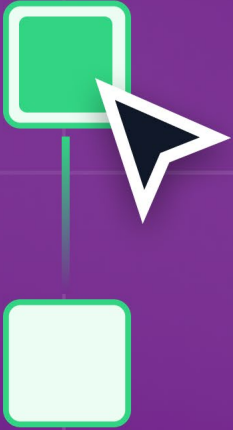
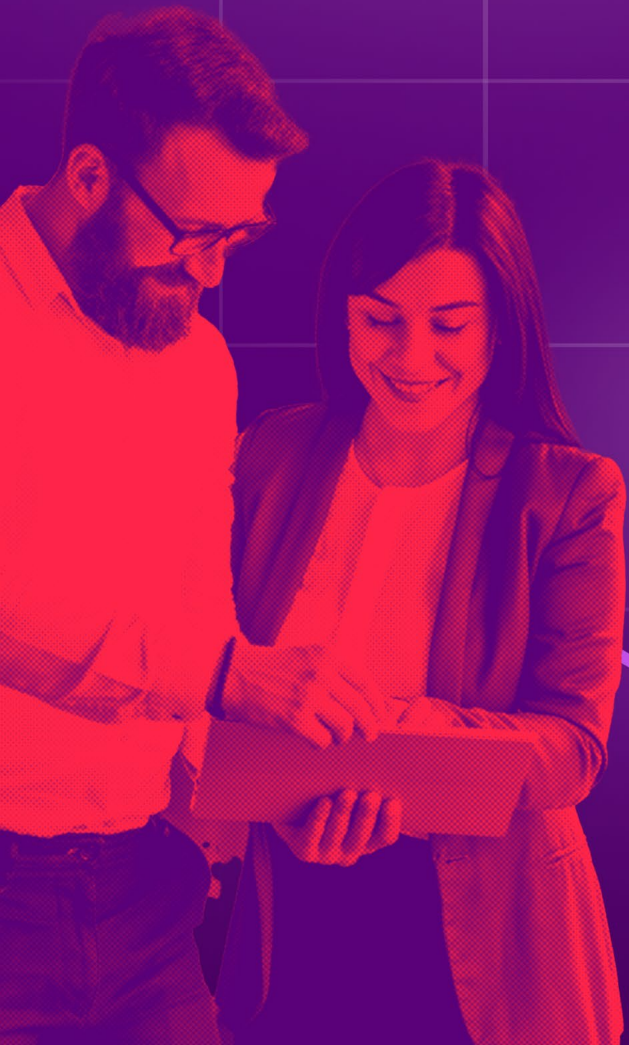


d•tidot



The Google Shopping launch playbook

12 decisions that decide if you
win the auction or get buried,
before your market even opens



Why this guide and why now

Google Shopping is arriving in new markets. For PPC specialists, this is rare. You do not often get to enter a channel before everyone else does.

When a market is new, the auction is empty. Competitors are still learning. Feeds are messy. Bids are low. This is the moment where small, correct decisions create a large, lasting lead.

*„When a market is new, the auction is empty.
This is your best chance to own it.“*

But there is a catch. Google Shopping does not reward the loudest advertiser. It rewards the best prepared one. Your product data, your account structure, and your bidding setup decide whether you appear at the top or never appear at all.

This guide gives you two things. First, a clear explanation of how Google Shopping works in 2026, with the latest changes. Second, a 12-point launch checklist. It is the exact checklist we use with every new market client.

Read it once. Use it as your launch plan. The window will not stay open for long.

Why timing wins

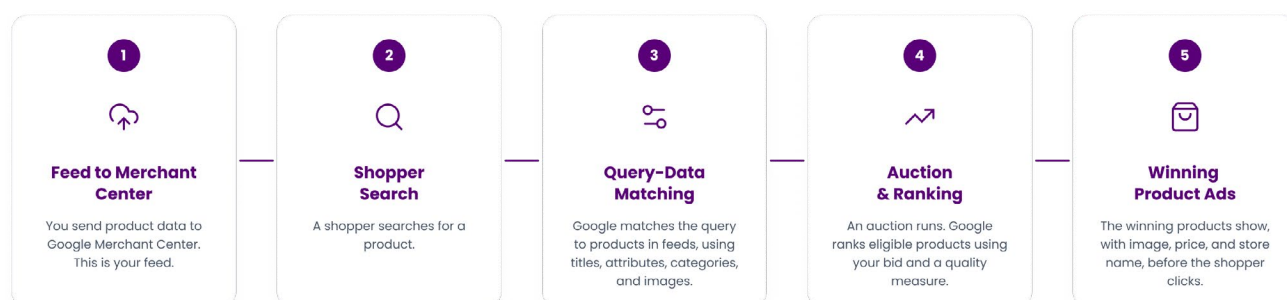
The first 90 days of a new Shopping market set the pricing of the auction for years. Early movers train Google's systems on their data and lock in lower costs. Late movers pay to catch up.

