



AI Max Guardrails Playbook

Your copy-paste toolkit for negatives, checklists, UI paths, and monitoring plans.

- ⚠️ Here's what nobody's telling you: AI Max is mandatory now, but most accounts burn **20-50% of their budget in week one** without these guardrails. Deploy it the same week.

Section 1: Guardrails Blueprint

1.1 Negative Keyword Starter Pack

Add these as a shared negative list at the account level, applied to all AI Max campaigns. Mined from real AI Max search terms reports. Blocks the most common waste patterns.

Jobs / Careers (12)

careers, jobs, hiring, employment, resume, apply, career, work at, intern, internship, salary, recruiter

Free / DIY / Cheap (12)

free, diy, tutorial, how to, make your own, homemade, template, sample, freebie, downloadable, pdf, cheap

Complaints / Research (10)

review, reviews, scam, sucks, complaint, problem, issue, ripoff, alternative, vs

Competitor / Marketplace (8)

amazon, ebay, walmart, target, etsy, reddit, [competitor 1], [competitor 2]

Generic / Off-Intent (10)

used, rental, lease, repair, fix, near me, locations, hours, login, customer service

Geo-Confusion (audit-driven)

If your campaign targets a city whose name overlaps with a product descriptor (e.g., "Beach", "Bay", "Garden", "Park", "Lake", "River"), apply EXACT-match negatives at the campaign level for specific collisions you observe.

SKU / Dimensions

Block as EXACT for known patterns, PHRASE catch-alls for the shape (e.g., "x [number] inch", "series [number]").

Off-Product / Sister-Product

If you sell windows, expect AI Max to bid on doors, siding, roofing. Block adjacent categories you don't sell.

Non-English (verify first)

Block non-English queries as PHRASE — only after confirming zero conversions on those terms in 90-day data.

1.2 Brand Exclusion Setup

Pre-Existing Brand Leakage (do this first)

Before enabling AI Max, pull 90 days of search terms across your Non-Brand campaigns and filter to anything containing your brand stem. In most accounts, **15-35% of NB spend is already leaking on brand-shaped queries**. Build a shared negative list of every brand variant (full name, no-space, misspellings, possessives, plurals, "{brand} {product}" combos) and apply to all NB campaigns.

⊗ AI Max amplifies this leak — fix it before turning AI Max on, not after.

Step-by-Step Setup

1. Google Ads → select AI Max campaign
2. Campaign settings → Brand exclusions → Edit
3. + Add → enter branded terms + common misspellings (e.g., nike, nikee, nke)
4. Save and verify in the auctions insights report: Brand-on-brand overlap should drop below 5% within 7 days.

× Campaign settings

Optimize your campaign with AI Max

Asset optimization Text customization turned on

Brands Use brand settings to ensure your campaign meets your branded traffic needs. You can add up to 20 brand lists across your brand inclusions and exclusions. [Learn more about brand settings](#)

Brand inclusions
Your ads will only show on searches that match your keywords and mention selected brands, including related products and services. Brand inclusions will limit search traffic, so apply only necessary brands.

🔍 Add brand lists

Brand exclusions
Your ads won't show on searches that mention selected brands or related products and services. If you exclude and include the same brand, only the exclusion will work.

🔍 Add brand lists

Cancel Save

1.3 URL Approval List

Whitelist 7-10 LPs. Google's URL expansion crawls your full sitemap and picks "semantic matches" – the only way to control it is to lock the list.

Sweet Spot: 7-10 URLs

Fewer than 7 starves AI Max and forces all traffic to one hub page. More than ~12 dilutes signal and lets AI Max route to weaker pages.

Include These Paths

/product/[sku], /collections/[category], /checkout, /thank-you

Exclude These Paths

/blog, /careers, /about, /contact, /privacy, /terms

Setup

Asset group → Final URL options → "Only send traffic to URLs you've added" → paste whitelist.



Verification

At 24 and 48 hours post-launch, pull the AI Max URL report. Confirm zero clicks landed on excluded paths. If any did, your exclusion isn't matching – typical causes: trailing slash mismatch, capitalization, query parameters. Always use "URL contains" match type, not "URL equals".

