

Google's Push For Data Strength Is Really A Push For Better Bidding via @sejournal, @brookeosmundson

Google keeps coming back to the same message this year: your AI is only as good as the data feeding it.

That message has shown up across the Ads Decoded podcast, Data Manager updates, tagging guidance, partner integrations, and now even developer-focused content like the Ads DevCast podcast. It seems to reflect a broader shift in how Google expects campaigns to be built and optimized.

The issue is not that advertisers lack data. Most accounts have plenty of it. The problem is how that data has been structured, selected, and fed into bidding systems over time.

As Google leans further into AI-driven optimization, that gap becomes more visible for advertisers who don't have a sound conversion setup. Campaign performance is increasingly tied to how clearly the system understands what success looks like.

Why Google Is Pushing Advertisers To Rethink Conversion Strategy

For years, many advertisers treated conversion tracking as something to expand, not refine over and over again.

If a platform made it easy to track an action, it got added. If a CRM could send something back, it got imported. If a new conversion type became available, it often made its way into

the account without much resistance.

On paper, that sounds like a more complete dataset. The more data, the better – right?

In reality, it's created a lot of noise for machines to learn what truly matters.

Campaigns are often optimized toward a mix of actions that did not share the same level of intent, value, or timing.

Some signals are high quality but might have low volume due to a delay in sales cycle activity. Others may be immediate but loosely tied to actual business outcomes. Many accounts end up blending all of them together under a single bidding strategy for the sake of measuring everything.

That worked well enough when automation was less dependent on precise inputs.

It becomes a bigger problem when bidding systems are expected to make decisions based on patterns in that data.

Where Most Conversion Setups Break Down

In one of the recent Ads Decoded podcast episodes, Google's recent guidance around lead generation makes it clear what they are trying to correct. The focus is on mapping the full customer journey and identifying the conversion point that provides a usable signal for bidding.

That means looking at three things at the same time:

1. How predictive the action is of real business value
2. How frequently it occurs
3. How quickly it happens after the initial interaction

Many advertisers still default to the deepest possible conversion, assuming that optimizing toward the final sale will produce the best outcome across every campaign.

The issue isn't that particular goal itself, but more how usable that signal is for the system in a higher-funnel campaign. And this is where many conversion strategies start to fall apart.

If that action happens infrequently or takes weeks to materialize, it limits how much the bidding system can learn from it. The result is often slower optimization, higher volatility, and less efficient scaling.

On the other end, optimizing toward early-stage actions without considering quality can inflate volume without improving actual outcomes.

Selecting the right signal requires matching the conversion to the role the campaign plays and ensuring that signal is both meaningful and usable for bidding.

That shift requires more intentional decision-making than many accounts have historically applied to conversion setup. It also introduces a level of discipline that many advertisers have not needed when automation was less dependent on signal quality.

Why Is Google Putting So Much Weight On Data Strength?

Google is not being subtle about the Data Strength push. It's showing up in product updates, integrations, tagging changes, and even in the way Google is speaking to both advertisers and developers.

Part of the reason is practical. Advertisers have lost visibility into many of the signals they used to rely on. Privacy changes, browser restrictions, and platform limitations have made measurement less complete than it used to be.

At the same time, Google's bidding systems are being asked to do more with less. That puts more pressure on the signals that are still available.

This is where Data Strength comes in. Google is trying to make those signals more reliable, easier to connect, and more useful for optimization. Data Manager, tag gateway, and partner integrations all support that goal.

The expansion of integrations with platforms like HubSpot, Zapier, and Cloudflare also supports this effort. Instead of relying on custom implementations, advertisers can connect the systems where their data already exists with less effort.

This improves consistency in how data flows into bidding systems.

It also reinforces Google's broader goal of making its automation more effective in a lower-signal environment.

Does This Point To A Broader Role For Google?

I also think there is a bigger shift underneath this push.

Google is moving closer to the systems where business outcomes actually happen, not just where ads are served. Connecting CRM data, offline conversions, and audience signals allows Google's platforms to better understand what a "good" customer looks like beyond the initial click or form fill.

That can absolutely help advertisers improve performance.

At the same time, it positions Google as more than just an ads platform. It becomes more integrated into how businesses measure performance, define value, and connect marketing efforts back to real outcomes

Where Does Server-Side Tagging Fit In With This?

There has been a lot of confusion around server-side tagging and how it relates to what Google is promoting today.

They are related, but they aren't the same thing.

Google tag gateway focuses on how the Google tag is delivered and how requests are routed through first-party infrastructure. It is a way to make existing tagging setups more resilient and aligned with privacy expectations.

Server-side tagging is a broader architectural approach. It shifts data processing from the browser to a server environment that the advertiser controls. This can improve site performance, provide more control over data handling, and support more advanced use cases across multiple platforms.

