WeAdU · Field Guide

Google Ads Best Practices for **Multi-Brand** Resellers

2016 Edition

The year the right-hand ads vanished, GTINs became compulsory for everything, Feed Rules arrived and text ads grew – what a multi-brand reseller should have done with each.

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1. The right rail disappears: Shopping takes the **desktop**

On February 19, 2016, Google confirmed that text ads on the right-hand side of desktop results were gone worldwide: up to four text ads above the results for highly commercial queries, up to three below, and the right column left to Product Listing Ads and Knowledge Panels. ChannelAdvisor had already spotted an expanded Product Listing Ads unit showing up to 16 products from January 2016, and scrollable desktop units by March. Adobe measured the immediate effect on text ads: costs per click up 6% in position one and 7% in position two, down 10% and 8% in positions three and four, and click-through rate up 13% at the top. For a reseller, the desktop page had just been rebuilt around the product tile.

- Re-read every brand's text campaign for position: with four slots above the results and none beside them, a brand that had lived in position five now had no desktop position at all, and its budget belonged in Shopping.
- Treat the Product Listing Ads unit as the shop window it had become: a 16-product carousel rewards a brand with a complete range of models in the feed, and punishes a brand represented by two accessories.
- Recheck cost per click per brand for the year: the top positions became more expensive on text, and the Shopping auction was about to absorb the budgets that left the right rail.

2. GTINs for everything, and eleven more **countries**

From May 16, 2016, in the twelve countries where designated-brand GTINs had been required since September 2015, GTINs became mandatory for every new product that has one assigned by its manufacturer – "going forward, Global Trade Item Numbers (GTINs) are required for all products with a GTIN assigned by the manufacturer," as the May 25, 2016 feed-specification update put it. The same update extended the GTIN

and *google_product_category* requirement to Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, India, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden and Turkey from February 14, 2017, and set September 1, 2016 for stricter apparel colour and size values in Germany, France, Japan and the UK, a 100-by-100-pixel minimum for non-apparel images, and a 4 GB feed file limit.

- Finish the supplier audit started in 2015 for every brand, not only the designated ones: from May 16 an unbranded accessory with a barcode needed that barcode in the feed as much as a flagship model did.
- Do not mark products *identifier_exists = false* to get around a missing supplier list; that flag was for products that genuinely have no GTIN, and misuse was demoted.
- Plan the February 2017 extension into the next supplier negotiation: a brand sold in Austria or Canada needed the same identifiers as one sold in Germany or the US.

3. Feed Rules: fix the brand field without touching the **feed**

On April 27, 2016, Google announced Feed Rules in Merchant Center: "Feed Rules allows you to perform basic transformations of your existing product data" – map column headers to attributes, transform values, and fill missing attributes with fixed or conditional values, applied to every future upload of that feed. On August 30, 2016, a new Merchant Center followed, with near-real-time feed diagnostics instead of twice-daily processing and a Programs page for local inventory ads, promotions and product ratings. For a reseller whose feed comes from a platform it does not fully control, Feed Rules was the first tool for normalising brand data at the point where Google reads it.

- Use a rule to standardise the brand value for each brand – one spelling, one capitalisation – so that product groups by brand and any brand-level bid see every product of that brand.
- Set custom labels by rule: margin tier from brand, promotion status from a supplier's SKU prefix, seasonality from category. The label logic then lives in Merchant Center, documented, instead of in a spreadsheet nobody remembers.
- Use the near-real-time diagnostics to catch a supplier feed that breaks on a Friday afternoon before the weekend's spend is wasted on disapproved products.

4. Expanded text ads, and device bids come **back**

At the Google Performance Summit on May 24, 2016, Google announced expanded text ads – two 30-character headlines and an 80-character description, launched on July 26, 2016 – and separate bid adjustments for mobile, desktop and tablet of up to +900%, which undid the 2013 merger of desktop and tablet. Standard text ads could be created until October 26, 2016, a deadline extended on September 13 to January 31, 2017. For a multi-brand reseller, the extra headline was room for the one thing a generic retailer's ad cannot say: the brand and the model, together.

- Rewrite each brand campaign's ads with the brand in headline one and the model or range in headline two, and the reseller status in the description; the second headline was the difference between a shop's ad and a brand's ad.
- Set the tablet adjustment per brand from measured tablet conversion; three years of merged desktop-and-tablet data hid brands that sold well on one and badly on the other.
- Test the new format alongside the old until January, brand by brand, rather than converting the account in one weekend.

