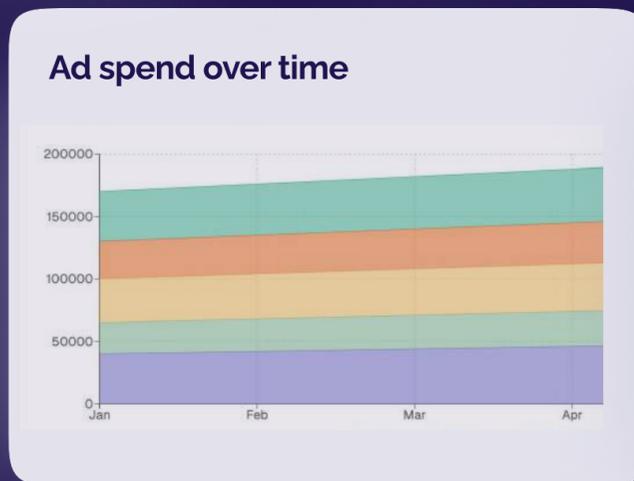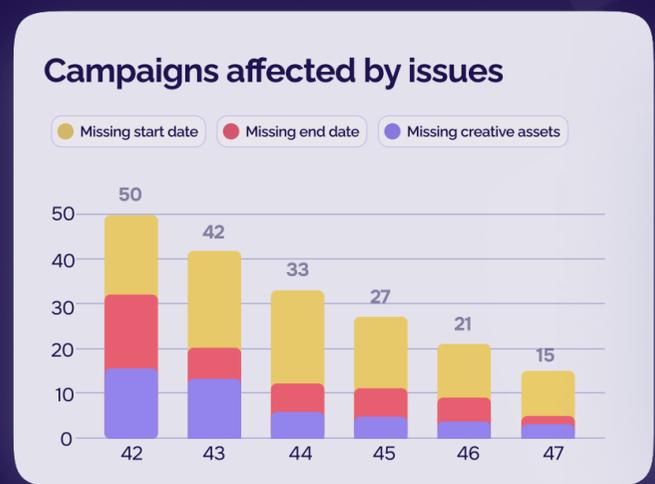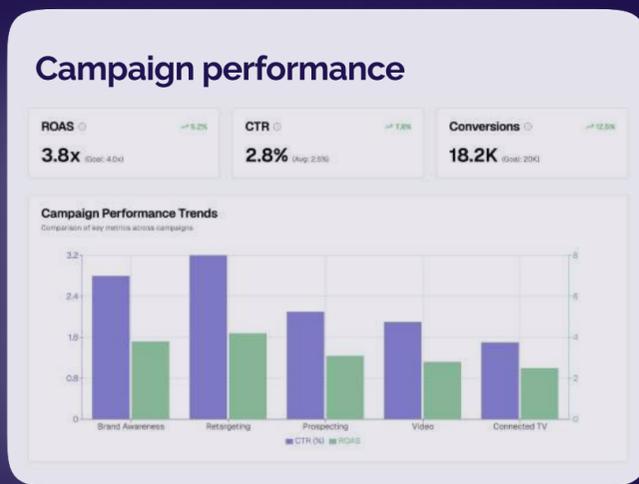# The Trade Desk Campaign Checklist

18 simple setting mistakes that can cost you millions

The Trade Desk
Campaign Checklist

We analyzed our clients with six-figure budgets for TTD campaigns to uncover the rules they follow to avoid budget waste.

THE RESULT? A SHOCKING DISCOVERY:

The most expensive errors were the simplest ones.

This guide reveals 18 of these costly errors in:

- setup
- targeting
- inventory
- bidding

Let's dive in and make sure your campaigns are set up for maximum impact!

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1 Campaign doesn't have a start date

A missing start date prevents your campaign from going live, causing delays that can disrupt time-sensitive initiatives and marketing plans.

⚠ WARNING

This is especially critical for seasonal promotions, product launches, or events with strict timelines.

⚡ ACTION

Locate the "Start Date" field and select the desired date and time for your campaign to begin.

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2 Campaign doesn't have an end date

Failing to set an end date can result in ads running indefinitely, leading to irrelevant impressions and wasted budgets.

