

A paid media agency audit can feel like two different things, depending on who is looking at the report. For the person paying the bill, it is often a mix of relief and frustration: relief because someone finally dug into the data, frustration because the findings can read like a autopsy, full of what went wrong and light on what to do next. For the agency, the same audit can be a chance to prove it can move from diagnosis to treatment.

The difference between a report that gathers dust and one that changes performance is not the sophistication of the charts. It is the agency's willingness to translate insights into decisions. Not vague "optimize targeting," not generic "improve creatives," but specific actions with clear ownership, timelines, and success criteria.

Below is how I recommend turning paid media agency audit results into practical work, without losing momentum or burning budget on changes that do not matter.

## **What a good audit output should enable**

Before you go line by line through the findings, clarify what the audit is meant to produce. A strong paid search agency audit should help you answer questions that directly affect spend and outcomes.

If an audit identifies wasted spend, you need to understand where it is coming from and which lever will stop it. If it finds tracking gaps, you need a plan for fixing conversion attribution before you change bidding. If it flags creative fatigue, you need to know which audiences and placements are showing decay and whether the issue is creative, offers, or landing page alignment.

In practice, I treat the "value" of an audit as its ability to reduce ambiguity. After the meeting, the client and the ppc management company should share the same map of the system: where data is trustworthy, where it is broken, what campaigns are actually driving results, and what constraints are preventing better performance.

That is why audit results should almost always include three elements: evidence, impact, and recommended action. When any one of those is missing, you are looking at commentary rather than a tool.

## **Start with a short alignment step, not a deep spreadsheet dive**

The fastest path to decision making is to start with alignment. Too many teams jump straight into a spreadsheet of ROAS by ad group and never reach agreement on what the business is trying to optimize.

A paid advertising agency can improve performance quickly, but only if the performance definition is consistent. During an audit, I usually see a mismatch between what the dashboard reports and what the business wants. For example, a client may care about booked revenue or qualified leads, but the campaigns are optimized to something else entirely, like "all conversions" that include low quality signups.

So the first action is to confirm the goal and the measurement hierarchy. You do not need a long workshop. You need a crisp agreement on:

- Which conversion actions represent real business value
- Which ones are "supporting metrics" that should not drive optimization
- Whether there are offline conversions and how they are integrated
- What time lag to expect for conversion windows and attribution

Once that is clarified, the audit becomes actionable because it is clear what "better" means. Otherwise you can spend weeks fixing things that do not move the business metric you actually care about.

# Categorize findings by what type of problem they are

A recurring issue with audit reports is mixing strategy, execution, and measurement problems into the same bucket. That creates chaos, because different problem types require different rhythms and decision processes.

In my experience, the cleanest approach is to sort findings into a few categories, even if the report itself does not explicitly do it.

## 1) Measurement and tracking issues

If tracking is unreliable, every optimization becomes guesswork. Common audit findings here include incomplete conversion tagging, duplicate events, missing parameters for call tracking, broken CRM integration, or inconsistent deduplication logic.

The action is usually not to “optimize harder.” The action is to fix instrumentation. If you change bidding or budgets while the measurement system is unstable, you can end up optimizing to ghosts, especially when conversion volume is low or skewed by attribution glitches.

## 2) Structural and targeting issues

These are the issues you can often fix quickly with campaign and ad group adjustments. Think of overbroad keyword matching causing irrelevant traffic, audiences layered in a way that excludes your best users, geographic targeting that does not match sales coverage, or ads not aligned with query intent.

A paid media agency audit might show, for example, that branded search is doing most of the heavy lifting while non-brand performs inconsistently. The structural insight is not just “brand is good.” It is often about cannibalization, budget allocation, and whether non-brand is set up to match intent at the landing page level.

## 3) Bidding and budget constraints

Sometimes performance is limited by the way budgets and bidding strategies interact with your conversion volume. An audit might reveal that a campaign is starved for impressions because budgets are capped, or it is losing efficiency because you switched bidding modes without enough conversion history.

These insights lead to actions like budget staging, moving from manual to automated bidding with guardrails, or adjusting shared budgets and portfolio structures to reduce learning disruptions.

## 4) Creative and landing page alignment

Creative fatigue and offer mismatch can show up as declining click-through rate, rising bounce, or “conversion rate collapse” after a period of stability.

The key here is to identify whether the issue is creative relevance, creative quality, or landing page friction. If you swap ads without looking at the landing page, you may just move the same problem to a different step in the funnel.

## 5) Process and governance problems

This is the hidden category, and it is where many ppc management agencies either win or lose long term. Audits might show that no one owns negative keyword hygiene, that ad approvals stall for weeks, or that experiments are not documented, so learnings do not accumulate.

Governance problems rarely show up in charts directly, but they show up as slow reaction time and inconsistent experimentation.

