

COUNTING  
OPINIONS



## CASE STUDY: HAMILTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

# Hamilton's Free Google Ads Mean the Library 'Always Comes Up First in the Search'

**Location:** Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

**System Info:** Hamilton Public Library has 22 branches (23 when a new one opens in Spring 2021), two Bookmobiles, and a virtual branch that is always open at [hpl.ca](http://hpl.ca).

**Service Area:** Hamilton, Ontario, Canada is a port city located in the Golden Horseshoe, at the west side of Lake Ontario. Hamilton is part of the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area. Hamilton Public Library serves 575,000 residents over a large geographic region of 1,138 km<sup>2</sup>. HPL serves rural, suburban, and urban communities.

**Library URL:** [www.hpl.ca](http://www.hpl.ca)

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### Library Situation

Our goal is to help the City of Hamilton deliver on its mandate: To make Hamilton "The best place to raise a child and age successfully." We do this by connecting with community partners and residents. We treat everyone age 1 to 101 with respect, serving their needs, requests, and interests.

To meet people's needs, Hamilton Public Library goes the extra mile. We have a social worker and a public health nurse. We host a community pantry at some locations and grow food in another. We host memory cafés for seniors, and multiple branches offer Makerspaces to increase digital literacy. Before COVID, we offered unstaffed Study Hall hours from 9 p.m. until midnight at branches near the local higher-education institutions.

In addition, HPL was the first library system in Canada to have Extended Access (via bibliotheca's open+ access system), which allows customers after-hours access to our rural branches.

**What type of product / service have you promoted with your Google Ad Grant?**

HPL uses Google Ads to promote all of the library's services (including Extended Access and Study Hall hours and locations), collections and resources, programs and events.

**What challenges was your library addressing? What goals was it trying to meet?**

Hamilton's population is growing quickly. We have new university and college students moving in each fall, as well as new residents all year. As we've added new branches, services, and programs across the system, we were looking for additional ways to connect with residents and HPL cardholders.

**Why did you decide to try Google Ads?**

HPL applied for the Google Ad Grants to help us reach residents when they're looking for information and activities. The grant gives HPL the opportunity to connect with new residents and new students (we have large university and college populations who may not realize the breadth of the library's offerings), and to communicate our hours, services, and programs to the public.

Hamilton Public Library has many resources, offers 10,000 programs each year, and partners with many of the community's social services. It's vital to be there for our residents and members where and when they need us: This includes new parents connecting with other new parents; kids learning to read, code, or craft; seniors learning new skills and meeting others in their neighbourhood; students needing a place to study or learn a new skill when they're far from home. Google Ads helps us reach all of these target audiences.

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**What did the start-up process look like at your library?**

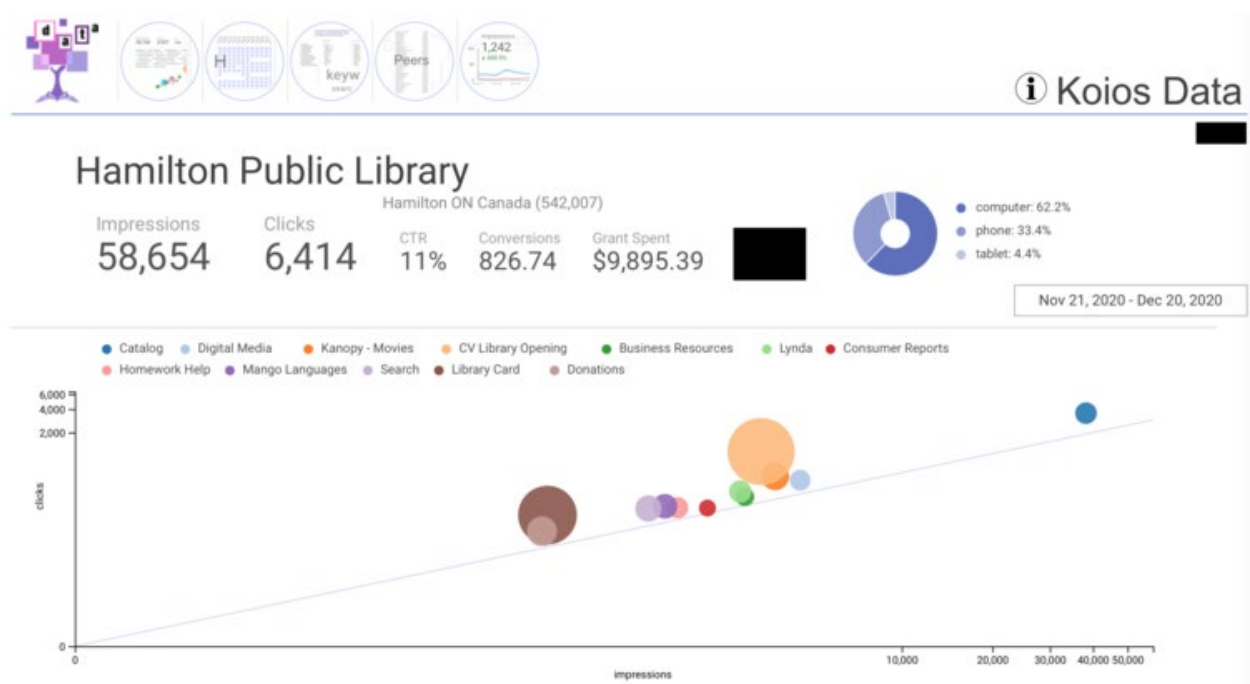
I'd relied on Google Ads in a previous position (at an ENGO) and found it helped us to easily connect our services and programs with hard-to-reach audiences. The same has been true for HPL.

Koios applied for the grant on HPL's behalf, then we worked with Koios to develop ads that best reflect current hours, locations, and offerings. During the year, HPL's small but mighty communications team works directly with Koios to quickly develop key ads that tie to our marketing plan and promote our catalogue, services, and programs. We customize our ads for time of year and the resources that best fit those times, such as Consumer Reports and baking resources during the holidays, homework and reading resources for back-to-school season, study hall hours for exam time, etc.

**What sorts of results have you seen from using Google Ads? Have you resolved the challenges and / or met the goals that you started with?**

Our advertised resources increased in use. The paid results from Google Ads bring more clicks to add to those from our other communication tactics. Koios' HPL dashboard provides charts to illustrate these wins

We've used the analytics for Board meetings and senior leadership reporting. HPL's leaders mention these results to us, saying "When I Google various topics, our library always comes up first in the search."



Ontario's HPL promotes diverse offerings with Google Ads. In this screenshot of HPL's dashboard, the color-coded categories are plotted at the intersections of Clicks and Impressions. Koios' proprietary Custom Catalog Campaign, which uses the library's holdings as keywords to direct Google searchers to library resources, gets the most attention by far.

### Any words of wisdom you want to share with your peers?

Our use of Google Ads has helped increase awareness of our catalogue, resources, services, and programs. Placing ads about our service changes and updates helps our residents and members stay informed about our work. HPL achieves greater reach by advertising special events and programs. In addition, we're able to tie our annual communications calendar to our resources easily using these ads.

**Shelley McKay** is a marketing and fundraising executive with 25 years of communications leadership with organizations across the U.S. and Canada. Shelley joined Hamilton Public Library system in 2018 as its Manager, Communications. Prior to joining HPL, she built and managed brands for agencies, nonprofit organizations, and corporations across Canada and the U.S. Shelley serves on community and professional association boards and is a frequent speaker at industry conferences.