

The 44-Point Google Ads Audit Checklist

The same checklist we run on every new Google Ads account before quoting work. Each item has a pass/fail criterion and a brief explanation of why it matters. Print this page or save it as PDF from your browser.

44 checkpoints across 8 sections ~15 min to audit a small account **v1.2** · updated 2026

1 Campaign Architecture

- Campaigns are organized by goal (Search / Shopping / Display / PMax / Demand Gen), not mixed into one container.

Why it matters: Mixed-network campaigns disable bid-strategy control and dilute optimization signals.

- Each ad group contains ≤ 20 tightly themed keywords (single intent per ad group, ideally ≤ 10).

Why it matters: Quality Score is calculated at the ad-group level. Loose themes drag CTR and CPC across all keywords in the group.

- Match types are segmented (broad / phrase / exact in separate ad groups or campaigns).

Why it matters: Without separation, you cannot adjust bids or pause underperforming match types independently.

- Campaign budgets reflect strategic priority — not equal-spread or historical inertia.

Why it matters: Equal budgets across campaigns of vastly different ROI guarantees you over-spend on weak campaigns and under-spend on strong ones.

- Shared budgets are NOT used unless explicitly intentional (most accounts misuse them).

Why it matters: Shared budgets prevent per-campaign optimization and obscure performance attribution.

- Performance Max campaigns are split by margin tier / catalog segment, not one monolithic PMax for the whole catalog.

Why it matters: A single PMax campaign averages performance across product tiers and optimizes for whatever sells easiest, regardless of profitability.

2 Keyword & Search Term Hygiene

- Search Terms report has been audited in the last 7 days.

Why it matters: Smart Bidding will spend on weird long-tail queries if they happen to convert once. Weekly auditing catches drift.

- Negative keyword lists are shared at the account level for universal exclusions (jobs, free, salary, "how to", competitor staff names).

Why it matters: Per-campaign negative lists are duplicate-effort; shared account-level lists scale with new campaigns.

- Brand terms are intentionally targeted with a dedicated branded campaign — not accidental cross-spend from generic campaigns.

Why it matters: Brand traffic should have its own ROAS target (typically 10–20× higher) and protect against competitor poaching.

- Competitor brand terms are either explicitly targeted (with dedicated copy and LP) or fully negative.

Why it matters: Accidental competitor-brand traffic burns budget without intent. Intentional competitor-conquest is high-ROI inventory in B2B.

- Broad match keywords have ≥ 30 conversions/month OR are paused.

Why it matters: Broad match without enough conversion signal to feed Smart Bidding becomes random-traffic acquisition.

- Underperforming keywords (high cost, zero conversions in last 60 days, ≥ 50 clicks) are paused.

Why it matters: These are pure budget drag — Smart Bidding will keep spending on them while it "explores".

3

Conversion Tracking

- Google Ads conversion data matches GA4 conversion data within 5% variance.**

Why it matters: Larger gaps indicate broken cross-domain tracking, GTM misfires, or double-counting. Smart Bidding optimizes off whichever signal is wired.

- For lead-gen accounts: offline conversions are imported from CRM (closed/qualified leads).**

Why it matters: Without CRM imports, Smart Bidding optimizes for form fills — including the 80% that never become customers.

- For e-commerce accounts: enhanced conversions with hashed email/phone are enabled.**

Why it matters: Enhanced conversions recover 20–40% of attribution lost to ITP, ad blockers, and cookieless browsers.

- Conversion actions are categorized correctly (primary for bidding, secondary for observation).**

Why it matters: Smart Bidding optimizes only toward primary conversions. Miscategorized actions either dilute the target or fail to count.

- Conversion value reflects actual revenue/LTV, not flat dummy values (e.g., \$1 per lead).**

Why it matters: Flat values make Target ROAS strategies meaningless. The algorithm cannot prioritize high-value conversions.

- GA4 is set as the conversion source where appropriate (vs. Google Ads native pixel).**

Why it matters: GA4 attribution model + offline imports = better cross-channel signal than the native pixel alone.

4 Smart Bidding & Budget

- Each Smart Bidding campaign has accumulated ≥ 30 conversions in the last 30 days.

Why it matters: Below 30 conversions/month, Smart Bidding cannot stabilize — performance becomes erratic.

- Bidding strategy matches business goal: Target CPA for lead-gen, Target ROAS for e-commerce, Max Conversions only for launch/learning phase.

Why it matters: Mismatched strategies optimize for the wrong outcome (e.g., Max Conversions on an e-commerce account ignores AOV variance).

- Target CPA / Target ROAS values are realistic — within 20% of historical 90-day average.

Why it matters: Targets set too aggressively choke spend. Targets set too loose waste budget on low-quality conversions.

