Google Ads A/B testing explained: three rules for testing AI Max, budgets and Smart Bidding

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Short answer: on 19 November 2026 Google published an Ads Decoded episode on A/B testing in Google Ads, summarised in three rules: start from templated experiments, measure qualified business outcomes over four to six weeks, and match your confidence level to the size of the decision. Google frames experimentation as the way to validate AI Max features, budget shifts and Smart Bidding strategies. The advice is practical, and it also shows what Google considers acceptable evidence.

TL;DR The short version

- Google's 19 November 2026 Ads Decoded episode gives three rules for A/B testing in Google Ads.
- Start from templated experiments that change one variable with a 50/50 split, measure qualified business outcomes over four to six weeks, and match confidence to the size of the decision.
- Extend tests for long sales cycles, and use experiments so you adopt automation on evidence rather than because it is new.

Read online, listen to it, or change the text size: https://blogs.iictp.org/google-ads-ab-testing-experiments-ai-max-explained

What is A/B testing in Google Ads?

The Experiments tab lets advertisers run a controlled comparison between a campaign and a modified copy. In the episode, Ads Product Liaison Ginny Marvin spoke with product leads Sagar Shah and Al Nevarez about testing AI Max, budget changes and Smart Bidding.

The three rules Google gives

- **Start with templated setups.** Pre-built templates isolate a single variable, split traffic 50/50 and reduce setup mistakes.
- **Focus on business outcomes.** Measure qualified conversions, not shallow proxies, and allow four to six weeks to account for conversion lag.
- **Match confidence to decision scope.** An 80% confidence level suits directional changes; reserve 95% for major structural changes.

Why these rules make statistical sense

- A single changed variable lets you attribute the difference to it.

- Conversion lag means early data under-counts sales that close later, so ending a test early biases the result.
- A lower confidence level accepts a higher chance of a false positive, which is reasonable when a change is cheap to reverse, and not when it is not.

Limitations and open questions

- The post is a summary of a podcast episode and does not show example data or power calculations.
- Four to six weeks may be too short for long sales cycles; extend it for B2B.
- Experiments inside one platform cannot see effects outside it, such as brand or organic changes.

How to run a clean test, step by step

1. State one hypothesis and one metric before you start.
2. Use a template that splits traffic 50/50.
3. Pre-decide the confidence level and minimum run time.
4. Do not change the campaigns in the test while it runs.
5. Record the result, including negative results.

What it means for performance marketers

Experiments protect you from adopting automation because it is new. Pair them with your own conversion quality checks, and see Squoosh UX-1 and simulated A/B tests for a research view of forecasting test outcomes.

Frequently asked questions

- **How long should a test run?** Google suggests four to six weeks to account for conversion lag.
- **What confidence level should I use?** Google suggests 80% for directional tweaks and 95% for major structural changes.
- **Can I test AI Max this way?** Google says experiments are how to validate AI Max, budget shifts and Smart Bidding.

Related reading

- Ads in Google AI Mode
- Invalid Traffic Overview Card
- How to evaluate an LLM application
- Certified Technical Practitioner

Sources and currency

Sources were read on 23 November 2026. Products, rules and standards change, so check the linked originals before you rely on any detail.

Related credential: Certified Technical Practitioner. Explore the exam facts and syllabus.

Sources and further reading

1. Google Ads. Build strategic A/B tests to grow your ad performance (Ads Decoded). 19 November 2026. blog.google/products/ads-commerce/ads-decoded-ab-testing.

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