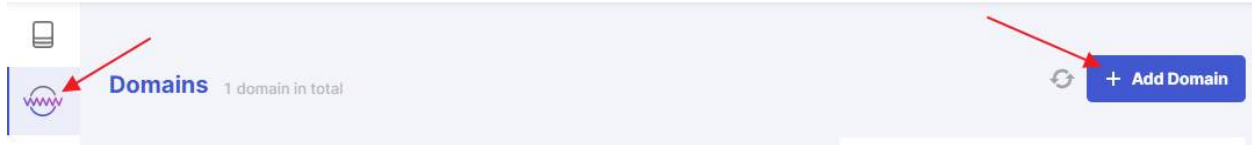


-Back in LanderLab, click on "Cloudflare Accounts" icon in left menu > + Add Cloudflare Account:

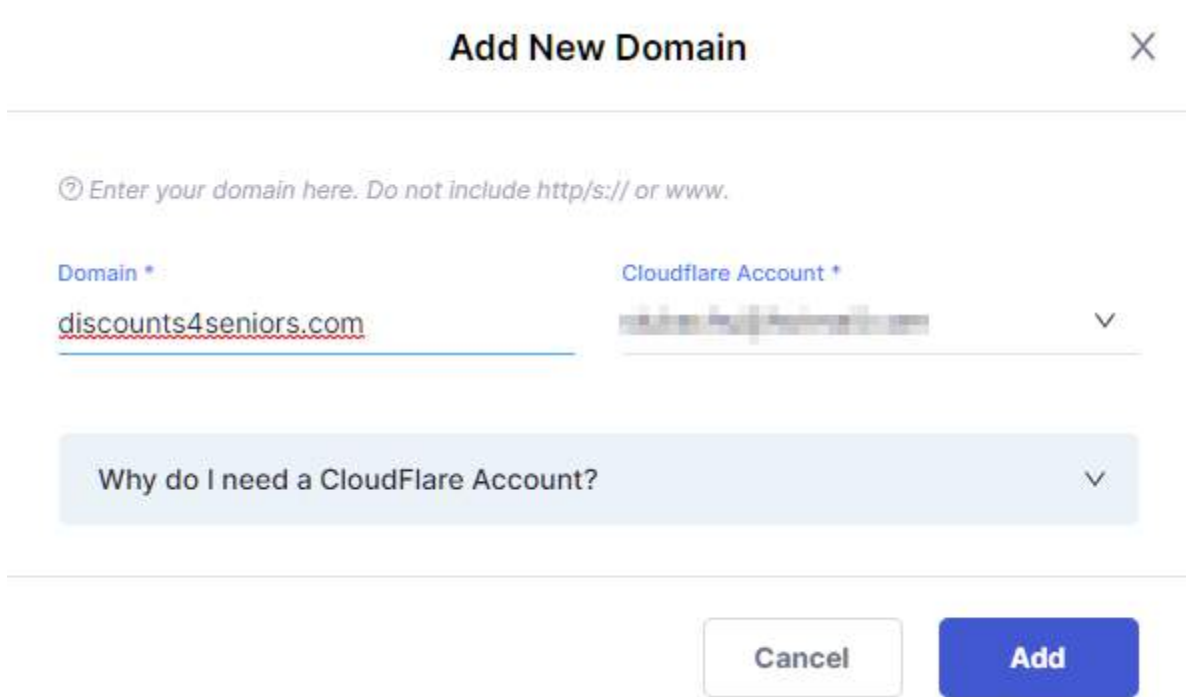


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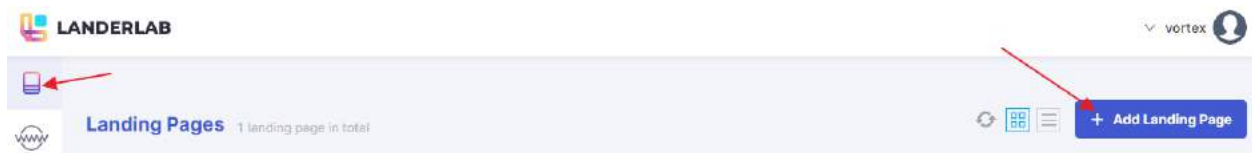
-Click on "Domains" icon in left menu > "+ Add Domain":



-Insert domain name, choose cloudflare account from dropdown, click "Add":



-Click on "Landing Pages" icon in left menu > "+ Add Landing Page".



-Click "Upload from Zip". Assign a name to the page, e.g. "Senior Rebates Lander 1 About Page", choose the domain you added, then upload the zip file of the index + privacy+contact+terms pages (don't drag the file - that function isn't working for some reason - click the upload area to upload). Click "Next".

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Name * Senior Discounts Lander 1

Language * English

Domain https://discounts4seniors.com

Subdomain Select Subdomain

Path / Path

Tags

Add Tag

Replace Outgoing Links

Outgoing Link Link

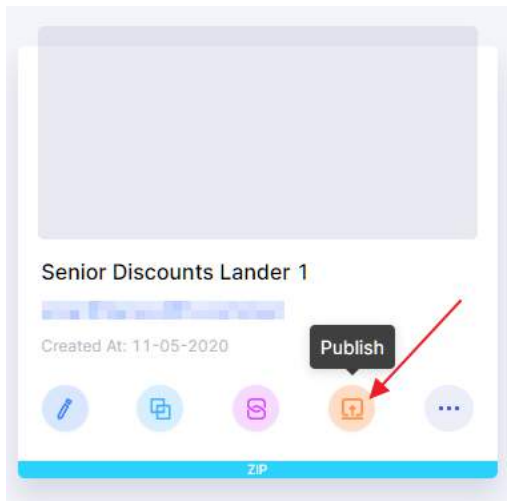
Click or drag ZIP to this area to upload
Maximum allowed size is 5MB.

discounts4seniors.zip

-For the next step, "Add to Tracker"/"You haven't added any integration yet.", just click "Skip this step". We can set things up in Voluum directly later. You should then see a "Success" screen. Click on "Go To Landing Pages".

-For your lander, click the Publish icon and click "Publish" for your landing page to set it live.

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Verify Lander Site is Working

Browse to your Voluum campaign url to verify that everything is working correctly (set your VPN to the target country first if you're not located there). Make sure everything looks good. Check all the links to make sure they're going to the intended offers. Click the links to/from the privacy+contact+terms pages to verify them.

One note about LanderLab: You can actually go to any Adplexity lander and click on "IMPORT TO LANDERLAB" and modify the lander within LanderLab's WYSIWYG editor. But I chose not to do this because LanderLab can't yet handle importing privacy+contact+terms pages separately to the same domain. But if you're running pop camps for example and ripping single-page landers, importing into LanderLab and editing it there can be a good option.

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CREATING ADS

Entire books can be written on how to create ads effectively, and it's not the main focus of this tutorial.

So I'll keep this section brief. I WILL say though that it helps to read up on copywriting (e.g. "Cashvertising" which is a must-read for online marketers) and banner creation. If you're an STM member, we have entire forum sections devoted to those topics, that you can learn from:

<https://stmforum.com/forum/forumdisplay.php?43-Copywriting-Conversion-amp-Psychology>

<https://stmforum.com/forum/forumdisplay.php?42-Design-Imagery-Banners-amp-Landers>

Outbrain Ad Requirements

There's a hard limit of 50 ads allowed per campaign. Outbrain recommends testing 10-15 ads at a time.

Each ad consists of:

- 1) **An Ad Title** - up to 150 characters allowed. Outbrain recommends to keep ad titles under 80 characters, or they'd risk getting cut off when displayed.
- 2) **An Ad Image** - up to 2.5 mb in file size, with recommended dimensions being 1200 x 800 px.

Another important thing to know here is that **ad CTR is crucial to a campaign's success**. In order to get traffic on Outbrain, you're entered into bidding auctions, and the 2 factors that will determine the likelihood of winning an auction are **Ad CTR and CPC**. This means that if you have an ad that has a high CTR, you can still win a lot of bids even with a lower CPC. Just something to keep in mind when creating your ads.

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Getting Inspiration for Ads

From [Adplexity results that were very relevant to what I was promoting](#), I wrote down a number of ad titles, and got an idea on what types of images were used.

Examples of Ad Titles:

-Born Before 1961? Claim These [X] Seniors Rebates Now

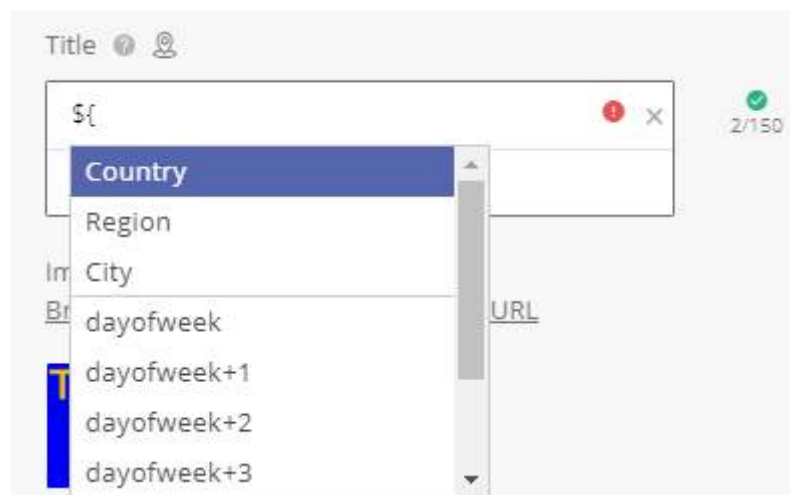
-Seniors Over [X] Should Claim These Benefits

-[X] Discounts Seniors Get Only If They Know

Above we've covered Outbrain's recommendations on title length. I would further recommend to keep the title even shorter than 80 characters if possible - based on my experience with other display ads, shorter titles often work better, probably because visitors can more easily tell at a glance what the ad is about.

You're encouraged to do your own testing, **but I'd strongly suggest to include at least a couple of ad titles that are under 50 characters.**

Also worth mentioning is Outbrain's "[Dynamic Title](#)" feature, which allows you to automatically display in the ad title, the visitor's country/region/city, as well as the day of week (or the day of week + 1 day, or +2/3/4/5/6 days):



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Based on my very limited testing, inserting the visitor's location seems to fetch better CTR than not.

Examples of Images:

-Seniors holding up checks or bills

-Wads of cash

-A totally irrelevant image of a McDonald's sign with a single arch instead of the usual double arch:



27 Discounts Seniors Get Only If
They Know

Whenever I run any type of display ads, I make it a habit to test "viral" type images like this one, i.e. images that REALLY capture people's attention and entice them to click.

Just one warning about viral images though: **Although they can get you high CTR, it may not translate into a good conversion rate**, i.e. lots of clickers and very few leads/customers. Many traffic networks - Outbrain included - will assign more traffic to high-CTR ads. So if you DO decide to test viral images, keep your eye on that ROI, or the ad can spend your budget and not convert very well. (Ads with this particular image did exactly that to my campaign - until I paused them.)

Also: In addition to copying some of the ad titles from relevant Adplexity ads, I also came up with several that were inspired by ads that weren't relevant - at all.

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In Adplexity, I did a broad search without specifying a keyword at all - to browse recent ads that received the most traffic:

https://native.adplexity.com/search/keyword?from=-6d&to=0d&days=10-30&q=&q=keyword.ad&order=volume_desc&ln=:en

For example, one of the ads said **"You Won't Believe the Story Behind This Shot!"** I could use the same idea to come up with something relevant like **"Seniors Won't Believe How Much They Can Save With These [X] Discounts!"** (This isn't the best example but you get the idea.)

So: Look through ads that have received a lot of traffic (i.e. tried and tested), borrow structure and words, and come up with something relevant to what you're promoting.

Where to Get Images

So where can you get images for ads (and landers too)?

The big disclaimer here is that I'm not a lawyer, so please do your due diligence when it comes to what images/videos you have rights to use. Although, I will do my best to suggest the safest places to find them.

(I know many affiliates would just rip ad images from spy tools - I don't know how risky that would be or not. Personally I like to play on the safe side by using images I have rights to. Plus, Outbrain also requires that we own usage rights to ad images.)

