

PAID SEARCH / STRATEGY

The Google Ads account structure that stops plateauing

Stop harvesting demand. Start creating a repeatable path to scale.

Search architecture, Shopping + PMax control, Demand Gen, and the audit checklist.

THE PLAYBOOK IN ONE LINE

DEFEND. LEARN. DISCOVER. SCALE.

A practical guide for DTC founders, operators and growth teams.

The executive read.

What matters, before you touch a budget.

01**Stop mixing campaign jobs**

Separate brand defense, precision learning and scaling discovery.

02**Make PMax explain itself**

Split placements and branded demand before trusting headline ROAS.

03**Protect high-intent Shopping**

Keep standard Shopping beside PMax and improve feed relevance.

04**Create tomorrow's demand**

Use Demand Gen to reach prospects before they begin searching.

THE FIELD GUIDE

01 “Google really isn’t a great platform for us. We plateau.”

02 The three-campaign search structure

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The following pages retain the authors' working recommendations and case examples. Diagrams and charts are editorial visualizations of the figures in the supplied drafts, not independent performance benchmarks.

“Google really isn’t a great platform for us. We plateau.”

That is how most DTC operators describe Google Ads, and it is the line we hear most from the brands we talk to. Brand search runs, Performance Max runs, the account harvests whatever demand already exists and never finds any more. The plateau is not the platform. It is an account built to wait for people who already searched for you.

This paper is the account structure DigiCom builds for every brand it takes on: three search campaigns with different jobs, standard shopping kept alongside PMax, a script that shows where PMax dollars actually land, and Demand Gen as the one impression-based line that scales like Meta. It is also the list of what we find in nearly every Google audit, because the fixes are usually structural rather than creative.

It is written for operators spending \$25,000 or more a month across channels whose Google account is either a brand-only cost line or a PMax black box they stopped questioning. Every structure below is one we run in client accounts today.

By Hemant Varshney, who started his career in Google Ads 17 years ago, with co-founders Danielle Dror and Mike Constandatos and Jake Orenstein, Director of Growth.

The three-campaign search structure

Three campaigns. Three jobs. No confusion.

01**BRAND DEFENSE**

Protect intent

Brand-only + CPC cap

**02****PRECISION**

Learn what converts

Exact-match themes

**03****SCALING**

Discover demand

Broad / AI Max + negatives

Framework: DigiCom Google Ads working model (source manuscript).

Search is three campaigns with three different jobs. Most accounts have one campaign trying to do all three, and it does the first one badly and the other two not at all.

Campaign	Match type	Job	How it is controlled
Brand defense	Your own name and its variants	Keep competitors off your name at the cheapest click in the account	Portfolio bid strategy on target ROAS or CPA with a max CPC cap; brand terms only, everything else negated
Precision	Exact match on your top converting non-brand terms	Learn what converts, with signal integrity	Single-themed ad groups, brand negated out, close variants excluded, message-matched pages
Scaling	Broad match and AI Max, seeded with what works	Discover adjacent queries and feed them to precision	Search-terms report worked daily; converting terms graduate into precision

Brand defense is not wasted money. The question we get most is whether bidding on your own name is a waste. The answer is a flat no. Competitors may not target your name on purpose, but PMax, AI Max and broad match identify what a product is and serve against similar searches, so if anyone sells something close to you, their ads are on your name. The control is the cap: most brands never need to bid above \$2 a click on brand and typically land at 30 to 40 cents. The cap is also what keeps the campaign honest. The number one finding in our audits is a brand campaign spending anywhere from 10 to 80% of its budget on non-brand terms. Brand spend has to be isolated or it is not brand spend.

Precision is where you learn. With the search terms as the known variable, you can test copy, landing pages and image assets against them and trust what you learn. Each ad group is one theme so the ad speaks to exactly what was typed.

Scaling is a discovery engine, not an efficiency play. It will find plenty of bad queries, which is why we are in its search-terms report daily or every other day adding negatives. That one task decides whether the campaign scales or bleeds. It will never be your most efficient campaign. It is not supposed to be; its job is to feed the other one.

The landing page is the second half of the ad

Message match is a conversion lever.

SEARCH QUERY

What they asked



AD

Answer the intent



LANDING PAGE

Keep the promise

Example: a category query should lead to a relevant answer page, not a generic homepage.

Continuity of message, from the query to the ad to the page, is what makes search work. Break the chain anywhere and you are paying for traffic the page cannot close.

Brand traffic goes to a PDP or an offer page, because those people are ready to buy. Non-brand traffic needs a page that addresses what the person searched for: a listicle, an advertorial, a Five Reasons page, a review page, a competitor comparison. Someone who typed “best non-toxic kids shampoo” did not ask for your homepage; they asked a question, and the page that answers it is the one that converts them.

Google scores this directly. Quality score is the alignment of landing page to ad to query, and it is the metric people who have worked inside Google name as the one that matters most internally. It is also why bidding on a competitor’s brand term scores so badly: nothing on your page has anything to do with what was typed.

