Search and shopping cheat sheet for the 2018 holiday season

Q4 is peak shopping season across the world. Be it Christmas, Black Friday, Diwali, or Singles' Day, shoppers all across the globe are bingeing on impulse deals or painstakingly researching long-planned-for big-budget items.

With multiple properties reaching over a billion users, Google is a trusted companion to shoppers. They search for ideas to buy gifts or treat themselves. They turn to us for the latest trends, fashion inspiration, and product reviews. They use apps and the mobile web to browse for, and purchase, the right products. They even look for help getting to stores before closing time!

For advertisers, it's the perfect time to **connect, reconnect, and engage** with would-be customers. Here are a few tips and tricks to help you gear up for the retail binge ahead.

Budgets & Bidding

☐ **Use 2017 data to plan budgets for peaks.**

Make sure November and December have enough budget. Look at last year's daily spend per campaign to ensure budgets are high enough, especially around sales peaks.

Tip: check the Recommendations tab for budget opportunities.

☐ **Target CPA/ROAS/Maximize Conversions on Search are the best way to drive results during the holiday season.**

Using query time bidding, these fully automated solutions will react instantly to changes in search volume, click volume, and conversion rates in most cases. Ensure you have enough budget allocated to your campaigns to capture the full holiday opportunity. While these bidding methods will adjust automatically to holiday-related changes most of the time, if you expect very large increases in conversion rates (50%+) over a 1-2 day period, consider decreasing your ROAS targets. Or, if you're using target CPA, increasing your CPA targets during the period.

Ads

☐ **Add a catch-all Dynamic Search Ads campaign to ensure coverage of all inventory during peaks.**

Create a campaign with a Dynamic Search Ads ad group targeting "*all web pages*" or "*landing pages from your standard ad groups*" to cover the long tail. Also, add DSA ad group(s) to each regular search campaign to improve performance. To do this, first enable DSA in the Campaign Settings.
Tip: check the Recommendations tab for budget opportunities.

☐ **Add Promotion Extensions and secure other extensions (e.g., Sitelinks, Callouts, Location, etc.).**

Extensions provide a 10–15% average CTR uplift per added extension shown.[1]

Promotion Extensions are critical in Q4. Price Extensions are strongly recommended where available.

☐ **Have 3+ ads per ad group and make sure ad rotation is set to Optimize.**

Simply put, the more ads per ad group, the more chance relevant copy for each user is found, resulting in 5–15% more clicks and conversions, on average.[1]
Add at least three (but ideally 4–6) ads per ad group if possible. Where available, add one or more Responsive Search Ads (RSA) alongside at least two ETAs.

☐ **Insert Countdown Timers for sales, and leverage ad customizers for loyal and/or mobile users.**

Countdown timers in ad copy dynamically update the time left for a sale offer (e.g., 5 days or 10 hours).

"IF" customizers can be used to adjust ad text for a loyal customer audience or for mobile users to increase relevance.

Audiences

- [ ] Ensure you reach the people who are most likely to engage with your brand this season, through our targeting solutions. Detailed Demographics, Affinity,[1] In-Market, Customer Match, and Remarketing Lists for Search Ads (RLSA) all provide better conversion rates than keyword targeting alone.

- [ ] **Acquire with Google Audiences**: Add the best performing Google audiences (Detailed Demographics, Affinity, and In-Market) like *Parents, Bargain Hunters, Shopaholics, Children's Products, Christmas Online,* and *In-Store Shoppers* to all campaigns. Contact your Google Rep for a list of specific recommendations tailored to your account.

- [ ] **Retain/grow with your 1P data**: Make sure you follow up with your 1P data[2] using **RLSA** to re-engage people who have been on your site, window shopping. Use **Customer Match** to reach people who purchased last year. **Similar Audiences** can help you expand to new audiences that are performing well.

- [ ] Leverage Smart Bidding to optimize bids for your 1P data (RLSA, Customer Match, and Similar Audiences), and adjust bids manually for Google Audiences (Detailed Demographics, Affinity, and In-Market).

- [ ] While certain keywords may not have performed well in the past, they may perform much better when targeted in conjunction with audiences that have previously visited your site. Test high-volume product keywords (for example, "Black Friday") on such audiences using the "Targeting" setting to limit the ad group/campaign just to people in the audience.

Note: This will limit the targeting to reach people already in an audience list with sufficient size for your conversion goals. So, for all other tips above, make sure to use the "Observation" setting (adjusting the bid only).

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[1] Affinity for Search is in closed beta.
[2] 1P data requires consent in accordance with our **data policy.**

Online to Offline

☐ Enable **location extensions** on all Search, display, and YouTube campaigns.

☐ Determine **goals and KPIs** to include offline activity over the holiday period.

Plan for the entire holiday season and key events that drive store activity — Black Friday, Cyber Monday, online shipping cut off, etc. Consider events for which you wish to drive store activity. Closer to the holidays, it might be too late to ship, so focus in-store then.

☐ Track **store visits** and increase **mobile bids**.

Make sure you track store visits and assign a value to them *(in-store conversion rate * in-store average order value)*. Then, use the data on a campaign level to determine budget allocation and performance evaluation by using a custom column (all conversions, conversion action "store visits"). Also use mobile bid adjustments to raise bids on mobile devices. The majority of store visits will often come from mobile devices.