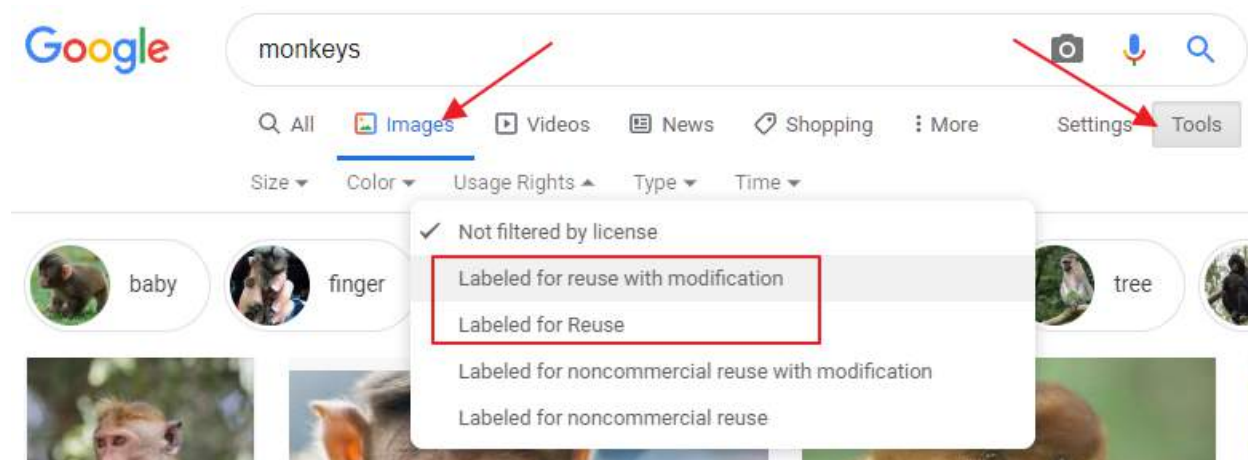
Here are some ways to get these images:

1) Anything you can get from the affiliate network, offer owner, or owner of the service/product you're promoting.

2) Google images. Go to google, perform a search, click on the "Images" tab > click on "Tools" > click on "Usage Rights". Then select either "Labeled for Reuse" if you're not planning on modifying the image, or "Labeled for reuse with modification" if you're planning on modifying it. (Note: Even if you're planning on using the image as-is, I would

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highly recommend to at least [remove the metadata](#), and perhaps resize it slightly by zooming in.)



3)Free stock images. I've built a link using Google Custom Search Engine to help you to search for images on a large list of free image sites from one place:

<https://cse.google.co.uk/cse?cx=012797124658405224211:ik8wz27r1y4>

(For more details refer to [this STM post](#).)

There's also [Needpix.com](#), which I've found recently and haven't had a chance to incorporate into the custom search engine above.

4)Paid stock image sites. Here are some that have decent-sized collections and reasonable prices:

-[Envato Elements](#) - This is the best deal I've found so far - has a good selection of stock videos, graphics, photos, audio clips, and more.

-[123rf.com](#) - I like to get their "pay-as-you-go" On Demand Credits packages, and whatever I can't find in envato I'd search for here.

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Number of Ads to Test

As was mentioned above, Outbrain recommends testing 10-15 ads at a time.

Eventually I whittled my list of ad titles down to around 7, and the number of images down to around 7 as well. Then for each ad title I selected 2-3 images I felt would be most suitable. I uploaded close to 20 ads, **but had to pause out three-quarters of them after a short time, as I realized it would have taken up quite a bit of budget to test so many ads.**

Outbrain's algo needs to send enough traffic to each ad, until it can "figure out" which ones have potential to be good performers, and start sending more traffic to those while sending less/little/no traffic to the poor performers. So the more ads you have, the more budget would be required.

On the other hand, the more ads you test, the higher the likelihood of finding one or more good performers.

So you need to find a balance.

Another approach you can take, is do what I did: **Load up lots of ads, run them for a bit, then manually pause out ads that had the lowest CTR.** The risk though would be two-fold:

- a) Ads may or may not have received enough impressions to show true performance yet, when you pause them prematurely, and
- b) You risk cutting out ads that have lower CTR but higher CR (conversion rate) that can result in higher ROI.

I'll make suggestions on how to cut ads later in this tutorial. **For now, I would suggest sticking to Outbrain's recommended 10-15 ads to start.** Pick 5 ad titles or fewer, 10 images or fewer, then pick 2-3 images to match each title, to produce the total of 10-15 ad variations.

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SETTING UP THE OUTBRAIN CAMPAIGN

In this part of the tutorial, I'll go over how to create a campaign on Outbrain, while explaining some of the targeting options and best practices.

Here I want to give a **BIG shoutout to Bryan Hernandez, Outbrain's Director of Customer Success - East Coast**. He has been most patient in providing guidance from the very start. We've done several calls and he answered numerous questions I've sent him on skype. This tutorial wouldn't be what it is without his help - thanks Bryan!

Also: I want to point out that the options available on my account may not be the same as what you see in yours - I have a feeling that some advertisers' account may have access to different targeting options than mine. Moreover, depending on how much time has elapsed between when I published this post and the time you're reading this, the interface may have gotten updated. When in doubt about anything, please check with Outbrain support.

Now let's get that campaign set up! First step would be to log into Outbrain, click on "Campaigns" in the left menu, then click "Add Campaign".



About Outbrain's Ad Placements

Let's get some terminology straight before I refer to them all over the place. Outbrain's placements are defined by "Publishers" and "Sections".

A **Publisher** is a website, app, etc. For example, theHill.com.

A **Section** is a part of a publisher, where a publisher can have multiple sections. For example, theHill.com has many sections, including "Opinion", "Senate", "House", "Administration", "Campaign", and others.

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Name Your Campaign

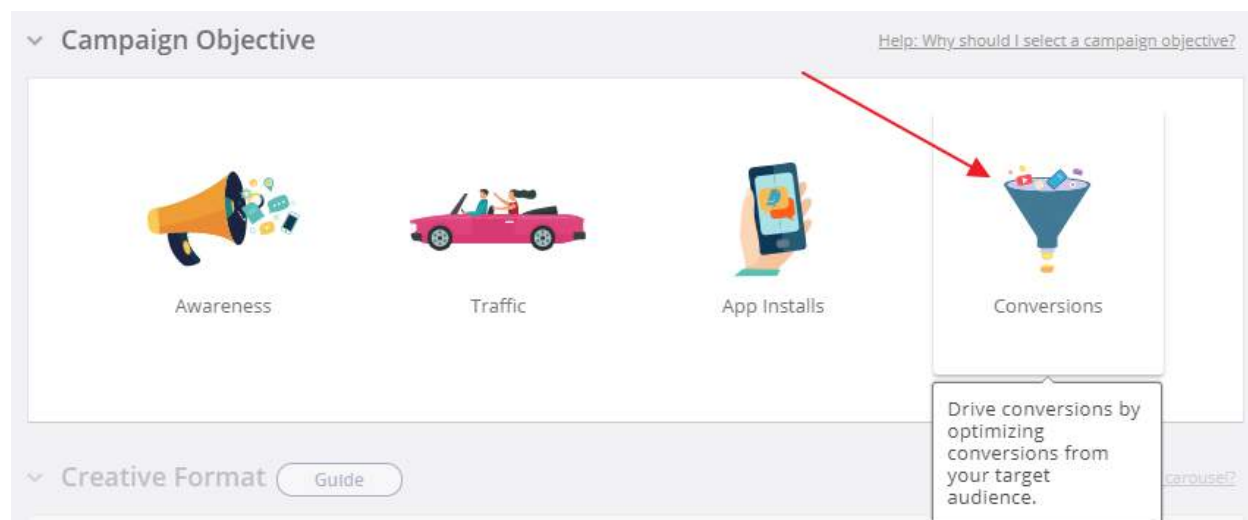
This one is self-explanatory. Give your campaign a meaningful name. Considering including some/all of: Offer vertical, date, audience targeting, country, device targeting, campaign objective, etc. Don't overthink - you can change this at any time.

Name Your Campaign

Amy's [STM Outbrain Tutorial](#) - Senior Discounts

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Campaign Objective



The best choice for most of us would probably be either "Traffic" or "Conversions".

Traffic: Outbrain will try to try to get as many clicks as possible.

Conversions: Outbrain will try to get as many conversions as possible.

(To read about the other objectives [see this article.](#))

For my first campaign, I chose "Conversions" as the campaign objective. I would recommend for you to choose the same for your first campaign as well.

Creative Format



To keep things simple, just start with "Single" - unless you've had success with carousel ads on Outbrain or FB or anywhere else. (For more info please see [this article.](#))

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Budget

Bid Strategy: You should see 2 options:



Semi Automatic - Outbrain will try to send more traffic from sections that are converting the best for your campaign. Mostly it will be using the default bid you specify (in the "Cost per Click (CPC)" field below), but sometimes it will be bidding higher than that in order to get more traffic from the best-converting sections.

How much higher? By an amount up to the percentage you set in the "Max CPC limit:" field.

Fully Automatic Whereas "Semi Automatic" will only allow the algo to adjust the bid for sections, "Fully Automatic" will ALSO allow the algo to adjust bids for your ads (or "content" as Outbrain calls them). Also, whereas "Semi Automatic" will mostly use the default bid you specify, "Fully Automatic" will allow the algo to change that default bid as it sees fit.

Also, with "Fully Automatic", Outbrain will automatically daypart for you as well.

Bryan advised to use "Semi-Automatic" for my first campaign. Feel free to do the same if you're not wanting too many moving parts at the start.

Conversions: This is an option that would appear if you had chosen "Conversion" as the campaign strategy (but not for "Traffic"). Select the conversion you've set up earlier in the tutorial (when you clicked on "Conversions" in the left menu).

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Conversions

We recommend including both lower funnel (0.5%-2% CVR) and upper funnel (10%-20% CVR) conversions, that are part of the same funnel. See your conversions current CVR by hovering over the conversion name when selecting it.



Cost per Click (CPC): If you have the luck of having an Outbrain rep, be sure to ask them for up-to-date values for competitive bids. If you don't, here are some guidelines from Bryan:

For desktop traffic: \$0.75-0.85 normally (pre-covid), but since prices have come down recently, \$0.55-0.75 should be good.

For mobile traffic: \$0.45-0.55 normally (pre-covid), but since prices have come down recently, \$0.35-0.40 should do.

Feel free to play with bids, but be aware that by bidding low, you won't get much (or ANY) traffic from the more competitive placements, which are probably the ones that are converting the best (hence everyone bidding higher to get more traffic from them, driving up the prices).

Moreover, be aware that the first 48 hours of a new campaign is what Outbrain calls the "exploration phase", during which it's super important to "start high and optimize down". "Starting high" means having a daily budget of no lower than \$50, a competitive CPC bid, and good ad CTRs.

Cost per Click (CPC)



CPC adjustments are activated for some publisher sections.

Max CPC limit: This option is only available for "Semi Automatic" Conversion campaigns. Bryan recommended to just leave it at the default 100%. I was told that Outbrain's algo is

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fairly conservative, such that the CPC wouldn't change drastically from the CPC we specify anyways.

Max CPC limit: 100.0% [Change](#) 

Run Experiment: This option may or may not be available in your account.

This option will allow you the option of running a split-test (A/B test) between 1) optimizing towards conversions via semi or fully automatic, whichever you specified, and 2) just standard traffic without automatically optimizing towards conversions.

For my first campaign, at the suggestion of Bryan, I checkmarked this option and set the percentage to 70% (i.e. 70% conversion-optimized, 30% standard traffic).



This split-test did not run to completion (i.e. statistical significance) because the budget ran out before it could. But based on preliminary data, the amount of revenue made by Outbrain's Semi-Automatic optimization was 2.5x (250%) the amount of revenue made from unoptimized standard traffic.

(For more information about this A/B option, [see this article](#).)

Regarding Optimization Approach:

Based on preliminary split-test results as mentioned above, "Conversions" + "Semi Automatic" seemed to get better results than to target standard traffic.

I haven't tested "Fully Automatic" yet so cannot recommend it, but the "Semi Automatic" option seemed to work well.

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Based on what I've seen of Outbrain's auto-optimization algo, it does do its job, but it's quite conservative, in that it requires quite a bit of data before making decisions. This is very good from a statistical significance standpoint, so if you have a bigger budget to test everything adequately - placements, sections, bids, hours of day, etc. - by all means try using only Outbrain's optimization algo (semi or fully automatic).

However, if your budget is quite conservative, and you just want to run some traffic to identify the best ads and placements (publishers+sections) to target - then I would recommend to cut more aggressively than what Outbrain is programmed to do. For example you can cut placements manually after a small spend - if they don't convert right away - to conserve budget. Of course by doing so you'd be cutting some placements that can ultimately turn out to be profitable, but you can always activate them at a later time to continue the testing. And this type of manual optimizations can be made easier by using theOptimizer (details to come).

