



# The Use of Search Engines in the Marketing of Accommodation Establishments: Adopt or Reject the Use of Google AdWords?

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## ABSTRACT

The digital marketing world has become an everyday part of life for almost all businesses, and many incorporate social media and other electronic media into their strategies. It is also a known fact that many companies do not optimise these electronic media to its fullest due to a variety of reasons. The aim of this research study was to firstly investigate the awareness of Google AdWords and secondly to establish the use of Google AdWords among star-graded overnight accommodation establishments. The study was conducted among star-graded overnight accommodation establishments in the Western Cape, a strongly competitive market resulting in an increased need for targeted, affordable marketing tools. An empirical study was executed which enabled the quantitative capturing of the use of Google AdWords among these establishments thereby addressing of the research objectives in full. The result of this research study indicates that a general perception exists regarding Google AdWords as being difficult to use, thus deterring the adoption thereof among many establishments. This however, is countered by establishments that do make use of Google AdWords as an e-marketing tool, in that it is perceived as a successful e-marketing tool among these establishments.

**Keywords:** Google Adwords, Search Engine Optimisation, Star-graded Overnight Accommodation Establishments

**JEL Classification:** M30

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The marketing of star-graded overnight accommodation establishments is often limited in scope, especially that of the smaller star-graded overnight accommodation establishments, such as guest houses and self-catering accommodation. Star-graded overnight accommodation establishments of this nature are primarily run by entrepreneurs who execute their own marketing activities and do not have the marketing budget of the big hotel chains (Nieman et al., 2008; Booyens and Visser, 2010; Tariq and Wahid, 2011). However, although limited, marketing of star-graded overnight accommodation establishments does occur.

Currently, the most popular traditional media used for marketing star-graded overnight accommodation establishments are the classified sections of publications, such as the Getaway and the Sunday Times Magazine (Business Partners Ltd., 2012) as well as websites such as TripAdvisor. Although these options are relatively affordable, they have a very specific and limited target audience as they are primarily local publications, and they

do not reach the important international market that visits South Africa (South African Tourism Report Q1, 2012). An alternative form of marketing that has received increased attention from academic researchers, and is able to reach the global market at an affordable price, is electronic marketing (e-marketing). This type of marketing is seen as a viable alternative for star-graded overnight accommodation establishments.

E-marketing can be defined as any marketing actions that require an interactive technology for its execution. While e-marketing primarily uses web-based or online channels, it is strictly speaking not limited to the online/web medium. Marketing using mobile technology, information kiosks and any other electronic channels is also seen as part of e-marketing (Dann and Dann, 2011).

One of the distinguishing characteristics of e-marketing is its non-intrusive nature. While traditional media attempts to get the attention of the audience regardless of whether the audience wants the information or not, e-marketing offers an opt-in type of marketing, where users can decide to click on and view an

advert. This is also beneficial to the marketer who is paying for the advertisement, as the web users that click on the advert are already indicating an interest in the advertised product or service; consequentially marketers pay to reach users that are likely to convert to a sale. This is unlike any traditional media, where there is no guarantee that the advertisement will be viewed, and much less that a response will be received from the consumers (Lee and Seda, 2009).

The study is not focused on e-marketing generally, but more specifically on Google AdWords as an e-marketing tool; as Google AdWords is one of the most popular e-marketing tools in the market (Kangas et al., 2007). Google AdWords is one element of e-marketing and is a form of pay-per-click (PPC) marketing, which is a subset of search engine marketing (SEM) within the broader context of e-marketing. AdWords (Google AdWords) is an advertising service by Google for businesses wanting to display ads on Google and its advertising network. The AdWords programme enables businesses to set a budget for advertising and only pay when people click the ads. The ad service is largely focused on keywords ([www.webopedia.com/TERM/A/adwords.html](http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/A/adwords.html)).

SEM is the use of search engines to provide the consumer with relevant information regarding a product or service at the time that they are actively searching for it (Ramos and Cota, 2006; Ryan, 2011). Search engines then provide a list of results, with links to websites that are the most relevant regarding the search criteria (also known as keywords). From the marketer's perspective, the ideal position for the link to the website to appear in the results is on the first results page of the search engine for specific keywords (Lee and Seda, 2009). It is important for the result to appear on the first page because searchers usually do not click through to the second or third results page. This means that businesses that are not on the first page will not be exposed to the searcher or potential consumer.

