

# Brand ads generate 50 percent more attention

EYEVIDO study in collaboration with eMBIS Academy examines the visual attention of Google Ads branding campaigns

In collaboration with the eMBIS Academy for Online Marketing ([www.embis.de](http://www.embis.de)), the usability testing company EYEVIDO investigated how the visual perception of ads on brand names compares to organic search results and how such ads affect users' click behavior.

A branding campaign is the placement of Google Ads on the company's own name. The goal: A company not only appears in the search results list, but an ad for the company is also displayed above the organic search results.

The result of the study by EYEVIDO and eMBIS: Visitors find it easier to click on an offer through Google Ads, the visual attention on relevant content increases significantly and companies receive more clicks overall.

## Initial situation

Since brand names are typically unique, companies usually end up at the top of the search results list in organic searches. Attention from the user is therefore guaranteed for the search result.

The question therefore arises as to whether it makes sense to book an additional paid campaign, even though the brand name already appears at the top of the result list. Or to be more precise:

- Does the doubled display of the brand name through the ad increase the visual awareness or does the ad rather distract from the good organic ranking?
- Can an ad prevent potential customers from being "hijacked" by clicks on third-party links, and/or can an ad "bring back" such customers?

## Brand ads help to keep user attention

- The decision to click on a company link was made more quickly and easily when brand ads were shown in addition to organic search results.
- Sometimes a third-party company hijacks potential customers by using your own brand's name in one of their ads. However, 13 percent of visual attention could be regained by running an own ad whenever a hijacking ad was shown. In addition, clicks on a third-party ad were significantly reduced.

## How do the big players do it?

We randomly examined 130 brands from the YouGov BrandIndex. The results:

- 125 of the companies were listed in first position in the organic search results. For the majority of companies, being visible is not a reason to run an ad campaign.
- In 56 percent of the 130 companies surveyed, the ad from their branding campaign was also shown simultaneously. So even among large companies that achieve very good positions in the search results list, the use of branded ads is widespread.

## Hijacking issue

However, 43 percent of the companies surveyed were affected by so-called keyword hijacking, i.e. the fact that a company places a Google ad on someone else's brand name. Example: The car repair service Pitstop runs an ad with the keyword "Dunlop" (see Figure 1).

Due to the relatively high frequency of ads from third-party companies, we considered the hijacking issue in our investigation and examined the impact of such ads on users' visual perception and click-through behavior.

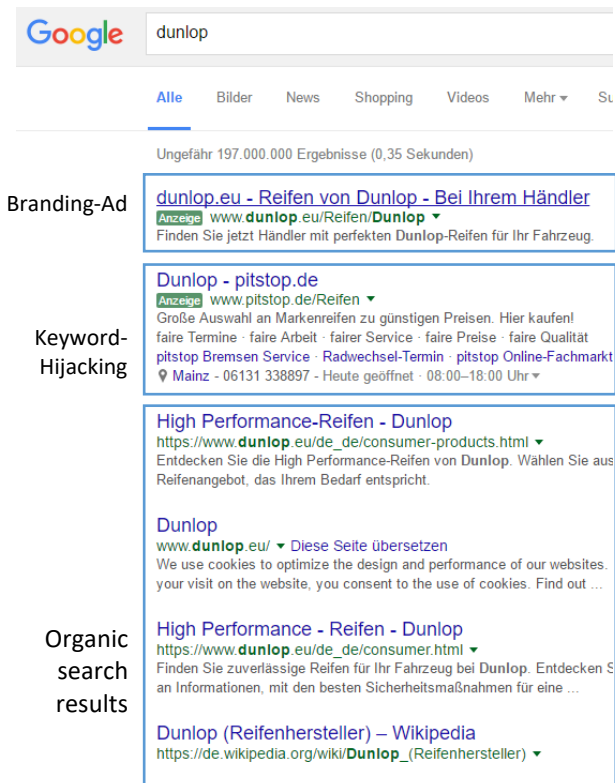


Figure 1: Google search results with brand ads, keyword hijacking and organic result using Dunlop as an example.