Budget Type:

The screenshot shows the 'BUDGET TYPE' settings in the Outbrain interface. It includes a 'Daily Budget' field set to '\$ 50', a 'Type' dropdown menu set to 'Day', and a 'Pacing' dropdown menu set to 'Accelerated'. Below the 'Pacing' dropdown, there is a note: 'Your actual daily spend may be up to 20% higher.' and a 'Learn more' link.

Daily Budget: Outbrain recommends to set this to at least \$250 USD per day for best results. However, I would actually recommend setting it to \$50/day for the first day, and then \$100/day for the next couple/few days while you're cutting underperforming ads and placements - here are the advantages:

-The initial low budget would give you a chance to make sure that all your tracking is correct, everything works as intended, etc.

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-This would give you a chance to cut ads and placements manually. Some of Outbrain's stats can be delayed by up to 2-4 hours, so running a bit of traffic daily will give the stats a chance to "catch up" so you can cut more efficiently).

Once you've cut down to a couple of winning ads, and most of the major placements have either been cut or had their bids adjusted, you can always increase the budget further - to \$250 or more. For the US for example, \$250/day is not much at all. It has the potential to spend over \$1k/day depending on bid and placements etc. If you spend enough to keep traffic running throughout the day, you'll be able to gather data on which days of week and hours of day convert the best, so you'd be able to implement dayparting adequately later on.

Which brings me to the next point: **If you're running on a daily budget that is so low that it will be depleted before the day is over, make sure you start running traffic at a good time of day that will get you traffic during the best-converting hours.** Either set this up in the "Schedule" section of Outbrain's campaign targeting options (covered below), or do the same via rules in the Optimizer (covered later in the tutorial).

If you don't yet have data on the offers you're running, and so have absolutely no idea what the best-converting hours would be, try to start traffic either in the morning around 8am, or in the evening around 5pm. According to personal experience (from running other types of traffic), I've found mornings and evenings to be the "safest" hours to target.

(Remembering the importance of the "exploration phase", please be reminded to set the daily budget no lower than \$50. Outbrain recommends that even if you want to set it to \$50 the first day, it should be increased to at least \$100+ the next day for the best results.)

Note that the actual spend can be up to 20% higher than what you specify here. In fact it often was in my case because I was running on such a low daily budget.

Pacing: This should be set to "Accelerated" by default. There is currently no option to stagger/throttle traffic. So Outbrain will send you as much traffic as is available as quickly as possible until the daily budget is reached (+ up to 20%) and then stop.

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Schedule

▼ Schedule
Guide
[Help: How long should my campaign be?](#)

START DATE
 Run continuously

 Set dates

START TIME ?
 Daily at
 Eastern Standard Time (UTC-05:00), NYC

 Set schedule [Optimize CPCs by hour. Learn more.](#)

Your campaign will run daily until midnight EST during your scheduled period.

Start Date: Either choose "Run continuously" starting from a certain date, or "Set dates" to set a date range. The difference is you can set an end date with the latter option. I chose the first option and paused/ended the campaign as I saw fit.

A note here regarding pausing a campaign: Outbrain's optimization algo doesn't handle campaign pausing very well, so try to refrain from pausing a campaign. Doing so can hurt campaign performance. If you somehow need to pause a campaign, and when you restart it, you no longer see the same level of performance, consider duplicating the campaign to get a fresh start.

Start Time: You can set the campaign to start at the same time each day, or choose the hours of day and days of week you'd like for traffic to run. Remember our discussion on setting an appropriate start time above. If you're using the Optimizer, you can choose to do the same from there instead of here.

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Target

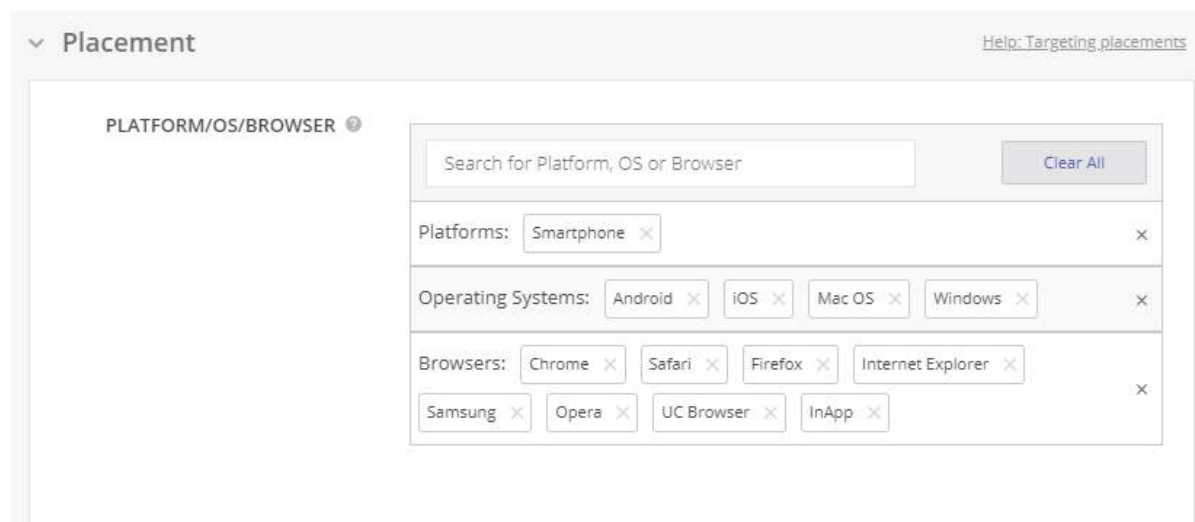
The screenshot shows the Facebook Targeting interface. At the top, there is a 'Target' dropdown menu and a 'Help: Targeting your audience' link. The main interface is divided into two sections: 'LOCATION' and 'ADVANCED AUDIENCE TARGETING'. The 'LOCATION' section has a search bar with 'United States' and 'All locations' selected, an 'Enter location' input field, and buttons for 'Export', 'Import', and 'Clear All'. The 'ADVANCED AUDIENCE TARGETING' section has a search bar with 'Search for Interests or Attributes', a 'Clear All' link, and radio buttons for 'And' and 'Exclude'.

Location: You can specify one or more countries, regions, DMAs (if targeting the US), and/or postal codes.

Advanced Audience Targeting: You can target audiences by interests and/or attributes, and create custom and lookalike audiences, similar to what you can do when advertising on FB. I didn't use this in my campaign, but you can get more information [from this article](#).

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Placement



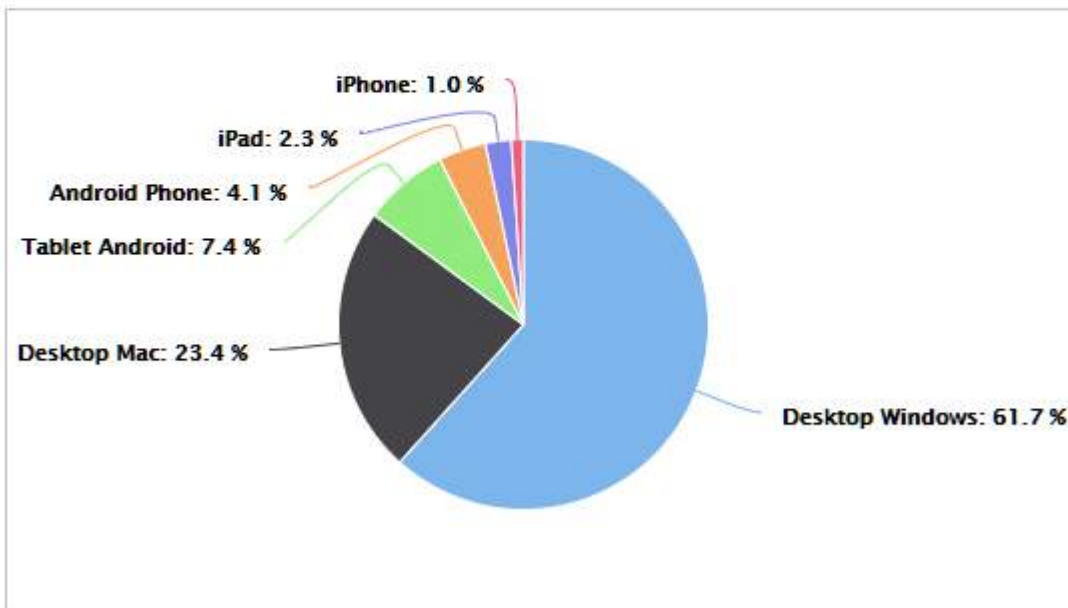
Platform/OS/Browser: Self-explanatory. I chose to target mobile simply because mobile traffic was cheaper (please see suggested bids in the bidding section above). With such a small test budget, I wanted to collect as much data as possible.

If you're not working with such a restricted budget, a better way to make an informed decision would be to review Adplexity search results that are relevant to what you're promoting, to look at what devices are being targeted:

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Device Type

Device Type



For best results, only take into consideration campaigns that have received the most traffic over at least a few days.

Also: **Avoid targeting mobile and desktop in the same campaign.** Otherwise you risk overbidding for mobile traffic and underbidding for desktop traffic - remember how different the suggested bid ranges were?

Bonus: Bryan gave me a tip that tablets usually have lower conversion rates. So if you're running a vertical/lander/offers for the first time, it would be wise to exclude this in the beginning.

Outbrain Extended Network: Also referred to as the OEN. Fox News and a handful of other quality publishers are included in this network. However, Bryan advised to keep this option deselected for my campaign to keep the number of publishers manageable (since I was operating on a low budget). I would suggest the same for you in the beginning. You can always turn OEN on when you're ready to scale your campaign.

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OUTBRAIN EXTENDED NETWORK

Use extended network traffic

Adblock: Bryan suggested for me to exclude adblock users. Considering traffic costs would remain the same, why not?

ADBLOCK Exclude AdBlock users

Track

Suffix: Take your voluum campaign url, copy the entire second part after the first "?", and paste it into this field.

For example, if the voluum campaign url looks like this:

```
https://campaigndomain.com/12345678-1234-1234-1234-123456789012?
campaign_id={{campaign_id}}&publisher_id={{publisher_id}}
&publisher_name={{publisher_name}}&ad_id={{ad_id}}&ad_title={{ad_title}}
&section_id={{section_id}}&section_name={{section_name}}&req_id={{req_id}}
&promoted_link_id={{promoted_link_id}}&time_stamp={{time_stamp}}
&ob_click_id={{ob_click_id}}
```

Then put the following in the "suffix" field:

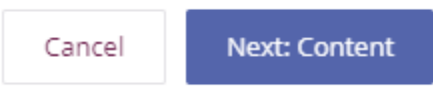
```
campaign_id={{campaign_id}}&publisher_id={{publisher_id}}
&publisher_name={{publisher_name}}&ad_id={{ad_id}}&ad_title={{ad_title}}
&section_id={{section_id}}&section_name={{section_name}}&req_id={{req_id}}
```

