SoudCoh

White paper · Home services

Marketing for home services in Australia

What SoudCoh's research shows about demand, discovery, measurement and growth

White paper · September 2026

For owner-operators, growing trade companies, multi-site service brands

West Tower, Level 4/608 St Kilda Rd, Melbourne

The short version

Home-service marketing in Australia turns on three things that are easy to leave unchecked: how customers really search, what counts as an enquiry, and whether budget follows jobs or cheap leads. SoudCoh's research sample of Australian plumbers, electricians, cleaners and other trades shows that 59% of enquiries came from searches nobody chose as keywords, that the search-terms report accounted for only 52% of spend, and that 77% of advertisers told Google every enquiry was worth one dollar. This paper sets out what the data shows, what it means from owner-operator to multi-site brand, and how to run the same checks yourself.

Key findings

59%

of enquiries came from searches that were never on the keyword list

52%

of Search spend is all the search-terms report accounts for

76%

of enquiries come from mobile clicks

+92%

overstatement of real enquiries where phone taps were counted as conversions

77%

of trade advertisers leave Google's default one-dollar value on every enquiry

1.3×

the enquiry rate of other searches, for 'near me' searches

What it means for your business

01 Treat the keyword list as a starting hypothesis: the search-terms report is where an account learns what customers actually type.

02 Audit the Conversions column before judging any campaign, agency or channel — taps and a default value can make a weak account look healthy.

03 Build for the phone first: a tappable tracked number, a one-screen form and someone who answers outside office hours.

04 Expect a new account's second month to cost more per enquiry than its first, and set targets from months two and three.

05 Simulate every negative keyword against converting searches before it goes live; the ones that feel safest are the most dangerous.

06 Fix ad rank and relevance before buying more budget — most lost impressions are lost to rank.

07 Move budget on revenue per ad dollar once won jobs are recorded against the ads that produced them, never on cost per lead alone.

08 Publish a specific page for each trade, service and suburb you want to be found for, by Google and by AI assistants.

01

The state of home-service demand

Home-service demand arrives on a phone, often outside office hours and rarely with the word 'emergency' in it — and the trade shapes it more than the device does.

Every home-service business carries a picture of its customer: the homeowner with water coming through the ceiling, ringing whoever answers first. SoudCoh's research sample of Australian trade and home-service advertisers tells a quieter and more useful story. Most demand is ordinary work. Most of it arrives on a phone. A real share of it arrives when the office is shut. And the trade — more than the device or the time of day — decides whether it comes in as a call or a form.

Throughout, an enquiry means a recorded phone call or a submitted form, never a tap on a phone number.

76%

of enquiries come from mobile clicks

58% vs 41%

of enquiries are phone calls, on mobile against desktop

17%

of enquiries come from 'near me' searches

1.9%

of search spend goes on emergency-worded searches, even for plumbers and electricians

Mobile is where the work is

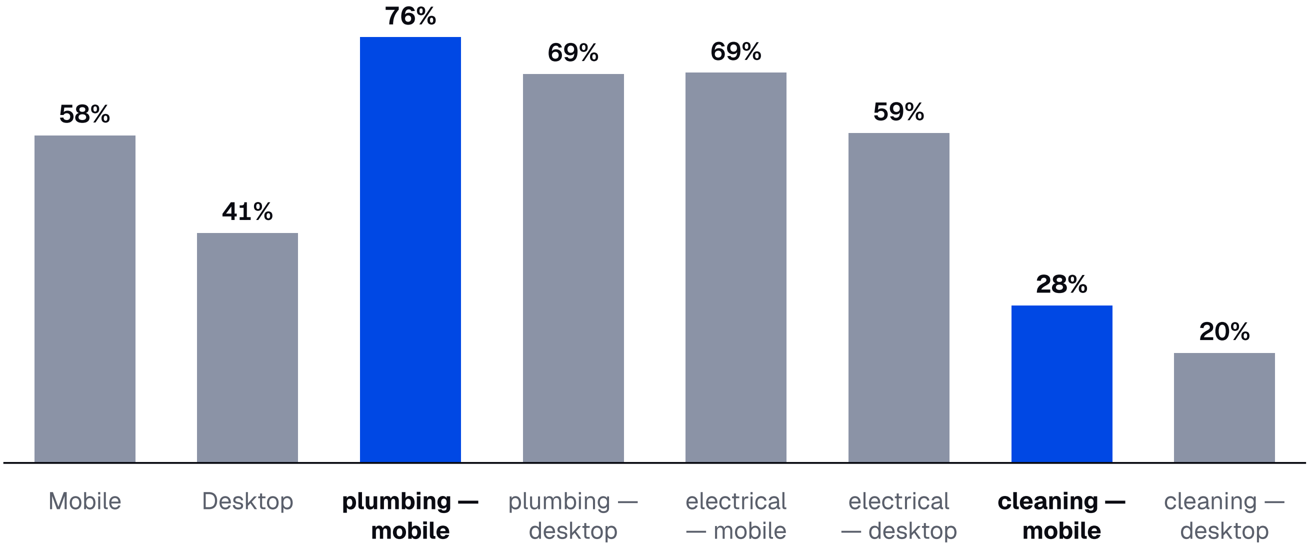
For the typical advertiser in the sample, 76% of enquiries come from mobile clicks, from a near-identical share of the spend. Mobile enquiries cost a little more — a premium of +9% per enquiry against desktop for the same advertiser — but a blanket mobile bid-down trades a small saving per enquiry for a large loss of volume. Fix the mobile page first, and adjust bids by device only where your own data shows a large gap.

Mobile searchers also behave differently once they land. The share of enquiries that are phone calls reads 58% vs 41%, mobile against desktop, for the median advertiser: desktop searchers are more likely to write, mobile searchers to ring. But the device split hides a bigger one.

Exhibit 1

Calls as a share of enquiries, by device and trade

Median advertiser; the remainder of enquiries are submitted forms



How to read this: Plumbers and electricians get mostly calls on both devices; cleaners get mostly forms on both. The job decides the contact route more than the screen does.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

The trade decides the door

Plumbing and electrical enquiries arrive mostly as calls on any device; cleaning enquiries arrive mostly as forms, even from phones. The reason is the job. A leak or an electrical fault is urgent and hard to describe, so people ring. A bond clean or a carpet clean is planned and easy to describe, so people write.

So design the contact route around the job, not the screen. Trades that live on calls need a visible number, call tracking and someone answering. Trades that live on forms need a short form, an instant acknowledgement and a fast reply. Every site still needs both doors, because every trade gets some of each.

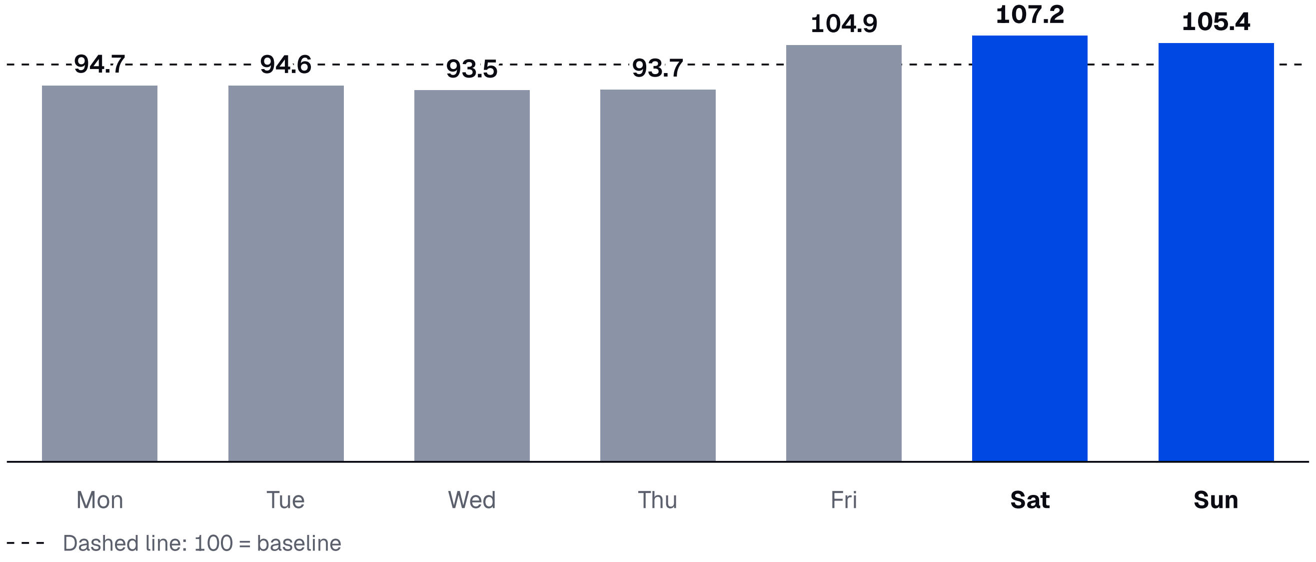
Demand does not keep office hours

About one in four calls from ads — 26% for the typical advertiser — arrive before 7am, after 6pm or on a weekend. Homeowners search when they are home. Weekends pay their way, too: for advertisers running ads all week, a weekend enquiry costs +4% against a weekday one.

Exhibit 2

Cost per enquiry by day of the week

Cost-per-enquiry index by day (lower is cheaper), median advertiser running ads every day



How to read this: Friday to Sunday cost a little more per enquiry than Monday to Thursday — a small premium, not a reason to switch weekends off.

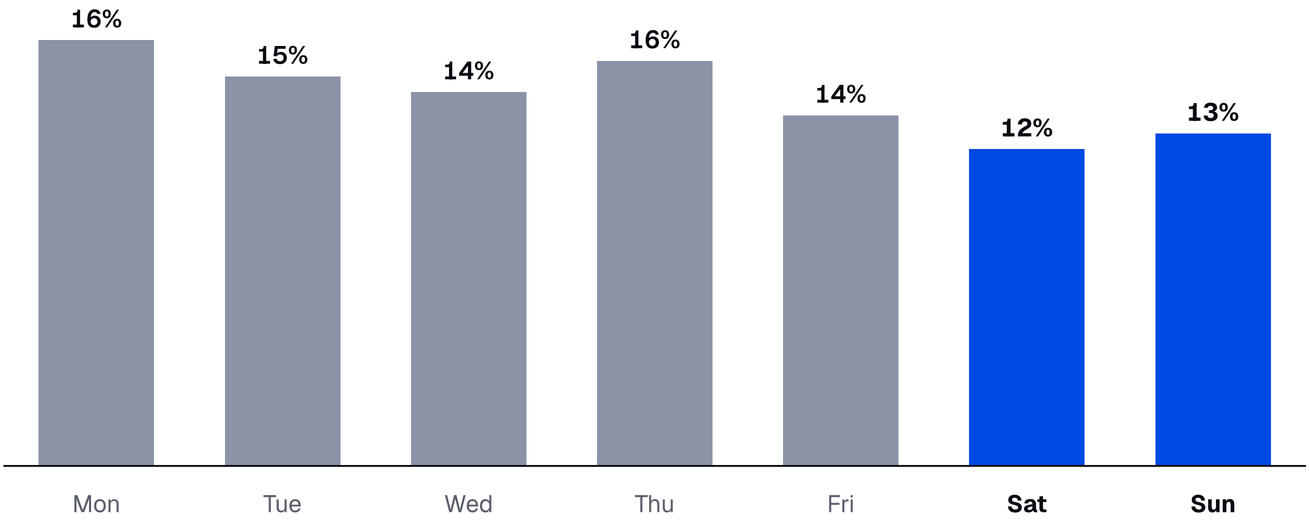
Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

No single day dominates the week's demand either: the busiest day carries 16% of the week's enquiries, and Saturday and Sunday carry a steady share.

