ConvertLab360

Google Ads 2027: account readiness

What Google changed in 2026, what changes in 2027, and how to get your account ready now: AI Max, Performance Max, Demand Gen, ads in AI Mode, DSA and Display migrations. Rules, thresholds, a change calendar, an 8-week plan, diagnostics and worksheets.

FREE GUIDE · 30 PAGES · NOVEMBER 2026

01 · Essentials
10 actions, first week, settings, diagnostics

02 · 2026 → 2027
Timeline, change calendar, 8-week plan, AI Mode

03 · Signal and money
Conversions, values, bidding, targets from margin

04 · Campaigns
Search + AI Max, PMax, Demand Gen, cadence, worksheets

THE MOST VALUABLE PAGES COME FIRST

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How to read the labels

GOOGLE — official Google Ads Help, Google Marketing Live announcements or statements by the Google Ads Liaison. Figures with this label are Google's own data; your account may differ. PRACTICE — agency experience and industry data; not a platform rule, so test it on your own account. CALCULATION — derived arithmetically from your own economics.

How to use this guide

If results are dropping, start with p. 5 (settings) and p. 6 (diagnostics). Preparing for 2027 — p. 8 (calendar) and p. 9 (8-week plan). If you are launching or rebuilding an account, go in order: conversions → bidding and targets → structure → campaigns. Without clean conversions nothing else works: Google's automation optimizes exactly what you tell it to count. Print the worksheets (p. 29) and fill them in with your numbers.

IF YOU READ ONLY ONE PAGE

10 actions with the biggest impact in 2026

01 **Keep only business conversions as primary** PRACTICE

Goals → Conversions → set every action to "Secondary" unless it is a purchase, a qualified lead or a booking. Page views, phone clicks, scroll and chat do not drive bidding.

02 **Reconcile conversion value with your backend over 30 days** PRACTICE

A noticeable gap between revenue in Google Ads and in your CRM or store — look for a duplicate tag or an event without `value` first, and only then change bids.

03 **Set tROAS at 90–95% of your actual 30-day ROAS** PRACTICE

A target above actual (say 500% when you run at 380%) can cut spend by more than half within two days. Raise it in steps of up to 15% after a full conversion cycle.

04 **Exclude your brand from PMax and AI Max in two ways** PRACTICE

A brand list in campaign settings plus a shared negative keyword list with misspellings and your domain. Keep the brand Search campaign unconstrained by budget, otherwise PMax takes its queries.

05 **Turn off auto-applied recommendations** PRACTICE

Recommendations → Auto-apply: switch off everything you did not choose deliberately (targeting expansion, broad match, AI Max). Change history shows what was already applied without you.

06 **Location: "Presence", not "Presence or interest"** GOOGLE

By default Google also shows ads to people merely interested in a region. For local services and delivery this is straight budget loss.

07 **Negatives via n-grams, not one query at a time** PRACTICE

Split queries into single words and word pairs, sum the spend: an n-gram with zero conversions and spend ≥ 3 × target CPA is a negative candidate (p. 17).

08 **Leads from the CRM — into Google Ads daily** GOOGLE

Bid on a funnel stage with a short conversion delay and at least 15 conversions a month. Upload daily via Data Manager.

09 **Tracking outage — apply a data exclusion immediately** GOOGLE

Tools → Bidding → Data exclusions for the outage dates, so Smart Bidding does not learn from "zeros". Not for promotions.

10 **Upgrade DSA manually before February 2027** GOOGLE

Auto-migration turns on search term matching, text customization and final URL expansion together, and some DSA rules become read-only. A manual upgrade lets you set URL and brand exclusions in advance (p. 9).

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

A 7-day plan for an account nobody has reviewed in a while

The typical picture: a dozen primary conversions including page views, PMax without a brand exclusion, DSA that Google is already moving to AI Max, and a ROAS target set a year ago. Fix measurement first, then move to campaigns.

Day	What to do and where	Outcome
1	**Goals → Conversions → Summary.** Keep 1–3 business actions as primary. Look for the same event counted twice: Google Ads tag + GA4 import. Check which goals each campaign uses (account-default or campaign-specific).	A list of primary conversions
2	Reconcile 30-day revenue and conversion count with the backend. Turn on enhanced conversions, open diagnostics. Check Consent Mode: consent state reaches the tags before they fire.	A clean signal for bidding
3	**Recommendations → Auto-apply:** switch off the extras. **Change history** for 90 days: what "Recommendations" or Google changed. Search campaigns: turn off Display expansion, location — "Presence".	Nobody changes the account without you
4	Calculate break-even ROAS and maximum CPA (worksheet on p. 29). Compare with current campaign targets.	Targets from economics
5	PMax and AI Max: brand list, shared negative list, URL exclusions (careers, support, login, blog, cart). 30-day search terms → n-grams (p. 17).	Automation off brand and junk
6	2027 inventory: DSA, Display, call-only ads, campaigns Google moved to AI Max in September 2026. For ecommerce — Merchant Center diagnostics and photos smaller than 500×500 px.	A list of what will change without you (p. 8)
7	Record a baseline: spend, conversions, value, backend revenue, share of brand queries. Start a change log (p. 26) and plan one change per week.	A reference point

What not to do in week one

Do not change targets, structure and creative at the same time, and do not pause your biggest campaign "to see what happens". Week one is for measurement and protective settings: they stop losses fastest and break nothing.