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```
&promoted_link_id={{promoted_link_id}}&time_stamp={{time_stamp}}
&ob_click_id={{ob_click_id}}
```

3rd Party Pixels: You can add FB and/or Google pixels here. But if you've implemented FB pixels on your lander(s) as I've described in a previous section, then there would be no need to implement the FB pixel here. For more information please read [this article](#).

Lastly - click on "Next: Content".



If you see the following pop up, and you've added Outbrain's postback url to Voluum as I've described, then you can safely ignore it:

Note!

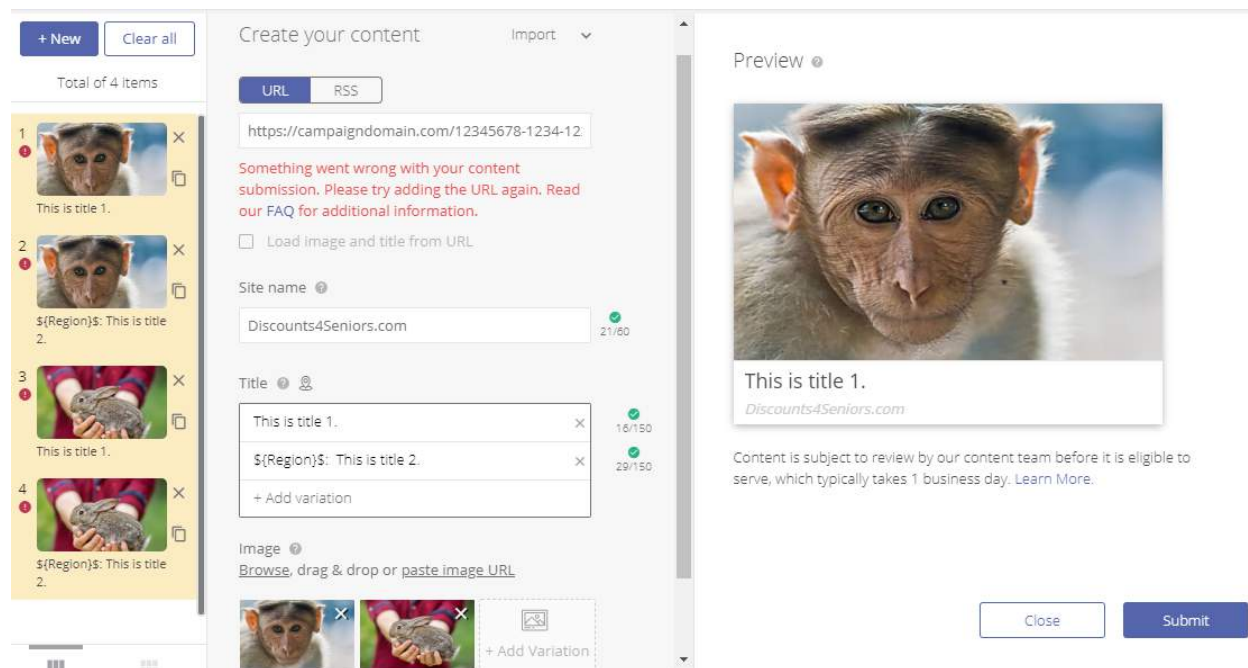
It seems that your pixel is not active yet. An active pixel will ensure your campaign is optimizing correctly against your bid strategy.



Just click "Got it" and move on.

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Add Content



For the "URL/RSS" toggle, leave "URL" highlighted (the default).

In the field that says "Enter your content's URL", enter the first part of your voluum campaign url.

For example, if the voluum campaign url looks like this:

