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FINTEL CONNECT

2025 Cost-Per-Acquisition Benchmarking Guide For Financial Services:

How to Drive Growth and Optimize Spend

Executive Summary

Campaign efficiency in the financial sector hinges on several key factors, including product competitiveness, conversion rates, and, notably, your marketing spend. These elements collectively impact the quality of your results and determine how swiftly you can scale up financial products. **One of the most straightforward levers to adjust for enhanced acquisition efforts is your marketing spend—specifically, the cost to acquire new accounts.**

When evaluating your cost per acquisition (CPA), it's essential to consider both internal and external factors. Internally, this means understanding the lifetime value of your customers and their product usage patterns, which helps you determine what you're willing to spend to acquire them. Externally, it's equally critical to compare your spend to industry benchmarks for similar products. You may be over or under-investing relative to the market, affecting your competitiveness.

Affiliate marketing emerges as a cornerstone for financial brands aiming to scale their customer acquisition strategies efficiently. This channel's power lies in its lower-funnel results-based model, ensuring measurable ROI. However, it's important to remember that CPAs and payout models are dynamic—they're influenced by the broader marketing mix and don't exist in a vacuum.

CPAs are always shifting. They fluctuate based on market conditions, competitive dynamics, and your organization's overall appetite for growth. For affiliates, these fluctuations play an even more critical role, given that the channel typically operates exclusively on a CPA model. The interplay between affiliate marketing and other channels—such as paid search, organic efforts, and social media—highlights the need for a holistic view when optimizing performance.

This is why we've chosen to focus heavily on payout models most commonly seen across the affiliate channel. **This report highlights CPA trends we're currently observing for financial brands, and in particular within affiliate marketing.**

Understanding your acquisition costs is the foundation of any successful marketing strategy, especially in financial services where margins and efficiency matter. This guide is designed to equip financial marketers with the insights they need to make informed decisions, optimize their CPA, and ensure their marketing dollars are driving sustainable growth. At Fintel Connect, we believe in transparency, data-driven decision-making, and the power of partnerships to help brands scale more efficiently.

Nicky Senyard
Chief Executive Officer

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1. What We'll Cover in This Guide

The goal of this CPA Benchmarking Guide is to give leadership, product managers, and affiliate marketers at financial companies a detailed look into how to approach your CPA planning and actionable insights for where you can optimize your program's performance. Whether you're trying to gauge where your acquisition costs stand in the industry or looking for tips to optimize your campaigns, this guide has you covered.

Here's what you can expect:

01 What Drives CPA

We'll dive into the main factors that influence CPA—type of product, the channels used, and how to define success—plus ways you can adjust each of these to improve performance.

02 CPA Benchmarks by Product Type

We'll break down acquisition costs and key influencing factors for key financial product categories.

03 Current CPA Trends

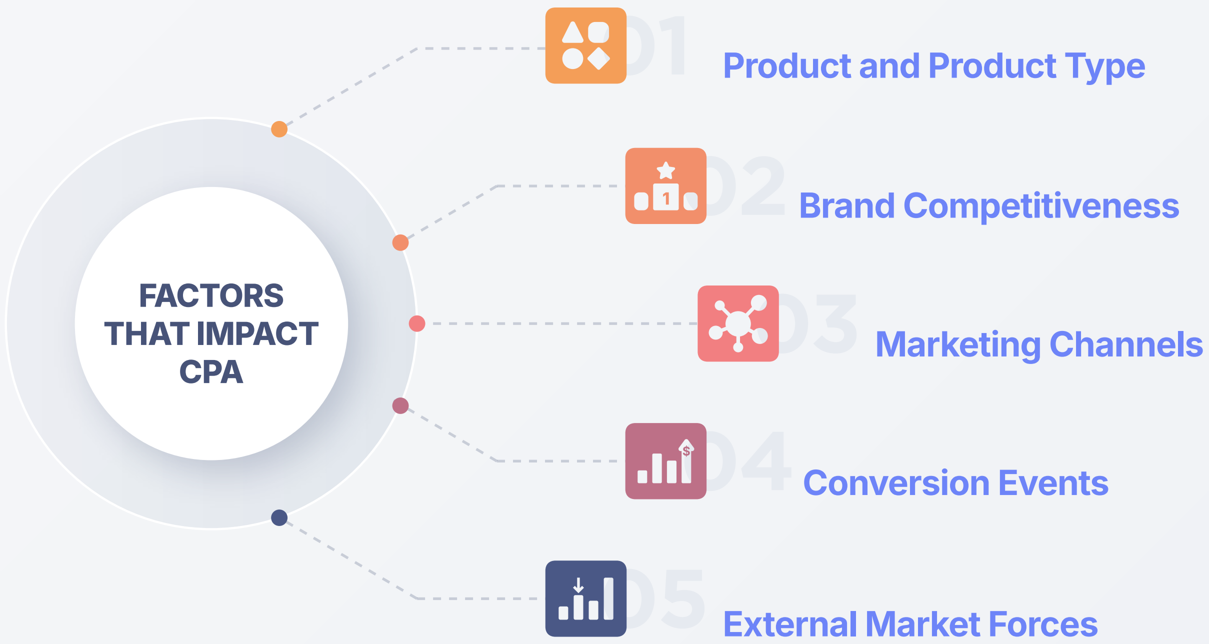
We'll explore what is impacting acquisition costs today, from AI-driven marketing to the increasing importance of data privacy compliance, and what these trends mean for your strategy.

