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USER ACQUISITION GUIDE

The Media Buyer's Playbook

Prep, test, optimize, scale, the system that works

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What is inside

If you can launch a campaign but you are not sure why some win and most die, this guide is for you. Launching is the easy part. The skill that pays is knowing what to test, when to kill it, and how to pour budget into a winner without blowing it up. That is the difference between someone who runs ads and a media buyer who scales them.

I have spent more than twelve years buying traffic across a lot of accounts and a lot of spend, and the thing that separates the people who last is a system. Not a secret audience, not a magic creative, a repeatable process they run every single week. This playbook is that process, broken into four stages: prep, test, optimize, scale. Work it in order and your results stop being random.

CHAPTER 1

The four stage workflow

Every account I have ever run well follows the same loop. You set up to win, you test small to find signal, you optimize what is working, then you scale it carefully. When results dip you do not panic, you walk back up the stages and find where the loop broke. Most junior buyers skip prep and jump straight to launching creatives, then wonder why nothing converts. The money is made in the boring parts.

The loop I run on every account

Stage	Goal	What you actually do
Prep	Set up to win before spending	Research the market, pick the offer, write angles, build tracking, set targets
Test	Find signal cheaply	Launch small structured tests, one variable at a time, collect enough data to judge
Optimize	Cut waste, feed winners	Kill losers on rules, reallocate budget, refine audiences and placements
Scale	Grow spend without breaking performance	Raise budgets slowly or duplicate, protect the learning phase, watch unit economics

Notice that three of the four stages happen before you are pumping real money. Beginners spend ninety percent of their attention on scale because that is where the big numbers are. Professionals spend most of theirs on prep and test, because scale is just the reward for getting those right.

> **RULE OF THUMB**
>
> You cannot scale your way out of a bad offer or a weak angle. If test results are mediocre, go back to prep. Do not throw budget at a campaign hoping volume fixes a math problem.

CHAPTER 2

Prep: research, offer, and angle

Prep is where you decide what you are selling, to whom, and why they should care. Get this wrong and no amount of clever bidding saves you. I spend real hours here before I build a single ad. The goal is to understand the market well enough that your creative feels like it was made by someone inside the customer's head.

Start with the offer. A strong offer solves a painful, specific problem for a specific person, and the math works: the customer is worth more to the business than it costs to acquire them. If those two things are not true, stop and fix the offer before you touch the ad platform. You are a media buyer, not a magician.

Then do the research. I want to know how the best prospect describes their problem in their own words, what they have already tried, what they are afraid of, and what a win looks like to them. Good sources: reviews of competing products, support tickets and sales call notes, community threads, and the language customers use in surveys. Collect the exact phrases. Those phrases become your headlines.

- Who is the sharpest buyer for this offer, described specifically, not just women 25 to 54
- What painful problem does the offer solve, in the customer's own words
- What are the top three objections that stop them from buying
- What proof do we have that the offer works, testimonials, numbers, guarantees
- What does the competition promise, and where is the gap we can own

CHAPTER 3

Angles: the real unit of creative testing

Here is the idea that changed my results the most. You are not testing creatives, you are testing angles. An angle is the core argument for why this person should buy: the specific problem, promise, and emotional hook behind the ad. The image, the hook line, the format, those are just expressions of an angle. Ten ads built on the same tired angle will all lose together. One fresh angle can carry an account for months.

So structure your creative work around angles first, executions second. For any offer I can usually brainstorm five to ten distinct angles. Examples for a budgeting app: save without feeling deprived, get out of debt faster, stop the anxiety of not knowing where your money went, look responsible to your partner, hit a specific goal like a house down payment. Each of those speaks to a different motivation.