```
https://campaigndomain.com/12345678-1234-1234-1234-123456789012?  
campaign_id={{campaign_id}}&publisher_id={{publisher_id}}  
&publisher_name={{publisher_name}}&ad_id={{ad_id}}&ad_title={{ad_title}}  
&section_id={{section_id}}&section_name={{section_name}}&req_id={{req_id}}  
&promoted_link_id={{promoted_link_id}}&time_stamp={{time_stamp}}  
&ob_click_id={{ob_click_id}}
```

Then put the following in this field:

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<https://campaigndomain.com/12345678-1234-1234-1234-123456789012>

Leave "Load image and title from URL" unchecked.

Note: If you see the message "**Something went wrong with your content submission. Please try adding the URL again. Read our FAQ for additional information.**", it may be because your landing page site doesn't have the required privacy and contact pages and the required personal contact information. If you've double checked and all the required information is there, please contact Outbrain support for help.

For "Site Name", put your landing page domain name as you want it to be displayed in your ad. As you type it in you'll see how it looks in the preview to the right.

Next, put your ad titles in the "Title" section and upload your ad images in the "Image" section. Note that if you put multiple ad titles and images, Outbrain will automatically create all possible combinations of the titles and images for you, which you'll see appear in the column to the left.

You can also click "+ New" to enter a new batch of title(s) and image(s), without deleting ads you've previously created.

And remember Outbrain's [Dynamic Title feature](#)? If you want to insert a dynamic token, just start by typing "\${" into a title field to bring up a dropdown and select the token you want.

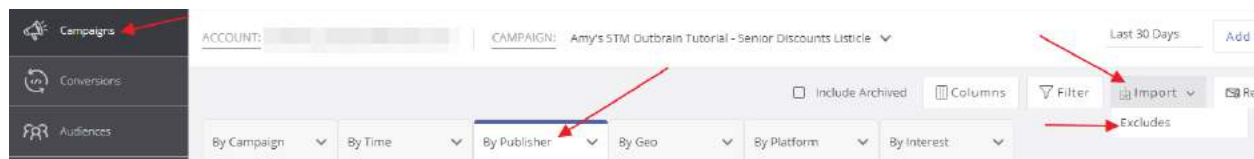
Reminder: Outbrain recommends testing 10-15 ads at a time. Also note that ads can't be edited as soon as they're submitted - you can pause them however.

When you're happy with the ads you've created in the left column, click "Submit" and we're done!

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Uploading a Bulk Blacklist

If you are fortunate enough to have gotten a blacklist of placements from your Outbrain rep, this is how you would upload it: Click on "Campaigns" in left menu > choose either the "By Publisher" tab or the "By Section" tab (depending on whether the blacklist is for Publishers or Sections) > Import > Excludes > Upload.



If the list is bigger than the maximum number of items you're allowed to upload, ask your rep to increase this limit for you.

If you didn't receive such a list, no worries. I'll provide some tips in the optimization section later that will help you to cut publishers.

Next, wait patiently for your Outbrain campaign to be approved, which would typically take 1 business day.

In the meantime, you can set up the Optimizer - which will be covered in the next section.

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SETTING UP THE OPTIMIZER ACCOUNT

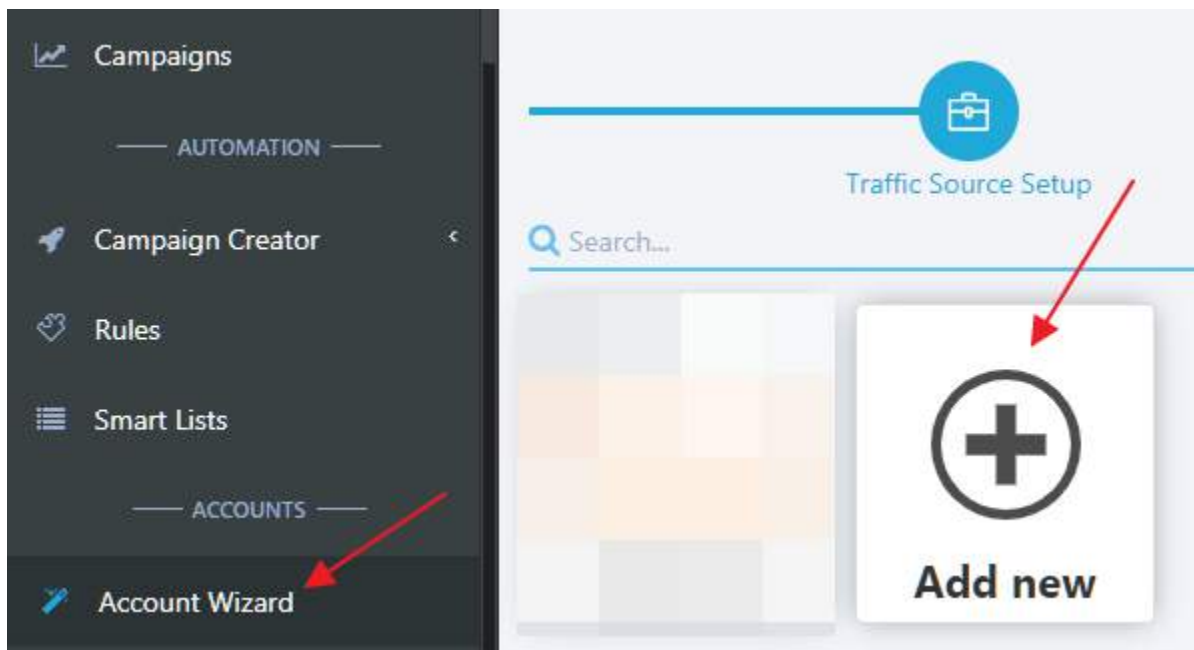
As was mentioned in the beginning of this tutorial, theOptimizer can be a pretty powerful optimization tool. However, even if you're not planning on subscribing to it at this time, you can still benefit from the content below, as you can MANUALLY implement the rules yourself, instead of setting them up in theOptimizer.

Doing so would be a lot of work, and you probably can't check your campaign every 10 minutes like theOptimizer can, but it would still be doable!

Next let's your Outbrain and Voluum accounts to theOptimizer.

-Log into theOptimizer.

-Choose "Account Wizard" from left menu. In next screen, for "Traffic Source Setup" click "Add new".



-Fill in the info for your Outbrain account as follows, except of course you'd be inserting your own Outbrain account login details. (Note: Outbrain's stats are set to Eastern

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Standard Time or UTC -5:00, so "America/New_York".) Click "Load Accounts", choose the Outbrain account you want to use from the dropdown, and click "Save Traffic Source".

+ New Traffic Source ✕

Outbrain ⌵

Nickname [How to properly setup Outbrain ?](#)

Outbrain1

(Give this Traffic Source a nickname. This is for your personal reference only. You can put whatever you like here)

Select the timezone of your traffic source account

America/New_York ✕ ⌵

Select the currency of your traffic source account

US Dollar ✕ ⌵

Email

your-outbrain-email@whatever.com

Password

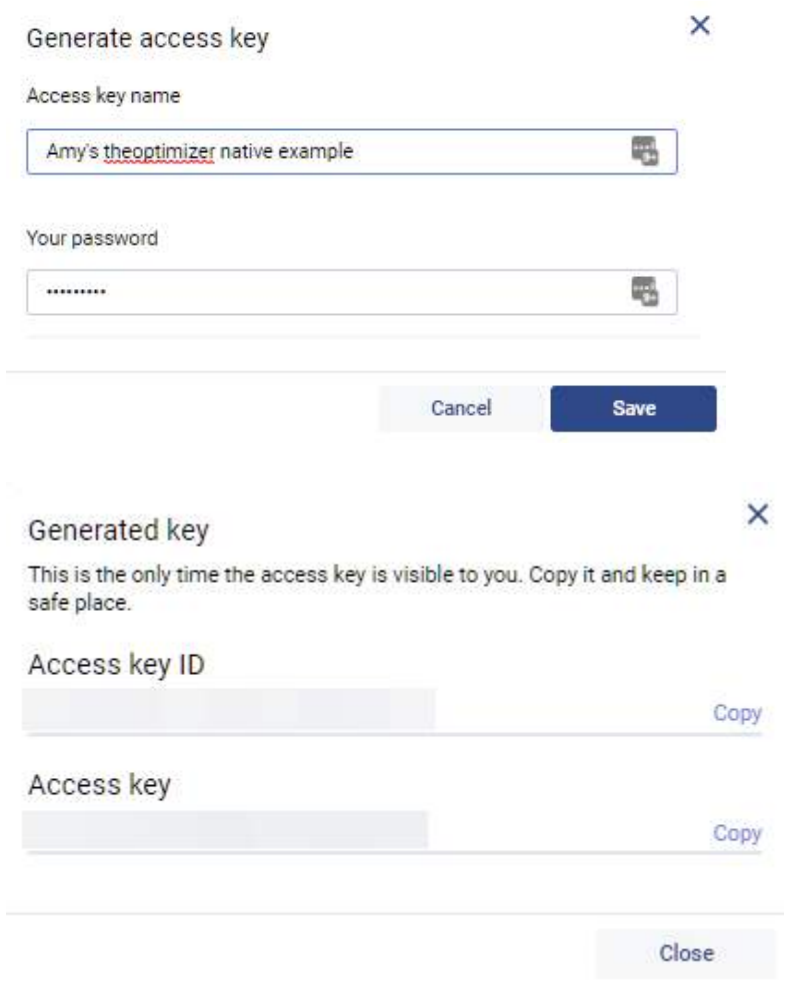
..... 🗑

Outbrain Account

Select Outbrain Account

-Next we need to grab an Access Key from the tracker. Log into Voluum, click on settings (the little gear icon at the top) > "Security" tab > "ACCESS KEYS" > "Add new key". Give the access key a name (e.g. "theOptimizer") and re-enter your voluum password to verify, and click "Save". You'll see a popup with the Access Key information.

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-Go back to theOptimizer. Click "Next" to go to "Tracker Setup". Click "Add new". Fill out the information as below - of course you'd be copying your unique Access Key details from Voluum. For "Conversion registration time reporting" I chose to go by "Visit timestamp" because that would help if I want to daypart later on. (The "Postback timestamp" can show a much-later time than the time Outbrain sent us the visitor. Delays would be caused by the time the visitor spends on the lander and offer sites, delays in conversion postback from aff networks to tracker, etc.)

Lastly, click "Save Tracker". Then click "Next".

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+ New Tracker

Voluum

Nickname
Voluum1
(Give this tracker a nickname. This is for your personal reference only. You can put whatever you like here)

Access Key ID [Where can I find API information for Voluum ?](#)
12345678-1234-1234-1234-123456789012

Access Key [Where can I find API information for Voluum ?](#)
12345-123456789012345678901234567890

Conversion registration time reporting ⓘ
 Visit timestamp
 Postback timestamp

Custom Domains (optional) ⓘ
Domain 1
[+ Add Domain](#)

[Save Tracker](#) [Cancel](#)

-Last thing to do: Choose from the dropdown what you named your Outbrain traffic source within your Voluum account. Make sure you get a list of green checkmarks for the tokens, as shown in the screenshot below. Then click "Finish".

* Connect the Traffic Source Account to the Tracker by selecting one of the available sources from the list.

Connect accounts

Outbrain

- ✓ {{campaign_id}} Is Found!
- ✓ {{publisher_id}} Is Found!
- ✓ {{ad_id}} Is Found!
- ✓ {{section_id}} Is Found!

Custom Variable 1 : {{campaign_id}}

Custom Variable 2 : {{publisher_id}}

Custom Variable 3 : {{publisher name}}

Outbrain1

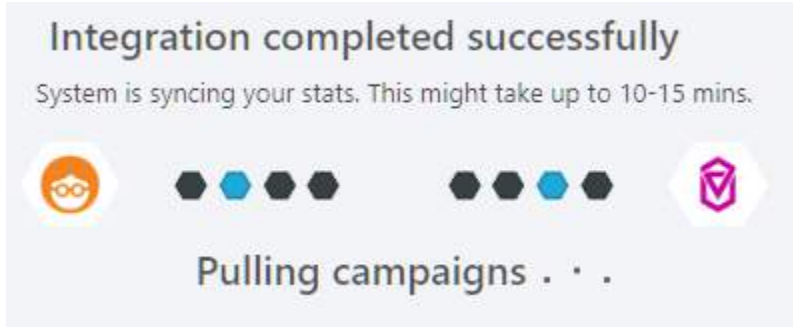
Ervin's Voluum

Outbrain

VOLUUM

Voluum

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-OPTIONAL: If you would like to receive a notification by Email or via Slack or Telegram, every time theOptimizer makes a change to your campaign, you can set that up in "Settings" in the left menu.

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CREATING RULES IN THE OPTIMIZER

Simply click on "Rules" in the left menu, then "+ New Rule" to start setting up a rule in the Optimizer.

Below are some suggestions of what rules you can set up. **I want to emphasize that the rules I present below are still "works in progress"** as I haven't run a lot of traffic to them. The best way to set up these rules, would be to run a campaign without using rules, accumulate some data FIRST, and THEN analyze the data to figure out what rules would have achieved the best results. As this was my first campaign, I had no such data, so please keep this in mind when reading the rules I'm suggesting below. If I find some time to run more campaigns on Outbrain in the future, I will no doubt continue to tweak the rules further and report back.

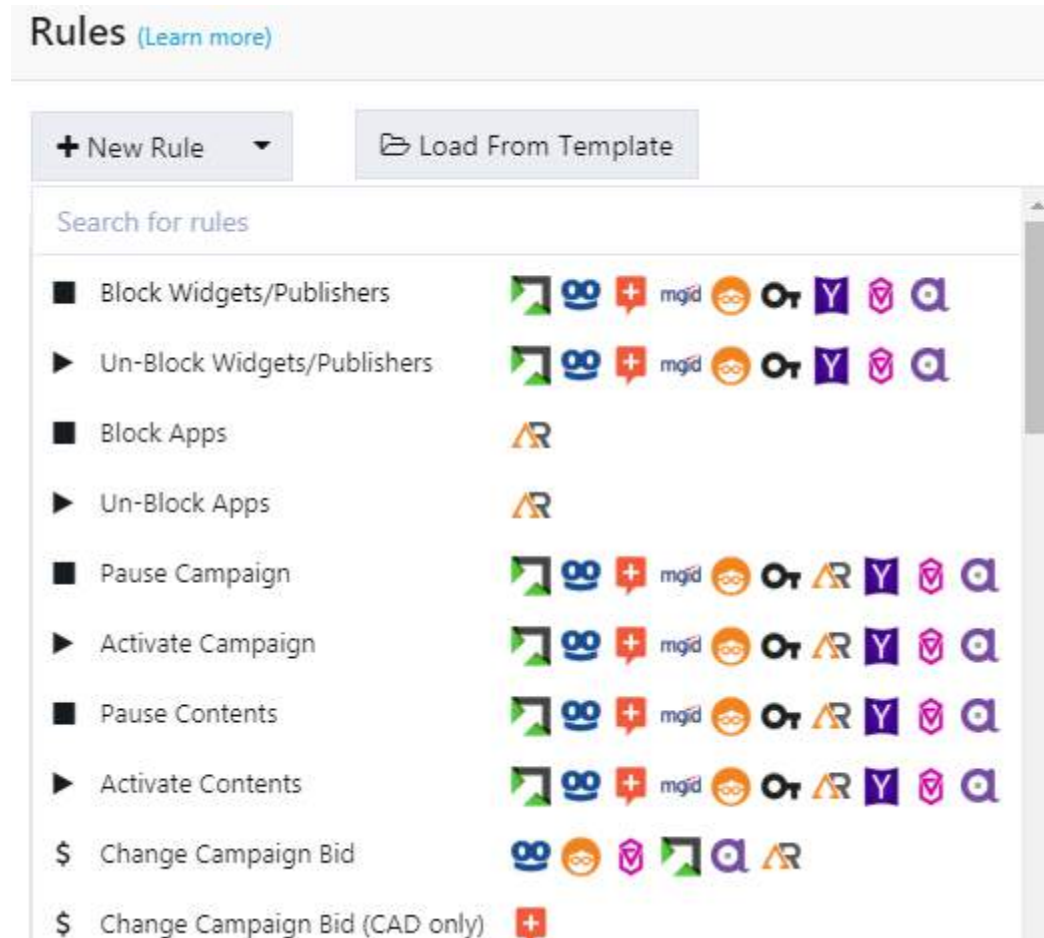
Also, I'm sure that one set of rules will not fit all campaigns.

Nevertheless, I will present what I have, and tell you the justification behind each rule, so you'll have some food for thought to build on.

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THEOPTIMIZER – BASIC OPTIONS

First thing you need to define, after clicking on "+ New Rule", is the action you're wanting to set up a rule for.



Then you'll be presented with options for setting up the rule. I'll very quickly go over each option.

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Edit Rule: Block Widgets/Publishers

Rule Name: Block Publishers that Spent \$20 Without Conversions

Rule Group: Search Groups... + New Group

Considering data from: Last 3 Days Exclude days from interval: None

Rule Conditions

IF Traffic Source Spent **IS** Greater or Equal **THAN / TO** 20 \$ -

AND Tracker Conversions **ARE** Less or Equal **THAN / TO** 0 -

+ Add

Widget Filtering Copy to clipboard Clear Widgets

Select Filter: Add Widgets (comma separated)

Apply rule to campaigns: Amy's STM Outbrain Tutorial - Senior Discounts Listicle ▼ Add Campaigns ▼

Run this rule every: Every 30 Minutes

Alert Only Execute Execute & Alert

Email Notifications Slack Notifications Telegram Notifications (Configure)

Save Cancel

Rule Name - Self-explanatory. A meaningful name will help avoid confusion.

Rule Group - Can ignore this option - it's just for tagging certain rules with a group name.

Considering data from - How many days of data the Optimizer should take into account when evaluating the rule conditions you specify.

Rule Conditions - The conditions that need to be met in order for the action you specified in the beginning (e.g. Block Publishers). Can specify multiple conditions.

Widget Filtering - You'll only see this for certain types of rules. It doesn't currently work for Outbrain sections, but the developer told me that it soon will. This option allows you to apply the rule to a list of specified widgets (by selecting "Include" and specifying widget IDs), or apply the rule to all widgets OTHER THAN the specified widgets (by selecting "Exclude" and specifying widget IDs).

Apply rule to campaigns - Self-explanatory. Choose one or more campaigns from dropdown.

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Run this rule every - How often you want theOptimizer to check for the conditions and run the rule. At first I thought "why not just set it to the highest frequency?" but that is sometimes not the best option - because [Outbrain's API has rate limits](#).

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THEOPTIMIZER – RECOMMENDED RULES

Here are some rules I would recommend setting up before the campaign is active.

Rule 1: Block Publishers that Spent X Times Payout Without Conversions

Block Widgets/Publishers 

Rule Conditions

IF	Traffic Source Spent	IS	Greater or Equal	THAN / TO	20	\$	-
AND	Tracker Conversions	ARE	Less or Equal	THAN / TO	0		-

Considering data from: Last 3 Days


Run this rule every: Every 10 Minutes

Notes: The purpose of this rule is to limit the spend of a non-converting publisher. 4x payout is an arbitrary number I decided to use, but you can definitely test other values depending on how aggressively you wish to cut publishers, or not. For listicles, different offers are being promoted and each may have a different payout. In the beginning when I had no idea what the average conversion value was, I just used the payout value of the first offer in the listicle. Or, if you want to be conservative, you can use a payout value of that of the lowest-payout offer in the listicle.

I like to cut aggressively at first, keeping in mind that I can always reactivate a publisher/section to further testing later on.

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[Rule 2: Pause Sections that Spent X Times Payout Without Conversions](#)

■ Pause Sections 

Rule Conditions

IF	Traffic Source Spent	IS	Greater or Equal	THAN / TO	5	\$	-
AND	Tracker Conversions	ARE	Less or Equal	THAN / TO	0		-

Considering data from: Last 3 Days

Run this rule every: Every 10 Minutes

Notes: This rule is for limiting the spend of each section. I set this to 1x payout, which is really aggressive - basically if a section doesn't start converting well straight away, it got cut. I only did this because I was working with a small budget. You may decide to set this to a higher value - I would recommend setting this to 2.

