WeAdU · Field Guide

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

2023 Edition

The year Performance Max learned to stay off a brand, generative AI entered the account, Demand Gen replaced Discovery and Universal Analytics ended – what a multi-brand reseller should have done.

WeAdU · Google Premier Partner · Google Ads practice since 2002

In this edition

1. Brand exclusions: Performance Max learns to stay off a brand
2. Brand restrictions for broad match in Search
3. Generative AI enters the account
4. Demand Gen launches; Discovery ends
5. Merchant Center Next, and the feed rules of 2023
6. Measurement: Universal Analytics ends, attribution models go, Enhanced CPC fades
7. Similar audiences are removed
8. Europe: gatekeeper status, and what March 2024 would bring
9. What was new in 2023 – and what each thing turned into
10. What the numbers showed: nine in ten retailers on Performance Max
11. A five-minute check

1. Brand exclusions: Performance Max learns to stay off a **brand**

On February 23, 2023, Google promised the control that multi-brand resellers had asked for since 2021: "Control which brands your campaign matches to – including your own brand – with campaign-level brand exclusions that are coming soon." Account-level negative keywords had arrived in late January, applying to Search, Shopping and the search and Shopping inventory of Performance Max. On June 29, brand exclusions finished beta and began rolling out to all advertisers; on July 25, Google called them fully launched, alongside page feeds. On October 26, search themes entered beta – up to 25 per asset group, and "search themes will respect brand exclusions in Performance Max and account-level negative keywords." For a reseller, the tool to keep brand A's campaign off brand B's searches finally existed inside the campaign that mattered most.

- Create one brand list per brand you sell, at account level, and apply it as an exclusion to every other brand's Performance Max campaign – never to the brand's own. Google's lists cover Search and Shopping inventory, catch misspellings and subsidiary brands, and are more comprehensive than negative keywords.
- Use account-level negative keywords only for terms that no campaign should ever serve – competitors you do not sell, product types you do not carry – because they apply to every campaign, including the brand's own.
- Use search themes per brand asset group for the model names and use cases of that brand, and read the search-terms insights they produce against the brand exclusions.
- Use page feeds to point each brand's asset group at that brand's pages only, so final URL expansion stays inside the brand.

2. Brand restrictions for broad match in **Search**

Announced at Google Marketing Live on May 23, 2023 and rolled out globally in the week after June 29, brand restrictions let a Search campaign using campaign-level broad match serve only on searches that mention the brands on its list. For a reseller, this was the first way to run broad match on a brand's campaign without the campaign wandering into another brand's demand – provided the list was the brand's, and only the brand's.

- Test broad match with brand restrictions on one brand's Search campaign, restricted to that brand's list, with the other brands' lists applied as exclusions; compare return with the exact-match campaign over a full month before widening.
- Keep the exact-match brand keyword in the same campaign: Google still prioritised an exact keyword identical to the search, and the restriction only decided which broad matches were allowed.

3. Generative AI enters the **account**

On February 27, 2023, automatically created assets for Search opened as a beta for all English-language advertisers, generating headlines and descriptions from landing pages and existing ads. On May 10, Google announced the Search Generative Experience: "with SGE, Search ads will continue to appear in dedicated ad slots throughout the page," and at Google Marketing Live on May 23 it said it would "experiment with Search and Shopping ads that are directly integrated within the AI-powered snapshot and conversational mode". The same day it announced Product Studio, generative product imagery for US merchants in Merchant Center Next, which reached all US Merchant Center Next users in the week of November 1, and a conversational experience for building Search campaigns, fully available in English in the US and UK from January 23, 2024. For a reseller, the assets that Google would now write and draw were assets about brands it does not own.

- Check each brand's distribution agreement before generating product imagery: many brands specify which images may be used, and a generated background around a brand's product is a new image.
- Point automatically created assets at brand-dedicated landing pages, because the generator reads the page: a generic store page produces generic headlines, a brand page produces the brand's.
- Read the generated assets per brand campaign as you would a junior copywriter's draft – for the trademark conditions (reseller status visible, prices and a way to buy on the page) as much as for the tone.

4. Demand Gen launches; Discovery **ends**

Demand Gen campaigns, announced at Google Marketing Live on May 23, 2023, opened a self-serve upgrade beta for Discovery advertisers on August 15 and "will now roll out to all Google Ads customers around the world starting on October 10th, 2023", with lookalike segments and product feeds for retailers; Google said the remaining Discovery campaigns would be upgraded automatically in early 2024. For a reseller, Demand Gen was Discovery with YouTube added, a product feed attached and a lookalike built from the store's buyer list.

- Build the lookalike from the all-buyers Customer Match list, not from one brand's; the store's next customer looks like the store's last one.
- Attach the product feed filtered by brand to each brand's Demand Gen campaign, so a brand's creative never carries a competitor's model.
- Judge it on new customers and assisted conversions per brand; it opens visits that the tiles close.