### Structure of the study

In our eye tracking study with 40 test participants, we investigated how visual attention is distributed on Google search result pages and which elements are clicked on. With the help of eye tracking, it is possible to examine which point on the screen is looked at by a test participant and for how long.

We compared the viewing and clicking behavior on differently structured search results pages.

The variants are:

- **Group A:** the search result page contains third-party and own brand ads.
- **Group B:** only organic search results are displayed.
- **Group C:** only own brand ads are displayed.
- **Group D:** only third-party brand ads are displayed.

The 40 test participants each performed 15 searches on well-known brands. They were between 18 and 31 years old (average: 22.8). 20 participants were female and 20 male.

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Figure 2: Group A (third-party and own ad)

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Figure 4: Group C (only own ad).

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Figure 3: Group B (no ad)

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Figure 5: Group D (only third-party ad)

The test assignments were each related in some way to a searched brand name, e.g., "You need construction materials and type 'Bauhaus' into Google. Search for the online shop of this hardware store." The test material consisted of 15 search result pages of brands from the current YouGov BrandIndex. The test participants should be familiar with the brands they were searching for, in order to simulate a search that was as realistic as possible.

The selected search result pages for group A each contained at least one own and one third-party ad. For the other groups, we then manipulated them in such a way that one search result page per brand name was created for each of the above-mentioned groups. In other words, ads were removed from the individual search result pages to create groups B, C and D, but no ads were "invented". The participants were exposed to alternating search result pages of the groups A, B, C and D as a result of their search query. This allowed us to compare the different perception and behavior depending on the search result variant.

### Study finding 1: Visual perception of Google ads in general

Because of its position above the search results and its visual similarity to the search results, the ads section on



the Google search result page generally attracts a lot of visual attention.

The following figure shows a result page with a heat map and the data of visual attention on the ad section. 45.7 percent of all fixations were on the ads. Only three percent of all result pages with google ads had no fixation on the ad area at all.

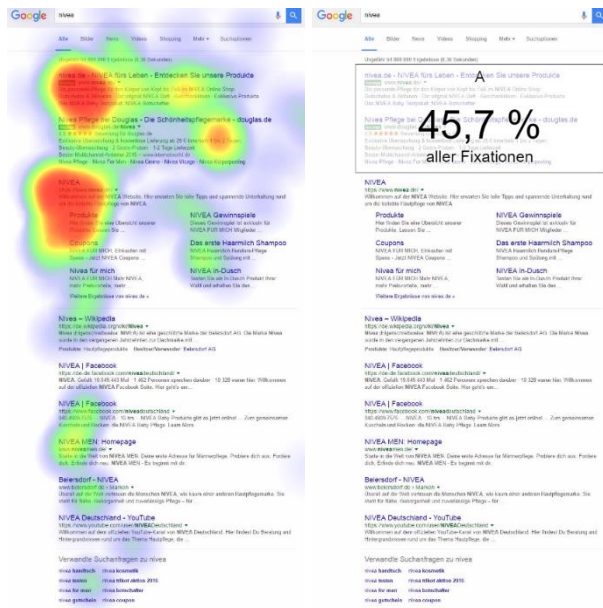


Figure 6: Search result page with heatmap and measurement of visual attention on the ad section (A)

In our study, an average of 35 percent of the participants' fixations were on the ad area, which translates to an average viewing time of 2.7 seconds.

**Study finding 2: Visual perception of brand ads (without hijacking ads)**

Third-party companies do not always place Google ads on the brand name of another company. In the case of less well-known companies, this is even quite unlikely. What happens to the click behavior of users if there is no hijacking ad, but an own brand ad appears in addition to the organic search result?

It is not surprising that by placing a brand ad, the attention on the organic search result area decreases.

- On average, the search result list was viewed for 5.8 seconds on Group B search result pages (no ads, organic search results only).

- If an ad was displayed above it, the viewing time of the search result list was reduced to 4.2 seconds.

