WeAdU · Field Guide

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

2018 Edition

The year AdWords became Google Ads, Smart Shopping offered to take the wheel, Europe's clicks got cheaper through a partner, and price benchmarks arrived – what a multi-brand reseller should have done.

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1. Smart Shopping campaigns: the automation offers to take the **wheel**

On May 3, 2018, Google launched a new Shopping campaign type that was "automatically goal-optimized" – maximizing conversion value, with or without a return target – and served across Google.com, the Search Network, Display, YouTube and Gmail from one feed and a few assets. At Google Marketing Live on July 10, 2018 it was named Smart Shopping campaigns: "these Smart Shopping campaigns help you hit your revenue goals without the need to manually manage and bid to individual products," with store-visit and new-customer goals announced and a Shopify integration coming. Google's launch cases reported revenue up 57% at a 61% higher return for one retailer and 23% more revenue at a 9% higher return for another. For a multi-brand reseller, the offer was real and so was the catch: the automation optimised toward one goal per campaign, and a reseller's goals differ by brand.

- Never put the whole catalogue in one Smart Shopping campaign: a single return target across brands lets the automation pour budget into whichever brand converts most easily, whatever its margin. One Smart Shopping campaign per brand tier, each with its own return target from that tier's margin.
- Keep the flagship models of each brand in a standard Shopping campaign you still control, and let Smart Shopping take the long tail; Smart Shopping took priority over standard campaigns for the same products, so the split had to be made in the feed with custom labels, not by hoping.
- Give each campaign brand-specific assets – the brand's logo and imagery, with permission – rather than the store's generic banner; the Display and YouTube placements were now selling a brand you had not chosen to feature.

2. AdWords becomes Google Ads; parallel tracking becomes **mandatory**

On June 27, 2018, Google announced that AdWords would become Google Ads, DoubleClick and the Analytics 360 Suite would become Google Marketing Platform, and the publisher products Google Ad Manager; the new name and logo appeared in the interface on July 24, 2018. The new interface, available to all since October 2017, became the only one by the end of the year. On the plumbing side, parallel tracking – which sends the shopper straight to the landing page while the click measurement runs in the background – became required for all accounts on October 30, 2018, for Search and Shopping. For a reseller with a tracking template per brand campaign, that date was a test of every template.

- Test every brand's tracking template and final URL suffix with parallel tracking before October 30, especially where an affiliate or co-op tracking layer sits between the ad and the site; a redirect that does not support it breaks the click.
- Take the rebrand as the moment to move any process still built around the old interface – bulk sheets, saved reports per brand – to the new one, which was faster and had the Shopping metrics added in 2017.

3. Europe: the comparison-shopping year – cheaper clicks, rebates, and a **cut**

In 2018 the remedy of September 2017 began to bite. Merchants who placed their Shopping ads through a comparison-shopping service other than Google's paid about 20% less per click, because Google Shopping's fixed margin is not deducted from a partner's bid; on top of that, Google offered a spend rebate to merchants using other comparison-shopping services, reported at 30% of spend with a monthly cap. Commissioner Vestager reported mid-year that rival services' presence in the Shopping slots had risen from 15% to a third and clicks on their offers from 2.5% to 6.1%. On November 1, 2018, after press reports of "fake" comparison-shopping services set up to harvest the rebate, Google cut it from 30% to 5%. For a British or European reseller, the arithmetic of section 1 in the 2017 edition had just become a line item.

- Do the comparison in writing: cost per click through Google Shopping, cost per click through a partner including the partner's fee, and the rebate while it lasted. The rebate was temporary; the margin difference was structural.
- Choose a partner that is actually a comparison-shopping service – with a public site and its own users – rather than a shell; the November cut was aimed at the shells, and the merchants in them lost the rebate with no service to show for it.
- Make the switch at store level and check every brand's tiles the following week: the "By …" label under each tile confirms who is placing the ad.

4. Exact match learns **meaning**

On September 6, 2018, Google announced that exact match keywords would match "close variations that share the same meaning as your keyword", including implied words and paraphrases, rolling out for English through October and other languages over the following months; early tests showed "3% more exact match clicks and conversions on average" for advertisers using mostly exact match. For a reseller, an exact-match brand-and-model keyword now matched a paraphrase of it – and the paraphrase might name a neighbouring model.