Exhibit 3

Share of the week's enquiries, by day

Advertisers running ads every day, median



How to read this: No day dominates and weekends carry a steady share of the week — switching ads off on Friday afternoon gives that share away.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

Switching ads off at night and at weekends is a common 'saving' that the data does not support as a default. Whether those hours pay depends on one thing no bid can fix: whether someone answers the phone. Either answer them — a call-answering service costs less than the ads that produced the call — or schedule the ads to the hours you can actually pick up. See **matching ad hours to the hours you answer**.

⚠ **Watch out**

The emergency myth

Emergency work is the story trades tell about paid search, but in SoudCoh's research sample it is a thin slice. Even for plumbers and electricians, emergency-worded searches — 'emergency', '24/7', 'urgent', 'after hours' — took 1.9% of search-term spend for the median advertiser and produced 1.9% of paid-search enquiries. Nearly every plumbing and electrical advertiser bids on emergency keywords; most enquiries still come from searches with no emergency wording. Run a separate emergency ad group only if someone genuinely answers in the middle of the night, and bid it on its own numbers so it cannot quietly take the budget. More in **emergency searches are a small share of trade demand**.

'Near me' is a decision, not a location

'Near me' searches produced 17% of enquiries for the median trade advertiser, and they converted clicks into enquiries at 1.3× the rate of other searches. A customer who types 'near me' has usually decided to hire and is choosing who. The search itself says nothing about where they are, so it only works when location targeting reaches people physically in the service area — not people merely 'interested in' it — and when the landing page shows the service area and a phone number in the first screen. See **why near-me searches convert better for trades**.

What an enquiry costs

Cost per enquiry varies widely by trade. The table sets out the three trades where SoudCoh publishes a benchmark.

Table 1

What an enquiry costs, by trade

Trade	Median cost per enquiry	Middle half of advertisers	Clicks that become enquiries (median)	Enquiries that are calls
Plumbing, drains and leak detection	A$141	A$110–A$174	12.3%	74.6%
Electricians	A$118	A$115–A$129	14%	75.5%
Cleaning	A$58	A$44–A$88	20.1%	25.7%
All trade and home-service advertisers	A$117	A$61–A$157	14.7%	64%

Ad spend divided by recorded calls and submitted forms, in Australian dollars excluding GST. Medians across SoudCoh's research sample; definitions are on the Google Ads benchmarks page.

The spread matters more than any single median. Cleaning enquiries cost far less than plumbing or electrical ones and far more of them arrive as forms; plumbing and electrical enquiries cost more and mostly arrive as calls. A rise in cost per enquiry that stays inside your trade's range is a different conversation from one that leaves it. The **Google Ads benchmarks for Australian trades** set out the full ranges and definitions, and our trade pages go deeper for **plumbing businesses**, **electricians**, **cleaning businesses**, **HVAC businesses**, **pest control**, **roofers**, **painters**, **removalists** and **builders**.

Homeowners search when they are home — which is often when the office is shut.

02

How customers actually search

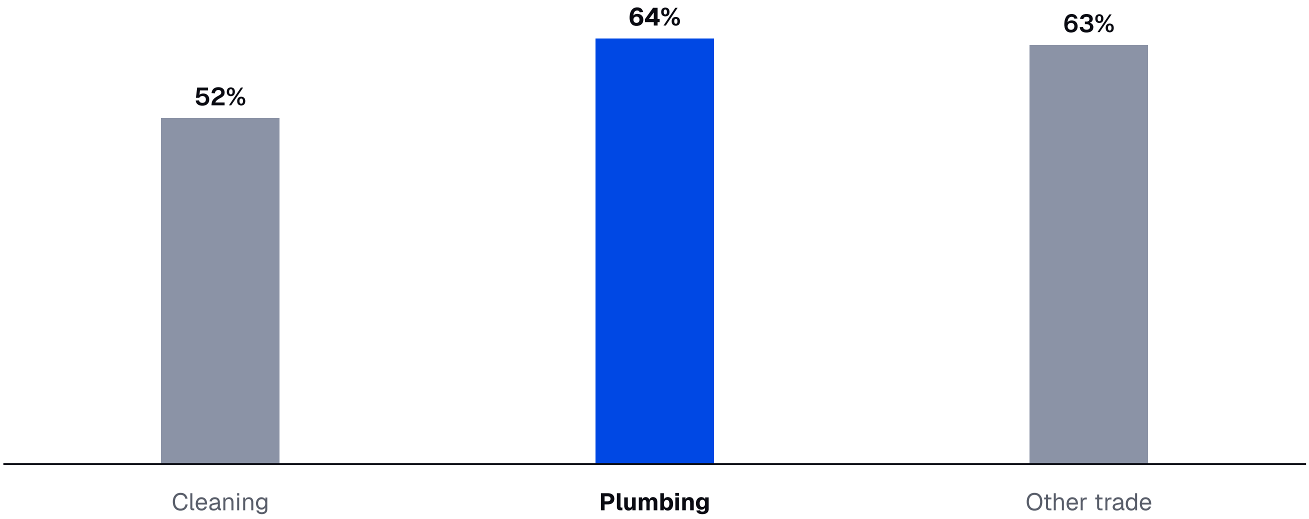
Most enquiries arrive in words nobody wrote down, and Google names the search behind only about half of them.

The keyword list is where most businesses think their advertising lives: the phrases the business, or its agency, chose to bid on. In SoudCoh's research sample it is closer to a starting hypothesis. For the median trade advertiser, 59% of enquiries came from searches that were not on the keyword list — even allowing for plurals and word order — and those searches took 64% of search-term spend. The symptom ('toilet keeps running'), the suburb, the odd phrasing: a large part of the demand a trade campaign captures arrives in words the business never chose.

Exhibit 4

Enquiries from searches that were never keywords, by trade

Median advertiser



How to read this: In every trade group, more than half of enquiries came from searches outside the keyword list — discovery is a structural feature of trade search, not a quirk of one category.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

Discovered demand is not free: an enquiry from a search that was not on the keyword list cost 1.19× as much as one worded like an existing keyword. That modest premium is the price of learning. Harvest discovery rather than switching it off — promote repeat winners to their own keywords and keep the net open. The full analysis is in trade enquiries come from searches you never chose.

> **A keyword list written on launch day is a hypothesis, not a map of demand.**

Half the enquiries live in the long tail

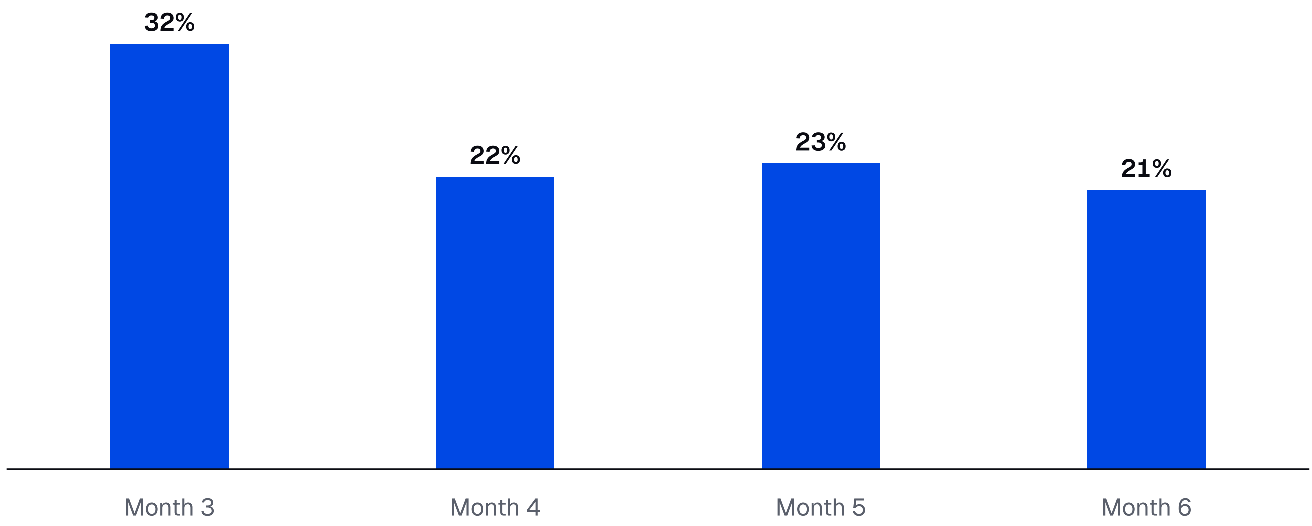
Trade demand is episodic: a burst pipe, a failed inspection, a lease ending. Much of it is phrased once and never again. For the median advertiser, 54% of enquiries came from searches that received no more than two clicks in total, and 33% came from searches that appeared in only one calendar month. Even from the third month of running onwards, 25% of each month's enquiries still came from searches that had not appeared in any earlier month.

No keyword tool would suggest most of these searches; only keywords with room to match can reach them. The campaign has to recognise intent, not memorise phrases.

Exhibit 5

Enquiries from searches never seen in any earlier month

Median advertiser, by month of running



How to read this: From the third month of running onwards, between a fifth and a third of each month's enquiries came from brand-new phrasings — search-term review is a standing job, not a launch task.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

'Exact' match is not exact

Many owners respond by asking for exact match only, to keep the account on a short lead. It no longer does that. Google now treats exact match as 'same meaning', and 47% of the enquiries that exact-match keywords produced came from searches worded differently from the keyword. That is mostly helpful —

close variants catch misspellings, reorderings and plurals — but it means an exact-only account still needs a search-term review and a negative list. Exact match alone is not control. See **exact match is not exact**.

> **Definition**
>
> ### Keywords, search terms and close variants
>
> A **keyword** is a phrase you choose to bid on. A **search term** is what the customer actually typed. The **match type** decides how far apart the two may be: exact (the same meaning), phrase (the meaning of your phrase, with words around it) or broad (anything Google judges related). **Close variants** are the misspellings, plurals, reorderings and synonyms Google counts as a match, even under exact. The **search-terms report** lists the search terms that triggered your ads — but only the ones Google chooses to name.

The report you rely on shows about half the picture

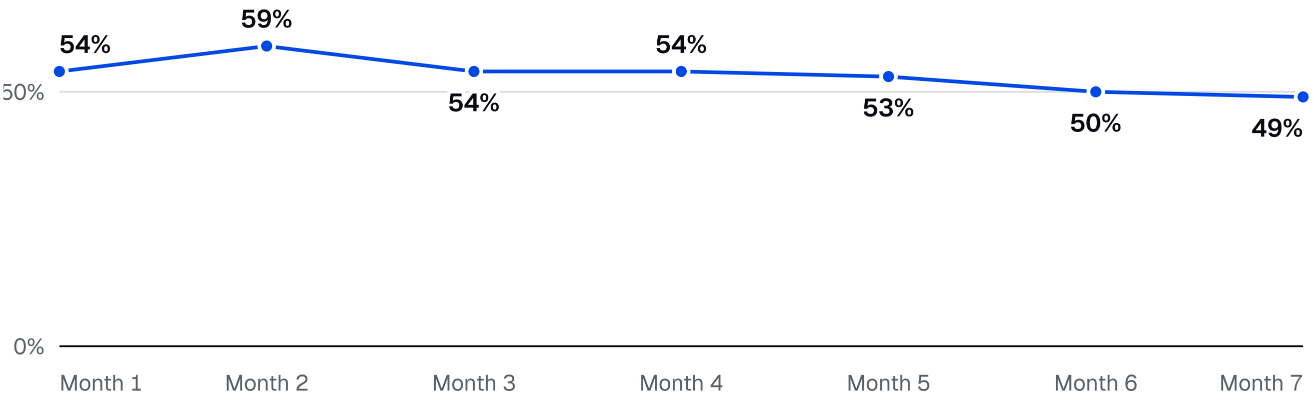
That last point matters more than most owners realise. Google's search-terms report accounts for only about 52% of the money a typical trade Search campaign spends; the rest goes on searches it never shows you. Enquiries are no more visible than spend: the report names the search behind roughly 51% of a typical advertiser's enquiries.

