

Promoting the Pike One-Name Study with Google Ads

by Dr David Pike (Member 4985)

Earlier this year I made use of Google Ads (then called AdWords) to do some advertising in support of the DNA project that is a key component of the Pike One-Name Study. Having mentioned this to a few other people, it was suggested that it would be good for me to share this experience in the form of an article in JOONS. So here goes.

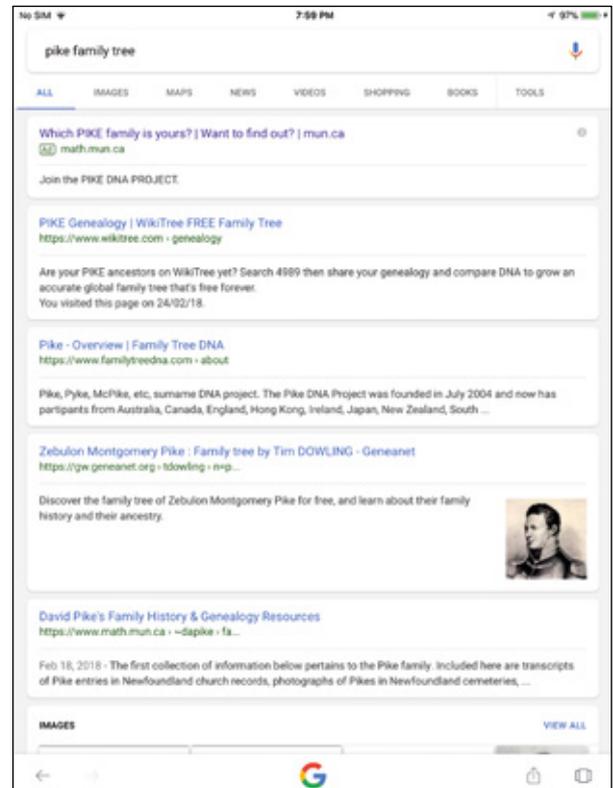
This particular escapade began to take form in February when I received an email message from Google, offering me a coupon code for up to \$300 worth of advertising via their AdWords branch, thereby enabling advertisements to be displayed when people do Google searches that include keywords of relevance. At first I suspected the email was spam, but on closer inspection it passed muster. I already had an account at AdWords (although I had never really used it before) and the coupon code was accepted as legitimate. All I had to do was to set up an AdWords Campaign and let it run for the duration of the coupon's validity.

As a bit of background, we (the volunteer co-ordinators of the Pike DNA Project) have struggled in recent years to reach out to prospective new project members. We used to do well by participating in relevant online message boards and mailing lists, but these seem to have waned in activity over the years. People just aren't using them as they previously did. We know that much genealogical activity is now taking place on Facebook, but Facebook explicitly prohibits any kind of advertising that targets people by surname and so there now seems to be no easy way to bring awareness of our project to the people that would be most likely to care about it.

So when the Google AdWords offer fell into my lap, the natural idea was to try to use it to promote the Pike DNA Project. And if possible, to target it to Pikes and Pykes. And, even more, to target it to people in places like England, where we are in greatest need of recruiting new members and getting additional Pike lineages represented.

Aware of the restrictions at Facebook and not wanting to face sanctions from Google, an ad was cautiously prepared which would not target Pike individuals too directly. It was a text-based ad, with the wording "Which PIKE family is yours? Want to find out? Join the PIKE DNA PROJECT". It was set up to be triggered by searches involving keywords such as 'Pike family' and 'Pike genealogy'.

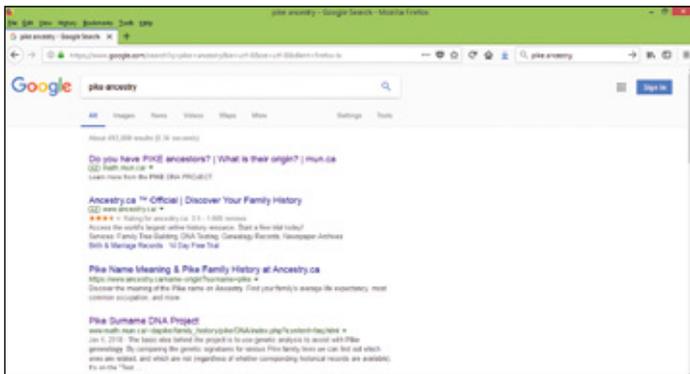
After our ad was approved and had been running for about a day, a second ad was crafted with the text "Do you have PIKE



ancestors? What is their origin? Learn more from the 'PIKE DNA PROJECT'. This was put in place and approved.

