WeAdU · Field Guide

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

2017 Edition

The year Europe's Shopping auction was rebuilt, customer lists reached Shopping, and Merchant Center learned supplemental feeds – what a multi-brand reseller should have done.

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1. Europe: the fine, and a new way to buy Shopping **ads**

On June 27, 2017, the European Commission fined Google €2,424,495,000 for favouring its own comparison-shopping service in search results across the 31 countries of the European Economic Area, and gave it 90 days to end the conduct. On September 27, 2017, Google announced the change: comparison-shopping services could now place Shopping ads on Google.com in EEA countries and Switzerland on behalf of the retailers they represent, and "Google Shopping in these countries will operate in the same manner, bidding alongside Comparison Shopping Services on equal terms" – in sixteen countries at launch, the United Kingdom among them. Google's own service, Merchant Center Help explains, "ensures profitability by deducting a fixed percentage margin from each merchant bid before entering it into the auction," and that "a merchant will never be second-priced against itself in the auction for any offer, irrespective of the number, or identity, of the CSSs used by the merchant." For a British or European reseller, this was the year the cost of a Shopping click acquired a second variable: who enters your bid.

- Look at the "By …" label under your own tiles and your competitors' after September 27: it shows which comparison-shopping service placed each ad, and therefore who is bidding on the same margin terms as you.
- Ask a comparison-shopping partner what it charges to enter your bids, and compare it with the fixed margin Google deducts; the arithmetic is different for every reseller, but it is arithmetic, not opinion.
- Do not move brand by brand: the choice of partner applies to the Merchant Center feed, so it is a store-level decision, made once and reviewed yearly.

2. Customer Match and similar audiences reach **Shopping**

On May 1, 2017, Google announced: "Starting today, we're rolling out similar audiences for Search and Shopping along with Customer Match for Shopping." The uploaded customer file that had worked on Search since 2015 now steered Shopping bids too, and similar audiences found shoppers who resembled the buyers on that file. For a reseller, the customer file spans every brand it sells, which makes it a better Shopping signal than any single brand's history.

- Apply the all-buyers list to every brand's Shopping campaign with a bid increase; a buyer of one brand is the store's best prospect for the next, and Shopping is where the next purchase starts.
- Use similar audiences as observation before adjustment: a lookalike of the store's buyers is not the same as a lookalike of one brand's buyers, and the difference shows up in conversion rate per brand.
- Refresh the uploads on a schedule tied to order data, not to memory; a stale list optimises toward who your customers used to be.

3. Merchant Center grows up: supplemental feeds, one feed for many **countries**

On September 19, 2017, Google announced supplemental feeds – a second file that adds or overrides attributes on the primary feed – together with one feed serving several countries with automatic currency conversion, Feed Rules for data submitted through the Content API, an Opportunities tab and multi-user access; Shopping was by then available in 37 countries. From November 2017, automatic item updates were on by default. For a reseller whose primary feed comes from an e-commerce platform, supplemental feeds were the tool that Feed Rules had hinted at: a way to own the brand, label and identifier data without owning the platform export.

- Keep the platform's export as the primary feed and put everything you decide in a supplemental feed keyed on the product ID: normalised brand values, custom labels for margin tier and authorized-reseller status, GTINs from supplier price lists.
- Use one feed for the countries where your distribution rights cover the same brands, and separate feeds – or exclusions – where they do not.
- Read the Opportunities tab per brand, and treat it as a list of hypotheses, not orders.

4. Close variants: word order and function **words**

On March 17, 2017, Google announced that exact match close variants would, over the coming months, include reordered words and added or ignored function words: "hotels in new york" would match "new york hotels", though "flights to new york" would not become "flights from new york". Google's early tests showed "up to 3% more exact match clicks on average while maintaining comparable clickthrough and conversion rates." For a reseller, a brand-plus-model keyword in exact match now matched the model-plus-brand search – useful – and a few searches it should not have.

- Delete the reordered duplicates of each brand's exact-match keywords rather than letting them compete for the same search.
- Read search terms per brand campaign for the function-word cases that change meaning: "for" and "with" turn a product search into an accessory search, and an accessory is a different margin.

- Keep the cross-brand negative lists current; every widening of exact match makes them more important, not less.