04 How to Optimize Your CPA

You'll get both quick wins for improving your CPA right away and long-term strategies to ensure sustainable cost efficiency, including tips for building stronger affiliate partnerships.

2. What Are the 5 Biggest Factors That Impact CPA

There are numerous factors that can influence a financial institution's acquisition costs. We've grouped these factors into five key areas. These areas are closely linked—strength in one factor can support another, while weaknesses can equally hinder the others. While it's not always feasible to excel in all five, minimizing gaps will help keep acquisition costs in check.



1- Product and Product Type:

The cost of acquiring a customer can vary widely depending on the product. **Factors like market demand, customer intent, and product attractiveness play a large role in determining acquisition costs.** Products like mortgages and investment services tend to have higher CPAs due to the longer customer journey and higher transaction value, which requires more trust-building and often non-linear journeys. Meanwhile, products like checking or savings accounts generally have lower CPAs given the simpler onboarding experience and wider accessibility. We'll get into specific CPA comparisons later on.

The attractiveness of your product also has an important role to play. In a certain product category, if your product doesn't stack up to the competition, it may result in an inflated CPA to compensate. For example, promoting a high-yield savings account (HISA) without a competitive interest rate can be a tough sell, regardless of how efficient your onboarding is. Customer incentives are a common way to enhance product competitiveness. Products with sign-up offers—such as cash bonuses, reduced fees, or exclusive rewards—can result in greater audience appetite and therefore willingness for publishers to work with you at an efficient CPA.

If you're considering **promotional offers**, keep these two key points in mind:

01
Test and learn

Test different incentive structures to understand what drives both sign-ups and long-term value. The right offer can boost acquisition, and data-backed optimization is what keeps costs efficient.

02
Customer retention

Ensure your product delivers value beyond the initial sign-up bonus. Offers may get customers in the door, but lasting product appeal is what keeps them from churning once the incentive runs out.

Prioritizing product quality is one of the most important pillars to achieving an efficient CPA, especially given its influence on the other CPA factors.

2- Brand Competitiveness:

Having a recognizable brand can help positively influence performance, and therefore CPA. **Financial brands with strong awareness and affinity tend to convert more efficiently and therefore continue to drive conversions even at lower CPAs.** Conversely, brands with lower awareness typically face higher acquisition costs as they must work harder to overcome consumer hesitation and establish credibility.

When brand recognition is limited, financial institutions may need to invest more in educational campaigns, partnerships, or endorsements to build trust and reduce acquisition costs over time. And despite what many think, **brand alone isn't always enough**. Without a compelling product, a product may still be unlikely to gain traction with publishers or consumers.

Key considerations for **addressing brand competitiveness** include:

01

Current brand position

New or lesser-known brands may need to invest more marketing dollars in top-of-funnel initiatives to build trust and awareness before working towards an efficient CPA.

02

Future state

As brand recognition improves through targeted marketing efforts, channels like affiliate marketing will start to become more accessible, and at efficient CPAs.