5. Showcase ads and Google Images: broad searches, one **store**

On May 16, 2016, Google said Shopping ads were live on Google Images: "your ads are automatically eligible to show on image search as part of the Google Search Network", with no separate opt-in. On July 12, 2016, it introduced Showcase Shopping ads for broad, non-brand searches such as "summer dresses" – "over 40% of shopping related searches on Google are for broad terms" – with all merchants running Shopping campaigns in the US, UK and Australia automatically eligible in the coming weeks. For a reseller, both formats sold the store rather than a brand, and that changed which products belonged in them.

- Keep the search-partner setting on for the brand campaigns whose images are strong: Google Images sends shoppers who choose with their eyes, and a brand with the manufacturer's photography wins there.
- Build Showcase groups by category across brands – the shopper searching a broad term has not chosen a brand yet – and let the brand campaigns handle the shopper who has.
- Measure Showcase on new-visitor rate and assisted conversions rather than direct return; Google itself later reported that about 80% of Showcase traffic to retailer sites came from new visitors.

6. Audiences widen: demographics, campaign-level lists, **attribution**

Demographics for Search Ads reached all advertisers on September 28, 2016, together with cross-device remarketing lists and 540-day list membership. Customer Match for Shopping opened as an invitation beta in June 2016. On December 8, remarketing lists and Customer Match could be applied at campaign level instead of ad group by ad group. And on May 10, 2016, six attribution models, including data-driven attribution, became selectable per conversion action and usable by automated bidding. For a reseller running dozens of brand campaigns, campaign-level audiences were the difference between an afternoon's work and a week's.

- Apply the store-level lists – all visitors, all buyers – at campaign level to every brand campaign in one pass, with the same bid adjustments; keep ad-group lists for the few brands whose buyers deserve a different message.
- Use demographics as observation first, then as adjustment per brand: a brand's buyers are not the store's average buyers.
- Move off last-click for the conversion actions that feed bidding; a brand campaign that opens the visit and a Shopping tile that closes it are both working, and last click pays only one of them.

7. Selling across borders from one **feed**

On July 12, 2016, Google began testing currency conversion in Shopping ads in Australia, Switzerland, Canada and the United Kingdom, so that a merchant could advertise in another country without changing its landing pages, and TrueView for shopping gained a companion banner and a product picker. For a reseller with European distribution rights for its brands, this was the first sign that one catalogue could sell in several countries without a separate site per country.

- Check each brand's distribution agreement before advertising it across a border: a brand you may sell in the UK is not necessarily a brand you may sell in Switzerland.
- Keep the feed's identifiers and brand values identical across country feeds, so that the same product matches the same catalogue entry everywhere.

8. What was **new** in 2016 – and what each thing turned into

Ten dated changes from the year, in order, each with what it became:

- **February 19 – no more right-hand text ads on desktop.**
- **March 15 – Google Analytics 360 Suite.**
- **April 27 – Feed Rules.**
- **May 10 – attribution models per conversion action, including data-driven.**
- **May 16 – Shopping ads on Google Images; store-pickup link on local pages.** Images are still in the Search Network; pickup became a local-inventory annotation.
- **July 12 – Showcase Shopping ads; currency conversion test.** Category asset groups; multi-country feeds.
- **July 25 – "Smart Bidding" named, with device-level Target CPA.** The bidding layer of every campaign type since.
- **July 26 – expanded text ads.**
- **September 6 – cross-device conversions counted automatically; "Converted clicks" retired by September 21.** Today's modelled conversions.
- **October 17 – Merchant Center integrations with BigCommerce, PrestaShop and Magento.** Platform integrations are now the default route for a feed.

9. What the numbers showed: Shopping grows four times faster than **text**

Merkle's Digital Marketing Report for the second quarter of 2016 put Google Shopping ad spend up 43% year on year against 10% for text ads, with Google paid search spend up 22% on 34% more clicks and costs per click down 9%; phones and tablets delivered 53% of paid search clicks. By the third quarter, Shopping spend was up 36% on 59% more clicks, text ads up 9% on 11% more clicks, phones and tablets at 62% of Google search ad clicks, and phone spend up 134%.

- Plan next year's budget by brand with Shopping as the growth line and text as the maintenance line; a brand whose text campaign grew 9% while its Shopping campaign grew 43% had moved, whether or not the budget had.
- Watch clicks growing faster than spend: costs per click were falling because inventory was expanding on phones, not because the auction was getting cheaper – the reverse would come.

