

Pre-Flight Checklist for Paid Media

How to avoid marketing smoke and generate real demand

Goal: Launch only what can create new sales conversations—fast.

Rule: If it doesn't create conversations, it's smoke.

1) Mission: What are we trying to prove?

- ☐ We have one objective (not three).
- ☐ We can answer: "If this works, what will happen?"
- ☐ Success is defined as conversations, not impressions or clicks.
- ☐ We know the one decision this campaign should influence (demo, discovery call, trial, assessment, etc.).

2) Message: Can we say it in one sentence?

- ☐ We have one primary message to test.
- ☐ We are not launching a "messaging universe."
- ☐ The message passes the 10-second test: a buyer understands what we do and why it matters.
- ☐ We can explain the offer without buzzwords.
- ☐ The message is specific enough to repel the wrong audience.

3) Offer: Is it actually useful?

- ☐ The offer is one thing (no menus).
- ☐ It's valuable without a sales call (tool, benchmark, calculator, teardown, assessment, checklist, etc.).
- ☐ It answers "What do I get?" instantly.
- ☐ It matches buyer stage (early trust vs. late-stage evaluation).
- ☐ It's realistic for the team to deliver quickly.

4) Landing Page: One page, one action, one path

- ☐ One landing page per offer (no paid traffic to the homepage).
- ☐ The CTA is singular (not "Book a demo / Download / Subscribe / Contact").
- ☐ The page loads fast, has a clear headline, and removes unnecessary friction.
- ☐ Social proof is present (logos, quotes, stats, validations, credible associations).
- ☐ If gated, the form is minimal—and the ask is justified.
- ☐ The thank-you page includes a next step (calendar link, related asset, qualification prompt).

5) Audience: Do we know who we're targeting?

- ☐ We're targeting one core persona (not "security leaders").
- ☐ We can name titles + pains in plain language.
- ☐ We're not trying to "reach everyone" to avoid risk.
- ☐ We have a plan to exclude irrelevant segments (students, job seekers, competitors, etc.).
- ☐ The audience is realistic given budget and channel constraints.

6) Tracking: Can we prove it worked?

- ☐ Conversion tracking is verified end-to-end (pixel/event firing tested).
- ☐ UTMs are standardized and documented.
- ☐ We can attribute each lead to campaign/ad/creative.

- ☐ We have definitions for: MQL; SQL / Sales Accepted Lead; Conversation / meeting.
- ☐ We can measure time-to-first-response and handoff quality.

7) Sales Alignment: Are we ready for the conversations?

- ☐ Sales agrees on lead criteria and follow-up timelines.
- ☐ Sales knows what the offer is and what the buyer saw.
- ☐ There's a first-touch script: "What brought you in?"
- ☐ There's a plan for rejected leads (recycle/nurture, not a black hole).
- ☐ A feedback loop exists (weekly review of lead quality + objections).

8) Budget+Testing Plan: Are we buying learning—not vibes?

- ☐ We have a defined test window (e.g., 2–3 weeks).
- ☐ We are not spreading budget across 10 campaigns.
- ☐ We test one variable at a time (message, audience, creative, offer).
- ☐ We have a minimum spend threshold to reach statistical signal (or at least directional truth).
- ☐ We have a kill / keep / iterate rule before launch.

9) Creative: Is it clear, not clever?

- ☐ Creative matches message + offer (no bait-and-switch).
- ☐ It's written for the buyer's brain: concrete outcomes, not abstract claims.
- ☐ We're using one strong visual concept (not "design exploration").
- ☐ We have 3–5 variations ready to test (headline + hook).
- ☐ No AI-slop language. Everything reads like a human wrote it.

10) Reality Check: Are we building demand or blowing smoke?

- ☐ This campaign can generate conversations in weeks, not quarters.
- ☐ We're not using paid media to justify long projects (website rebuild, CRM overhaul).
- ☐ We're not mistaking dashboards for pipeline.
- ☐ We have the humility to learn and the discipline to iterate.
- ☐ If it doesn't work, we'll change the message/offer—not blame the market.

Pre-Flight Sign-Off

Before launch, everyone agrees:

If it doesn't create conversations, it's a smoke machine.

Name:

Date:

Notes (optional):