	Group B No ads	Group C Only own branded ads
Viewing time search results total	5.8 s	4.2 s
Viewing time search results searched brand	3.5 s	2.7 s
Viewing time on the ad	-	2,5 s
Total viewing time of the brand	3.5 s	5.2 s
Viewing time third-party results	2.4 s	1.5 s

Table 1: Viewing times without Google ads and with brand ads.

If one considers the fixation period on the relevant search results, i.e. the search results of the brand in question, placing a brand ad still makes sense.

- In group B (no ads), the organic results of the searched brand were viewed for 3.5 seconds, the rest of the viewing time was spent on other companies.
- In group C (own ad only), the organic results of the brand were viewed for 2.7 seconds. However, the accompanying ad also accounted for 2.5 seconds, which together results in a relevant fixation time of 5.2 seconds.





Figure 7: Viewing time of relevant search results of group B (no ads) on an example page.



Figure 8: Viewing time of relevant search results and own ad of group C (only own ads) on an example page.

Conclusion: Overall, displaying a brand ad can increase the viewing time on one's own content by over 50 percent, while decreasing the attention on third-party search results by 40 percent.

**Study finding 3: Click behavior on brand ads (without hijacking ad)**

If the test participants were shown a brand ad of their own brand on the search result pages of group C (only own ads), 33.1 percent clicked on the ad instead of on the organic search result.

	Goup B No ads	Group C Only own branded ads
Click on search result area	100 %	66.9 %
Click on ad area	0 %	33.1 %

Table 2: Click behavior

Conclusion: If a brand ad was placed, 33.1 percent of the test participants generated additional costs by clicking on the ad, even though the organic search result of the brand was displayed below it.

**Study finding 4: Evaluation decision making process**

After each search task, participants were asked how easy it was for them to decide to click. Specifically, they were asked about their agreement with the statement "It was easy for me to decide on a link." where a 1 meant "I fully agree" and a 5 meant "I don't agree at all."

The results:

- Overall, the participants did not find the decisions difficult, and the average rating was 1.79.
- If no advertisement was available (group B), an average rating of 1.81 was given. The most difficult decision, with a value of 1.86, was made for a search result page in group D (only third-party ads).
- If an own ad was placed in addition to the third-party ad (group A), the decision was somewhat easier for the participants, with a score of 1.78. Moreover, the participants found it easiest to decide on a search results page in group C (only their own ad), with an average score of 1.72.

Conclusion: Running a brand ad seems to make the participants' decision easier, regardless of whether a third-party ad is already present or not.

**Study finding 5: Duration until click**

We also examined how much time the participants needed to click on a link, i.e. to make a decision.

The results:

- If only third-party or third-party and own ads were displayed (groups A and D), the subjects needed an average of 10 seconds to click on a link.
- The second-fastest decision to click, within 9.5 seconds, was made when no ads were visible at all.
- The participants clicked on a result fastest when they saw a search results page on which only ads for the brand they were looking for were displayed. It then took an average of just 9 seconds to click on a result.

Conclusion: If hijacking ads are present, the decision time is not influenced by an own ad. However, if no ad is present and a brand ad is placed, the time to a click is shortened.



**Study finding 6: Misleading visual attention and clicks through hijacking ads**

In light of the fact that third-party companies can also use a certain brand name as a keyword to run Google ads, the question arises to what extent third-party ads on one's own company name (ad hijacking) influence click frequency and visual attention.

For this purpose, the results of group D (only third-party ads) were examined:

- The third-party ad was viewed for an average of 1.5 seconds. An example gaze path can be seen in Figure 9.
- For Group D search results pages, 7.86 percent of clicks were on a hijacked ad, i.e., not on the brand participants searched for, but on the ad of a third-party company.
- In 40 percent of these search runs, participants did not have a single fixation on the organic search, i.e., they were "distracted" by the hijacking, so they did not even look at the search results.

Conclusion: Hijacking leads to a considerable loss of clicks and attention.