## 2. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of this research study was to firstly investigate the awareness of Google AdWords and secondly to establish the use of Google AdWords among star-graded overnight accommodation establishments.

The research addressed star-graded overnight accommodation establishments that are using Google AdWords as an e-marketing tool in an attempt to understand why Google AdWords is used or is not used, it will further endeavour to indicate the factors that affect the use of Google AdWords among star-graded overnight accommodation establishments and if they optimise the use of search engines in the process. In doing this, the study explained an area that possesses limited literature, that being the area of the e-marketing field; more specifically within the South African context. The contribution of this study is primarily to add to the theoretical knowledge base of e-marketing, an area that is lacking in empirical research due to the infancy of the field (El-Gohary, 2012). The findings of this research will benefit marketing practitioners and star-graded overnight accommodation establishments, providing insight into how these establishments can optimise the use of this medium.

## 3. THE MARKET FOR STAR-GRADED ACCOMMODATION ESTABLISHMENTS

Tourist accommodation is a prominent segment of tourism within South Africa, and tourism in turn contributes significantly to the South African economy, having injected R35.3 billion into the economy between January and June of 2013 (South Africa, 2013). Due to this contribution, the tourism sector has provided numerous opportunities for entrepreneurs to develop business ventures, which in turn stimulate the South African economy. The key to developing a sustainable business in the tourism sector is being noticeable in the clutter of tourism service providers that are attempting to attract the attention of both foreign and local tourists (SME Toolkit, 2013).

The fundamental concept of integrated marketing communication (IMC) is to integrate all the marketing communication elements, with the purpose of obtaining marketing communication objectives as stipulated in the marketing communication strategy. The integration of these elements will ensure that consumers experience one consistent message from all touch points with the business's brand, thereby improving brand equity (Du Plessis et al., 2007; Barker et al., 2012). In order to accomplish IMC successfully, comprehensive planning is required, thereby ensuring the alignment of all elements in the marketing mix. The six elements that constitute the marketing communication mix include advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing and e-marketing (Du Plessis et al., 2007; Koekemoer, 2011) (Figure 1).

All the elements in the model are important to marketers, but the focus will be on e-marketing for this discussion.

E-marketing can be defined as the use of new media, such as the internet, world wide web, smart phones and other interactive technologies to engage in marketing communication activities with current and potential consumers (Dann and Dann, 2011; Chaffey and Smith, 2013). The internet al.ne offers a wide array of new tools through which marketing communication can be achieved. E-marketing allows marketers to reach

**Figure 1:** Elements of integrated marketing communication



Source: Adapted from: Du Plessis et al. (2007), Koekemoer (2011)

consumers more frequently and with greater impact (Gurâu and Duquesnois, 2011).

The “e” in e-marketing indicates the digital application of technologies across business functions. During the initial stages of the internet, many businesses prioritised spending on Information Communication Technologies (ICT) (Dann and Dann, 2011). The results of ICT adoption were, however, not as successful as expected and resulted in a low adoption rate. Simultaneously, many marketers and strategists did not have the insight to identify the developing potential of the internet. The challenge was to integrate the potential of the internet with the principles of marketing. E-marketing constitutes the internet platform of e-marketing, and is therefore also known as internet marketing (Dehkordi et al., 2012; Gilmore et al., 2007). Various e-marketing tools are available as part of the e-marketing mix, and are ultimately part of IMC. The following are some of the e-marketing tools:

### 3.1. The Website

The website is defined as numerous files, in computer program code format, that are hosted on a server until a user requests these files via their computer by typing in a URL in a browser or clicking on a hyperlink. As an e-marketing tool, the website is fundamental to all other e-marketing communication (Swanepoel and Bothma, 2013). The number of visits that a website obtains is known as traffic. Once the individual is on the website, it is vital that the design will grab the attention of the visitor and thereby preventing him/her from leaving the site (Lee and Seda, 2009).

