MARKETING

READ YOUR LEAD COSTS CORRECTLY

Blended averages hide what you pay to reach strangers.

SearchLight Digital's benchmarks show why one blended number misleads. HVAC branded search averaged $34 a lead, while non-branded averaged $149. The blended figure was $104. Plumbing non-branded search averaged $183.

ASK FOR THREE NUMBERS

- Cost per lead, branded and non-branded, reported separately
- Cost per booked job from each source
- Revenue from each source, not only lead count

WHY IT MATTERS

Branded clicks are often people already looking for you. If they carry your blended average, your ads can look better than they are.

START WITH WHAT A LEAD ACTUALLY IS

Before you compare numbers, get a definition everyone agrees on. Your agency may count a form fill, a click-to-call, a 30-second phone call, or a repeat caller. Your CSR counts someone who actually needs service in your area. Those can be very different numbers. If your vendor reports 200 leads and your office booked 40, the gap between them is what you need to investigate.

Listen to a sample of calls every month. Mark each one as a booked job, a real opportunity that didn't book, an existing customer, or junk. It takes about an hour and it's the most useful marketing report you'll have.

FOLLOW THE FUNNEL ALL THE WAY DOWN

Cost per lead is only the first stop. Work through each step for each source:

- Cost per lead
- Booking rate, which gives you cost per booked job
- Show rate, which gives you cost per run job
- Close rate and average ticket, which give you revenue per dollar spent
- Gross margin, which tells you what you actually kept

An example with made-up numbers: Source A costs $60 a lead and books 50%, so it costs $120 per booked job. Source B costs $110 a lead and books 80%, so it costs about $138. If Source B's customers spend 40% more, it's the better source despite the higher lead cost. You can only see that by following it all the way through.

BRANDED VERSUS NON-BRANDED

When someone searches for your company by name, they've already decided to consider you. Paying for that click can protect your name from competitors bidding on it, but it isn't the same as finding a new customer. Ask your agency to report these separately, along with Local Services Ads and Performance Max. Campaigns that blend everything together often lean on branded traffic to make the results look better.

DON'T FORGET THE REPEAT VALUE

A new customer's first ticket rarely tells the whole story. Someone who starts with a small repair may buy a plan, a replacement and refer a neighbor. On the other hand, a price shopper who only wants the coupon may never come back. Look at revenue per new customer over 12 and 24 months once you have the history. Compare that with your cost to acquire them.

BE CAREFUL WITH WHAT YOU CAN'T TRACK

Call tracking numbers and form attribution miss things. A homeowner sees your truck, searches your name, clicks an ad, and later calls from a fridge magnet. Each channel may get the credit or none. Ask new customers how they heard about you, and record

it, even though the answers are imperfect. Look for broad patterns instead of arguing over every lead.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR MARKETING PARTNER

- How exactly do you define a lead?
- Can I listen to the calls?
- What's my cost per booked job by campaign?
- How much of this is branded?
- Who owns the ad account, the call tracking numbers and the data if we part ways?

BUILD A ONE-PAGE REPORT

Put each source in a row, with spend, leads, booked, run, sold, revenue and return. Review it monthly with whoever handles your marketing. Move money slowly and on purpose, because seasonal swings can make a good source look bad for a month. Compare your numbers with our benchmarks, and remember that your market and your close rate matter more than any average.

Sources: SearchLight Digital benchmarks (2026), see Benchmarks.

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BEST PRACTICES: PRICING AND KNOWING YOUR NUMBERS

MAKE IT A HABIT

What good looks like

> A handful of numbers reviewed every week.

> Prices built from your real costs and target margin.

> Cost per booked job known for every lead source.

The habits

1. Pick five weekly numbers: answer rate, booked jobs, close rate, average ticket and revenue per tech.
2. Price from your true hourly cost, including drive time and overhead.
3. Review prices at least once a year and when costs change.
4. Track every job back to the source that created it.
5. Cut the lead sources that cost more than they bring in.
6. Share the numbers with your team, so everyone knows the score.

Signs it's time to get help

- You learn how a month went when the accountant tells you.
- You can't say which lead source pays best.
- Prices haven't changed in over a year.

Where we fit: ProCall Field reports by source, tech and job type, and Service ProCall reports every campaign from call to sold job.

More on pricing and knowing your numbers