For non-brand keyword tests in CPG and wellness (keto-friendly, low-carb) we build a page per theme, so the conversion rate on the precision campaign reflects the match and not the mismatch. The same discipline applies to Meta, where putting the person from the ad at the top of the page changes who the platform reaches as well as who converts; on Google it decides whether you win the auction at all.

Standard shopping still earns its place next to PMax

Google has been pushing advertisers to run Performance Max only and let it handle shopping. That is not true. We run standard shopping alongside PMax in every account, because shopping is the highest-intent placement on Google and PMax does not let you control it.

Shopping is where ready buyers click. They see the product image, the price and every competitor lined up next to you, and they click when they are ready to purchase. The visual is the bid, which is why our audits so often flag product images too small or unclear to read. PMax spends across every placement; some weeks it spends in shopping and some weeks it does not. A standalone shopping campaign puts budget directly into the placement that converts.

Single product ad groups give you controls PMax cannot. One ad group per product. If a skincare product is pulling hair-care queries, you negate that term at the product level; in PMax you can only exclude at the campaign level, which blocks it everywhere. You can bid higher on a higher-LTV product. You can pull back on a product running low on inventory and set campaign priority so the best-selling variant leads instead of the slowest. None of those levers exist in a feed-only PMax campaign.

Your feed titles are your targeting. You cannot target keywords in shopping or PMax; Google decides when to show the product from the feed, and the title carries most of the weight. A bad title reads like the brand’s internal name for a kit. A good one leads with the kit name and keeps going: non-toxic kids face cream, moisturizer, shampoo, safe skin care for kids. Every phrase is a query Google can now match. Mike built those titles by pulling the search terms that triggered conversions across shopping and PMax and writing them back into the products. Search volume went up, the products triggered more often, and the account scaled. Use all 150 characters, and keep revisiting them, because this is not set-and-forget and better titles improve shopping and PMax at the same time.

Opening the Performance Max black box

The PMax black box: one account-level finding

65%

of one underperforming PMax campaign's spend went to YouTube in DigiCom's account example.



65% YouTube

35% other placements

Client-account example in source document; not a general PMax benchmark.

PMax serves across shopping, search, YouTube, Discovery, Gmail, display and occasionally Maps, and Google's reporting still bundles the channels together. We run a script that breaks out cost and conversions by placement and splits brand from non-brand at the account level. It has changed more Google strategies than any other tool we use.

Know where the dollars land. Two campaigns from the same account: a consolidated non-brand campaign sent roughly 20% of spend to search and most of the rest to shopping, and shopping produced most of the conversions. That is the shape we want. A standalone hair-care campaign underperformed, and the script showed why: about 65% of its spend had gone to YouTube. We paused it and folded hair care back into the consolidated campaign as its own asset groups. In an account spending \$1,000 a day the script tells you \$400 went to shopping, \$400 to search and \$200 to display, with the conversions for each, and that is the data you change strategy on.

Brand inside PMax. We are never going to grow an account if PMax is spending the budget on the branded side. The script's brand split is the first thing we look at, and a brand exclusion is the first thing we add.

The display leak. Push PMax past the volume it can deliver efficiently and the algorithm starts spending in display against your existing customers. The fix is to tighten the target ROAS or CPA and add the brand exclusion, not to raise the budget again.

There is no excuse for an average ad strength. An asset group is your audience, your ad set and your ad in one, and it is the one part of PMax that is not a black box. Google tells you exactly what is missing: three more horizontal images, one more 4x5 vertical. The most common audit finding is an asset group sitting at Average. Gemini resizes assets inside the platform and image tools can generate the missing formats from a Merchant Center shot, so there is no reason not to be at Excellent.

Seasonal asset groups. Build them the way you would build a seasonal Meta ad: for Black Friday, an asset group where every headline is about gifting, savings and family, driving to a page built around a gift set. Test different gift sets in different asset groups and let the data pick the hero. The same structure handles any launch or season.

Demand Gen: the only Google campaign that scales like Meta

Everything else in Google waits for someone to search. Demand Gen does not. It is impression-based, the rest of Google is demand-based, and that single property is what most accounts are missing when they say the platform will not scale.

Demand Gen runs across YouTube, Discovery and Gmail (it has absorbed the old video campaign types for conversion goals) and it spends what you give it. Set a \$100 daily budget and it spends \$100. It is also the only Google campaign type that accepts a lookalike segment: build one off your top spenders or your last 90 days of site visitors and Google finds people who resemble them. And unlike PMax, where you load 20 images and 15 headlines and hope, Demand Gen lets you A/B test five videos against five others and get a real answer.

It is a different creative room. The creatives that win on Meta usually lose here. For an apparel brand, the Meta winners were a person wearing the product and talking to camera; on Demand Gen the product laid out with the graphic shown won, and we found it through the first-25%-watched rate, which is the Demand Gen equivalent of hook rate. Our search team asks the social team which creatives ran on Meta and TikTok that week, then tests them in Demand Gen and PMax asset groups, and keeps the ones that survive the different room.

