Think with Google

The Hybrid Apps advertising playbook

Contents

The Hybrid Apps advertising playbook

In the Google advertising space, we define a hybrid app client as one that is web-first and app-second such as retail, finance and groceries apps — clients that are not app-first pioneers (e.g. a gaming or ridesharing app).

If you work at a company that fits this definition and is thinking about launching a hybrid app, or you already run one, this playbook is for you.

For the past three years, the Google team has been in hundreds of client meetings where we've answered many questions related to investing in app growth.

These questions not only sharpened our understanding of the app advertising space but also drove us to seek and analyse the comprehensive knowledge required to address them.

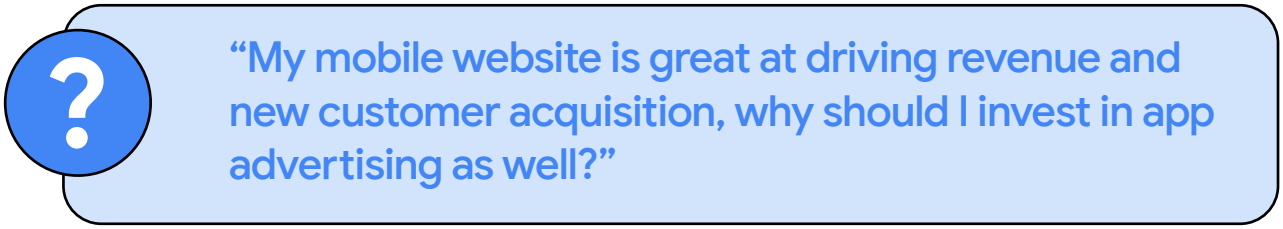
Here we're sharing the most often asked questions, and our insights to answer them.

Topic #1:

The value of App customers

If you're considering launching an app, or need facts and statistics to win over internal stakeholders, this section is for you.

We address the core strategic questions around your app's value, proving it is far more than just a mobile website mirror. From challenging the notion of web-first ROI to identifying and acquiring high-value users, here's why the app is your most powerful tool for customer retention and lifetime value.



While your mobile website can be excellent for initial discovery and acquisition, the app is a retention and Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) tool. App users show superior commitment: they convert at 2.8x the rate, spend more time, have a bigger basket size and ultimately generate a significantly higher CLV than mobile web only customers.[1]

Investing in app advertising shifts the focus from simple acquisition to acquiring the most valuable long-term customers, yielding a greater overall return on ad spend (ROAS) while having the possibility to exclude targeting your existing customers through functions like Audience Exclusions.

[1] Material Business Value of Apps Research Study, App Users (n = 2406) App Non-Users (n=2404), United States, November 2022-January 2023

“What’s the added value of having an app? I don’t have a loyalty programme, is it worth having an app that mirrors my mobile website?”

The app is meant to provide a superior user experience to the mobile website as well as additional exclusive features and benefits that are usually not available on the mobile web.

The app is an owned and operated channel for any business, once the user is acquired, a frictionless user experience, personalised content and a few exclusive benefits here and there convert and retain the acquired app users, organically and for the long run.

Unlike the mobile web, a native app offers instantaneous load times, seamless integration of device features (like fingerprint ID or face ID, Wallet payment for checkout), in-store comparison and personalised content through the higher likeliness of sharing first party data[2] and Push Notifications.

This last point is key: Push notifications are a powerful, real-time channel for re-engagement anchored in personalisation. It increases purchase frequency, making the app invaluable even without a formal loyalty programme.

[2] Material Business Value of Apps Research Study, App Users (n = 2406) App Non-Users (n=2404), United States, November 2022-January 2023

“Why should I invest in acquiring app users if what I actually need is customers?”

We agree that an install is just the beginning. That’s why Google App Campaigns utilises machine learning to optimise for high-value, post-install events like purchase or subscription.

By setting your campaign goal to a Target CPA or Target ROAS based on these deeper events, the system learns to prioritise acquiring the specific users who are most likely to convert into paying customers, ensuring your budget is focused on revenue generation, not just download volume.

“App users are expensive, how can we identify and acquire high-value users who will make repeat purchases, rather than just a one-time transaction?”

If you’re looking at an app user from a single-purchase perspective, then your concern is absolutely valid. The goal of a successful app strategy is however to acquire long term high-value customers that purchase 33% more frequently than mobile web users[3], with a higher basket size.

A brilliant way to mitigate the “expensive” factor is by leveraging predictive Lifetime Value (pLTV). Google’s Smart Bidding can be optimised for Target ROAS using your historical revenue data. This strategy targets users who are not only likely to make a purchase but are statistically predicted to make repeat purchases. Once a high-value user is acquired, you can use exclusion lists to efficiently manage your budget and ensure you are not wasting ad spend on continuous retargeting for users who are already highly engaged.

Topic #2:

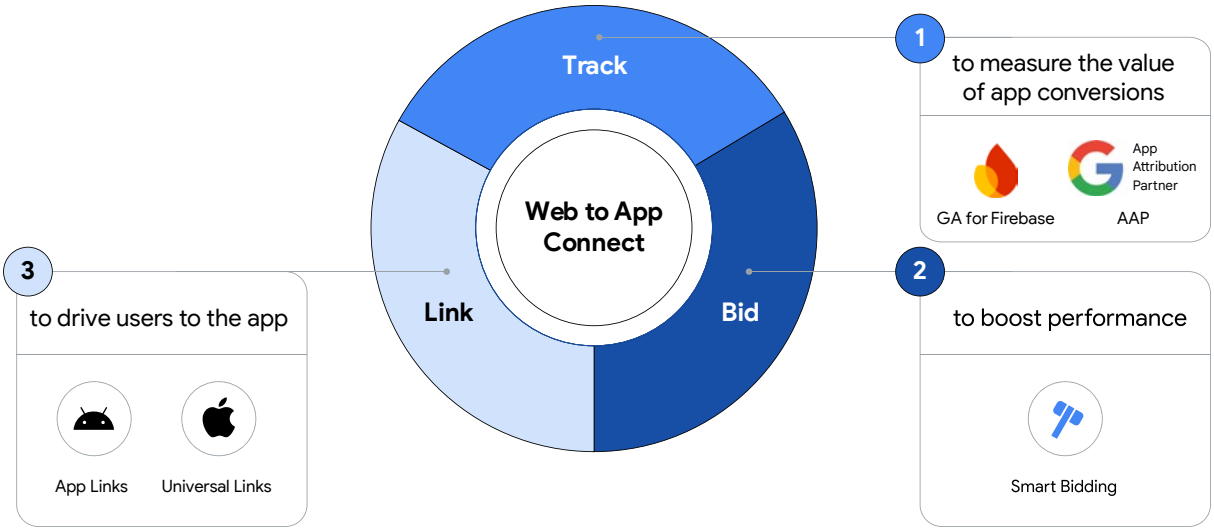
Web to App Connect

The ultimate strategic goal is to unlock the full value of web to app flywheel — driving online users to convert in your superior app environment.

Web to App Connect (W2AC) is the critical technology that makes this happen. This section explains how W2AC works, and how to measure the performance uplift it delivers.

"What is Web to App Connect and how is it related to my app media efforts?"

Web to App Connect (W2AC) is a Google Ads tool suite that enhances your mobile strategy by integrating web campaigns with your app. W2AC comprises key components: seamlessly routing users from web ads (like Search, Shopping, and PMax) into your app (via deep links), robustly tracking in-app conversions originating from web clicks, and leveraging this conversion data to optimize your bidding models. These elements work together to improve user experience and campaign performance, driving higher conversion rates and ROAS by capitalizing on the app's high-engagement environment.



To enable Web to App Connect, you'll need to do three things:

1. Implement a native app tracking Software Development Kit (SDK), such as Firebase or any of Google's App Attribution partners (Adjust, AppsFlyer, Kochava, Branch, Singular, Airbridge, Tenjin).

2. Bid on app conversion events as primary events on an account level and on a web campaign and by selecting the in-app conversion actions that you want to optimise for using your web campaigns.

3. Implement **Deep links**, mapping your website to your app, allowing users to navigate seamlessly from a web environment to an app environment. Accepted Deep Links are Universal links for iOS and App links for Android.

"How is W2AC different from the Full Value of Web and App Flywheel?"

W2AC is part of the Full Value of Web and App Flywheel (FVWA). It's a growth enabler that helps drive traffic to apps, and optimise for app conversions.

FVWA is a wider concept as it also includes app campaigns to grow the install base. This creates flywheel.

Revenue stream 1:

which refers to the direct revenue associated with an app campaign. For example: user A sees an app install campaign on Youtube, downloads the app, proceeds to purchase an item in the app within the post-install conversion window. This purchase is then attributed to the app campaign and is then considered part of Revenue stream 1.

Revenue stream 2:

refers to the revenue associated with a web campaign where the purchase was made in the app. For example: 3 months after user A had downloaded the app, they saw a search campaign for the new collection, they clicked on the search ad, got redirected to the app (due to W2AC), and purchased an item within the conversion window of that campaign. This purchase is then attributed to the search campaign and is considered part of Revenue stream 2.

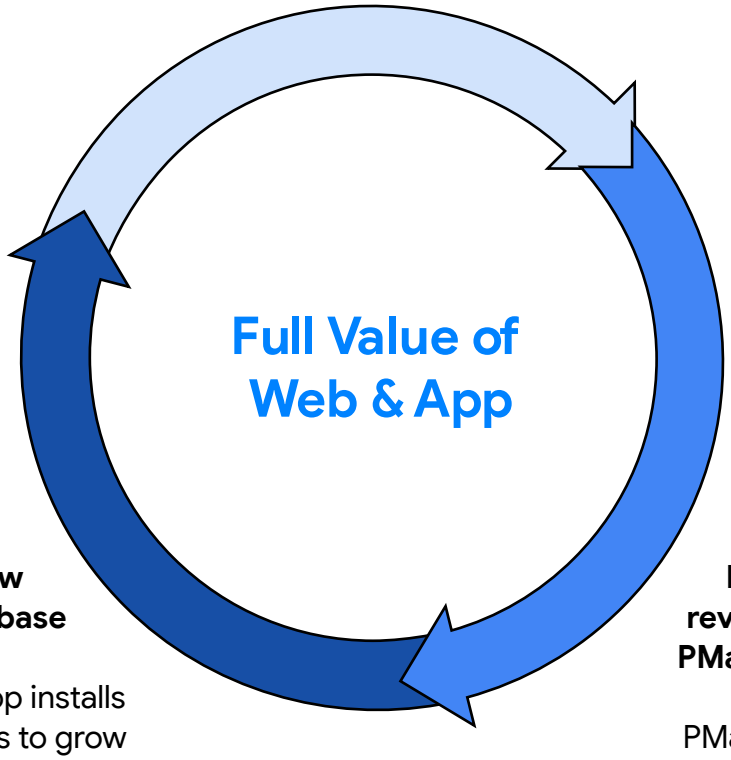
Revenue stream 1 is a means to an end, it enables a higher, more impactful revenue stream 2, the more app users you have, the higher the impact of those users on your search and pMax campaigns.

In a nutshell, W2AC enables the flywheel while growing the install base with App Campaigns fuels the flywheel.

The “Flywheel” effect

Implement
Web to App Connect

Catalyst to this flywheel



Grow
Install base

AC drive app installs & purchases to grow the app userbase & CLTV
⟶ Revenue stream 1

Direct revenue from App install and engagement campaigns

Multiply revenue from PMax & Search

PMax & Search perform twice as well when the user lands on the app as opposed to the mobile web
⟶ Revenue stream 2

Web campaigns converting better in the App.

“How can I measure the difference in performance between web users and app users on a search campaign?”

Use the Ad Destination report in the Report Editor to isolate these metrics effectively. By segmenting your campaign data by "Ad Destination," you can split your performance stats into two clear categories: traffic that was deep-linked directly into your App and traffic that was directed to your Website.