5. Merchant Center Next, and the feed rules of **2023**

On May 23, 2023, Google announced Merchant Center Next: "Merchant Center Next has already started rolling out for new users. We'll start upgrading smaller businesses over the coming months, with plans to complete the global rollout in 2024." The 2023 product data specification update, effective June 15, made shipping cost mandatory in more countries, added a *certification* attribute for EU energy labels, and made availability mandatory for local inventory, with out-of-stock enforcement from September 1. From April 17, Google Search showed shipping and return information on merchants' text results in the US, read from Merchant Center settings or structured data. In December, the "incorrect value: identifier exists" error was downgraded from a disapproval to a warning. For a reseller, the feed rules kept tightening around the things a supplier controls: shipping, energy labels, stock.

- Set shipping cost per country for every brand before June 15, including the countries a brand ships to from a supplier's warehouse at a different rate.
- Collect the energy-label data for the brands that need it from the manufacturer's EPREL entry, not from a product page.
- Keep local availability exact per brand from September 1; an out-of-stock local product was now a policy issue as well as a lost sale.

6. Measurement: Universal Analytics ends, attribution models go, Enhanced CPC **fades**

Standard Universal Analytics properties stopped processing data from July 1, 2023 – in practice, over the following weeks. On June 21, Google announced that first-click, linear, time-decay and position-based attribution would be removed from selection in July and deleted in September, leaving data-driven and last-click. On September 21, Google's developer blog said that from early October, Enhanced CPC in Shopping campaigns would behave as Manual CPC. On September 26, Buy on Google for Search and Shopping was discontinued, and on October 11 Google Ads Data Manager was introduced for first-party data connections. For a reseller, the brand-level measurement stack was being replaced piece by piece.

- Move brand-level reporting to Google Analytics 4 with item brand on every event, and re-baseline return per brand on the new property before comparing it with last year's.
- Move the standard Shopping campaigns that relied on Enhanced CPC to Target ROAS per brand tier, or to deliberate manual bids; the automation was gone either way.
- Connect the customer file through Data Manager once, at account level, so that Customer Match and enhanced conversions draw on the same source.

7. Similar audiences are **removed**

"Starting May 1, 2023, Google Ads will no longer generate similar audiences," and in August 2023 they were removed from all campaigns, replaced by optimized targeting, audience expansion and Smart Bidding. For a reseller, the lookalike of the store's buyers was gone as a segment; the buyer list stayed, as a signal.

- Apply the all-buyers Customer Match list as the audience signal in every Performance Max campaign and as the seed of Demand Gen lookalikes; the signal is what optimized targeting expands from.

8. Europe: gatekeeper status, and what March 2024 would **bring**

Under the Digital Services Act, Google Shopping was designated a very large online platform and Google Search a very large online search engine on April 25, 2023, with obligations from August 25, 2023. Under the Digital Markets Act, the European Commission designated Alphabet a gatekeeper on September 6, 2023 – with Google Search, Google Shopping and Google's advertising service among the core platform services – and gatekeepers had to comply by March 7, 2024. In November 2023, Google announced consent mode v2, needed to keep audience features for EEA users from March 2024. For a British or European reseller, the year was the notice period.

- Plan the consent mode v2 upgrade for every brand template before March 2024; without the new consent signals, Customer Match and remarketing for EEA users would degrade.
- Expect the Shopping unit and the comparison-shopping units in EEA results to change in March 2024, and plan a public Shopping reading – presence, product shown, price, "By …" label – for the week after.

9. What was **new** in 2023 – and what each thing turned into

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

- **January – account-level negative keywords for all.** Still the account-wide floor under every campaign.
- **February 23 and 27 – brand exclusions announced; automatically created assets in open beta.**
- **May 10 – the Search Generative Experience.**
- **May 23 – Google Marketing Live: Merchant Center Next, Product Studio, Demand Gen, brand restrictions, conversational campaign building.**
- **June 21 – four attribution models removed.** Data-driven and last click only.
- **June 29 and July 25 – brand exclusions for Performance Max rolled out and fully launched, with page feeds.**
- **July 1 – Universal Analytics stops.** Google Analytics 4 only.
- **August – similar audiences removed.** Customer Match as signal.
- **October 10 and 26 – Demand Gen for all; search themes beta.** Discovery upgraded early 2024.
- **November 1 – Product Studio for all US Merchant Center Next users.**

10. What the numbers showed: nine in ten retailers on Performance **Max**

Tinuiti's benchmark for the fourth quarter of 2023 put US Google search ad spend up 17% year on year, spend across Google Shopping and Performance Max up 19%, Shopping clicks up 13% with cost per click up 5%, and 91% of retailers running Performance Max – whose sales per click ran 13% below standard Shopping and whose return on ad spend ran 2% below it. Adobe measured US online holiday spending at $222.1 billion, up 4.9%, with 51.1% of it on smartphones.