3- Marketing Channels: Choosing the Right Mix

Each marketing channel plays a different role in the acquisition funnel and therefore can influence CPA costs in varying ways. Here's an in-depth look at channels most commonly used in financial services marketing and how they influence CPA:

Channel	Audience Intent (Buying Stage)	Competitiveness	CPA
Search Advertising	High	Very High	High
	This channel reaches people actively shopping for products, and therefore tends to drive high-quality, immediate results. This also means it can be competitive – and expensive.		
Paid Social	Low	Low	Medium
	This is an upper-funnel channel to help spark interest and create awareness. While it is less competitive and less costly, you'll likely see less quality and product adoption.		
Affiliate Marketing	High	Medium	Medium to High
	This channel brings high-intent audiences and also creates valuable exposure and credibility. Product is a big driver of performance – and therefore cost.		
Email Marketing	Low to Medium	Low	Low to Medium
	Sending emails can help drive awareness and can be very targeted as it tends to be used to reach pre-qualified audiences. It's less expensive but may result in poor-quality customers long-term.		

For more details, see our blog: *"Marketing Channels: Choosing The Right Mix To Control CPA"*

4- Conversion Events: Defining What Triggers a CPA

The most common conversion event used to calculate CPA is account approval. This comes in the form of an opened account, funded loan, or confirmed policy holder. But there are many layers to these “success” events, and it’s important to consider how it may impact your budgeted CPAs. We break down the most common payout models based on various conversion criteria.

Conversion Event	Common Use Cases	Top CPA Influencers	Tips and Considerations
Cost per approved account	Banking, Checking, Savings, Credit cards	Customer journey and application funnel	Prioritize partners or channels that drive high approval rates as it indicates good targeting + quality.
Cost per application	Credit cards, Loans, Insurance	Completed and submitted application (regardless of approval outcome)	In cases where decisioning is non-linear or offline, this can be a happy conversion medium to partner with affiliates.
Cost per funded account	Investments - CDs, GICs, Robo advisors, Brokerage apps	Minimum funding criteria	Consider lower minimum funding criteria, and instead, evaluate campaign efficiency based on longer-term funding metrics
Cost per qualified lead	Loans, mortgages, business accounts	Level of qualification required	Be targeted and make sure your sales and loan officers have the right pull-through ability
Cost per funded loan	Personal loans, auto loans, business loans	Richness of the product and path to conversion	Prequalify leads to improve conversion rates, and consider time to approval when negotiating deals.
Cost per click (CPC)	New to market products, competitive product lines	Traffic quality and partner volume	Optimize targeting to improve click-to-lead rates and feed conversion data back to partners.

For more details, see our blog: *“The Hidden Costs in Your CPA: Are You Optimizing for the Right Conversion Event?”*

Why Choosing the Right Conversion Event Matters

Picking the right conversion event means playing a calculated game of risk. The deeper in the funnel the conversion event, the more valuable the conversion is and therefore the higher the cost to the brand. The higher in the funnel, the lower the cost and the higher the risk to the brand. Here are some considerations:

01

Smarter budget spend

Your winning combination is a deeper-funnel conversion event combined with a healthy conversion rate. The more your product converts (ie no leaky funnels) the harder your budget will work for you.

02

Boost customer quality

By optimizing to conversion events deeper in the funnel – like funded accounts or first use – you're more likely to align spend to the right type of customer. This only works with a compelling product and a seamless journey to conversion.

03

Maximize lifetime value (LTV)

Once you've got a customer in the door, you can focus on cross-selling and upselling other products, like savings accounts or credit cards, which helps boost LTV and increase your ability to spend more for the right accounts.

Tracking conversion rates for each event is also essential. Conversion rates provide a clear picture of how effectively leads progress through the funnel, showing where potential drop-offs occur and highlighting areas for improvement. Metrics like funding rates, approval rates, and account activations play a huge role in driving down acquisition costs.

5- External Market Forces:

When it comes to most marketing efforts, the broader economic landscape has a big impact on customer acquisition costs. Things like consumer preferences, seasonality, interest rates, competition, and even global events all add layers of complexity. These factors create a moving target for financial institutions trying to fine-tune their affiliate marketing strategies.

1- Consumer Preferences

Consumer behavior shifts dramatically based on changing preferences and seasonality, impacting how financial products are perceived and adopted. When demand for certain products rises, CPAs often become less competitive as customers are actively seeking those products. However, when demand drops, financial institutions may need to increase marketing spend to attract the same level of interest, leading to higher CPAs.