Google Shopping in 2026: How it works

If you come from search ads, forget keywords for a moment. Google Shopping does not work the way text ads do.

In text ads, you choose keywords. You write a copy. You bid on a search term. In Shopping, you do none of that directly. You upload product data. Google reads that data and decides which searches your products match. Your feed is your keyword strategy, your ad copy, and your targeting, all at once.

This is the single most important idea in this guide. Your product data drives everything. A great feed wins. A weak feed loses, no matter how much you bid.



Shopping ads matter because they sit where buying happens. Per Adthena's benchmarking of 40 million ads across the US and UK, cited in Smart Insights, Google Shopping ads now drive 76.4% of retail search ad spend and generate 85.3% of all clicks on Google Ads or Google Shopping campaign ads. The format is visual. The shopper sees the product, the price, and the store before clicking.

That means the clicks you get are more qualified. Reported average cost per click for Shopping ads sits well below text search ads. Industry benchmarks place the average Shopping CPC near 0.66 US dollars, far below the typical search CPC.

The Shopping campaign types you need to know

In 2026, Shopping is not one place. Your products can appear across many Google surfaces. You need to know them, because your feed feeds all of them.

Performance Max

This is now the main way most advertisers run Shopping. Performance Max, or PMax, is a single campaign type powered by Google AI. It serves your products across Search, Shopping, YouTube, Display, Gmail, Discover, and Maps, all from one campaign. It pulls products from your Merchant Center feed. For ecommerce, the Shopping part is usually the strongest. Google has pushed PMax hard, and it is the default choice for many accounts.

Standard Shopping

This still exists in 2026, and it still matters. Standard Shopping runs Shopping ads only, on Search, the Shopping tab, and Google Images. It gives you manual control: product level bids, negative keywords, and a full search terms report. A recent shift is important. When the same product is eligible in both a PMax and a Standard Shopping campaign, the winner is now decided by Ad Rank, not by automatic PMax priority. This gives skilled advertisers a way to win back impressions with strong data and a good bid. Many top accounts run both types together: PMax for scale and reach, Standard Shopping for control of brand, margin, and clearance.

Free product listings

Your feed can also show for free. Free listings appear on the Shopping tab, and across Search, Images, YouTube, Maps, Gemini, and other surfaces. They cost nothing and run from the same Merchant Center feed. A note for 2026: Google has started mixing some sponsored results into the free listing grids, so the line between paid and free is moving. Either way, a clean feed gets you both.

Demand Gen

This campaign type targets demand earlier in the journey, across visual surfaces like YouTube and Discover. It can use your product feed too. It is less about high intent search and more about creating interest.

The new AI surfaces

This is the biggest change of 2025 and 2026. Google launched AI Mode shopping, built on its Gemini models and its Shopping Graph. Per Google's own blog (November 13, 2025), AI Mode is powered by the Shopping Graph, which includes more than 50 billion product listings, 2 billion of which are updated every hour. Shoppers can browse with conversational queries, use virtual try-on for clothing, and use agentic checkout, where Google can complete a purchase for them when the price is right. Google also introduced the Universal Commerce Protocol for agentic commerce, announced at NRF in January 2026.

Why does this matter to you? Because all of these AI features read your product data. If your feed is incomplete, your products can be left out of AI results entirely. The shopper never sees your homepage or your brand story. The AI reads your structured data. Rich, complete, accurate feeds win the AI era. Thin feeds disappear.

Where it shows	Paid or free	Uses feed?	Uses feed?
Performance Max	Paid	Yes	Scale and cross channel reach
Standard Shopping	Paid	Yes	Control of brand, margin, clearance
Free listings	Free	Yes	Extra visibility at no cost
Demand Gen	Paid	Yes	Creating demand earlier
AI Mode shopping	Both	Yes	The new discovery and checkout place



One feed, many places

Search, Shopping tab, Images, YouTube, Gmail, Maps, and now AI Mode. Every place reads the same product data. Fix the feed once, win everywhere.