- Budget pacing alerts are configured (Google Ads → Tools → Notifications or Looker Studio).

Why it matters: Budget overspend by 2× is common when daily bids increase and no one notices until end-of-month.

- Day-parting and location-bid adjustments are applied where data justifies them (≥ 60 days of segmented data).

Why it matters: Smart Bidding handles most adjustments, but certain patterns (off-hours / specific geos) still benefit from manual overrides.

Ad Copy & Assets (RSAs)

- Each Responsive Search Ad has 11+ headlines (Google's ideal threshold) and 4 descriptions.

Why it matters: RSAs with full asset diversity produce more headline combinations and higher CTR. Sparse RSAs underperform consistently.

- Ad Strength shows "Good" or "Excellent" on all live RSAs.

Why it matters: "Average" or "Poor" Ad Strength capping impression share regardless of bid.

- Sitelink, Callout, Structured Snippet, Call, and (if relevant) Location and Price assets are all active.

Why it matters: Each enabled asset increases ad visual footprint and CTR by typically 5–15%.

- Asset reporting is reviewed monthly — underperforming headlines/descriptions paused, new variants tested.

Why it matters: Set-and-forget RSAs decay as user search behavior shifts. Quarterly refresh is the baseline; monthly is best practice.

- No ad copy claims trigger Google policy violations (guarantees without disclaimers, undisclosed APR for finance, "cure" claims for health).

Why it matters: Policy violations cause silent disapprovals that quietly drop your delivery without alerting you.

6 Landing Page & Quality Score

- Each ad group has a landing page that matches the keyword intent (no generic homepage targeting for specific keywords).

Why it matters: Landing page relevance is a Quality Score component. Generic LP for specific keywords forces higher CPC.

- Landing pages pass Core Web Vitals (LCP < 2.5s, INP < 200ms, CLS < 0.1).

Why it matters: Page experience signal affects both Quality Score and direct conversion rate.

- Mobile responsive layout — 60%+ of paid traffic is mobile.

Why it matters: Mobile-unfriendly landing pages convert at 30–50% lower rate than desktop, but you pay the same CPC.

- Single primary CTA above the fold on each LP — no decision paralysis.

Why it matters: Multiple competing CTAs cut conversion rate by 15–30% per added CTA.

- Form fields are minimal (3–5 max for lead-gen, optimized for mobile keyboard types).

Why it matters: Each additional form field drops conversion ~7%. Mobile keyboard mismatch (text keyboard on phone field) adds another 5–10% drop.

- Conversion tracking fires correctly on every LP (test with GA4 DebugView and Google Tag Assistant).

Why it matters: Silent tracking failures on a single LP can hide 20%+ of your conversion data.

7 Audiences & Remarketing

- Customer Match lists from CRM are uploaded and refreshed at least monthly.**

Why it matters: Customer Match enables exclusion of existing customers from acquisition campaigns and inclusion in upsell/retention campaigns.

- Remarketing audiences are layered onto Search/Shopping campaigns as "observation" (with bid adjustments) where appropriate.**

Why it matters: Returning visitors convert at 2–4× higher rate. Bid adjustments on these audiences improve CPA dramatically.

- Excluded audiences are set on prospecting campaigns (e.g., existing customers excluded from new-customer acquisition).**

Why it matters: Without exclusions, you re-acquire your own customers at full CPC.

- In-Market and Affinity audiences are layered for relevant categories.**

Why it matters: These Google-built audiences provide intent signal even when the user is not actively searching.

- Lookalike / Similar Audiences from past customers feed PMax audience signals.**

Why it matters: PMax campaigns use audience signals as bidding hints. Lookalike audiences accelerate the learning phase.

8 Reporting & Account Hygiene

- A live dashboard (Looker Studio recommended) connects Google Ads → GA4 → CRM with primary KPIs.

Why it matters: Monthly PDF reports lag reality. Live dashboards let you and stakeholders react within hours, not weeks.

- Account access is properly scoped — admin access reserved for the agency lead, standard access for the team.

Why it matters: Over-granted admin access creates audit trail gaps and security exposure.

- Account history shows weekly optimization activity (changes log in Tools → Change History).

Why it matters: Empty change history = abandoned account. Smart Bidding cannot replace ongoing hygiene.

- Conversion goals match the current business priority (e.g., trial signup vs. paid conversion has shifted with your model).

Why it matters: Old optimization goals waste budget if your business model evolved (very common in SaaS year-over-year).

- A documented monthly optimization checklist exists and is followed.

Why it matters: Account hygiene depends on consistent process, not heroics from a single account manager.

Found 5+ items failing on your account?

Most accounts we audit have 15+ items failing. We can run the full audit and deliver a written remediation plan in 5 business days.