- Read search terms per brand campaign weekly for two months after the roll-out reached your language, and add negatives for the neighbouring models and accessories that "same meaning" pulls in.
- Give each brand's core terms an exact-match keyword in that brand's own campaign; Google still prioritised an exact keyword identical to the search, and identical beat similar.
- Keep the cross-brand negative lists current; every widening of matching raises their value.

5. Price benchmarks arrive in Shopping **reporting**

On June 12, 2018, Google announced price benchmarks in Shopping reporting, "to show Shopping advertisers how other retailers are pricing the same products", alongside a Local Feed Partnership program and local catalog ads, rolling out to all advertisers by the end of the month. For a reseller who sells the same models as every other authorised reseller, this was the first Google report that said, product by product, where its price sat against the market.

- Read the benchmark per brand and per model, and split the feed accordingly with a custom label: products where you sit below the benchmark get pushed, products above it get a price decision or an exclusion.
- Do not treat the benchmark as the whole market: it averages every advertiser of the product, marketplaces included, and it reads from feeds that update on other merchants' schedules.
- Check the benchmark against a manual reading of the carousel for the models that matter; a stale competitor feed can show a price that is no longer there.

6. Shopping Actions: pay per sale, and what it meant for a **reseller**

On March 19, 2018, Google launched Shopping Actions in the United States: products listed in a universal cart across Google Search, Google Express and the Google Assistant, on "a pay-per-sale model, meaning you only pay when a sale actually takes place", with Target, Ulta and 1-800-Flowers among the first retailers and "approximately 30% average increase in basket size" reported; by June 12, more than 70 retailers were live. For a reseller, a commission model was a different economic animal from a cost-per-click one, and the brands it sold had opinions about marketplaces.

- Check each brand's distribution agreement for marketplace and third-party-checkout clauses before listing it in a Google-hosted cart; several brands treated a Google-hosted checkout as a marketplace.
- Compare the commission against the brand's margin, brand by brand: a pay-per-sale rate that works for a high-margin accessory line can wipe out a thin-margin appliance line.
- Keep fulfilment and returns metrics up to the program's standards on every brand, because the program's rating was the store's.

7. GDPR: consent becomes part of the **account**

The General Data Protection Regulation applied from May 25, 2018. On March 22, Google said it would update its EU User Consent Policy when the GDPR took effect, and offered a non-personalised ads option for publishers; for advertisers, consent was already required for personalised ads and remarketing, and the new regime put the burden of proof on the data controller. For a reseller, the assets built since 2013 – remarketing lists, Customer Match uploads – now depended on documented consent.

- Audit the consent basis of every Customer Match list before the next upload: a list built from orders without marketing consent could not lawfully be used for personalised ads in the EEA.
- Put the consent record where the marketing data is, so that a brand's distribution agreement, a customer's consent and the audience list can be checked in one place.

8. Amazon steps out of the Shopping **auction**

Merkle reported that Amazon stopped bidding in Google's Product Listing Ad auctions from April 28, 2018. For every reseller selling brands that Amazon also carried, the largest bidder on those products had left the auction, at least for a while. Whether the pause lasted was not something a reseller could know; what it could do was measure.

- Watch cost per click and impression share per brand from May, and read auction insights for the brands where Amazon had been the dominant competitor; a cheaper auction is a reason to test, not a reason to spend blindly.
- Use the window to win the top mobile slot on the flagship models of each brand and hold it with a return target, so that the position survives Amazon's return.

9. What was **new** in 2018 – and what each thing turned into

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

- **February 15 – Market Finder for cross-border expansion.** Multi-country feeds and feed labels did the rest.
- **March 19 – Shopping Actions.**
- **May 3 and July 10 – goal-optimized, then Smart Shopping campaigns.**
- **June 12 – price benchmarks in Shopping reporting; local catalog ads rolling out to all advertisers.**
- **June 27 and July 24 – AdWords becomes Google Ads.** The name every edition since uses.
- **July 10 – responsive search ads begin rolling out; Local campaigns.**
- **September 6 – exact match same-meaning variants.**
- **October 30 – parallel tracking mandatory for Search and Shopping.**
- **November 1 – comparison-shopping rebate cut from 30% to 5%.** The margin mechanism, not the rebate, is what remains.