X Add URL exclusions

URL exclusions

Enter URLs or create rules to exclude non-commercial pages or sections of your website

URLs	Custom labels	Rules	
URL	contains	<input type="text"/> And	1 selected Clear All
			URL contains /blog and URL contains /about and URL contains /career  
Add			

1.4 Asset / Creative Locks

Stop Google from generating off-brand creative.

01

Navigate to Assets

Asset groups → Edit → Assets tab

03

Pin Descriptions

Pin 2 descriptions ("Fast ship. Trusted brand. Shop now.")

05

Disable Auto-Gen

Disable "Auto-generated assets" in campaign settings

02

Pin Headlines

Pin 3 headlines (e.g., "Buy [Product] | 20% Off Now")

04

Set the Ratio

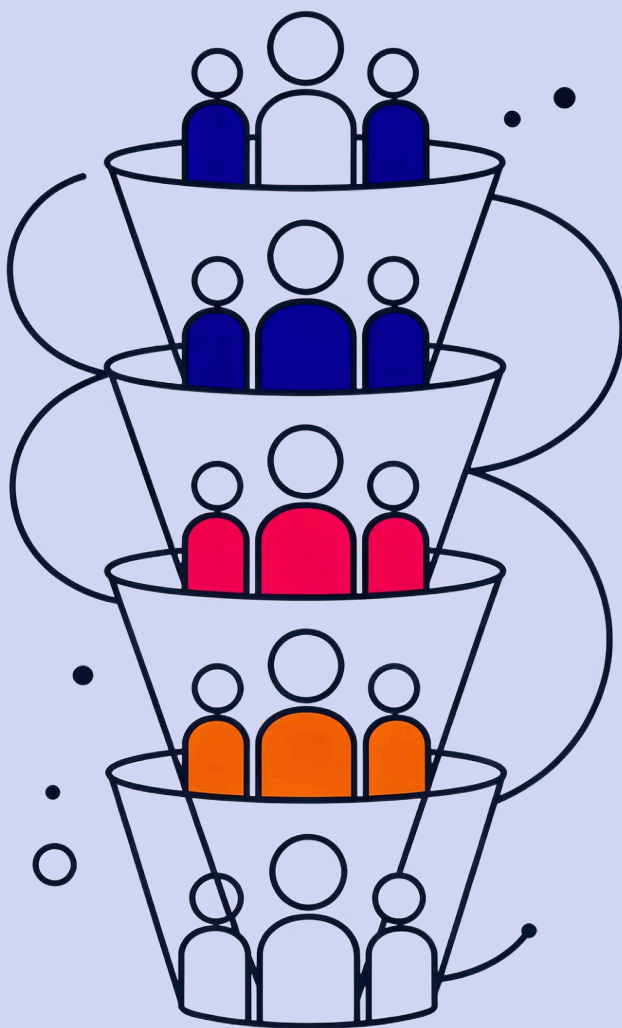
~70% pinned, ~30% dynamic

06

Experimental Group

Allow auto-gen only for one experimental asset group, after 30 days of clean data

 Pinning controls which approved text appears. It does not stop AI from generating new headline/description combinations from your assets. For that, use Text Guardrails below.



1.5 Audience Signal Guardrails



First-Party Remarketing

Add 2-3 first-party remarketing audiences (past converters, cart abandoners) as audience signals.



Customer Match Lists

Layer in a few customer-match lists if available for stronger signal quality.



Keep Signals Tight

AI Max will expand off your signals, so a small high-quality seed beats a sprawling generic one.

1.6 Text Guardrails (AI Max Text Guidelines)

This is the layer most accounts skip. AI Max recombines your approved assets and generates new headlines and descriptions you never wrote. Without text guardrails, expect:

Fabricated Prices

"\$99 [product]!" when you sell at \$750

Fabricated Percentages

"60% off!" when your sale is 25%

Fabricated Warranty Terms

"Lifetime Warranty" when yours is 10-year

Competitor Brand Mentions

Unfavorable comparisons you never approved

Off-Tone Language

Clickbait, ALL CAPS, false urgency, non-English

Two Key Inputs in AI Max UI

- **Term Exclusions:** single words/short phrases, max 25
- **Messaging Restrictions:** full-sentence rules, max 40, 300 chars each

Where to Mine Your Guardrails

Pull all RSAs from the last 90 days, dedupe headlines and descriptions. The words/claims that appear **0 times** across your live creative ARE your text guardrails.

