WeAdU · Field Guide

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

2025 Edition

The year AI Max arrived for Search, Performance Max got negative keywords and search terms back, AI Mode went live with ads, and Amazon left the Shopping auction again – what a multi-brand reseller should have done.

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1. AI Max for Search: keywordless matching with brand **controls**

On May 6, 2025, Google announced AI Max for Search, a one-click upgrade to existing Search campaigns rolling out in beta from that month and worldwide from September 10: search term matching (broad match plus keywordless matching), text customisation (the renamed automatically created assets) and final URL expansion, with brand inclusions and exclusions at campaign and ad-group level, locations of interest, URL inclusions and exclusions, and a search terms report that shows the headline and landing page served. Google's claim: "advertisers that activate AI Max in Search campaigns will typically see 14% more conversions or conversion value at a similar CPA/ROAS". It stayed in beta through 2025. For a reseller, AI Max was the 2021 phrase-match question again, with the controls that 2021 lacked.

- Test it on one brand's Search campaign with that brand's list as an inclusion and every other brand's list as an exclusion; the inclusion is what keeps a keywordless campaign inside the brand.
- Restrict final URL expansion to the brand's pages with URL inclusions, and check the tracking template works with dynamically chosen landing pages before switching it on; an incompatible template can send a shopper to a 404.
- Read the new search terms report with headline and URL per brand weekly, because the report now shows not only what matched but what the ad said.

2. Performance Max gets negatives, search terms and channel **reporting**

On January 23, 2025, Google announced campaign-level negative keywords for Performance Max, rolling out to all advertisers over the following weeks – live for everyone by mid-March – together with asset-group reporting segmented by device and time, a high-value new customer acquisition goal, and a coming setting to

keep Shopping ads serving on searches that mention an excluded brand. On April 9, the per-campaign limit was raised from 100 to 10,000 negative keywords. On April 30, a search terms report and channel-level performance reporting followed, the latter in open beta at Google Marketing Live and on all campaigns by November 6; negative keyword lists reached Performance Max on August 7, for Search and Shopping inventory. For a reseller, the two controls it had asked for since 2021 – keep a campaign off the other brands' terms, and see what it actually served – were now both in the campaign.

- Apply each brand's shared negative-keyword list – its core terms – to every other brand's Performance Max campaign, under the brand exclusions; the exclusions catch misspellings and subsidiaries, the negatives catch the model names.
- Read the channel report per brand campaign: a brand whose spend has drifted into Display and YouTube with a weak return needs its assets and audience signal fixed, not its budget cut.
- Use the Shopping-ads-on-excluded-brands setting only where you sell the excluded brand and want its tiles but not its text ads; leave it off where the exclusion is a routing rule between your own brands.

3. AI Mode, ads in AI answers, and agentic **checkout**

AI Mode opened to all US users on May 20, 2025, reached the United Kingdom on July 28, 180 more countries in English in August and 40 countries in 35 languages from October 7. On May 21, Google said that Search and Shopping ads in AI Overviews would soon expand to desktop in the U.S. ahead of a wider rollout, and that "we're also starting to test ads in AI Mode", served from Performance Max, Shopping and Search campaigns with broad match. On November 13, conversational shopping in AI Mode and agentic checkout – Google completing the purchase on the shopper's behalf with participating merchants – launched in the US. For a reseller, the Shopping Graph that fed all of this held 50 billion listings, two billion of them refreshed hourly, and one of them was each of its products.

- Keep the feed complete enough to be summarised: an AI answer builds the comparison from listings, and a brand's model with thin attributes loses the comparison before any bid is placed.
- Check each brand's distribution agreement before joining agentic checkout; a purchase completed by Google on the shopper's behalf is the marketplace question of 2018, asked again.
- Read the search terms per brand for the conversational queries – "which of these fits my …" – that AI Mode produces, and answer them on the brand's pages.

4. Smart Bidding Exploration and total campaign **budgets**

At Google Marketing Live on May 21, 2025, Google launched Smart Bidding Exploration in global beta: an opt-in for Target ROAS on broad-match Search campaigns and portfolios that lets flexible ROAS targets fuel an algorithm capturing additional searches and conversions the strategy would otherwise skip, within the account's existing reach. Total campaign budgets – a budget for a date range rather than a daily amount – were listed as available for Search, Shopping and Performance Max in Google's retail recap of September 10. For a reseller, both were brand-tier decisions: how much return to trade for reach, and for which brands.

- Decide how much each brand tier can explore, set from margin: a thick-margin tier can afford to chase the extra reach; a thin-margin tier cannot afford to trade return for it.
- Use total campaign budgets for the manufacturer-funded events with fixed dates – a brand's promotion week – so the spend lands inside the window the co-op claim covers.