1. List five to ten distinct angles, each a different reason to buy or a different emotion
2. For each angle, write two or three hooks, the first line or first three seconds that grabs attention
3. Produce a few executions per angle, different formats, images or video, but keep the argument constant
4. Test at the angle level first: find which argument resonates before you polish the execution
5. Once an angle wins, pour your production effort into more variations of that angle

RULE OF THUMB

When an account plateaus, ninety percent of the time you need a new angle, not a new audience. Audiences are broad and the algorithm finds people. Fresh angles are what re engage a market that has seen your pitch already.

CHAPTER 4

Test: structured testing that gives clean answers

A test only teaches you something if you can trust the result. The two ways juniors ruin tests are changing several things at once and judging too early. Fix both and your testing becomes a machine that reliably tells you what works.

Change one variable at a time. If you swap the angle, the audience, and the budget in the same test and results improve, you have no idea which change did it, so you cannot repeat it. Hold everything constant except the thing you are actually testing, usually the angle or the hook.

On budgets: fund each test enough to reach a decision, not so much that a bad variant burns real money before you cut it. A practical starting point is a daily budget that lets each ad set collect enough conversions to judge within a few days. If your target cost per acquisition is 30 dollars, a test cell needs to be able to spend a few multiples of that before you can say anything, so plan for it. Do not launch twenty ad sets at 5 dollars each and expect signal, you will just spread the data too thin to read.

> **HOW MUCH DATA BEFORE YOU JUDGE**
>
> Do not make a kill or scale decision until an ad set has either roughly 50 conversions or has spent about three times your target cost per acquisition with zero conversions. Below that, the numbers are noise. As a rough significance check, you want at least 100 conversions split across two variants before you trust that one truly beats the other, and a gap under about 10 percent between them is usually noise, not a winner.

The reason for the conversion threshold is simple: conversion events are rare, so small counts swing wildly. One extra sale on a tiny sample can double your apparent conversion rate. Give the numbers room to settle. Patience in the test stage is not slowness, it is the thing that stops you from killing winners and scaling flukes.

CHAPTER 5

Kill rules: decide before you launch

Write your kill rules before the campaign goes live, when you are calm and not attached to any ad. In the heat of a launch you will invent reasons to keep a loser alive. Predefined rules remove the emotion. A kill rule is a clear line: if this metric crosses this threshold after this much data, the ad is dead.

- Spent three times target CPA with zero conversions: kill the ad, the math will not save it
- Cost per acquisition sits 50 percent above target after 50 conversions: kill or rework
- Click through rate far below account average and cost per click high: the creative is not landing, kill it
- Strong early clicks but no conversions past your data threshold: the landing page or offer, not the ad, is the leak

Just as important, do not kill too fast. On platforms with a learning phase, cutting an ad set in the first day or two throws away the algorithm's optimization and resets your data. Respect the threshold. Kill on evidence, not on a nervous morning.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Kill rules are written before launch, in numbers, not vibes
- Two failure modes cost the most: judging too early and holding losers too long
- A no conversion problem past your data threshold usually lives on the page, not the ad

CHAPTER 6

Optimize: read the data, fix the leak

Optimization is diagnosis. Every campaign is a funnel, and each metric points to a different stage. Read them in order and you can tell exactly where money is leaking, then fix that stage instead of guessing.

What each metric is telling you

Symptom	Likely leak	Where to work
Low click through rate	Creative or angle not grabbing	New hooks and angles
Good clicks, low landing page views	Slow page or bad click experience	Page speed, ad to page match
Good traffic, low conversion rate	Offer or landing page not convincing	Offer, copy, proof, checkout
Good conversion rate, CPA too high	Paying too much for clicks	Bidding, audience, placements

Work top of funnel first. There is no point optimizing your checkout if nobody clicks the ad. Once the click through rate is healthy, move to the page, then the offer, then the bidding. Reallocate budget toward the ad sets and angles that hit your targets and cut from the ones that do not. Do this on a regular cadence, weekly for most accounts, not by staring at the dashboard hourly. Intraday numbers are noise and reacting to them is how you break the learning phase.

