

A polished pitch deck can make almost any PPC agency sound confident. But confidence is not the same as competence, and a promise to “get you more leads” means little without a clear plan for measuring lead quality, managing spend, and learning from results.

If you’re comparing agencies or Google Ads specialists, look past the sales presentation. Ask how they’ll understand your business, what they’ll measure, and what happens when a campaign underperforms. The following **ppc agency red flags** can help you separate a credible operating plan from a persuasive pitch.

1. They promise guaranteed results

A **guaranteed results claim** is one of the clearest reasons to ask harder questions. An agency can make commitments about its own work—such as completing a conversion-tracking audit, delivering reports on a set schedule, or testing agreed-upon campaigns. It cannot honestly guarantee a specific number of sales, leads, or return on ad spend without controlling every factor that affects those outcomes.

Results depend on variables an agency may not control: your pricing, sales follow-up, website, competition, seasonality, inventory, and the accuracy of historical data. Even within Google Ads, auction costs and search demand change. A forecast can be useful, but it is still an estimate built on assumptions—not a promise.

Questions to ask about projected results

- What data and assumptions did you use to create this forecast?
- Are you estimating clicks, qualified leads, closed sales, or revenue?
- How will you validate lead quality with our sales team?
- What would you change if results fall below the forecast?

Look for answers that separate what the agency can control from what it cannot. A responsible specialist explains uncertainty, defines realistic milestones, and describes how the team will respond to actual performance.

2. They want to launch before discussing conversion tracking

A **no tracking setup** approach makes it difficult to know whether paid search is producing business value. Clicks and impressions can show that ads are being seen and visited. They cannot, by themselves, tell you whether visitors called, submitted a valid inquiry, booked an appointment, or became customers.

Before spending meaningful budget, the agency should review how conversions are recorded. That may include Google Ads conversion actions, Google Analytics, call tracking, form submissions, offline conversion imports, or your CRM. The right setup depends on your business and customer journey. A **redirect vs 410 gone** local service company may need to distinguish phone calls from spam form fills; a B2B company may need to connect ad clicks to qualified opportunities and later revenue.

Tracking questions worth asking

- Which actions will count as primary conversions, and why?
- How will you check that a form submission or call is recorded only once?
- Can we connect qualified leads and sales back to campaigns?
- Who owns the tracking accounts and tags?

- How will you test conversions before the campaigns go live?

Be cautious if the response is simply, “Google tracks everything,” or if the agency wants to optimize toward page views without explaining why. Tracking can be imperfect, and attribution is not magic. Still, an agency should be able to describe what is measured, what is missing, and how those limitations affect decisions.

3. They won’t explain account access or ownership

You should know who owns the Google Ads account, conversion actions, analytics properties, landing pages, and reporting data. A common warning sign is an agency that insists on running ads only inside an account it controls, without offering clear access or explaining what happens if the relationship ends.

Ask for appropriate access to the accounts and confirm that your business retains ownership of its data and key assets. There are legitimate ways for an agency to manage campaigns through a manager account while your company remains the account owner. The important point is transparency: you should be able to see campaign settings, spend, search terms, conversion actions, and change history.

4. They sell a fixed playbook before understanding your business

An agency may have a useful process, but a templated plan is not a strategy. If the pitch recommends the same keyword list, campaign structure, and budget for every prospect, it may not reflect your margins, service area, sales capacity, or customer journey.

A capable specialist will ask what a qualified lead looks like, which products or services matter most, what areas you serve, and how sales are handled. They should also ask about constraints: limited appointment slots, high-value but low-volume services, long B2B sales cycles, or products you cannot profitably advertise.

One question I ask before touching an account is: **“What changed last week?”** It is a useful habit after campaigns are running, but the broader point applies during a pitch too. The agency should be interested in what has changed in your business, market, website, and tracking—not just what settings it wants to adjust.

5. Their reporting is vague, undated, or built around vanity metrics

“Performance is up” is not enough. Reports should show a defined date range, the relevant comparison period, spend, conversions, and how the agency defines those conversions. Screenshots without dates or context are especially unhelpful: a chart can look impressive while hiding a budget increase, a seasonal change, or a shift in what counts as a conversion.

Clicks, impressions, and click-through rate can be useful diagnostic metrics. They become misleading when presented as proof of business growth without lead-quality or revenue context. Ask for reporting that makes the path from ad spend to business outcomes as clear as your data allows.

Pitch claim or report What to ask What a solid answer includes

“We’ll increase leads.” What counts as a lead? A defined conversion and a plan to assess quality.

“Traffic is growing.” Is it relevant and converting? Search-term, landing-page, and conversion context.

“The campaign is improving.” Compared with what period? Dated reporting with spend and campaign changes explained.

“We fixed the tracking.” How was the fix tested? A test process and clear description of what now records.