In practical terms, tag gateway is often a more accessible first step for advertisers looking to improve data reliability without a full infrastructure overhaul.

Server-side tagging is a larger investment and tends to be more relevant for organizations with more complex data requirements or stricter governance needs.

The two approaches can work together, and Google documentation often recommends combining them for a more durable setup.

A Thoughtful Approach To Data Strength

The increased focus on Data Strength is directionally positive, but it does not remove the need for careful decision-making.

Simplifying setup does not automatically lead to better

outcomes. If conversion actions are poorly defined or not aligned with campaign intent, connecting them more efficiently will not improve performance.

If you're a marketer who isn't directly involved with setting up conversions, it may be worthwhile to meet with your Analytics teams. Create a list of must-have conversion events or actions you need to track for campaigns (online and/or offline), and cross-check that list with what's currently set up.

There is also a governance component to consider. As tagging becomes more automated and data collection expands, teams need to understand what is being captured, how it is being used, and how it aligns with internal policies.

Google has noted that expanded automatic event collection may result in additional data being sent to its systems, which should be reviewed as part of implementation.

Another consideration is how platform-specific improvements fit into a broader measurement strategy.

Google's push around Data Strength is primarily focused on improving performance within its own arena. That is valuable, but it should be complemented by broader measurement approaches when making budget and channel decisions.

This is where initiatives like Meridian come into play. Google has positioned Meridian as an open-source marketing mix modeling solution to help advertisers evaluate performance across channels and connect those insights to budget planning.

How Google Is Reinforcing Data Strength Across The Industry

One of the more interesting aspects of this push is how consistently it's showing up across different mediums.

Product updates are only one piece of it.

Google is also investing in education and communication around Data Strength, using formats that reach both marketers and developers. Ads Decoded continues to focus on practical campaign strategies, including how to map the customer journey and select the right conversion signals.

At the same time, newer initiatives like Ads DevCast are aimed at a more technical audience, with episodes focused on topics like the Data Manager API and data integration workflows. The goal seems to be to meet teams where they are, whether they are responsible for campaign strategy or the underlying implementation.

The Data Manager API itself reinforces this direction. Google is shifting workflows like Customer Match into a system designed specifically for data connectivity, privacy controls, and more consistent ingestion of first-party data.

That combination of product changes, partnerships, and education signals a coordinated effort to strengthen how data is collected, connected, and used across the entire advertising atmosphere.

What Advertisers Are Saying About The Data Strength Conversation

The discussion around Data Strength and lead quality have sparked a lot of needed conversations between Google and advertisers.

In reaction to the Ads Decoded episode “Beyond the Form Fill”, many advertisers are happy that B2B businesses are getting the attention they’ve been asking for. Melissa Mackey praised the episode, stating that “All lead gen advertisers should go listen.” A few marketers noted the need to improve or purge the amount of bot leads they see in their B2B campaigns,

including Robert Peck.

Google also did a series of posts and interviews with experts on the importance of data strength. All seemed to have similar sentiment and this is where I started seeing more and more advertisers connect the dots.

Adrija Bose commented on a discussion with Kamal Janardhan, Senior PM Director at Google, and Jeff Sauer, CEO of MeasureU:

What strikes me most is the framing of AI as the engine, not the strategy. Too many leaders conflate the two, expecting AI to compensate for weak signals. This post nails why high-quality data is non-negotiable for meaningful outcomes.

Jonathan Reed also showed his support on the renewed focus of data strength, stating that while it's a full-time job for his team, they've seen "seeing dramatic increases in conversions, and dramatic decreases in cost!"

What Does This Mean For Your Campaigns?

This shift will show up pretty quickly once you look at how your campaigns are actually set up.

A lot of accounts still treat conversion tracking as something to build once and leave alone. But if the signals feeding your campaigns don't match the intent behind the queries you're targeting, it becomes harder for bidding to do its job well.

That usually shows up in ways you've probably already seen, where performance feels inconsistent and scaling becomes more difficult. Even small changes can create overly volatile swings.

None of that is coming from one setting or one campaign. It is usually a reflection of how the system is learning from the

data it is given.

That is why this push toward Data Strength matters so much.

It forces a closer look at which signals are actually being used for optimization, how reliable they are, and whether they reflect real business outcomes.

In some cases, that means connecting better data from your CRM. In others, it is fixing how your tags are set up or how conversions are being defined in the first place.

As Google continues to lean into this direction, the gap will likely grow between accounts that are intentional about their data and those that aren't.

More Resources:

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<https://www.searchenginejournal.com/googles-push-for-data-strength-is-really-a-push-for-better-bidding/571621/>