A negative-keyword list can only ever police the visible part. That is why control has to come from structure — tight service themes, sensible match types, location settings — and not from the search-terms report alone. Review the report weekly, but judge a campaign on enquiries and cost per enquiry, not on how tidy the visible terms look. More in **the search-terms report hides half your spend**.

Exhibit 6

Share of Search spend the search-terms report accounts for

Median trade Search campaign, month by month



How to read this: Month after month the report names the searches behind only about half the spend. The hidden share is permanent, not a teething problem.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

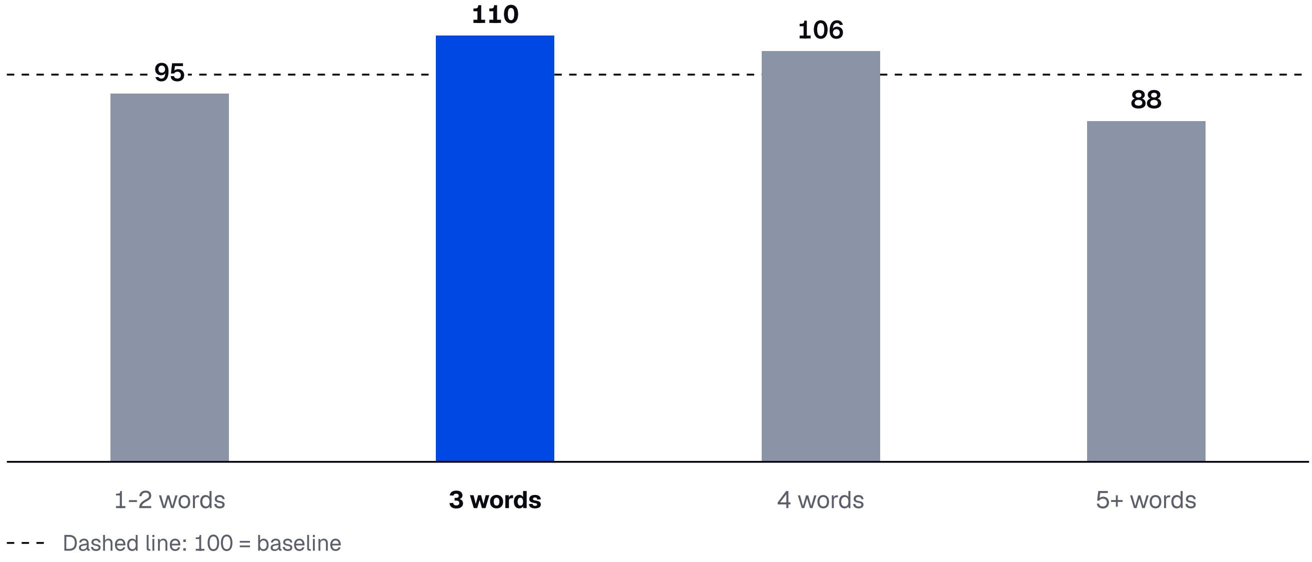
Short and specific beats long and wordy

Longer searches are not always better searches. Three-word searches converted clicks into enquiries at 1.24× the rate of searches of five or more words. The searches that convert most often are three or four words long, often a service plus a place or a problem; one- and two-word searches convert slightly below average. Very long searches tend to carry questions and research — 'how much does it cost to...', 'why does my...' — and convert below average. Long-tail room is still worth having because it adds volume, but those searches need the tightest cleaning.

Exhibit 7

Enquiry rate by length of search

Conversion index by number of words in the search (higher converts better)



How to read this: Three- and four-word searches convert above the rest; searches of five or more words convert least often.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

Segments worth reading separately

Some kinds of search behave differently enough to deserve their own line in every review, and several overturn defaults that rules-based cleaners still apply.

Table 2

Search segments at a glance

Segment	What the data shows	What to do
Searches not on the keyword list	59% of enquiries; each cost 1.19× as much as a keyword-worded enquiry	Harvest monthly: promote repeat converters to exact keywords
'Near me'	17% of enquiries; converts at 1.3× the rate of other searches	Target people physically in the area; show the service area and phone number up front
Suburb or local town named	7% of enquiries; converts at 1.07× the rate of other searches	Say the suburb back in the ad and on the page; judge on cost per enquiry, not click price
Emergency-worded	1.9% of spend, even for plumbers and electricians	A separate ad group only if the phone is answered around the clock
Price research ('cost', 'how much', 'quote')	Cost per enquiry 0.95× that of other enquiries	Answer the price question in the ad and on the page; do not blanket-negate
Competitor business names	0.6% of spend; produced enquiries for 72% of advertisers that paid for them	Segment and bid separately; negate a name only after a long window with no enquiries

Medians across SoudCoh's research sample.

Do this

Answer the price question instead of hiding from it

A blanket negative on 'price' or 'cost' is a common default in rules-based cleaners, and it throws away enquiries at a normal cost. Price researchers convert less often, but Google charges less for their clicks, and the two effects roughly cancel out: in SoudCoh's research sample, an enquiry from a price-research search cost 0.95× what other enquiries cost. Put a starting price, a call-out fee or a free-quote promise in the ad and on the page — whichever is true for your business — and let the people who want to compare, compare.

03

Structuring an account that can learn

A good account is built to discover demand and send it to the right page — its size is not the point.

Structure is organisation, not size: each service in its place, each keyword with a job.

If most demand arrives in words nobody chose, structure matters more than the length of the keyword list. Its job is to make sure that whatever a customer types, the ad that answers is about their job, the page it opens says the same thing, and the account can tell you which services and areas are paying.

Size is not the point. What separates a good account from a poor one is whether the searches, ads and landing pages line up, and whether someone reads the search-terms report every week. Be wary of any pitch that sells 'more keywords' as the fix.

> **Account size is not a strategy. Whether the search, the ad and the page say the same thing is.**

Service campaign first; suburbs as a satellite

Every account SoudCoh builds starts with a service campaign: one ad group per service, each with its own tight keyword set (a median of 18 keywords per ad group), three responsive search ads and a matching service page. Where suburb-named searches matter, a per-suburb location campaign runs beside it on a minority of the budget, with its own budget so the two can be compared. The **Search campaigns** page describes the setup.

That comparison is the point. Clicks on per-suburb campaigns carried a premium of +49% over service-campaign clicks from the same advertiser: a search naming a suburb signals intent to buy, so those auctions are more contested. Whether the extra intent pays for the dearer click is close to a coin toss: for 57% of advertisers running both, the suburb campaign produced fewer enquiries per dollar than the service campaign. Run both legs with separate budgets and let cost per enquiry decide once both have two months of data.

Table 3

Service campaigns and per-suburb campaigns compared

	Service campaign	Per-suburb campaign
What it catches	Searches for the job, wherever the customer is in the service area	Searches that name a suburb or local town
Share of demand	Most of the account's enquiries	Suburb-named searches: 7% of enquiries for the median advertiser
Price per click	The account's baseline	A premium of +49% over service clicks from the same advertiser
Enquiry rate	The account's baseline	Suburb-named searches convert at 1.07× the rate of other searches
Wins on enquiries per dollar	Slightly more often than not: close to a coin toss	In a minority: loses for 57% of advertisers running both
Landing page	One page per service	A real suburb page: local jobs, local photos, travel times

Medians and shares across SoudCoh's research sample.

Insight

Idle ad groups are coverage, not failure

For the typical advertiser, 17% of live ad groups received no impressions at all over a month. That is what a net cast for rare searches looks like: most suburbs generate a suburb-named search only occasionally. Spend most of the optimisation time on the ad groups that do spend; review idle ones quarterly rather than deleting them in week two.

A small core does most of the work

A comprehensive build switches on hundreds or thousands of keywords, but a small core carries the account. The top tenth of keywords by spend carry 53% of all keyword spend for the typical trade advertiser, and only 29% of switched-on keywords have triggered even one impression. That is harmless — Google matches each search to the closest keyword, so near-duplicates sit silent — but it makes keyword count a vanity metric. Watch the core daily: bids, search terms, ad copy and landing page. Manage the long tail in bulk and prune it quarterly.

53%

of keyword spend goes to the top tenth of keywords

29%

of switched-on keywords have triggered an impression

92%

of advertisers lose more impressions to ad rank than to budget

Match types: phrase is the workhorse

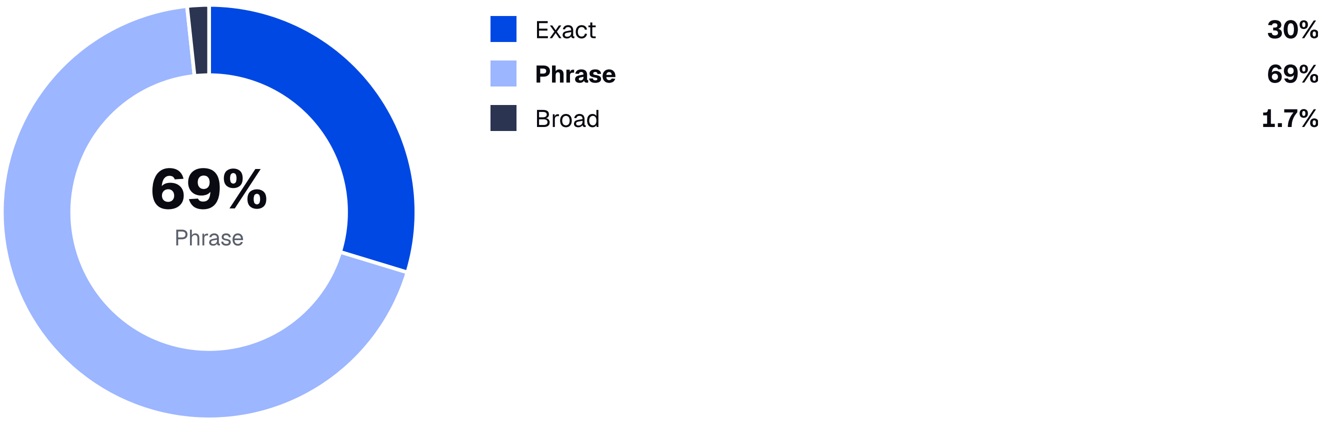
Phrase match carries 69% of keyword spend across SoudCoh's research sample, with exact match holding the proven core and broad match a small remainder. Phrase match keeps the service words fixed and lets the customer add the rest — the suburb, the urgency, the symptom — which is the balance most trade accounts need. SoudCoh's builds launch every keyword as an exact-and-phrase pair, with effectively no broad match at launch.