This report provides a direct, apples-to-apples comparison of key performance indicators — such as CPA, Conversion Rate, and ROAS — between your web and app users, allowing you to identify which destination yields the highest value for your spend. To generate this, navigate to Insights & Reports > Report Editor and add "Ad Destination" as a row in your custom table.

Ad destination report

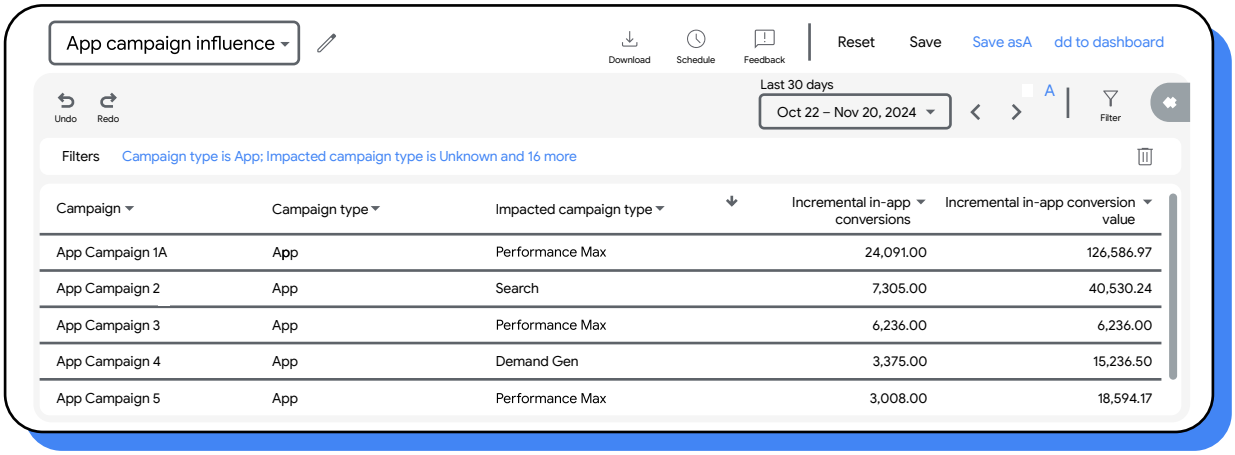
Device is Mobile phones	**Campaign type** is Search and 2 more	**Ad destination** is App deep link, Website	Conv. rate	Cost/ conv	Conv. value / cost
Mobile phones	Search	Website	6.51%	USD 2.1	29.30
Mobile phones	Search	App deep link	15.82%	USD 1.93	77.53
Mobile phones	Shopping	Website	5.93%	USD 2.24	41.21
Mobile phones	Shopping	App deep link	14.16%	USD 1.49	68.65
Mobile phones	Performance Max	Website	7.2%	USD 1.68	56.20
Mobile phones	Performance Max	App deep link	18.02%	USD 1.16	64.56

Data above is for demonstration purposes, not based on client data, but based on data trends derived from the retail industry.

“How can I know that the improved performance on my web campaigns is not coming from app users I’ve acquired organically ”

All app users will perform better on your web campaigns than your web users will[4], that is related to the fact that the app is a platform that promotes higher conversion rate, equipped to up-sell and cross sell creating a higher basket size and through the optimised experience encourages a higher engagement frequency. With that being said, all app users are valuable.

However, if your concern is to measure the longer term effect of your paid app users on your web campaigns, then there’s also a “App campaign influence” report in “insights & reports” that allows you to measure the incremental revenue generated by your acquired paid app users by tracking and linking the web performance to the app campaigns from which they were acquired, see below.



Campaign	Campaign type	Impacted campaign type	Incremental in-app conversions	Incremental in-app conversion value
App Campaign 1A	App	Performance Max	24,091.00	126,586.97
App Campaign 2	App	Search	7,305.00	40,530.24
App Campaign 3	App	Performance Max	6,236.00	6,236.00
App Campaign 4	App	Demand Gen	3,375.00	15,236.50
App Campaign 5	App	Performance Max	3,008.00	18,594.17

Data above is for demonstration purposes, not based on client data, but based on data trends derived from the retail industry.

[4] Material Business Value of Apps Research Study, App Users (n = 2406) App Non-Users (n=2404), United States, November 2022-January 2023

Topic #3:

Measurement & Data Privacy

Measurement is the most complex hurdle for hybrid app marketers, particularly with the proliferation of multiple SDKs (Software Development Kits), and the evolving privacy landscape.

This section provides clarity on multi-SDK setups, how to manage reporting discrepancies, and, most crucially, how to confidently measure iOS performance using Google's privacy-preserving solutions like SKAdNetwork and Conversion Modelling.

> **"I already have Firebase imported to Google Ads, but we also run a 3rd party native SDK in our App. What is the value of importing both?"**

The more data sources, the better the grounds covered. It is always advised to have more than one data source for many reasons, one predominant reason is to use one SDK to validate the other.

Oftentimes a broken consent setup leads one SDK to share less conversions with Google Ads, misleading the team into thinking the performance has dropped. Being able to constantly compare the observed data from both SDKs removes this risk.

One key difference between Firebase and other App SDKs is the ability to do value-based bidding through Firebase.

“Working with multiple SDKs in our measurement setup, how do we pick the right conversion events for bidding vs reporting?”

Any of the App Attribution partner SDKs are a reliable source of native app tracking and attribution to be used for bidding and/or reporting in Google Ads.

When having multiple SDKs in one account, it is important to ensure that only one of those SDKs’ purchase events are set to primary and included in the web campaigns’ bidding. Setting two purchase events as primary and including them in the bidding of web campaigns leads to double-counting of the app purchases in the reporting, especially the “Ad Destination report” that you can find on page 12 in this playbook.

With the Android and iOS purchase events from one SDK set to primary on an account level supplementing the web campaigns’ bidding, you can then choose on a campaign level which event to use to optimise your app campaigns on. Given the additional bidding functionality available within Firebase that isn’t available for other SDKs (such as tROAS bidding), it is advised to bid using your Firebase events, to train the model and collect historic data in preparation for a move towards tROAS bidding.

"With multiple SDKs in place, we're seeing differences in reported numbers. Why would SDKs report differently for the same conversion event?"