With an overall budget of \$300 and a deadline for coupon's validity, the AdWords campaign was configured to run for twenty-nine days and with an average daily budget of \$10. A wonderful feature of Google Ads is that one can geographically target where advertisements should be shown. Since our project already has good representation from several Pike families in the USA, we put geographical restrictions in place so that our ads would primarily appear in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Jersey, Guernsey, Costa Rica and four Canadian provinces (Alberta, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland & Labrador). The goal, insofar as AdWords was concerned, was to maximise the number of clicks, each of which would take the user to the introduction page for the Pike DNA Project.

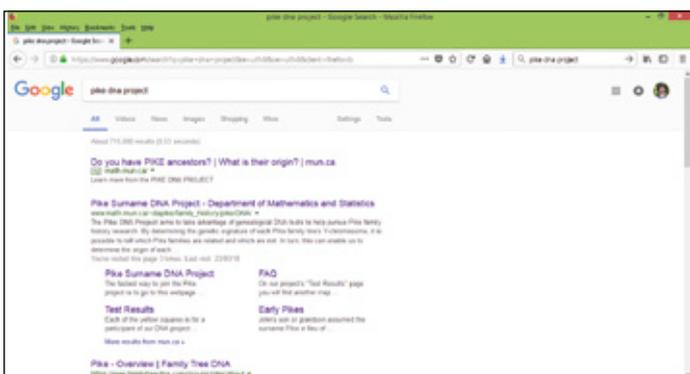
For the first week the campaign's pace was slow but steady. It was generating several 'impressions' (i.e. displays of ads) per hour, with the peak hours getting about 30 impressions. Impressions have no budgetary impact. It is only when an



ad is clicked on that a cost is incurred. The campaign's first two clicks were for searches on 'Minnie and Wallace Pike Clifford genealogy' and 'what nationality is the surname Pike', suggesting that the ads were suitably targeting the intended audience. In the first week there were about 300 impressions daily and four clicks daily.

And then things changed. Apparently once enough traffic and/or clicks had been observed, the algorithms within Google were able to learn what kind of content was associated with our keywords and what our target/clicking audience was interested in. Google was then able to begin displaying our ads within its 'display network'. That is, our ads began to appear in places such as GMail and other locations, without any search being performed at all, but presumably when the content was deemed relevant to our campaign's criteria. It started getting hundreds of impressions per hour, sometimes over 500 in a single hour. It got more clicks too. Clicks via the display network were not nearly as expensive as those via Google search, possibly because there is a kind of bidding auction involved for ads that are shown via Google search. One dollar might cover three display network ads, whereas a single Google search ad could cost as much as \$5 or more when it resulted in a click.

As the campaign progressed it was evident that it was also attracting some unwanted clicks, namely clicks that didn't appear to be made by people with an interest in Pike genealogy, but instead by people with an interest in pike fishing. That's an unfortunate consequence of having a surname that coincides with some other meaning. The good news is that the AdWords system permits 'negative keywords' to be entered, to help avoid displaying ads when the search/content is not to be targeted. So negative keywords like 'freshwater' and 'angling' and so forth were entered. They probably helped, but I don't think that they were completely effective. In hindsight, the ad with text about 'Pike family' (as opposed to the one about 'Pike ancestors') may also have inadvertently lured in some fishermen who weren't expecting to be taken to a genealogy project.



By the time that the campaign ended it had gotten a total of 57,907 impressions, leading to 259 clicks. The geographic breakdown of the impressions and clicks is as follows:

Location	Impressions	Clicks
UK	35686	158
Australia	12842	51
New Zealand	3762	18
Alberta	2743	13
Nova Scotia	859	4
Newfoundland & Labrador	662	9
Costa Rica	629	3
New Brunswick	564	3
Guernsey	81	0
Jersey	79	0

Within the UK, the top locations appear to have been London with 16 clicks, Leeds 4, Slough 4, Birmingham 3, Belfast 3, and then a bunch of 2s and 1s. It would be nice to have all of the locations from which clicks were made to be shown on a map, but I don't think that's a built-in reporting option. Still, the information reported by the system seemed to indicate that clicks came from all around the UK.

All in all, I think this was a pretty good exercise. Initially it looked as though we might get about 100 clicks in total, but we ended up with 158 in the UK alone, which was anyway the region that we most wanted to target. Also the UK got 61% of our total clicks, so that's pretty good too.

