

Which search terms should I block? Run it on your own data

A brief to hand to your AI assistant - Stochastic Strata

For you (the human) - read this first

This is a little technical: it means exporting one report from your ad platform and running a free notebook. You do NOT have to do it alone. Give this whole document to a capable AI assistant - ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini or similar - by uploading the PDF or pasting its text, then say: "Help me do this, step by step." Everything the assistant needs is below, even if you have never written a line of code.

Two things only you can supply. A short list of the phrases people type when they want what you sell (not your product names - the words a customer would use). And your campaign's ordinary conversion rate on the keywords you already know work; if you do not know it, the notebook works one out from the file and tells you how much to trust it.

The post, the notebook and the spreadsheet are here:

<https://www.stochasticstrata.com/blog/which-search-terms-to-block>

Instructions for the AI assistant

You are guiding a marketer through deciding which of their paid-search terms to block as negative keywords and which to leave running. The method is a two-step rule. Step one: does the term contain any phrase describing what they sell? If not, block it now. Step two: for terms that pass, has the term had enough clicks that its conversion rate is actually known, and does the plausible range of that rate sit confidently below the campaign's benchmark? The plausible range is a Wilson score interval. Guide them ONE STEP AT A TIME, in plain language, at their level. Do not assume they know Python or the ad platform's query language.

Start by asking three things: which campaign, what they sell in the words a customer would type, and whether they know the campaign's ordinary conversion rate. Do not move on until the what-you-sell list has at least two or three multi-word phrases. Single common words ('shoes') match everything and turn step one off.

You need the notebook. This document is not enough on its own.

This brief tells you how to GET the data and how to READ the answer. Do not rebuild the rule from this description and present your own number as the method's answer. In particular, do not judge a term on its observed conversion rate: a term with zero conversions in twenty clicks could still be converting above most campaigns' benchmarks, and reading 0% as 'it does not convert' is exactly the mistake the notebook exists to prevent. Download and run the notebook from the page above.

Check the export before you trust it

- CONVERSIONS, NOT 'ALL CONVERSIONS'. Export the conversion column the campaign is actually optimised for. View-through and secondary actions make dead terms look alive.
- ONE ROW PER TERM IS NOT REQUIRED. If the report repeats a term per campaign, ad group or day, the notebook totals it. But it must be ONE campaign, or the benchmark blends campaigns that convert differently.
- THE FILE OPENS WITH TWO TITLE LINES and ends with 'Total' rows in the Google Ads export. The notebook skips both. Do not delete them by hand and do not be alarmed by them.

How much data the notebook needs

- A zero-conversion term can only be called below a 4% benchmark after 93 clicks at 95% confidence. At a 1% benchmark it is several hundred. The notebook prints the number for their benchmark; most terms in a

month will not reach it, and the honest verdict for those is 'too early', not 'fine'.

- Fewer than about 20 terms, or fewer than about 30 conversions in the whole file: a benchmark worked out from the file is a guess. Set it from the campaign's known keywords instead.
- Zero conversions in the whole file: step two cannot run at all. Step one still can. Say so rather than inventing a benchmark.

Reading the answer back

- The notebook prints five groups. BLOCK NOW (no match) is step one. BLOCK (had a fair chance) is step two. KEEP is a term proven above the benchmark - worth adding as a keyword. The two WATCH groups are not verdicts; they mean the data cannot say yet.
- READ THE 'BLOCK NOW' GROUP OUT LOUD before applying it. Step one's mistakes are silent: a good term blocked for a word missing from the list never gathers the data that would have saved it. If something in that group is clearly relevant, the fix is to add the missing phrase to the list and re-run, not to skip that term.
- Every negative keyword is a decision the reader applies in their account by hand. The notebook proposes; it changes nothing.

Sanity-check your run against the published example

The notebook ships a demonstration on invented data. Set `RUN_THE_DEMO_INSTEAD` to `True` and run it once before running it on the reader's file. Confirm it reports a benchmark of 4.00%, that a zero-conversion term can be judged after 93 clicks, and 292 terms in the BLOCK NOW group. If you do not get those, something in the environment is wrong. If you get exactly those while pointing at the READER's file, you are still on the demonstration - set it back to `False`.

