Nexus HUB

FREE MEMBER RESOURCE

GOOGLE ADS · FIELD GUIDE

Performance Max for HighLevel agencies

Pitch it, launch it, track it through HighLevel and scale it across every client account — without living in the dashboard.

SEARCH / DISPLAY / YOUTUBE / GMAIL / MAPS / SHOPPING

WHAT'S INSIDE

Eight chapters, one outcome

A Performance Max offer you can sell, deliver and defend. Read it straight through before your first launch, then keep it next to the account.

PLUS

The pre-launch checklist and a budget quick-reference table you can put in front of a client tomorrow.

INTRODUCTION

The campaign type built for lean agencies

You already run the hard part. Your clients' funnels, calendars, pipelines and follow-up live in HighLevel. What most agencies still lack is a repeatable way to fill the top of that funnel with paid traffic — one that doesn't require a dedicated media buyer per account.

Performance Max is Google's answer to exactly that problem. One campaign reaches Search, Display, YouTube, Gmail, Maps and Shopping at once, with Google's AI deciding where each impression goes. For a lean agency, that's the pitch: multichannel Google presence for every client, managed by a small team, optimized by machine learning instead of manual bid schedules.

There's a catch, and it's the reason this guide exists. PMax rewards agencies who feed it clean conversion data and clear creative — and quietly burns the ones who launch it like a search campaign and walk away. The difference between "PMax printed leads for my roofer" and "PMax spent $2,000 on nothing" is almost never the algorithm. It's the setup.

This guide walks the whole arc: deciding which clients are a fit, scoping budgets and expectations, wiring conversions through HighLevel so Google optimizes toward booked appointments instead of button clicks, building assets, layering audience signals from first-party data, and scaling the whole thing into a productized service.

No jargon, no theory you can't use this week. Bring a client account to mind and read with that account in view.

A NOTE ON NUMBERS

Examples in this guide are illustrative composites drawn from agency scenarios, not audited case studies. Your results depend on your market, budget and setup — treat every number here as a shape, not a promise.

CHAPTER 01

Why PMax belongs in your stack

Performance Max launched in 2021 as Google's first fully goal-based campaign type. Instead of you choosing keywords and placements, you give Google a conversion goal, a budget and a set of creative assets. The system assembles ads and places them across every Google surface, shifting spend in real time toward whatever is converting.

What actually changes for you

In a standard Search campaign you control keywords, match types and bids — and you answer for all of them. In PMax you control the inputs: goals, budget, assets, audience signals and conversion data. The auction-level decisions move to Google. You trade granular control for reach and for hours back, which is precisely the trade a multi-client agency should want — provided the inputs are right.

Campaigns are built from **asset groups**: bundles of headlines, descriptions, images, logos and video, usually one per service line or offer. Google mixes those elements into whatever format each placement needs. For a med spa you might run one asset group for injectables and one for memberships, each pointed at the same booking funnel.

Which clients are a fit

PMax is a strong pitch when a client:

- has a clear, trackable conversion — booked call, form fill, purchase
- can sustain a real budget for at least two months (see chapter two)
- has or will approve decent creative — photos, a logo, ideally short video
- already has follow-up wired in HighLevel, so leads don't die in an inbox

Hold off when the client demands keyword-level control, has a tiny test budget, or has no conversion tracking. PMax without conversion data is a slot machine. Run a Search campaign first, build conversion history, then graduate the account.

OPERATOR'S TAKE

Don't sell PMax as "Google's AI does everything." Sell it as what it is: a campaign that turns your client's conversion data into multichannel reach — and turns your agency's setup discipline into the moat.

CHAPTER 02

Scope it like an operator

Most PMax failures are scoping failures. The campaign was fine; the budget was too thin, the goal was vague, or the client expected leads on day three. Scope the engagement before you touch the platform.

One goal per campaign

Pick the single conversion that pays the client — a booked estimate, a scheduled consult, a completed checkout — and make it the campaign's primary goal. Secondary actions (calls, form starts) can be tracked, but don't let them share primary status. Every extra goal you mark primary dilutes what the algorithm optimizes toward.

Budget math you can defend

A useful rule of thumb: set the daily budget at 5–10× the client's target cost per lead, and commit to six weeks minimum before judging. If a plumber's acceptable cost per booked job is $60, that's $300–600 a day at the aggressive end — or, more realistically for local, a $1,500–3,000 monthly spend with expectations set accordingly. Under roughly $1,000 a month the system rarely gets enough conversions to learn; say so before you take the money.

