Google Ads Campaign Setup Guide

A step-by-step guide to setting up high-performing Google Ads campaigns from scratch. From account structure and keyword research to ad copy, conversion tracking, and your first 30 days of optimisation.

8.5x AVERAGE ROI FROM GOOGLE ADS	**3.75%** AVERAGE CTR FOR SEARCH ADS	**8** SETUP SECTIONS	**Free** CAMPAIGN SETUP GUIDE

Who This Guide Is For

This guide is designed for business owners, marketing managers, and PPC beginners setting up Google Ads campaigns for the first time or rebuilding an underperforming account. Follow each section in order for the best results. Estimated setup time: 4–8 hours for a well-researched campaign.

Setting up a Google Ads campaign correctly from the start saves you thousands in wasted spend. This guide walks through **eight essential steps**, from initial account configuration to a structured 30-day optimisation plan that ensures your campaigns start strong and improve continuously.

Before You Start

✓ Define your campaign goals (leads, sales, calls)
✓ Know your target audience and geography
✓ Have your landing pages ready
✓ Set a realistic monthly budget
✓ Prepare a list of your products/services
✓ Have access to Google Analytics

Common Setup Mistakes

✗ Launching without conversion tracking
✗ Using only broad match keywords
✗ Sending traffic to the homepage
✗ Not setting geographic targeting
✗ Skipping ad extensions entirely
✗ Using automated bidding without data

Business Name: ....

Campaign Goal: ....

Monthly Budget: ....

1 Account Setup & Structure

A well-structured account makes campaign management, reporting, and optimisation far easier. Set the foundation right from day one.

→ **Create or access your Google Ads account** at ads.google.com. Use a business email and link to a Google Analytics property.

→ **Set your time zone and currency** correctly during setup — these cannot be changed later without creating a new account.

→ **Link Google Analytics 4, Google Tag Manager, and Google Business Profile** in the Linked Accounts section.

→ **Plan your campaign structure** before building. Separate by service/product line, geography, or campaign type.

→ **Use a consistent naming convention** for campaigns and ad groups (e.g., Search_IT-Support_London_Exact).

→ **Create shared negative keyword lists** before launching — add common exclusions (free, jobs, DIY, etc.).

> **Recommended Account Structure**
> **Campaign Level:** Group by service/product and campaign type. **Ad Group Level:** Group by keyword theme or product variation. **Example:** Campaign "Search_Managed-IT_London" → Ad Groups: "IT Support London", "Managed IT Services London", "IT Outsourcing London".

2 Campaign Type Selection

Choose the right campaign type based on your goals, audience, and where they are in the buying journey.

CAMPAIGN TYPE	BEST FOR	KEY FEATURES	WHEN TO USE
Search	High-intent leads & sales	Text ads on Google SERPs	Core campaign for most businesses
Display	Brand awareness & remarketing	Visual ads across 3M+ websites	Retargeting & top-of-funnel reach
Shopping	E-commerce product sales	Product images, prices in SERPs	Online stores with product feeds
Video (YouTube)	Brand awareness & engagement	Video ads before/during content	When video creative is available
Performance Max	Multi-channel automation	AI-driven across all Google channels	Accounts with strong conversion data
Demand Gen	Discovery & social-style ads	Gmail, YouTube, Discover feed	Visual brands targeting interest

> **Important Note**
> Start with Search campaigns if you are new to Google Ads. Search captures high-intent users actively looking for your product or service. Only add Display, Video, or Performance Max once your Search campaigns are profitable and conversion tracking is proven.

3 Keyword Research & Planning

Thorough keyword research ensures you target the right search terms and avoid wasting budget on irrelevant clicks.

→ **Use Google Keyword Planner** to find keyword ideas, search volumes, and competition levels for your products/services.

→ **Group keywords by intent** — informational (learn), navigational (find), commercial (compare), transactional (buy).

→ **Focus on commercial and transactional keywords** first, as they have the highest conversion potential.

→ **Include long-tail keywords** (3+ words) that are highly specific and often cheaper to bid on.

→ **Analyse competitor keywords** using tools like SEMrush, Ahrefs, or SpyFu to find gaps and opportunities.

→ **Build negative keyword lists** during research to proactively block irrelevant terms.

> **Match Type Strategy**
> **Exact Match [keyword]:** Highest control, lowest reach. Best for proven, high-value terms. **Phrase Match "keyword":** Moderate reach with intent matching. Good starting point. **Broad Match keyword:** Maximum reach but requires Smart Bidding and strong negatives. Use only with data-driven strategies.

4 Writing High-Converting Ad Copy

Your ad copy is the first impression users have of your business. It must be relevant, compelling, and action-oriented.

Headlines (Up to 15)

→ **Include the target keyword** in at least 3 of your 15 headlines to ensure ad relevance.

→ **Lead with your strongest value proposition** — what makes you different from competitors?

→ **Include numbers and specifics** where possible ("Save 30%", "24/7 Support", "Rated 4.9/5").

→ **Write clear calls-to-action** — "Get a Free Quote", "Book a Demo", "Shop Now".

→ **Create variety** — include benefit-focused, feature-focused, urgency, and social proof headlines.

Descriptions (Up to 4)

→ **Expand on your headlines** with more detail about benefits, features, and the offer.

→ **Address common objections** (no contracts, free consultation, money-back guarantee).

→ **End with a CTA** that tells the user exactly what to do next.

→ **Use all available character space** — longer descriptions give Google more options to optimise combinations.

