WeAdU · Field Guide

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

2019 Edition

The year manufacturers could fund a reseller's Shopping campaigns, average position disappeared, identifiers stopped disapproving and started limiting – what to have done.

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1. Shopping campaigns with partners: the manufacturer pays for your **tiles**

At Google Marketing Live on May 14, 2019, Google announced a beta of Shopping campaigns with partners: a manufacturer funds priority products inside a retailer's own Shopping campaigns, and the retailer shares attribution reporting with the brand. For a multi-brand reseller, this was co-op advertising built into the tool rather than reconciled afterwards in a spreadsheet – and, like all co-op money, it came with the brand's conditions attached.

- Ask each brand whether it will fund its own products in your campaigns, and negotiate the funded products by model, not by brand: the manufacturer wants its flagships pushed, and so do you, but not at the expense of the brands that pay you more.
- Keep the funded products in the brand's own campaign, so that the shared reporting shows the brand its own results and nothing else – a reseller's other brands are not the manufacturer's business.
- Treat the funding as a reason to hold a return target, not to abandon it; a subsidised click that does not convert is still a click your store handled.

2. Average position dies; absolute top takes **over**

On February 26, 2019, Google announced that the average position metric would be sunset, and it was removed from the week of September 30, 2019, replaced by Impression (Absolute Top) %, Impression (Top) % and the matching impression-share metrics introduced in November 2018. For a reseller, "position 1.3 on brand X" had always been a poor guide – it averaged the auctions won and ignored the ones lost – and the new metrics said, per brand, how often the ad sat at the very top of the page.

- Rebuild every position-based rule and report per brand on absolute-top impression share: the question is not where the ad sits on average but how often it holds the top slot when it shows.
- Use a Target Impression Share strategy set for absolute top only on the terms where the top slot is worth its price – your own store name, and the flagship models of the brands where you are the cheapest authorised reseller.

3. Phrase and broad match modifier learn **meaning** too

On July 31, 2019, Google announced that phrase match and broad match modifier keywords would begin matching "words within the search query that share the same meaning as the keyword", in English within weeks and in other languages through 2020, and expected 3% to 4% more clicks and conversions for advertisers using those match types. What exact match had learned in September 2018, the two wider match types learned now.

- Read search terms per brand campaign for the same-meaning substitutions that change the product: a brand's "cordless" matching "battery", a model name matching its predecessor.
- Keep an exact-match keyword for each brand's core terms in that brand's own campaign; Google still prioritised an exact keyword identical to the search over a wider match.
- Apply the cross-brand negative lists to every phrase and modified-broad campaign, not only to broad.

4. Identifiers: from disapproval to "limited **performance**"

Two Merchant Center changes in 2019 made the feed quieter, not simpler. From March 27, 2019, *google_product_category* became optional – Google assigns a category itself – and *ads_redirect* had to match the domain of the link. From August 2019, a product missing its GTIN, MPN or brand was no longer disapproved; it received "limited performance" instead. For a multi-brand reseller, a disapproval had been loud and visible in Diagnostics; limited performance was a product that still showed, less often, for reasons the dashboard did not shout about.

- Keep supplying identifiers as if disapproval still applied: a matched offer sits inside the product listing shoppers compare; an unmatched one competes alone, and less often.
- Add "limited performance" to the weekly feed check, per brand, next to disapprovals; the brands whose suppliers never sent GTINs are the ones that will drift down without any error to fix.
- Set *google_product_category* anyway, for the categories where Google's guess is wrong – accessories filed under the main product's category are the typical case.

5. Price competitiveness becomes a bidding signal, then a **report**

On April 22, 2019, Google said price competitiveness and seasonality would become signals for Smart Bidding in Shopping campaigns: the automation would bid more on products priced well against the market. Seasonality adjustments arrived on August 28 for Search and Display, with Shopping to follow. The Merchant Center price competitiveness report, which began rolling out in beta in February 2020, used data back to October 14, 2019 – so the year's fourth quarter was the first the report could show. For a reseller, whose prices sit next to identical prices from every other authorised reseller, price position was now something Google bid on whether or not the reseller looked at it.

- Read the benchmark price difference per brand and per model, and split the feed with a custom label: push the products where you are below the benchmark, decide or exclude the ones above it. Smart Bidding was already doing a version of this; doing it deliberately keeps the budget on the brands that pay.
- Prepare the seasonality adjustment per brand for the events that matter to that brand – a manufacturer's own promotion, not only Black Friday.

