The 10 Warning Signs

Use this on your placement report for the last 14 to 30 days. Mark each placement against the signs.

☐ 1. CTR far above the campaign's normal, with few conversions

☐ 2. Clicks that don't become visits; most visits end in under two seconds

☐ 3. No daily rhythm in one country's traffic

☐ 4. A long tail of placements with spend and zero conversions

☐ 5. Names that look wrong: random strings, macros, IP addresses, copy-cats

☐ 6. One IP range, device or OS version dominating; data-center traffic

☐ 7. Top placements change every week after you block

☐ 8. Conversions too fast, in batches, with similar details, or no activity after

☐ 9. Country in the ad platform doesn't match analytics

☐ 10. A new placement suddenly takes a big share of spend

Two or more signs on one placement: block it. One sign: watch it.

Before you judge a placement, let it spend two to three times your target cost per conversion.

Google and Microsoft Ads Clean-Up

About 30 minutes per account. See chapter 5.

☐ Invalid clicks and Invalid click rate columns added; any campaign far above the rest noted

☐ Display Network unticked in every search campaign

☐ Search partners compared with Google Search; switched off where they do worse

☐ Location targeting set to presence (people in the location) for local campaigns

☐ Content suitability set at the account level: inventory type chosen, embedded videos and unlabeled content considered

☐ "Where ads showed" report sorted by cost; placements with two or more warning signs blocked

☐ One account-level placement exclusion list in use (it also protects PMax)

☐ Brand exclusions and account-level negative keywords applied to PMax

☐ PMax and Demand Gen placement and channel reports checked; weak channels switched off

☐ Every campaign optimizes for purchases or qualified leads, not page views

☐ Billing section checked for invalid activity credits

☐ Microsoft: ad distribution narrowed, website exclusion list attached, publisher report checked

☐ Evidence kept (dates, clicks, sessions, IPs, click IDs) for any review request within 60 days

Meta and Social Ads Clean-Up

See chapter 6.

- ☐ Results broken down by placement for the last 30 days
- ☐ Audience Network results compared with the main apps
- ☐ Audience Network switched off where it doesn't produce real sales
- ☐ Block list applied for placements outside the main apps
- ☐ Lead forms reviewed: fake or junk leads counted
- ☐ Friction added that bots trip over: confirmation step, real-information field
- ☐ Leads matched to real outcomes in your CRM or sales records
- ☐ Fake leads removed from audience lists and lookalike sources
- ☐ Engagement checked for bot-like patterns (sudden bursts, empty profiles)
- ☐ Optimization goal set to a real outcome, not cheap clicks or reach
- ☐ Same checks run on TikTok, LinkedIn, Reddit and any other social channel
- ☐ Every block recorded in your blocklist sheet

Programmatic, Pop, Push and Native Clean-Up

See chapter 7.

- ☐ Report pulled by site, app, zone or source ID
- ☐ Placements with two or more warning signs blocked
- ☐ Whole sources or sub-networks blocked where the pattern points to them
- ☐ Unfilled macros, IP addresses and random-string names blocked
- ☐ Every pre-bid quality filter on the platform switched on
- ☐ ads.txt and app-ads.txt checks enabled where the platform offers them
- ☐ MFA and arbitrage sites excluded on native
- ☐ Pop and push tested source by source, with a small budget per source
- ☐ Allowlist campaign built from proven sources
- ☐ New sources promoted to the allowlist only after they prove themselves
- ☐ Placements checked again two or three days after blocking (rotation)
- ☐ Every block recorded in your blocklist sheet

Questions to Ask a Platform

Ask before you deposit. Write down the answers. See chapters 7 and 9.

☐ Do you filter traffic before the bid, after, or both?

☐ What, specifically, does your filter check?

☐ Roughly what share of incoming traffic does it remove?

☐ Do you use a third-party verification vendor? Pre-bid on every impression, or a sample?

☐ Will I see a report by site, app, zone or source ID?

☐ Can I block individual sources? Can I run an allowlist?

☐ Do you check ads.txt, app-ads.txt and sellers.json?

☐ Do you publish a sellers.json file of your own?

☐ How do you handle domains that rotate after being blocked?

☐ Can I see invalid or filtered traffic counts in my reports?

☐ Is there a credit or refund policy for invalid traffic? Where is it published?

☐ Who do I contact about a suspicious source, and how fast do they respond?

Vague answers ("AI-powered protection") are an answer too.

The 30-Day Clean-Up Plan

See chapter 10.

Week 1: Measure - [ ] 30 days of placement, analytics and sales data pulled - [ ] Placement or source IDs in every click URL - [ ] Baseline: cost per click, per real visitor, per sale; junk share - [ ] Every placement marked block, watch or keep

Week 2: Block - [ ] Exclusions, block lists and pre-bid filters applied on every channel - [ ] Leaks closed: search partners, Audience Network, bad sources - [ ] Every block recorded; new placements rechecked after 2 to 3 days

Week 3: Rebuild - [ ] Winners sorted by real cost per sale - [ ] Allowlist campaign set up where it fits - [ ] Bids and budgets moved toward winners in small steps - [ ] Watch list cleared

Week 4: Lock in - [ ] "After" numbers written under the baseline - [ ] Alerts set: spend spike, CTR spike, conversion drop - [ ] Calendar: weekly 15-minute check, monthly review, quarterly settings review

The weekly 15-minute check: totals (3 min), new and big placements (5 min), clicks versus visits (3 min), conversion quality (2 min), act and record (2 min).