CSS explained: the free bidding advantage most advertisers miss

This is the part that can change your launch economics. It is also the part most advertisers do not understand.

o What CSS is

CSS means Comparison Shopping Service. When you run Shopping ads in European markets, you do not run them directly with Google. You run them through a CSS. Google's own service, called Google Shopping, is one CSS. There are also many third party CSS partners. You must use at least one CSS to place Shopping ads.

o Why CSS exists

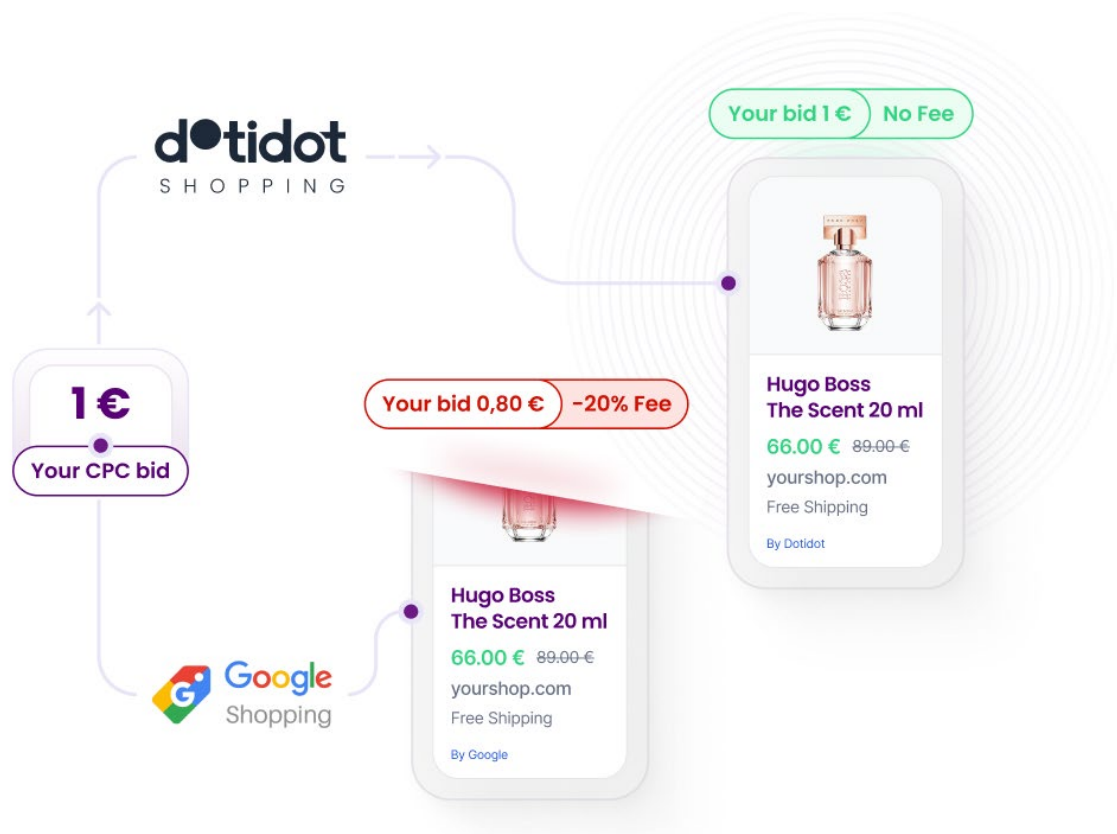
Per the European Commission press release of 27 June 2017, the Commission fined Google 2.42 billion euros for breaching EU antitrust rules by giving an illegal advantage to another Google product, its comparison shopping service. It was then a record EU antitrust fine, and it was upheld by the EU Court of Justice in September 2024. To comply, Google opened the system. Now independent CSS partners can place Shopping ads in the same auction. This is why the CSS program exists in the European Economic Area, plus Switzerland and the United Kingdom. It was not Google's idea. It was a legal remedy.

o How the advantage works

Here is the mechanism, explained accurately. Google's own Merchant Center documentation confirms that Google Shopping ensures its required profitability by deducting a fixed percentage margin from each merchant bid before that bid enters the auction. The margin is built into the cost per click and is charged only when a user clicks. When you run through a third party CSS partner, that margin is not taken. Your full bid enters the auction. savvyrevenue

The headline figure has long been „up to 20%.“ Google no longer publishes the exact number in its public documents. Some respected specialists, such as the Shopping agency SavvyRevenue, now estimate the real advantage at around 16% to 18% in practice, while confirming it is „absolutely still in effect today.“ The math also explains a common framing. If Google keeps 20%, only 80% of your bid enters the auction. Recovering that gap is the same as bidding 25% more. That is why CSS partners such as Producthero and Channable describe it as up to 25% more bidding power for the same spend.