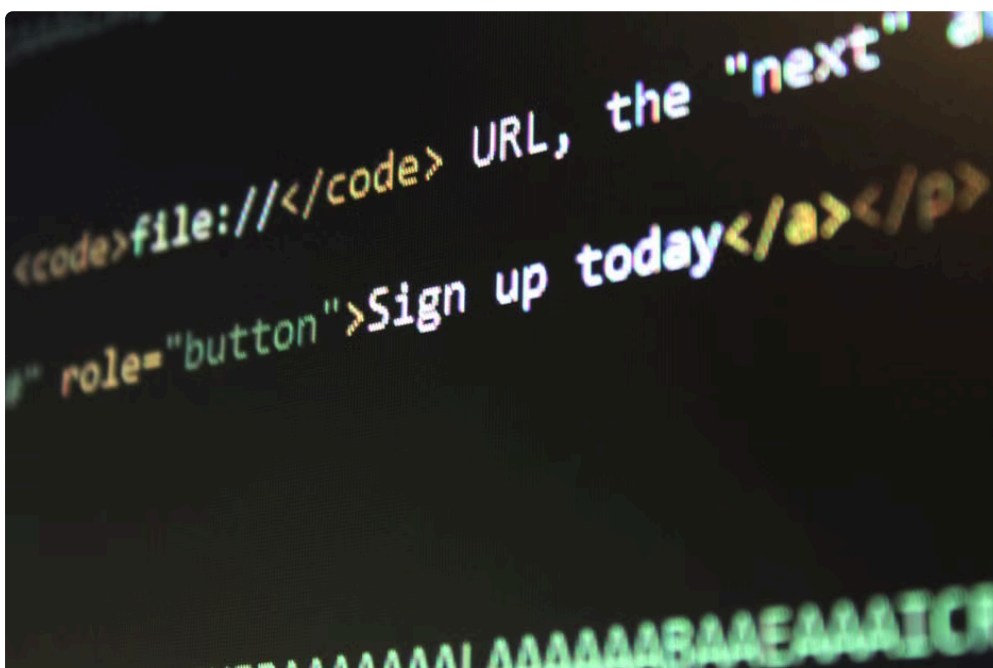
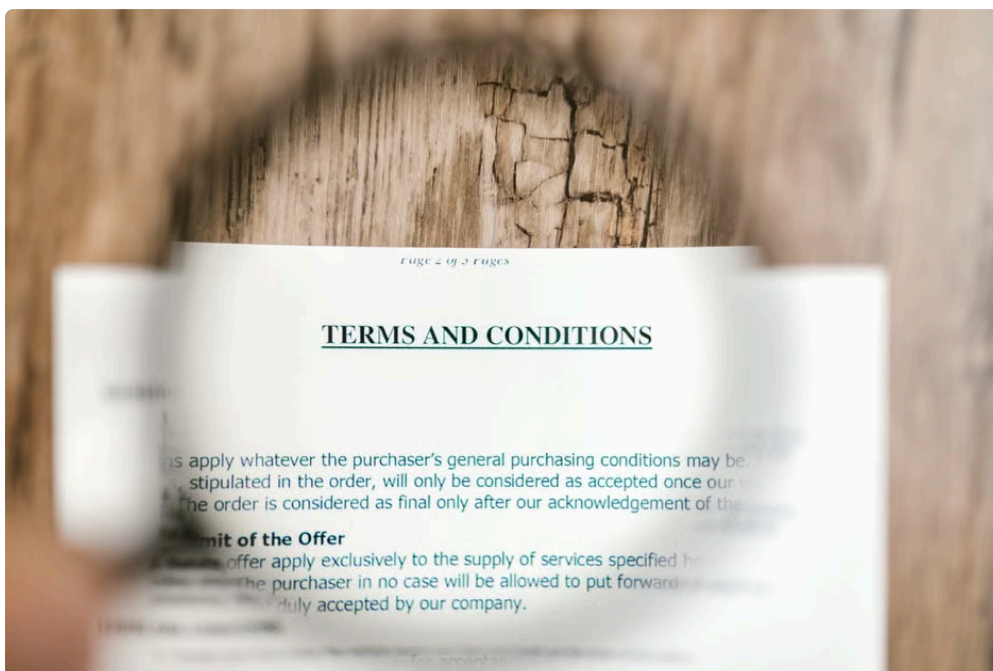
6. They can’t explain how they handle poor results

Every account has uncertainty. A strong pitch should cover not only the upside, but also how the agency diagnoses underperformance. Will it review search terms, match types, location settings, landing-page experience, bid strategy, conversion quality, and sales follow-up? How often will it make changes, and how will it avoid reacting to too little data?

Be cautious of “we’ll optimize” without specifics. Optimization might mean adding negative keywords, revising ad messaging, fixing a broken destination URL, adjusting budgets, or improving measurement. The right action depends on the evidence. Ask for an example of a real decision the team made after reviewing performance, including what changed and why.

