

# TROUBLESHOOTING AD PERFORMANCE



If you're not getting the results you want from your ads, this guide can help you figure out:

- What might be causing that
- What you can do about it

While this article can't tell you exactly what's causing a given ad's performance issue, it can explain the possibilities, direct you to tools that can help you narrow them down and recommend actions to take. It covers both poor performance and unexpected performance fluctuation.

If your issue is that your ad isn't delivering at all, it's worth doing a quick check to make sure none of the following non-performance issues are causing your ads to not be delivered before proceeding:

- Ad not approved. Facebook makes sure each ad you create follows our [policies](#) before Facebook starts showing it. If your ad wasn't approved, you can [edit and resubmit it](#).
- Paused ad. If you've paused your campaign, ad set or ad, Facebook won't show it. Learn how to [un-pause it](#).
- Spending limit reached. If you set an account spending limit and reach it, Facebook stops showing all your ads. If you set a campaign spending limit and reach it, Facebook stops showing all the ads in that campaign. If you want us to start showing those ads again, change or reset your [account spending limit](#) or [campaign spending limit](#).
- Schedule. Check that your ad isn't scheduled to run in the future. Facebook will only show your ad during the time period you choose. To have it start running now, [change your schedule](#).

If none of these are the issue, Facebook recommends refining your bid strategy, targeting and/or creative. We'll explain how in the next sections.

## Types of performance issues

There are two general ways to classify performance issues:

- Ad sets or campaigns aren't spending enough. This means your ad is not competitive in the [auction](#) or there aren't enough results available in your target audience so Facebook stopped delivering your ads or can't deliver them consistently.
- Costs too high. Your ads may be delivering consistently, but the average cost of each [optimization event](#) is too high for you to maintain a profit from your ads.

## Changes you can make to improve performance

There are three major types of changes you can make to try to improve performance:

- [Bid strategy](#). An uncompetitive bid strategy will prevent you from winning enough auctions to spend your budget. An overly flexible bid strategy may lead to unsustainable costs. We'll address how to deal with each type of problem below.
- [Targeting](#). A target audience that's too narrow may reduce your chances of spending your budget. A high-quality audience that has less targeting constraints may help increase spend and reduce the cost per optimization event.
- Creative. An ad that doesn't resonate with the people seeing it make make it challenging to spend your campaign's budget and/or have a higher cost per optimization event. Try different creative.

Note: Ad sets that are optimized for conversions sometimes also perform poorly because they can't gather enough optimization events to stabilize delivery and costs. You can get specific recommendations for improving the performance of conversion campaigns in our set of [best practices guides](#). However, the recommendations in this guide are still relevant for conversion campaigns.

## Bid strategies to increase spend

If you can't win auctions, Facebook can't show your ad. Increasing the amount Facebook can bid for you isn't the only way to become more competitive, but it's a powerful way that you have direct control over. There are three ways to do this:

- Switch to the [lowest cost bid strategy](#) without a bid cap. If you're not already using this bid strategy, try switching to it. It allows us to bid as much as is needed to spend your full budget. This is the simplest way to improve delivery and spend your full budget. It should work for most advertisers, especially if they care more about spending their full budget than controlling cost on a result-by-result basis.
- If you're using a bid cap, increase it. The 'Bid Limited' status in the Delivery column indicates when bids at or above your bid cap are winning auctions. If your ad set is not delivering as expected and you see the 'Bid Limited' Delivery status, the ad set is not delivering due to a low bid cap. If you decide to increase your bid cap, monitor the results and adjust again as needed. You should think of your bid cap as something that needs to be monitored and adjusted based on results, not as a perfect amount you can find and then use indefinitely.
- If you're using a [cost target](#), change it. You're more likely to be experiencing performance issues if your cost target is too low (not competitive). If that's the case, increase it. Aim for an amount that's as low as possible while still getting consistent delivery. Though less likely, it's also possible you're experiencing performance issues because your cost target is too high (FB can't

find results that are expensive enough to reach it). If this is the case, lowering your cost target may actually improve delivery.

Keep in mind that your budget may not change or improve ad performance. The only time a [budget](#) could affect performance is if it's not at least 5 times higher than your bid cap or cost target. That would mean your ad set isn't in a good position to get at least 50 of its optimization event per week. If your budget is not at least 5 times higher than your bid cap or cost target, increase it. Otherwise, a budget change won't affect performance.

## Bid strategies to reduce costs

If your cost-per-optimization event is too high and you're using the lowest cost bid strategy without a bid cap, add a bid cap or switch to target cost. This will give you more control over your cost per optimization event. If you're already using a bid cap or cost target but your costs are still too high, lower it. In either scenario, keep in mind that it could lead to less delivery if your bid cap is too low or your cost target is too low or too high.

Whether you're trying to increase spend or reduce costs, be sure to monitor the results of the change and adjust again as needed. If your change is significant enough to reset the [learning phase](#), allow it to end before making another change.