5. Trust on the tile: Customer Reviews, ratings everywhere, promotion extensions

On April 3, 2017, Google Customer Reviews replaced Google Trusted Stores: an opt-in post-purchase survey whose results feed seller ratings, which Google said "can boost your ads' click through rate by up to 10%". On December 5, product ratings became available on Shopping ads in every market where Google Shopping is present, from a ratings feed, an aggregator or Customer Reviews. On November 16, promotion extensions launched in the new AdWords experience, with twelve occasions such as Black Friday. For a multi-brand reseller, the seller rating is still the store's, the product rating is still the product's, and the promotion is the one thing on the tile that is yours alone.

- Switch from Trusted Stores to Customer Reviews before the old program closed, and keep the survey running on every order, whichever brand was bought; the rating is shared by every brand's ads.
- Send product reviews for all brands, or none: a brand's model with 200 reviews at one reseller and none at yours loses the comparison before price is read.
- Use promotion extensions on brand campaigns for manufacturer-funded events, with the brand's dates, and keep the co-op paperwork with each.

6. Bidding and reporting: Target ROAS for Shopping, absolute top, click share

By 2017, Target ROAS was in general use for Shopping campaigns; in November Google reported that advertisers using it were "twice as likely to be in the first position for queries that convert most", and that "Shopping ads in the top results on mobile see up to 3X the engagement from shoppers." Maximize conversions arrived on May 30 for Search only. On August 31, the new AdWords experience – available to all advertisers from October 11, 2017 – added absolute top impression share and click share for Shopping. For a reseller, a return target per brand tier and a position report per brand were now both available; the work was to read them together.

- One Target ROAS per brand tier, set from the tier's margin, never one for the account; the automation only knows the number you give it.
- Read absolute top impression share per brand against the return: a brand at 80% absolute top and below its return target is being bought too dearly; a brand at 10% and above target has room.
- Watch click share for the flagship models specifically, because the top mobile slot is where the 3X engagement sits.

7. Showcase ads go to fifteen more countries

On October 24, 2017, Google said Showcase Shopping ads had launched in the new AdWords experience and were now available to more advertisers globally, in fifteen new countries, with support in DoubleClick Search, Kenshoo and Marin. Its case study reported three times more brand searches and 32% more click-assisted

conversions for one retailer. For a reseller, Showcase remained a store-level format: the shopper has not chosen a brand yet.

- Build Showcase groups by category across brands, with the store's range as the argument, and let brand campaigns take the shopper who searches a brand.
- Measure Showcase on new visitors and assisted conversions, not on last-click return; it opens visits that the brand campaigns and the tiles close.

8. Fourteen more Shopping countries – and the distribution-rights **question**

On September 7, 2017, Google opened Shopping ads in fourteen more countries, including Ireland and Portugal, bringing the total past thirty, and began accepting English-language feeds in more than twenty-one countries. Together with the multi-country feed of September 19, a reseller could now advertise in a new country from the feed it already had. Whether it may is a different question, and it is not Google's.

- List, brand by brand, the countries each distribution agreement covers before enabling a country in Merchant Center; exclude the brands that are not covered with a feed rule, not with good intentions.
- Keep the same identifiers and brand values across country feeds so the product matches the same catalogue entry everywhere.

9. What was **new** in 2017 – and what each thing turned into

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

- **February 27 – Manufacturer Center opens to self sign-up.** Brand profiles are now managed through Merchant Center.
- **March 17 – exact match includes word order and function words.**
- **April 3 – Google Customer Reviews replaces Trusted Stores.** Still the free source of seller ratings.
- **May 1 – similar audiences for Search and Shopping; Customer Match for Shopping.**
- **June 27 and September 27 – the European fine and the comparison-shopping auction.** The "By …" label on every UK and EU tile.
- **August 31 – absolute top impression share and click share for Shopping.** Today's Impression (Absolute Top) % metrics.
- **September 7 and 19 – fourteen more countries; supplemental feeds; multi-country feeds.**
- **October 11 – the new AdWords experience for all advertisers.**
- **October 19 – parallel tracking announced.** Mandatory for Search and Shopping from October 30, 2018.
- **December 5 – product ratings in every Shopping market.** Stars on the tile everywhere since.