If you categorize findings like this, you can plan work in the right order. Measurement first, then structure and targeting, then bidding and budgeting, then creative and landing pages, and finally governance.

## Turn findings into a prioritized action backlog

Once you have categories, you need prioritization. The trick is to prioritize not by how interesting the finding is, but by how much it can change performance within realistic constraints.

I like to prioritize using three dimensions:

- Expected impact on the business metric (not just CTR or CPC)
- Time to implement
- Risk of making performance worse if the change is wrong

For example, fixing conversion tracking may have high impact and high urgency, but it could carry implementation risk if your developer pipeline is overloaded. Reworking keyword structure may have moderate impact with low risk. Testing new landing pages may have high impact but longer timelines and dependencies on content.

This prioritization approach prevents a common trap: doing quick wins that do not change the outcome, while the major constraint remains intact. Many accounts look “busy” after an audit even when results stall, because teams keep iterating on low leverage areas.

If your paid search agency is performing the audit, you should expect the deliverable to include a prioritized backlog, even if it is described in prose rather than a formal project plan. If the audit only lists issues and does not translate them into a work sequence, you will spend the next quarter re-litigating priorities.

## Choose the right order of operations

This is where audits often fail in execution: they recommend multiple changes at once. When everything changes, it becomes impossible to know what worked.

A paid media agency that turns insights into action typically follows a strict order of operations that protects measurement and learning.

Here is the order I see work best in real accounts:

First, resolve tracking and data integrity. Second, fix structural problems that directly affect traffic quality. Third, adjust bidding and budgets based on reliable conversion signals. Fourth, run controlled creative and landing page tests where you can attribute improvement to the change.

If you invert that order, you can end up training automated bidding on faulty data or spending budget on irrelevant clicks that you could have blocked earlier with negative keywords and better match types.

## A practical “what to do first” checklist

Use this as a short internal filter when reviewing your audit action plan. If the agency’s recommendations do not cover these items, ask why.

1. Confirm conversion definitions, deduplication, and attribution settings
2. Verify tracking quality across major ad accounts and landing page variants

3. Identify wasted spend sources like poor keyword match behavior or irrelevant audiences
4. Establish a controlled testing approach for creative and landing pages
5. Set a governance cadence for negatives, budgets, and reporting reviews

That checklist is simple, but it forces the audit to become operational rather than academic.

## **Make every action specific enough to execute**

“Optimize your campaigns” is not an action. It is a request for work, not a direction for outcomes.

After an audit meeting, I want to see the recommended actions written in a way that someone can execute without guessing. That usually means the action statement includes what changes, where it changes, and what success looks like.

For instance, an audit might say:

- “Non-brand ad groups show high CPC but low conversion rate.”

That is true, but not actionable by itself. The next layer should specify, for example:

- Which ad groups (by theme)
- Which keyword match types or search terms are driving poor quality traffic
- Whether the landing page mismatch is content or form friction
- What the target metric should improve, like qualified conversion rate or cost per qualified lead

When a pp c agency or paid media agency provides action items with those details, the client can confidently approve changes, and the agency can start executing quickly.

A related point: ask how the agency plans to isolate variables. If they want to change bids and landing pages at the same time, you need a plan for attribution. Otherwise, you cannot learn.

## **Use baselines and leading indicators, not hope**

Audits often show historical underperformance. That is helpful, but it can also create a psychological pull toward drastic changes. The problem with drastic changes is they can reset learning and slow signal accumulation.

A more effective approach is to set baselines and monitor both leading indicators and lagging outcomes.

Leading indicators might include search term quality distributions, click quality (lower CTR is not always bad, but quality can show in conversion rate per click), impression share trends, and conversion rate changes after tracking fixes. Lagging indicators might include cost per qualified conversion, pipeline contribution, or offline conversion rates once CRM matches settle.

When I see a paid advertising agency execute well after an audit, they are not staring at a single metric. They are tracking a small set of signals that can indicate whether the direction is right within days, then confirming with the conversion metric after enough volume accumulates.

If you only watch lagging outcomes, you tend to overreact to short-term noise. If you only watch leading indicators, you risk “optimizing for clicks” rather than results.

## **Require an experiment plan, even for “optimizations”**

Some changes are not experimental, like excluding obviously irrelevant search terms or fixing conversion tracking. But many high leverage actions are experiments in disguise: new ad copy, new bidding approach, new landing page layout, new audience segmentation.

You should ask your paid media agency to treat these as experiments with guardrails. That does not mean every test needs a long methodology. It means you define:

- The hypothesis (what you expect and why)
- The test units (ad groups, keywords, audiences, landing pages)
- The budget and timing boundaries
- How you will declare a winner, and what happens if performance declines

This is where many paid search agencies lose trust. They run changes and then report results, but they cannot explain what learning occurred. With an experiment plan, learning becomes cumulative.

