

# VisionDirect found 9.6 percent sales conversion with Google AdWords.



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Steven Holmes  
Director of Online Marketing  
VisionDirect



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## ABOUT GOOGLE ADWORDS

Google AdWords is currently used by thousands of businesses worldwide to gain new customers in a cost-effective way. AdWords uses keywords to precisely target ad delivery to web users seeking information about particular product or service. The program is based on cost-per-click (CPC) pricing, so advertisers only pay when an ad is clicked. Advertisers can take advantage of an extremely broad distribution network and choose the level of support and spending appropriate for their business.

For more information, go to  
[www.google.com/ads](http://www.google.com/ads)

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In less than 20 years, contact lens technology has dramatically changed the business. Today people have a wide range of choices, including disposables (daily, weekly, monthly), permeables, toric and vial lenses – even a range of colors. After the occasional eye exam and prescription, contact lens wearers are free to buy multiple pairs as extras or replacements – and they are doing so in great numbers online. This means online retailers like VisionDirect (and its related sites, LensSmart.com and 1StopContacts.com) attract a large volume international business, and can offer a selection of two million lenses, one-day turnaround, guaranteed low prices, plus extras like free shipping and frequent buyer points.

Based in Vancouver, B.C., today VisionDirect is the contact lens replacement supplier for online pharmacy Drugstore.com, which acquired the company late in 2003.

## Challenge

When VisionDirect began shipping orders in 1999, says Steven Holmes, director of online marketing for VisionDirect, there was little competition for online buyers. Today, the challenge is to stand out in an increasingly crowded field of sellers. And, Holmes says, the ongoing quest for business is twofold: to find a steady stream of new buyers, and to retain repeat customers. VisionDirect began using Google keyword advertising to help with both starting in 2000. Leaving no opportunity untried, Holmes also used ad banners, other keyword ad programs, paid inclusion in major portals, and affiliate marketing.

## Results

Holmes believes in developing Google AdWords™ campaigns, watching their performance, and adjusting them over time as customers respond. Two years ago, he ran ads on an “exhaustive” list of keywords – about 4,000 of them. Today, he’s edited that list but has added campaigns for countries and currencies besides the U.S. (Canada, U.K., and the Euro). By offering a huge selection and one-day delivery, VisionDirect cares about retaining customers. This approach has paid off well. In the fourth quarter of 2003, Holmes reports overall site conversion of 12 to 13 percent – and credits Google with the lion’s share, 9.6 percent, through AdWords. Further, he notes that average sale per order is \$5 greater on Google than on another keyword ad program. Holmes also describes AdWords account management as being “much more reliable” than another program he uses. “The reports are better. They’re easier and faster to run, and the top-line summaries are very useful.”

As his company’s marketing focus has shifted, Holmes says, he’s narrowed his marketing options down to a few affiliate marketing programs plus keyword advertising. “Everything else is too expensive – and we get a much higher rate of return from our keyword ads,” he adds. Looking back, Holmes remembers “packing orders on top of our washing machine. We didn’t spend money outsourcing in the beginning.” As a result, the company has remained profitable during a turbulent period for e-commerce. This slow-but-steady build has worked well, Holmes observes. “We have doubled our gross revenue year after year. Google has been, and will be, the most important piece of our customer acquisition strategy.”