WeAdU · Field Guide

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

2021 Edition

The year Performance Max reached everyone, broad match modifier disappeared, measurement was rebuilt after iOS 14.5, and customer lists opened up – what a multi-brand reseller should have done.

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1. Performance Max arrives: one campaign, every channel, one **goal**

On November 2, 2021, Google announced that "Performance Max campaigns will roll out to all advertisers around the world starting today": one campaign serving Search, Shopping, YouTube, Display, Discover, Gmail and Maps from a feed, assets and audience signals, bidding on a single conversion goal; Google's own data put the average uplift at 13% more incremental conversions at a similar cost per action. The same post said Smart Shopping and Local campaigns would be upgraded to Performance Max in 2022. For a multi-brand reseller, the offer was the Smart Shopping offer of 2018, larger: one goal per campaign, and a reseller's goals differ by brand.

- Do not rebuild the account around it yet: test one Performance Max campaign for one brand tier whose brands share a margin and a return target, against the Smart Shopping campaign it will replace, and keep the rest as they are until 2022.
- Inside the campaign, one asset group per brand, with that brand's imagery, text and audience signal, and listing groups split by brand from the feed; a pooled asset group sells the store and lets the automation choose which brand to feature.
- Keep the brand Search campaigns running with exact-match brand keywords: Performance Max had no brand exclusions in 2021, so the only way to keep it off a brand's own searches was to make sure the brand campaign won them.

2. Broad match modifier folds into phrase **match**

On February 4, 2021, Google announced that phrase match would absorb broad match modifier: "the updated phrase match will contain the best of both match types: the control of phrase match, and the expanded reach of broad match modifier." Phrase match keywords began matching the wider traffic on February 18 in eight languages and everywhere by July, and "starting in July 2021, you will no longer be able to create new BMM keywords." Broad match itself increasingly drew on more signals from across the account – other keywords, landing pages, recent search activity – to decide what a search matched. For a reseller whose brand campaigns were built on modified broad "+brand +model" keywords, the match type that had made those campaigns precise was going.

- Convert each brand's modified-broad keywords to phrase match deliberately, brand by brand, reading the search terms for two weeks after each conversion; the new phrase match respected word order in a way modified broad had not.
- Keep the exact-match keyword for each brand's core terms in that brand's campaign, and the cross-brand negative lists everywhere; with less visibility in the search terms report since 2020, structure did the routing.
- Test broad match with Smart Bidding on one brand's campaign only, with brand negatives from every other brand applied, before deciding whether it belongs anywhere else.

3. Measurement rebuilt: iOS 14.5, enhanced conversions, consent mode, value **rules**

Apple's App Tracking Transparency took effect with iOS 14.5 on April 26, 2021, and Google said the same day that its click identifier would no longer be appended on some iOS traffic, with modelled conversions filling the gap. Google had already announced conversion modelling through consent mode on April 15 for advertisers in the EEA and the UK, recovering "more than 70%" of the ad-click-to-conversion journeys lost to refused consent. Enhanced conversions, which send hashed first-party data with the conversion, were shown at Google Marketing Livestream on May 27 and rolled out in beta to all eligible advertisers on September 30. Conversion value rules arrived on August 19: adjust a conversion's value by location, device or audience, from half to ten times. For a reseller, the measured return per brand was about to move for reasons that had nothing to do with the brands.

- Deploy enhanced conversions and consent mode on every brand template through the tag manager, so that measured return per brand moves for the same technical reasons across brands, and the comparison between brands stays fair.
- Use a conversion value rule on the audience of past buyers to raise the value of repeat purchases, which is where a multi-brand store makes its margin – and use one on the store's own country to correct for cross-border orders that cost more to serve.
- Mark the date of each measurement change in the brand-level reporting, so that a drop in a brand's return is not misread as a drop in the brand.

4. Customer Match for nearly **everyone**

At Google Marketing Livestream on May 27, 2021, Google said Customer Match would be available to nearly all advertisers, dropping the $50,000 lifetime-spend requirement; on November 15 it added that all policy-compliant advertisers would get it over the coming weeks, with accounts under 90 days of compliance or

$50,000 of spend limited to observation, similar audiences and exclusions rather than targeting and bid adjustments. For a reseller below the old threshold, the customer file that spans every brand it sells became a Google Ads asset for the first time.