Exact match is not a cheaper way to buy a lead. For the same advertiser, phrase-match clicks cost 17% less than exact-match clicks and convert less often, and the two effects cancel out: a phrase-match conversion costs about the same as an exact-match one. Judge match types on cost per enquiry, never on cost per click. Broad match has a place too. Where it ran — a minority of the sample — its enquiries cost 1.09× as much as exact-match enquiries from the same advertisers. It is a tool for well-tracked, well-cleaned campaigns, not a default for an account nobody reviews.

Exhibit 8

Keyword spend by match type

SoudCoh research sample



How to read this: Phrase match carries most of the spend; exact holds the proven core and broad is a small remainder.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

Most lost impressions are lost to rank, not budget

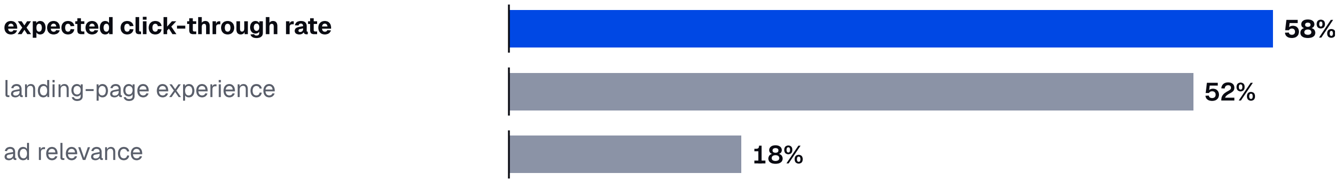
The typical trade Search campaign in the sample appears in 21% of the searches it is eligible for, and for 92% of advertisers more impressions are lost to ad rank than to budget. Raising the budget does nothing for impressions lost to rank. Under automated bidding, 'lost to rank' also includes auctions the algorithm chose not to chase because they looked too expensive, so the levers are relevance and a realistic cost-per-enquiry target — not a bigger daily budget.

Relevance can be measured. The most common Quality Score drag is expected click-through rate: for the typical advertiser, 58% of scored keyword spend is rated 'below average' on it, with landing-page experience close behind. Expected click-through is judged against every other advertiser on the same search, so in trades the ad has to beat directory listings and big brands on the first line — price, speed and proof beat slogans. And 54% of scored keyword spend goes to keywords with a Quality Score of 4 or less. Some high-intent, high-competition searches never score well, but each one should be a deliberate choice, reviewed monthly.

Exhibit 9

Quality Score components rated below average

Share of scored keyword spend rated below average, typical advertiser



How to read this: Expected click-through rate and landing-page experience drag Quality Score far more often than ad relevance — the fixes are sharper ads and better pages.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

Definition

Impression share lost to rank and to budget

Impression share is the share of searches your ads appeared for, out of all the searches they were eligible for. Google splits the rest into two causes. **Lost to budget**: the daily budget ran out. **Lost to rank**: your ad rank — your bid combined with quality signals such as expected click-through, ad relevance and landing-page experience — was too low to show. Only the first is fixed with a bigger budget; the second needs better ads and pages, or higher bids.

Keep Search campaigns on search

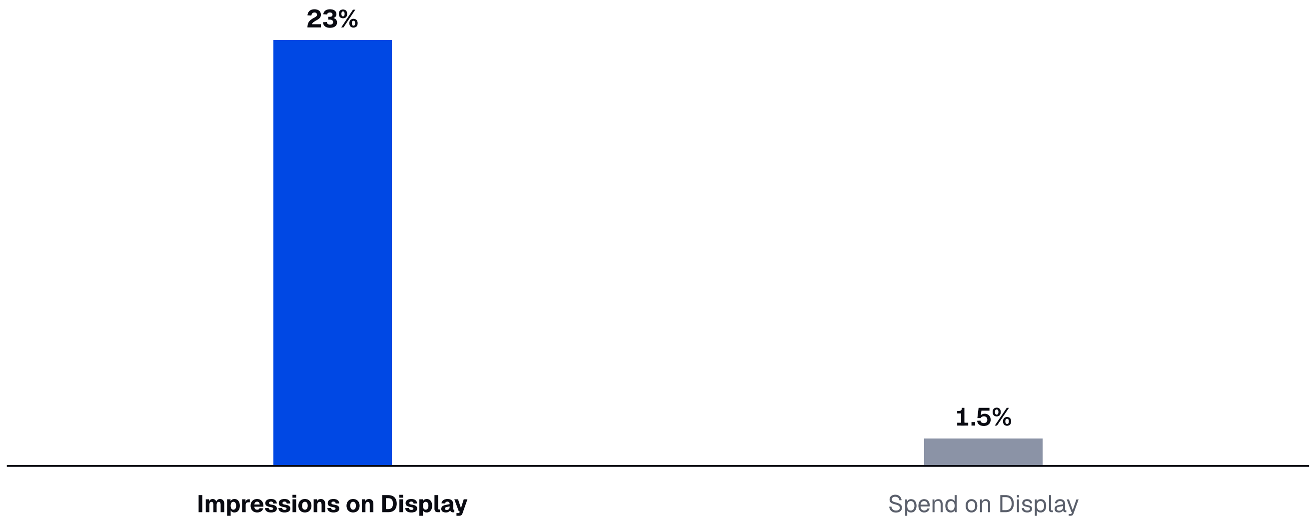
One structural setting deserves its own check. For 21% of trade advertisers in the sample, campaigns labelled 'Search' were also serving ads on the Display Network. The 'Include Google Display Network' box is ticked by default when a Search campaign is created, and Google can shift delivery towards Display without any change appearing in the change history. Where Display ran inside Search campaigns it took 23% of their impressions for a sliver of the spend, and a Display click produced a real enquiry at about 4% of the rate of a Google Search click in the same campaigns.

Search partners fared better, but not well: cheaper clicks that converted at 16% of the Search rate for the median trade advertiser, so each enquiry cost more. 100% of the Search campaigns created through SoudCoh's campaign builder launch with Display and Search partners switched off, targeting people physically in the service area. More in the Display Network on Search campaigns.

Exhibit 10

Display inside Search campaigns: impressions against spend

Search campaigns where Display was switched on, median advertiser



How to read this: Display took a large slice of impressions for a sliver of spend — flattering reach and click-through averages while barely touching the budget line anyone checks.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

Run this yourself: the ten-minute settings check

- [ ] Open every Search campaign's settings and confirm 'Include Google Display Network' is unticked.
- [ ] Keep Search partners on only if a report split by network shows more enquiries per dollar from them.
- [ ] Set location options to people in, or regularly in, your service area — not the option that adds people 'interested in' it.
- [ ] Compare the ad schedule with the hours someone actually answers the phone.
- [ ] Review automatically created assets and final URL expansion, which decide what the ad says and where the click lands.
- [ ] Add the impression share columns, including lost to rank and lost to budget, before asking for more budget.
- [ ] Sort keywords by spend and list the top tenth: those are the keywords to watch daily.
- [ ] Confirm each ad group points at the page for its service, not the home page.

04

The first 90 days

The phone should ring within days, the first month flatters, and the second month is the real baseline.

The first three months of a new account follow a pattern that surprises most owners. In SoudCoh's research sample, the launch arc has three phases: early proof that demand exists, a honeymoon month, and a second month that costs more.

Before day one

Nothing SoudCoh builds goes live on the strength of a generator alone: 97% of the campaigns SoudCoh's builder creates go into the account paused, and are switched on only after a person has read the ad groups, keywords, copy and landing pages against the business — the cheapest point to catch a service it does not offer or a promise it cannot keep.

Days one to seven: the phone should ring

Search captures demand that already exists, so enquiries should arrive almost immediately. 84% of new launches in the sample recorded an enquiry from their first three days of ads, and nearly all did within the first week. A silent first week is far more often a broken call-tracking number, a form that does not fire or a phone nobody answers than a bad keyword. Check those before touching bids.

84%

of new launches record an enquiry within three days

+31%

change in cost per enquiry from month one to month two, typical new launch

68%

of new launches pay more per enquiry in their second month

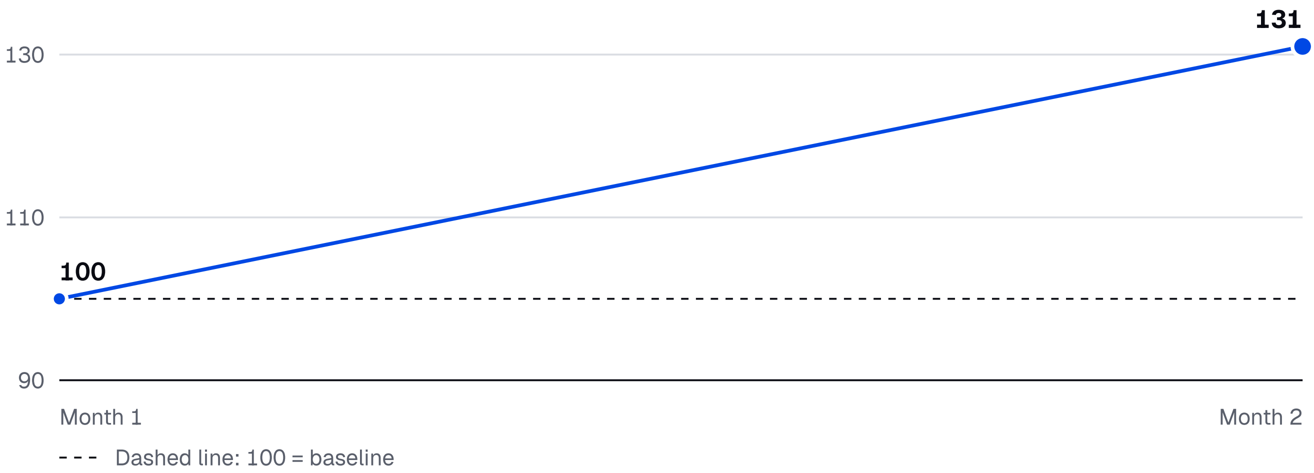
The honeymoon, then the rise

A new account's second month is usually dearer than its first. The typical cost per enquiry in month two ran +31% against month one, and 68% of new launches paid more per enquiry in their second month. A fresh account tends to serve the most urgent, ready-to-book searches first, before the bidding widens its reach into harder searches. Month two is the real baseline.

Exhibit 11

Cost per enquiry, month one against month two

Index: month one = 100, median new launch

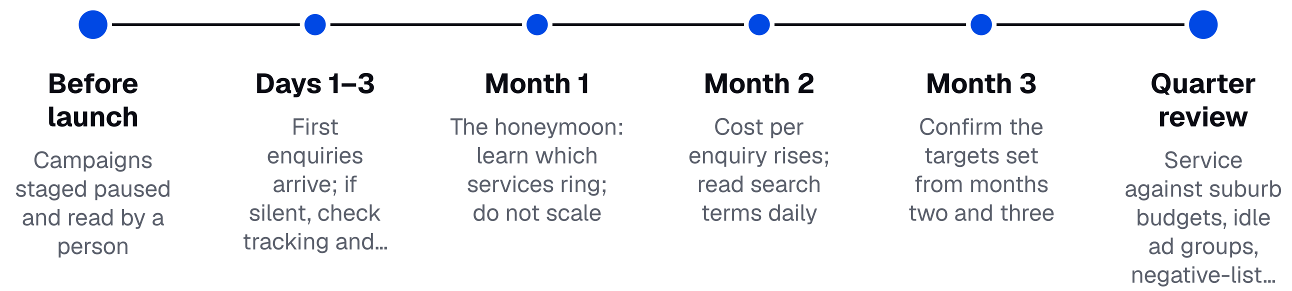


How to read this: Cost per enquiry steps up in month two. Set targets from months two and three, not from the honeymoon.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

Figure 1

The first 90 days of a new account



What usually happens, and what to check, as a new trade account settles.