⚠ WARNING

This is critical for campaigns promoting a limited-time offer, which might continue serving ads after the offer has expired.

⚡ ACTION

In the campaign setup section, find the "End Date" field and input the date and time you want your campaign to conclude.

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3 Campaign missing an assigned creative

Ad groups without assigned creatives cannot run.

⚠ WARNING

No ad delivery = missed opportunities to reach your audience and a 100% budget waste.

⚡ ACTION

Upload or select the relevant creative assets (banner ads, video ads, etc.) associated with that ad group.

4 DSP budget isn't specified

A TTD campaign can technically be launched without a specified overall budget at the campaign level. However, omitting a budget at the campaign level is not recommended.

⚠ WARNING

No budget causes unpredictable delivery, inefficient budget allocation, and disrupted ROI.

⚡ ACTION

Go to the campaign setup and enter the total budget you want to allocate to the campaign. Also set budgets for each ad group within the campaign.

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5 Incorrect campaign pacing

The safest budget pacing option is "Evenly," which distributes the budget consistently over the campaign's duration. For time-sensitive campaigns (product launches or events), where early visibility is critical, you might need "Ahead."

⚠ WARNING

If ASAP pacing is accidentally selected, the entire campaign budget might be exhausted within a day.

⚡ ACTION

Stick to "Evenly" or "Ahead" pacing. Use "Daily Cap" or "ASAP" only if you have a clear reason and understand the risks.

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6 Non-even pacing in ad groups

While you might have your overall campaign pacing set correctly, individual ad groups can still experience uneven spending.

⚠ WARNING

Selecting "ASAP" pacing at the ad group level can cause some ad groups to deplete their budgets rapidly, while others struggle to even place bids. This can happen even if your campaign pacing is set to "Evenly."

⚡ ACTION

Within ad group's settings, prefer the "Even" pacing to ensure a consistent and balanced spend throughout the campaign flight.

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7 Ad groups missing geo inclusion targeting

Geography inclusion targeting defines where your ads appear. For example, setting it to the US limits ads to US users, excluding clicks and impressions from other countries.

⚠ WARNING

Without inclusion targeting, ads may reach regions where your product isn't available. You also risk missing your core audience since ads may not serve only in high-value regions.

⚡ ACTION

Specify the countries, regions, or cities where you want your ads to be shown.

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8 Non-target regions aren't excluded

While it's important to include the right locations, it's equally important to exclude the wrong ones. TTD allows you to prevent your ads from showing in specific geographic areas.

⚠ WARNING

Failing to set geo exclusions may result in ads serving in low-value or irrelevant regions, paying for clicks that won't convert.

⚡ ACTION

Use the geographic exclusion options to specify locations where you don't want your ads to be served.

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9 Limited platforms in display/video campaigns

People might browse products on their phone, compare prices on their tablet at home, and make a purchase on their laptop. Display and video campaigns are designed to reach people on a variety of devices.

⚠ WARNING

If you don't select all the device types, you could be missing out on a huge portion of your potential audience.

⚡ ACTION

Make sure the checkboxes for "PC," "Tablet," and "Mobile" are all selected for display and video campaigns.

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10 CTV device targeting errors

Connected TV (CTV) campaigns are meant for big screens. These ads are designed to be seen in a living room setting, where people are relaxed yet attentive.

⚠ WARNING

CTV ads on phones or desktops will appear small, easily ignored, and out of context.
Wrong devices invalidate CTV-specific metrics like completion rate, household reach.

⚡ ACTION

Always exclude Mobile and Desktop devices in CTV campaigns.

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11 Wrong environments for Display and Video ads

Display/video ads are designed for websites and mobile browsers.

⚠️ WARNING

If you don't select the right "environments," your ads might end up in places they don't belong:

Connected TVs (CTV)   Digital Out-of-Home (DOOH) screens

Audio platforms   Virtual browsers

Ads in wrong environments are less impactful and waste budget.

⚡ ACTION

Select "Web" and "Mobile Web" for Display and Video ads.

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12 Ad groups don't have the exclusion lists

Exclusion lists control where your ads should not appear, helping to maintain ad relevance, performance, and brand safety.

⚠ WARNING

Without exclusion lists, your ads can be displayed alongside unsuitable content, which could negatively affect your brand.