MONTHLY AD SPEND	FIT	WHAT TO TELL THE CLIENT
Under $1,000	Poor	Start with Search; build conversion history first.
$1,500–3,000	Workable	Single-location lead gen; six-week learning window, judged at 60 days.
$3,000–10,000	Good	Room for multiple asset groups and real testing.
$10,000+	Strong	Segment by service line or location; value-based bidding pays off here.

The expectations talk

Have it before launch, in writing. The learning period is real: expect noisy results for two to three weeks, stabilization around weeks four to six, and meaningful optimization after that. Agree now on what "working" means — cost per booked appointment, not clicks — and put the first review call on the calendar for day 30. Clients rarely churn over slow starts they were warned about. They churn over surprises.

RETAINER MATH

Price management as a flat fee or a percentage of spend with a floor — never a pure percentage on small accounts. Your setup work is the same whether the client spends $1,500 or $15,000.

CHAPTER 03

Track everything through HighLevel

This chapter is where HighLevel agencies have an unfair advantage. PMax is only as smart as the conversions you feed it — and you already own the system where real conversions happen: forms, calendars, calls and pipeline stages, per client, per sub-account.

Track outcomes, not clicks

The default mistake is importing "page view" or "button click" as a conversion. Google will happily optimize toward cheap clicks from people who never book. Instead, define conversions at the moment of real intent: a submitted form, a booked calendar slot, a qualified inbound call. Wire each client's funnel so those events flow from the sub-account into Google Ads — via the native integration where available, or a webhook-to-conversion pipeline where not.

Close the loop with offline conversions

The real unlock is offline conversion tracking. Capture the `gclid` on every lead form, store it on the contact record, and when the opportunity moves to "appointment held" or "closed won" in the pipeline, send that conversion back to Google with a value attached. Now the algorithm isn't optimizing toward form fills — it's optimizing toward the leads that became revenue. Few competing agencies bother. It shows in their results.

Calls count — if you score them

For local clients, half the conversions are phone calls. Use tracking numbers per campaign, record and score calls in the sub-account (duration is a weak proxy; a quick qualified/unqualified tag is better), and push only qualified calls back as conversions. One junk-call conversion teaches the algorithm to find more junk calls.

Attribution the client can read

Keep UTM discipline absolute — every PMax ad tagged, every contact stamped with source. Then your client report writes itself from the pipeline: spend in, appointments out, revenue attributed. When the client can see "Google ads → 14 appointments → $22,000 in closed work" inside the same system they use every day, the retainer conversation gets very short.

BUILD IT ONCE

Turn your tracking setup into a snapshot: form fields, workflows, pipeline stages, webhook wiring. Every new PMax client becomes a deploy, not a project.

CHAPTER 04

Assets that win for local clients

Google assembles your ads from parts, so the parts are the product. Weak assets cap the whole campaign — no bid strategy rescues a bad headline. The good news: local service creative doesn't need to be fancy. It needs to be specific.

Headlines and descriptions

Supply the full quota: short 30-character headlines, long 90-character ones, and descriptions that each stand alone (Google pairs them unpredictably). Lead with the outcome and the locality, not the feature. "Same-week AC repair in Mesa" beats "Licensed HVAC professionals." Fold in proof where you have it — years in business, review count, guarantee — and end descriptions with a direct call to action: book, call, get the quote.

Images

Real beats stock, every time. A slightly imperfect photo of the client's actual crew, storefront or finished work outperforms a polished stock image that looks like every competitor's ad. Get landscape, square and portrait crops of each; keep text off the image; make the subject obvious at thumbnail size. Build a simple intake step in onboarding that collects 10–15 usable photos before launch.

Video, even rough video

If you supply no video, Google auto-generates one from your images — and it will be generic. A 15–30 second vertical clip of the owner saying who they help and what to do next, shot on a phone, is enough. Hook in the first five seconds, design for sound-off with captions, keep the brand visible throughout. One decent video per asset group changes how much YouTube and Discover inventory the campaign can win.

Test on a calendar, not a whim

Review asset performance ratings every two weeks; replace what Google marks "Low" and clone what earns "Best." Refresh images monthly and rotate seasonal offers — a spring tune-up angle for HVAC, a year-end promo for a med spa. Keep a shared asset log per client so anyone on the team can see what's been tried and what won.

