Follow the Blueprint

We are hoping this document will give other interested in replicating the experiment an idea of what to expect in terms of planning, timeline, skills and resources. We're also hoping others will "fork" and modify this set of instructions to add better, more effective steps and tips, or to adapt them to specific contexts.

Campaign preparation

STEP 1

Identify the problem you are trying to address through a campaign

As a starting point, identify the problem you are confronting, and its key characteristics. During the pilot, the problem we identified was ISIS's ability to recruit and spread propaganda through dissemination of particular myths, narratives, and calls to action.

STEP 2

Identify what you want achieve

Identify what needs to change to address the problem, and ensure you have a clear understanding of how a campaign will contribute to that change. Different campaigns have different desired outcomes. You may wish to undermine the ability of a group to recruit, you may wish to change the minds of people that have already joined or you may with to mobilise counter-activists against an extremist group. Having a clear aim is an essential component to a successful campaign.

STEP 3

Map the extremist content you're trying to address

Many campaigns fail as they are based on assumptions rather than evidence. As such it is essential to map out the online content you are seeking to counter or undermine. For example, recruitment narratives are likely to change with regions, languages, target audience, etc, so it is crucial in this step to engage experts on the type of extremism you are seeking to counter. It can be useful to begin the mapping process with pre-existing lists or databases of content online. In our case we found Jihadology a useful starting point when mapping ISIS recruitment content. For far right extremism resources maintained by the SPLC may prove helpful.

STEP 4

Analyze this content to map the main recruitment narratives

Each piece of content identified during step one should now be analysed and placed in the context of the broader extremist narratives. At this stage subject matter experts must be engaged in order to filter this content into a manageable selection of key narratives used by the extremist group. During the pilot we identified five key ISIS narratives. We found that engaging former extremists, defectors and security service personnel is a useful addition to engaging with academic experts in the field. The Against Violent Extremism network allows organisations to connect with former extremists.

STEP 5

Gather content that counters the key narratives you've identified

Using your key narratives, start to gather video content that counters these narratives. In order to do this, use simple snowball sampling by searching for content countering your key narratives on Google and exploring available content. In addition to having researchers search for counter-content based on the key narratives, community activists and others should be engaged to make recommendations around effective content which may not be indexed accurately.

STEP 6

Create a database of your counter-arguments

Draw your counter-content into a database. Code this database by theme, content creator, video length, probable resonance with your target audience, production quality and any other factors which may be useful in the decision making process. As in previous steps, community activists and others should be engaged to make recommendations around the most effective content in this database.

STEP 7

Select the videos you will use, start making possible playlists

Pick the best videos in your database and send a heads up email, or YouTube message to the content owners to notify them that you'll use their videos. Sort them into possible playlists, with each playlist corresponding to a theme you have identified in step #2. It may not be the case that your channel benefits from being too closely associated with your subject matter. During the pilot we deliberately built a channel that appeared to be a generic content aggregation channel.

STEP 8

Arrange your videos within each playlist to tell a story

For each playlist, attempt to develop a narrative arc, bringing together the content so that each video flows naturally from one to the other. Each playlist should now have roughly ten videos within it. If possible, ensure that the first video is striking and draws the user in. When creating a playlist around the 'Victimhood of the Ummah" for example, we told a story which began by showing the reality of daily life for Muslims living in the west and slowly moved the viewer towards the negative reality of life under ISIS. This took the user on a narrative journey even though the content was uploaded by different creators.

STEP 9

Develop trailers for your playlists

If you're planning to use video advertising in your campaign, then Each you could use your video ad as the playlist to draw users in. These trailers should be of high quality and, where creative capacity does not exist in house, should be developed by trusted professional film makers. The trailers should draw on the content for the playlist which they are promoting and broadly address the kay narrative of the playlist it is promoting. Trailers should be: Short, engaging and ambiguous enough so users committed to extremist beliefs will not immediately recognize that the content of the playlist conflicts with their worldview. See here

for example.

STEP 10

Pick an identity for your YouTube channel
Decide on an overarching identity for your channel, and design appropriate logos and cover photos to match. It may not be the case that your channel benefits from being too closely associated with your subject matter. During the pilot we deliberately built a channel that appeared to be a generic content aggregation channel.

STEP 11

Set up your YouTube channel, upload your designs on it
Create your channel and upload your channel logo, cover photo and description. For help see [here](#).

STEP 12

Upload your trailers
Upload your trailers to your channel, for help see [here](#). For now, keep these trailers unlisted. This way you can add them to playlists and ads but they will be undiscoverable until you are ready for your campaign to go live.

