

# Paid Search: PLAs Offer More Than Meets the Eye.

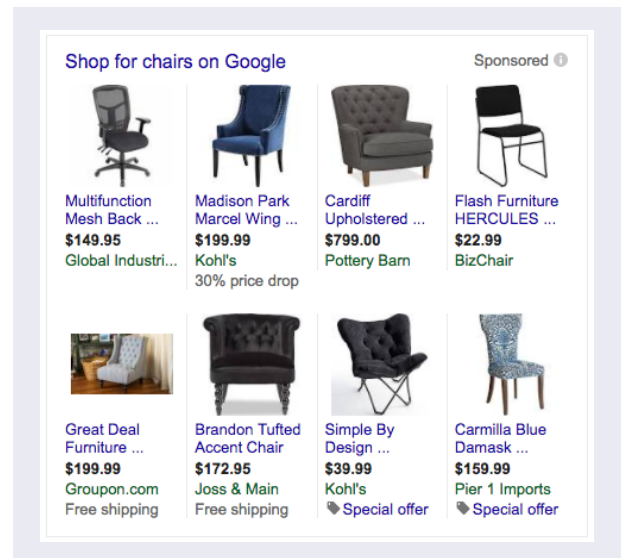
The competition for consumers' attention is tougher than ever. After extensive qualitative research from our in-house usability lab, we found that there's one attention-grabbing ad format that is perceived differently from the rest: Product Listing Ads (PLA).

## What is a Product Listing Ad?

Located at the top or side of the Search Engine Results Page (SERP), it's a grouping of images that rely heavily on imagery and contain other product attributes, such as rating stars, promotions, pricing, etc.

## Methodology

Research was conducted with 743 online survey respondents and 24 in-lab qualitative interviews. Both sets of participants were asked to complete a series of tasks requiring them to enter search terms related to various shopping scenarios and interact with a search results page. After completing each task, they were asked to explain what they did and why. Below are the results of our research.



## Key Finding: PLAs Were Not Commonly Viewed as Ads by Consumers.

Surprisingly, many of our respondents didn't categorize PLAs as ads at all. PLAs were labeled as helpful, accurate, easy, and seen as a convenient comparison tool, which ultimately resulted in more interactions.


## What Makes PLAs so Click-able?




















### Search Behavior and Perception


Respondents often ended up on the images tab, when using Google, to compare and narrow down their searches. However, the top of the images page is populated with PLAs, which unsuspecting respondents would click on—not realizing they were paid ads. The use of imagery and the subtlety of the "Sponsored" badge gave consumers the impression that PLAs were organic and not paid for.

***"49% of participants said that they did not click on ads during the survey when in fact they had clicked on PLAs."***

 **Consumers Love Imagery**

Product and lifestyle images used in PLAs grabbed consumers' attention due to their contrast with the rest of the text on the Search Engine Results Page (SERP).

<p><b>70% Off Accent Chairs - jossandmain.com</b>  <b>Ad</b> <a href="http://www.jossandmain.com/Accent-Chairs">www.jossandmain.com/Accent-Chairs</a>           4.5 ★★★★★ rating for jossandmain.com          Save on Accent Chairs. Free Shipping on Orders Over \$49.          Top Brands &amp; Styles · 70% Off Home Decor · Up to 70% Off Furniture          Styles: Cottage, Glam, Rustic, Nautical, Traditional</p> <p>Up to 70% Off Home Decor      Bed &amp; Bath          Furniture at Joss &amp; Main      Shop Lighting</p>		<table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="876 546 998 756">   <b>Carmilla Blue Damask ...</b>  <b>\$159.99</b>                  Pier 1 Imports   Special offer             </td> <td data-bbox="1006 546 1136 756">   <b>Fabric Reception ...</b>  <b>\$74.95</b>                  Global Industri...             </td> <td data-bbox="1144 546 1274 756">   <b>Madison Park Marcel Wing ...</b>  <b>\$199.99</b>                  Kohl's                  30% price drop             </td> <td data-bbox="1282 546 1404 756">   <b>Great Deal Furniture ...</b>  <b>\$199.99</b>                  Groupon.com                  Free shipping             </td> </tr> </table>	 <b>Carmilla Blue Damask ...</b> <b>\$159.99</b> Pier 1 Imports  Special offer	 <b>Fabric Reception ...</b> <b>\$74.95</b> Global Industri...	 <b>Madison Park Marcel Wing ...</b> <b>\$199.99</b> Kohl's 30% price drop	 <b>Great Deal Furniture ...</b> <b>\$199.99</b> Groupon.com Free shipping
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<b>Text Ad</b>		<b>PLA Ad</b>				