⚡ ACTION

Create exclusion lists to block unsuitable publishers (e.g., kids' sites for adult products). Adjust them post-campaign based on performance insights.

13 Ad groups weren't assigned inclusion lists

Inclusion lists proactively define where ads can appear. This gives you more control over where your ads are seen and helps you ensure they're reaching the right audience.

⚠ WARNING

Without inclusion lists, ads may appear on mediocre or less relevant sites not blocked by exclusion lists.

⚡ ACTION

Create or select inclusion lists that precisely define the websites, apps, or content categories where you want your ads to appear.

14 Non-compliance with ads.txt

ads.txt is a file that lets advertisers verify the validity of the sellers they purchase from, helping to prevent domain spoofing and arbitraged inventory. TTD checks ads.txt compliance, but advertisers must take action to enable these filters.

⚠ WARNING

Without activating ads.txt compliance filters, campaigns may inadvertently bid on unverified inventory, increasing the risk of fraud and brand safety issues.

⚡ ACTION

Enable ads.txt compliance check.

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15 Inventory sources missing private contracts

Private contracts in TTD are premium placements that you can secure through direct deals with publishers. However, private contracts need to be manually added and activated in the advertiser's dashboard.

⚠ WARNING

If private contracts are not active, campaigns may underperform due to undesirable placements and higher costs.

⚡ ACTION

Verify that your inventory sources include private contracts.

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16 No bid caps

Bid caps limit how much you spend per impression. Consider starting with these benchmarks (and adjust based on your specific needs and performance):

⚠️ **WARNING**

No bid caps can hurt your ROI: you might overspend on costly impressions with low returns.

⚡ **ACTION**

Always set maximum bid amounts for your campaigns.

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17 Disabled Auto Allocator for non-guaranteed campaigns

The Trade Desk's Auto Allocator is an AI-driven tool that dynamically adjusts bids across placements. This is key for programmatic non-guaranteed campaigns where you're competing with other advertisers for impressions.

⚠ WARNING

Without dynamic optimization, campaigns may struggle to meet KPIs like reach, impressions, and ROI.

⚡ ACTION

Make sure you turn on Auto Allocator for programmatic non-guaranteed campaigns.

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18 Disabled KOA Optimizations for non-Scibid groups

To avoid this mistake, it's important to understand the difference between KOA and KOA Optimizations:

- **KOA** is The Trade Desk's core AI engine that provides real-time insights, data analysis, and overall campaign intelligence.

- **KOA Optimizations** is an optional feature that automates actions like reallocating budgets, refining audience targeting, and adjusting bids.

While KOA is always active, KOA Optimizations need to be manually activated.

Scibids provides advanced AI bidding strategies for complex campaigns, but you need to pay for it. For simpler campaigns, you can save budget by using The Trade Desk's built-in tools. Activating KOA Optimizations is essential for non-Scibids groups.

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BIDDING & OPTIMIZATION

⚠ WARNING

Without KOA Optimizations, you lose the real-time adjustments that improve performance and prevent budget waste on underperforming placements.

⚡ ACTION

If you're not using Scibid for a particular ad group, enable KOA Optimizations.

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The Trade Desk Campaign Checklist

Campaign basics

- ☐ A campaign has a start date set
- ☐ A campaign has an end date set
- ☐ A campaign is assigned with relevant creative assets
- ☐ The DSP budget is specified
- ☐ Campaign pacing is set to "Evenly" or "Ahead"
- ☐ Ad groups have even pacing

Targeting

- ☐ Ad groups have geography inclusion targeting
- ☐ Non-target regions are excluded
- ☐ PC, tablet, and mobile devices are targeted in display/video campaigns
- ☐ CTV campaigns only target CTV devices
- ☐ Web & Mobile environments are selected to display/video campaigns

Inventory quality

- ☐ All ad groups have the necessary exclusion lists applied
- ☐ Ad groups are assigned with an inclusion list
- ☐ The websites you're advertising on have a valid ads.txt file
- ☐ Inventory sources include your private contracts

Bidding & optimization

- ☐ You've set max bids for campaigns
- ☐ Auto Allocator is on for programmatic non-guaranteed campaigns
- ☐ KOA Optimizations are enabled for non-Scibid groups

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ARE YOUR TTD CAMPAIGNS PERFORMING AT THEIR BEST?