20 MINUTES THAT STOP SILENT LOSSES

Settings to check first

Where	What to check	Recommendation
Recommendations → Auto-apply	Which types are on: targeting expansion, broad match, AI Max, budgets	Turn off anything you did not choose deliberately PRACTICE
Change history	Changes by the "Recommendations" user or by Google	Roll back what you did not plan
Search → Networks	Display expansion; search partners	Display — off; partners — evaluate with the "Network" segment and turn off if worse
Locations → Options	"Presence or interest" by default GOOGLE	"Presence: people in or regularly in"
Campaign goals	Does the campaign optimize to account goals or its own	Lead gen and ecommerce campaigns — different goals
Attribution	Model and conversion window of every primary action	Data-driven; window matching your sales cycle
URL expansion, auto assets	Search: AI Max, automatically created assets; PMax: URL expansion, auto-generated video and text	Enable only together with URL exclusions and text guidelines
Account negatives	An account-level list for obvious junk	"free", "jobs", "DIY", "essay" and similar
Placement exclusions	Mobile games, made-for-advertising sites, kids' content in PMax and Demand Gen	Account-level exclusions + content suitability PRACTICE
Ad schedule	"When ads showed" report for 90 days	For calls — business hours only if nobody answers otherwise
Call conversions	Minimum call length (60 s by default) GOOGLE	Set the length after which a call is genuinely qualified
Customer Match and lists	Customer list uploaded and refreshed	Needed for signals, exclusions and the new-customer goal
Verification, billing	Advertiser verification status, payment limits	No blocks before peak season

Why this comes first

These settings need no new creative and do not reset learning, yet they are where silent budget losses most often start: impressions outside your region, Display clicks, changes nobody planned.

CHECK IN ORDER, NOT ALL AT ONCE

Results dropped: diagnostics from simple to complex

Most “algorithm drops” have a mundane cause: a broken tag, a site change, or someone touching the goals. Work top to bottom and do not move on until the previous step is ruled out.

#	Check	What to look for	What to do
1	**Tracking**	Conversions fell to zero or sharply while backend orders did not. Tag status, enhanced conversions diagnostics, site or CMP changes.	Fix the tag; do not touch bids until data recovers
2	**Conversion delay**	The last 7–14 days look “worse” because some conversions have not arrived yet.	Compare periods that have fully matured
3	**Change history**	Who changed what: targets, budgets, primary conversions, AI Max, DSA upgrade.	Roll back or wait for adaptation
4	**Policy and feed**	Disapproved ads or products, domain restrictions, advertiser verification.	Fix the root cause, request review
5	**Budget and targets**	“Limited by budget”, a tROAS or tCPA that is too tight, low impression share.	Loosen the target or add budget
6	**Demand and seasonality**	Impressions down across the market, holidays, competitor promos in auction insights.	Compare year over year; do not “cure” demand with bids
7	**Traffic mix**	Which channels, products, queries and customer types absorbed spend. Brand vs non-brand.	Exclusions, negatives, asset group review
8	**Landing page and offer**	Site conversion rate, speed, price, availability, promos; where URL expansion sends traffic.	Fix the page or exclude the URL

What not to do in the first days

Do not change structure, target, budget and creative all at once. Do not switch off a big campaign “to test”: without a control group the result is unreadable PRACTICE.

If ROAS fell but revenue did not

The problem is attribution or tracking, not advertising. Reconcile with the backend and GA4 using the same attribution windows.

THE TIMELINE THAT EXPLAINS YOUR ACCOUNT

What changed in 2025–2026 and what it means for you

When	What happened GOOGLE	What it means for you
2025	Campaign-level negative keywords in PMax; limit raised to 10,000 per campaign. Channel performance report and search terms report in PMax.	PMax is no longer a “black box”: there is something to review weekly
2025	AI Max for Search: query matching beyond keywords, text customization, URL expansion — a layer on top of a regular Search campaign.	Keywords are a signal, not a boundary
Early 2026	PMax: first-party audience exclusions, a budget report with month-end spend forecast, audience reporting by age and gender, placement breakdown by network.	You can run PMax for new customers and see where budget goes
March 2026	Demand Gen: lookalike segments gradually become a suggestion rather than a hard targeting boundary PER TRADE PRESS.	First-party seed lists matter more than lookalike settings
15.04.2026	DSA shutdown and automatic upgrade to AI Max announced.	Review DSA rules before the migration (p. 19)
May 2026	Enhanced conversions for web and for leads merge into a single toggle PER TRADE PRESS.	Check that the setting did not get lost
20.05.2026	Google Marketing Live: ads in AI Mode, Direct Offers, AI Brief, Demand Gen in Maps, Asset Studio, Ask Advisor, new attribution metrics (details on p. 10).	Access to the new surfaces — via AI Max, PMax, broad match + Smart Bidding
15.06.2026	Offline conversion and enhanced conversions for leads uploads move to the Data Manager API; they are blocked in the Google Ads API.	Check how your CRM sends conversions
01.09.2026	Automatic conversion of campaign-level broad match and automatically created assets to AI Max began. The same week — a test of exact and phrase serving in AI Mode for queries with explicit intent.	Look for the upgrade banner in your campaigns
Next	DSA upgrade to AI Max: dates in the sources range from September 2026 to February 2027. Account-level content and page-title exclusions in AI Max were promised “later this year”.	Do not wait for auto-migration: prepare rules in advance

The main takeaway

Google keeps removing manual levers (keywords as a boundary, DSA rules, lookalikes) and giving exclusions, reports and asset controls in return. The winners shift effort from “targeting setup” to signal quality, feed, landing pages and a weekly report review.