1.6A Term Exclusions (max 25)

Format: single words or short phrases. Customize per brand. The 25 slots break out roughly as:

Price-Positioning (6-7 slots)

cheap, cheapest, discount, bargain, wholesale, lowest price, guaranteed lowest

Compliance / False Claim (3-4 slots)

lifetime warranty, forever warranty, risk-free, 100% off

DIY / Self-Serve (1-2 slots)

DIY, do it yourself

Off-Product / Off-Service (2-4 slots)

[repair term], [parts term], [adjacent product you don't sell] — fill from your category

Competitor Brands (5-7 slots)

[top 5-7 competitors in your market]

Marketplace / Big-Box (2-4 slots)

Amazon, eBay, Home Depot, Lowe's, Walmart, Target — only those relevant to your vertical

⚠ Total ≤ 25. Don't pad — every slot should be a term you've confirmed appears 0 times in approved ad copy.

1.6B Messaging Restrictions (max 40)

× Add text guidelines

Text guidelines BETA

Tell Google AI the rules it needs to follow when it creates relevant, on-brand headlines and descriptions for you.
[Learn more about text guidelines](#)

[Copy guidelines from existing campaign](#)

Term exclusions (0/25) ⓘ

For example: Cheap, free shipping, etc. Press Enter after each word or phrase.

Messaging restrictions (0/40) ⓘ

0 / 300

0 / 300

0 / 300

[+ Add another restriction](#)

Format: full sentences in "Don't [action], such as [example]" structure. Generic 30-rule template; 10 slots remain open for brand-specific additions.

Pricing Rules

- Don't use specific dollar amounts or monthly payment figures – promotional pricing changes frequently.
- Don't invent specific percentage discounts. Use only percentages from the campaign's active asset library.
- Don't promise specific savings figures – variances are user/order-specific.

Brand Voice Rules

- Don't use specific years-in-business numbers. Use "since {year_founded}" or "for decades".
- Don't fabricate review counts or star ratings. Only repeat ratings exactly as they appear in approved ad copy.
- Always reference the company as "{exact brand name}". No abbreviations, possessives, or articles in headlines.

Operational Claim Rules

- Don't promise delivery/installation faster than "{standard timeline}".
- Don't reference any warranty/guarantee other than "{exact warranty name}".
- Don't promise instant or same-day "{quote / consultation / response}".
- Don't claim brand serves regions outside "{actual service area}".

Competitive Rules

- Don't mention any competitor brand name or manufacturer/provider in the category.
- Don't mention marketplace or big-box retailers.
- Don't reference specific competitor pricing or pricing comparisons.

Compliance Rules

- Don't claim "{specific performance claim}" without qualifier.
- Don't write "free {product}" or "free {service}" as a standalone offer without context.
- Don't make health, safety, or efficacy claims.
- Don't claim "100% satisfaction guarantee" unless the brand has an actual money-back program.
- Don't reference government grants, veteran discounts, or income-qualified programs unless confirmed active.
- Don't promise specific energy/time/cost savings percentages – use directional phrasing.

Format / Tone Rules

- Don't use clickbait or sensational framing: "shocking", "you won't believe", "weird trick", "secret", "exposed".
- Don't write headlines or descriptions in ALL CAPS or use multiple exclamation points.
- Don't use false urgency tied to dates that aren't real sale end dates.
- Don't include phone numbers in headlines or descriptions – they belong in extensions.

📌 10 slots remain open intentionally for brand-specific additions surfaced during the first 30 days of monitoring.

Section 2: Minimum Viable Thresholds

2.1 Conversion Volume by Bid Strategy

Industry-tested floors. Below these, the algo guesses.

Bid Strategy	Min Conv / 30 Days	Notes
Target CPA	30	Start tCPA 20% above historical
Target ROAS	50	Needs accurate value tracking
Maximize Conversions	15	Volume play, no targets
Max Conversion Value	30	Value tracking required

2.2 Spend Floor

\$50


Daily Minimum

Per campaign minimum spend to generate enough auction entries for the algo to learn.