Table 4

The launch plan, phase by phase

Phase	What usually happens	What to check	What not to do
Week one	Enquiries arrive: 84% of new launches record one within three days	Call tracking, form firing, who answers the phone	Change bids or keywords before the tracking is proven
Month one	The honeymoon: urgent, ready-to-book searches are served first	Which services and areas ring; search terms daily	Scale the budget on month-one results
Month two	Cost per enquiry rises: +31% against month one for the typical new launch	Search terms daily, negatives after simulation, landing-page fixes	Pause, panic or rebuild the account
Month three	Enough history to confirm or adjust the month-two target	Set cost-per-enquiry targets from months two and three	Judge the channel on a single month
End of the quarter	Enough data to compare the service and suburb legs	Cost per enquiry by leg; idle ad groups; a negative-list audit	Delete idle coverage because it is quiet

Medians across new launches in SoudCoh's research sample.

Do this

Tell the business before launch

If an owner is told nothing, month two feels like the campaign is breaking. Put it in the launch plan in writing: the second month usually costs more per enquiry than the first, and that rise is the signal to tighten, not to stop. Set cost-per-enquiry targets from the second and third months, and use the first month to learn which services and areas ring. More in why month two of Google Ads costs more and how long to give a campaign before judging it.

Cleaning pays most at the start

The first months are also when search-term cleaning matters most. Control compounds: each negative removes a pattern for good, so the junk that reaches the account shrinks as the list matures and the review gets faster. Two months into daily cleaning, the share of reviewed spend that needed negating had fallen for the median advertiser (−43%). After that, cleaning becomes maintenance.

05

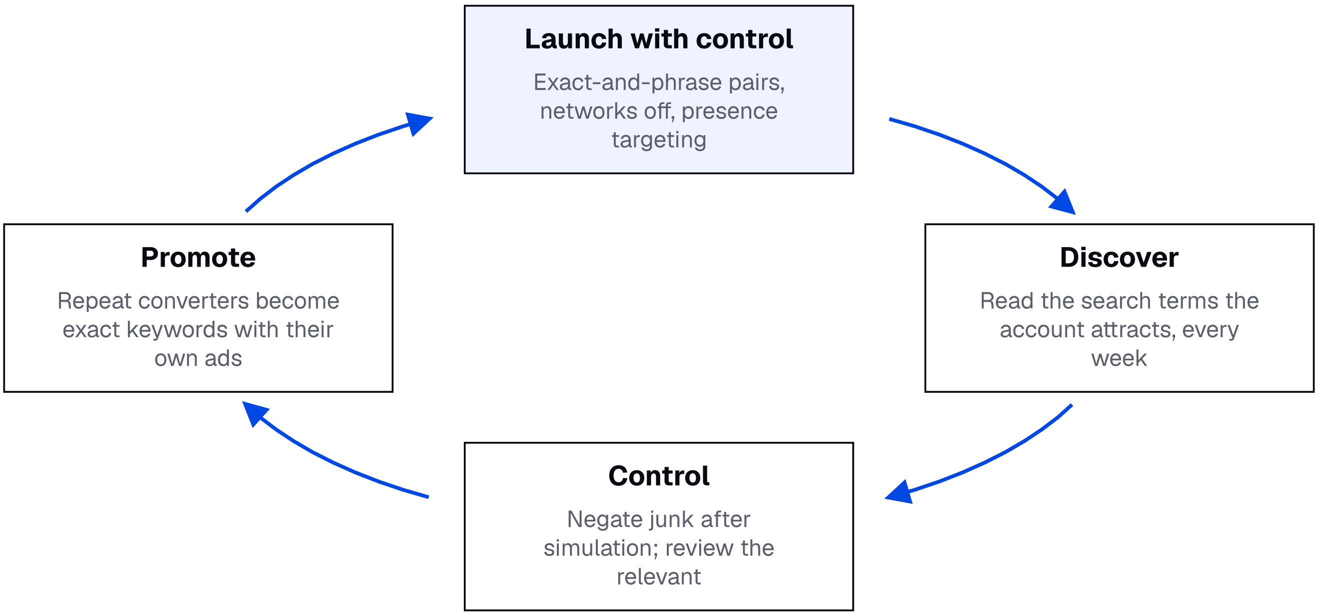
Discovery with control

Cleaning protects an account rather than growing it — and the negatives that feel safest are the ones most likely to block customers.

If discovery brings in most enquiries, control stops it bringing in junk. The two are usually presented as opposites — tight accounts against loose ones — but in SoudCoh's analysis they work as a loop: launch with control, let the account discover, fence what it finds, promote what works, and go round again. The companion paper, **Launch, discover, control**, sets out the method in full.

Figure 2

Launch, discover, control, promote



Each lap tightens the account and widens what it knows about demand.

In a well-run account, waste is a leak, not a flood

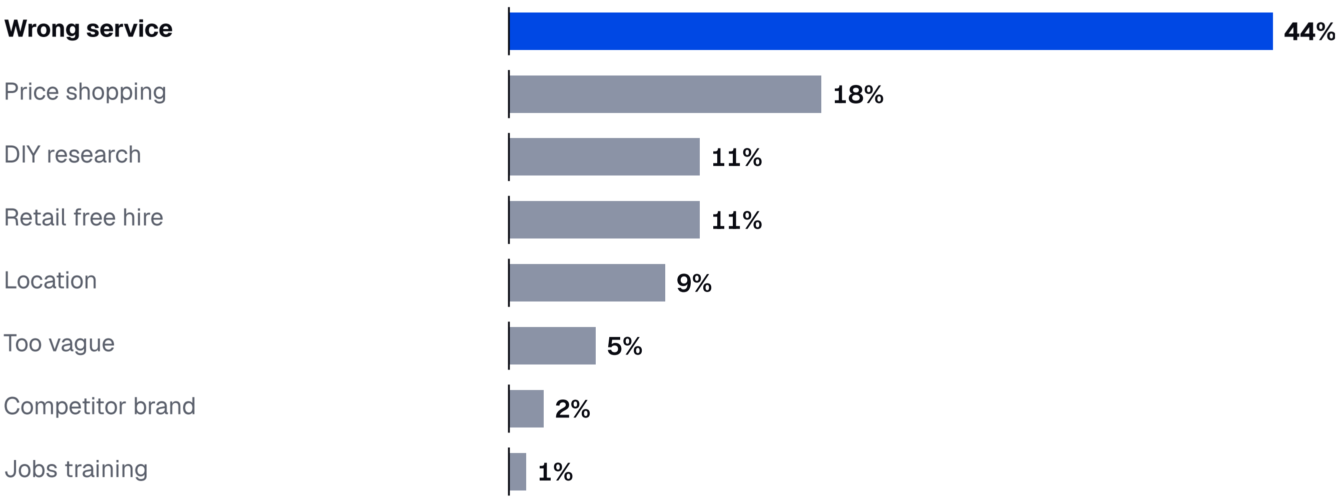
In SoudCoh's daily search-term reviews, only about 4.4% of reviewed spend was clear-cut waste to negate for the median trade advertiser — 1.5% in cleaning and 4.5% across other trades and home services. The leak differs by trade, because the words overlap differently with jobs, DIY and retail searches, but it is a leak, not the flood that 'wasted spend' pitches describe. The big gains in trade search come from structure, bids and landing pages; cleaning protects those gains by stopping the leak from growing. An agency that promises large savings from cutting wasted spend alone is describing an account nobody has looked after.

The expensive junk is not where most template lists look. The biggest single source of waste — 44% of all the spend SoudCoh's reviews flagged — was searches for a different service, or for something unrelated that happens to share a word: a neighbouring job the business does not do, which looks relevant enough to click. Job-seeker and DIY searches, the usual targets of template negative lists, were only 12% of flagged spend. Template lists (jobs, courses, DIY tutorials, free downloads; never free on its own, which would block free-quote searches) are cheap insurance worth adding on day one, but the expensive leaks are specific to each business and only show up in its own search terms.

Exhibit 12

What the flagged waste was

Share of spend flagged for negation, by reason



How to read this: Wrong-service searches dwarf the jobs and DIY searches that template negative lists are built to catch.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

⚠ **Watch out**

The negatives that feel safest are the most dangerous

In SoudCoh's negative-keyword reviews, 60% of proposed negatives failed a challenger review and a simulation against converting searches. The 'we don't do that' kind were the worst: 92% of negatives proposed because the business supposedly did not offer a service were rejected, because they would have blocked work it does do or searches that convert. 'Pool', 'dishwasher' and 'waterproofing' all looked like other people's work for a plumbing business, and all blocked converting searches. Almost half of proposed competitor-name negatives (47%) failed too, mostly because the 'brand' was also an everyday trade phrase or had brought in enquiries.

60%

of proposed negatives failed review and simulation

92%

of 'we don't do that' negatives were rejected

52%

of trade advertisers block at least one search that produced an enquiry

Old negatives block new customers

Negative lists only grow unless someone prunes them. 52% of trade advertisers in the sample now block, through their own negative keywords, at least one search that produced an enquiry over the preceding year. The typical cost is small — blocked searches had produced 0.4% of the year's search-term enquiries for the median advertiser — but it is concentrated: in the worst case in the sample, searches that a business's own negative list now blocks had produced 6% of its paid-search enquiries over the year. It is the cheapest fix in paid search, because the enquiries were already proven. See negative keywords that block customers.

Rules alone make this worse. 1.5% of the searches a keyword-rule cleaner flagged for negation had converted in the very window it was judging, and 2% of searches that simple waste rules flagged had produced a genuine enquiry at some point in the year. That is why every automated negative in SoudCoh's process goes through a person and a simulation against a long window of converting searches.

Figure 3

Four kinds of search term, four different moves

Irrelevant and never converted Negate — after simulating against converting searches	**Relevant, not converted yet** Review: fix the bid, the ad or the page, and give it time
Relevant and converting Promote to an exact keyword with its own ad	**Looks irrelevant, has converted** Keep — the words that feel safe to block often are not

Sort by relevance to what the business sells and by enquiry history, not by a word list.

'Relevant but not converting' is a question, not a verdict

About 75% of the spend a daily search-term review flags is on searches that look relevant but have not converted yet — a judgement call, not junk. Negating them on a cost threshold would shrink the account. 7% of the relevant-but-unconverted searches held back from negation went on to produce an enquiry in a later month, and 53% never triggered an ad again, so adding them as negatives would only have lengthened the list. The better moves are a bid change, a sharper ad, a better landing page, and more time. Negate only when a pattern repeats with meaningful spend and no enquiries over a long window, or when the owner confirms the job is not wanted.

Competitor names: segment, do not ban

Searches naming another trade business took only 0.6% of search-term spend for the median advertiser, so blocking them all saves very little. And for 72% of the advertisers that paid for competitor-name clicks, those searches produced at least one real enquiry: people search a known name, find it busy or out of area, and call the next credible option. Negate a rival's name only after a long window of spend with no enquiries, using the full brand phrase — or give competitor traffic its own low-bid campaign and judge it on its own numbers.