The key point for a PPC specialist: **this is a bidding advantage, not a visible discount.** As the industry body IMRG puts it, „this isn't a flat 20% discount. It's legally binding additional bidding power that gives your campaigns the edge.“ You will not see a refund or a discount line in your Google Ads account. Instead, your bids are simply stronger in the auction. With the same budget, your products enter more auctions, win better positions, and earn more clicks. Often the gain shows up as more volume at your target ROAS, rather than a lower number on screen.



Does it work with Smart Bidding and PMax

Yes. The CSS margin advantage also applies to automated bidding strategies like Target ROAS, Target CPA, or Performance Max. One honest caveat: in PMax, the advantage applies to the Shopping inventory, not to every channel PMax touches. After a switch, automated bidding may need a day or two to recalibrate, because the algorithm has to learn that its bids now go further.

How switching works

Switching CSS is done at the Merchant Center level, not the campaign level. You keep your Merchant Center account, your product data, your history, and your Google Ads campaigns. Nothing pauses. You approve a request, and the switch is processed. Moving from Google's own CSS is usually fast. Moving from another CSS partner can take up to a 14 day grace period. During that time your ads keep running, and you can still reverse the decision. It is low risk and reversible.

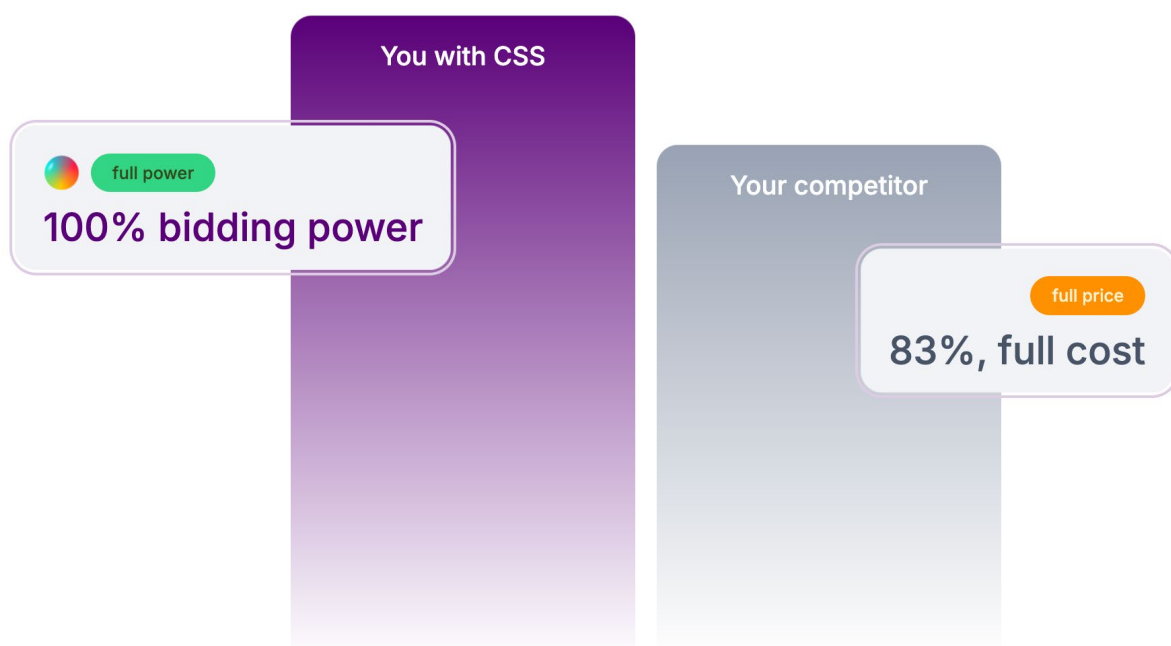
Why CSS matters even more in a brand new market

CSS is useful in any European market. In a new market, it is a launch weapon.