STEP 13

Create your playlists
Now it's time to create your playlists! For help see [here](#). As with the trailers, it may be best to keep these playlists unlisted for now to ensure that YouTube users do not stumble across them until your campaign is fully ready.

STEP 14

Set up your adwords account
Good news, you are now ready to [set up your AdWords account](#)! When setting up an account you will be asked for credit card details and the details of your first campaign, adverts and target group.

STEP 15

Create a Media Plan
Depending on the advertising budget you are planning to use for this project, and the advertising channels (Search, Display, and Video) that you decide to use, work on a media plan to estimate the amount of media you'll be able to run with this budget. Tools such as the Keyword Planner, and Display Planner are a great resource to gain an indication on the estimated cost of each metric. Otherwise, if available, consult an online advertising strategist.

STEP 16

Decide which messages you'll use in your banner ads
Working with subject matter experts, decide on the type of messaging you wish to use in your banner ads. The message of your ads may directly refute the beliefs you are attempting to counter, or alternatively, they may more subtly speaking to the primary themes you are

addressing in an attempt to draw your audience in.

STEP 17

Source graphic design support

Banner ads, see here, will take longer to create than text ads and are harder to adjust later on, so they should be designed before text ads. In order to complete these to a high standard, high quality graphic designers should be sourced. If quality graphic design capability is not available in house, outside graphic designers should be engaged.

STEP 18

Design your visual banner ads.

Work with your designers to begin to design your visual banner ads. The text used in the banner ad should directly correspond with the name of the playlist you are directing people towards. For example, in the pilot, ""The Soldier's Perspective"" was text used in the banner ad for a playlist countering the notion of ISIS' military supremacy.

- Ads should attempt to draw on the visual style used by the groups you are countering.
- Constructive ambiguity: Ads should be descriptive of the content that users can expect to reach if they click, but not completely overt about their purpose. Including questions in the text of the ad, which leave the viewer curious, are particularly useful for this.
- Make sure all ads follow AdWords Advertising Policies
- Once unique images have been selected for the banner ads associated with each playlist, designers must now ensure that banners are created to match each possible size required in adwords.

STEP 19

Create keyword longlist

For each narrative you are seeking to counter, brainstorm long lists of keywords your target audience might be searching for. These are the keywords you will be advertising against. Don't just think about the exact narratives you are countering, think about particular phrases, in-group terms, and references which are unique to the group you are targeting.

STEP 20

Eliminate false positives

Once you have captured your ideas for possible keywords to advertise against, review the list with someone that was not in the original brainstorming session and attempt to remove false positives. For example, if the group you are seeking to target is often in the news, simply advertising against the group name alone may reach many people simply looking for news items, rather than reaching those at risk of falling into the orbit of a violent group. In addition, beware of search terms that may be commonly searched for by history students, for example certain commonly used in-group terms (such as 'crusader army' in the case of Jihadists) or historical references (such as 'Joseph Goebbels' in the case of neo-Nazis) may also be searched for regularly by students.

STEP 21

Prioritise most important keywords

Within each list, chose certain keywords that you believe to be crucial to the success of your campaign, for example because they reach the highest risk individuals. In the pilot, we prioritised keywords that indicate violent intent.

STEP 22

Draft initial text ads

Now it's time to start thinking about your text ads. Text ads can be changed and adjusted mid campaign with ease, so feel free to try out a number of options! To begin think about which ad message best corresponds to the keyword lists you plan to use for targeting, additionally it's preferable if create text ads which are relevant to the banner ads you have already created. If you have an ad which asks a question, create a text ad to match - simple! Just make sure to bear character restrictions in mind while drafting. Draft at least one text ad per campaign, and don't worry, we'll be drafting more later. Similar to banner ads, make sure all ads follow AdWords Advertising Policies.

STEP 23

Create display campaign

Now that you have one search campaign ready! It's time to create your Display campaign. In the ad space window you will see the option to +Campaign. Once you click this you should select 'Display' as the campaign type. Proceed to select your target location and keywords as normal, then upload your banners. See here for instructions.

STEP 24

Create in display video campaign

Next you must create a YouTube campaign, but don't worry, this can also be done via Adwords! As above, click on +Campaign button, but this time select 'Video' as your campaign type. You will again need to input your keywords and your target location. Following this, you must select the link to the playlist which you are attempting to guide users towards and decide if you want to create an 'In Display' or an 'In Stream' campaign. You will then have the option to select an auto generated thumbnail or upload your own. Once you have followed these steps your 'In display' campaign will be ready to go.