10. Europe: the supplementary **objections**

On July 14, 2016, the European Commission sent Google a supplementary Statement of Objections on comparison shopping, reinforcing its April 2015 charges with further evidence, and a separate Statement of Objections on AdSense. Google had eight weeks to reply on shopping. For a European reseller, the account did not change in 2016; the decision that would restructure the Shopping auction in the European Economic Area was now a year away.

- Nothing to change in 2016. Worth noting: every remedy discussed since 2013 puts comparison-shopping services inside Google's Shopping results.

11. A five-minute **check**

CHECK	WHY IT MATTERS
Every brand's text campaign re-read for position after February 19; budgets moved to Shopping where no top slot is winnable	Four slots above, none beside
Every product with a manufacturer GTIN carries it from May 16; identifier_exists never used as a shortcut	Disapproval, or demotion for misuse
Feed Rules normalise the brand value and set custom labels by brand	Brand-level structure runs on the brand field
Expanded text ads per brand: brand in headline one, model in headline two, reseller status in the description	Standard text ads end January 31, 2017
Tablet bid adjustment per brand, from measured tablet conversion	Three years of merged data hid the differences
Showcase groups by category across brands; brand campaigns for shoppers who have chosen	Broad searches sell the store, not a brand
Store-level audience lists applied at campaign level to every brand campaign	One pass instead of one ad group at a time
Bidding conversion actions moved off last click	A brand ad that opens and a tile that closes both deserve credit

About **WeAdU**

WeAdU is a Google Premier Partner and the current home of a Google Ads practice founded in 2002, focused on AI-boosted Google Ads for brand product resellers.

Across the client book: **$241M+** in sales generated, **$132M+** tracked in Google Ads, **$32M+** in ad spend managed and **5.3M+** conversions. **14 of 20** clients (**70%**) saw a higher ROAS, measured over 12 months.

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This edition is a retrospective written in September 2026, not a document from 2016: it describes Google AdWords, Product Listing Ads, Google Shopping and Merchant Center as they worked that year, checked against sources published at the time or reliable later accounts, listed below.

Sources & further reading

Google, Inside AdWords / The Keyword: "Introducing the Google Analytics 360 Suite" (March 15, 2016); "New Merchant Center Feed Rules" (April 27, 2016); "Move beyond last-click attribution" (May 10, 2016); "Ways to be useful for mobile shoppers" – Shopping ads on Google Images, store pickup, Purchases on Google (May 16, 2016); "Ads and analytics innovations for a mobile-first world" – Performance Summit (May 24, 2016); "2016 update to Google Shopping products feed specification" (May 25, 2016); "Making Travel and Shopping Easier for the Seasons Ahead" – Showcase Shopping ads, currency conversion (July 12, 2016); "Showcase products and services with price extensions" (July 18, 2016); "Automatically counting cross-device conversions" (July 19, 2016); "More powerful bid automation with Smart Bidding" (July 25, 2016); "Three ad innovations for a mobile-first world" – expanded text ads (July 26, 2016); "Introducing the new Google Merchant Center" (August 30, 2016); "Expanded text ads: more time to test" (September 13, 2016); "Search audience ad innovations" – Demographics for Search Ads (September 28, 2016); "Shop the Look on Google" (September 6, 2016); "Google Shopping partners with e-commerce platforms" (October 17, 2016); "Click-to-message ads" (October 18, 2016); "Save time by applying audience lists at the campaign level" (December 8, 2016); "Find your next customer" – similar audiences and Customer Match for Shopping (May 1, 2017); "Making it easier to shop across Google" – Showcase new-visitor figure (May 14, 2019). Independent: Search Engine Land – right-hand ads removed (February 19, 2016), GTINs required from May 16, 2016 (February 2016), Merkle report on Shopping ads' share of clicks (2018); PPC Hero – sidebar removal (February 22, 2016), Feed Rules (April 28, 2016), Performance Summit takeaways (May 25, 2016), Customer Match for Shopping beta (July 1, 2016), Merchant Center disapprovals and GTINs (November 13, 2019); Search Engine Watch – Adobe figures after the right-rail removal (April 29, 2016), three recent changes to Google Shopping (March 23, 2016), Merkle Q2 2016 figures (July 26, 2016), Merkle Q3 2016 figures (October 28, 2016), expanded text ads (July 29, 2016); European Commission press release IP/16/2532 (July 14, 2016). Policies and product names have changed since 2016; the 2026 edition describes the current rules.