### 3.2. Social Media

Social media is defined as sites where users generate content by providing opinions and statuses (Charlesworth, 2009). Social media is where communication technologies, content and social interaction intersect (Dann and Dann, 2011. p. 344). Social media benefits the advertiser by enabling the advertiser to gather insight into consumers while building the brand and creating a competitive advantage (Boitor et al., 2011). Currently, social media networks are increasingly used by businesses to advertise their brand, products or services, and to build relationships with consumers (Boitor et al., 2011).

### 3.3. Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is defined as an idea or material that is being transferred from one individual to another, growing exponentially and creating a buzz about the particular material (Funk, 2009). Viral marketing is an online version of word-of-mouth marketing (Sterne and Priore, 2000, in Gay et al., 2007). Viral marketing can consist of an idea or material going viral within a niche market or the mass market (Funk, 2009), and viral marketing usually consists of a video. The crux of viral marketing is that it is low-budget and depends on the integral appeal of the idea to provoke people to forward the material to others.

### 3.4. Blogging

Blogging can be defined as the activity of uploading content on a blog. The content on the blog is a potential communication tool that can be used for marketing purposes. Blogs can be used for publishing a variety of content by individuals, companies, special interest groups or politicians.

### 3.5. Email Advertising

Email advertising can be defined as electronic mail, containing communication regarding new products or services, promotional offers, newflashes, reminders or newsletters, sent to consumers’ e-mail accounts (Gay et al., 2007). Email advertising is a cost-effective and easy-to-use marketing tool (Telang and Bhatt, 2011).

### 3.6. Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate marketing can be defined as an organisation hosting banners and links on its website, for an organisation wanting to advertise. The organisation wanting to advertise pays the host organisation an agreed amount each time a consumer clicks on the advertisement link, directing the consumer to the organisation wanting to advertiser’s website.

### 3.7. SEM

SEM has already been defined as the use of search engines to provide relevant information about a product or a service to a searcher at the time that the information is searched for (Ramos and Cota, 2006; Ryan, 2011). SEM is considered a critical success factor of an online marketing campaign. SEM encompasses a combination of technical and marketing skills, which, when combined, increase traffic to a website. SEM is based on the online consumer’s tendency to initiate the process of gathering data by means of starting a search on a search engine (Fesenmaier et al., 2011). As Google AdWords forms part of SEM, the following section will discuss this marketing tool in more detail.

The process of SEM commences with a search query. The query is typed into the search box of a search engine (Lee and Seda, 2009). This query gives the search engines a critical piece of information surrounding the information that is being searched for by the user, and hence indicates the results that should be displayed to address the query that was entered. The results are ranked in a search engine results page in order of most relevant to least relevant as per the search query (Chaffey and Smith, 2013). From the marketer’s perspective the ultimate purpose of SEM is for their website to appear on the first page of the search engine results (Lee and Seda, 2009).

In terms of the successes of SEM, it has been found that SEM has the highest return on investment (ROI), coupled with the lowest cost per acquisition when compared to the other forms of advertising and promotion. The SEM e-marketing tool can be subdivided into two major categories of SEM, including search engine optimisation (SEO) and PPC (Ramos and Cota, 2006). SEO is an organic form of SEM, and refers to optimising a company’s website so that it can be listed and ranked on a search engine’s results page at no cost. PPC, on the other hand, is paid-for advertising, which enables marketers to bid on certain keywords in order to appear on the first results page of search engines when the topic searched for is related to the website’s content.

### 3.8. Search Engines

A search engine is defined as “a program for the retrieval of data, files, or documents from a database or network, especially the internet” (Google, 2013). Search engines are used by searchers to filter through the masses of web pages that are available on

the internet. Search engines are also expected to provide the web pages that are most relevant and authoritative on a specific topic that is being searched for.

### 3.9. Keywords

Keywords are defined as the words or phrases that a user enters when searching on a search engine (Fleishner, 2011). Choosing the correct keywords is an important aspect of SEM, as these are the words that users will type into the search engine when looking for information about the marketer's products or services (Shore, n.d.).

### 3.10. SEO

SEO is an organic form of marketing by which the manipulation of the design of a website enables the website to be ranked on the first page of a search engine's results pages. This manipulation may include increasing links to the site, using keywords and improving content on the site to get the attention of search engine spiders (McStay, 2010).