> **RULE OF THUMB**
> Optimize the stage with the biggest leak, not the stage that is easiest to tweak. A ten percent lift on your worst metric beats a two percent lift on your best one.

CHAPTER 7

Unit economics: your target CPA and max bid

This is the part that turns you from a button pusher into a buyer the business trusts. You need to know, in dollars, the most you can pay to acquire a customer and still make money. Everything upstream, budgets, kill rules, scale decisions, hangs off this number. If you do not know your numbers, you are gambling with someone else's money.

Start from lifetime value, the total gross profit a customer brings over their whole relationship, not just the first order. Decide the margin the business wants to keep, which sets your target return on ad spend, and back out the most you can pay per customer. Then use your funnel conversion rate to turn that into a maximum cost per click, so you know your ceiling at every level.

WORKED EXAMPLE: FROM LTV TO MAX BID

Say a customer is worth 120 dollars in gross profit over their lifetime (LTV). The business wants to keep at least half of that as profit, so it will spend at most 60 dollars to acquire one customer. That 60 dollars is your maximum CPA, and it implies a target ROAS around 2 on lifetime value. Now bring in conversion rate. If 5 percent of people who click the ad become customers, then 100 clicks buys you 5 customers. Five customers at 60 dollars of allowed spend each is 300 dollars, spread across 100 clicks, which is a maximum cost per click of 3 dollars. So: LTV 120, max CPA 60, conversion rate 5 percent, max CPC 3 dollars. If clicks are costing you more than 3 dollars, either the conversion rate has to rise or you are losing money. That single chain of math tells you whether a campaign can ever work before you scale it.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Max CPA equals LTV times the share of margin the business is willing to spend
- Max CPC equals max CPA times your funnel conversion rate
- If real CPC sits above max CPC, fix conversion rate or the offer, do not scale the loss
- Track payback period too: how long until a customer repays their acquisition cost, since cash timing limits how fast you can scale

CHAPTER 8

Scale and stay compliant

Scaling is not turning the budget from 100 to 1000 overnight. On platforms with a learning phase, a big sudden budget change resets optimization and performance tanks for days. You scale by nudging or by duplicating, and you always keep one eye on unit economics, because your cost per acquisition almost always rises as you spend more and reach colder audiences.

1. Confirm the campaign clears your target CPA with real volume before you add budget
2. Raise budget in steps of roughly 20 to 30 percent and wait for it to re stabilize before the next step
3. To move faster, duplicate winning ad sets rather than shocking one with a huge increase, so each keeps its own learning
4. Broaden audiences and add fresh angles as you scale, so you do not exhaust the same pocket of people
5. Watch CPA at every step: the moment it passes your maximum, stop scaling and optimize before pushing further

Now the part that protects your career: stay white hat. The fastest way to lose everything you built is to get accounts banned, and once you are flagged it follows you. So play it straight. Send people to the page you advertised, make claims you can back up, and follow the platform's advertising policies as written.

- Do not cloak, do not show the platform one page and users another, it is the fastest route to a permanent ban
- Do not run misleading claims, fake countdowns, or before and after promises you cannot prove, they trigger disapprovals and account reviews
- Do not farm or buy accounts or try to evade a ban, one clean account you protect is worth more than ten burner accounts
- Read the advertising policies for your platform and vertical, know the rules for restricted categories before you spend
- Keep landing pages honest and consistent with the ad, mismatch is both a policy risk and a conversion killer

RULE OF THUMB

If a tactic only works by hiding what you are really doing from the platform, it is not a strategy, it is a countdown to a ban. Build on offers and angles that win in the open, they scale further and they last.

Where to go next

This playbook is the skeleton. The muscle comes from running the loop on real campaigns, week after week, until reading data and setting kill rules feels automatic. I break down the individual pieces, angle writing, testing structures, and unit economics, in more depth on the shenshin.co blog, and if you are still getting your first campaigns live, start with my free course to build the fundamentals before you scale. Then come back to this and run the system.

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