- Upload the all-buyers list first, at account level, and apply it to every brand's Search, Shopping and Performance Max campaign as an audience signal or a bid adjustment; a buyer of one brand is the best prospect for the next.
- Check the consent basis of the file before the first upload, brand by brand where a brand's customers were collected under a different form.
- Refresh the upload on a schedule tied to order data; a stale list steers bids toward who your customers used to be.

5. Merchant Center in 2021: price accuracy to checkout, duplicates, **backorders**

The 2021 product data specification update took effect on April 6, 2021: prices had to match through to checkout, with a 28-day warning before enforcement; backordered products could be listed with an *availability_date*; handling and transit times could be set by region. From June 15, 2021, products submitting the same brand and MPN combination more than once were disapproved. From September 15, the country sub-attribute became required in shipping. For a reseller, the duplicate rule was the sharp one: a catalogue with the same manufacturer part number on a product and its bundle, or on two colour variants without an *item_group_id*, lost both.

- Audit brand-plus-MPN uniqueness per brand before June 15: variants of one model belong under an *item_group_id* with their own GTINs; bundles need their own identifier and the bundle flag.
- Match the feed price to the checkout price including any brand-specific surcharge or delivery rule; a price that changes in the basket is a price accuracy failure, however it is labelled.
- Use *availability_date* for the brands whose suppliers publish delivery dates, and keep the rest out of the feed until they are in stock.

6. Free listings get promotions, deals and shipping **annotations**

On July 21, 2021, Google extended promotions to free listings on the Shopping tab, added "new customers only" promotions, and announced a "deals related to your search" section on the Shopping tab and a deals carousel in Search for the US from October; the best sellers report gained history and a relative-demand measure. On August 31, shipping and return annotations – "Free delivery by …", "Free returns until …" – began showing on free and paid listings alike. For a reseller, the tile's second line was now the promotion, the delivery promise and the returns promise, on every listing whether or not a bid stood behind it.

- Set shipping and return policies in Merchant Center per brand where they differ – a brand shipped from a supplier cannot carry the same delivery date as one in stock – so the annotation is true on every tile.
- Run manufacturer-funded promotions through Merchant Promotions so they show on free listings too, and use "new customers only" for the brands whose repeat rate makes a first purchase worth the discount.
- Read the best sellers report per brand for relative demand: a model whose demand is rising and whose price you match is where the promotion budget goes.

7. Product feeds reach video and **Discovery**

At Google Marketing Livestream on May 27, 2021, product feeds from Merchant Center became generally available in Video action campaigns and an open beta in Discovery ads, with Google claiming that feeds drove 60% more conversions at lower cost; Target ROAS reached Video action campaigns. For a reseller, the manufacturer's video and the reseller's feed could now meet in more places than YouTube's in-stream slot.

- Use the manufacturer's video with permission and filter the feed to that brand for each campaign, so a brand's video never carries a competitor's model from your catalogue.
- Judge these campaigns on assisted conversions and new customers, per brand, not on last-click return; they open visits that the tiles close.

8. Europe: the General Court upholds the **fine**

On November 10, 2021, the General Court of the European Union largely dismissed Google's appeal and upheld the €2,424,495,000 fine of 2017, annulling only the finding of abuse on the general search market. For a British or European reseller, the judgment changed nothing in the account: the comparison-shopping auction of September 2017 had been running for four years, and the "By …" label under every tile still said who placed it.

- Nothing to change in 2021. The yearly comparison – partner fee against Google's fixed margin, on your click volume – was still due.

9. What was **new** in 2021 – and what each thing turned into

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

- **February 4 and 18 – broad match modifier into phrase match; responsive search ads become the default ad type.**
- **April 6 – price accuracy through checkout; backorders with availability_date.** Still enforced.
- **April 15 and 26 – conversion modelling through consent mode; iOS 14.5.**
- **May 27 – Google Marketing Livestream: Performance Max expanded, Customer Match opened, feeds in video and Discovery, image extensions worldwide.**
- **June 15 – duplicate brand and MPN combinations disapproved.** Still enforced.
- **July 21 – promotions on free listings; "new customers only" promotions; best sellers with relative demand.**
- **August 19 – conversion value rules.** Still the way to weight repeat buyers and regions.
- **August 31 – shipping and return annotations; expanded text ads sunset announced for June 30, 2022.** Both in force.
- **September 27 and 30 – data-driven attribution the default; enhanced conversions in beta for all.** Both standard today.
- **November 2 – Performance Max for all advertisers.**

10. What the numbers showed: Shopping up 37%, stock **down**

Tinuiti's benchmark for the fourth quarter of 2021 put Google Shopping spend up 37% year on year on 19% more clicks, with cost per click up 15%, Google search spend up a little over 30% and retail search spend up 28%; responsive search ads were 59% of text-ad clicks by December. Merkle's first-quarter report had Shopping's share of retailers' Google search clicks back at 60%; its fourth-quarter report put local inventory ads at 35% of Google Shopping clicks against 18% a year earlier, and retail paid search spend up 6% with cost per click up 13%. Adobe measured US online holiday spending at $204.5 billion, up 8.6%, with Cyber Week down 1.4% year on year and six billion out-of-stock messages shown to shoppers.