[Rule 3: Block Publishers that Spent \\$X with ROI < -Y%](#)

■ Block Widgets/Publishers 

Rule Conditions

IF	Traffic Source Spent	IS	Greater or Equal	THAN / TO	50	\$	-
AND	Traffic Source ROI	IS	Less	THAN	-50	%	-
AND	Tracker Conversions	ARE	Greater or Equal	THAN / TO	1		-

Considering data from: Last 90 Days

Run this rule every: Every 30 Minutes

Notes: The first two rules were to catch placements that spent money without converting right away. This rule and the next one below are to catch placements that get a lucky conversion (or what we call "lottery" conversion) at the start, and then stop converting with the same performance. Again, you can play with the exact dollar amount and ROI percentage to make this rule more aggressive or less so than how I have it.

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Rule 4: Pause Sections that Spent > \$X with ROI < -Y%

■ Pause Sections



Rule Conditions

IF	Tracker ROI	IS	Less	THAN	-70	%	-
AND	Traffic Source Spent	IS	Greater or Equal	THAN / TO	10	\$	-

Considering data from: Last 7 Days

Run this rule every: Every 10 Minutes

Notes: Explained in previous rule.

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THEOPTIMIZER – ADDITIONAL OPTIONAL RULES

In addition to the 4 recommended rules above, I'll also leave you with the following rules that you can choose to add as applicable and as you prefer.

Rule 5: Set Campaign Budget to \$X During Best-Converting Days+Hours

\$ Change Campaign Budget



Rule Conditions

IF Hour of Day IS IN

Timezone: America/New_York x v

Select All / Clear Week Days Weekends Working Hours

	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Mon	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thu	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fri	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sun	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

X

+ Add

Rule Budget

Set Budget To \$

Considering data from: Today

Run this rule every: Every 1 Hour

Notes: If you know, either based on intel from affiliate networks (or elsewhere) or based on past data, that certain days or the week / hours of the day convert better than others, you can use this rule to set a higher or normal budget during those days and hours. In my case, because I was promoting offers where call centres needed to follow up with leads

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Considering data from: Today

Run this rule every: Every 1 Hour

Notes: Already covered in the rule above.

[Rule 7: Change Content Bid to 70% of EPC](#)

\$ Change Content Bid



Rule Conditions

IF	Tracker Conversions	ARE	Greater or Equal	THAN / TO	1	-
----	---------------------	-----	------------------	-----------	---	---

+ Add

Rule Bid

Set Bid To	70	%	of EPC	i
------------	----	---	--------	---

Do not allow the Bid to be lower than	0.31	\$
---------------------------------------	------	----

Do not allow the Bid to be higher than	0.8	\$
--	-----	----

Considering data from: Last 7 Days

Run this rule every: Every 1 Hour

Notes: This is a powerful rule that continuously adjusts the content bid (CPC bid for each ad) to a % of the EPC (earnings/revenue per ad click). In the ideal world you'd be left with a profit (i.e. the other 30%, if you set the bid to 70% of EPC), which due to various reasons may or may not happen. But the rule will strive towards that goal.

IMPORTANT: Do not run this rule if you're running a campaign with the "Conversion" objective, where Outbrain is optimizing bids automatically already. Having the Optimizer and Outbrain both making changes to bids can make things complicated. But if you're wanting to give the "Traffic" objective a test, then this type of rule may be helpful.

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This rule can work well if at least one of your ads is fetching good EPC, such that the resulting CPC bid (the 70% of EPC) would STILL be high enough to win bid auctions to get traffic. If the opposite is true, i.e. **the resulting CPC is so low that the campaign isn't getting a lot of traffic, and/or not getting traffic from the best-converting placements, then it would be wise to refrain from implementing this rule until later in the campaign.** Perhaps make other optimizations first (such as cutting placements) until the ad EPC is better, and THEN switch this rule on.

The "Do not allow the Bid to be lower than" should be set to a bid that isn't so low that you'd stop getting traffic. And the "Do not allow the Bid to be higher than" is to prevent the bid from "running away" - it would be safer to set a maximum here and then manually increase the bid as you see fit.

If you're not seeing decent EPC for ANY ad in ANY section, that probably means either your ads suck, or your landing page or offers do. In this case you'd need to identify what the issue is, likely by split-testing more ads and/or landing pages and/or offers.

(Here I'm ruling out Outbrain's traffic quality as a potential issue, because I know they have good traffic - assuming your base CPC which you specified in your campaign settings is competitive enough to win traffic from good placements.)

Also worth mentioning is that the Optimizer would be working with stats that are delayed by up to 2-4 hours. for this reason, it may be better to leave the automatic bid-changing to Outbrain, which of course has access to real-time up-to-the-second stats.

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[Rule 8: Change Section Bid to 70% of EPC](#)

\$ Change Section Bid



Rule Conditions

IF	Tracker Conversions	ARE	Greater or Equal	THAN / TO	1	-
----	---------------------	-----	------------------	-----------	---	---

+ Add

Rule Bid

Set Bid To	70	%	of EPC	i
------------	----	---	--------	---

Do not allow the Bid to be lower than	0.21	\$
---------------------------------------	------	----

Do not allow the Bid to be higher than	0.6	\$
--	-----	----

Considering data from: Last 7 Days

Run this rule every: Every 1 Hour

Notes: Similar idea as for the last rule, but applied to section CPC bids. Again, **do not run this rule if you're running a campaign with the "Conversion" objective, where Outbrain is optimizing bids automatically already.**

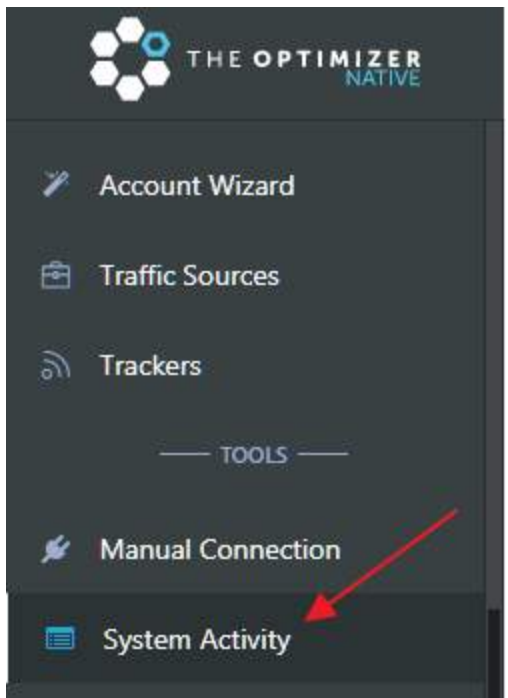
Again, this rule can be great if you have at least some well-converting sections with decent EPCs. If you don't, again it's probably because of your ads/lander/offers. If you have at least 1-2 decent ads with good performance, then wait until after you've cut most of the inferior ads, which should result in higher EPCs across sections, and THEN implement this rule.

Again, if you're not seeing decent EPC for ANY ad in ANY section, chances are it's your ads and/or landing pages and/or offers.

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THEOPTIMIZER REPORTING

To see a list of changes that are implemented by theOptimizer's rules, choose "System Activity" from the left menu:



You can use the filters at the top to specify a date range, choose a type of entries (Rule, Manual, or List), items affected (Campaigns, Contents, Sections, etc.), and statuses (either Completed or Failed).

Clicking on column headings will allow you to sort the data.

At the bottom you'll find buttons for downloading the report in either CSV or Excel format. The note here is that doing so will only export entries on the current page. If you wish to export all the data in as few files as possible, change the number of rows from the default 10 to the maximum 1000, then download each page.

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System Activity [\(Learn more\)](#)

Date	Type	Affected Item	Item Id	Item Name	Action
2020-05-01, 12:08:24 AM	rule	Widget	4010b66e503a197e049253fb00d7ee50	Amy's STM Outbrain Tutorial - Senior Discounts Listicle	pause
2020-05-01, 12:08:24 AM	rule	Widget	4010b66e503a197e049253fb00d7ee50	Amy's STM Outbrain Tutorial - Senior Discounts Listicle	pause
2020-05-01, 12:08:25 AM	rule	Widget	4010b66e503a197e049253fb00d7ee50	Amy's STM Outbrain Tutorial - Senior Discounts Listicle	pause
2020-05-01, 12:08:57 AM	rule	Section	4010b66e503a197e049253fb00d7ee50	Amy's STM Outbrain Tutorial - Senior Discounts Listicle	pause
2020-05-01, 12:08:58 AM	rule	Section	4010b66e503a197e049253fb00d7ee50	Amy's STM Outbrain Tutorial - Senior Discounts Listicle	pause
2020-05-01, 12:36:40 AM	rule	Section	4010b66e503a197e049253fb00d7ee50	Amy's STM Outbrain Tutorial - Senior Discounts Listicle	pause
2020-05-01, 12:39:17 AM	rule	Section	4010b66e503a197e049253fb00d7ee50	Amy's STM Outbrain Tutorial - Senior Discounts Listicle	pause
2020-05-01, 12:39:18 AM	rule	Content	4010b66e503a197e049253fb00d7ee50	Amy's STM Outbrain Tutorial - Senior Discounts Listicle	change_bid
2020-05-01, 12:41:44 AM	rule	Section	4010b66e503a197e049253fb00d7ee50	Amy's STM Outbrain Tutorial - Senior Discounts Listicle	change_bid
2020-05-01, 12:41:44 AM	rule	Section	4010b66e503a197e049253fb00d7ee50	Amy's STM Outbrain Tutorial - Senior Discounts Listicle	pause

(Note: When you see "Widget" in the reporting, it's referring to the "Publisher in Outbrain.)

Then - we wait for traffic to start. After that, we need to watch the stats and make some manual adjustments. That and more will be covered in the next section.

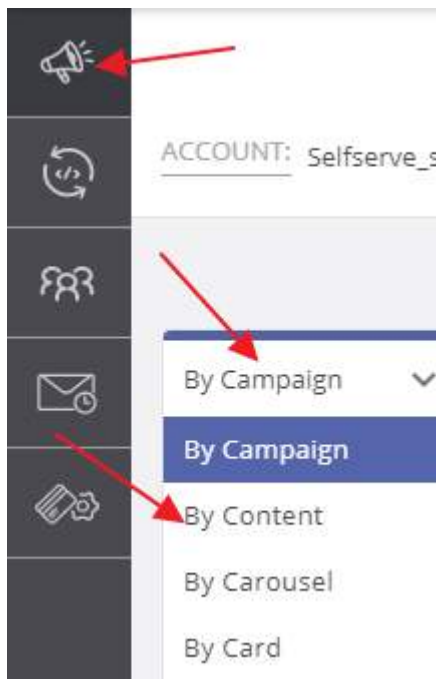
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HOW TO PAUSE ADS MANUALLY

The way Outbrain's algo works when it comes to ads, is that it will automatically assign more traffic to ads that have higher CTRs. (Remember how the winning of auctions depend on CTR and CPC? Ads with higher CTR will win more auctions, CPC being equal.) Although the algo is effective in identifying high-CTR ads, we can help to improve efficiency and save on budget by cutting ads manually to **optimize for revenue instead of CTR**.

This is what this part of the tutorial is about!

To see ad stats in Outbrain, click on "Campaigns" in the left menu > "By Campaign" tab > "By Content".



First thing I want to point out:

Last complete date: 🕒 May 14, 2020										Performance 🕒 2-4 hours				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Status	Image	Content Title	CPC Adjustment	URL	Date Added	Delivery	Approval Status	Avg. C...	Impr.	Clicks	CTR	Conversio..	CPA (Click

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The columns in lighter blue are up-to-the-minute, whereas the ones in darker blue are delayed by up to 2-4 hours. Just something to keep in mind when reading campaign stats.

Here's an ad-cutting approach you can start with, and tweak to your liking:

1) If you're testing lots of ads in the beginning (like I did) and need to cut them down to the recommended 10-15, **wait until some of the high-CTR ads have clearly emerged** (hard to define which point this would be - say 20-30k+ impressions or so for the ad that has received the most impressions?) **Then, gradually cut ads that have gotten at least 5-6 clicks (so the CTR wouldn't be too inaccurate) and have the worst CTR of all the ads.**

Cutting based on CTR instead of CR or ROI is obviously not ideal. But if you're wanting to test a lot of ads without forking up the cash, then the inaccuracy may be a worthy sacrifice.

2) Once you're down to the recommended 10-15 ads, **check to see whether at least one of the ads is profitable for at least some of the sections.** To check this, either a) drill down two levels into your tracker stats (break down by ads and then further by sections), or b) in the Outbrain interface just change the date filter to show stats from AFTER you've cut down to your best ad(s).

If none of the ads is profitable for at least a few sections, it would be a waste of time to continue. As I've explained before (while talking about one of the rules in the Optimizer), it's probably because your ads and/or landing page and/or offers are not good enough.

Doing this check at this point in time is important, because if your ads+lander+offers are not good enough, you wouldn't want to continue running the campaign and spending thousands of dollars on cutting placements just to end up with a handful of placements making small profits that will never make that money back.

You may ask at this point: How much traffic do we need to run, and how many profitable sections do we need to see, for us to decide to keep the campaign running as-is and focus on cutting placements and tweaking bids? Unfortunately, I don't have a definite answer. I haven't run enough campaigns on Outbrain to provide any rules of thumb.