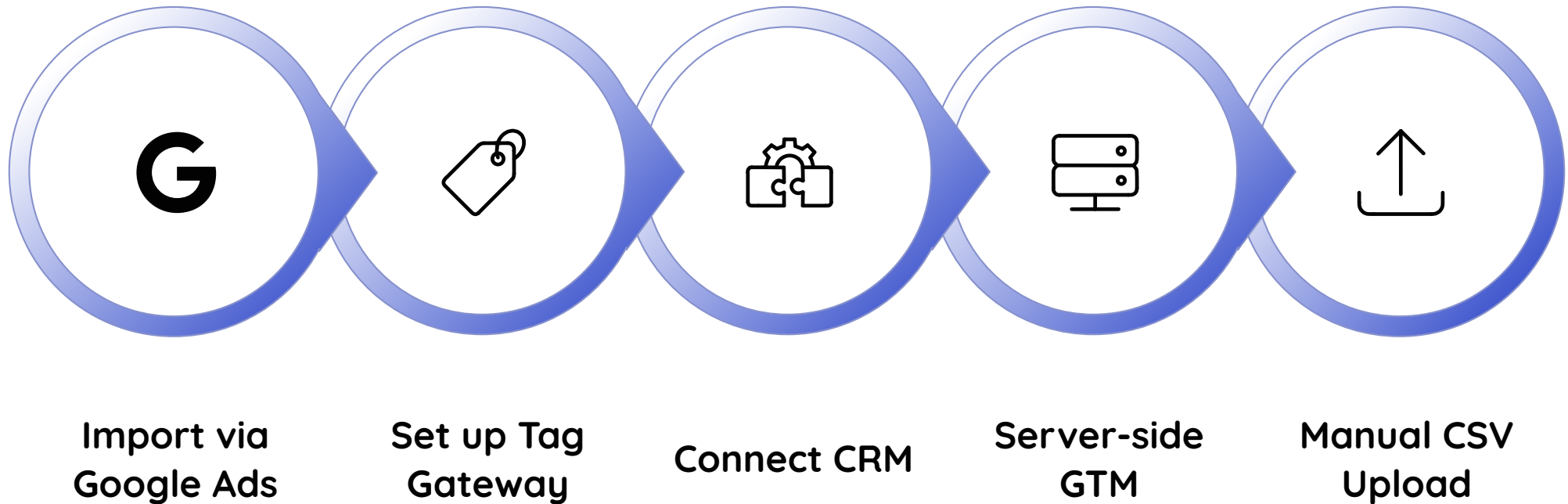
\$1K

Monthly Threshold

If you're at less than \$1k/month aggregated, hold off on AI Max entirely.

 Volume matters more than raw spend – what you need is enough auction entries for the algo to learn.

2.3 Offline Conversion Data Setup



Verify imports in the Conversions report within 7 days. Supported CRM integrations include Shopify, HubSpot, Salesforce, and Zapier. For blocked pixels, use server-side GTM with OCI endpoint. Manual fallback: weekly CSV upload (gclid, conversion name, value, time).

2.4 Smart Bidding Pre-Flight Checklist

1

Conservative Targets

tCPA +20% / tROAS -20% vs historical

2

Learning Budget

15-day learning budget ringfenced

3

Offline Data Verified

Active in Conversions report

4

No Manual Overrides

No manual CPC overrides during learning period

5

Volume Threshold Met

Historical 30 conv/30d threshold confirmed

2.5 When NOT to Enable AI Max

⊗ If any of these conditions apply, do not enable AI Max until they are resolved.