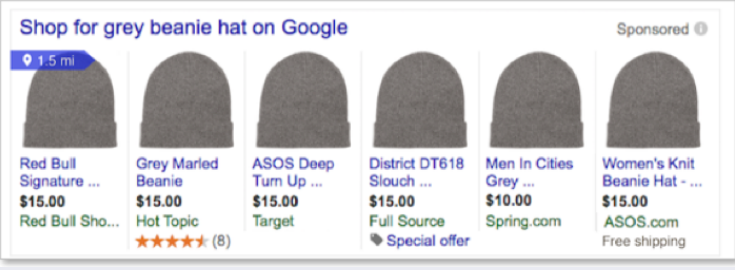
 **Easy to Compare**

Participants were able to quickly scan and evaluate PLAs visually. This enabled them to visualize the item in context, confirm the right style, evaluate sizing, and determine its quality.

**PLA Research Task: Shop for a Grey Beanie Hat**

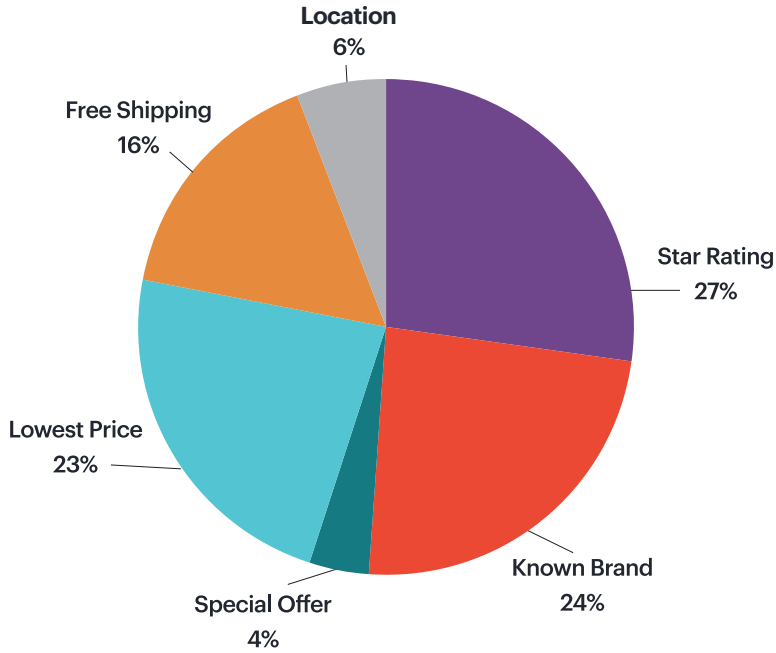
We asked respondents to search for this item, and set some parameters. While we used the same “Grey Beanie Hat” image, we included an array of different PLA attributes (e.g., location, ratings, free shipping, etc.) to see which ad had the most engagement.

