FREE FIELD SHEET · Nº 158
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KEYWORD FUNNEL

AI MODE BUDGET CHECK

Four account checks to run before pulling budget from AI Mode discovery traffic

CHECKS	DO FIRST	PARTS	COST
16	4	4	Free



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Google has told advertisers that AI Mode traffic converts at a lower rate because people using it are earlier in their buying journey, not ready to purchase yet. This means accounts built around the assumption that search traffic is mostly bottom-funnel may be misreading AI Mode clicks as underperformers when they are actually early research visits. Use this checklist to test four account-level changes before cutting budget from AI Mode discovery traffic.

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TICK IT ON YOUR PHONE
youtube.hamzajameel.com/free/funnel-158

PART 1 OF 4 — 4 CHECKS

What changed

- [ ] 1.1

Google has stated that AI Mode traffic converts at a lower rate than traditional search traffic.

Reported by Search Engine Journal, citing Google's own statement that this is because AI Mode traffic lands earlier in the buying funnel, not because the traffic is lower quality.

- [ ] 1.2

Google's stated reason is that AI Mode users are more often in a discovery or research stage rather than ready to buy.

This is Google's explanation as reported in the source article, not an independent confirmation from third-party data.

- [ ] 1.3

The source frames this as paid search broadly moving up the funnel, with AI Mode as a driver of that shift.

SEJ's article title and framing state that paid search is moving up the funnel and that Google is acknowledging AI Mode pays less as a result.

- [ ] 1.4

The article argues PPC budgets need to adjust toward discovery-stage testing rather than assuming bottom-funnel keywords alone carry the account.

This is the recommendation made in the source post, not a Google-mandated change to bidding or targeting.

PART 2 OF 4 — 4 CHECKS

Check your account data before changing budget

- [ ] 2.1 • DO FIRST

Pull a conversion lag report segmented by traffic source for the last 90 days.

If AI Mode or Search Partners traffic shows longer lag times than your other search traffic, that supports Google's claim that this traffic starts earlier in the funnel rather than it being low quality.

WHERE `Google Ads › Tools › Conversions › Conversion lag (or Segment › Conversion › Days to conversion in reports)`

- [ ] 2.2 • DO FIRST

Compare assisted conversions versus last-click conversions for Search campaigns.

A channel that shows low last-click conversions but high assist value is doing discovery work, not failing. Check if this pattern applies before cutting spend.

WHERE `Google Ads › Insights and reports › Attribution › Conversion paths`

☐ 2.3

Check your current attribution model setting on affected campaigns.

If you are still on last-click attribution, early-funnel traffic will always look weak. Data-driven attribution gives credit across the path and is a fairer test of discovery traffic value.

WHERE `Google Ads › Campaign settings › Attribution model`

☐ 2.4

Review new-to-brand or new customer metrics if you have them enabled.

Discovery-stage traffic should show a higher share of new customers. If it does not, that is a signal the traffic genuinely is not performing, separate from the funnel-stage explanation.

WHERE `Google Ads › Audiences, keywords, and content › Audiences › New customer acquisition`

PART 3 OF 4 — 5 CHECKS

Test account changes before pulling budget

☐ 3.1 • DO FIRST

Set up a separate campaign or budget line to isolate AI Mode and other early-funnel traffic.

Isolating this traffic lets you measure it on its own terms (assists, lag, new customer rate) instead of averaging it in with bottom-funnel keyword performance.

WHERE `Google Ads › Campaigns › Settings › Networks`

☐ 3.2

Extend your conversion window to match the lag data you pulled.

If your lag report shows conversions happening 20 to 30 days out, a 7-day window will undercount discovery traffic. Match the window to what the data shows.

WHERE `Google Ads › Tools › Conversions › [select conversion action] › Edit settings › Conversion window`

☐ 3.3

Add or review a micro-conversion (newsletter signup, add to cart, tool use) as a secondary goal for discovery-stage campaigns.

Early-funnel traffic may not convert on the primary goal yet. A micro-conversion gives you a near-term signal that the traffic is engaged rather than dead weight.

WHERE `Google Ads › Goals › Conversion actions › New conversion action`

☐ 3.4

Hold budget steady on the isolated discovery campaign for one full conversion cycle before judging it.

If your lag data shows a 30-day average time to conversion, judging performance after 7 days will look like a failure even if the traffic is working as designed.

☐ 3.5

Document the before and after of any attribution model change in a shared note.

Switching attribution models changes reported numbers immediately. Keep a record of what changed and when so later performance comparisons are not misread as traffic quality changes.

PART 4 OF 4 — 3 CHECKS

Decide whether to shift budget

Only move budget after completing the checks above, not before.

☐ 4.1 DO FIRST

Shift budget toward discovery-stage testing only if lag and assist data confirm the pattern Google describes.

The source recommends shifting budget toward discovery-stage testing, but this should follow confirmation in your own account data, not happen automatically because of a Google statement.

☐ 4.2

Keep a control budget on existing bottom-funnel keywords while testing the shift.

Cutting all bottom-funnel spend at once removes your ability to compare performance. Keep a portion unchanged as a baseline.

☐ 4.3

Revisit the test after one full reporting cycle matched to your conversion lag window.

A single week of data is not enough to judge a funnel-stage hypothesis. Use the lag window you found earlier to set the right check-in date.

WANT ME TO LOOK AT YOURS?

If you have gone through this and want a second pair of eyes, book a free call. We open the account together and look at what is actually happening. No deck, no pitch.

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SOURCES

1. https://www.searchenginejournal.com/paid-search-is-moving-up-the-funnel-google-admits-ai-mode-pays-less/595875/