Here is the logic. The CSS advantage is strongest when your competitors do not have it. If everyone in your market uses a CSS partner, bids equalize and the edge fades. But in a new market, most advertisers will not even know CSS exists. Many will run on Google's own CSS by default, and pay the margin without realizing it.

That means you can enter the auction with stronger bids than your competitors, for the same budget, from day one. You win better positions while costs are still low. You gather conversion data faster. Your Smart Bidding learns sooner. By the time competitors catch up, you already hold the positions and the data lead.

This is the first mover advantage made concrete. In a mature market, CSS keeps you level. In a launching market, CSS puts you ahead.



Your product feed is the backbone of Shopping

If you remember one section, make it this one. Feed quality decides Shopping performance more than any other single factor.

Google matches your products to searches using feed data, not keywords. A complete, accurate, well structured feed gets shown more, costs less, and converts better. A weak feed gets disapproved, hidden, or shown for the wrong searches.

Required versus recommended

Some attributes are required, or your product will not serve at all. Others are recommended, and they lift performance. The smart approach is to treat many recommended attributes as required, because they decide how often you show.

Here is a practical view of the attributes that matter most.

Where it shows	Paid or free	Uses feed?
id	Required	Unique product identifier.
title	Required	The biggest driver of which searches you match.
description	Required	Read by Google and AI to understand the product.
link	Required	The product landing page.
image_link	Required	Your main product image.

Where it shows	Paid or free	Uses feed?
availability	Required	In stock or out of stock. Must match the site.
price	Required	Must match the landing page exactly.
brand	Required	Helps matching and identity.
gtin	Required	Omitting it when you have one limits visibility.
mpn	Required	Used when there is no GTIN.
google_product_category	Required	Google's taxonomy. Helps matching.
product_type	Required	Your own categories. Powerful for structure and bidding.
custom_label_0 to 4	Required	Your segmentation for bidding by margin, season, stock, performance.
additional_image_link	Required	Extra images. Can lift clicks.
product_highlight	Required	Short bullet benefits. Read by AI.
shipping	Required	Affects approval and the store experience.

Freshness matters

Prices and stock change. Your feed must keep up. Stale data causes disapprovals and wasted spend. The AI Shopping Graph refreshes 2 billion listings every hour, and your data needs to be current to stay eligible. Use scheduled uploads or an API connection so your feed reflects reality.

Supplemental feeds and feed rules

You do not have to fix everything at the source. Supplemental feeds let you add or override attributes, like custom labels or extra images, alongside your main feed. Feed rules let you transform data in bulk, for example to restructure titles or filter out products. These tools are how teams manage large catalogs without manual work.

Product title, identifiers and categories that win

o Why CSS exists

The title is the single most powerful attribute in your feed. Google uses it to decide which searches you match. You have up to 150 characters. Most shoppers see only the first 70 or so, so front load the important details.

A reliable title structure is: brand, then product type, then key attributes like color, size, and material. For example, an apparel title might read „Brand, Women’s Running Shoes, Black, Size 8, Mesh.“ Your feed title does not need to match your website title. In fact, a more search focused title often performs better.

Do not stuff promotional text, do not use all capital letters, and do not add price or shipping into the title. A note for 2026: titles created with generative AI must be submitted using the structured_title attribute, not the standard title attribute.

T-shirt example:

<brand> <product type> <product name> <color> <size>

BOSS pánské tričko Terry, bílé, XL

Mobile phone example:

<product type> <brand> <product name> <capacity> <color>

Mobile phone Samsung Galaxy S23 512GB, titan gray

Running shoes:

<brand> <product type> <activity> for <color> <size>

Nike running shoes for trail running, Blue, 45

Laptop bag:

<brand> <product type> for <laptop size> <material>

HP Laptop Bag for 15-inch Laptops, Water-Resistant

Milk example:

<brand> <product type> <fat_number> fat

Miil fresh milk 1,5 % fat

TIP: If you want to learn more about creating a product title that converts

[read this blog article >](#)

o Identifiers

GTIN, MPN, brand. GTIN is the global trade item number, the barcode number. If your product has a GTIN and you leave it out, your visibility is limited. Provide it. When there is no GTIN, use brand and MPN instead. Never guess or invent identifiers, because wrong ones cause disapproval. If a product genuinely has no identifier, set identifier_exists to no.

o Categories

Two different fields, both useful. People confuse these, so be clear.

google_product_category

uses Google's fixed taxonomy. Choose the most specific category that fits. It helps Google understand and match your product.

product_type

uses your own category words. It is not shown to shoppers. It is powerful for matching and, importantly, for structuring and segmenting your campaigns.