## Targeting that's too narrow or not relevant enough

When attempting to improve performance through targeting changes, there are two general targeting strategies you can try:

- Improving the quality of your audience

- Broadening your audience

The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, so it's worth trying to find a balance between both.

## **Improving the quality of your audience**

Improving the quality of your audience makes it easier for us to find results and increases the relevancy of your ads. This can help you compete in auctions. If you want to improve the quality of your audience using demographic criteria, ask yourself questions like:

- **Where are my customers?** If you're a local business or can only ship items to certain places, don't target, say, an entire country. Target your local area or the areas you can ship to.
- **Who are my customers?** Think about what basic traits your customers may have in common. Are they likely to be older or younger? Are they likely to be a particular gender? Where are they likely to live? What interests might they share?
- **What language do my customers speak?** Facebook doesn't translate your ad copy into other languages, so make sure the audience you're targeting can read your ad using appropriate language targeting choices.
- **Do I have better insight into a given type of targeting than Facebook would?** This can be difficult to know in every situation, as it depends. If you think you have information that Facebook doesn't have, you should include that in your targeting. This helps us find the best people to show your ads to. However, if you think Facebook is the better information resource, then you shouldn't need to add additional details to your targeting criteria. No matter how broad or narrow your audience, Facebook's delivery system tries to optimize your targeting by showing your ads to the people most likely to interact with them. Excessive targeting choices may restrict our delivery system and could end up hurting your ad's performance.

- **Am I excluding my audience strategically?** Including additional targeting criteria is helpful, but don't ignore your ability to exclude too. Doing so can help us focus on the right people faster.
- **Am I using Audience Insights to guide me?** If you're really unsure who to target, but also don't want to leave optimization up to Facebook's delivery system alone, use [Audience Insights](#). It can show you relevant information about your target audience that can help you refine your targeting and your creative.

If you want to leverage customer information you have to improve the quality of your targeting:

- **Create a Custom Audience.** Facebook can target ads to people who already interact with your business using [Custom Audiences](#). Facebook can create a specific audience made up of people who've engaged with your content on Facebook's family of apps and services, visited your website, used your mobile app and/or are on your customer list.
- **Create a lookalike audience.** If you're already using a Custom Audience on your poorly-performing ad set, you may have saturated it (meaning people in it are no longer responding to your ads). To extend the success of that audience, consider using it as a source for a [lookalike audience](#), which finds people similar to those in your source audience.

## **Broadening your audience**

No matter how big your audience is, Facebook is always showing your ads to the people they think are most likely to take the action your ad set is optimized for. Because of this, it's usually a best practice to not restrict targeting unless you have a good reason to do so (see above). If you're not totally sure who to target and can't use a Custom Audience, start with a broad audience, then see who

responds to your ads. Based on what you learn, refine your audience and monitor your ad's performance to inform additional changes.

Note: Remember that any change to targeting resets the learning phase. We recommend waiting until an ad campaign ends before judging how effective a change was and/or making another.

If you want to broaden your audience:

- Ensure you're targeting people who are in your service location, or who you can ship your products to. Take advantage of our targeting system's ability to help you [find the populous areas](#) near your business or to [deliver your ads worldwide or regionally](#). Doing so can greatly expand the reach of your campaigns, opening them up to a range of new (and potentially better) results.
- Use [targeting expansion](#): This feature gives us the option to expand your detailed targeting if we think doing so will get you better results. (Note that this feature isn't currently available for all marketing objectives.)
- Consolidate ad sets so you have larger audiences for each one. Having too many similar ad sets in your campaign could lead to auction overlap (meaning your ad sets end up in the same auction, and Facebook has to remove one) or too little data for each ad set. (Facebook usually need about 50 optimization events each week to ensure consistent delivery.) If the ad sets that are performing poorly are targeting similar audiences or are optimized for the same result, consider combining those ad sets and their budgets. This will help increase delivery. Be sure to check [Delivery Insights](#) (more information later in this article) to find out if [auction overlap](#) is causing performance issues, or check how much your audiences overlap ahead of time using the [audience overlap tool](#).
- **Use automatic placements.** Facebook can deliver your ads across the Facebook family of apps and services, and we recommend taking advantage of this. It helps us find people in your target audience in more places and opens your ad set up to more (and potentially better) results. By selecting [automatic](#)



[placements](#) during ad set creation, you enable us to deliver your ads to all available placements, finding the best results across them. This can help increase delivery and control costs.

- **Remove unnecessary targeting restrictions.** If you've used the Narrow Audience or Narrow Further option in the “[Detailed Targeting](#)” section of ad set creation, consider moving those interests to the regular “Include” section. This means people will only have to meet one of your criteria to be included in your audience, not all of them.  
If you're excluding anyone unnecessarily, remove that restriction too.  
If you're using a Custom Audience or lookalike audience, we recommend not using any additional targeting.  
If it makes sense to at least try expanding your age or gender targeting, do so. For example: If you target people younger than 30 because you think that's the most likely age for people interested in your product, then try expanding your age range. Even if it ends up that most people who are interested in your product are younger than 30, Facebook may still be able to find a worthwhile number of people older than that who are likewise interested in your product.