10. What the numbers showed: three quarters of retail search **budgets**

Merkle put Shopping ads at 60% of retailers' Google search ad clicks in the first quarter of 2018; Adthena reported that US retailers put 76.4% of their search ad budgets into Google Shopping in the same quarter; Merkle's second-quarter report had Google Shopping spend up 31% year on year; Marin's fourth-quarter benchmark put Shopping at 36% of search spending across all verticals. Adobe measured Cyber Monday 2018 at $7.9 billion, up 19.3%, and the season from November 1 to December 25 up 16.5%.

- With three quarters of the budget in Shopping, the feed was the account: a brand's titles, identifiers, images and prices deserved the review cadence that ad copy used to get.

- Compare your own Shopping share of clicks per brand with the 60% average: a brand far below it was a brand whose tiles were losing, and the benchmark columns said whether on price or on bid.

11. A five-minute **check**

CHECK	WHY IT MATTERS
One Smart Shopping campaign per brand tier, with its own return target; flagships kept in standard Shopping	One goal per campaign, and a reseller's goals differ by brand
Brand-specific assets in each Smart Shopping campaign, with the brand's permission	Display and YouTube placements now sell the brand
Every brand's tracking template tested with parallel tracking before October 30	An incompatible redirect breaks the click
Cost per click through Google Shopping compared with a partner's, in writing; a real comparison-shopping service chosen	The margin difference is structural; the rebate was not
Search terms per brand read weekly after same-meaning matching arrives; exact keyword per brand kept	Paraphrases name neighbouring models
Feed split by price position from the benchmark: push below, decide or exclude above	Same models as every other reseller; price is the comparison
Distribution agreements checked for marketplace clauses before Shopping Actions	A Google-hosted checkout looked like a marketplace to some brands
Consent basis documented for every Customer Match list	GDPR from May 25

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 2018: it describes Google AdWords and Google Ads, Shopping 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, The Keyword / Inside AdWords: "Grow your business beyond borders" (February 15, 2018); "Shopping Actions" (March 19, 2018); "Changes to our ad policies to comply with the GDPR" (March 22, 2018); "Drive sales and reach customers with a new Shopping campaign type" (May 3, 2018); "AdWords transition to the new experience" (May 7, 2018); "New innovations to remove friction from shopping" – price benchmarks, Local Feed Partnership, local catalog ads, 70 retailers on Shopping Actions (June 12, 2018); "Introducing simpler brands and solutions for advertisers and publishers" (June 27, 2018); "Machine learning in the hands of advertisers" – Google Marketing Live, Smart Shopping campaigns, responsive search ads, Local campaigns (July 10, 2018); Hotel campaigns (July 11, 2018); mobile landing page speed score (July 11, 2018); Google Ads Developers blog – click measurement improvements, parallel tracking from October 30 (July 12, 2018); Google Ads announcement – exact match same-meaning close variants (September 6, 2018). Google Ads Help – answer 9028765 (Google Ads brand change, July 24, 2018). Google Merchant Center Help – answer 7558973 (Comparison Shopping Services). Independent: Search Engine Journal – Amazon drops Google Shopping ads, citing Merkle (May 15, 2018), exact match same-meaning (September 7, 2018), comparison-shopping incentives cut (November 19, 2018), Adthena retail search budgets (May 1, 2018), Marin Q4 2018 benchmark (February 12, 2019), parallel tracking for Display and Video (February 12, 2019), Optmyzr study on Amazon's 2025 exit (August 19, 2025); Search Engine Land – Merkle Q1 2018, Shopping ads 60% of clicks (2018); Econsultancy – Google Shopping clicks 20% cheaper in the EU (July 24, 2018); Digital Commerce 360 – Google's efforts to avoid fines on Shopping ads, Vestager figures (June 18, 2018); ClickZ – Merkle Q2 2018 figures (August 17, 2018); Practical Ecommerce and CNBC – Adobe holiday 2018 sales (November 27–28, 2018); 9to5Google – Shopping Actions launch (March 19, 2018); Google Ads Developers blog – Buy on Google for Search and Shopping discontinued (September 2023). Policies and product names have changed since 2018; the 2026 edition describes the current rules.