☐ Include **bid by distance** to reach valuable customers near your location.

Apply increased location bids in the area around your stores where customers are most likely to visit you. See step-by-step instructions [here](#).

☐ Consider **keyword and category** expansion, ad text changes, and/or consider creating additional "local" campaigns.

Increase investment in keywords and products that are best at driving store visits. Review your Search Terms Report and analyze product category performance to determine key drivers. Adjust ad texts to drive more people to store.

☐ In addition to being visible on paid search, try out the new [local campaigns](#) that have just launched in all Store Visit supported countries (open whitelist).

Local campaigns give you great visibility on five platforms (Search, Maps, business profile, display, and YouTube) in a relevant radius around your stores. Machine learning will optimize the campaign to maximize store visits within your budget!

Measurement & Attribution

☐ This holiday period, **move away from last-click** within Google Ads and Search Ads 360.

Enter the holiday season using a better attribution model than last-click to make better and smarter decisions during sales peaks. Change **both** Google Ads and Search Ads 360 to the same model for consistency across platforms.

☐ **Choose a data-driven model.** If unavailable, default to a **rule-based model**.

Check each conversion action and choose the best attribution model. A data-driven model requires approx 600+ conversions per month and some weeks of history. Always select data-driven attribution (_preferred_). If unavailable, choose either time-decay, position-based, or linear. These are all better than last-click!

Tip: Find out how early your customers start interacting with your ads before the season and plan better! Ask your Google Account manager to run a DDA seasonality report on your ads account.

☐ **Act on the data** by bidding (automatically) and look at budget allocations between campaigns.

No attribution model will instantly give you better results. You need to act on the data. If you are using Smart Bidding, the algorithm will automatically tune itself based on the new model. If you are bidding manually, you should make sure you use eCPC and start to adjust base bids. Also, remember to look at campaign budget allocation!

Shopping

☐ Ensure that all your [basics](#) are in place:
- ☐ Budget Delivery Mode "Standard" (not Accelerated, as many converting clicks are in the evening)
- ☐ Ample budget for peaks
- ☐ Remarketing lists and other audiences added
- ☐ [Search partners opted-in](#)
- ☐ Negative keywords reviewed
- ☐ [Inventory filters](#) up to date
- ☐ All relevant products submitted in time
- ☐ Disapproved items reviewed
- ☐ And last but certainly not least, mobile bids and [bid-by-distance](#) for O2O!

☐ Leverage fully **automated bidding** for shopping, not just for Search.

Target ROAS and Smart Shopping campaigns are fully automated Smart Bidding solutions that set your bids in real-time based on many signals like the actual search query, time of day and day of week, product, and likely order value. Advertisers saw a median increase of 35% in conversion value with Shopping campaigns using the Target ROAS Smart Bidding strategy. We also observed a median increase of 19% return on ad spend (ROAS).[1] Similarly, in early testing, advertisers using Smart Shopping campaigns saw an average of over 20% more conversion value at a similar cost.[2] If part of your objective is to own your digital shelf space, look at [Absolute Top Impression Share](#).

☐ Use [sale price annotations](#) (available everywhere) and [Merchant Promotions](#) (where available).

Stand out from the crowd by highlighting your USPs and special offers.

[1] Lift is calculated as median, from a historical analysis of all 2,956 campaigns with at least 10 weeks history prior to opt-in and at least 4 weeks post opt-in.
[2] Google Data, Feb - May 2018. Based on A/B traffic split for 50 advertisers with Smart Shopping campaigns spend > $4k and comparable spend is within 50%.

- [ ] **Ensure you target your full Black Friday inventory.**

    If needed, create an extra "catch-all" campaign.

- [ ] **Activate local inventory ads** (where available/beta) to show shoppers in which local stores they can buy now.

    Local inventory ads (LIA) guide shoppers to your local stores, based on the inventory levels you upload to Merchant Center. For shoppers who want to buy in a physical store rather than online, this information is priceless. Enhance your LIA with the new "push" media display format: Local catalog ads (LCA, where available).

- [ ] Expand Shopping to **YouTube, Gmail, and display** with Smart Shopping campaigns.

    Gain more reach this year by launching Smart Shopping campaigns.

- [ ] Showcase your entire inventory with **Showcase Shopping ads** (where available).

    Make sure Showcase Shopping ads cover all relevant products. Showcase ads drive the biggest volumes in home, apparel, and luggage categories, so it's especially important to have those products in your inventory. Leverage the Maximize Clicks bid strategy to maximize engagement.

- [ ] Make sure you're **always on**: only 18% of shoppers consolidate all shopping during Black Friday-Cyber Monday.

    People are always shopping — before, during, and after the holidays. In fact, only about 18% of U.S. shoppers consolidate all of their shopping to the Black Friday-to-Cyber Monday weekend, and, by then, shoppers have already completed 42% of their holiday shopping.[1] An always-on strategy is critical to reaching people whenever they need you — not just when it suits your campaign calendar.

- [ ] Shopping goes beyond borders.

    Black Friday and holiday shopping are growing internationally! Use Google Shopping ads to reach new global customers, promote the products you sell, and find better-qualified leads by putting product images, price, and your business name in front of people searching globally on Google.

[1]Think with Google, "Holiday shoppers are begging brands for help. Are you listening?"

Notes