WHAT IS ALREADY LIVE AND WHAT IS COMING — WITH DATES

Change calendar: second half of 2026 and 2027

When	What changes	What to do
From 01.06.2026	Hourly, daily and weekly data is kept for 37 months; monthly and yearly data for 11 years PER TRADE PRESS	Export daily history older than 3 years if you need it for seasonal analysis
From 03.08.2026	No new Smart campaigns, campaign-level broad match campaigns or legacy automatically created assets	New campaigns — Search with AI Max or PMax
From 17.08.2026	Budget-limited tCPA/tROAS campaigns no longer "overachieve" their target	Review targets: if ROAS used to run well above target, volume may have shifted
September 2026	Campaign-level broad match and auto assets moved to AI Max (search term matching on). Campaign-level language targeting removed from Search and AI Max	Review migrated campaigns: queries, URLs, text; separate languages through landing pages and assets
January 2027	Expected block on creating new standalone Display campaigns; later — auto-migration to Demand Gen DATE UNCONFIRMED	Migrate manually with the Google Ads tool (p. 9)
31.01.2027	Merchant Center: product images smaller than 500×500 px become a violation PER TRADE PRESS	Find and replace small images in the feed
February 2027	Automatic DSA upgrade to AI Max; new dynamic ad groups can no longer be created GOOGLE	Upgrade manually earlier, with URL and brand exclusions (p. 19)
February 2027	Call-only ads stop serving PER TRADE PRESS	Replace with RSAs with a call asset; move call conversions
2026–2028	Limited Ad Serving policy expands from Search to all Google ads	Advertiser verification and a clean policy history
"Later"	AI Brief, account-level content and page-title exclusions in AI Max, wider access to Qualified Future Conversions GOOGLE	Watch the banners in your account

If you work via API and scripts

Offline conversions go through the Data Manager API (new uploads via the Google Ads API closed from 15.06.2026). Google Ads API versions on Google's tentative schedule: v23 — February 2027, v24 — May, v25 — August, v26 — November 2027. Scripts that create DSA must be rewritten before February PER TRADE PRESS .

DECEMBER — FEBRUARY, NO RUSH AND NO SURPRISES

Getting your account ready for 2027: an 8-week plan

Weeks	What to do	How you know it is done
1–2	Settings audit (p. 5), primary conversions and values (p. 12–13), Consent Mode, enhanced conversions. Offline data — via Data Manager	Value in Google Ads ≈ backend; diagnostics "Good"+
2	Inventory of what 2027 affects: DSA, Display, call-only, Smart, campaigns migrated in September. A table: campaign → what happens → date → owner	No campaign migrates "by itself"
3	Campaigns migrated to AI Max in September: search terms (match type "AI Max"), landing pages ("Selected by"), generated assets. URL and brand exclusions	No brand or junk queries in AI Max
3–4	DSA: export rules, check "page title / page contains", page feed with custom labels. Upgrade one campaign manually as a pilot	The pilot performs no worse, rules reproduced
4–5	Display → Demand Gen: the migration tool (one-way, new daily budget, up to 42 days of history carried over). If you need GDN only — channel controls. Brand Lift for GDN in Demand Gen is not supported PER TRADE PRESS	No Display campaigns left
5	Call-only → RSA with a call asset, ad schedule, minimum call length as a conversion	Calls are counted in the new ads
6	Upgrade the remaining DSA manually. Negatives, brand exclusions, text guidelines	No DSA left — before auto-migration
7	PMax: campaign negatives, brand and existing-customer exclusions, channel report. Feed: images ≥ 500×500 px, disapprovals	Brand separate, feed without warnings
8	2027 baseline: spend, conversions, value, revenue, new-customer share, brand share. Change log (p. 26), test plan for Q1	You have something to compare 2027 against

Why not wait for auto-migration

Google itself recommends the manual upgrade because it gives more control. DSA auto-migration turns on search term matching, text customization and URL expansion at once, and some DSA rules become read-only afterwards. Migrate manually in a quiet month and you set the limits yourself instead of untangling them after the switch GOOGLE.

NEW PLACEMENTS AND HOW TO GET THERE

Ads in AI Mode and AI Overviews

Who can serve GOOGLE

- Search with **broad match** or AI Max for Search
- Performance Max, Shopping, DSA
- **Smart Bidding is required**, according to the Google Ads Liaison
- No separate campaigns or budgets needed
- Exact- and phrase-only campaigns without AI Max do not take part by default; since September 2026 Google has been testing them for queries with “explicit and direct intent”

What you do not control GOOGLE

- You cannot target AI Mode separately or opt out of it separately from Search
- Negative keywords, asset pinning and brand exclusions still apply
- No separate report: impressions are aggregated with regular Search
- “The relevance bar is higher in AI Search”: the ad is matched to both the query and the content of the AI answer

Google Marketing Live 2026 announcements worth knowing GOOGLE

What	The point	Status
Ads in AI Mode	Ads inside the AI Mode conversation	Via AI Max or PMax
Direct Offers	An exclusive discount at the moment of purchase intent; payment via Google Pay	Testing since January 2026
Business Agent for Leads	The prospect asks questions inside the ad; answers come from your website	Test: education, auto, real estate
AI Brief	Describe brand, audiences and guardrails in plain text; the system turns them into ad guidelines	English “in the coming months”
Demand Gen in Maps	First expansion of Demand Gen to Google Maps	Announced
Asset Studio	Image and video generation (Gemini, Veo), 1-Click Creative Testing	Testing — English, summer 2026
Ask Advisor	One agent across Google Ads, Analytics and Merchant Center with a shared memory of goals	Global beta, English
Attributed Branded Searches	How many branded searches an ad “caused”	Google Ads and GMP
Qualified Future Conversions	A forecast of conversions up to 6 months out; a supplement to, not a replacement for, standard metrics	Limited test

What to do now PRACTICE

There is no need to rebuild the account for AI Mode. Make sure your main non-brand campaigns run Smart Bidding with broad match or AI Max, and that landing pages answer the customer’s question clearly: the AI answer and the ad both draw their content from there.