- Costs per click rising 15% while clicks rose 19% is an auction with more bidders and less stock: read return per brand monthly, and stop funding a brand whose supplier cannot deliver rather than paying more for its clicks.
- Take the local-inventory share as a signal that shoppers were checking availability before buying: keep availability exact per brand, online and in store.

11. A five-minute **check**

CHECK	WHY IT MATTERS
One Performance Max test for one brand tier; one asset group per brand; brand Search campaigns kept	No brand exclusions in Performance Max in 2021
Modified-broad brand keywords converted to phrase match brand by brand, with search terms read after each	No new broad match modifier keywords from July
Enhanced conversions and consent mode on every brand template; measurement changes dated in reporting	Return per brand moves for technical reasons too
All-buyers Customer Match list uploaded at account level and applied to every brand campaign	Threshold dropped; the file spans every brand
Brand plus MPN unique across the feed; variants under item_group_id; bundles flagged	Duplicates disapproved from June 15
Feed price equals checkout price for every brand; availability_date on backorders	Price accuracy enforced from April 6
Shipping and return policies set per brand where they differ	Annotations show on free and paid tiles
Partner fee versus Google's fixed margin reviewed (UK and EEA)	The fine was upheld; the auction did not change

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 2021: 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, Google Ads Developers blog / Google Ads Help / The Keyword: "Changes to phrase match and broad match modifier" (February 4, 2021; answers 10346549, 10286719); responsive search ads default (February 18, 2021, answer 10434300); Merchant Center product data specification update (April 2021, answer 10451760); Insights page for all advertisers (April 14, 2021, answer 10568762); "Conversion modeling through consent mode" (April 15, 2021); iOS 14.5 notice (April 26, 2021, answer 10635155); "Google Marketing Livestream 2021 innovations" (May 27, 2021) and the Livestream recap (answer 10727844); image extensions available globally (May 27, 2021, answer 10700789); "More ways to shop" – Shopping Graph and Shopify (May 18, 2021); promotions on free listings and deals (July 21, 2021, answer 10897114); "Better control over Smart Bidding with conversion value rules" (August 19, 2021); "2021 retail holiday checklist" – shipping and return annotations (August 31, 2021); expanded text ads sunset (answer 7056544); "Data-driven attribution, the new default" (September 27, 2021); enhanced conversions beta for all eligible advertisers (September 30, 2021, answer 11192862); "Performance Max campaigns" (November 2, 2021); Customer Match for all policy-compliant advertisers (November 15, 2021, answer 11129174); Advertising Week announcements – Performance Max beta (October 6, 2020); "The new Google Analytics" (October 14, 2020); "Prepare for the future with Google Analytics 4" (March 16, 2022). General Court of the European Union, judgment T-612/17 (November 10, 2021); Court of Justice press release 135/24 (September 10, 2024). Independent: Search Engine Journal – broad match modifier phase-out (February 4, 2021), conversion value rules (August 19, 2021), shipping annotations (August 31, 2021); Search Engine Land – phrase match and broad match modifier (February 4, 2021), Google Marketing Livestream Customer Match and Performance Max (May 27, 2021), Shopping Graph and Shopify (May 19, 2021), Customer Match for all (November 15, 2021), Merchant Center specification (April 2021), expanded text ads sunset (August 31, 2021); Search Engine Roundtable – product data specification changes (April 8, 2021); AdExchanger – data-driven attribution default (September 2021); Reuters – General Court ruling (November 10, 2021); Tinuiti – Google Ads benchmark report Q4 2021 (January 25, 2022); Merkle Digital Marketing Reports Q1 2021 (May 10, 2021) and Q4 2021 (February 1, 2022); Tinuiti Q2 2022 benchmark (Shopping 64% of retailers' Google search budgets); CNBC – Adobe holiday 2021 figures (January 12, 2022); PPC Land – free listings removed across the EEA (September 19, 2026). Policies and product names have changed since 2021; the 2026 edition describes the current rules.