



Google Ads Demographic Targeting: The 2026 Audit Checklist

Use this 12-point scorecard to evaluate your active campaigns. Stop wasting budget on manual exclusions and align your demographic strategy with modern Smart Bidding algorithms and privacy standards.

Phase 1: Setup & Observation Checks

- **Observation First:** Are demographic segments in new campaigns (under 30 days old) set to "Observation" rather than "Targeting"?
- **Unknown Segment Retention:** Is the "Unknown" category active across all campaigns to ensure machine learning algorithms aren't starved of discovery data?
- **PMax Signal Check:** In Performance Max campaigns, are your demographic insights properly loaded as "Audience Signals" rather than treated as hard exclusions?

Phase 2: Performance & Budget Analysis

- **Volume Validation:** Do you have at least 30–90 days of conversion data before judging the performance of a specific age or gender bracket?
- **Revenue over CPA:** Are you evaluating demographic success based on downstream pipeline value (ROAS/LTV) rather than just initial Cost Per Acquisition (CPA)?
- **Cross-Platform Alignment:** Do the top-performing demographic segments in Google Ads match your First-Party CRM data and Meta Ads insights?

Phase 3: Smart Bidding Alignment

- **Eradicate Manual Adjustments:** Have you removed all partial manual bid modifiers (e.g., -20% or +15%) on demographics in campaigns using Target CPA or Target ROAS? (*Smart Bidding ignores these*).



- **Value-Based Bidding (VBB):** Instead of manual bids, are you using "Conversion Value Rules" to assign higher values to your most profitable demographic segments?
- **Hard Exclusions (Only When Necessary):** Are exclusions (-100%) applied *only* to demographics that are mathematically proven to yield zero ROI or violate business compliance?

Phase 4: Privacy & Creative Fit

- **Consent Mode Compliance:** Is Consent Mode v2 actively running to model conversions for users who opt out of demographic tracking?
- **Enhanced Conversions:** Are Enhanced Conversions configured to securely pass First-Party hashed data back to Google, improving demographic accuracy?
- **Creative Match:** Does the ad copy and landing page messaging directly speak to the specific pain points of the demographic segment driving the most value?