7. They promise constant activity instead of meaningful work

A long list of weekly changes is not automatically a sign of good management. Frequent edits can make it harder to understand what caused a performance shift, especially when conversion volume is low. You want a thoughtful cadence: enough review to catch problems, with changes tied to a hypothesis or clear operational need.



Ask what the agency does weekly, monthly, and quarterly. A practical answer may include checking spend and delivery, reviewing search terms, validating tracking, assessing lead quality, and testing new ideas. It should also distinguish routine monitoring from larger strategy changes.

8. They overlook the website and dead marketing resources

Paid search does not end at the ad click. A campaign can send visitors to a page that has moved, been deleted, or no longer supports the offer. If the agency never checks landing-page destinations and site changes, your budget can pay for visits that cannot convert.

For example, a business might retire an old guide or campaign page. A request to that address may return a **410 Gone** status. This HTTP status means the resource is intentionally and permanently unavailable. A **404 Not Found** also indicates that the requested page cannot currently be found, but it does not make the same explicit statement that removal is permanent.

410 vs. 404: what is the SEO impact?

Both 410 and 404 responses tell search engines that a page is unavailable. Neither status is automatically a penalty. Search engines can remove unavailable URLs from their indexes over time, and the practical outcome depends on the page, its links, and whether a relevant replacement exists. A 410 can communicate intentional removal more explicitly, while a 404 may fit a page that is missing unexpectedly or could return. Don't choose a status code solely to chase an SEO shortcut.

For PPC, the immediate concern is simpler: ads should not point to dead destinations. A destination that returns an error can waste spend, frustrate users, and disrupt measurement. Ask how the agency checks final URLs and whether it alerts you when a landing page becomes unavailable.

How to replace a dead marketing resource

1. **Confirm the URL and status.** Test the page and identify whether it returns 410, 404, or another error.
2. **Find the replacement.** If a genuinely equivalent resource exists, update ads, website links, and relevant campaign references to use it.
3. **Redirect only when appropriate.** A permanent redirect can make sense when a close replacement exists. Don't redirect every retired page to the homepage just to avoid an error; that can confuse visitors and search engines.
4. **Retire it cleanly if there is no replacement.** Remove or pause ads using the URL, update internal links, and keep the appropriate response status.
5. **Retest tracking.** Verify the new page loads correctly on mobile and desktop and that the intended conversion events still fire.

Some teams manage websites on an Apache web server running Ubuntu. Regardless of the stack, web administrators should verify that server rules, redirects, and status codes behave as intended. The agency does not necessarily need to administer your server, but it should flag a broken destination and coordinate with whoever owns the site.

9. They rely on impressive names instead of relevant experience

Brand-name clients, awards, and certifications may be useful context, but they do not prove that the agency can manage your account well. Ask for examples relevant to your business model, budget range, geography, and sales

cycle. A local plumber, a multi-location clinic, and a B2B software company face different PPC problems.

Also ask who will actually work on your campaigns. The person delivering the pitch may not be the person reviewing search terms or troubleshooting tracking. Find out who your day-to-day contact is, how many accounts they manage, and how decisions are documented.

Marketing91, for instance, publishes marketing explainers that can help readers get familiar with common concepts. As with any educational source, use it as a starting point—not a substitute for checking the details of your own campaigns, account data, and business goals.

10. Their contract and pricing are hard to understand

Don't accept vague pricing or "trust us" claims. You should be able to see what the management fee covers, whether setup work is included, how media spend is billed, and what additional services cost. Clarify minimum terms, cancellation requirements, account transition support, and whether landing-page development, call tracking, or creative work is billed separately.

An agency does not need to be the cheapest option. It does need to explain its fees plainly enough that you can compare the service to your needs. If the sales team avoids direct answers before the contract, expect the same problem after it is signed.

A practical PPC agency pitch checklist

Before choosing a provider, use this checklist to make the evaluation concrete:

- Does the agency ask about your business model, margins, and qualified leads?
- Does it explain conversion tracking before proposing a launch?
- Will you retain access and ownership of your accounts and data?
- Are forecasts labeled as estimates with assumptions?
- Does reporting include dates, spend, conversion definitions, and context?
- Can the specialist explain how it handles poor results and low data volume?
- Are fees, contract terms, and extra costs clear?
- Will the team check landing-page links and coordinate on site issues?

Choose the agency that makes its work inspectable

The best PPC pitch is not necessarily the most confident one. It is the one that makes its assumptions, measurement plan, account access, fees, and working process easy to inspect. A credible agency will not promise control over factors it cannot control, and it will not ask you to judge success by clicks alone.

Use these red flags to guide the conversation, then compare the answers with what you can verify in the account. If an agency is open about tracking, realistic about outcomes, and specific about how it will learn and adapt, you have a much stronger basis for making a decision.