**Search Factors:**

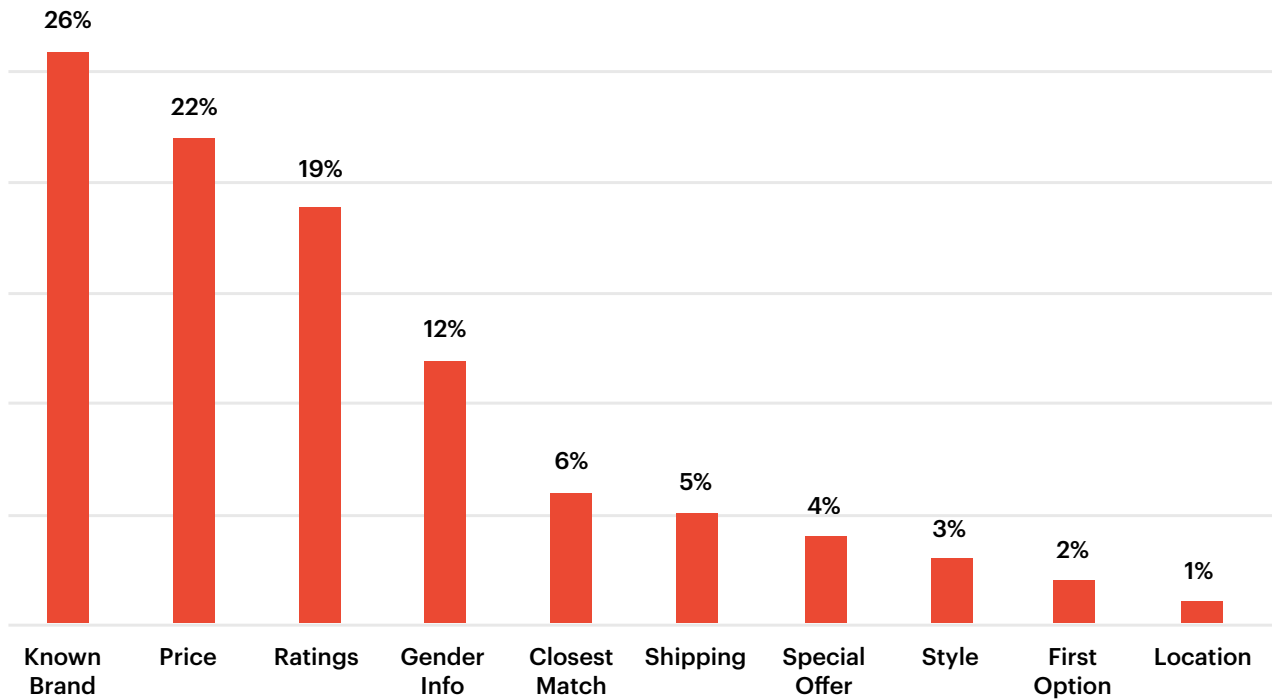


<b>Location</b>	<b>Ratings</b>	<b>Known Brand</b>	<b>Special Offer</b>	<b>Low Price</b>	<b>Free Shipping</b>
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Which aspect was most important?



What made respondents click?



## Key Takeaways:

### Brand Preference Often Outweighed Cost

PLAs that featured a brand logo or name often performed better than other PLAs without it.

### Product-based Ratings had an Unexpected Influence

While ratings accounted for 19% of responses, respondents weren't necessarily motivated by the number of rating stars. Surprisingly, it was the presence of the product-based rating itself that visually grabbed peoples' attention and prompted them to click.

## PLA Program Recommendations

PLAs are a great way of attracting new consumers who have an aversion to text ads. Generally speaking, respondents were much more comfortable clicking on the visually appealing PLAs, which at times, were not perceived as ads.

As an advertiser, you should be sure to invest in PLA programs or ensure you are creating a product feed to launch a campaign. Once it has been launched, make sure that you're optimizing your product feeds and testing it at all times.

### Feed Management is Critical:

- Ensure images are large, clear, and in context whenever relevant.
- Titles and descriptions must be accurate and set correct expectations for the navigation path.
- Adjust ad colors to optimize performance.
- Implement seller ratings, which can call attention to your PLA listing vs. another competitor without a ratings system.
- Make sure you do a routine audit and evaluation of your product images. Test additional images in the data feed to see which image performs best.
- PLA campaigns should be opted into the Search Partner Network. This is because image search is not part of the "core" Search Network (Google.com, Google Play, Google Shopping, and Google Maps).

Based on our research, we concluded that the primary drivers of PLA clicks were strong imagery, followed by brand recognition and then cost. After all, a great image is worth a thousand clicks or more!

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