But the more data you have, the more you can be sure whether your best ad is "cutting it" or not (no pun intended!) And if you don't think you have enough data to make this decision, run traffic for longer - meanwhile, you can still continue to cut ads as described below.

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3)Next, you may want to cut more ads using this statistically-sound method.

I would recommend using the bayesian method to cut ads that have at least a 90% chance of being inferior to the "current-best" ad. I've described the method in step-by-step detail at the end of this tutorial – please refer to Appendix A.

When using the [bayesian calculator](#), use the number of impressions (number of times an ad is shown) as "Trials", and the number of conversions as "Successes".



Conversion Rate (%)

Version	Include	Trials	Successes	Apprx probability of being best	95% chance conversion rate between
A	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	74732	5	6%	0% and 0.1%
B	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	20581	4	94%	0% and 0.1%
C	<input type="checkbox"/>	0	0		
D	<input type="checkbox"/>	0	0		

CUT! (with arrow pointing to 6%)

WINNER! (with circle around 94%)

Please note that this method will only cut ads that are INFERIOR to the top-performing ad. The evaluation does not take into account of revenue or ROI at all.

Optional: 4)Once you've cut down to only the best-performing ads, if you want to test that rule in theOptimizer that sets the content bid to 70% (or whatever percentage you like) of the EPC, now may be a good time. (Again, only if you're not using Outbrain's conversion optimization algo, i.e. only if you're not using "Semi Automatic" or "Fully Automatic"

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optimization. Otherwise, just let Outbrain's algo do its job without interference from theOptimizer.)

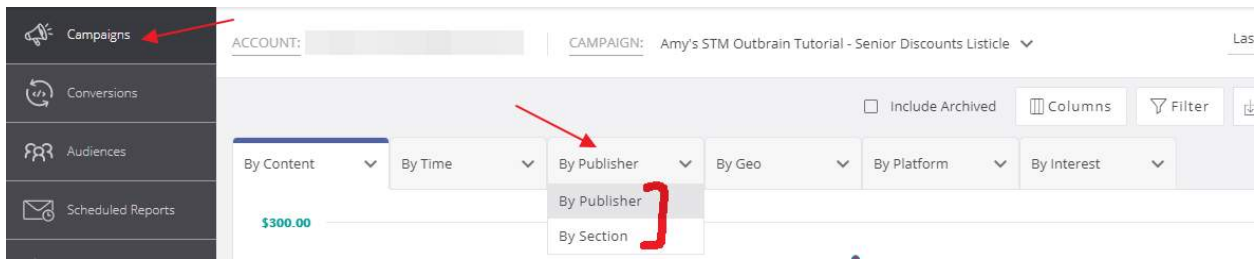
IMPORTANT: Sometimes, it may be good to keep ads that have higher CTR but lower ROI than your best-ROI ad, because the higher-CTR ads can win more auctions and get traffic from the more competitive placements - which the lower-CTR best-ROI ad may not be able to get. So, if the higher-CTR lower-ROI ad isn't "wasting" too much money compared to the best-ROI ad, it may be good to keep it running, just to continue getting a sample of the best traffic.

Once you've cut down to the best one or more ads, focus on evaluating and cutting placements towards a positive campaign ROI - as described below.

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HOW TO CUT PUBLISHERS & SECTIONS MANUALLY

To see placement stats in Outbrain, click on "Campaigns" in the left menu > "By Publisher" tab > and click on either "By Publisher" or "By Section", whichever you want to see.



To pause/exclude a publisher or section, simply toggle the "Exclude" to the right:

Last complete date: 🕒 May 14, 2020

<input type="checkbox"/>	Exclude	Publisher Name		Exclude Status
Total				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gray TV (Gray TV)		Partially Ex... ●
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	CNN (Turner U.S.)		Excluded

In the screenshot, CNN has been excluded, but Gray TV is still active.

In this part of the tutorial, I want to suggest some criteria you can use to decide which publishers and/or sections to exclude.

1) From the beginning of the campaign, you can use the four theOptimizer rules for cutting publishers and sections (Rules 1-4). These are like safety guards that can prevent any "runaway" publishers or sections from sucking up your budget. Some of the publishers and sections can be reactivated later on, but by cutting aggressively in the beginning, we can potentially get better ROI faster.

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Of course, the other option would be to just allow Outbrain's auto-optimization algo (semi/fully automatic) to take care of things, without using theOptimizer rules.

OR, you can use a mix of both. It all depends on how aggressively you want to do the cutting.

2)I also want to offer another way of cutting placements, that is statistically-sound. Please see below.

How to Cut Placements Using Statistics

(If you have further questions after reading the instructions below, [this STM post](#) can provide further insight.)

Firstly, please download the "Kill/Whitelist Calculator" excel spreadsheet [from here](#).

Open the calculator spreadsheet and go to the tab "Kill-Whitelist CPC".

Next, we need to download stats from Outbrain for pasting into this calculator.

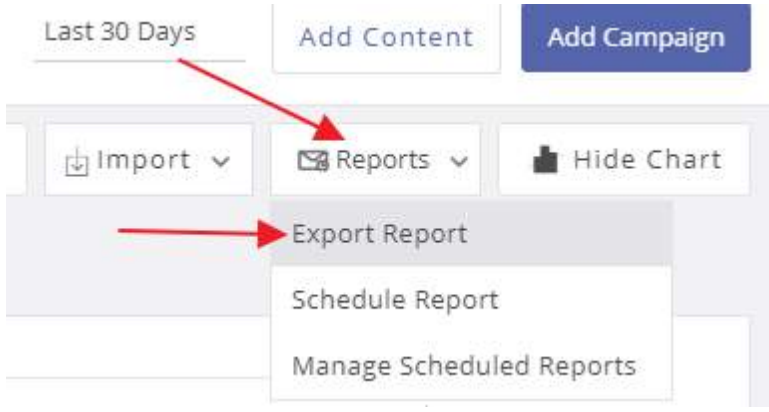
In Outbrain bring up either Publisher stats or Section stats (whichever you're wanting to analyze and potentially exclude). For best results, set the date filter to only show stats from AFTER the best ads have been cut. For example, if I started running on April 13th, and cut ads down to the last 1-2 best performers by the start-of-day on April 14th, then I would set the date filter to only show traffic from April 14th onwards.

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Doing so will ensure that you're treating the publishers/sections fairly. A placement can only perform as well as the ads allow them to. If you include stats from subpar ads, you'd be cutting placements that may become profitable by running only your best remaining ads on them.

Go to "Reports" > "Export Reports":



Open the Outbrain stats spreadsheet you've just exported. These are the headings you'll see.

Section ID	Section Name	Publisher ID	Publisher Name	CPC Adjustment	Amount Spent	Avg CPC	Impressions	Clicks	CTR	Total Conversions (view & click)	Conversions (click)
------------	--------------	--------------	----------------	----------------	--------------	---------	-------------	--------	-----	----------------------------------	---------------------

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You'll need to copy and paste the following columns of data into the calculator spreadsheet, as follows.

- Outbrain spreadsheet's "Section Name" or "Publisher Name" column (depending on which stats you chose to download) into Calculator spreadsheet's "Ad/Placement Name (Optional)" column.
- Outbrain spreadsheet's "Amount Spent" column into Calculator spreadsheet's "Cost (\$)" column.
- Outbrain spreadsheet's "Impressions" column into Calculator spreadsheet's "Impressions" column.
- Outbrain spreadsheet's "Total Conversions (view & click)" column into Calculator spreadsheet's "Conversions" column.

Then, copy the excel formula from any of the cells in the "VERDICT" column and copy all the way down to the last row of data.

As for the values at the top of the Calculator spreadsheet:

- Confidence:** Can leave that at 80%. If you want to cut more aggressively but with less certainly/accuracy, you can decrease that to 70%, but I wouldn't recommend going any lower. Setting this higher than 80% is also possible, but will require collecting more data to arrive at a verdict.
- Payout:** This would be the revenue per conversion. If you're promoting several offers - in a listicle for example - you can calculate the average conversion value by dividing your total revenue by the total number of conversions, and putting that value in this field.
- Min. ROI:** This would be the minimum ROI you want to achieve for your campaign. Typically this would be at least 10-30%.

At this point you should look through the values in the "VERDICT" column. **Entries that say "KILL!" means that the placement would be highly unlikely to achieve the minimum ROI you've specified** (with the exception I'm about to point out). If you're lucky you'll see the "WHITELIST!" verdict, but a placement would need to have outstanding performance in order to receive that verdict. "KEEP RUNNING" means there's insufficient data for either verdict to be reached.

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Needless to say, the idea is to pause the placements that are marked "KILL!" But before you do so, consider the following:

1)The calculator makes predictions based on the assumption that the same conditions would persist. So if you were to change the section bid for example, there is a slight chance you could still make that section/publisher profitable.

For example, if you've spent \$50 on a section and made \$25 back, in theory by decreasing your bid by more than half, you may be able to make the section profitable.

The reminder here is that by decreasing your bid, the traffic level from that section will drop and possibly cease. But I'll leave that to your experimentation.

Note that if you had chosen the automatic conversion optimization option (semi/fully automatic), then Outbrain would already be tweaking your section CPCs. So, if you wish to change the bid manually, you'd need to override Outbrain's algo.

Here's how to change a section's bid: In Outbrain, display section stats, find the section you want to change the bid for, click on the sandwich icon in the "CPC Adjustment" column, click the plus/minus sign to increase/decrease the bid until you reach the desired target CPC, checkmark the "Override automatic system adjustment applied by Conversion Bid Strategy" statement, and click "Save".

Last complete date: May 16, 2020

Performance 2 - 4 hours

<input type="checkbox"/>	Exclude	Section Name	Publisher Name	Exclude Status	CPC Adjustment	Avg. C...	Impres..	C	
Total							\$0.38	1.7m	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			Excluded					
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			Excluded					
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			Excluded					
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			Excluded					
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			Excluded					
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			No Excl...					
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			Excluded					

CPC Adjustment

-20 % Estimated CPC is \$0.2

Override automatic system adjustment applied by Conversion Bid Strategy (not recommended)

Note!

If CPC adjustments are made to excluded sections, the change won't take effect until re-included.

[Reset](#)

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2) If you're analyzing publisher stats using this calculator, be aware that it would still be possible for one or more of the sections under that publisher to become profitable if you'd run more traffic to them. If you're not sure, it may be good to keep that placement running to collect more data before taking another look.

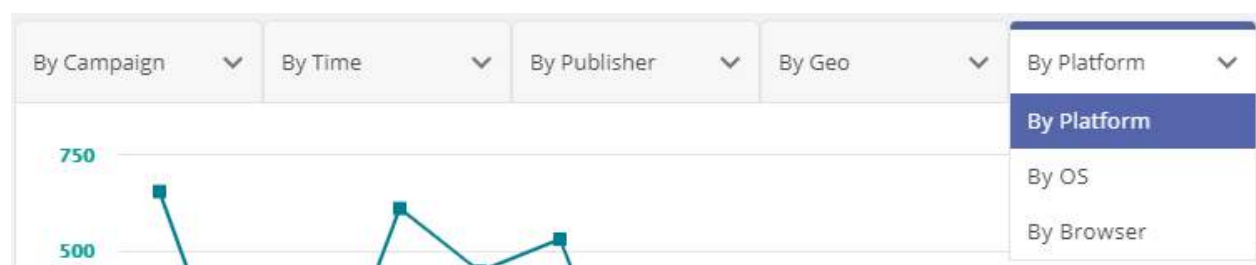
In addition to checking the "KILL!" entries, you may also want to look for placements (publishers/sections) that have been paused out by the Optimizer, to see what the "VERDICT" is. **If the verdict says "KEEP RUNNING", you may decide to run them further to collect more data.** At this point, you may want to turn off one or more rules in the Optimizer (for example the more aggressive Rules 1 & 2) and go to Outbrain to toggle some of those publishers/sections back to active to run more traffic. Alternatively, you can leave them paused until later on when you have a profitable campaign and ready to scale, at which time you may decide to re-test all the publishers and sections that have gotten paused prematurely.

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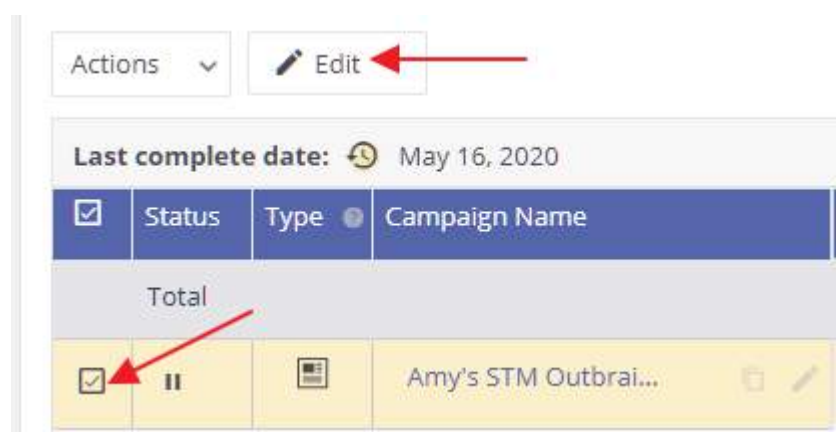
OTHER OPTIMIZATION OPPORTUNITIES

Drilling into Other Stats

If you go to Outbrain's stats and click on the "By Platform" dropdown:

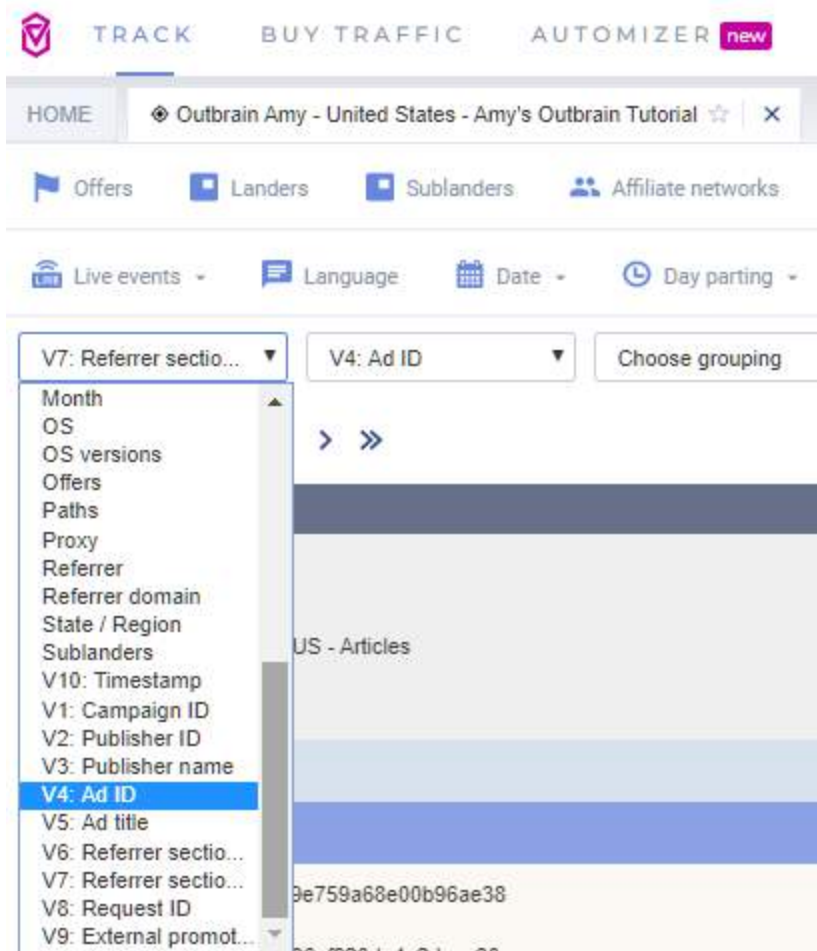


You can see which platforms, OSs and browsers are converting the best/worst, and include/exclude from campaign targeting, by going to the "By Campaign" tab in Outbrain, selecting your campaign, and clicking on "Edit":



You may also want to go into tracker stats, which will allow you to drill down to up to 3 levels deep. There is the standard data that Voluum captures, such as offer stats and information on devices. And then there are the 10 variables for which Outbrain sends data to Voluum - marked as V1 to V10:

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(V6 is "Referrer section ID" and V7 is "Referrer section name" - these got cut off. For the complete list of tokens, you can always go into Voluum's traffic source details for Outbrain.)