Most digital marketing channels, including affiliate, capitalize on user intent—and they can't always influence demand. When fewer people are actively searching, performance naturally dips.

Product trends also play a role. For example, during the cryptocurrency boom, CPAs for crypto accounts dropped significantly as demand soared. When the market cooled, CPAs increased as platforms had to spend more to capture new customers.

To optimize CPA during fluctuating demand:

01

Time campaigns to match consumer trends

Launching campaigns when consumer interest is high (e.g., during tax season or when mortgage rates are low) can reduce CPA.

02

Introduce incentives during low-demand periods

A compelling introductory offer or limited-time incentive during a seasonal lull can capture attention and heighten intent, even when overall demand is lower.

2- Rate Environment

The interest rate environment has a direct impact on product demand and CPA. For example, when mortgage interest rates are favorable, demand for mortgage products increases, leading to competition among financial institutions, which can drive CPAs up. When interest rates rise and demand for mortgage products declines, it can potentially result in either a shift in focus away from prioritizing these products, or can also drive costs up as competition for the same buyer persona increases.

To manage CPA in varying rate environments:

01

Launch campaigns during favorable rate periods

Timing campaigns when interest rates are competitive can help capture a larger market share.

02

Strategically allocate resources

Shifting budgets toward high-demand products during favorable rate conditions can improve acquisition efficiency.

3- Competition

In highly competitive markets, CPAs can rise as financial institutions compete for the same pool of customers. For instance, during periods of increased refinancing or intense credit card promotions, institutions may need to invest more in marketing to stand out, driving up acquisition costs.

01

Benchmark CPA against competitors

Regularly assessing your acquisition costs compared to competitors helps ensure you remain competitive without overspending. Tip – working with affiliates can help give you these insights.

02

Leverage product differentiation

Highlighting unique product features, such as rewards or fee structures, can help attract customers without engaging in costly bidding wars to get their attention via other means.

4- Geopolitical Environment

Geopolitical events, such as trade tensions or financial instability, can influence consumer confidence and the financial markets, affecting CPA. During times of uncertainty, consumers may hesitate to make significant financial decisions, causing financial institutions to adjust marketing spend, or tighten consumer requirements for approval which can drive up the costs for each acquired account.

01

Adjust acquisition strategies

In periods of uncertainty, consider focusing more on the always on predictable tactics like affiliates – it's important to keep a brand presence while mitigating unpredictable risks in marketing spend.

02

Monitor CPA benchmarks

Continuously benchmarking CPAs helps maintain acquisition efficiency, even in unstable environments.

3. CPA Qualifiers by Product Type

Acquisition costs vary significantly depending on product type, conversion events, application funnels, brand strength, and product offerings. The below data outlines CPA benchmarks to help guide strategic planning. It includes most common conversion events, key influencing factors, and target values.