POPULAR RULES WORTH CHECKING

Popular claims vs what is actually known

Claim	What is actually true
"Daily budget = 3 × target CPA"	There is no universal formula for Search and PMax. Budget follows the volume of demand, the customer cost you can afford and conversion frequency. For Demand Gen, Google does recommend ≥ 10 × tCPA GOOGLE.
"Learning takes two weeks"	There is no fixed period. What matters is conversion delay and whether traffic was representative. With a 14-day sales cycle, fresh clicks have not produced results yet PRACTICE.
"PMax replaces Search and Shopping"	In a study of 24,702 campaigns (2024), 82% of advertisers ran PMax alongside other campaign types PRACTICE. Search remains for brand queries, controlled messaging and dedicated budgets.
"Audience signals are targeting"	Signals only suggest where learning should start and do not limit who sees the ads. Hard limits are exclusions.
"Search themes = keywords for PMax"	Search themes are for concepts not visible from the site, feed and history. They do not restrict targeting, and there is no need to fill them "to the limit".
"Ad Strength 'Excellent' = profit"	Ad Strength shows missing formats and variety. It does not predict profitability PRACTICE.
"PMax always beats Search"	An exact keyword identical to the query takes priority over PMax. PMax search themes share priority with phrase and broad; Ad Rank decides the rest GOOGLE.
"The channel credited in the PMax report drove the conversions"	The channel report is diagnostic: credit in the report does not mean the channel worked on its own.
"No AI Max — no ads in AI Mode"	AI Max is not required: broad match with Smart Bidding, PMax and Shopping qualify GOOGLE.
"Higher ROAS is always better"	A target that is too tight cuts volume; in practice conversion drops of up to 50% have been seen PRACTICE. The goal is maximum profit, not maximum ROAS.

THE FOUNDATION OF EVERY BID STRATEGY

Conversions: what counts as primary and how not to break the signal

Smart Bidding, AI Max and PMax learn from what you marked as a primary conversion and from its value. If that is junk, the system will diligently buy junk.

Primary (bidding learns from these)

- Purchase with real transaction revenue
- Qualified lead, booking, accepted application
- Store visit (where available)
- CRM stages: opportunity, deal — with value

Secondary (for analysis)

- Page views, scroll, time on site
- Clicks on phone or email, chat opens
- Add to cart, begin checkout
- Raw “form submits” if there is a qualification step

Signal checklist

What	How to check
No double counting	The same event is not counted as primary from both the Google Ads tag and a GA4 import PRACTICE.
Accurate value	Revenue in Google Ads matches the backend. With uneven margins, consider margin-based values so bidding does not favor cheap high-ticket items.
Enhanced conversions	Hashed first-party email/phone improve measurement. Diagnostics show the status: “Excellent”, “Good”, “Needs attention”, “Urgent” GOOGLE.
Consent Mode	The consent banner passes its state to tags before Google Ads fires; without it part of EEA conversions simply disappear.
Offline data	CRM import via Data Manager. Match keys — GCLID and user-provided data; keep sending GCLID GOOGLE.
Conversion delay	Know your typical cycle: with a 14-day cycle, fresh clicks do not have a final outcome yet.
GA4 + Google Ads link	Linked accounts make GA4 audiences and conversions available for bidding; keep only one version of each event primary.

Rule: one business event = one primary conversion with a real value

TOOLS THAT ARE RARELY USED

Values, new customers, tracking outages and seasonality

Conversion value rules GOOGLE

- A value multiplier by location, device or audience: e.g. ×1.3 for a city with a higher average order, ×0.7 for a region with frequent returns.
- In reports look at both adjusted and unadjusted value (the “Value rule adjustment” segment): “Conv. value / cost” includes the added value.
- Take multipliers from CRM data (average order, LTV, returns by segment), not by eye.

New customer acquisition goal GOOGLE

- Two modes: **bid higher for new customers** (extra value per new customer) or **only bid for new customers**.
- Requires value-based bidding and a list of existing customers (Customer Match, purchasers).
- If you do not know the amount, start with Google’s recommended value. The new-customer share is visible in reports even with a nominal uplift PRACTICE.

Situation	Tool	How to apply GOOGLE
Tag broke, CRM did not upload, double counting for a few days	Data exclusions (Tools → Bidding)	As soon as possible, for the exact outage dates. Planned site downtime — in advance. Not for promotions. Google does not recommend backfilling data after an outage
A 1–7 day sale with an expected conversion spike	Seasonality adjustment	Only for major conversion-rate changes; Smart Bidding handles normal seasonality itself. Duration 1–7 days PRACTICE
Lead gen without an order value	Static values	At least 2 different values on 2+ actions, none of them zero
Long funnel	Bidding on a funnel stage	A stage with a short delay and ≥ 15 conversions a month; daily uploads
Products with different margins	Value = profit	Send margin-based value instead of revenue (or custom labels + separate targets)

Check: Σ value in Google Ads ≈ backend revenue (or profit) for the same period and attribution window

BUSINESS GOAL FIRST, TARGETING SECOND

Which bid strategy to choose

Strategy	When it fits	Risk
Maximize conversions	The selected conversions are genuinely valuable and roughly equal in worth	Buys micro-conversions and mixed-quality leads
Maximize conversions + tCPA	Stable lead cost, a target from economics and recent account data	A target far below achievable stops delivery
Maximize conversion value	Values are trustworthy and the differences matter (ecommerce, leads with values)	Inflated or duplicated values — misleading ROAS
Maximize conversion value + tROAS	There is a value history; the target comes from margin	A target that is too tight cuts volume
Target impression share	Brand, defending positions; here Google recommends phrase and exact GOOGLE	Does not optimize for outcomes
Maximize clicks / tCPC	Starting without conversions, Demand Gen for traffic	Cheap clicks with no value

What Google says GOOGLE

- Conversion-based Smart Bidding (tCPA or tROAS) works best with AI Max and delivers the most reach within your goals.
- Bidding learns at the query level: a query matched elsewhere in the account informs bids across the account.
- Switching from tCPA to tROAS gives on average +14% conversion value at a similar ROAS.