### 3.11. PPC

PPC is defined as a text advertisement, which includes a link to a webpage and is displayed when a search engine user types in a query (Chaffey and Smith, 2013). PPC is sometimes referred to as 'the first monetisation of search' and was created by "GoTo," a company that later rebranded to Overture and then to Yahoo!, one of the top competing search engines in the market. Currently PPC is the most popular form of SEM (Zhang and Guan, 2008), and the purpose of PPC is to attract the attention of a user, get them to click on a link and be redirected to the marketer's website, thus creating relevant traffic for a website (Fleishner, 2010).

## 4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In light of the above the main objective of this study was to investigate the use of Google AdWords as an e-marketing tool among star-graded overnight accommodation establishments in the Western Cape and to ascertain the perceived success of Google AdWords among these accommodation establishments.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

The empirical data was collected by means of a web-based survey. The target population was a self-developed database of star-graded overnight accommodation establishments in the Western Cape area. The researcher utilised the database of star-graded overnight accommodation establishments in the Western Cape as provided by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa to develop the self-developed database including only star-graded overnight accommodation establishments in the Western Cape (all venue establishments were excluded as these are not considered overnight accommodation establishments).

The survey instruments were in the form of online self-administered questionnaires and were distributed by e-mail to the respondents. This study aimed to achieve a minimum sample size of 200 respondents (the primary requirement was that the surveys be fully completed surveys that could be thoroughly

analysed) which are in line with the requirements for statistical analysis purposes.

## 6. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study was conducted using a web-based self-administered survey. The purpose of the web-based self-administered survey is two-fold, firstly to gather the demographic profile of respondents, and secondly, to realise objectives of the study. The purpose of the demographic section is to develop a profile of the star-graded overnight accommodation establishments that took part in the research study.

The total population of 1953 star-graded overnight accommodation establishments in the Western Cape were given the opportunity to take part in the research survey. The study obtained 278 fully completed and usable responses to the self-administered web-based survey. The low response rate resulted in a non-response error; which means that the results could not be generalised to reflect the larger population.

## 7. RESEARCH FINDINGS

As was made clear in the discussion above there are various e-marketing tools that can be used by marketers. These tools however, are not effective if not optimised in some way. The research focussed on Google AdWords, which is one of the search engines marketers can use and the findings are given below.

## 8. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

### 8.1. Profile of Western Cape Star-graded Overnight Accommodation Establishments

The research study received a response from 278 star-graded overnight accommodation establishments' employees in the Western Cape. Eight types of star-graded overnight accommodation establishments were identified namely: Guest houses, self-catering, bed-and-breakfasts, hotels, lodges, backpackers, country houses, and caravanning and camping. The types of star-graded overnight accommodation establishment is relevant due to it being an indicator of the size of the establishment, which alludes to varying marketing budgets available for different types of accommodation.

From Figure 2 it is evident that guest houses (34%) constitute the majority of star-graded overnight accommodation establishments that took part in the study, followed by self-catering (30%) and bed-and-breakfasts (18%). Of the star-graded overnight accommodation establishments, 8% were hotels and 3% were lodges.

### 8.2. The Perceived Usefulness of Google AdWords

This question measured the perceived usefulness of Google AdWords, by posing five statements to respondents and requiring a response ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." A Likert scale was used for this purpose. The statements that were included in the scale can be found in Table 1. Also indicated in Table 1 is the distribution of responses from the scale.

**Table 1: The perceived usefulness of Google AdWords (n=267)**

Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Unknown (%)
Using Google AdWords would enable the marketing of an establishment more quickly	2 (0.7)	6 (2.2)	69 (25.8)	112 (41.9)	45 (16.9)	33 (12.4)
Using Google AdWords would improve an establishment's marketing performance	2 (0.7)	5 (1.9)	67 (25.1)	116 (43.4)	47 (17.6)	30 (11.2)
Using Google AdWords would enhance the effectiveness of marketing an establishment	2 (0.7)	5 (1.9)	67 (25.1)	121 (45.3)	43 (16.1)	29 (10.9)
Using Google AdWords would make it easier to market an establishment	3 (1.1)	6 (2.2)	75 (28.1)	104 (39.0)	43 (16.1)	36 (13.5)
Google AdWords is useful in marketing an establishment	3 (1.1)	5 (1.9)	72 (27.3)	104 (39.4)	47 (17.8)	33 (12.5)