6. The redesigned Google Shopping, Showcase on Images and **Discover**

On March 5, 2019, Google began testing shoppable ads on Google Images and brought Showcase Shopping ads – already running in seventeen countries – to Images as well; at Google Marketing Live it extended Showcase to Discover and reported that "on average, we see about 80% of traffic from Showcase Shopping ads to retailer sites are from new visitors". On October 3, 2019, the redesigned Google Shopping went live in the US: a personalised homepage, price tracking, a nearby-store filter and Buy on Google, with Google Express folded in. For a reseller, the surfaces multiplied while the feed stayed one.

- Keep Showcase groups by category across brands, and judge them on new visitors and assisted conversions; a format that brings 80% new visitors is not a last-click format.
- Watch price tracking as a shopper's tool: a model whose price you drop for a promotion now triggers alerts for shoppers who had been watching it, on every reseller's listing.
- Check each brand's distribution agreement before Buy on Google, as before Shopping Actions; the checkout is Google's, and some brands read that as a marketplace.

7. Ninety-five markets, multi-country feeds, and the first free **surfaces**

On October 30 and November 6, 2019, Google opened Shopping ads in more than 50 new markets, for 95 in total, introduced multi-country feeds and automated feeds built from a website, and launched "Surfaces across Google" in the US and India: free product listings on Search rich results and Google Images for merchants with a Merchant Center feed.

- Opt into the free surfaces where available and treat them as a second reason to keep the feed complete and accurate: the same data now showed in places no bid controlled.
- Enable a new market only where every brand in the feed has distribution rights there, or exclude the ones that do not with a feed rule; Google's market list is not your contract list.

8. Store visits join Smart **Bidding**

At Google Marketing Live, Google announced that Smart Shopping campaigns could optimise for store visits and local inventory, with a buy-online-pick-up-in-store beta; on September 23, 2019, store visits became available in Smart Bidding for all eligible Search and Shopping advertisers. For a reseller with stores, a brand's online return was no longer the whole return.

- Add store visits to the conversion value per brand only where the brand's in-store margin justifies it; a brand that sells online at a thin margin and in store at a thick one deserves a different weighting from one that does not.
- Keep local inventory feeds current by brand; a store visit for a model that is not on the shelf is a return customer lost.

9. Europe: the remedy under **fire**

In January 2019 Google withdrew the SpendMatch rebate it had paid to merchants using other comparison-shopping services, leaving the structural advantage – clicks up to 20% cheaper because Google Shopping's fixed margin is not deducted from a partner's bid. On April 12, idealo sued Google for damages of about €500 million; on November 7, Commissioner Vestager said "we still do not see much traffic for viable competitors"; on November 28, 41 comparison-shopping services from 21 countries wrote to her that the remedy "is simply not working". For a British or European reseller, the politics did not change the arithmetic: a partner still entered the bid without the margin.

- Re-run the comparison without the rebate: partner fee against Google's fixed margin, on your own click volume. For most resellers the partner still won; the rebate had only made the margin larger.
- Choose a partner that will survive the argument – an actual comparison site with its own traffic – because switching partners means re-verifying the feed.

10. What was **new** in 2019 – and what each thing turned into

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

- **March 5 – shoppable ads on Google Images test; Showcase, already in 17 countries, added to Images.** Images are still part of the Search Network.
- **March 27 – google_product_category optional; ads_redirect must match the link domain.** Google now assigns categories itself.
- **April 22 – price competitiveness and seasonality as Shopping bidding signals.**
- **May 14 – Google Marketing Live: Shopping campaigns with partners, Discovery ads, Gallery ads, the redesigned Google Shopping.**
- **June 6 – campaign-level conversion settings.** Standard in every campaign type since.
- **July 31 – phrase and broad match modifier same-meaning variants.**
- **August – optimization score for Shopping (Aug 12); seasonality adjustments (Aug 28); identifiers move to limited performance.**
- **September 23 and 30 – store visits in Smart Bidding; average position removed.** Both still in force.
- **October 3 – the redesigned Google Shopping in the US.**
- **October 30 and November 6 – 95 markets, multi-country feeds, automated feeds, Surfaces across Google.**