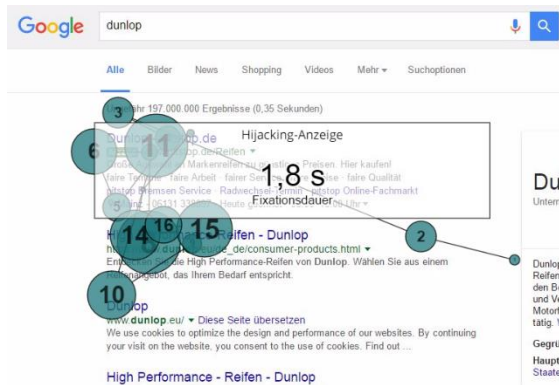


Figure 9: Gaze path of a single participant who looked at the hijacking ad for 1.8 seconds..

**Study finding 7: Mitigating the influence of hijacking ads with own ads**

The search results pages of group A were basically identical to those of group D, with the difference that the company's own ad was additionally displayed as the first ad.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Due to the high relevancy of the ad to the search term, the brand ad is usually displayed first.

- If the own branding ad appeared above the hijacking ad, the average attention on the third-party ad was slightly reduced, from 1.5 to 1.3 seconds.
- However, the impact on clicks was much stronger: Only 1.88 percent of clicks landed on a third-party ad.

	Group D Hijacking ads only	Group A Hijacking ads and own ads	Changes through own ad
Fixation duration on hijacking ad	1,5 s	1,3 s	Fixation time on hijacking ad decreases by 13 %
Click on hijacking ad	7,86 %	1,88 %	Clicks on hijacking ads dropped by 76 %

Table 3: Comparison of fixations and clicks with and without brand ads.

Conclusion: By using an own ad, about 13 percent of visual attention could be regained and hijacked clicks were reduced by 76 percent.

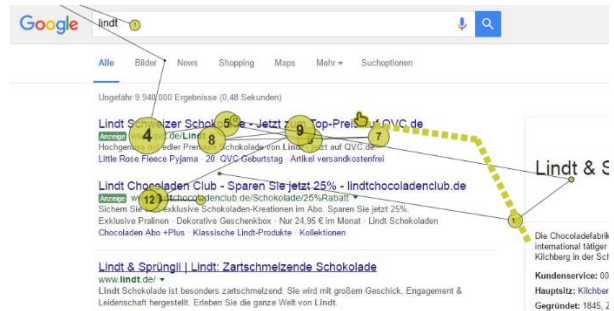


Figure 10: Gaze path, mouse path (dashed) and clicks of a participant on a search results page of group A.



## Summary and recommendations

### 1. Brand ads, yes or no?

If a company runs Google ads on its own brand name, many visitors (about 30 percent) click on the ad instead of the organic search result. These clicks generate costs. This is initially a disadvantage. However, these costs are manageable: Brand keywords are usually not in high competition and are therefore comparatively affordable.

Despite the additional costs, there are several points in favor of running brand ads:

- The decision to click on a link was particularly easy for the participants if a brand ad was available.
- Our research also showed that the decision to click was made more quickly when no other ads were available, and a brand ad was placed.

More importantly, the brand ad reduced attention to other elements of the search results list, i.e., the search results of other companies. After all, competitors automatically move further down the list as a result of the ad. The visual attention on the company's results was increased by 50 percent through such a brand campaign.

### 2. Dealing with hijacking ads

If third-party companies placed keywords ads on the brand name of your own company, a brand ad for your own brand makes sense. Without this countermeasure, about eight percent of visitors click on a third-party link.

When it comes to keyword hijacking:

- About 13 percent of the visual attention could be regained by an own ad.
- In addition, clicks on a third-party ad were significantly reduced. Placing an ad reduced clicks on hijacking ads from 7.86 percent to 1.88 percent.
- Another positive effect observed was that the placement of an ad made it somewhat easier for the participants to decide to click on a link and that the click rate was somewhat higher overall.



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