

Paid Advertisements

Are they worth the investment?

by: Jenna Miller, Emerald Strategic Marketing

You need to get your company noticed, but you do not want to throw money into ads because your budget is tight. At the same time, you need quick results. So, you may be asking: “Should we run paid ads or stick with organic options?” You are not alone. It is a common question we hear from CEOs, founders and business development leaders.

There is a misconception that paid ads are a magic switch — flip them on and leads pour in. But the truth is more nuanced. Paid ads and organic marketing work together, not independently. Organic marketing establishes your brand while paid ads amplify it. One sustains, the other accelerates. Understanding the difference is the key to smart spending and effective scaling.

Paid Vs. Organic: What Is the Actual Difference?

Organic marketing includes the marketing and brand presence you build without paying for placement. You will find organic marketing in social media posts, user-generated content, content marketing, webinars, emails, on your website, and the Google search rankings that are driven by SEO, answer engine optimization (AEO) and backlinks.

Here is the reality: Organic traffic still makes up 62% of all website visits. It is the backbone of discovery. Organic marketing is a slow burn that builds momentum over time, while building trust and credibility. But it does require consistency, clarity and a strong strategy. It is also important to realize that organic marketing does not give instant results, can be unpredictable and is not actually free — it takes time, effort and expertise to execute it correctly.

On the other hand, paid advertising is paying for visibility, clicks or conversions. This includes social media ads on LinkedIn and Meta, as well as Google search ads (often referred to as pay-per-click [PPC] ads).

Paid ads can deliver fast visibility and traffic, better audience targeting and scalable options with a growing budget. And while organic marketing dominates overall traffic, the top three paid search ads still capture 46% of all clicks on



page one, proving paid ads absolutely command attention when used strategically.

But paid ads do have an obvious downside — the cost. The cost of running ads varies widely depending on the platform, your target audience and the popularity of the keywords you choose to use. LinkedIn ads generally cost \$15 to \$20-plus per click. For search engine ads on Google, the range is even wider — from a few dollars up to \$80 per click. For many, this is the biggest barrier to entry.

Why Organic Must Come First

Paid ads amplify what already exists. They do not fix weak strategies, outdated websites or inconsistent content. Without a strong organic foundation, ads become expensive, leads do not convert and audiences do not trust your brand.

Imagine a potential client is searching for a managed services business in his (or her) area. Your ad pops up and he clicks the link to learn more. But when he gets to your site, he finds it is out-of-date, and does not speak to his struggles and goals. The landing page and site do not show social proof that your company is qualified or reputable (using testimonials, case studies or white papers) and it is difficult to get the information he is looking for. On top of that, he cannot find your contact information. You just lost the client. This is why organic marketing, like website optimization, needs to come first.

Organic marketing establishes a clear brand voice, proof of expertise, social proof and a healthy website ecosystem, while paid ads work best when they reinforce a strong foundation. To get the most for your money, we recommend focusing on organic marketing before considering ad spending.

How Paid Ads Support Organic Growth Over Time

Once your organic presence is strong, paid ads can accelerate the momentum you have built. The additional traffic they generate sends positive signals to search engines, increasing your visibility over time. As more people search for your brand, your authority grows and retargeting ads allows you to stay in front of audiences that first discovered you organically.

Paid campaigns also give you rapid feedback on messaging and creative, offering insights that strengthen your organic content strategy. They will quickly reveal what works and what does not.

When it comes to conversions, paid ads have a clear advantage: PPC traffic converts 50% better than organic traffic. Paid ads do not replace organic growth; they simply speed it up.

The 'Slow Burn Vs. Quick Wins' Reality Check

Admittedly, organic marketing can feel painfully slow. For example, a strong SEO strategy typically takes four to 12-plus months to show meaningful results. It takes time to build momentum and strengthen long-term brand equity. While paid advertising delivers quick wins with immediate visibility, results stop the moment the budget does. The strongest marketing strategies blend both approaches with intentionality, using organic marketing for durability and paid ads for acceleration.

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Final Verdict

Paid ads are powerful. Organic marketing is essential. Together, they create a marketing engine that grows visibility, trust and revenue. But without strategy, clarity and a strong organic foundation, paid ads become expensive experiments instead of profitable investments. The smartest marketing investment is one that aligns both, building a brand that grows steadily

through organic momentum and scales quickly through paid acceleration. ■

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