STEP 25

Create in stream video campaign

In order to create an 'In Stream' campaign simply follow the same steps as above, but select 'In Stream' when given the option. This time you won't even have to pick a thumbnail - couldn't be easier!

STEP 26

Complete remaining campaigns

Once the above steps have all been completed for one of your key themes, repeat as required until you have created Search, Display, and Video campaigns matching each theme

and playlist.

STEP 27

Add additional text ads

For each of your Search campaigns, consider adding more text ads in order to maximise the possibility of reaching your target audience. Ads which closely match the keywords of searches are more likely to have a higher engagement rate (CTR). So look to your keyword list for inspiration, remember those PRIORITY key words (see step #20), and see if you can work these into the text of your ads. Repeat the above process across all search campaigns until you have between ten to twenty ads per Search campaign. For example, if 'Dabiq' is a priority keyword, make sure that you have created multiple ads with that word in it. This makes it more likely that your ad will be shown, and makes it more likely that your target audience will click on your ad once shown. Again, it's important to make sure all ads follow AdWords Advertising Policies

STEP 28

Decide on your key campaign metrics

Now that you have familiarized yourself with Adwords through the creation of the campaigns, it's time to decide on your key campaign metrics! Ensure that you refer back to the aims of your campaign (step #2), and identify metrics that can help you assess your Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Perhaps measuring the click through rate on your ads, the overall viewing figures within your playlist, the Impression Share across the campaign, or a mix of all of the above. Whatever you decide your KPIs are, it's crucial that you agree on and track these and they are linked to the overall outcomes you are attempting to achieve. For tips on how to evaluate ad performance see here.

STEP 29

Create a metrics tracker

Create a tracker to capture your metrics. This should be easy to fill in and capture the key metrics you can gather from AdWords and your YouTube analytics.

STEP 30

Publish the playlists

Publish your playlists.

Campaign Management

STEP 31

Ensure that payment systems are live
Ensure that your method of payment is approved and able to cope with your advertising budget. If possible, it may be a good idea to register a backup payment method on Adwords to ensure that your bases are covered. Checking the 'Billing' section of Adwords should be carried out daily.

STEP 32

Hit go!
To start your campaigns, unpause them. Congratulations, you're now live!

STEP 33

Check approval status.
Ensure none of your ads have been disapproved, and adjust where necessary. This task needs to be carried out daily. Ads can be disapproved even after they have initially been approved, especially ones related to sensitive content.

STEP 34

Maintain search terms hygiene
Maintain search term hygiene by checking your search term report and adding negative keywords where necessary. This task needs to be carried out daily.

STEP 35

Monitor videos comments
Monitor any videos you have uploaded (trailer for example) for negative or hateful comments. Depending on your campaign aims you may wish to remove these comments or respond to them. One of your KPIs may include reaction of your target audience, so it may be essential to capture this data before removing it. This task needs to be carried out daily.
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STEP 36

Capture Adwords data
Download data on key metrics (identified during step #27) from AdWords and input into tracker created during step #28. This task must be carried out on a weekly basis.

STEP 37

Capture YouTube data
Download data on key metrics from YouTube and input into tracker. This task must be carried out on a weekly basis.

STEP 38

Update key stakeholders
Share metrics tracker with any key stakeholders on a regular basis. KPIs must be monitored closely and adjustments made where the campaign is failing to meet one of its objectives. This task must be carried out on a weekly basis.

STEP 39

Adjust bids
Adjust bids across campaigns and maximum Cost Per Click (CPC) for priority keywords depending on the relative success, as measured against key indicators. This task must be carried out on a weekly basis.

STEP 40   *Create new ads based on trends*
Check the CTR on each of your text ads to assess any patterns, and learn from ads that are outperforming others. For example, within one of your campaigns you may find that your audience is responding better to ads which pose a question. Draft new text ads that match the style and tone that seems to be resonating with your audience.

STEP 41   *Adjust playlist order*
From time to time, you should asses the average time your audience is spending in each playlist and attempt to identify patterns. If one of your playlists is outperforming the others on a regular basis, consider re-ordering your videos in other playlists and measuring whether or not this increases average time in playlist.

Post-Campaign

STEP 42   *End all campaigns*
Once your budget has run out, pause all campaigns to ensure they stop running. Important to remember this step, because otherwise your campaigns will continue charging you on your registered payment method!

STEP 43   *Share findings*
Share your findings and suggestions.

STEP 44   *Update method*
Update the Redirect Method blueprint on Github.