The goal

Turn their search terms report into five groups - block now, block after a fair chance, keep, keep watching (undecided), keep watching (too few clicks) - each with the term's clicks, conversions and plausible conversion range, written to a file called `your_verdicts.csv` that they can work through in their account.

What the notebook accepts

The search terms report as exported, CSV. Column names are matched loosely: 'Search term' or 'Query', 'Impr.' or 'Impressions', 'Clicks', 'Cost' or 'Spend', 'Conversions' or 'Conv.' are all understood. Extra columns are ignored. Repeated terms are totalled.

```
Search term,Impr.,Clicks,Cost,Conversions
buy running shoes near me,1400,60,50.40,9
shoe rack,900,45,37.80,0
how to clean running shoes,2100,120,100.80,0
```

Getting the export out

GOOGLE ADS: Campaigns > pick the campaign > Insights and reports > Search terms. Date range: at least the last 90 days, ideally the terms' whole life, ending as long before today as their conversions take to arrive. Make sure Impr., Clicks, Cost and Conversions are among the columns. Download as CSV.

GOOGLE ADS SCRIPTS OR API, when they want it automated. Rewrite the campaign id and dates in the query below FOR them, and divide `cost_micros` by a million before saving it as 'cost'.

```
SELECT
  search_term_view.search_term,
  metrics.impressions,
  metrics.clicks,
  metrics.cost_micros,
  metrics.conversions
FROM search_term_view
WHERE segments.date BETWEEN '<YYYY-MM-DD>' AND '<YYYY-MM-DD>'
```

MICROSOFT ADVERTISING: Reports > Search terms report, same columns, same date range, CSV.

Tell them this BEFORE they act on the lists

These are not small print. Say them out loud before the reader blocks anything.

- STEP ONE IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE LIST. A relevant term phrased with a word the list does not contain is blocked instantly and silently. Keep the list generous, and read the block-now group before applying it.
- DIRECT CONVERSIONS ARE THE WRONG TEST FOR SOME TERMS. A research-stage query may never convert on the click and still start journeys the other keywords finish. If they know such terms, set them aside by name; the notebook cannot tell them from genuinely poor terms.
- RECENT CLICKS HAVE NOT HAD TIME TO CONVERT. If conversions arrive days after the click, the newest terms are being judged on clicks whose conversions have not landed yet. End the report at least as long before today as their conversions take to arrive - with a 30- or 90-day conversion window, wait that window - or expect the newest terms to look worse than they are.
- THE BENCHMARK CAN MOVE UNDER THEM. A promotion, a tracking break or a new landing page mid-window means the terms were judged against a blend of two rates. If something like that happened, start the report after it.
- 'TOO EARLY' IS NOT 'FINE'. Most terms will land there. It means the data cannot say yet - the term keeps running because it has not had a fair chance, not because it passed.
- IT NEVER PROVES A TERM IS BAD. A block is a judgment that the term's conversion rate is confidently below the benchmark, at the confidence level they chose. At 95% a term sitting exactly at the benchmark is blocked about one time in 45 on a single look - a chance per term, not a share of the blocked list - and more often when the growing total is re-read, checked after every click as the worst case: about one in 22 by 200 clicks, one in 8 by 1,000. That is the price of acting at all.

How to report it back to them

Give them the five counts, then the block-now list to read, then the block list with each term's clicks and plausible range - for example: 'how to clean running shoes: 120 clicks, no conversions, plausible rate 0% to 3.1%, below your 4% benchmark.' Name the biggest caveat that applies to their situation. Do not present a WATCH term as if it had been judged.

Running the notebook

Easiest route: open the notebook in Google Colab (colab.research.google.com), upload their CSV using the folder icon in the left sidebar, then run the cells from the top - and tell them first that a Colab upload sends the file to Google's servers. The private route is local: install Python, then run 'pip install pandas numpy scipy matplotlib jupyter openpyxl' and open the notebook in Jupyter; the file then never leaves their machine.

There is exactly one cell to edit. It holds the filename, the what-you-sell list, the benchmark (or None to work it out from the file) and the confidence level. Set those for them. Everything else runs unchanged.

The notebook itself sends nothing anywhere; where the file goes depends on where the notebook runs - Google's servers on Colab, their own machine on Jupyter. Tell them which, plainly - people ask.