Use both. They do different jobs. One speaks Google's language. The other speaks your business logic.

Image specs for 2026

Your image is your ad. In a Shopping unit, the product image is the largest element and the first thing a shopper sees. Image problems are one of the most common causes of product disapprovals, so get this right before launch.

Where it shows	Uses feed?
Minimum size (general)	At least 100 x 100 pixels today.
Minimum size (apparel)	At least 250 x 250 pixels today.
New minimum coming	500 x 500 pixels. Warnings began April 14, 2026. Enforcement starts January 31, 2027.
Recommended size	1500 x 1500 pixels or larger. Start here, not at the minimum.
Maximum	Under 64 megapixels and under 16 MB.
Accepted formats	JPEG, PNG, WebP, non animated GIF, BMP, TIFF.
Background	White or plain neutral for the main image.
Product fill	Product should fill most of the frame, around 75 to 90 percent.
Promotional text	Not allowed. No text, logos, watermarks, badges, or calls to action on the image.
Additional images	Use <code>additional_image_link</code> for more angles. Use lifestyle images in their own slots.
AI images	AI generated or AI edited images must be marked in the feed.

Bidding and campaign logic for a launch

Now the strategy. How you bid in a new market is not how you bid in a mature one.

o Start to gather data, then add targets

Smart Bidding needs conversion data to work. Target ROAS and Target CPA both need a reasonable volume of conversions before they perform well. As a working guideline, Store Growers advises that a campaign with 30 to 50 conversions per month can support one or two campaigns, while low-volume campaigns „never gather enough data to exit the learning phase.“ In a brand new market, you start with zero history. So do not start with an aggressive Target ROAS. Start with Maximize conversions or Maximize conversion value to gather data. Add a target once the campaign has enough conversions to learn from. Setting a hard target too early starves the campaign of impressions.

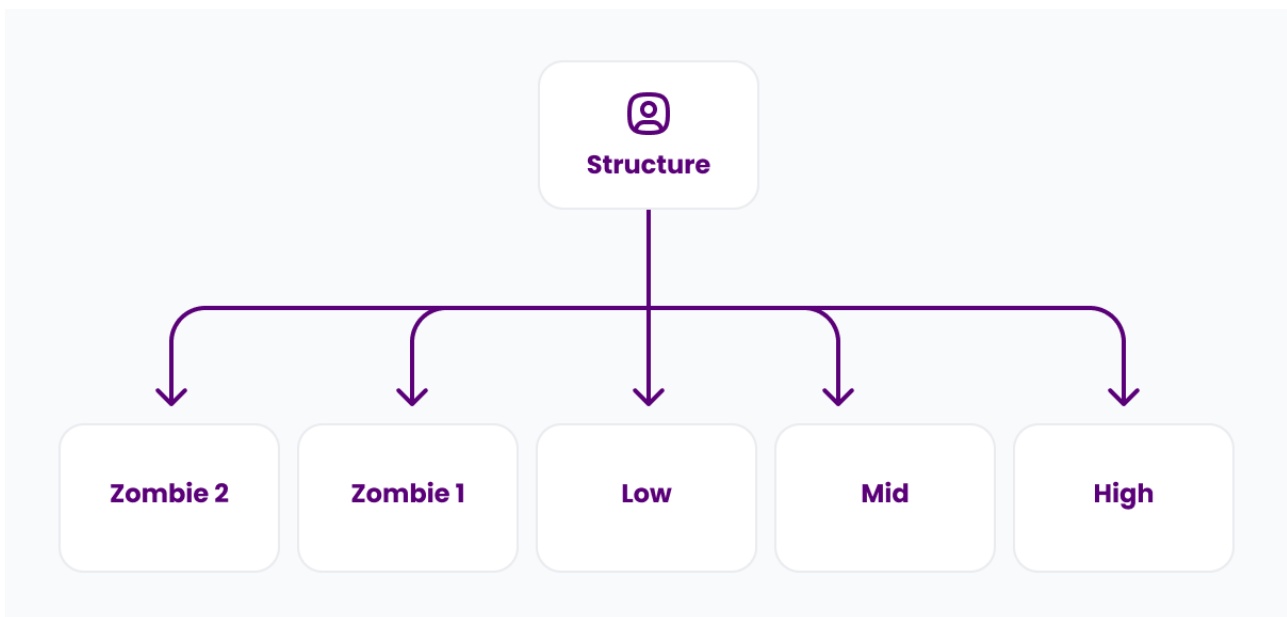
o Respect the learning phase

When you launch or make a big change, Smart Bidding enters a learning phase, often one to two weeks. Performance is volatile during this time. Avoid frequent changes, because each major change can reset the clock.

