Unpacking Unexpected Traffic Drops in App Campaigns:

A Support Perspective Case Study

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Performance fluctuations are a common challenge in the dynamic world of app advertising. Recently, I had the opportunity to work with a leading global brand facing a significant, and somewhat puzzling, drop in traffic for their Universal App Campaigns (UAC) in key international markets. This case highlights the importance of digging beyond surface-level metrics and understanding the complex interplay of factors influencing campaign performance.

The Challenge:

Our client reached out reporting a sharp decline in Android traffic in one market, and drops across both Android and iOS in another. What made this particularly challenging was that while they had initially decreased bids due to ROAS concerns, subsequent *increases* in bids weren't bringing traffic back as expected. They observed that in previous months, *lower* average bids had actually delivered significantly *higher* impression volumes than their current, elevated bid levels. This discrepancy was impacting their overall market ROAS and required urgent investigation.

My Role & Approach:

As a professional specializing in Apps, my task was to conduct a deep dive into their campaign data using our internal tools. The goal was to understand the root cause of the traffic decline, differentiate between controllable and uncontrollable factors, and provide actionable recommendations aligned with their ROAS objectives.

My approach involved:

1. Analyzing recent performance trends (within the 90-day data window available to me).
2. Reviewing bid history, budget settings, and conversion data.
3. Identifying potential technical issues or account-level restrictions.
4. Considering external factors like auction dynamics and competition based on observed campaign behavior.

Analysis & Findings:

My investigation revealed several key insights:

- **Bid Capping as a Primary Factor:** Despite recent bid increases, the campaigns were still heavily bid-capped. This meant that even at seemingly higher bid levels compared to previous periods, the campaigns were restricted from entering or winning a sufficient volume of competitive auctions in the *current* market landscape.
- **Shifting Auction Dynamics:** The puzzle of lower historical bids yielding more traffic pointed strongly to significant shifts in auction dynamics and competition over time. While I couldn't access granular competitor data or historical market trends beyond 90 days, the campaign's inability to scale at current bids, even after increases, indicated a more competitive environment where higher bids were now required just to maintain visibility, let alone grow.
- **Conversion Lag:** A crucial factor impacting the client's *perceived* ROAS and CPA was conversion lag. For these campaigns, a significant portion of conversions were attributed several days (up to 20 days for iOS) after the initial ad click or impression. This lag made recent CPA data appear inflated, potentially influencing bid decisions based on incomplete short-term data.
- **Dual Capping (iOS):** In one Japan iOS campaign, I observed a combination of both budget *and* bid capping. This dual restriction severely limited the campaign's ability to participate in auctions, compounding the traffic decline.
- **SKAdNetwork (SKAN) Impact (iOS):** For the Japan iOS campaign, the timing of performance shifts also correlated with the campaign being outside the SKAN 8-slot bucket for several weeks. This can impact attributed conversion volume and introduce performance volatility due to changes in measurement signals.

Recommendations:

Based on these findings, I provided the client with a multi-pronged strategy:

1. **Re-evaluate Bid Strategy:** Acknowledge that current market conditions require significantly higher bids than in previous months to achieve similar volume. While respecting ROAS goals, a substantial bid increase was identified as the most direct lever to overcome bid capping and regain auction competitiveness.
2. **Focus on Asset Optimization:** Recommend a thorough asset refresh, particularly high-quality video assets. Stronger assets can improve Ad Rank and unlock access to broader inventory (like YouTube), helping the algorithm find efficient scale even within bid constraints.
3. **Leverage Features:** Suggest enabling features like On-Device Model (ODM) for iOS campaigns to improve optimization signals, especially given SKAN limitations.
4. **Manage Expectations:** Advise against direct performance comparisons with periods significantly outside the recent 90-day window due to constantly evolving market conditions.

Outcome:

While the path to full traffic recovery is ongoing and dependent on the client's strategic bid adjustments, my analysis provided critical clarity on *why* their previous bid logic was no longer yielding the same results. By identifying bid capping as the primary controllable barrier and explaining the influence of shifting market dynamics and technical factors like conversion lag and SKAN, we equipped the client with a clearer understanding of the situation and a data-informed strategy to navigate the competitive landscape and work towards their ROAS goals.