That is completely normal and to be expected, different SDKs will report different conversion count for the same event, it is due to multiple factors:

- **Different tracking methodologies:** SDKs may use different methods to track conversions, such as reporting by the day of the ad interaction versus the day of the conversion event. Google Ads reports conversions based on the day of the ad interaction (e.g., click, impression), while third-party reports may use the day of the conversion event.
- **Conversion window differences:** Conversion windows, which define the timeframe within which a click is considered valid for a conversion, can differ between Google Ads and third-party reporting systems. This can lead to discrepancies in the number of conversions reported.
- **Attribution models:** Different attribution models (e.g., last click, data-driven attribution) can lead to variations in how conversion credit is distributed, which can result in different reported conversion counts. Google Ads offers attribution models like last click and data-driven, while third-party platforms may use different models.
- **Conversion counting settings:** The "Conversion Count" setting in Google Ads (e.g., "One" or "Every") determines how many conversions are counted per ad interaction. If set to "Every," multiple conversions can be recorded per ad click, while "One" records only one conversion per click.

“Are there any differences in SDKs ability to model conversions across Android and iOS?”

The SDKs’ ability to model conversions differs significantly between iOS and Android due to the privacy regulations and the nature of the platforms. Google is implementing solutions like ICM (Integrated Conversion Measurement) and ODM (On-device Measurement) to address these challenges and provide more accurate conversion reporting, particularly on iOS.

Google Ads uses conversion modeling to bridge the gap between the observed and the non-observed conversions (or conversions where the device identifier is not shared and therefore the attribution to the ad is missing). Until ICM is implemented, modeled data in Google Ads is not shared with the third party SDK, which leads to major discrepancies between the reported conversions in Google Ads and an AAP’s dashboard.

“After importing conversion events to Google Ads we don’t see any reported events as we do for our web conversions, what’s wrong?”

The issue of not seeing reported conversions for imported app conversion events in Google Ads, despite importing the events, can stem from several factors. Here’s a breakdown of potential problems and troubleshooting steps:

- Setup of the SDK: Ensure that the conversion events are being sent correctly to Google Ads via the App Attribution Partner (AAP) program. Verify that the linking between Google Ads and the third-party provider is successful. Check that the third-party provider is sending the required information (e.g., gclid or gbraid) in the session_start event

- **Lack of data flowing in:** If your web and app are not connected through W2AC and you are not running any app campaigns, then no conversions will be attributed to Google Ads campaigns, hence no app conversions are expected to show in Google Ads.

- **Consent:** Ensure the correct consent parameters are being collected and passed to Google Ads through your SDK.

“Beyond tracking basic in-app conversion events, what else should we track to capture customer lifetime value and how can we use that data to optimise our media efforts across web and app?”

To capture true CLV, you must track engagement and quality events that precede a purchase, such as user_registration, add_payment_info, search, and content_view. Most importantly, ensure you are passing the revenue value parameter with every purchase event. Feeding this rich, high-fidelity data back into your Google Ads campaigns is essential, as it unlocks powerful Target ROAS bidding*, allowing us to optimise media spend across the web and app for maximum profit, not just volume.

By passing vital campaign identifiers such as gclid and gbraid, you can also ensure that the paid media journey from the web to the app is also captured, for example, you’ll be able to account for the app users that clicked on a search ad and ended up purchasing in the app through the implemented deep links.

By combining all app interactions by a customer in your business analysis tools, you can then segment customers into different lifetime values and adjust the bidding to bid more on acquiring higher value customers.

* Bidding on tROAS within app campaigns is only available through Firebase, whereas including app conversion events in account-level tROAS bidding on web campaigns can include other AAP events (non-firebase).

> **“We are an omnichannel retailer and have the goal to drive more foot traffic to our stores this year. Can we measure whether the app is contributing to that objective?”**

Yes! The app is often seen as the outcast from the omnichannel setup while it does tie it all together quite nicely. Besides the observed high likelihood to use the app for comparison in the store[5], you can now also measure the store traffic that was generated by users that have downloaded your app through Google’s app campaigns.

Advertisers with a physical presence know that app users are their most valuable customers: they visit stores 41% more often, spend 2x more. After implementing W2AC, advertisers see on average a 2.8x increase in Conversion Rate for clicks that land on app vs mobile website.[6] However, by not officially measuring the store visits driven by App Campaigns, advertisers miss the full picture of their investment’s value. Which is why Google Ads is gearing up to showcase the foot traffic impact from app campaigns.

Here’s an example:

- User sees ad to download the app
- User clicks and downloads the ad
- User chooses to make certain purchases through the app and save a few other items to check them in store prior to purchasing them (or to purchase them in store instead)
- User visits your store within the post-install conversion window of the app campaign
- Both the store visit as well as the purchase made in the app get attributed to your app campaign, reported on in your campaign view.

[5] EurekAlert 2019; Percentages based over 18 months after app launch
[6] EurekAlert 2019; Percentages based over 18 months after app launch

“Given the iOS changes in privacy, it no longer shares the same level of data visibility as Android, how can I be confident of the results?”

Post-iOS 14 privacy changes in 2020, confidence shifts from granular user data to aggregated, modeled measurement. We fully rely on Apple’s privacy-preserving framework, SKAdNetwork (SKAN), which provides anonymous conversion data. For the remaining gap where users opt out, Google uses conversion modeling. This sophisticated machine learning estimates the true conversion volume based on observed trends, providing a robust, statistically sound, and comprehensive view of your campaign performance.

Google has also developed On Device Measurement, a privacy-safe way of fueling the conversion modeling with quality signals relying on first party data & event data of logged in users without tracking it back to an identified user, ensuring anonymity of users that have decided to opt out of the ATT prompt by choosing “Ask app not to track”.

It is important to recognise that this change in privacy has impacted all advertisers, all advertising channels and is still in the process of being improved and optimised by Apple and Google alike. We have moved to an era of no single source of truth for iOS users, rather a portfolio of iOS features and tools that paint a better picture than the one we had back in 2020.