11. What the numbers showed: two thirds of clicks, four fifths of **budget**

Merkle's report for the first quarter of 2019 put Google Shopping spend up 41% year on year, with retail advertisers' paid search clicks up 11% across all formats, Shopping at 65% of retailers' Google search ad clicks and 89% of their non-brand clicks, and Showcase at 8% of Shopping clicks. Its fourth-quarter report had Google search spend up 16%, Shopping revenue per click 18% above text ads, local inventory ads at 29% of Shopping clicks and Amazon Sponsored Products spend up 63%. Sidecar's benchmarks on 2019 data put

Google Shopping at 80% of retailers' Google Ads budget, with Amazon's Shopping impression share above 60% in several categories in the third quarter. Adobe measured the holiday season at $142.5 billion online, up 13.1%, with smartphones at 36% of revenue.

- Spend up 41% against a much smaller rise in overall retail clicks points to a filling auction: check cost per click per brand quarter on quarter, and move budget to the brands whose return holds.
- Read auction insights per brand for Amazon's impression share; where it sits above 60%, a reseller wins on the model searches the marketplace does not target, not on the head terms.

12. A five-minute **check**

CHECK	WHY IT MATTERS
Each brand asked about partner-funded Shopping; funded models kept in the brand's own campaign	Co-op inside the tool, on the brand's conditions
Position rules rebuilt per brand on absolute-top impression share	Average position gone from September 30
Search terms per brand read for same-meaning substitutions in phrase and modified broad	A model name can match its predecessor
"Limited performance" checked weekly per brand, next to disapprovals	A missing identifier no longer shouts
Feed split by price position with a custom label; seasonality adjustment planned per brand	Smart Bidding already bids on price position
Showcase judged on new visitors and assisted conversions	80% of its traffic is new visitors
New markets enabled only where every brand's distribution rights apply	95 markets is Google's list, not your contract list
Partner fee re-compared with Google's fixed margin, without the rebate	The structural advantage remained

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 2019: it describes 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 / Google Ads announcements: "Shopping ads on Google Images" (March 5, 2019); product data specification update (March 27, 2019, Merchant Center Help answer 9269666); Smart Bidding signals for Shopping – price competitiveness and seasonality (April 22, 2019); "New ad innovations for the new consumer journey" and "Making it easier to shop across Google" – Google Marketing Live (May 14, 2019); campaign-level conversion settings (June 6, 2019); "Sunset of the average position metric" (Google Ads Developers blog, July 25, 2019); phrase match and broad match modifier close variants (July 31, 2019, answer 9426627); optimization score for Shopping (August 12, 2019); "Find the best prices and places to buy on Google Shopping" (October 3, 2019); "Get your products in front of holiday shoppers" – 95 markets, multi-country feeds, automated feeds, Surfaces across Google (October 30, 2019); "It's now free to sell on Google" (April 21, 2020); "Driving online sales" – free and fast shipping annotations, new customer acquisition (July 15, 2020). Google Cloud – Merchant Center price competitiveness schema; Merchant Center Help answer 9626903 (price competitiveness report). Independent: Search Engine Land – Smart Bidding signals for Shopping (April 22, 2019), Discovery and Gallery ads at Google Marketing Live (May 2019), Maximize conversion value (August 21, 2019), price competitiveness report (February 10, 2020); Search Engine Journal – Smart Shopping store visits (May 14, 2019), seasonality adjustments (August 28, 2019), store visits in Smart Bidding (September 23, 2019), Shopping ads in 50 new markets (November 6, 2019); Practical Ecommerce – average position sunset (February 27, 2019), conversion action sets (September 2, 2019); PPC Hero – Merchant Center disapprovals and GTINs (November 13, 2019), autumn 2019 Merchant Center updates (October 9, 2019); Delante – best sellers report (March 5, 2020); TechCrunch – redesigned Google Shopping (October 3, 2019); True Interactive – Shopping campaigns with partners; DataFeedWatch – Google Shopping comparison-shopping services; idealo – damages claim (April 12, 2019); Hausfeld – letter of 41 comparison-shopping services (November 28, 2019); Kelkoo Group – Google Shopping timeline; Merkle Digital Marketing Reports Q1 2019 and Q4 2019 (January 28, 2020); Sidecar 2020 benchmarks report (March 2020); Adobe – 2019 holiday recap (January 2020); PPC Land – free listings removed across the EEA (September 19, 2026). Policies and product names have changed since 2019; the 2026 edition describes the current rules.