Google Ads quick-start guide

Set up Google Ads properly from day one: tracking that counts real sales, a simple first campaign, negative keywords and the checks to run in week one.

Google Ads can bring in customers who are already searching for what you sell. It can also spend money quickly on clicks that go nowhere. The difference is almost always in the setup. This guide covers the steps we'd want in place before spending your first dollar.

Before you start

- **Know what a result is worth.** Work out roughly what a new customer is worth to you, and how much you could afford to pay to win one. Without that, you can't tell whether a campaign is working.
- **Pick one goal.** Online sales, enquiry forms or phone calls. Start with the one that matters most.
- **Check your landing page.** Send people to the page that answers their search, not your home page. It should load quickly on a phone and make the next step obvious.
- **Own the account.** Create the Google Ads account under your business's own Google login, not your agency's or a freelancer's. Give others access as users. If you part ways, the account and its history stay with you.

Step 1: set up tracking first

Google Ads learns from what you tell it is a result. If tracking is missing or wrong, it learns the wrong lesson.

1. **Install the Google tag** on every page of your site. Most website platforms, including Shopify, WordPress and Squarespace, have a built-in way to do this.
2. **Create a conversion action** for your main goal, such as a purchase, a submitted enquiry form or a phone call from the ad.
3. **Record the right value.** For online sales, send the actual order value. For enquiries, use a sensible estimate of what an enquiry is worth.
4. **Turn on enhanced conversions** if you collect an email address or phone number at checkout or in your form. It helps Google match sales to ad clicks more reliably.
5. **Test it.** Place a test order or send a test enquiry, then check it appears once, and only once, in Google Ads.

If sales often close later, over the phone or after a quote, ask your developer about sending those results back to Google Ads from your customer database. That way Google learns which ads bring in paying customers, not just enquiries.

Step 2: build a simple first campaign

Start small and focused. You can always expand.

- **Use a Search campaign** for your first campaign. It shows text ads to people searching on Google, which makes results easier to understand.
- **Group keywords by theme.** One ad group per product or service, with keywords that closely match it.
- **Write ads that match the search.** Use the words people search for, say what makes you different, and include a clear next step.
- **Set your location carefully.** Target the areas you actually serve. Check the setting that controls whether you reach people *in* your area or people merely *interested in* it.
- **Set a daily budget you're comfortable losing** while you learn. Treat the first few weeks as a test.

Step 3: block the searches you don't want

Negative keywords stop your ads showing for searches that won't turn into customers, such as people looking for jobs, free versions or how-to videos.

Add a starter list before you launch. Our free keyword block lists cover common categories, ready to paste into Google Ads. Google's help centre says you can share up to 20 negative keyword lists per account, with up to 5,000 keywords in each, and apply a list to many campaigns at once.

Be careful not to block words you actually want. A negative keyword that overlaps with one of your normal keywords will stop your ad showing.

Step 4: check in after a week

- **Read the search terms report.** It shows the actual searches that triggered your ads. Add anything irrelevant as a negative keyword. Do this weekly at first.
- **Check conversions against reality.** Do the sales or enquiries Google reports match what you can see in your shop or inbox? If not, fix the tracking before changing anything else.
- **Look at cost per result,** not clicks or impressions. Cheap clicks that never convert are still wasted money.
- **Resist big changes too early.** Give each change time to show results before judging it.

Common mistakes

- Letting the platform's automatic recommendations change your campaigns without reviewing them first.
- Counting minor actions, like page views, as conversions. Google will then optimise for page views.
- Sending all traffic to the home page.

- Running Search and Display in the same campaign, which mixes very different kinds of traffic.
- Never checking the search terms report.

Where Blend can help

If you're already spending on Google Ads and the numbers don't line up with your real sales, our Ads & Analytics Audit checks your tracking and campaigns against what you actually sold. For a quick read on where you stand, try the free Data Maturity Assessment.

> This guide is general information, not professional advice for your situation. Read it online and find more free guides at www.blend-datastrategy.com/tools.