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## Background

The OERu partnership has made significant progress in assembling OER-based open online courses for a full first year of study with pathways to achieve formal academic credit towards two university-level qualifications. The OERu is proceeding with a phased launch of these tuition-free courses.

A fundamental challenge is to develop and implement an effective and affordable marketing approach to communicate these free learning opportunities to the populations of students who are most likely to benefit from these open courses.

The OER Foundation (OERF) qualifies for the Google Ads Grant for non-profits which provides US\$10,000 per month of in-kind advertising spend. However, Google Ads is a complex and highly specialized area of pay-per-click (PPC) advertising. Recipients of the the Google Ad Grant are [required to retain](#) a 5% click-through rate (CTR) each month and if this standard isn't met for two consecutive months, the account will be cancelled. The [average CTR across](#) all industries is 1.91% and 2.2% for Education.

The OERF does not have in-house expertise or experience in PPC. We aim to contract consultants with PPC expertise to assist the OERF in establishing, managing and optimising an effective Google Ads campaign and associated search engine optimisation (SEO) of the landing paged on the OERu websites. In addition, the OERF would would like to trial and compare alternative strategies, for example advertising on Facebook, LinkedIn and other media to determine the most effective approach to target our student audience. Finally, we would like pilot a corporate citizenship strategy where companies sponsor individual OERu micro-courses in return for brand association as a mechanism to generate sustainable funding for ongoing PPC marketing of OERu courses in the longer term.

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## Determining benchmarks

The OERF created an Adwords account and ran two small ad groups to establish benchmarks to monitor success of this grant. After a week and an associate ad cost of \$85 this benchmark campaign achieved a CTR of 2.75% (i.e. 65 clicks from 2.37K impressions.) The average quality score achieved was 4.42 (out of a maximum score of 10). Quality score is an estimate of the quality of the ads, keywords and landing pages. Higher quality scores can lead to lower prices and better add positions in the Google Ad bidding process. The benchmark pilot did not implement conversion tracking.

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## Project objectives

- Establish, monitor and optimise a global Google Ad Campaign for the OERu courses to achieve an average CTR in excess of 5% to effectively utilise the Google Ad Grant of US\$10,000 per month.
- Implement conversion tracking for OERu Google Ads to exceed the 4.13% average conversion rate (CVR) for the Education sector.
- Improve the SEO of the landing pages on OERu websites to achieve an average Google Ad quality score better than 5 which is considered [above average](#).
- Trial alternative PPC advertising channels (eg Facebook and LinkedIn) in conjunction with alternative media approaches for the Learning in a Digital Age course in a targeted country in the developing world, for example Kenya to compare strategies for this target audience.
- Establish a communication campaign to trial the concept of corporate sponsorship of OERu courses in return for brand association with New Zealand companies. This small pilot will initially be restricted to New Zealand corporations because of the tax benefits for New Zealand companies donating to a locally registered charity.

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## Project organisation

The OERF will establish a reference group comprising members of the OERu Marketing and Recruitment working group which includes marketing professionals from the OERu partner institutes.

Dr Mackintosh will lead this project with support from Dave Lane, the OERF Open Source Technologist. Dave will assist with integration of the technical components for tracking conversions on our websites. Emeritus Professor Jim Taylor and Dr David Porter will be the liaison contacts from the OERF Board of Directors.

Otago Polytechnic will donate staff time from Adon Moskal, Lecturer in the Bachelor of Information Technology, assisted by Alex Chubarov a student in Information Technology; Claire Goode and Simonne Wood, both Learning and Teaching Specialists will assist with the review of ad copy. Claire and Simonne have been seconded from Otago Polytechnic to work with the OERu.

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## Project budget

Establish, manage and optimise Google Ad campaign	US\$9,000
Search Engine Optimisation	US\$6,000
PPC Direct Ad cost (Facebook, LinkedIn etc)	US\$1,500
Kenya marketing initiative	US\$7,500
Establish corporate citizenship campaign	US\$1,000
<b>Total cost</b>	<b>US\$25,000</b>