From Table 1 it can be deduced that the majority of respondents perceive Google AdWords to be useful, with a response rate ranging from 39% to 45% for "agree" across all five statements. The mean and standard deviation of each item was calculated in order to provide further statistical insight as to the general response that was obtained. Table 2 shows the results obtained for the mean and standard deviation for each item. From Table 2, it is evident that responses were positive with regard to the perceived usefulness of Google AdWords, as the means of each item was higher than 3.79, and the overall mean was calculated at 3.82 with a standard deviation of 0.05.

According to respondents, Google AdWords is expected to perform well in terms of speed of marketing (Item 1; mean = 3.83), improving marketing performance (Item 2; mean = 3.85), enhancing marketing effectiveness (Item 3; mean = 3.83). However star-graded overnight accommodation establishment respondents do not expect Google AdWords to necessarily make it easier to market an star-graded overnight accommodation establishment or to be useful to market and star-graded overnight accommodation establishment (Item 4 and Item 5; mean = 3.79 and mean = 3.81 respectively) as both of these items scored lower than the overall mean.

The internal consistency of the scale used is determined by calculating Cronbach's alpha, which was found to be 0.98. Assuming that a Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 and above indicates that the scales can be accepted as being reliable, a 0.98 Cronbach's alpha is acceptable and, therefore, it can be said that all the items in the scale measure the same general construct.

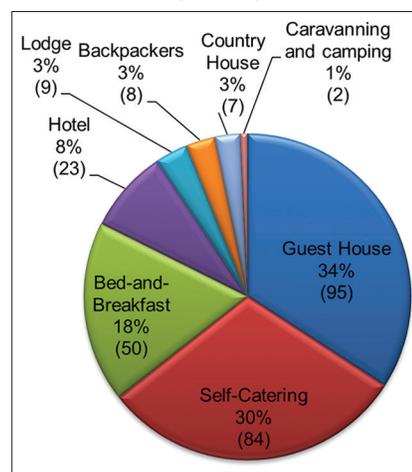
### 8.3. The Perceived Ease of Use of Google AdWords

The second Likert scale was used to determine the perceived ease of use of Google AdWords. Six statements were posed to respondents regarding their perceived ease of use of Google AdWords, and respondents were required to respond to each statement with a response ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." These statements and the summary of responses can be found in Table 3.

Table 3 is supported by the results in Table 4 which indicates the mean and standard deviation of each item in the Likert scale. From Tables 3 and 4, it is evident that the perceived ease of use (overall mean of 3.26) was lower than the perceived usefulness (overall mean of 3.82), but respondents did respond positively to

**Table 2: Perceived usefulness of Google AdWords descriptive statistics**

Item	Mean±Standard deviation
Using Google AdWords would enable the marketing of an establishment more quickly (n=233)	3.83±0.05
Using Google AdWords would improve an establishment's marketing performance (n=235)	3.85±0.05
Using Google AdWords would enhance the effectiveness of marketing an establishment (n=236)	3.83±0.05
Using Google AdWords would make it easier to market an establishment (n=231)	3.79±0.06
Google AdWords is useful in marketing an establishment (n=231)	3.81±0.05
Overall measure	3.82±0.05

**Figure 2: Type of star-graded overnight accommodation establishment (n = 278)**

the perceived usefulness of Google AdWords as an e-marketing tool (mean of 3.26).