Promote the winners

The other half of control is promotion. Only 11% of the searches that produced an enquiry through phrase or broad match were ever added as keywords in their own right, and even among searches that produced three or more enquiries, only 33% had been promoted. A search that is merely caught cannot be bid up, written for or protected from a stray negative. A monthly promotion pass — repeat converters moved to exact match in the right ad group, with an ad that repeats the customer's words — is cheap and compounds.

Once an account is cleaned regularly, the remaining junk is a rounding error: after every safety check, the negatives that could safely be added covered just 0.6% of monthly spend for the median advertiser. The typical trade advertiser carries about one negative for every five keywords (a ratio of 0.2); a list growing much faster is a sign the structure is too loose. From there, the money is in cost per click, conversion rate and budget allocation.

Run this yourself: the negative-keyword safety check

- [ ] Before adding a negative, pull a year of search terms and list every search it would block.
- [ ] If any blocked search produced an enquiry, narrow the negative or drop it.
- [ ] Never add a single-word negative without that check — words such as 'cheap', 'price' and 'pool' are classic own-goals.
- [ ] Check every 'we don't do that' negative against your own service list and site pages.
- [ ] Remember that negatives do not match close variants, plurals or synonyms; add the forms you actually mean.
- [ ] Negate a competitor's name only after a long window of spend with no enquiries, using the full brand phrase.
- [ ] Once a quarter, list converting searches that your negatives now block, and undo the accidents.
- [ ] Keep a note of why each negative was added, so the next person can tell a policy from a mistake.
- [ ] Once a month, promote searches with repeat enquiries to exact keywords with their own ad.

06

Measurement that tells the truth

Before judging a campaign, an agency or a channel, check what the account is counting — for many trade businesses, the Conversions column is not counting enquiries.

Checking what is wired to what: the measurement audit comes before any other judgement.

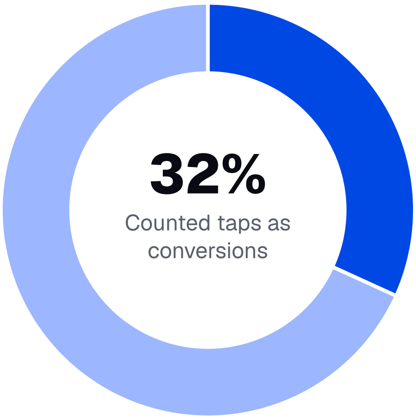
Every decision in this paper — which searches to keep, which services to fund, whether month two is working — rests on the Conversions column. For many trade businesses, that column is not counting what the owner thinks it is. The problems are ordinary, several are Google's defaults, and each can be checked in minutes.

Taps are not enquiries

For a third of the sample (32%), taps on a phone number, email or WhatsApp link were being counted as conversions in Google Ads. A tap shows someone meant to call, not that they did. Where taps were counted, they made up 45% of everything Google Ads reported as a conversion for the median advertiser, and the Conversions column overstated real enquiries — connected calls and submitted forms — by +92%. A campaign reporting nearly twice the enquiries it produced shows a cost per enquiry at roughly half the truth, and Smart Bidding chases the people most likely to tap.

Exhibit 13

Trade advertisers counting taps as conversions



Counted taps as conversions	**32%**
Did not	**68%**

How to read this: One in three advertisers counted taps on a phone number, email or WhatsApp link as conversions — a click, not an enquiry.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

> **When close to half of reported conversions are taps, the true cost per enquiry is close to double what the report says.**

45%

of reported conversions were taps, where taps were counted

+92%

overstatement of real enquiries where taps were counted

19%

of calls to a tracked number come from someone who has already called

The fix costs nothing: move taps and profile actions to secondary, and let bidding optimise to calls and forms only. We explain how in phone-tap conversions inflate trade leads.

Two call routes, counted once per caller

Calls arrive two ways: straight from the ad, through Google's call reporting, and after someone has read the website, through a tracked number swapped onto the site for paid visitors. Both are enquiries, but they are measured by different machinery, and most businesses in the sample did not capture both — only 32% did. An account that captures only ad calls undercounts what its strongest pages produce, and steers budget away from them.

Then count people, not rings. About one call in five to a tracked number — 19% — comes from someone who has already called: chasing a quote, confirming a time, calling back after a missed call. Those calls matter to the business but they are not new enquiries. Google's 'one' counting option stops a single ad click being counted twice, but a caller who rings back later can still count again, so apply a unique-caller rule wherever your call tracking allows it, or cost per enquiry looks better than it is.

Exhibit 14

How trade advertisers record phone calls

How to read this: Only one in three advertisers captures both the calls that come straight from the ad and the calls made after reading the website.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

The 60-second line hides short, decisive calls

About half of answered calls from ads — 49% — last less than a minute, below the 60-second line Google uses by default to decide whether a call counts. Short calls are a mix: wrong numbers and hang-ups, but also the quick 'can you come Thursday?' that books a job. A fixed 60-second rule hides the second group from bidding and keeps the first out of reports; neither is ideal. Listen to a sample of short calls before deciding where your threshold should sit, and revisit it by service — a blocked-drain call is often short and decisive. See short ad calls and the 60-second rule.

Definition

What counts as an enquiry in this paper

An **enquiry** is a recorded phone call — from an ad, or to a tracked number on the website — or a submitted enquiry form. Taps on a phone number or email link, page views, direction requests and profile clicks are **signals**: worth watching, never counted as enquiries. A **won job** is an enquiry that became paid work, with its value recorded against the lead that produced it.

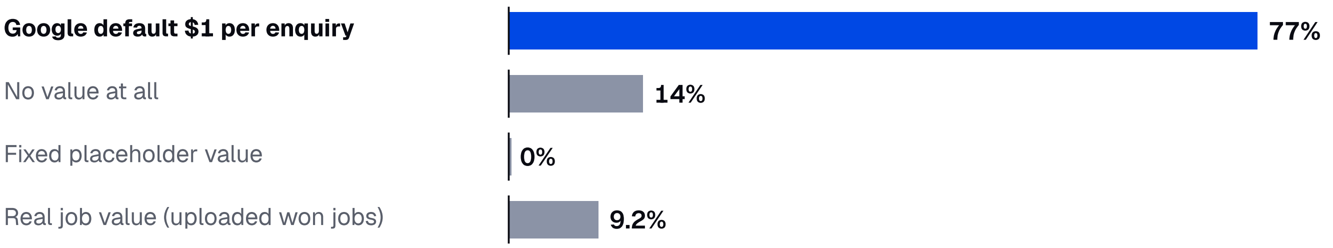
The one-dollar default makes ROAS meaningless

77% of trade advertisers in the sample leave Google's default value of one dollar on every enquiry, so the 'conversion value' and ROAS columns simply count enquiries in dollars. That is harmless until someone reads the ROAS column, or switches to a value-based bid strategy — at which point Google optimises for the number of enquiries while everyone believes it is optimising for revenue. Only 9% told Google Ads what a job was actually worth, and none did it through website or call tags: the only real values were won jobs uploaded after the fact.

A website cannot know what a job is worth when the form is sent; the price is set on site, days later. Real value has to come back from the job book — until then, treat every ROAS figure as a placeholder. More in the default conversion value makes ROAS meaningless.

Exhibit 15

What trade advertisers tell Google an enquiry is worth



How to read this: Three in four advertisers leave the one-dollar default in place; fewer than one in ten feed real job values, all of them won jobs uploaded after the fact.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

Figure 4

The measurement stack

Signals	Taps, clicks and page views — secondary, never bid on
Enquiries	Connected calls from ads and the website, and submitted forms, counted once per person
Source	Click id, campaign, ad group and search term attached to every lead
Won jobs	Value recorded against the lead that produced it
Revenue per ad dollar	The figure budget follows, over rolling quarters

Each layer depends on the one beneath it; few trade businesses feed the top two back into Google Ads.

Table 5

Sort every conversion action into three piles

Conversion action	Pile	Where it belongs	Why
Call from the ad, above your duration threshold	Enquiry	Primary	A person rang about a job
Call to a tracked number on the website	Enquiry	Primary	Captures callers who read the site first
Submitted enquiry or quote form	Enquiry	Primary	A described job with contact details
Completed online booking	Enquiry	Primary	A committed job
Tap on a phone number, email or WhatsApp link	Signal	Secondary	Where counted, taps were 45% of reported conversions
Directions, profile clicks, page views	Signal	Secondary	Interest, not an enquiry
Won job with its value	Revenue	Offline import, secondary at first	Only 9% of trade advertisers send real job values

Check campaign-level goals too: a campaign can still bid on an action the account has marked secondary.

Run this yourself: the 20-minute measurement audit

- [ ] Open the conversions summary in Google Ads and list every action marked Primary.
- [ ] Move taps on phone, email and WhatsApp links, directions and profile clicks to Secondary.
- [ ] Confirm you record both call routes: calls from ads and calls to a tracked number on the website.
- [ ] Check that repeat calls are counted once per caller, not once per ring.
- [ ] Listen to ten short calls before accepting the default 60-second threshold.
- [ ] Check the value on each enquiry action: if it is the one-dollar default, ignore the ROAS column.
- [ ] Open each campaign's goals and confirm they use the account's primary enquiry actions.
- [ ] Split a month of results by network and by device before drawing any conclusion.
- [ ] Repeat the audit whenever the website, tag manager or call-tracking provider changes.

One lead record, with its source attached

SoudCoh's method is to write every form, call and booking to one lead record, with its source captured on arrival — click ids, landing page, device and, once matched, campaign, ad group, keyword and search term — alongside the existing Google tags rather than instead of them. Won-job values then go back to Google Ads as an offline conversion, secondary at first, so they inform reporting before they change bidding. The **tracking** page describes the setup, and **how to tell whether your leads are tracked properly** walks through the checks.

07

From enquiry to revenue

Cost per lead is the easiest number to optimise, and it says nothing about what a job is worth.

A trade business does not get paid for enquiries. It gets paid for jobs, and jobs vary enormously in value — which is why cost per lead, the most common way of judging trade advertising, is a poor guide on its own.

A handful of jobs carry the month

The biggest tenth of won jobs carried 41% of recorded revenue for the median business. A single large job — a switchboard upgrade, a full re-pipe, a leak that became a bathroom — can swing a month's return on ad spend more than any campaign change. Judge campaigns on rolling quarters, look at the median job as well as the total, and keep a separate eye on the services that produce the big tickets, because they are rare enough to be cut by mistake.