Insufficient Conversions

Less than 15 conversions per 30 days



No Value Tracking

No conversion value tracking if using tROAS



Low Daily Spend

Less than \$50/day campaign spend



No Offline Pipeline

No offline data pipeline configured



Mid-Seasonal Ramp

Wait until baseline stabilizes before enabling

2.6 Measurement Guardrail — "All Conversions" Trap

AI Max defaults to reporting "all conversions", which includes engaged page views, click-to-call taps that don't produce a measurable lead, scroll events, and other soft signals. **None of these are revenue.**

The Problem

- Engaged page views counted as conversions
- Click-to-call taps with no measurable lead
- Scroll events and other soft signals
- Inflated CPA / ROAS metrics

The Fix

- Override the default Conversions column to show **hard conversions only** (form fills, qualified calls per CRM, purchases, signed quotes)
- In monthly reporting, disclose the all-conv : hard-conv ratio
- If ratio is greater than 5x, you have soft-event inflation
- Use hard conversions exclusively when computing CPA / ROAS for decision gates

Section 3: Copy, Keywords & LPs

3.1 Headline / Description Lock Templates

Pin these (adapt to brand):

Headline 1

"Buy [Product] Now"

Headline 2

"[Brand] [Product] — On Sale"

Headline 3

"Free Shipping on [Product]"

Description 1

"Order today. Fast delivery. Shop [Brand]."

Description 2

"Best [Product]. Limited stock. Buy now."

3.2 URL Expansion Controls

1 Enable Whitelist Mode

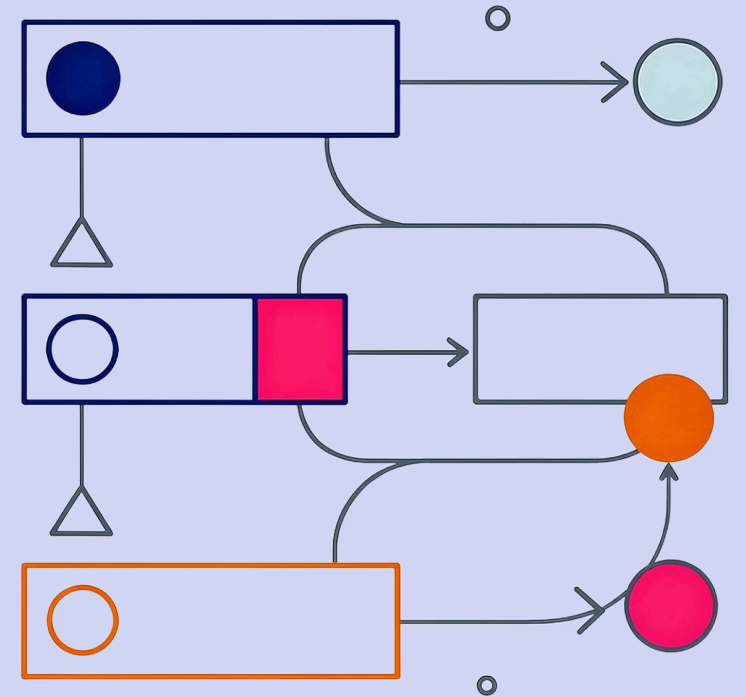
Asset group → Final URL → whitelist mode. This is your primary control lever for URL expansion.

2 Bulk Edits via Editor

Use Google Ads Editor for bulk URL edits across asset groups — much faster than the UI for large accounts.

3 Add Site-Level Negatives

Add `site:yourdomain.com/careers` style negatives if expansion is leaking to unwanted paths.



3.3 Search Term Insights Workflow

Daily (First 14 Days)

- Reports → Predefined → Search terms (last 7 days)
- Filter: spend > \$5, conversions = 0
- Add 10–20 negatives per session

Weekly (Post-Stabilization)

- Same workflow, lighter cadence
- Watch CTR < 2% and conv rate < 1% as kill signals

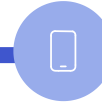
ⓘ Mining tip: Filter by AI_MAX match type (`segments.search_term_match_type = 'AI_MAX'`) to isolate AI Max-generated queries from your existing match-type traffic. This is the highest-signal report for negative-list refinement.

3.4 Landing Page Audit Checklist



Load Time <3s

Verify with PageSpeed Insights before launch



Mobile-First

Fully responsive design required



Clear Primary CTA

Above the fold, no ambiguity



Headline Matches Ad Theme

Message match between ad and LP



No Popups or Redirects

No interstitial redirects that break tracking



Conversion Event Firing

Confirmed on thank-you page

⚠️ Exclude from URL whitelist if thin (<500 words) or non-commercial.

Section 4: Scale Checklist

4.1 Pre-Launch Audit

Run through every item before going live. No shortcuts.