Improvado audits your TTD campaigns across all items from this checklist and 100+ more data points to uncover hidden pitfalls and opportunities to boost results.
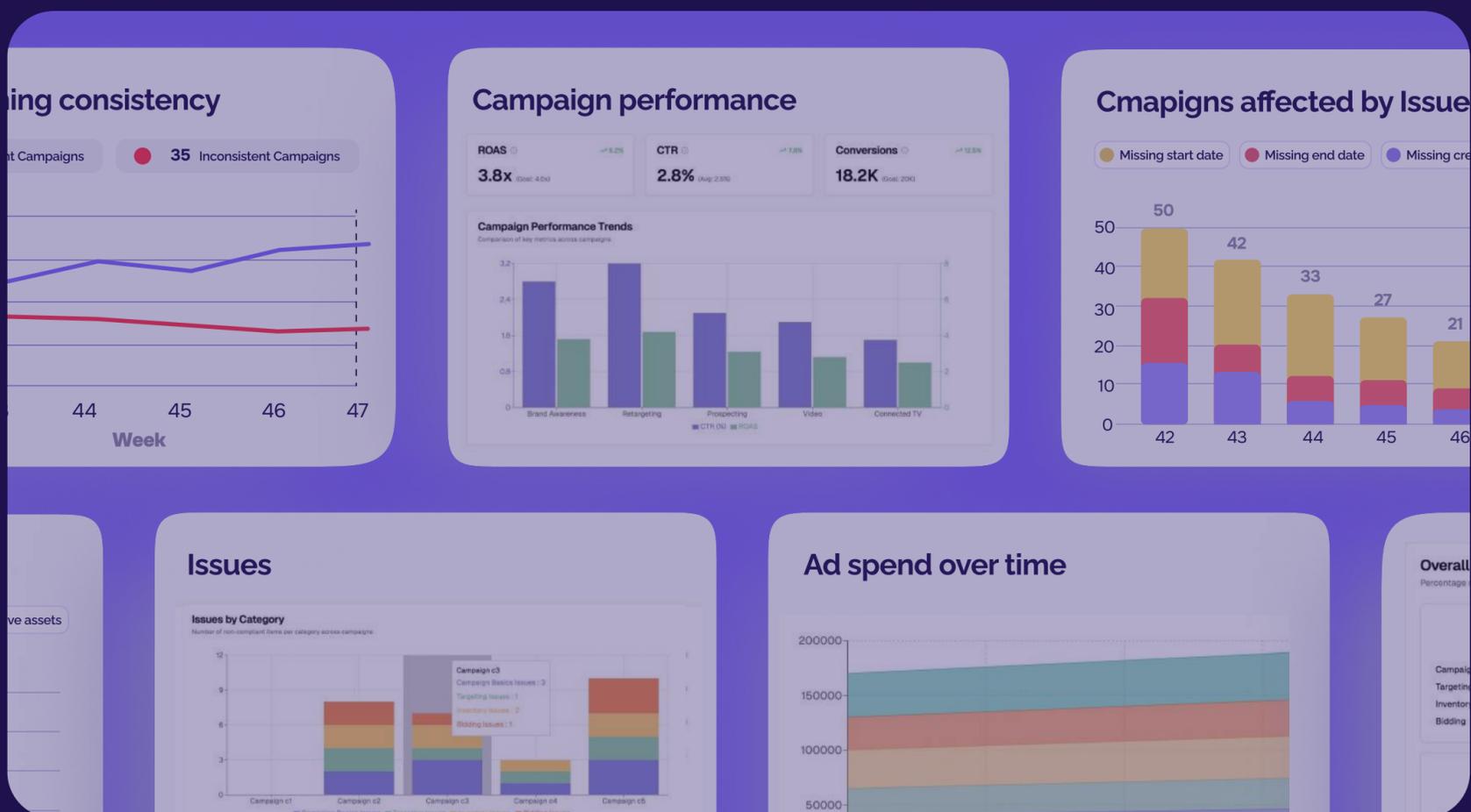
No commitment. Just insights.
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