## **A compact way to structure experiments**

You do not need a full research protocol. A good agency will still be able to describe the basics clearly in conversation. I look for an approach like:

- “We will test two creatives against the same audience and placements, with a stable bidding strategy for two weeks, and we’ll evaluate cost per qualified lead, not only CTR.”
- “We will move a subset of non-brand keywords from one match type structure to another, while holding budget constant, then we’ll apply negatives based on search term performance.”

If the agency cannot describe the experiment boundaries, they are likely to make it hard for you to trust the results.

## **Address edge cases that can derail the plan**

Audits often focus on the average case. Real performance has edge cases that matter.

Here are a few that I frequently see derail “audit to action” plans if no one accounts for them.

First, conversion volume can be too low for certain optimizations. If you switch to a fully automated bidding strategy without enough conversion events, the algorithm may struggle. The audit might recommend that switch anyway, but the action plan should consider ramp time and interim measurement.

Second, seasonality and lead time. If the business has a long sales cycle, a change in ad performance may not translate into pipeline immediately. A good paid media agency audit should acknowledge these lag effects, especially when deciding what “success” means within a short audit implementation window.

Third, landing page dependencies. If landing page improvements require engineering resources, the schedule can slip. In that case, it may be smarter to run creative tests and keyword refinements first, while treating landing page changes as a parallel workstream.

Fourth, account learning resets. Major structural changes can reset learning in automated campaigns. Even if those changes are “correct,” they can temporarily reduce performance. A good ppc management agency will stage changes to avoid unnecessary resets.

The audit should surface these realities. The action plan should respect them.

## Define roles and ownership, so work does not stall

After an audit, teams often assume the agency “owns” execution. In many cases, they do own the campaign management. But clients still own critical inputs: access, approvals, landing page changes, CRM mapping, offline conversion feeds, creative sign off, and offer alignment.

If ownership is unclear, you get a predictable pattern: campaign changes pause waiting for approvals, then the business metrics miss deadlines, then expectations shift again. That is how audit energy turns into frustration.

In practice, I recommend making ownership explicit for the highest impact dependencies. Even without a formal RACI chart, you need to know who is responsible for each action item and when it is due.

This is also where paid advertising agencies vary. Some are comfortable coordinating cross-functional work and communicating trade-offs. Others focus narrowly on ad account changes and push the rest back to the client. If your goal is to turn audit results into real performance, choose the agency that can manage the whole loop, or at least be transparent about what they cannot do.

## What “good reporting” looks like after the audit

A final test of whether an audit is truly useful is how reporting changes afterward.

Good post-audit reporting is not a longer deck with more charts. It answers: what changed, what we expected, what happened, and what we learned.

You should expect weekly or biweekly check-ins early on when changes are still ramping. The agency should also report on implementation status, not just performance outcomes. If the audit recommended conversion tracking fixes and they are still pending, the reporting should say so clearly.

Also, ask for reporting that connects actions to outcomes. If the agency changes negative keywords, the next report should show how query quality shifted. If they test creative, the next report should show which ads performed better and why, not just that “CTR improved.”

That level of specificity is what you get from a paid media agency that treats audit insights as a working plan rather than a one-time deliverable.

## Common failure modes, and how to avoid them

I have seen the same set of failure patterns in accounts after audits. Recognizing them early helps you keep momentum.

One failure mode is “everything gets changed at once.” That makes results ambiguous and invites argument about causality. Another is “tracking fixes get delayed.” When measurement is unstable, optimization becomes unreliable. A third failure mode is “creative is treated as the only lever.” If structural issues and audience targeting are wrong, better copy can temporarily mask the problem but not solve it.

The best mitigation is discipline: change in sequence, measure changes, and document the decisions. When your team can tell a coherent story about why performance moved, you are in control. When you cannot, you are reacting.

A good ppc management company will help you avoid these traps by keeping the plan structured and by explaining trade-offs in plain language.

# Bringing it all together: the action loop

Turning audit insights into action is not a one-time event. It is an ongoing loop:

Diagnose, decide, implement, measure, learn, and refine.

The audit gives you the diagnosis. The real work starts when you convert findings into a prioritized backlog with clear ownership and specific execution details. Then you protect learning by sequencing changes and tracking both leading indicators and business outcomes. Finally, you adjust based on what the experiments and optimizations reveal.

If you treat the audit report like a map rather than a verdict, you get results. And if your agency can move from evidence to execution with enough specificity that your team can confidently approve and support the plan, the audit becomes the beginning of improvement, not just a list of problems.

If you are hiring or evaluating a pay per click agency or paid search agency, pay attention to [paid media buying](#) this: the best teams do not just explain what they found. They explain how they will turn those findings into a measurable set of actions within a defined timeline, while protecting tracking accuracy and learning. That is what makes paid media management feel less like guesswork and more like a craft you can trust.