How to set and change the target PRACTICE

01 Start

tROAS = 90–95% of actual 30-day ROAS; tCPA = 105–110% of actual CPA. No history — 2–4 weeks without a target (Maximize conversions / value).

02 Step size

Up to 15% at a time (Google for Demand Gen: 5–10% a week, no more than 15% GOOGLE). Next change — after a full conversion cycle.

03 Sign of a choked target

Spend below budget and falling, impression share lost to rank rising — loosen the target rather than adding budget.

04 Portfolio strategy

When several campaigns share the same economics and each has low volume on its own.

NUMBERS FROM YOUR OWN ECONOMICS

CPA and ROAS targets, budget from margin

Break-even ROAS = 1 ÷ margin

Margin after cost of goods, shipping, fees and returns. 40% → break-even ROAS 2.5 (250%) CALCULATION.

Maximum CPA = profit per customer × share you are willing to give

For repeat purchases calculate from LTV, but only if you actually see repeat sales in the data.

Example	Margin 70%	Margin 15%
Break-even ROAS	1.43 (143%)	6.67 (667%)
A 500% ROAS is...	very profitable	a loss

How to think about budget PRACTICE

01 How much qualified demand exists?

Keyword Planner and impression share show the ceiling. Budget above it will not buy more buyers.

02 What customer cost is sustainable for the business?

The target depends on this, not on the “recommended budget”.

03 How often will a conversion happen, and when is the final outcome visible?

A few conversions a month — one campaign is better than five.

04 Is the budget enough to test without spreading thin?

Fewer campaigns with enough data in each.

05 Can the business handle the demand?

Stock, production, people answering the phone.

Google’s budget recommendations

Forecasts and budget recommendations are platform estimates, not approval. Since 2026 PMax has a budget report with a month-end spend forecast and the effect of changing the daily budget GOOGLE — useful, but the decision stays with your economics.

SIMPLER MEANS MORE DATA IN EACH CAMPAIGN

Account structure in 2026

Google recommends a simpler structure: AI Max + Smart Bidding and ad groups by theme, so the system can pick the best keyword and ad for a query GOOGLE. But “simple” does not mean “everything in one campaign”.

Separate campaign if these differ

- budget or CPA/ROAS target
- countries, languages, locations
- goal (sale, lead, new customers)
- brand exclusions, promotions
- reporting needs

Consolidate if these match

- economics (margin, order value, target)
- creative logic and landing pages
- geography and schedule
- each has too few conversions on its own

Baseline setup PRACTICE

Campaign	Role	Settings
Search — brand	Brand protection, text control, cheap conversions kept apart from the rest	Exact/phrase; brand excluded from PMax and AI Max
Search — non-brand + AI Max	Core demand for services and categories	Themed ad groups, Smart Bidding, AI Max after a test
PMax / Shopping	Products (ecommerce) or cross-channel acquisition	Feed, asset groups by theme (p. 21–24)
Demand Gen	Creating demand: YouTube, Discover, Gmail	Separate targets and a longer evaluation window (p. 25)

Locations of interest

AI Max only: geographic intent at ad-group level without extra keywords (“plumber Leeds”) GOOGLE.

Do not merge unlike things

Different offers with different economics in one campaign for the sake of volume — and bidding will pick the easiest, not the most profitable.

THE CHEAPEST OPTIMIZATION WITH THE HIGHEST RETURN

Search terms: n-grams and negative keyword lists

With broad match and AI Max the search terms report grows many times over, and reviewing queries one by one no longer works. N-grams show which *word* drains budget across hundreds of different queries.

The one-evening process PRACTICE

01 Export 30–90 days of queries

Search (match type, including "AI Max") + PMax (terms and categories). Columns: query, clicks, cost, conversions, value.

02 Split into 1-, 2- and 3-word n-grams

"boiler repair leeds price" → "boiler", "repair", ..., "boiler repair", "repair leeds", ... Sum cost and conversions for each n-gram.

03 Flag candidates

0 conversions and cost ≥ 3 × target CPA, or n-gram CPA twice the target with enough clicks.

04 Review the full queries

Before blocking a word, look at every query containing it: "today" may sit in your best queries. One conversion is a reason to review, not to block.

05 Add the negative to the right list

A broad match negative blocks a query containing all its words in any order. Negatives do not cover close variants GOOGLE, so add plurals and common misspellings separately.

Shared list	What goes in	Attach to
General junk	free, jobs, careers, DIY, essay, download, used (if you do not sell used)	Account level
Informational	what is, how does it work, reviews (careful for services)	Sales campaigns
Brand	name, misspellings, domain, product names	Non-brand Search, PMax
Competitors	competitor brands, if you do not plan to conquest them	All except a conquest campaign
Wrong geography / services	cities you do not serve; services you do not offer	Local campaigns

NOT A NEW CAMPAIGN TYPE, BUT A LAYER ON TOP OF SEARCH

AI Max: what it switches on and where your levers are

According to Google, advertisers who turn on AI Max typically get +14% conversions or value at a similar CPA/ROAS; in campaigns where more than 70% of conversions came from exact and phrase — +27% (non-retail data) GOOGLE. These are averages: verify with an experiment.

Queries
Search term matching: broad match and keywordless technology find new relevant queries.

Text
Text customization: headlines and descriptions from your landing page, ads and keywords.

URL
Final URL expansion: the most relevant page on your domain. Works only with text customization on.