10. What the numbers showed: Shopping passes half of all Google search **clicks**

Merkle's Digital Marketing Report for the fourth quarter of 2017 recorded that Product Listing Ad spending grew 32% in the quarter against 15% for text ads, and that Product Listing Ads "accounted for 55% of Google search ad clicks among U.S. advertisers, up from 48% a year earlier". Adobe measured Cyber Monday 2017 at $6.59

billion, up 16.8%, and the five days from Thanksgiving at $19.62 billion, up 15%, with mobile's first two-billion-dollar day.

- More than half of the account's Google search clicks now came from tiles, so the feed – titles, images, identifiers, prices – was the account's largest creative asset, and deserved a review cadence brand by brand.
- Budget the peak days by brand with the return target in mind rather than a fixed daily amount; Smart Bidding was now good enough to steer the day if the target was right.

11. A five-minute **check**

CHECK	WHY IT MATTERS
"By …" label read under your tiles and competitors' after September 27 (UK and EEA)	It shows who enters each bid, and on what terms
Comparison-shopping partner's fee compared with Google's fixed margin; decided once, at store level	The choice applies to the feed, not to a brand
All-buyers Customer Match list applied to every brand's Shopping campaign	The customer file spans every brand
Supplemental feed holds your brand values, custom labels and GTINs; platform export left as primary	Own the data without owning the platform
Reordered duplicates of brand keywords removed; function-word search terms reviewed per brand	Exact match now matches word order and function words
Customer Reviews survey on every order; product reviews sent for all brands	Seller rating is the store's; product rating is the product's
One Target ROAS per brand tier; absolute top impression share read per brand against return	The automation only knows the number you give it
Countries enabled only where each brand's distribution rights apply	Google opened the door; the agreement decides who walks through

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 2017: 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

European Commission press release IP/17/1784 (June 27, 2017). Google, The Keyword / Inside AdWords: "The European Commission decision on online shopping: the other side of the story" (June 27, 2017); "Changes to Google Shopping in Europe" (September 27, 2017); "Discover the new AdWords experience" (January 31, 2017); "Google Manufacturer Center opens self sign-up" (February 27, 2017); "Close variants now connect more people" (March 17, 2017); "New measurement innovations" – store visits (March 29, 2017); "Google Customer Reviews: receive and display seller ratings" (April 3, 2017); "Introducing Smart display campaigns" (April 20, 2017); "Find your next customer with new audience solutions" (May 1, 2017); "Powering ads and analytics innovations with machine learning" – Google Marketing Next (May 23, 2017); "Maximize conversions with Smart Bidding" (May 30, 2017); "Introducing better, simpler ad rotation" (August 29, 2017); "New reporting to show how often your ads are at the very top" (August 31, 2017); "Reach more customers with Shopping ads in new countries" (September 7, 2017); "Ring in the holidays with new Merchant Center features" (September 19, 2017); "The new AdWords experience is now available to all advertisers" (October 11, 2017); site-wide tagging (October 12, 2017) and parallel tracking (October 19, 2017); "Unwrapping new innovations for the holidays" – Showcase in 15 new countries (October 24, 2017); local and omni-channel marketing (October 25, 2017); "Reach more shoppers this holiday season" – Target ROAS and mobile engagement figures (November 9, 2017); new AdWords innovations – promotion extensions (November 16, 2017); Manufacturer Center international (November 29, 2017); "Product ratings on Shopping ads now available in all markets" (December 5, 2017). Google Merchant Center Help – answer 7558973, "About advertising with Comparison Shopping Services". Independent: Digital Commerce 360 / Bloomberg – Google's standalone shopping unit (September 26, 2017) and Merkle Q4 2017 figures (February 1, 2018); PPC Hero – close variants impact (March 30–31, 2017); Search Engine Journal – Customer Reviews launch (April 4, 2017), Amazon pauses Google Shopping ads (May 15, 2018); Practical Ecommerce – Adobe holiday 2017 sales (November 30, 2017); Econsultancy – cheaper clicks through comparison-shopping services (July 24, 2018); DataFeedWatch – automatic item updates; Lengow – Google Shopping changes in Europe (2017). Policies and product names have changed since 2017; the 2026 edition describes the current rules.