While advertisers and advertising partners will never have the full picture again, we all strive to paint a better, more complete picture in a privacy-safe environment, such as through the ODM and ICM enablement, more details on this in the next question.

“What happens to the data when an app user chooses to opt out of app tracking on iOS, and what alternative methods can we use to measure campaign effectiveness for those users?”

When a user opts out of the ATT prompt by choosing “Ask app not to track”, the IDFA (Identifier for Advertisers) becomes unavailable, preventing personalised, user-level tracking.

To measure these users, we rely on two key methods: SKAdNetwork (SKAN), which provides aggregated data based on their post-install activity, and Conversion Modeling. Modeling intelligently estimates conversions based on macro trends and contextual signals, ensuring you receive a complete and accurate measurement of your iOS campaign effectiveness despite the data restrictions. On-Device Measurement (ODM) is an additional set of signals by Google that fuels better, more accurate conversion modeling. For a more detailed read, check this guide on the full best practices framework for iOS measurement.

“Historically we’ve seen lower performance from iOS campaigns which led us to drop investments in iOS, why should we pick it up now?”

Ever since the update to the privacy regulations on iOS and the introduction of the ATT prompt, loss of data visibility has led to a negative impact on performance. Things have changed since that release in 2020 with the introduction of new features and tools allowing to bridge that gap and improve the performance of iOS campaigns, namely Conversion modeling, the use of SKAN and ODM (as highlighted in the previous sections of this playbook).

It is always advised that your campaigns be set up per Google's best practices to provide the algorithm with enough volume to fuel the above mentioned tools. It is also very important to measure the intrinsic value of your iOS user vs your Android user and identify what good performance looks like for each of these platforms, taking into account Customer Lifetime Value (CLV). Example: while a Cost of Acquired Customer of 10$ might be sufficient for Android, you might need to allow for a CAC 25$ for iOS should the iOS user present a CLV of 2.5X that of Android.

iOS is a massive bet that Google is determined to continue investing in. Many new features and products are being released to improve the measurement capabilities on iOS while navigating regional data and privacy regulations (such as ODM first party data and ODM event data). Such measurement improvements will result in an enhanced performance of the iOS campaigns with Google Ads and a representation of the Google Ads data across the different AAPs (example: ICM).

"How can I make sure that my app install campaigns are not targeting my existing web or store customers? We have a key objective this year to drive new customer acquisition."

The most effective method is utilising Customer Exclusion Lists. By regularly uploading a hashed list of your existing customer identifiers for your web customers for example (e.g., emails), you can apply this list as a negative audience to your App Campaigns. This tells our system to block ads from being shown to these segments, ensuring that your valuable acquisition budget is laser-focused on reaching genuine new customers and driving business growth.

With that said, we do believe that converting your web-only customers to app customers still provides immense incremental value to your business, from a higher conversion rate to a higher purchase frequency rate all the way to a higher basket size per purchase[7]. It would be unwise in the longer term to completely discard the incremental value an app user drives to a business, even through existing customers.

[7] Material Business Value of Apps Research Study, App Users (n = 2406) App Non-Users (n=2404), United States, November 2022-January 2023

"With new privacy regulations and restrictions on data tracking, how can we ensure our App SDK integration remains compliant while still providing the necessary data for effective campaign optimisation?"

Compliance begins with your integration. By using Google Analytics for Firebase, you benefit from an SDK designed with privacy in mind. Crucially, you must fully implement Consent Mode to dynamically adjust data collection and measurement modeling based on the user's explicit consent status (e.g., their choice in the iOS ATT prompt). This combination allows you to comply with regulations while maximising the data needed for effective optimisation. The same principles apply to any of our App Attribution Partners SDKs (Adjust, AppsFlyer, Kochava, Branch, Singular, Tenjin).

Topic #4:

App campaign setup, budgets, and creative excellence

With your app's value established and your measurement foundation built, the next step is execution.

This section is a practical guide to the nuts and bolts of running Google App Campaigns. We detail the three main campaign types, provide clear advice on setting budget minimums for testing and scaling, and optimising your creative assets — because in the AI-driven world of App Campaigns, the quality of your inputs dictates the quality of your output.

"What are the different types of app campaigns and how many campaigns do I need to create to ensure my ad is showing across the Google inventory?"

There are three main types: App Campaign for Installs (ACi) driving new app user acquisition; App Campaign for Engagement (ACe) driving specific user action from existing users; and App Campaign for Pre-registration (ACpre), an Android-only option for pre-launch buzz.

The major benefit of App Campaigns is that you typically only need one campaign of the required type to access the full Google inventory — Search, Google Play, YouTube, Discover, and the Google Display Network (AdMob). The App Campaign algorithm will optimise the placement of your ad across the inventories to hit your performance goals.

"How can I make sure my campaign is set up for success? What is the minimum required to run an app install campaign and an app engagement campaign?"

The foundation of a successful App Campaign is providing high-quality inputs:

1. Robust measurement: Your SDK must be fully implemented, tracking both first_open and key post-install events.
2. Clear bidding: Set a Target CPA or Target ROAS based on your business goal.
3. Diverse creative assets: Provide the minimum requirement of assets (e.g., 2 headlines, 1 description, 1 image, 1 video) , and ideally, a diverse range to cover all formats (up to 5 headlines, 5 descriptions, 20 images and 20 videos). In addition to the above, App Campaigns for engagement also require valid deep links.

"We are working towards a full omnichannel setup of our advertising, where we capture store sales and bid on web and store purchases. How does the app fit in that bidding and optimisation setup?"

Omnichannel retailers should aim to optimise sales across all their channels: web, app and store.

The app is the missing glue to fuel the online and offline conversions in the omnichannel setup. Just like the website, the app is a powerful channel that converts online demand and intent to online purchases, it is also capable of driving online demand into store visits and purchases, let's explore how.

The app ties the full online experience together: the signals and conversions captured by the app through the W2AC implementation (of deep-linking, tracking and bidding) ties the whole online journey together. Once you are web-to-app-connected, the performance of your website and mobile app fuels the bidding and targeting of your existing web campaigns (Search, pMax and Shopping), informing Google's algorithm that your customer has made an online purchase following an ad interaction, be it on the web or the app.