Lever GOOGLE	Level	How it works
Search term matching	Campaign → off per ad group	Turn on at campaign level first; ad groups can be switched off individually
Text customization	Campaign	Text guidelines: term exclusions and tone. Turning off = assets shown as “Removed”
URL expansion	Campaign	Turns off together with text customization
URL exclusions	Campaign	A “URL contains” rule matches whole words, not part of a string
URL inclusions	Ad group	Without expansion — only your URLs; with expansion — yours plus Google-selected ones
Brand exclusions	Campaign	Stops AI Max from cannibalizing the brand campaign
Brand inclusions	Campaign / ad group	An ad-group rule overrides the campaign rule for that ad group
Locations of interest	Ad group	AI Max only, for keywordless matches
Negative keywords	As usual	Still apply with AI Max

Watch out: pinned assets

Pinned RSA headlines serve as intended only when both URL expansion and URL inclusions are off. If a legal line or disclaimer relies on pinning, check before launch GOOGLE.

STEP BY STEP AND WITH A CONTROL GROUP

AI Max: how to launch, test, and what to do with DSA

Phased rollout PRACTICE

01 Queries

Turn on search term matching — find demand beyond keywords.

02 Text

Text customization — where brand and compliance allow.

03 URL

URL expansion — only once the site, content and tracking are ready.

04 Together

Combine once each feature has proven its value on its own.

Experiment

- The built-in AI Max experiment splits the campaign 50/50: current settings vs AI Max PRACTICE
- Duration — at least 4–6 weeks and 1–2 conversion cycles; longer if the delay is long
- Write down the success criterion and what counts as incremental before you start
- Watch brand / non-brand and whether conversions "moved over" from other campaigns

What to check in reports

Report	What to look at
Search terms	Match type "AI Max", whether matched by broad expansion or keywordless; the query → headline → URL link
Landing pages	The "Selected by" field: where AI Max chose the page. Outdated pages, expired promos, login, pages without a next step — exclude
Assets	Generated headlines: claims out of context, the wrong offer, brand risk. Winning themes — into your manual ads

DSA → AI Max: get ready for the migration GOOGLE

- Dynamic ad groups become standard ones, DSAs become responsive search ads with a minimum of generated assets. DSAs keep serving until the new RSAs pass review.
- Rules like "page title contains" become read-only: you can remove them but not edit them. "Page contains" is not supported.
- URL rules, page feeds with custom labels, rule combinations, campaign URL exclusions and ad-group inclusions carry over.
- Audit your DSA rules now and check whether a page feed reproduces each rule while they can still be edited.

THE AI WRITES FROM YOUR SITE, SO YOUR SITE IS ADVERTISING TOO

Ads and landing pages

Google's page requirements for AI Max GOOGLE

- Clear, accurate content and well-written page titles: Google writes ad headlines from them and decides which queries the page answers.
- Simple navigation so the system can recognize themes and terms.
- Do not rely on images or Flash and do not hide content behind a login — AI Max reads such pages poorly.
- Sensitive verticals: the right certifications and audience settings are required.

Assets that cover different messages PRACTICE

Message type	Example headline
Product / service	"Vaillant and Bosch boiler repair"
Customer problem	"Boiler not heating? We come today"
Benefit	"A warm home in 2 hours"
Differentiator	"Genuine parts in stock"
Proof	"4.9 ★ from 1,200 reviews"
Offer / availability	"Free diagnostics until 30 Nov"
Action	"Book an engineer online"

Examples are illustrative. Write different message types, not five rewrites of one sentence. Every possible combination of assets must remain true.

Pin rarely

Over-pinning limits optimization, and with URL expansion pinning is ignored anyway. Pin only what you are obliged to show.

Landing page = the ad's promise

Promo, price and availability on the page must match the ad and the feed. Expired promos — into URL exclusions or deleted.

PMAX DOES NOT RUN ITSELF

Performance Max: when it fits and how to build it

It fits if

- the conversion goal is clear and tracking is reliable
- values reflect real outcomes
- the team can evaluate results outside the platform
- the business genuinely needs reach across all channels

Limit or postpone if

- the primary conversion is “soft” (a view, a click)
- lead quality is not sent back to Google Ads
- the feed has errors
- you need strict control of queries, placements or channel budgets
- offers with different economics would share one target

PMax serves on Search, Shopping, YouTube, Display, Discover, Gmail and Maps.

Asset groups PRACTICE

- One asset group = one coherent theme (category or audience segment). One group per campaign is usually too few.
- Every combination of the group’s assets must be accurate.
- Images in landscape and square, portrait where possible.
- At least one video of your own, not auto-generated. Check the settings that create text and video automatically.
- Lifestyle shots of the product in use work better on YouTube and Discover than packshots.
- Headlines — a functional benefit plus an emotional payoff, not specs only.
- Listing groups determine which products are eligible in each asset group.

How many conversions do you need?

Practitioners disagree here. Some treat ~30 conversions in 30 days as a working minimum and recommend Standard Shopping with tROAS below that while history builds up. Others reject any universal threshold and look at conversion delay and representative traffic instead PRACTICE. Our approach is on p. 27.

WHAT YOU CAN ACTUALLY CONTROL

PMax: control levers and how to use them

Lever	How to use it
Campaign negatives GOOGLE	Up to 10,000 per campaign; they apply only to Search and Shopping, not to YouTube or Display. Block irrelevant intent (“free”, “jobs”), not a query that failed to convert on a small sample.
Brand exclusions	Decide: your brand, competitors, or both. After enabling, check the impact on total volume and new customers.
URL expansion	Keep it if the site is strong and several pages are safe. Restrict it if paid traffic must go to one landing page, content is regulated, or pages carry different economics. Excluding sections (careers, support, login) beats switching it off entirely.
Audience signals	Priority: 1) Customer Match of purchasers, 2) visitors with meaningful behavior, 3) custom segments from searches and URLs; in-market — as a complement. Signals do not restrict delivery.
Search themes	For concepts missing from the feed and site: new products, specialist terms, seasonal scenarios, high-value use cases.
Audience exclusions GOOGLE	Since 2026 — exclusion of your own customer lists. For pure new-customer acquisition, exclude existing ones if measurement can tell them apart.
New customer goal	Optimize or bid only for new customers; requires a reliable list of existing customers.
Placements and brand safety	Placement exclusions and content suitability settings. The placement report shows where ads served but gives no control over outcomes.
Feed and custom labels	Margin, season, bestseller, stock priority — for separate campaigns or asset groups.