> **Ad Strength Target**
> Aim for "Good" or "Excellent" ad strength on every RSA. Google explicitly states that ad strength directly impacts the ability of your ad to serve. Use diverse headlines that offer different messages rather than repetitive variations.

5 Setting Up Conversion Tracking

Conversion tracking is non-negotiable. Without it, you cannot measure ROI or use automated bidding effectively.

→ **Install the Google Ads global site tag** (or use Google Tag Manager) on every page of your website.

→ **Create conversion actions** for each valuable action: form submissions, phone calls, purchases, chat initiations.

→ **Set conversion values** where possible — even estimated lead values help Smart Bidding optimise more effectively.

→ **Choose the right attribution model** — data-driven attribution is recommended when you have enough conversion data.

→ **Enable enhanced conversions** to capture more conversion data in a privacy-centric world.

→ **Test every conversion action** by completing a real submission and verifying the tag fires in Google Tag Assistant.

→ **Import Google Analytics 4 conversions** for actions tracked in GA4 that are not tracked natively in Google Ads.

> **Essential Conversion Actions**
> **Primary:** Form submissions, phone calls, purchases — these drive bidding optimisation. **Secondary:** Page views, time on site, PDF downloads — useful for reporting but should not be included in bidding.

6 Budget & Bidding Strategy

Set realistic budgets and choose the right bidding strategy based on your data maturity and campaign goals.

Setting Your Budget

→ **Calculate your daily budget** by dividing your monthly budget by 30.4 (average days per month).

→ **Start conservatively** — allocate budget to your highest-priority campaign first and expand as you prove ROI.

→ **Account for Google's overspend** — Google can spend up to 2x your daily budget on any given day (but not over monthly).

Choosing a Bid Strategy

STRATEGY	GOAL	WHEN TO USE
Manual CPC	Full control over keyword bids	New accounts with no conversion data
Enhanced CPC	Manual with smart adjustments	Transitioning to automation
Maximise Clicks	Drive traffic volume	Awareness campaigns or data gathering
Maximise Conversions	Get the most conversions	Accounts with 15+ conversions/month
Target CPA	Hit a specific cost per acquisition	Accounts with 30+ conversions/month
Target ROAS	Hit a specific return on ad spend	E-commerce with revenue tracking

> **Budget Tip**
> Never set a budget that limits your best-performing campaign. If your top campaign is "Limited by budget", either increase the budget or redistribute from lower-performing campaigns. Budget-limited campaigns miss high-value clicks.

7 Launch Checklist

Before you hit "Enable" on your campaigns, run through this pre-launch checklist to avoid costly mistakes on day one.

Account & Settings

- ☐ **Billing** is set up with a valid payment method
- ☐ **Time zone and currency** are correct
- ☐ **Google Analytics 4** is linked to the Google Ads account
- ☐ **Google Tag Manager** container is installed on the website

Campaign Settings

- ☐ **Geographic targeting** is set to "Presence" (not "Presence or Interest") for local businesses
- ☐ **Language targeting** matches your audience
- ☐ **Search Partners** are disabled initially (enable later after testing)
- ☐ **Ad rotation** is set to "Optimise" for RSAs
- ☐ **Ad schedule** is configured if your business has specific operating hours

Keywords & Ads

- ☐ **Keywords** are in the correct match types with no accidental broad match
- ☐ **Negative keyword lists** are applied to all relevant campaigns
- ☐ **RSAs** have "Good" or "Excellent" ad strength in every ad group
- ☐ **All ad extensions** (sitelinks, callouts, structured snippets, calls) are configured

Tracking & Landing Pages

- ☐ **Conversion tracking** is verified with real test submissions
- ☐ **Landing pages** load in under 3 seconds on mobile
- ☐ **Final URLs** are correct and point to relevant, live pages
- ☐ **UTM parameters** are appended for GA4 tracking

8 First 30 Days Optimisation Plan

The first month is critical. Follow this week-by-week plan to optimise your campaigns based on real performance data.

Week 1: Monitor & Collect Data

Check daily: budget pacing, impression share, ad disapprovals. Review search terms every 2 days and add negatives. Ensure conversion tracking is recording correctly. Do not make major changes yet — let the algorithms learn.

Week 2: Refine Keywords & Ads

Add high-performing search terms as keywords. Pause keywords with high spend and zero conversions. Review ad strength and improve underperforming RSAs. Check device and location performance for early trends.

Week 3: Optimise Bids & Budgets

Shift budget toward campaigns and ad groups with the best CPA or ROAS. Increase bids on top-performing keywords. Consider switching from Manual CPC to Maximise Conversions if you have 15+ conversions. Test new ad copy variations.

Week 4: Analyse & Plan

Compile a full performance report: CTR, CPC, CPA, ROAS by campaign and ad group. Identify top and bottom performers. Set targets for Month 2. Plan A/B tests for landing pages and ad copy. Share results with stakeholders.

! Campaign Setup Summary & Notes

Use this section to document your campaign setup decisions, key metrics from the first 30 days, and ongoing optimisation priorities.

Campaign Details

Campaign Name: ....

Campaign Type: ....

Geographic Target: ....

Daily Budget: ....

Bid Strategy: ....

Primary Conversion: ....

Target CPA / ROAS: ....

Month 1 Performance Summary

METRIC	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
Impressions				
Clicks				
CTR				
Conversions				
CPA				
Spend				

Key Learnings & Next Steps

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