Negatives & Exclusions

- Shared negative list applied
- Brand exclusions active
- Pre-existing brand-leakage diagnostic complete (90-day NB scan)
- URL whitelist set (7-10 LPs)
- URL exclusion list set (~20 patterns)

Assets & Creative

- Asset locks (3 headlines / 2 descriptions pinned)
- Auto-generated assets disabled
- Term exclusions set (≤ 25 in Text Guidelines)
- Messaging restrictions set (≤ 40 in Text Guidelines)

Measurement & Bidding

- Conversion column overridden to hard-conv only
- 30 conv / 30d threshold met
- Offline data flowing (test import verified)
- tCPA/tROAS set conservative

Technical

- Sitemap scrubbed of /careers, /privacy, etc.
- \$10 test budget run for 24h before scaling

4.2 First 14 Days Monitoring Plan

Days 1-3 (Daily)

1

- Search terms report → add 10-20 negatives
- Asset performance → pause auto-generated junk
- CPA vs historical (acceptable: $\pm 20\%$)

2

Days 4-7 (Daily)

- URL placement report → 90%+ on whitelisted LPs
- ROAS trend stabilizing
- Offline imports confirmed in Conversions report
- Brand exclusion working (auction insights)
- Sample 10 served headlines/descriptions — confirm zero violations

Days 8-14 (Every 2-3 Days)

3

- Auctions report → brand overlap <5%
- Conversion volume ramping toward learning exit
- Negative list growing weekly
- Pause if CPA >2x historical at day 10
- Begin cautious tROAS tightening (5%) if stable