As for the keywords that generated the most clicks, 'Pike ancestry' won with 24 followed by 'Pike family' at 20. Next there was a 3-way tie for 'Pike family tree', 'Pike history' and 'Pike last name' each with 6. And then there were a few 4s 3s 2s and 1s for other desirable keywords/phrases that had been entered. This doesn't sum to 259 clicks though, as it probably only counts clicks that came from proper Google searches.

Google separately reported the actual search phrases that led to clicks, for which there was a 3-way tie for first place: 'Mitton family tree', 'Pike family tree' and 'Ward Pike family' each had two clicks. Then there was a bunch with one click each. Although no single search phrase is a clear winner, we can at least see that several involved searches for Pike family, such as:

- David Charles Pike genealogy
- Elsie Kate Pike 1895
- genealogy Pike Wiltshire
- last name Pike origin
- Pike family of Heytesbury

Other search phrases that resulted in clicks represented more generic genealogy queries. For example:

- Berry family tree
- Briggs ancestry
- Chambers family tree
- Perry family tree
- Marsh family history

And then there were those that involved ‘Pike’ but probably not genealogy, such as:

- pikelets origin
- which are the members of the pike family Wikipedia
- Zebby Pike song
- Mike the Pike 17cm
- largest member of the pike family
- can I get some photos information on the saltwater pike eel and saltwater pike fish species

As for whether the campaign was a success, I’d say it was, particularly since it got us some publicity that we wouldn’t otherwise have had, and it got us publicity in locations where we want it.

Of the two ads that were crafted, the one that said “Do you have PIKE ancestors? What is their origin? Learn more from the PIKE DNA PROJECT” got 43,537 impressions and 173 clicks. The one saying “Which PIKE family is yours? Want to find out? Join the PIKE DNA PROJECT” got 14,362 impressions and 86 clicks. The better click-per-impression ratio of the “Which PIKE family is yours?” ad may be because it inadvertently appealed to a wider audience than we had wanted to target.

As for money, the campaign cost \$291.20 in total. True to their word, Google subsequently put a credit for that amount into my AdWords account. However, they only did so after they had charged my credit card for the \$291.20 worth of advertising done during the campaign. Apparently the fine print of the coupon was not quite the ‘get up to \$300 in free advertising’ that I had thought it to be, but instead it was more akin to ‘spend up to \$300 and then get the same amount for free’.

So a new campaign to spend this credit in my account was set up to run from early April until the end of May. Having learned from the initial campaign, the new one was forged with a single text ad “Do you have PIKE ancestors? What is their origin? Learn more from the PIKE DNA PROJECT”. The other ad about ‘PIKE family’, which could have been misconstrued as pertaining to different types/subspecies of pike fish, was no longer shown. Additionally, a more substantial list of negative keywords was included in an attempt to inhibit the ad more forcefully from being shown when not relevant. The geographical areas that were targeted were also refined, this time mainly consisting of England, Wales, Australia, New Zealand, Jersey, Guernsey, Newfoundland & Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ottawa, Dublin and Glasgow. In terms of budget, the second campaign was limited to spending \$5.50 daily, and with a maximum cost per click of \$3.50, thereby ensuring that the campaign remained active for several weeks.

This second campaign appears to have done a better (albeit still imperfect) job of avoiding unwanted clicks. When the campaign had ended, it had generated 29,752 impressions and 186 clicks as follows:

Location	Impressions	Clicks
England	15526	110
Australia	7025	32
New Zealand	2565	8
Dublin	2158	14

Wales	777	7
Ottawa	425	4
Nova Scotia	383	2
Glasgow	369	1
Newfoundland & Labrador	301	8
Guernsey	66	0
Jersey	66	0
Other	91	0

Again, it provided our project with exposure that we might not have otherwise gotten, and in locations of key interest. Although the second campaign didn’t generate as many clicks as the first one, eliminating the ‘PIKE family’ ad in favour of just the ‘PIKE ancestors’ ad, coupled with the more aggressive list of negative keywords, likely helped to reduce the number of unwanted clicks.

One question that needs asking is “How effective were the campaigns at encouraging people to join the Pike DNA Project?” While we have had a modest increase in new members as well as inquiries from England and Australia since the campaigns began, it is impossible to tell whether the campaigns have played a significant role in this. That said, shortly after the second campaign concluded, a Pike in England joined the project and mentioned that he had recently seen our ad, giving us some evidence of success.

Although the campaigns have ended, additional project members are still welcome. Guild members who are in touch with Pikes or Pykes are encouraged to mention the project to them. ■

David is studying the surname Pike with variants Pikes, Pyke, Pykes and can be contacted at pike@one-name.org