When we start talking about omnichannel (web, app & store) we refer to integrating the app revenue into the omni ROAS bid strategies of the EXISTING web campaigns in the account (Search, Shopping, pMax). By doing so, we align all of our sales channels to one goal: Omnichannel ROAS.

In case you are capturing dynamic store sales values or use store visits with a default value, you would include your in-app purchases in your overall Omni ROAS bidding strategy, optimising for the purchase value wherever it happens, on the web, in the app or in store.

Another way of measuring the impact of the app in driving store visits and purchases is through app campaigns for install which now offer the ability to track the store visits that resulted from an app install campaign and subsequent in-store purchases.

The app is a powerful glue between the online and offline channels, providing a seamless experience that rallies the channels around your business goal.

"How can I exclude my existing app users from seeing an app install campaign? Is there a way in the settings of the campaign to exclude them?"

Your existing app users will be automatically excluded from seeing an app install campaign across our inventory through their unique identifier (ADID for Android users and IDFA for iOS users).

With that being said, given the limited visibility of iOS IDFAs post the implementation of the ATT prompt, users that have asked the app not to track might still see your app install campaigns, that's due to the fact that Google does not have access to their IDFA and therefore cannot actively exclude it from an app install campaign audience.

“How can I target or exclude certain users with my app install campaigns?”

App Campaigns are highly automated. Your control is primarily indirect: Exclusion is done by creating and applying an Exclusion Audience list by uploading a list of your existing user IDs (or emails) or by creating an audience of users who completed the first_open event. This list is then applied as an Exclusion within the Audiences settings of your App Install Campaign.
The system will then automatically restrict ad serving to users on that list.

Targeting is guided by bidding strategy (Target CPA tells the system to find users who convert) and by providing Audience Signals (like Customer Match lists) as a seed to help the machine learning find similar high-value users. While you don’t select direct demographics or interests in app campaigns, you can influence the targeting by enriching the campaigns with audience signals.

“Can I choose where the users should land in an app install campaign? What about an app engagement campaign?”

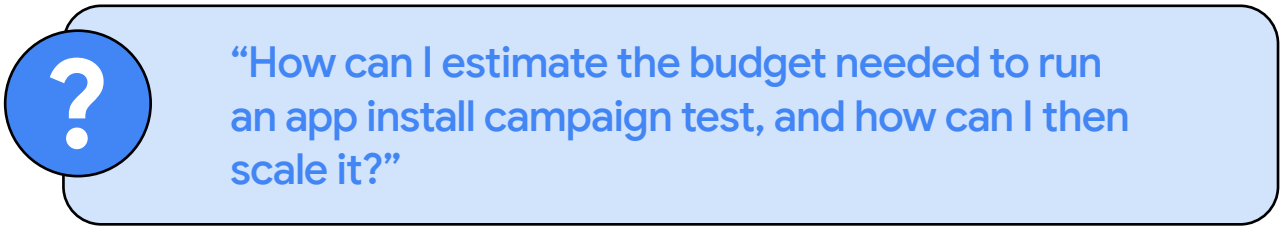
App Install Campaigns (ACi):

No. The destination is fixed to the App Store listing (Google Play or Apple App Store), as the goal is the first download. You can however choose to redirect the users to a specific in-app page post-install, by adding a Deferred Deep Link on an ad group level.

App Engagement Campaigns (ACe):

Yes. You must use Deep Links to specify a precise URL that sends the existing user directly into the relevant section of the app (e.g., a specific product page or offer) to maximise the probability of conversion.

This is also an additional advantage of having W2AC implemented as all deeplinked urls will then be possible to link to through your App Engagement Campaigns.



App Campaigns are fully AI automated and optimised. They are fueled by volume, so the faster you get a high volume of desired actions taken, the better the performance.

Test budget: To exit the learning phase and get stable results, your budget should be set to acquire at least 50 of install events (e.g., first_open) on Android per day for at least two weeks and at least 100 of install events (e.g., first_open) on iOS per day and for at least four weeks.

- **Target cost per install (tCPI):** You can apply your best judgement to estimate a healthy tCPI to start with based on how much you’re willing to pay to acquire an app user, alternatively your Google representative can advise on a healthy tCPI to set for Android based on industry and market benchmarks (we observe a CPI of ~4$ in the US and ~2$ in mainland Europe). You can then multiply it by 1.5x to 2x to estimate the iOS equivalent. A few weeks into the test you’ll be able to monitor and update your tCPI based on actuals to meet the demand.

- **Scaling:** To maintain efficiency, increase your budget gradually, using increments of no more than 15% to 20% every 3 to 5 days. Large jumps can shock the system and lead to short-term underperformance and trigger a new learning phase.

“App Campaigns are not able to promote short term offers, therefore we shift budget towards other platforms.”

Given that app campaigns are fueled by volume over a steady period of time, it is possible to advertise short-term offers by creating a specific ad group for said offer, ensuring the daily budget, tCPI/tCPA are beyond generous, and leveraging the temporary seasonality adjustment. This ensures higher conversion volume is captured, which bootstraps the algorithm for a fast learning period.

Three additional super important componen

1. Have a really good offer, worth the hype and immediate action of a user.
2. Provide the full scope of creative assets aligned with best practices.
3. Bid towards actions in those peak moments to capture the high-intent demand in a short period of time.

“We don’t have enough high-quality creative assets to run successful campaigns and don’t have time or budget to create new ones soon”

That is the struggle of most app advertisers, it’s important though to shift the focus from a few “perfect” assets to a dynamic, iterative approach that uses a variety of creative types.

- **Asset variety is key:** Diversity is key; ensure you have the minimum requirement of assets across formats (e.g., 2 headlines, 1 description, 1 image, 1 video). You can always add assets along the way either in the same ad group if they address the same topic or target audience or in a new one if they don't.

- **Dynamic creative testing:** Use App Campaigns to automatically test combinations of headlines, descriptions, images, and videos. This frees up creative resources and ensures continuous optimisation.