5. Amazon leaves the US Shopping auction **again**

On July 23, 2025, Amazon stopped bidding in US Google Shopping ads, as it had in 2018. Optmyzr compared the week after with the week before across its accounts: clicks up 7.8%, cost per click down 8.3%, return on ad spend down 4.4%. Tinuiti had already recorded Amazon's US Shopping impression share falling to 29% in late May, its lowest since early 2022. For a reseller selling brands that Amazon also carried, the largest bidder on those products had left the carousel; the clicks it had been buying now went to whoever was next.

- Read impression share and cost per click per brand from the last week of July, and re-check the return: cheaper clicks with a lower return is what Optmyzr saw on average, which means the extra clicks were not all good ones.
- Win the top mobile slot on each brand's flagship models while the auction is thinner, and hold it with a return target so the position survives a return.
- Re-run the public Shopping reading – presence, product shown, price, "By …" label – model by model; with Amazon gone, the cheapest authorised reseller is more visible, and so are you.

6. Merchant Center in 2025: loyalty prices, carrier shipping, brand profiles, the new **API**

The April 8, 2025 product data specification update added carrier-based shipping attributes and handling and transit days, and replaced the EU energy-label attributes with *certification*; from July 1, member prices could no longer be submitted as *price* or *sale_price* and had to use *loyalty_program*, and US tax attributes were no longer required. On May 21, brand profile management moved into Merchant Center, with a video hub, predictive insights and Product Studio in more countries. In August, the Merchant API became generally available, with the Content API to be shut down on August 18, 2026. In October, Google clarified its misrepresentation and physical-goods subscription policies. For a reseller, the loyalty-price rule was the one to act on: a member price shown as the price was now a policy violation.

- Move every member price into *loyalty_program* before July 1, brand by brand, and check that the tile shows the public price with the loyalty benefit beside it.
- Plan the Merchant API migration in 2025 rather than in the summer of 2026; same-day price and stock sync runs through it.
- Re-read the misrepresentation policy against every storefront: own name, logo, contact details, and the authorized partnerships stated.

7. Demand Gen in 2025: channel controls and the end of Video action **campaigns**

On January 30, 2025, Google announced channel controls for Demand Gen – YouTube, Discover, Gmail, Shorts-only, Display – in beta from March, vertical image ads for Shorts, product-feed local offers and omnichannel bidding, new view-through conversion columns, and the timetable for Video action campaigns: an upgrade tool in March, no new campaigns from April, automatic upgrade in July. Target CPC bidding and new-customer goals followed later in the year. For a reseller, the manufacturer's video and the reseller's feed, which met in TrueView for shopping in 2015, now ran in one campaign type with a channel switch.

- Upgrade each brand's Video action campaign in March on your own terms, with the brand's feed filter and audience signal, rather than in July on Google's.
- Use channel controls per brand: a brand whose creative is video belongs on YouTube and Shorts; a brand with strong stills can run Discover and Gmail.
- Check audiences, target CPA or ROAS bidding with adequate budget, "Excellent" Ad Strength and sitewide tagging plus offline data per brand campaign before scaling it.

8. Europe: preliminary findings, and one ad per **business**

On March 19, 2025, the European Commission preliminarily found Alphabet in breach of the Digital Markets Act for favouring its own shopping, hotel, transport and financial results in Search, with fines of up to 10% of worldwide turnover possible. The comparison-shopping mechanism for Shopping ads did not change in 2025. Separately, from April 14, 2025, Google's Unfair Advantage policy banned "more than one ad for your business, app, or site in a single ad location" – a rule that a reseller running two storefronts for the same business now had to read carefully.

- If you run several storefronts – a brand-dedicated site and a general one – check that they do not both bid into the same ad location for the same search; one business, one ad per slot.
- Keep the yearly comparison of partner fee against Google's fixed margin; the mechanism stood through the year.

9. What was **new** in 2025 – and what each thing turned into

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

- **January 23 and 30 – Performance Max negatives and asset-group reporting; Demand Gen channel controls.** Both standard by year end.
- **April 8 and 14 – the 2025 feed specification; the Unfair Advantage policy.** Loyalty prices from July 1; one ad per business per slot.
- **April 30 – Performance Max search terms and channel reporting announced.** On all campaigns by November 6.
- **May 6 – AI Max for Search.**
- **May 20 and 21 – AI Mode in the US; Google Marketing Live: Smart Bidding Exploration, ads in AI Mode, Asset Studio, brand profiles in Merchant Center.**
- **July 1 – member prices only through loyalty_program.** Still enforced.
- **July 23 and 28 – Amazon leaves US Shopping ads; AI Mode reaches the UK.**
- **August – Merchant API general availability; negative keyword lists in Performance Max; search themes cap raised to 50.** Content API ends August 18, 2026.
- **September 10 – AI Max in global beta; total campaign budgets available.**
- **November 13 – conversational shopping and agentic checkout in AI Mode.** The permission question of 2018, again.