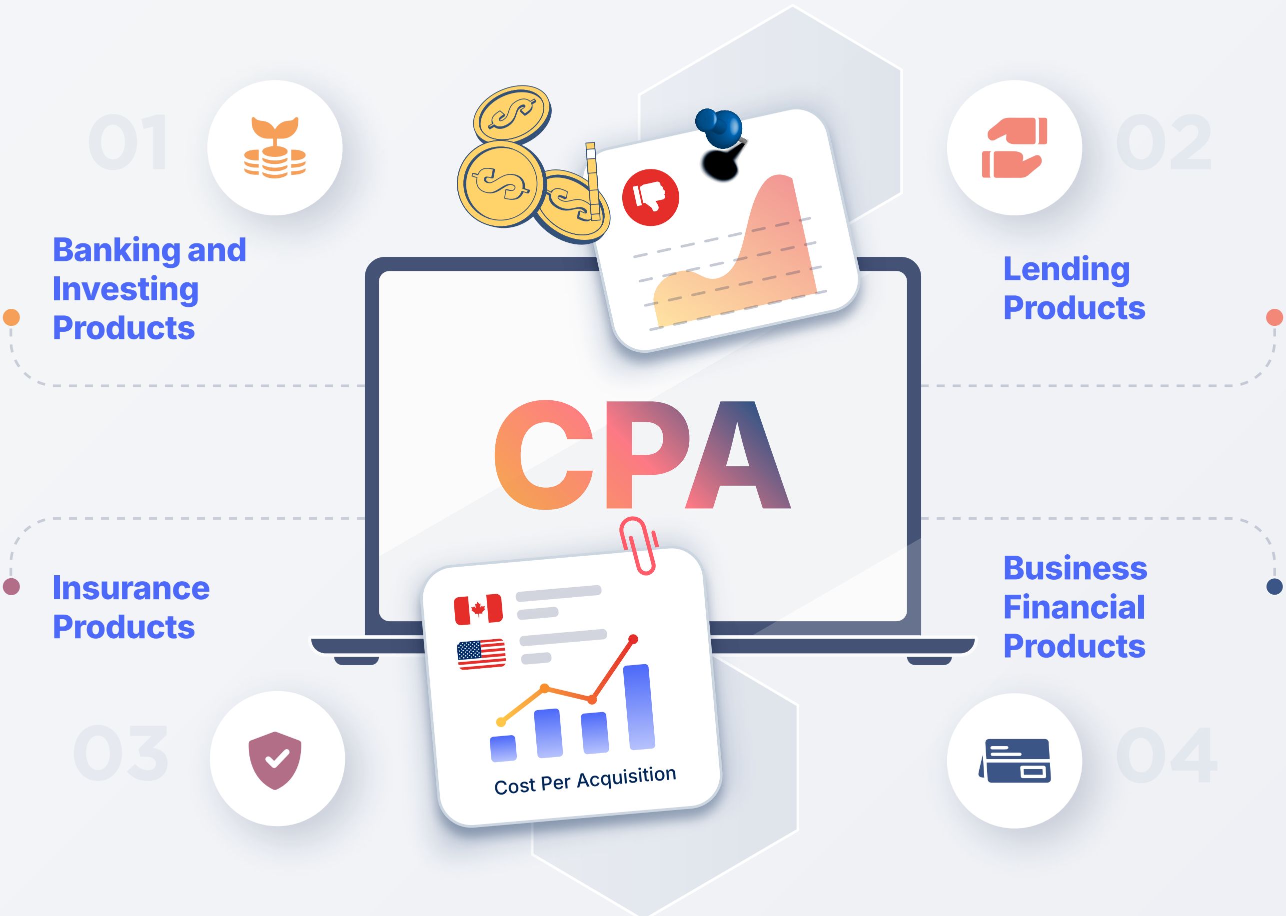
It's important to note that **the CPA targets outlined here are based on the assumption that the five key factors outlined earlier are in good standing**. If any of those areas fall below industry standards, **CPA expectations will likely increase**.

As a general rule of thumb, if your conversion rate is **20% below the industry average**, expect **to pay roughly 20% more than the target CPA** to achieve similar acquisition results.

Additionally, promotional offers and incentives are important levers across all product types and can play a key role in driving performance.

*If you'd like to explore these factors against your **current CPA targets**, we welcome you to connect with our team who can help evaluate and share deeper insights into your approach.*

Contact our team to get direct feedback on your CPA strategy



US Market - CPA Qualifiers:

Product	Most common conversion event	Biggest influencing factors	Target CPA (US) !
Banking and Investing Products			
Checking Accounts	Opened account	Promotional offer, fees, required funding amount	$175
Savings Accounts	Funded account	Promotional offer, required funding amount	$175
Certificate of deposits (CDs)	Funded account	Promotional offer, required funding amount	$165
Investment Accounts (IRAs, Brokerage)	Funded account	Promotional offer, required funding amount	$150
Lending Products			
Unsecured Credit Cards	Approved application	Card type (premium, no fee, rewards)	$250-400+
Secured Cards	Approved application	Fees	$80
Prepaid Cards	Opened account	Rewards/perks of prepaid card, fees	$40
Personal Loans	Funded loan	Loan amount, secured vs unsecured	$250+
Mortgages	Qualified lead	Home loan type, lead exclusivity	$80+
Small Business Loans	Qualified lead or funded loan	Loan size, lead criteria	$150+
Insurance Products			
Life Insurance	Qualified lead	Insurance type, lead exclusivity	$80
Auto Insurance	Qualified lead	Quote complexity, underwriting requirements	$75
Business Financial Products			
Business Checking/Savings Accounts	Opened account	Business size, required funding amount	$200
Business Credit Cards	Approved application	Card type, approval criteria	$400+

! Target CPAs listed within this document are based on market exposure and detailed anecdotal investigation by the Fintel Connect team.