- **Iterate and learn:** Establish a regular feedback loop where the campaign's top-performing assets are used to inform future creative production. This moves the creative process from guesswork to a data-informed strategy.

"I want to have full creative control over my app campaigns, is this possible with app campaigns?"

No. App Campaigns are designed as an asset-based system powered by machine learning, not a fixed ad system. You upload multiple assets (up to 20 videos, 20 images, 5 descriptions, 5 headlines), and Google's AI automatically generates, tests, and optimises combinations across thousands of placements.

Your control is focussed on managing the quality and diversity of your input assets based on the Asset Report. There are multiple account and campaign level guardrails you could explore to control where your campaigns can show, please consult with your Google team to explore these, none however impact how your app campaigns will show.

To check out what the served assets look like, you can click on "View ad previews" on an asset level.

“How often should I refresh my creatives?”

Refresh creatives strategically to prevent ad fatigue. Monitor the Asset Report and prioritise replacing the lowest-performing assets (those rated “Low”) ideally twice to four times a year. It’s best to refresh incrementally, replacing a few assets at a time, rather than swapping out everything simultaneously, to maintain performance stability.

The rule of thumb is to always keep an eye out on the performance of the assets and the conversion rate from impression to action, if some time passes and your campaign is optimised from a bidding setup perspective, it would be worth taking a look at the lowest performing assets and replacing them with ones inspired by the highest performing assets.

“How many ad groups can I have for each campaign and why can’t I just put all the creatives in one ad group?”

Most campaigns perform best with multiple ad groups. You should not put all creatives into one group because Ad Groups are meant to be a structural way to isolate a specific, unified message, theme, or language.

If you have two distinct value propositions (e.g., “Free Shipping” vs. “Exclusive Content”), they should be in separate Ad Groups with corresponding creatives to allow the AI to optimise each message independently.

“We rely a lot on our product feed in our creatives, do app campaigns allow a product feed based creative solution?”

While it’s not top of mind for App Campaigns, feeds functionality is available for App Campaigns and is designed to work with your existing Google Merchant Center (GMC) feeds. This allows for the use of product feeds to expand reach and increase conversions.

An integration with GMC allows for the use of existing feeds. Feeds in App Campaigns can lead to a performance uplift, such as a 12% to 14% increase in conversions and installs.

“Google Ads is too expensive, and we don’t know if we can afford to acquire users this way.”

The focus is on a phased approach to budget allocation and proving the value of a high-quality user.

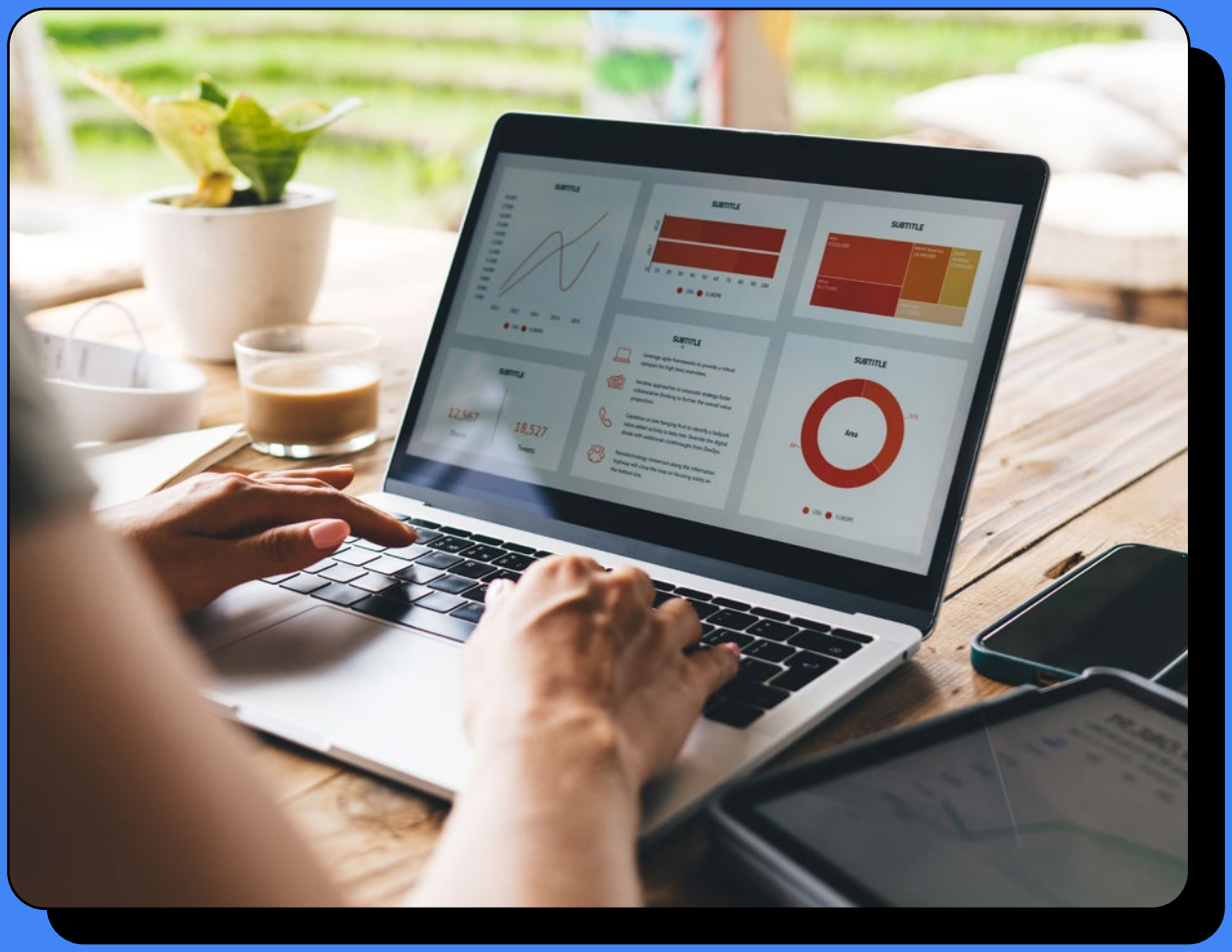
- **Phase 1: Validation (Small Budget):**
  Begin with a conservative budget targeting high-intent in-app actions (e.g., registration, adding an item to a wishlist). Use a Target ROAS or Target CPA bidding strategy to prove that Google Ads can deliver valuable users at a predictable cost.