## Creative that doesn't resonate

Because Facebook considers user value in addition to advertiser value when deciding which ads to show, having creative that resonates with your target audience is an important aspect of ad performance. Facebook offers two products to help optimize your creative:

- [Dynamic creative](#). This enables you to give us creative components that we'll test and configure for the best results from each impression.

- [Placement asset customization](#). This enables you to use one ad set with assets customized for each placement, reducing the number of ad sets needed.

Facebook also offers resources for making qualitative improvements to your creative:

- [Best Practices to Make Your Ad More Engaging](#)
- [Creative Hub](#)
- [Ads Guide](#)

## Summary

It's possible that a combination of these restrictions caused your ad's performance issues. Facebook recommends thinking about each suggestion in relation to one another. For example, if you're sure you have great creative, you may not be targeting an audience that's receptive to it. Conversely, if you're sure you're targeting the right audience, you may not have the right creative to capture the audience's attention. (A useful tool for refining both your targeting and creative is Audience Insights, which can help you find a more receptive target audience or gain a better understanding of your current one.) When choosing which ads to show, we consider the value to users, as well as advertisers. This means that your targeting and creative matter at least as much as your bid strategy. If your targeting is appropriate and your creative is relevant, this will give you a competitive advantage. If people seeing your ad don't like it, that puts you at a disadvantage.

Additionally, if you're sure your creative and targeting are right, you may need to adjust your bid strategy so you that the audience can see your creative.

Conversely, if you can't afford to change your bid strategy, refining your targeting and/or creative is another powerful way you increase your competitiveness.

## Causes of fluctuating or unexpected performance

Sometimes your ad's performance will change even if you haven't made changes to your ad. In this section, we'll discuss why that happens and direct you to tools to help diagnose the specific cause.

When confronted with fluctuating or unexpected performance, it's important to remember:

- Your ads exist in a dynamic marketplace where many advertisers are competing to reach the same people you want to reach. This means that ad performance may change even when you haven't made any changes to your ad. Sometimes competition increases, which may lead to fewer and/or more expensive results. Sometimes competition decreases, which may lead to more and/or cheaper results.
- Fluctuating performance should be expected when your ad runs (for the first time or after a significant edit). There's a minimum amount of data Facebook needs (usually about 50 optimization events) to start to stabilize the delivery and costs for your ad set. Facebook calls the period before they have this data the “learning phase.” We explain it in more detail below.
- No ad can sustain high performance forever. Even if you create an ad that couldn't be more relevant to your target audience, it'll become less effective after they've seen it enough times. You should also expect costs to rise if you significantly increase the budget of an ad using the [lowest cost bid strategy](#) because of [pacing](#).
- The more control you choose to have, the closer you have to monitor your performance to make adjustments. There are various points in ad creation that allow you to either take more control over specific aspects of your ad performance or empower Facebook's delivery system to control those aspects for you. For

example, the lowest cost bid strategy without a bid cap let's our system automatically bid whatever is needed to try to spend your full budget. Choosing this option saves you management time in exchange for some control of your costs. If you add a bid cap you have more control over costs, but you'll need to spend more time managing the ad set to maintain performance by adjusting the bid cap.

We offer two tools to help you understand fluctuating or unexpected performance:

- [Delivery Insights](#)
- [The learning phase](#)

## Delivery Insights

Delivery Insights can help you understand if you've exhausted your target audience, if some of your ad sets are competing against each other due to similar targeting, or if auction competition has increased. Though these issues are not as directly in your control as other issues outlined above, they are related to them and you can use the same strategies to deal with them.

## The learning phase

The learning phase tells you when Facebook is still gathering the data Facebook needs to stabilize your delivery and costs. Facebook shows it in the "Delivery" column in Ads Manager. During this phase of your ad's delivery, Facebook recommends not making significant edits. In other words, if you're not satisfied with performance during the learning phase, Facebook recommends against using any of the strategies Facebook outlined above. Wait until the learning phase ends (either because your ad set got around 50 optimization events or

failed to get enough), then you can evaluate performance in an informed way and make adjustments as necessary.

## Summary

Here's a general framework you can use for evaluating ad performance and making changes to improve it:

1. After creating or significantly editing your ad set, allow the learning phase to end.
2. Once it has, evaluate your performance based on what specific goal you're trying to achieve.
3. If you're not satisfied with the results, check Delivery Insights. (If you are, continue to monitor your results and return to this guide as needed.)
4. If Delivery Insights helps you diagnose your problem, use that as guidance as you make changes. If it doesn't, determine whether your issue is with the amount of budget spent (underdelivery) or costs. With what you're trying to improve in mind, adjust your bid, targeting and/or creative based on what you think will be most impactful and what you have the most flexibility on.
5. If your changes reset the learning phase, let it end and evaluate again.

You can succeed if you monitor your results using these tools, make appropriate changes and give them a chance to have an effect.

Source: Facebook

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