- A 2% lower return with 13% lower sales per click means Performance Max was buying cheaper, lower-value clicks: read which brands' clicks those were, per campaign, and move the flagship models of each brand back to a standard Shopping campaign where the return is measured per product group.

– With paid search still driving a large share of online sales on the peak days, a budget per brand steered by measured return, not a daily cap, is what keeps a paying brand from being cut off at 3 p.m.

11. A five-minute **check**

CHECK	WHY IT MATTERS
One brand list per brand, applied as an exclusion to every other brand's Performance Max campaign, never its own	Brand exclusions cover Search and Shopping inventory
Account-level negatives only for terms no campaign should ever serve	They apply to every campaign, including the brand's own
Search themes and page feeds per brand asset group	Keep the automation inside the brand
Broad match with brand restrictions tested on one brand's Search campaign	The restriction only decides which broad matches are allowed
Distribution agreements checked before generating product imagery; generated assets read per brand	A generated background is a new image of the brand's product
Demand Gen lookalikes built from the all-buyers list; feed filtered by brand per campaign	The store's next customer looks like its last one
Shipping cost per country and energy-label data set per brand before June 15	The feed rules tightened around what suppliers control
Brand-level reporting rebuilt on Google Analytics 4; Enhanced CPC campaigns moved to Target ROAS per tier	Universal Analytics stopped; Enhanced CPC faded
Consent mode v2 planned for every brand template before March 2024 (UK and EEA)	Audience features for EEA users degrade without it

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.

Request the free Starter audit

Free. Delivered in 2 business days from read-only access. weadu.com/audit · jeff@weadu.com · Reseller case studies: weadu.com/case-studies

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This edition is a retrospective written in September 2026, not a document from 2023: 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 Help / The Keyword / Google Ads Developers blog: "What's new in Performance Max" (February 23, 2023, answer 13311048); automatically created assets open beta (February 27, 2023, answer 13352636); "New ways to be more productive with generative AI in Search ads" (May 10, 2023); "Supercharging Search with generative AI" (May 10, 2023); "Introducing a new era of AI-powered ads with Google" (May 23, 2023); "Product Studio" (May 23, 2023); conversational experience (May 23, 2023, answer 13602916); attribution models removal (June 21, 2023, answer 13695100); brand exclusions and brand restrictions rolling out (June 29, 2023, answer 13729701); brand exclusions and page feeds fully launched (July 25, 2023, answer 13780156); new customer acquisition for high lifetime value (August 8, 2023, answer 13844604); Demand Gen upgrade beta (August 15, 2023, answer 13859703); automatically created assets in more languages and generative AI (September 20, 2023, answer 14079753); Enhanced CPC in Shopping campaigns (Google Ads Developers blog, September 21, 2023); Buy on Google for Search and Shopping discontinued (September 2023); "Demand more from social with AI-powered ads" (October 10, 2023); Google Ads Data Manager (October 11, 2023); search themes beta (October 26, 2023, answer 14179631); new Merchant Center features for the holidays (November 1, 2023); "Put Google AI to work with Search ads" – conversational experience (January 23, 2024); shipping and returns information in Search (Google Search Central blog, April 17, 2023); Universal Analytics sunset (Analytics Help answer 11583528); similar audiences (SA360 Help answer 13388565); identifier exists warning (Merchant Center Help answer 14294691); consent mode v2 (Google Ads Help answer 14505993, January 18, 2024); "Complying with the Digital Markets Act" (March 5, 2024). European Commission – gatekeeper designations (September 6, 2023) and press release IP/24/1689 (March 25, 2024). Independent: Search Engine Land – four new Performance Max features (February 23, 2023), account-level negative keywords (January 27, 2023), ads in the Search Generative Experience (May 10, 2023), Merchant Center Next (May 23, 2023), Demand Gen beta (August 15, 2023), Universal Analytics after the sunset (July 10 and September 1, 2023), similar audiences removed (July 31, 2023), Product Studio (November 1, 2023); Search Engine Journal – brand controls for Search and Performance Max (July 3, 2023), account-level negatives (January 30, 2023); Search Engine Roundtable – search themes (October 27, 2023); TechCrunch – Product Studio (November 1, 2023), SGE in 120 countries (November 8, 2023); WordStream – Google Marketing Live 2023 (May 23, 2023); KeyCommerce – 2023 product data specification update (June 22, 2023); Tinuiti – Digital Ads Benchmark Report Q4 2023 and Q4 2024; Adobe – holiday 2023 recap (January 4, 2024); PPC Land – free listings removed across the EEA (September 19, 2026). Policies and product names have changed since 2023; the 2026 edition describes the current rules.