- **Phase 2: Optimisation (Medium Budget):**
  Once validation is complete, scale the budget incrementally. Use A/B testing on creative assets and audience signals to find the most efficient combinations. Reinvest savings from performance improvements back into the campaign.

- **Phase 3: Scale (Full Budget):**
  Once the campaign consistently delivers a positive return, unlock the full budget to acquire a larger user base. Leverage Smart Bidding and audience expansion to reach a broader, yet still high-quality, audience.

Topic #5:

Media Effectiveness - do app campaigns work?



What marketers really want to know is, whether app campaigns resulted in sales that would not have happened anyway.

This section details how to definitively prove that your App Campaign spend is driving genuinely new sales and not cannibalising organic activity. We explore methods like User-Based Conversion Lift Studies (where a random set of users are intentionally withheld from seeing ads) and Geo-Lift Studies (where ads are shown in certain geographic regions but not others, to measure the difference in business results). We will also talk about other advanced techniques that prove value beyond mere last-click attribution, like MMM.

"I understand that App is another channel but it is quite complex to measure and assess in our complex web and app infrastructure. How can I measure and make sure that what I am spending on app campaigns isn't better off spent on something else like Search or even with another advertising partner?"

In today's privacy-focused marketing landscape, it's more important than ever to have a robust measurement and evaluation framework. Gone are the days of relying on a single tool to gauge success. A modern approach requires a combination of methodologies to understand both the true impact of your marketing efforts that you can find more details on in the Modern Measurement Playbook.

This is particularly relevant for your app advertising efforts.

1 Attribution: Understanding the User Journey

Attribution is the process of identifying which specific marketing touchpoint (an ad, a search, or a social post) led a user to install an app or take an action inside it. Because users rarely see one ad and immediately buy, attribution acts as the “connective tissue” that helps you understand which of your spending is actually working.

While attribution is useful for day-to-day optimisations and understanding which channels are part of the user journey, its main limitation is that it shows correlation, not causation. It can’t tell you if a user would have installed your app anyway, without the ad. This is where incrementality testing comes in. This is particularly relevant for your app advertising efforts.

2 Incrementality Testing: Measuring True Causal Impact

Incrementality testing is a scientific approach to determine the true, causal impact of your marketing campaigns. It answers the fundamental question: “How many of these app installs or in-app events would have happened anyway, without this ad campaign?” This is done by comparing a group of users who saw your ads (the test group) to a similar group who did not (the control group).

User-Based Incrementality
This is the classic approach to incrementality, where users are randomly divided into a test group and a control group. The test group is exposed to the advertising campaign, while the control group is not. The difference in conversion rates between the two groups reveals the “lift,” or the incremental impact of the campaign. This method can be used to measure the effectiveness of both user acquisition and retargeting campaigns. However, with increasing privacy restrictions, tracking at the user level has become more challenging, especially on iOS, which is why user-based incrementality testing of app campaigns is only available on Android.

Geo-Based Incrementality (Geo-Lifts)
As a privacy-friendly alternative, geo-based incrementality testing has become increasingly popular. Instead of splitting users, this method splits audiences by geographic location.

How it works: Ads are shown in certain regions (test group) while being held back in others (control group). By comparing the business outcomes in these regions, you can measure the incremental lift of your campaigns.

Advantages: This method doesn't require personally identifiable information (PII) and can be used to measure the impact of a wide range of media, including offline channels.

This test method is available for Android and iOS app campaigns.

3 Marketing Mix Modeling (MMM): The Strategic Big Picture

Marketing Mix Modeling (MMM) is a top-down, statistical analysis technique that uses historical data to quantify the impact of various marketing and non-marketing factors on your business outcomes. Including your app sales into MMM allows you to measure the effectiveness of media in driving sales via app, compared to other channels. If your media mix includes app install or app engagement campaigns, the best practice is to measure these campaigns as distinct inputs in the model and calculate their differentiated ROIs.

The most advanced marketers use these methods in a virtuous cycle. For instance, the causal insights from **incrementality tests** can be used to calibrate and validate the results in your **MMM**, making your strategic model more accurate and reliable.

By combining the granular, tactical insights from attribution with the causal proof of incrementality and the strategic overview of MMM, you can build a comprehensive measurement practice that allows you to confidently invest in campaigns that truly drive growth for your app.

"I'm getting organic app installs, how can you prove that Google Ads campaigns are driving new users who would not have installed the app organically or through another channel? I wouldn't want to pay to acquire a user I would have acquired for free"

You are right to question the assumption that every attributed install is a new one. By running a Geo-Lift or Conversion Lift study, you can move from correlation to causation and get a definitive, data-backed answer. This will show you exactly how many "new" users your Google Ads campaigns are delivering, proving their value beyond the users you would have acquired organically.

"The incrementality test did not show an uplift. Does it mean my app investments are wasted?"

A flat or inconclusive incrementality test result can be disheartening, but it absolutely does not automatically mean your app investments are wasted.

Instead, think of it as a crucial diagnostic tool. The test has given you a very specific and valuable piece of information: your current advertising strategy is not driving a measurable number of new users who wouldn't have installed your app anyway.

A "no uplift" result is not a verdict on your investment, but a signal to investigate why. Here are the most common reasons this happens and what to do next.

A flat result is rarely about a single cause. It's usually a combination of factors related to your campaign strategy, your measurement setup, or your position in the market, here are a few reasons (you can read more on these in the Modern Measurement Playbook):

1. You're preaching to the Choir
2. Organic strength is dominant
3. Measurement & Test Limitations (wrong test setup)
4. Creative or offer is not compelling
5. Market saturation

What can you do?

1. Review the Test Setup
2. Analyse Your Targeting Strategy
3. Evaluate Your Creative and Offer
4. Consider the Full-Funnel Impact

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