Warm the audience before you need it. The people Demand Gen reaches in September are the ones who come back through shopping, search and PMax in November. A Demand Gen campaign seeded with a top-spender lookalike, running two months before a peak, is the cheapest way to make Q4 search and shopping look like they scaled on their own.

The PMax placement script does not yet cover Demand Gen. Until Google exposes placement spend there, treat it as the one line in the account you scale on creative tests and lookalikes rather than on placement data.

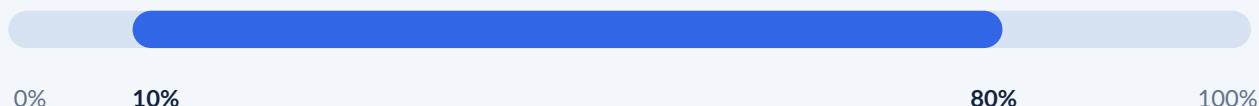
What we find in almost every audit

Brand campaign leakage: the audit flag

10%-80%

of "brand" budget found on non-brand queries

across audits cited in this manuscript.



Reported observed range. Audit your own search-terms report to establish the actual share.

Five findings show up in most of the Google accounts we open, including accounts behind \$20 million Shopify businesses. None of them is a creative problem.

A brand campaign leaking into non-brand. 10 to 80% of brand budget on queries that are not the brand, because there is no CPC cap and no negatives. Fix: portfolio bid strategy with a max CPC, brand terms isolated.

One shopping campaign for everything. Hair care, skin care, mom products and baby products in one campaign, one asset group's headlines trying to describe all of them, and budget that can only be moved at the campaign level. Fix: split by product line, then single product ad groups.

Asset groups sitting at Average ad strength. Google says exactly what is missing, three more horizontal images, one more 4x5 vertical, and nobody has uploaded them, so the campaign enters fewer auctions than it could. Fix: every asset group to Excellent; Gemini resizes assets inside the platform.

Attribution firing twice. Pixels and conversion tags double- and triple-firing, the same event counted three times, in accounts at \$10 to \$20 million in revenue. The brand is not negligent; nobody told them. Fix: one conversion action per event, counting the outcome you actually want, so Google bids on real orders instead of inflated ones.

PMax judged only on platform ROAS. A platform number that looks fine while the business declines, because PMax is spending brand and display. Fix: the placement script, the brand split, and a total-business read where Google's number is reconciled against Shopify's.

Ask your agency about each of these. If the answers are vague, the structure is probably the problem, and it is a cheaper fix than another creative batch.

The checklist

- [] Brand campaign is on a portfolio bid strategy with a max CPC cap, and its search-terms report shows brand queries only
- [] A precision campaign runs exact-match non-brand terms in single-themed ad groups with brand negated
- [] A scaling campaign runs broad match or AI Max, and someone works its search-terms report at least every other day
- [] Non-brand traffic lands on a page that answers the query, not the homepage
- [] Standard shopping runs next to PMax, split by product line, one ad group per product
- [] Top product titles use the full 150 characters and are built from converting search terms
- [] A placement script breaks every PMax campaign out by channel and by brand versus non-brand
- [] Every PMax asset group is at Excellent ad strength, and seasonal asset groups exist for the next peak

[] A Demand Gen campaign is live with a top-spender or 90-day-visitor lookalike

[] Each conversion event fires once, and the conversion action Google optimizes to is the one the business cares about

What happens next

Most Google accounts have a leak you cannot see from inside the account: a brand campaign quietly spending a third of its budget on non-brand terms, a PMax campaign pushing dollars into display against customers you already have. Finding those leaks is what DigiCom's free audit is built for. Each one takes 10 to 12 hours of a senior strategist and covers structure, settings, keyword mining, feed setup and where every dollar is actually going, for brands spending \$25,000 or more a month. It ends in one of three honest answers: yes we can hit your goal, yes with specific changes, or no. Contracts come only after the audit and media planning, and the team that runs the audit runs the account.

Take the two-minute Growth Leak Check at digicom.io/audit to see whether you qualify for one of this month's slots.

DigiCom is a 2X Inc. 5000 honoree (2025 and 2026), a Google Partner, Meta Business Partner and TikTok Marketing Partner, with \$200M+ in ad spend managed and \$1B+ in revenue generated for 200+ brands. The DigiCom team hosts Performance Anxiety and the Checkout Required community for DTC operators.

A free audit. Three possible answers.

YES

We can hit your goal.

YES, IF...

We fix specific leaks first.

NO

We will tell you why.

[See how the senior-team review works >](#)

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PLAYBOOK

Meet DigiCom.

The no bullshit growth agency.

Born in New York, powered by global talent. We help ambitious DTC brands build growth engines through paid media, creative, CRO, influencer partnerships and measurement. We care about profitable growth, not vanity metrics.

\$200M+

MEDIA SPEND

\$1B+

REVENUE GENERATED

200+

BRANDS

20+

PLATFORMS

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Metrics reflect DigiCom's published agency / leadership track record.

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SCAN TO VISIT

For qualifying brands spending \$25K+ per month, as described in this paper.

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