Do not bid on all products equally

This is the heart of smart Shopping management. Your products are not equal. Some have high margin. Some are bestsellers. Some are low stock. Some are low value. If you bid the same on all of them, Smart Bidding optimizes for blended results, and it can overspend on low margin products while underinvesting in high margin ones.

The fix is segmentation with custom labels. You can use custom_label_0 to custom_label_4 to tag products by your own business logic. Common segments include margin tier, bestseller status, seasonality, stock level, and price tier. Then you build campaign structure and targets around those segments. For example, a higher ROAS target for high margin bestsellers, a data gathering setup for new products, and a controlled approach for clearance stock.



◦ Feed quality multiplies the CSS advantage

Here is how the pieces connect. CSS gives you stronger bids. Good feed data gets you into the right auctions. Smart segmentation points your budget at the products that make you money. Each one helps the others. CSS without good data wastes the edge. Good data without CSS pays more than it should. Do all three and the gains compound.

◦ Feed quality multiplies the CSS advantage

If you run PMax, a few things matter for a launch:

Asset groups

Do not put your whole catalog in one asset group. Split by category or margin tier, with matched creative and audience signals for each.

Listing groups

These organize your products inside PMax, similar to product groups in Standard Shopping.

Audience signals

These are hints, not hard targeting. Customer match lists from real buyers are the strongest signal.

Search themes

You can add search themes to guide the algorithm. Per Google Ads Help, you can now add up to 50 unique search themes per asset group, double the previous limit of 25, after the August 2025 update. Use specific themes, not vague ones.

Brand exclusions

Turn these on from day one. They stop PMax from absorbing your brand search traffic and inflating its reported results. Route brand traffic to a separate, controlled campaign.

PMax and Standard Shopping together

When both target the same product, Ad Rank decides which serves. Many strong accounts run PMax for reach and Standard Shopping for control of brand, margin, and clearance.

The 12-point launch checklist

This is the centerpiece. It is the exact checklist we use with every new market client. Work through it in order. Each item tells you what to do, why it matters, and what goes wrong if you skip it.

1. Set up and verify Merchant Center

Create your Merchant Center account, claim and verify your website, and configure it for the target market. Get this clean before anything else.

Why it matters: Nothing serves without a verified, correctly configured account.

If you skip it: Products do not show, and you lose launch days fixing access problems.

2. Set up your CSS, and lock in the bidding edge

Decide which CSS you run through. Using a third party CSS partner lets your full bid enter the auction, which is worth around 20% more bidding power for the same spend. Set it up before launch so you are stronger from the first auction.

Why it matters: In a new market, most competitors will run on the default and pay the margin. You can start ahead.

If you skip it: You quietly pay more per click than you need to, while rivals who set up CSS outbid you for free.

3. Set up conversion tracking, and check it twice

Install accurate conversion tracking before you spend a cent. Track purchases with correct values. For longer journeys, import offline conversions.

Why it matters: Smart Bidding is only as good as the conversion data it learns from.

If you skip it: Your bidding optimizes toward nothing, or toward the wrong actions, and budget burns.

4. Choose your campaign structure

Decide your mix of Performance Max and Standard Shopping. A common launch structure is PMax for scale, plus Standard Shopping for brand, high margin, and clearance control. Plan asset groups and turn on brand exclusions from day one.

Why it matters: Structure decides how well the algorithm can learn and how much control you keep.

If you skip it: Products compete against each other, brand traffic inflates your reports, and you cannot tell what works.

5. Build a complete, correct feed

Fill every required attribute and as many recommended ones as you can. Aim for high attribute completeness, especially on your top products.

Why it matters: Feed completeness decides how often you show, on Shopping and on AI surfaces.

If you skip it: Products get limited visibility or disappear from results entirely.

6. Optimize product titles

Front load brand, product type, and key attributes in the first 70 characters. Use up to 150 characters. No promotional text, no all capitals.

Why it matters: The title is the biggest driver of which searches you match.

If you skip it: You show for the wrong searches, or not at all, and waste clicks.