41%

of recorded revenue came from the biggest tenth of won jobs

9%

of trade advertisers send real job values to Google Ads

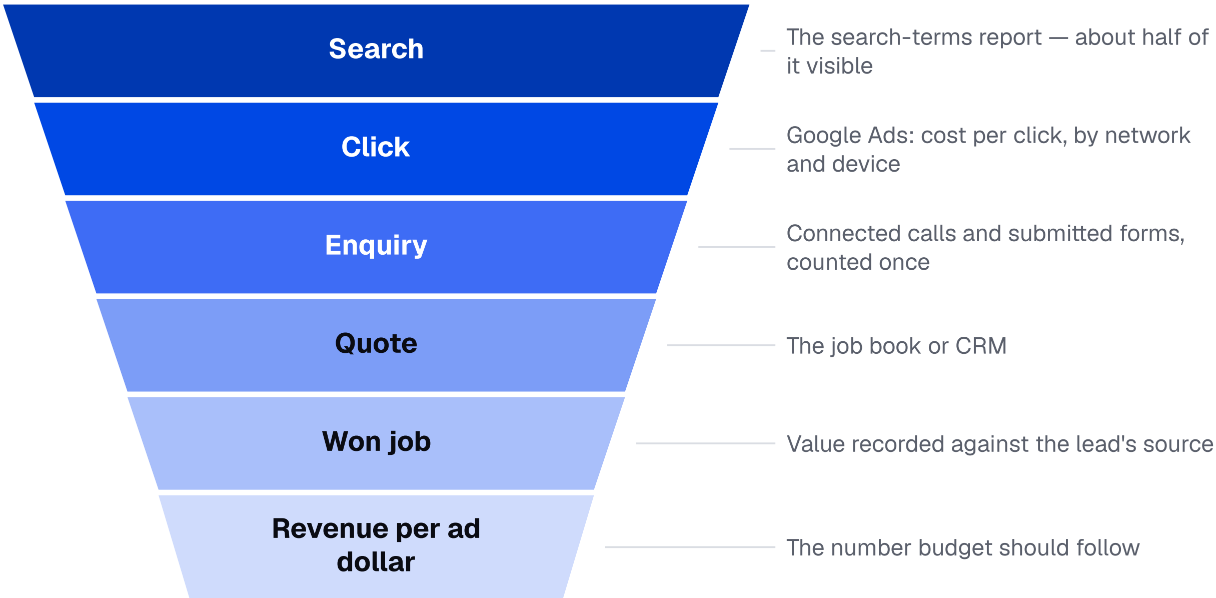
> **A trade business does not get paid for enquiries. It gets paid for jobs.**

Judge each lead by the job it wins

Cost per lead treats a blocked-drain call and a hot-water replacement as equal. They are not. Give planned services — installations, replacements, hot water, gas and compliance — their own campaigns and budgets so a steady stream of small call-outs cannot starve them. Reply to forms as fast as you answer the phone, and judge calls and forms by the jobs they win, not by how urgent they sound. For how that plays out across channels, see lead generation for service businesses.

Figure 5

From search to revenue: where each number lives



Most trade reporting stops at the enquiry. The decisions that matter sit below it.

> **Do this**
>
> ### Connect jobs to ad groups — a spreadsheet is enough
>
> You do not need new software to start. Once a month, export the enquiries with their source — campaign, ad group, and the search term where it is known — mark which became won jobs and what each was worth, and total revenue per ad dollar by ad group and by service. Move budget on that figure over rolling quarters, never on a single month, and never on cost per lead alone. When the numbers are steady, upload won jobs to Google Ads as an offline conversion, secondary at first. The From keyword to revenue white paper sets out the full method.

Run this yourself: the monthly revenue check

- [ ] List every won job for the month with its value and the enquiry it came from.
- [ ] Match each enquiry to its campaign and ad group, using the click id or the tracked number.
- [ ] Total revenue per ad dollar by ad group and by service — not just cost per lead.
- [ ] Look at the median job as well as the total, so one large job does not mislead you.
- [ ] Compare planned services with reactive call-outs on value per won job.
- [ ] Check win rates for calls and forms separately, and how quickly forms were answered.
- [ ] Make budget moves on rolling quarters, never on one month.

08

Websites and landing pages built for the phone call

Answer the job, the suburb and what happens next in the first screen — on a page built for the service.

Most trade enquiries start on a phone. The website's job is narrow and demanding: prove in the first screen that you do this exact job, in this area, and make it easy to ring or to write.

A page for every service

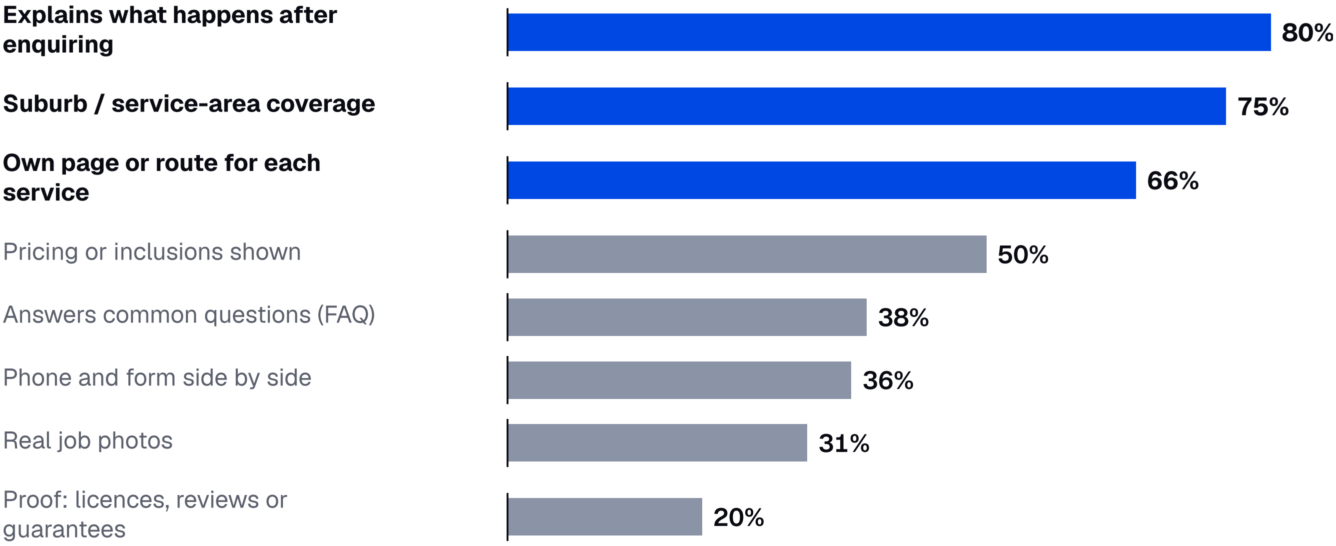
SoudCoh sends ads to service pages rather than the home page. Service pages make ads more relevant, lift Quality Score, and give Google and AI assistants something specific to cite. That matters because landing-page experience is the second most common Quality Score drag, rated below average on 52% of scored keyword spend for the typical advertiser. What converts is what is on the page: the job, the area, proof and an easy way to get in touch.

Suburb pages follow the same rule: build them only for the areas you want, and make them real — local jobs, local photos, travel times, not a template with the suburb name swapped.

Exhibit 16

What recurs across the trade websites SoudCoh builds

Share of SoudCoh's trade website builds that include each component



How to read this: Three components recur: an explanation of what happens after enquiring, clear suburb coverage and a page for each service.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

What the first screen needs

Across the trade websites SoudCoh builds, three components recur: an explanation of what happens after someone enquires, clear suburb coverage, and a page for each service. They answer the questions a homeowner has before calling — do you do this exact job, do you come to my suburb, and what happens after I press send? None needs a big budget; they need specific, accurate content. The pages that convert put the phone number and a short form in the first screen, name the suburb and the job, and show proof: licences, reviews, photos of real work.

Build the contact route around the job. For call-led trades — plumbing, electrical, most urgent work — the number must be tappable, tracked and answered, including outside office hours. For form-led trades such as cleaning, the form must fit on one phone screen, acknowledge instantly and promise a reply time you keep. Every page still needs both doors. See the website guides for **electricians**, **plumbers** and **cleaning businesses**, and **a trade website that converts calls and forms**.

⚠ **Watch out**

Test it the way customers see it

Design the landing page for the thumb first. A tap-to-call button that works, a form that fits on one screen and a page that loads before the searcher gives up are worth more than any bid change. Test it yourself on your own phone, on mobile data, from the ad — not from a bookmark on the office computer.

Run this yourself: the first-screen test

- [ ] Open your ad on a phone, on mobile data, and note how long the page takes to become usable.
- [ ] Without scrolling, can you see the service, the area you cover and a phone number?
- [ ] Tap the number: does it dial, and is it a tracked number?
- [ ] Is there a short form in or near the first screen, and is it easy to fill in on a phone keyboard?
- [ ] Does the page say what happens after someone enquires, and how quickly you reply?
- [ ] Is there proof — licences, reviews, photos of real jobs?
- [ ] Does each service you advertise have its own page, and each suburb campaign a real local page?
- [ ] Do the ad and the page use the same words for the job?

09

Being found by AI answers

AI assistants answer the question they were asked with the page most specifically about it — and the answer changes each time you ask.

Some of the questions buyers once typed into Google now go to ChatGPT-style assistants. SoudCoh tests how those assistants choose their sources, using buyer questions about marketing for trades.

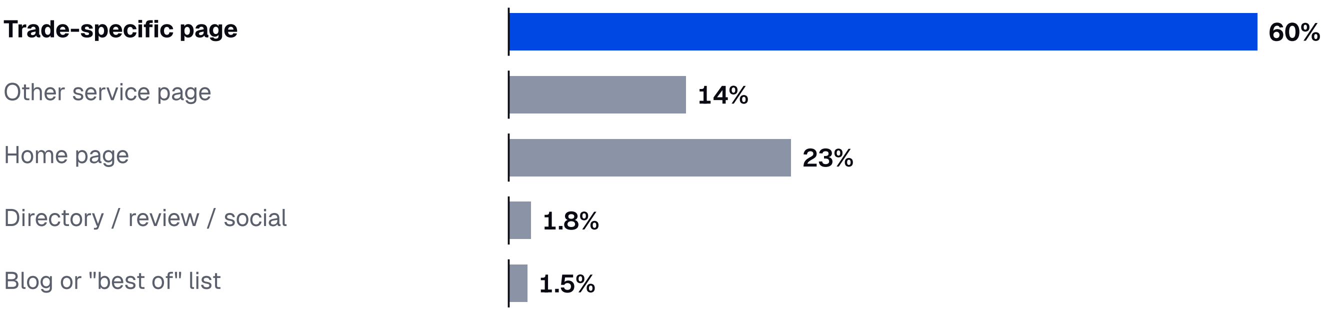
Assistants cite the page built for the question

When ChatGPT-style assistants answered 'who does marketing or websites for [trade]', they mostly cited agency pages built for that exact trade — 60% of the pages cited in SoudCoh's tests — not agency home pages or directories. Asked about electricians, an assistant looks for a page that is about electricians, and a general 'we do digital marketing' home page rarely qualifies. The pages that get cited state plainly who they are for, what the work involves and what it costs. If you want to be recommended for a trade, publish a page for that trade.

Exhibit 17

What AI assistants cited when asked who does marketing for a trade

Share of cited pages, by type of page (SoudCoh tests)



How to read this: Pages built for the exact trade were cited far more often than home pages, other service pages or directories.

Source: SoudCoh analysis of reported Google Ads data.

An AI answer is a draw from a short list

Ask an AI assistant the same buyer question three times and only a minority of the websites it cites — 25% in SoudCoh's tests — appear in all three answers. There is no single 'AI ranking' to win. Being on the list — through a page that directly answers the question, a directory profile and third-party mentions — matters more than being first in any single answer. Measure AI visibility by asking many times, on more than one assistant, never once.

Analytics undercounts AI discovery

Do not expect analytics to show you this. On SoudCoh's own website, visits that analytics could attribute to AI assistants were 0.2% of sessions; most AI-influenced visits arrive with no referrer and are filed as 'Direct'. When someone copies a name from an AI answer into a browser, or taps a link inside an app that drops the referrer, nothing travels with the visit to say where it came from; some assistants tag their links, which a dedicated channel can catch. Ask every new enquiry how they found you, store the answer on the lead, and give AI assistants their own channel in analytics. See how ChatGPT chooses which business to recommend.