CAD Market - CPA Qualifiers:

Product	Most common conversion event	Biggest influencing factors	Target CPA (CAD)
Banking and Investing Products			
Checking Accounts	Opened account	Promotional offer, fees, required funding amount	$150
Savings Accounts	Funded account	Required funding amount	$150
Guaranteed Investment Certificates (GICs)	Funded account	Required funding amount	$150
Investment Accounts (IRAs, Brokerage)	Funded account	Required funding amount	$150
Lending Products			
Unsecured Credit Cards	Approved application	Card type (premium, no fee, rewards)	$150
Secured Cards	Approved application	Fees	$80
Prepaid Cards	Opened account	Fees	$45
Personal Loans	Funded loan	Loan amount, secured vs unsecured	$200
Mortgages	Qualified lead	Home loan type, lead exclusivity	$30
Small Business Loans	Qualified lead or funded loan	Loan size, lead criteria	$80+
Insurance Products			
Life Insurance	Qualified lead	Insurance type, lead exclusivity	$165
Auto Insurance	Per application submit	Quote complexity, underwriting requirements	$100
Business Financial Products			
Business Checking/Savings Accounts	Opened account	Business size, required funding amount	$175
Business Credit Cards	Approved application	Card type, approval criteria	$175

! Target CPAs listed within this document are based on market exposure and detailed anecdotal investigation by the Fintel Connect team.

4. Increasing CPA Efficiencies Through Affiliate Partnerships

Because we work exclusively in partner marketing, we're focused on identifying ways to optimize CPA payouts in this channel. We've chosen to highlight five core areas that can be used to enhance campaign efficiency and achieve better acquisition outcomes.

1- Affiliate Selection and Relationship Building

Quality > Volume

Driving quality results in affiliate marketing often comes down to building the right partner mix. Large-scale partners can deliver volume efficiently, but often at a higher cost. On the other hand, long-tail partners tend to be more cost-effective and can unlock quality in niche audiences. It's important to test and learn.

Be Transparent

Transparency is king in affiliate partnerships. The more deeper-funnel data you can share with partners, the harder they'll be able to work for you to achieve quality results – and therefore drive down costs.

Work To Their Strengths

Understand what tactics your partners use to deliver results. For example, don't shy away from CPC-based campaigns – you'll be surprised how much more efficient this model can be when done right.

2- Commission and Incentive Structures

Results-Based Structures

Tie commercial models with partners to meaningful outcomes for your business where the return on investment is clearly measurable.

Tiered Incentives

Encourage affiliates to prioritize your brand and drive greater volumes by offering richer payouts tied to account size or volume of conversions. Offer higher CPAs for hitting volume tiers or give a bonus each time they achieve a minimum monthly volume.

3- Data and Analytics

Data, Data, Data

Tie user journey performance and funnel activity directly back to specific partner placements. This allows you to measure not just volume of conversions – but messaging and targeting accuracy and ultimately partner quality.

Improve Attribution

Implement advanced tracking solutions that provide accurate attribution across channels. Ensuring that affiliates get credit for driving conversions helps build trust and encourages them to focus on performance, improving overall efficiency.

4- Conversion Optimization

01

Optimize Conversion Paths

A brand's responsibility is to provide a seamless customer experience and an efficient path to conversion. Test and optimize the path to your success metric, removing friction wherever possible.
For example, if a partner has a detailed product review, try directing their audience straight to the application start page.

02

Test and Refine Offers

Regularly test different offers, creatives, and messaging to see what resonates most with your affiliates' audiences. Small changes in how an offer is presented can have a big impact on conversion rates, which directly impacts CPA.

03

Align Affiliate Efforts with Demand Cycles

Time affiliate campaigns around periods of high demand for certain products (e.g., mortgage products during low-interest-rate periods) to help affiliates drive more efficient conversions, reducing CPA.

5- Product and Cross-Sell Strategies

Cross-Sell Opportunities

Encourage affiliates to promote multiple products to the same audience. For example, after acquiring a customer for a checking account, affiliates can cross-sell savings accounts, credit cards, or loans, which increases lifetime value (LTV) and could help to lower overall acquisition costs with bundled offers.

5. Trends to Watch for 2025: What's Shaping CPA in Financial Services

As we look ahead to 2025, several key trends are set to shape the way financial institutions approach customer acquisition. Let's dive into what's coming and how it could impact your strategy.