You can play around to see what additional insights you can gain by drilling up to 3 levels into various stats. For example, you can drill down first by "V4: Ad ID", then by "V7: Referrer section name", then expand the stats for your top-performing ad, to see whether the section has promise of becoming profitable. (ie. If not even your best ad can make a section profitable, then you should either pause the section, or test more ads.)

One important thing to point out is that Voluum can't track by ad image - it only tracks by Ad title and Ad ID. If all your ads have different ad titles, you can just drill into "Ad title" in Voluum. But what if you have multiple ads with the same title but different images?

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I've confirmed with Bryan that there's no way to tell from Outbrain's interface, the Ad ID of each ad. So what we'd have to do to make the correlation, is display stats by "Ad ID" in Voluum, then look at the ad state in Outbrain by going to the "By Content" tab, and comparing these values to match up ads in Outbrain with Ad IDs in Voluum:

- Outbrain ad's "Clicks" and Voluum's "Visits".
- Outbrain ad's "Conversions" (Click) and Voluum's "Conversions".

Excluding Non-Traditional Publishers

Bryan told me that Outbrain has different types of inventory. There's "traditional" inventory like CNN, NY Post and Time. However, they now have additional, non-traditional inventory such as in-app and push placements. The quality and user-behavior from these placements are different. So, make sure to optimize your ads accordingly. This could mean bidding down on them because the traffic is typically cheaper, or blocking them out altogether if the conversion rates aren't up to par with the rest of the publishers within a campaign.

I would recommend to just block these out at the start to conserve budget, and retest them for scaling after your campaign becomes profitable.

However, there's no known way to block these out ourselves. But what you can do is click on each publisher's hyperlink to check whether it's an in-app or push placement:



And if it is, then toggle to pause it.

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ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

Here are some additional ideas I have on how to improve on this campaign (that haven't already been covered).

- It's always a good idea to split-test landing pages from the start. I didn't do so due to my campaign being a very small test, but you are strongly encouraged to do so!
- If possible and relevant, try to incorporate some loan offers in your listicle - lots of people can use some temporary financial help to get them through the covid situation. If I had decided to run this campaign further, I would definitely test this.
- Instead of starting by finding out which offers were hot from affiliate networks and friends, I could also have done research on Adplexity to see what other people were promoting, made a list of offers and then tested those.
- On hindsight: Since most of the insurance campaigns on Adplexity Native were pushing single offers, perhaps I shouldn't have insisted on testing listicles. But this is something you could test!
- Once you've blacklisted some of the biggest publisher and sections in the initial few days, it may be good to test more ads/landers/offers or even completely different verticals on that whitelist, to see which ad(s)+lander+offer(s) perform the best, before spending further money on cutting placements.

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BEST RELEVANT THREADS ON THE STM FORUM

A lot of wisdom can be found in some of the threads in the [Native subforum](#). The following in particular are must-reads:

<https://stmforum.com/forum/showthread.php?43538-CASE-STUDY-60k-Profit-on-Taboola-Running-Casino-App-Installs-%26%23129297%3B>

<https://stmforum.com/forum/showthread.php?41674-%26%23127940%3B-Wakeboarder-Rides-Into-Native-Waters-%26%23127940%3B>

<https://stmforum.com/forum/showthread.php?43173-Mastering-Native-Ads-with-Voluum-DSP>

<https://stmforum.com/forum/showthread.php?41261-How-much-To-start-with-native>

<https://stmforum.com/forum/showthread.php?40649-NATIVE-What-is-the-best-tool-for-native-optimization>

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OUTRO

And that's all I have to say about that!

As usual, this tutorial has turned out to be a lot longer than I had originally planned - thanks so much for bearing with my long-windedness as always!

I hope that this small experiment has sparked your interest in giving Outbrain's traffic a try. And if any of you veterans in native traffic are reading this - please don't be shy - any tips you can share on how to make "my" process better would be very much welcomed!

If you have any further questions about this tutorial, or wish to see similar tutorials on how to run paid traffic on various traffic types - including Native, Pop, Push, Facebook, and more - I would invite you to join us at STMForum.com. The following are just some of what you will find on the forums:

- Over 44k threads consisting of over 375k posts.
- A "Success Stories" section containing reports of major successes posted by forum members.
- A "Newbie Zone" section dedicated to helping complete newbies get up and running. Contains lots of guides, including a step-by-step 40-day beginner's tutorial that teaches everything from setting up tracking, to choosing offers, to preparing landing pages, to creating campaigns, to analyzing data, to tweaking campaigns to profitability. A "Facebook Beginner's Tutorial" is in the process of being written as well, with the first few lessons already posted.
- Other comprehensive guides and tutorials include: "Twinaxe's Push Tutorial", "How to Run Adult Traffic", "eCommerce Cookbook", "Facebook Scaling Mastery Tutorial", and more!

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- Forum sections with discussions on different traffic types including: Facebook, Mobile, Native, Adult, Search (Adwords/Bing), Email, etc.
- Discounts and coupons from various tools and services, including Adplexity, Voluum, and the Optimizer which are used in this tutorial.
- "Follow-Along" sections where you can create a thread to document your campaigns to receive feedback from moderators and the rest of the community, and to ask any questions when you're stuck. This is the next best thing to having a coach or mentor, and as a member you'll get that at a small fraction of the price.
- Forum sections on various Technical & Creative Skills, including campaign tracking, programming, banner and landing page design, and copywriting.
- A "Masterminds" section for members to form groups to work towards success together.
- Lots of case studies documenting how profitable campaigns are made.

To see a more-detailed description of what you'll find inside the forums, please see:

<https://stmforum.com/join/>

You can preview some of our forum content here: <https://stmforum.com/preview/>

Our forum moderators and members jointly possess expertise in many areas of affiliate marketing, and many traffic networks and affiliate networks have a presence on our forums as well.

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[Click Here to Join the STM Forum Now!](#) (Use coupon code **OUTBRAINSTM40** for 40% off the 1st month.)

We'll see you on the inside!

Thanks for reading!

With Much Gratitude,

Amy (aka Vortex)

Senior Moderator at STMForum.com

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APPENDIX A: How to Identify the Best Banners and Landers

Oftentimes we need to compare a group of something to know which one is best. For example:

- Created 5 different types of landers and want to see which one performs best.
- Made 2 versions of a well-converting lander to split-test, to try to improve CR further.
- Have 20 banners running and want to identify the best one, then pause the rest to maximize ROI.

To identify the best in a group of anything, this would be the tool to use:

<http://www.peakconversion.com/2012/02/ab-split-test-graphical-calculator/>

Here's how to use it...

Step 1 - Identify the current-best

Say we're testing 7 landers, landers A/B/C/D/E/F/G. We have the following data from our tracker:

Lander	Impressions	Conversions
A	31548	2
B	51217	1
C	35173	9
D	54513	4
E	96155	8
F	22144	6
G	31253	5

What the fields in the calculator mean:

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"Trials" = number of impressions on the lander (or if you're using banners, the number of clicks to the lander)

"Successes" = number of conversions

The split-test calculator can only test 4 items at a time. If we had 4 landers or fewer, we'd simply input all the data, click "Calculate", and the one with the highest "Aprx probability of being best" would be our "current-best".

However, since our example has 7 landers, here's what we can do - test A/B/C/D, make a note of the best (lander C). Then test E/F/G and make a note of the best (lander F). Then test the best from each lot (lander C vs. lander F) to find the winner - in this case, lander F.

Round 1 - Landers ABCD:

Trials	Successes	Aprx probability of being best
31548	2	2%
51217	1	0%
35173	9	97%
54513	4	1%

Round 2 - Landers EFG:

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Trials	Successes	Apprx probability of being best
96155	8	0%
22144	6	81%
31253	5	19%

Round 3 - Lander C vs. F - K.O.!

Trials	Successes	Apprx probability of being best
35173	9	43%
22144	6	57%

It's not unlike how tournaments are set up, where winners from the previous round are set to compete in the current round and so on until the final winner emerges.

Step 2 - Identify items ready to be cut

Next, we use the calculator to compare the "current-best" from the first step - in this case lander F - against EACH of the other landers. If the "Apprx probability of being best" of a lander is less than 10%, it should be OK to cut that lander from rotation. If none of the landers are at less than 10%, DO NOT CUT - we allow it to collect more data.

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Lander F vs. Lander A:

22144	6	97%
31548	2	3%

Verdict: Cut Lander A

Lander F vs. Lander B:

22144	6	100%
51217	1	0%

Verdict: Cut Lander B

Lander F vs. Lander C:

22144	6	56%
35173	9	44%

Verdict: Let Lander C Continue

Lander F vs. Lander D:

22144	6	98%
54513	4	2%

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Verdict: Cut Lander D

Lander F vs. Lander E:

22144	6	98%
96155	8	2%

Verdict: Cut Lander E

Lander F vs. Lander G:

22144	6	81%
31253	5	19%

Verdict: Let Lander G Continue

Note: The lower the "Apprx probability of being best" of a lander is when compared to the current-best, the more certain you can be that it will continue to be worse than the current-best in the long run. For example, say I was testing a bunch of landers that were the same except for the image, < 10% would be enough for me to cut a lander. However, if I was testing 2 landers I spent 2 days to mod, I may test until one of them falls below 2% or even reaches 0% "Apprx probability of being best" before I'd cut it - because I put so much effort into the landers I want to LITERALLY be 100% sure not to cut the wrong one!

Another Note: You may be tempted to cut something before it reaches 10% or less. **Please REFRAIN from doing that!** You may feel that by cutting earlier you'd be saving money, but what you'd actually be doing is make an ad hoc decision that is not statistically sound, which effectively renders your entire test a waste of time and money. I've been

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guilty of that so many times I've lost count! When your "winners" turn out to be "losers" you'll kick yourself for it!

Either test until results reach statistical significance, or don't bother to test at all!

Step 3 - Repeat until only 1 item is left

Now, simply repeat Steps 1 & 2 every so often for the remaining landers, to cut gradually until you're left with the winner!

After that, you can make more landers to test against your winner and start the cutting process all over again. Keep beating your winner to continuously improve on your ROI!

NOTE: If you see 2+ landers going neck-to-neck, you may not want to spend a ton of time and money just to wait for a winner!

If you've had a few hundred clicks worth of data for each landing page, all of them have probabilities of being best between 25% and 75%, and you're seeing high, overlapping graphs like the ones below, the remaining landers all perform about the same. Pick one to continue running, pause the others, and start a new split-test.

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