10. What the numbers showed: Performance Max's share falls **back**

Tinuiti's benchmark for the third quarter of 2025 put Google Shopping ad spend up 14% year on year on 15% more clicks, with cost per click down 1%, and Performance Max at 68% of retailers' spend on Google Shopping listings; by the fourth quarter, Shopping spend was up 16%, Performance Max's share had fallen to 62% from 69% a year earlier – after 53% in the first quarter and 59% in the second – Google search spend was up 13%, and Demand Gen spend up 25%. Adobe measured US online holiday spending at $257.8 billion, up 6.8%, with mobile at 56.4% of revenue and traffic to retail sites from AI sources up 693.4%.

- The share falling back is resellers taking control back: standard Shopping campaigns for the flagship models of each brand, now that they compete with Performance Max on equal terms. Do the same, brand by brand, where a fresh public reading shows a model absent.
- Clicks rising faster than spend, with Amazon gone from July, is the cheaper auction of section 5: check the return per brand before treating it as growth.
- Traffic from AI sources up nearly sevenfold is small in absolute terms and large in direction: keep every brand's feed and pages ready to be summarised.

11. A five-minute **check**

CHECK	WHY IT MATTERS
AI Max tested on one brand's Search campaign with that brand's inclusion, other brands' exclusions, URL inclusions	The inclusion keeps a keywordless campaign inside the brand
Tracking templates checked against final URL expansion before AI Max serves any brand	An incompatible template can produce 404 errors
Each brand's negative list applied to every other brand's Performance Max campaign, under the brand exclusions	Exclusions catch misspellings; negatives catch model names
Channel report read per brand campaign; assets and signals fixed before budgets are cut	Spend drifting into Display and YouTube is a creative problem first
ROAS tolerance set per brand tier from margin; total budgets used for fixed-date brand promotions	Reach costs return; thin margins cannot pay for it
Impression share, cost per click and return re-read per brand from the last week of July	Amazon left; the extra clicks were not all good ones
Member prices moved to loyalty_program before July 1; Merchant API migration planned	Policy violation from July 1; Content API ends August 2026
Distribution agreements checked before agentic checkout; storefronts checked against one-ad-per-slot	The marketplace question of 2018, and the Unfair Advantage policy

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 2025: 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 Help / Merchant Center Help / business.google.com: "New Performance Max features" (January 23, 2025); "New Demand Gen features" (January 30, 2025); 2025 product data specification update (April 8, 2025, answer 16098264); Unfair Advantage policy (adspolicy/answer/15936768, April 14, 2025); retention goals and customer acquisition cost column (April 9, 2025, answer 16127398); "Channel performance reporting coming to Performance Max" (April 30, 2025); "AI Max for Search campaigns" (May 6, 2025) and AI Max help (answer 15910366); "AI Mode in Search" (May 20, 2025); "Google Shopping: AI Mode and virtual try-on" (May 20, 2025); Google Marketing Live 2025 (May 21, 2025, answer 16290177; "Smart Bidding Exploration"; "Google Search AI and brand discovery"); Merchant Center AI insights and brand profiles (May 2025, answer 16291351); AI Mode in the UK (July 28, 2025); "Back to school AI updates: try-on and price alerts" (July 24, 2025); Performance Max negative keyword lists, search themes and targeting (August 7, 2025, answer 16451273); Merchant API general availability (August 2025, answer 16493611); Search Partner Network reporting (answer 16286960); "AI Max for Search expands globally" (September 10, 2025); Think Retail recap – total campaign budgets (September 10, 2025); Demand Gen Drops (September 2025); AI Mode in more languages and locations (October 7, 2025); channel performance reporting for all Performance Max campaigns (November 6, 2025, answer 16710258); "Agentic checkout and AI shopping for the holidays" (November 13, 2025); 2025 recap (December 8, 2025, answer 16756291); campaign total budgets open beta (January 15, 2026); "We're upgrading Dynamic Search Ads to AI Max" (April 15, 2026); brand settings (answers 13721847, 14505308). European Commission – preliminary findings under the Digital Markets Act (March 19, 2025, IP/25/811). Independent: Search Engine Journal – Performance Max targeting and reporting (January 23, 2025), negative keyword limit (March 18, 2025), Unfair Advantage policy (March 30, 2025), AI Max launch (May 6, 2025), Smart Bidding Exploration (May 21, 2025), Google Marketing Live 2025 (June 5, 2025), Performance Max controls and reporting (August 7, 2025), Optmyzr study on Amazon's exit (August 19, 2025), Search Partner Network visibility (August 21, 2025), AI Max global beta (September 10, 2025), Performance Max channel reporting and Waze (November 6, 2025); TechCrunch – ads in AI Mode (May 21, 2025), agentic checkout (November 13, 2025), Digital Markets Act findings (March 19, 2025); Search Engine Land – Dynamic Search Ads sunset (July 23, 2026); Tinuiti – Digital Ads Benchmark Reports Q2, Q3 and Q4 2025; Adobe – 2025 holiday shopping report; PPC Land – free listings removed across the EEA (September 19, 2026). Policies and product names have changed since 2025; the 2026 edition describes the current rules.