MEMBER EXAMPLE — ILLUSTRATIVE

An agency running PMax for a garage-door client replaced stock imagery with 12 phone photos from the install crew and added one 20-second owner video. Same budget, same targeting — cost per booked estimate dropped by roughly a third over the following six weeks.

CHAPTER 05

Audience signals from first-party data

Audience signals are suggestions, not targeting. You're telling Google's AI "people like this convert," and it uses that as a starting point before expanding on its own. The stronger your starting point, the shorter and cheaper the learning period — and your clients' HighLevel contact lists are the strongest starting point there is.

Start with customer match

Export the client's past customers — better, their best customers, filtered by closed-won value or repeat purchases — and upload the list as a customer match audience. A few hundred emails of proven buyers tells the algorithm more than any interest category. Refresh the list monthly; a stale list drifts.

Layer, don't pile

Add website visitors, then one or two in-market segments that match the service ("home improvement," "cosmetic procedures"), plus obvious demographics if the business skews hard one way. Stop there. Ten stacked signals don't focus the AI — they blur it. A tight signal set plus clean conversion data beats an elaborate one every time.

Segment where it earns its keep

Separate asset groups by service line when the audiences genuinely differ — emergency repair versus planned remodel attracts different people with different urgency. Give each its own signal set and creative. Don't segment a small budget into slivers; below about $3,000 a month, one focused asset group usually outperforms three starved ones.

Mind the privacy line

Upload only data the client collected with proper consent, honor opt-outs, and stay away from sensitive categories. Beyond compliance, it's positioning: you're the agency that builds durable first-party-data assets for clients while competitors chase third-party workarounds that expire.

Measure signals the same way you measure everything else: cost per qualified conversion by segment, reviewed monthly. Expand what works, cut what doesn't, and write down the winning combinations — they transfer surprisingly well between clients in the same niche.

CHAPTER 06

Automation with guardrails

The agencies that lose accounts to PMax are the ones at the extremes: micromanagers who fight the automation daily, and absentees who set it and forget it. The job is neither. You define the boundaries; the machine works inside them.

Set the boundaries up front

- **Target CPA or ROAS** on every campaign once it has conversion history — the ceiling the AI must respect.
- **Brand exclusions** so PMax doesn't spend the budget winning the client's own name.
- **Location and content exclusions** — service-area edges, placements that don't fit the brand.
- **Budget caps and pacing rules**, especially in the first month.

Automate the watching, too

You can't eyeball 20 client accounts daily, so alert instead: automated rules or scripts that flag a conversion-rate drop over 20%, a spend spike, a cost-per-conversion drift past the agreed ceiling. Route the alerts where your team actually lives. The goal is a system where silence means healthy.

Know the red flags

Act quickly on: sudden conversion cliffs (check tracking before blaming the campaign — it's tracking half the time), spend concentrating on low-quality placements, lead quality sliding even as volume holds, and learning periods that restart because someone edited the campaign daily. Most fixes are input fixes: better conversion data, refreshed assets, a corrected goal.

Keep the human layer

Automation handles auctions; it doesn't know the client extended their spring promo or stopped serving one suburb. Sync campaign settings with business reality on a monthly cadence — promos, seasonality, capacity. An HVAC client who's fully booked for two weeks doesn't need more leads this week; they need the budget shifted to the service line with open capacity.

OPERATOR'S TAKE

Your value to the client isn't pulling levers Google automated away. It's judgment: knowing which boundary to set, which alert matters and when the machine needs new inputs.

CHAPTER 07

Optimize and scale across accounts

One client doing well is a win. Twenty clients on the same repeatable framework is a business. The framework has three parts: a review rhythm, a scaling rule and a playbook that compounds.

The review rhythm

Weekly during each account's first month, bi-weekly once stable. Same four numbers every time: qualified conversions, cost per qualified conversion, spend pacing and asset ratings. Check performance by time of day, day of week and geography quarterly — local businesses often have sharp patterns worth bidding around (evenings and weekends for home services is a classic). Resist daily tinkering; every significant edit can restart learning.