7. Add identifiers: GTIN, MPN, brand

Provide GTINs for every product that has one. Use brand and MPN where there is no GTIN. Never invent values. Mark genuine no identifier cases correctly.

Why it matters: Correct identifiers improve matching and unlock full visibility.

If you skip it: Products with a missing GTIN get limited reach, and wrong values cause disapprovals.

8. Set categories: google_product_category and product_type

Assign the most specific Google category. Also fill product_type with your own clear category words.

Why it matters: One helps Google match your product. The other powers your campaign structure and bidding.

If you skip it: Matching gets weaker and you lose a key tool for segmentation.

9. Fix your images to spec

Use clean images on a white background, product filling most of the frame, no overlays or logos. Aim for 1500 x 1500 pixels or larger, and prepare for the 500 x 500 minimum that begins enforcement on January 31, 2027.

Why it matters: The image is your ad, and image issues are a top cause of disapprovals.

If you skip it: Products get disapproved, or show with a weak image and lose the click.

10. Add custom labels for segmentation

Tag products by margin, bestseller status, season, stock, and price tier using custom_label_0 to 4. Build your bidding around these segments.

Why it matters: It lets you spend on the products that actually make you money.

If you skip it: Every product gets the same treatment, and budget drifts to low value items.

11. Check local pricing and currency traps

Confirm feed price equals landing page price, in the correct local currency, with VAT handled the way the market expects. Align structured data. Configure shipping and returns for the market. Use localized landing pages.

Why it matters: Price and currency mismatches are the number one disapproval cause, and worse in a new market.

If you skip it: Products are disapproved at launch, and repeated mismatches risk account suspension.

12. Set launch bidding, then let it learn

Start with Maximize conversions or Maximize conversion value to gather data. Add Target ROAS or Target CPA once you have enough conversions. Respect the learning phase and avoid constant changes.

Why it matters: Targets set too early starve the campaign. Patience lets the algorithm find profit.

If you skip it: You either choke volume with a hard target, or you never reach efficiency.

How Dotidot help you launch faster (and FREE CSS)

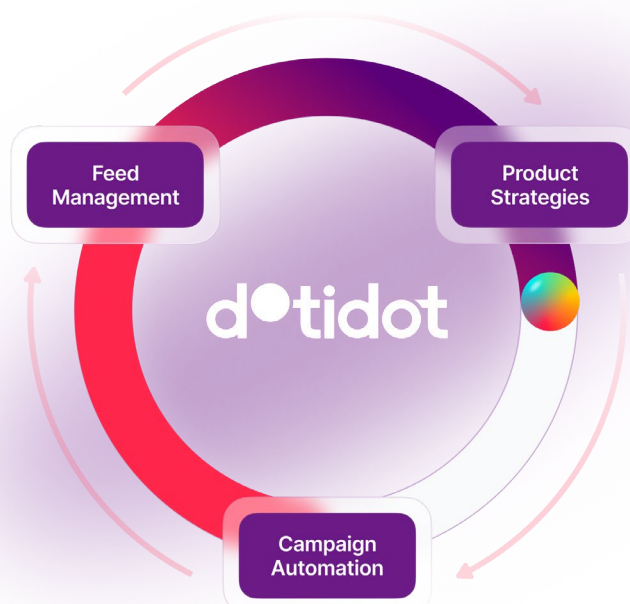
You can do every item in this checklist by hand. In a new shopping market, with a launch window closing, most teams want to do it faster and with fewer mistakes. That is where Dotidot fits.

Dotidot is a platform for PPC automation, feed management, and Google CSS. Think of it across three pillars.

Product strategies. Bid toward your real goals, not a blended average. Dotidot helps you segment by margin, stock, performance, and other business logic, so your budget goes where it earns. This is exactly the segmentation that the checklist calls for.

Feed management. Your product data stays clean, complete, and fresh. Transform titles, fix images at scale, add custom labels, and keep prices and stock in sync, so your ads reflect reality and avoid disapprovals.

Automation. Think of it as a PPC specialist that never sleeps. Rules and optimizations run on a schedule, with frequent synchronizations, so your campaigns react as fast as your catalog changes.



And the part that matters most for a launch: Dotidot gives you its CSS program for free when you book a call. That is around 20% more bidding power, for the same budget, set up before your market's launch window closes. The CSS joins your active campaigns without disruption. You keep your accounts, your data, and your history.

Your market launches once.
Don't waste the window.

[Get Free CSS](#)

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