What PMax does not allow

Moving a fixed budget between channels inside the campaign, setting separate bids for YouTube or Display, or applying negatives to video. If that is critical — use a dedicated campaign type for the job.

THE MOST COMMON REASON FOR A "GREAT" PMAX ROAS

Brand cannibalization in PMax: how to find and stop it

Signs

- Your name, domain and product names show up in PMax search terms and categories
- After PMax launched, the brand Search campaign's impression share and conversions fell, while brand + PMax combined did not grow
- PMax ROAS is many times higher than non-brand Search, with flat total revenue
- The new-customer share in PMax is low

Why it happens

Brand queries are the cheapest conversions, and PMax learns from them because they are the easiest path to the target. A budget-limited brand Search campaign loses to PMax even when it has an identical exact keyword PRACTICE.

Step by step PRACTICE

01 Record the baseline

For 30 days: spend and conversions of brand Search, PMax, both combined, the share of brand queries in PMax.

02 Brand list in PMax

Campaign settings → Brand exclusions → pick or create a list with your brand. If your brand is not in Google's database, request that it be added.

03 Shared negative list

Misspellings, domain, product names, founders' names — attached to PMax. The brand list catches the entity, negatives catch specific spellings; you need both.

04 Brand Search campaign

Exact and phrase, a budget without "Limited by budget", target impression share or Maximize conversions.

05 New customer goal in PMax

"Bid higher for new customers" or "Only bid for new customers", if you have an up-to-date purchaser list.

06 Judge the total, not PMax alone

After 2–4 weeks compare brand + PMax + total revenue with the baseline. PMax ROAS will drop — that is fine if total profit grew.

The same applies to AI Max

In a non-brand Search campaign with AI Max, brand exclusions work at campaign level GOOGLE. Without them AI Max finds your brand queries just as eagerly as PMax does.

REPORTS FOR DIAGNOSIS, DECISIONS ON BUSINESS DATA

PMax: reports and diagnosis by symptom

- **Channel performance:** shifts in distribution, especially when spend rises without better backend results. Lots of Display and little Shopping — check the feed and asset groups.
- **Search terms:** irrelevant demand, brand dependence, new intent. The report mixes Search and Shopping.
- **Assets:** serving patterns and gaps. Assets serve together — do not read them as independent.
- **Placements** (in "Where ads showed", with a network breakdown): visibility and brand safety, not incrementality.
- **Audiences:** since 2026 — age and gender.

Symptom	What to check PRACTICE
High ROAS, revenue not growing	Brand and returning demand, view-through credit, promotions; whether PMax is taking sales that would have come from elsewhere
Many leads, few sales	Primary conversions, import of qualified stages, queries, locations, URL expansion, call validation, CRM loss reasons
No spend	A target that is too tight, budget, policy status, a small location, product eligibility, stock, audience exclusions, tracking
Spend up, efficiency down	Which channels, products, queries and customer types absorbed the extra budget
Too much brand traffic	Queries, brand exclusions or negatives, a brand Search campaign, impact on the whole account
Off-brand creative	Asset combinations, text and video generation, where URL expansion sends traffic; upload your own replacements
Uneven products	Feed, margin, stock, custom labels, listing groups; whether a small group of products eats the whole budget

Incrementality

Separate brand and non-brand demand, new and existing customers, reconcile with the backend. To estimate PMax's contribution — an Uplift experiment or a geo holdout with enough volume. Do not abruptly switch off a big campaign "to test" — without a control the result is unreadable.

YOUTUBE, DISCOVER, GMAIL — CREATING DEMAND

Demand Gen: Google's four practices and how to evaluate

According to Google, advertisers who adopted at least 3 of the 4 practices below saw on average 40%+ more conversions and 30%+ more conversion value. Adding Demand Gen to Search and PMax — +10% ROAS and +12% sales GOOGLE.

Practice	What to do GOOGLE
1. Data strength	Google tag gateway with user-provided data or offline import; GA4 and Google Ads linked; CRM via Data Manager; more signals (email, transaction IDs, GBRAID/WBRAID)
2. Conversion volume	"Maximize..." strategies — from $100 a day; tCPA/tROAS — budget ≥ 10 × target CPA. Do not evaluate before 50 conversions. Change bids and budgets by 5–10% a week, no more than 15%. Shallow actions (page views, add to cart) — not for bidding
3. AI targeting	Optimized targeting on all prospecting campaigns together with first-party seed lists; remarketing — separate segments and creative; new customer goal
4. Creative diversity	Per campaign — an ad with 3 vertical, 3 square and 3 landscape images, 1 video of each format, creators, a Shorts-only ad with vertical video. Add new before removing old; pause only weak assets that have had ≥ 14 days

Structure GOOGLE

- Consolidate prospecting ad groups; a separate group for remarketing
- Merge groups with < 30 conversions in 30 days
- All channels rather than restricted placements
- Seasonal creative — in a separate campaign

How to evaluate

- Only ~40% of Demand Gen conversions happen within 30 days GOOGLE
- Engaged-view conversions separately from clicks, reconciled with the CRM PRACTICE
- For comparison with social — "Conversions (platform comparable)"
- Rights to creator videos are your responsibility