01

AI-Powered Precision and Personalization

AI is becoming a major player in the affiliate marketing world, especially when it comes to targeting the right audiences at the right time. By identifying high-intent customers earlier in the funnel, AI is making campaigns sharper and more cost-effective, helping affiliates connect with people ready to convert.

02

Privacy-Driven Data Collection

Privacy regulations are tightening, and marketers are adjusting by prioritizing first-party, consent-based data practices. This is already influencing attribution capabilities, which may mean needing to use CPA as a way to compensate for potential affiliate loss in referral credit.

03

Rising Competition

Competition is heating up – that's not new. The challenge is compounded by limited advertising inventory. Only the top products will win, which may mean alternative payout models to help boost coverage. It's a key reason the Fintel team is laser-focused on expanding and diversifying the partner mix.

04

Multi-Channel Campaigns

Effective and congruent marketing across channels will be key to winning the conversion game. Leveraging diverse channels like combining media with search and affiliate means bolstering performance of these channels and likely increasing CPA efficiencies in the process.

05

Customer Incentive Costs

Brands are focused on creating the most value for their customers – so we're likely to see more collaborative incentive offers through partnerships. While this may result in perceptively higher CPAs, it is likely to also result in higher quality customers and therefore LTVs.

6. Actionable Recommendations

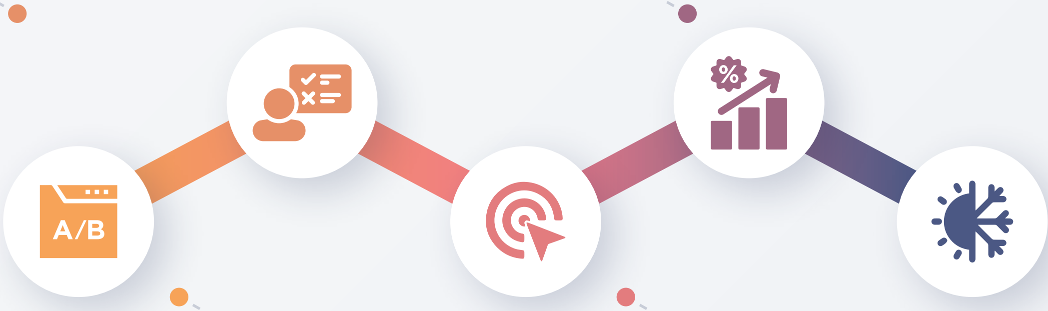
Short-Term Strategies for Improving Acquisition Spend

Refine Your Partner Mix

One of the quickest ways to improve CPA is to evaluate your current affiliate partner roster. Focus on high-performing partners with a history of driving quality traffic and conversions.

Implement Dynamic Payout Models

Offer the right payouts to the right partners depending on key qualifying metrics – conversion rates, time to activate, average deposit balances etc.



A/B Test Affiliate Creatives

Test your journeys. Co-branded landed pages can work well with larger, credible partners. Traffic from long-form product reviews may be best directed right into the application funnel.

Deploy Targeted Retargeting Campaigns

Affiliates can be highly valuable for re-engaging audiences. Give partners tracking tools to retarget traffic they've sent to you but may not have fully converted. Let them help do some of the heavy lifting to improve conversion rates.

Leverage Seasonal Campaigns

Seasonality plays a big role in campaign performance – and therefore cost. Work with your partners to execute seasonal pushes to create urgency and capitalize on consumer attention.

Want to know where to invest long-term for sustainable acquisition efficiency? Get in touch with our team

Conclusion

As financial institutions continue to navigate an increasingly competitive landscape, understanding and optimizing CPA remains a critical component of successful marketing strategies. **By leveraging performance-based channels, refining conversion strategies, and fostering deep partnerships with affiliates, financial institutions can achieve immediate improvements in their CPA.** However, sustainable success requires ongoing investment in technology, data integration, and adaptive frameworks that can respond to market conditions and evolving consumer behaviors.

Looking ahead to 2025 and beyond, building an agile acquisition framework—rooted in real-time data, privacy compliance, omnichannel engagement, and personalized marketing—will be key to maintaining competitive CPA in a rapidly shifting environment.

Ready to take your acquisition strategy to the next level?

Get in touch with Fintel Connect to learn how we can help you optimize your marketing performance and acquisition spend today.

Book a Demo