With regard to the results for the specific items indicated in Table 3, it is evident that while respondents felt that it would be easy to learn to operate Google AdWords (the majority of responses indicating "agree" [36.0%] to Item 1), respondents were not as positive about being able to get Google AdWords to do what respondents wanted

**Table 3: Perceived ease of use of Google AdWords (n=276)**

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Unknown
Learning to operate Google AdWords would be easy for me	10 (3.7)	32 (12.0)	77 (28.8)	96 (36.0)	16 (6.0)	36 (13.5)
I would find it easy to get Google AdWords to do what I want it to do	11 (4.1)	36 (13.5)	91 (34.1)	80 (30.0)	8 (3.0)	41 (15.4)
My interaction with Google AdWords would be clear and understandable	10 (3.8)	25 (9.4)	102 (38.3)	79 (29.7)	8 (3.0)	42 (15.8)
I would find Google AdWords to be flexible to interact with	12 (4.5)	23 (8.6)	105 (39.3)	76 (28.5)	8 (3.0)	43 (16.1)
It would be easy for me to become skillful at using Google AdWords	11 (4.2)	22 (8.3)	93 (35.2)	84 (31.8)	12 (4.5)	42 (15.9)
I would find Google AdWords easy to use	9 (3.4)	26 (9.7)	88 (33.0)	96 (36.0)	11 (4.1)	37 (13.9)

**Table 4: Perceived ease of use descriptive statistics**

Item	Mean±Standard deviation
Learning to operate Google AdWords would be easy for me	3.33±0.06
I would find it easy to get Google AdWords to do what I want it to do	3.17±0.06
My interaction with Google AdWords would be clear and understandable	3.25±0.06
I would find Google AdWords to be flexible to interact with	3.21±0.06
It would be easy for me to become skillful at using Google AdWords	3.69±0.06
I would find Google AdWords easy to use	3.81±0.05
Overall measure	3.26±0.05

it to do (the majority of responses were neutral [34.1%]). From Item 2 it can be seen that 17.6% of respondents did not think that they would be able to get Google AdWords to do what they wanted it to do (mean = 3.17), which is the lowest mean among all items. Respondents were also not optimistic regarding communication with Google AdWords being clear and understandable (Item 3; mean = 3.25) and for Google AdWords being flexible to interact with (Item 4; mean = 3.21). However, most of the respondents indicated that Google AdWords would be easy to use with a reported mean of 3.81 for Item 6, which is the highest mean of all the items in the question. Respondents also felt that they would become skillful at using Google AdWords (Item 5; mean = 3.69).

In terms of comparing the two factors, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, the mean (3.26) and standard deviation (0.05) of perceived ease of use indicate that respondents are less likely to perceive Google AdWords to be easy to use when compared to their perception of the usefulness of Google AdWords which had a mean of 3.82. Therefore, Google AdWords is perceived to be useful but the deterring factor is the perceived ease of use.

In order to determine the reliability of this scale, the Cronbach's alpha was measured, where a Cronbach's alpha over 0.7 is considered acceptable. For this Likert scale measuring the perceived ease of use, a Cronbach's alpha was calculated at 0.98, therefore the scale is reliable.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results, analysis, and discussion certain recommendations can be made surrounding star-graded overnight accommodation

establishments and their perception of the use of Google AdWords as an e-marketing tool:

- It is recommended that the ease of use, as well as the usefulness of Google AdWords as an e-marketing tool be thoroughly communicated to star-graded overnight accommodation establishments. It is suggested that, if the usefulness and ease of use of Google AdWords be improved and better communicated, star-graded overnight accommodation establishments will be more inclined to use Google AdWords as an e-marketing tool.
- In order to improve the effectiveness of Google AdWords, it is recommended that the calculation of the ROI of Google AdWords be incorporated in the e-marketing tool, and that this calculation be communicated to star-graded overnight accommodation establishments. This will ensure that Google AdWords will become easier to measure and the effectiveness of the tool can be calculated in monetary terms, thus making it more quantifiable for star-graded overnight accommodation establishments also being indicative of the viability of Google AdWords as an e-marketing tool.
- Star-graded overnight accommodation establishments that are aiming to improve their position in the market should make use of Google AdWords in order to improve exposure of the star-graded overnight accommodation establishment and increase traffic to the star-graded overnight accommodation establishment's website, as respondents indicated that these are some of the successful benefits of Google AdWords as an e-marketing tool.
- Despite the negative perception regarding the ease of use, which found that respondents thought that Google AdWords was not that easy to use, it is recommended that star-graded overnight accommodation establishments use Google AdWords as an e-marketing tool. The reason for this recommendation is because users that do utilise Google AdWords find it to be an effective e-marketing tool.

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