The 20% scaling rule

Scale only after 30 days of stable or improving cost per conversion. Raise budget 20%, hold for 7–10 days, check the numbers. Stable? Another 20%. Slipping? Step back and diagnose before touching budget again. Walk client budgets up on evidence and the renewal conversation handles itself — "we scaled from $2K to $5K and cost per appointment held" is the strongest retention sentence in the business.

Optimize for value, not volume

Once offline conversions flow (chapter three), assign real values: a booked consult worth $80, a closed remodel worth $1,200. Switch mature campaigns to value-based bidding and let Google chase revenue instead of lead count. This is where the same spend starts producing visibly better clients for your client.

Compound the playbook

Every experiment's outcome goes into a shared playbook, organized by niche: winning headline patterns, signal combos, budget curves, seasonal calendars. Your tenth roofing client should launch in days with the ninth client's lessons baked in. That accumulated pattern library — plus your snapshot from chapter three — is the actual product your agency sells.

MEMBER EXAMPLE — ILLUSTRATIVE

An agency standardized its PMax delivery: one snapshot, one review cadence, one scaling rule. Time per account dropped from six hours a month to two, which is the difference between capping at eight ad clients and comfortably running 25.

CHAPTER 08

Troubleshoot and save the retainer

Every account dips eventually. What separates agencies that keep clients from agencies that lose them is speed of diagnosis and quality of communication — usually in that order.

Diagnose in order

When performance drops, check in this sequence — it's ordered by how often each is the culprit:

1. **Tracking.** Did a form change, a domain move or a workflow edit break the conversion path? Verify a test lead flows end to end.
2. **Recent edits.** Big changes restart learning. Check the change history before theorizing.
3. **The business.** Seasonality, a paused promo, a competitor's aggressive offer, the client's own reviews dipping.
4. **Assets.** Fatigued creative, "Low" ratings piling up, an expired offer still running.
5. **Signals and placements.** Audience drift, junk placements absorbing spend.

Communicate before they ask

If your alerts (chapter six) fire, the client should hear from you before they notice anything. "We caught a dip Tuesday, traced it to a broken form after your site update, fixed it, and volume is recovering" builds more trust than a flawless month. Silence during a dip is how retainers die.

Recover deliberately

Fix the root cause, then resist the urge to change five things at once — you'll never learn what worked, and you'll restart learning again. One correction, a stabilization window, then reassess. If lead quality is the complaint, tighten call scoring and audience exclusions before touching budget. If volume is the complaint, check impression share before assuming the campaign is broken; sometimes the market just got expensive and the honest answer is a budget or offer conversation.

Prevention is a weekly 15-minute pass per account: alerts reviewed, search themes scanned, asset ratings checked, one line logged. Small, boring and it catches nearly everything early.

OPERATOR'S TAKE

Clients don't fire agencies for dips. They fire agencies for not knowing why, not saying so and not having a plan. Own all three and dips become credibility.

APPENDIX

The pre-launch checklist

Run this before every launch. If any box stays empty, the campaign isn't ready — no exceptions for friendly clients or end-of-month deadlines.

SCOPE

- [ ] One primary conversion goal defined and agreed with the client in writing
- [ ] Budget meets the minimum for the goal (chapter two table) with a 60-day commitment
- [ ] Expectations talk done: learning period, review dates, definition of "working"

TRACKING

- [ ] Conversions fire on real outcomes (booked appointment, qualified call) — test lead verified end to end
- [ ] gclid captured on forms and stored on the contact record for offline conversions
- [ ] Call tracking live, with a call-scoring step in the sub-account
- [ ] UTM convention applied to every final URL

ASSETS & SIGNALS

- [ ] Full headline and description quota written; each line stands alone
- [ ] Real client photos in all three crops; at least one 15–30s video with captions
- [ ] Customer match list uploaded; one or two in-market segments layered — no more

GUARDRAILS

- [ ] Brand terms, service-area edges and unwanted placements excluded
- [ ] Automated alerts set: conversion drop >20%, spend spike, CPA past ceiling

- [ ] Day-30 review call on the calendar before launch

THIS GUIDE IS THE FREE VERSION OF US

Get unstuck faster

Everything in this guide gets easier with the people and tools behind it. Nexus Hub is the community for HighLevel agencies ready to scale, optimize and connect.

01 Weekly Q&A sessions — bring your stuck point, leave with a plan

02 Exclusive snapshots & templates — including tracking builds like chapter three

03 Premium partner deals on the tools you already pay for

04 A private community of operators who've already solved your problem