Google still gets the short search

Two in five non-brand Google searches that showed SoudCoh's site named a place (41%), while phrased questions barely registered. Questions are moving to AI assistants; Google still gets the short commercial search. So build both — service-plus-place pages for the short search and plain-English answers for the questions — with local SEO underneath.

> **Do this**
>
> ### Make pages an assistant can quote
>
> Publish one page per service and per question type rather than one general page. Put the answer first, in plain language, followed by a short list of facts that stand on their own — who it is for, what it includes, what it costs, where you work. Add a small FAQ written in the words customers use, and original information where you have it. Structured data, a clean sitemap and directory profiles support the page; they do not replace it.

Run this yourself: the AI visibility check

- [ ] Write down five questions a customer might ask an assistant about your service and area.
- [ ] Ask each one three times, on at least two assistants, and record who is named and which pages are cited.
- [ ] Check that you have a page answering each question directly, in its first paragraph.
- [ ] Make sure your Google Business Profile and main directory listings match your site's services and areas.
- [ ] Add 'How did you find us?' to your forms and call script, and store the answer on the lead.
- [ ] Repeat the check each quarter — a single answer is noise.

10

Growth stages: from owner-operator to multi-site

The principles hold at every size; what changes is how much can be measured, who answers the phone and how budget is split.

The same principles hold from one van to many sites; what changes is what can be measured.

The findings in this paper apply at every size, but a business meets them in a different order as it grows: an owner-operator is short of time, a growing company of measurement, a multi-site brand of consistency.

On budget

We recommend a minimum of A$5,000 a month in ad spend for most businesses; the largest companies we work with invest up to A$30,000 a day. The reason for a floor is learning: an account needs enough enquiries each month for search terms, match types and services to be compared, and at low volumes a single large job — or a single quiet week — can make a month look like a trend. Whatever the level, spread the budget across all seven days, and check whether impressions are being lost to rank before adding money; for most advertisers, rank is the tighter limit.

Table 6

What changes at each stage

	Owner-operator	Growing trade company	Multi-site service brand
The binding constraint	Time, and answering the phone	Measurement and crew capacity	Consistency, and allocation across services and regions
Account shape	One service campaign; suburbs only where they matter	Service campaign plus a per-suburb satellite with its own budget	Service campaigns by region or brand, with shared negative lists audited quarterly
What to measure	Connected calls and submitted forms; taps as secondary	Both call routes, unique callers, won jobs in a monthly spreadsheet	Won-job value uploaded to Google Ads; revenue per ad dollar by service and region
Who answers	The owner, plus a call-answering service after hours	A dedicated person or roster, with forms answered as fast as calls	A roster or contact team matched to the ad schedule
Budget decisions	Run ads in the hours you can answer; fix rank before budget	Move budget between service and suburb legs on cost per enquiry	Move budget between services on revenue per ad dollar, over rolling quarters
Website	A page per service; phone and form in the first screen	Real suburb pages for the areas you want	Consistent templates, with local proof on every location page
Search-term work	A weekly review; template negatives on day one	Daily cleaning with simulation; monthly promotion	Propose, challenge, simulate, verify — with a record of why each negative exists

No stage is a size threshold.

Owner-operators

For a business where the owner is also the one on the tools, the most valuable changes cost nothing but attention. Make sure the Conversions column counts real enquiries. Keep the ads to the hours someone can answer, or put a call-answering service behind the number. Build one tight service campaign with a page for each service, and read the search terms once a week. Resist the pitch to add hundreds of keywords.

Growing trade companies

As crews are added, the bottleneck moves from finding work to knowing which work pays. This is the stage to capture both call routes, count unique callers, answer forms as fast as calls, and start the monthly spreadsheet that connects won jobs to ad groups. It is also the stage to test a per-suburb satellite campaign against the service campaign with separate budgets, and to give planned services — installations, replacements, compliance — their own campaigns so reactive call-outs do not starve them.

Multi-site service brands

At scale, small leaks compound across sites. A shared negative list can silently remove a service everywhere at once, so it needs a quarterly audit against converting searches and a record of why each negative exists. Won-job values should flow back into Google Ads as offline conversions — secondary at first — so budget can move between services and regions on revenue per ad dollar rather than cost per lead. And because a handful of large jobs carry a large share of revenue, judge regions and services on rolling quarters and on the median job, not on a single month's return — with one definition of an enquiry across every site.

11

A 12-point action plan

Twelve checks any home-service business can run on its own account, roughly in the order they pay back.

Each point below comes from a finding in this paper. The first four take an afternoon and cost nothing; the rest are standing habits. None requires an agency — though if you would rather someone else ran them, talk to SoudCoh.

Run these on your own account

1. **Audit the Conversions column**
   Sort every conversion action into enquiries, signals and revenue. Only connected calls, submitted forms and bookings stay primary; taps, directions and profile clicks move to secondary.

2. **Check the value on each enquiry**
   If every enquiry carries Google's one-dollar default, ignore the ROAS column until real job values flow back from your job book.

3. **Keep Search campaigns on search**
   Untick the Display Network, keep search partners only if they win on enquiries per dollar, and target people physically in your service area.

4. **Match ad hours to answered hours**
   Compare the ad schedule with who actually picks up. Answer after-hours calls, or schedule the ads to the hours you can.

5. **Fix the first screen**
   On a phone, on mobile data: the job, the area, a tappable tracked number and a short form, without scrolling.

6. **Give each service its own ad group and page**
   One service per ad group, three ads written for it, and a page that says the same thing.

7

Read the search terms every week

Sort them into negate, review and promote, remembering the report names the searches behind only about half the spend.

8

Simulate every negative

Check each proposed negative against a long window of converting searches before it goes live — especially the 'we don't do that' kind.

9

Promote the winners monthly

Move searches with repeat enquiries to exact keywords, each with an ad in the customer's own words.

10

Fix rank before buying budget

Compare impressions lost to rank with those lost to budget, and lift rank with relevance and better landing pages first.

11

Judge new campaigns from months two and three

Expect the honeymoon and the month-two rise; do not scale on month one or stop in month two.

12

Follow revenue, not cost per lead

Record won jobs against their source, judge on rolling quarters, and give planned services their own budget so call-outs cannot starve them.

Methodology

SoudCoh research sample: reported Google Ads campaign data from Australian trade and home-service businesses — plumbing, electrical, cleaning and other home services — covering search terms, keywords, calls, forms, conversion settings and won jobs. Figures are medians across the sample unless stated. An enquiry is a recorded phone call or a submitted form; taps, page views and profile clicks are not counted as enquiries. Costs are ad spend in Australian dollars, excluding GST. Findings on AI answers come from SoudCoh's own tests and website.

Questions readers ask

What is the most effective way to market a home-service business in Australia?

Start with Google Search, because it captures demand that already exists: in SoudCoh's research sample, 84% of new launches recorded an enquiry within three days. Then get four things right — count only real calls and forms as enquiries, give each service its own ad group and page, read the search terms every week, and answer the phone, including after hours.

How much should a home-service business spend on Google Ads?

We recommend a minimum of A$5,000 a month in ad spend for most businesses; the largest companies we work with invest up to A$30,000 a day. Across SoudCoh's research sample of trade and home-service advertisers, the median cost per enquiry was A$117, but it varies widely by trade, so compare against your own trade's benchmark and check whether impressions are lost to rank before adding budget.

Why does Google Ads cost more per lead in the second month?

Because the first month is usually a honeymoon. In SoudCoh's research sample, the typical cost per enquiry moved +31% from month one to month two, and 68% of new launches paid more per enquiry in their second month. A fresh account tends to serve the most urgent, ready-to-book searches first. Set targets from months two and three, not from the first month.

Should phone-number taps count as conversions in Google Ads?

No. A tap shows intent, not an enquiry. SoudCoh found 32% of trade advertisers counting taps as conversions, and where they did, the Conversions column overstated real enquiries by +92%. Keep taps as secondary signals and count only connected calls and submitted forms.

Is exact match safer than phrase or broad match for trades?

Not on its own. In SoudCoh's research sample, 47% of the enquiries exact-match keywords produced came from searches worded differently from the keyword, and a phrase-match conversion cost about the same as an exact-match one. Pair exact and phrase match, review search terms weekly, and add broad match only when tracking and cleaning are solid.

Are emergency keywords worth it for plumbers and electricians?

Only as a small, separately bid ad group. In SoudCoh's research sample, emergency-worded searches took 1.9% of search-term spend even for plumbers and electricians, and most enquiries came from ordinary service searches. Run emergency ads only if someone genuinely answers the phone around the clock.

Do home-service businesses need a page for each suburb?

Only for the suburbs you genuinely want, and only if the page is real. In SoudCoh's research sample, clicks on per-suburb campaigns carried a premium of +49% over service clicks, and the suburb campaign produced fewer enquiries per dollar than the service campaign for 57% of advertisers running both. Run suburbs as a satellite with its own budget and let cost per enquiry decide.

How do AI assistants like ChatGPT decide which business to recommend?

They cite the page that answers the exact question. In SoudCoh's tests, 60% of the pages assistants cited when asked who does marketing for a trade were pages built for that trade, and only a minority of cited sites appeared in all three repeats of the same question. Publish a specific page for each trade, service and area, and measure visibility by asking many times.

Further reading

Article

Most trade enquiries come from searches you never chose →

Article

Exact match is not exact: what close variants mean for trades →

Article

Your search terms report hides about half your spend →

Article

Negative keywords that block your customers →

Article

Why Google Ads month two costs more than month one →

Article

Near me searches convert better for trades →

Article

Phone taps are not enquiries: how Google Ads overcounts trade leads →

Article

The default conversion value that makes trade ROAS meaningless →

Article

Is your Search campaign quietly running on the Display Network? →

Article

Short calls and the 60-second rule: which Google Ads calls should count? →

Article

Emergency searches are a small share of trade demand →

Article

How ChatGPT chooses which business to recommend →

Article

How Do I Know If My Leads Are Being Tracked Properly? →

Article

What does a trade website need to turn clicks into calls and forms? →

Article

How Long Should I Give a Campaign Before Judging It? →

Article

Set ad hours around the calls your team can answer →

Page

All SoudCoh white papers →

White paper

Launch, discover, control: the first 90 days on Google Ads →

White paper

From keyword to revenue: measuring what trade marketing is really worth →

Page

Google Ads benchmarks for Australian trades →

Industry

Marketing for plumbing businesses →

Industry

Marketing for electricians →

Industry

Marketing for cleaning businesses →

Industry

Marketing for HVAC businesses →

Industry

Marketing for pest control businesses →

Industry

Marketing for roofing businesses →

Industry

Marketing for painting businesses →

Industry

Marketing for removalists and moving companies →

Industry

Marketing for construction businesses →

Industry

Websites for electricians →

Industry

Websites for plumbers →

Industry

Websites for cleaning businesses →

Page

Google Ads management →

Page

Google Search campaigns →

Page

Tracking and analytics →

Page

Local SEO →

Page
Lead generation for service businesses →

Page
Talk to SoudCoh →

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4. About Display Expansion on Search campaigns — Google Ads Help
5. About impression share — Google Ads Help
6. About phone call conversion tracking — Google Ads Help
7. About primary and secondary conversion actions — Google Ads Help
8. About conversion values — Google Ads Help
9. About offline conversion imports — Google Ads Help
10. Creating helpful, reliable, people-first content — Google Search Central

Most relevant to: Plumbing, Electrical, Cleaning, HVAC, Pest control, Roofing, Painting, Removals, Construction.

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