REGULARITY MATTERS MORE THAN THE NUMBER OF EDITS

Optimization cadence: weekly and monthly

Weekly PRACTICE

- Spend and budget pacing
- Tracking anomalies
- Order or lead quality
- Search terms and obvious exclusions
- Disapprovals and feed changes
- Brand and new-customer mix
- Major shifts between channels
- Whether URL expansion picked unsuitable pages
- AI Max generated assets

Monthly PRACTICE

- Reconcile with CRM, revenue, margin, returns, cancellations
- Asset groups and listing groups
- Creative gaps by message and format
- Performance by product, category, location, audience
- Targets vs conversion delay and economics
- Consolidate or split campaigns
- Document one test or one material change

Change log

Date	What changed	Hypothesis	When we evaluate
Example	tROAS 450% → 400% in PMax “Shoes”	More volume at ROAS ≥ break-even	After 2 conversion cycles

The one-change rule

Do not change budget, target, structure, creative and exclusions at the same time. One change at a time, dated in the log — and a month later you know exactly what produced the result.

HONESTLY ABOUT THE CONTESTED QUESTIONS

Where practitioners disagree — and how to choose

Question	Positions	Our approach
Minimum conversions for PMax	~30 in 30 days, otherwise Shopping with tROAS; against — there is no universal threshold	Fewer than 15–20 conversions a month — Search/Shopping and a clean signal first; then PMax with a cautious target
Budget	"3 × CPA a day" vs "from demand and economics"; for Demand Gen Google says ≥ 10 × tCPA	Search/PMax — from demand and the impression-share ceiling; Demand Gen — Google's rule
Target from day one	tROAS/tCPA immediately vs starting without a target	With history — a target slightly looser than actual; without — no target for 2–4 weeks
AI Max	"Turn it on for everyone" vs "ecommerce only"	Search term matching — test in every account; text and URL — after a site audit
Standard Shopping next to PMax	Redundant vs essential for top SKUs	Only with a clear role: top SKUs, control, test
Budget split	PMax 60–70%; Demand Gen 10–15% — heuristics from individual guides	From incremental total revenue, not by percentages
URL expansion	Always on vs always off	On with section exclusions; off for regulated and single-purpose landing pages
Pace of target changes	Google for Demand Gen: 5–10% a week, no more than 15%; some practitioners — 10–15% every 72 hours	Up to 15% per step and not before a full conversion cycle
Segmenting by custom labels	Split only from ~50 conversions a month vs "always split by margin"	Split when a segment needs a different target or budget and has its own data

How to choose for yourself

If a piece of advice has no source in Google's documentation, treat it as a hypothesis. Test it with an experiment on part of the traffic and judge by the business outcome, not by a platform metric.

WHAT EATS THE BUDGET MOST OFTEN

Twelve mistakes we see in accounts most often

01 Micro-conversions as primary

Bidding buys page views instead of sales.

02 Double counting

The Google Ads tag and a GA4 import count the same purchase.

03 Brand in PMax

A “beautiful ROAS” on people who were searching for you anyway.

04 A ROAS target “out of thin air”

Without break-even ROAS the target either chokes volume or permits a loss.

05 One PMax for everything

With a target set long ago.

06 Thin asset groups

One group, one set of photos, no video.

01 Scaling lead gen on form cost

Without CRM data — more spam.

02 URL expansion without exclusions

Paid traffic to careers and login pages.

03 A raw feed

Internal names, empty attributes, outdated prices.

04 Ignoring the DSA migration

Rules became read-only — and routing is frozen.

05 Ten changes a day

Impossible to tell what worked.

06 Judging Demand Gen after a week

Most conversions are still ahead.

The essentials in one sentence

Clean primary conversions with real value, targets from margin, brand kept apart from automation, exclusions instead of manual targeting, and one change a week verified against the backend.

PRINT AND FILL IN

Your numbers: targets from margin and a search term review

A · Campaign targets

Line	Example	Campaign 1	Campaign 2
1. Margin after cost of goods, shipping, returns	40%		
2. Break-even ROAS = 1 ÷ line 1	2.5 (250%)		
3. Desired profit per order, % of revenue	10%		
4. Target ROAS = 1 ÷ (line 1 – line 3)	**3.33 (333%)**		
5. Lead gen: profit per deal × share of leads that become deals	$2,000 × 10%		
6. Maximum CPA per lead = line 5 × share you give to advertising	**$200 × 50% = $100**		

B · Search term review (30 days)

Query or theme	Intent	Cost / conv.	Source (keyword, AI Max, PMax)	Decision
Example: “boiler repair diy”	DIY	$84 / 0	AI Max	phrase negative

How to read it

If your current ROAS target is below line 2, the campaign may be losing money even with a “good” report. If a query has the right intent but has not converted on a small sample, do not exclude it — wait for data.

Checklist: your account is ready for 2027

- [ ] Primary conversions — business outcomes only
- [ ] No double counting Google Ads + GA4
- [ ] Values match the backend
- [ ] Enhanced conversions on, diagnostics "Good"+
- [ ] Consent Mode before the tags
- [ ] Leads: qualified stages from the CRM via Data Manager
- [ ] Break-even ROAS and maximum CPA calculated
- [ ] Brand — separate campaign, excluded from PMax and AI Max
- [ ] Non-brand Search: Smart Bidding, broad or AI Max
- [ ] URL exclusions: careers, support, login, blog
- [ ] Campaign-level negatives in PMax
- [ ] Asset groups by theme, with your own video
- [ ] Call-only replaced with RSAs with a call asset
- [ ] DSA and Display upgraded manually before 2027
- [ ] Search terms and landing pages reviewed weekly
- [ ] Change log, one material change at a time

Want us to review your Google Ads account?

ConvertLab360 sets up conversions, Search, Performance Max, Shopping and Demand Gen. We will review your account against this guide for free and show you the 3–5 most expensive problems.

Get a free audit → convertlab360.com

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