4.3 Path to AI Overviews Inventory

Criteria You Need to Meet

AI Max Enabled

Campaign must be running on AI Max

10+ Days Stable Learning

Algorithm needs time to exit learning phase

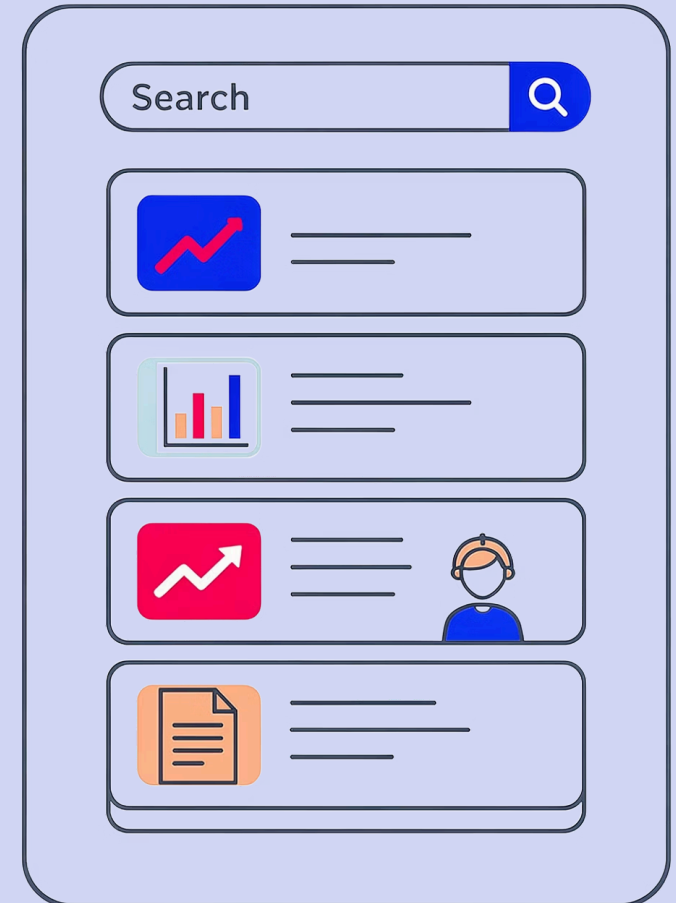
50+ Conversions

Sent through smart bidding signals

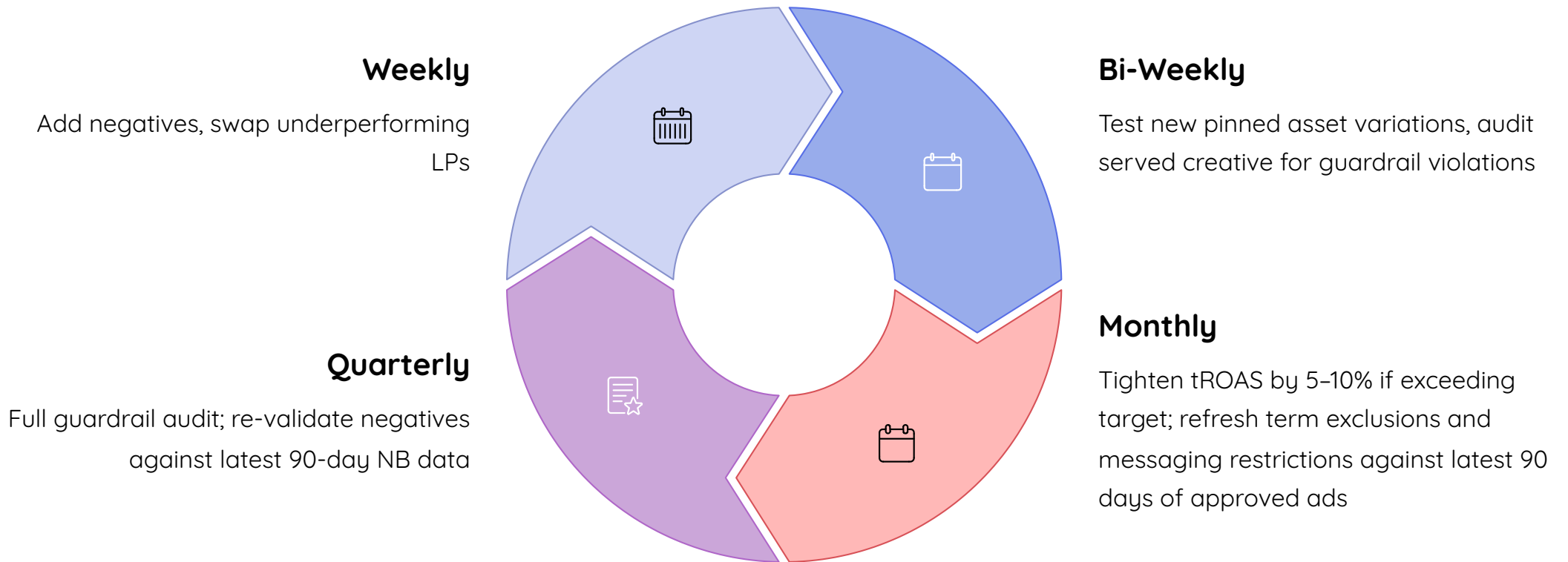
Clean Guardrails

Asset and URL guardrails verified clean

i Verify: Placement report → look for "Search partners" and AI surface impressions. If they're not appearing within 14 days, audit guardrails for over-restriction.



4.4 Performance Optimization Cadence



4.5 Red Flags / When to Pause

CPA >2x Historical at Day 7

Algorithm is not converging — immediate review required

20%+ Spend on Negative Categories

Guardrails are not working — audit shared negative list

Bounce Rate >80%

On AI Max-driven traffic — LP mismatch or poor URL routing

No AI Overview Impressions After 14 Days

Over-restriction in guardrails — loosen and re-audit

Conversion Volume Declining Week Over Week

Learning regression — check for recent changes that disrupted signals

Served Creative Violates Exclusions

Any term in your exclusion list or messaging restriction violation

⊗ If any **two** of these hit simultaneously, pause and migrate 50% of budget back to exact match while you fix the guardrails.



Next Steps

Run the pre-launch audit against one campaign this week. Don't wait — every day without guardrails is budget at risk.

Step 1: This Week

Run the pre-launch audit checklist against your first AI Max campaign. Deploy the shared negative list and brand exclusions before anything else.

Step 2: Days 1-14

Follow the monitoring plan daily. Add negatives aggressively. Watch CPA vs historical and pause if it hits 2x at day 10.

Step 3: Get Expert Help

Reach us via scaledon.com/contact-us and type "ai max" in the **What can we help you with?** section if you want a direct account review.

— Iulia, ScaledOn