MERCHANT CENTER & PRODUCT FEEDS

40-point health checklist

A practical review framework for retailers, ecommerce teams, agencies and developers working across source data, product feeds, Google Merchant Center and the customer-facing product journey.

Use this checklist to find the weak layer, not just the visible error.

Score each check as **2 = healthy**, **1 = partly controlled**, or **0 = missing / unreliable**. The score is a prioritisation aid, not a Google quality score. A single critical issue can matter more than ten minor improvements.

0-39	40-59	60-69	70-80
High operational risk. Start with blockers and ownership.	Functional but fragile. Prioritise recurring errors and data debt.	Good base. Focus on consistency, monitoring and performance.	Strong operating model. Maintain and test incremental improvements.

Important: Google Merchant Center changes over time. Validate requirements against the current Google product data specification and issue guidance before making production changes.

1. Source data & ownership

☐	**1. A clear system of record exists for core product facts.** You know which platform owns title, brand, GTIN, MPN, price, availability, taxonomy, variant data and channel-specific enrichment.	0 1 2
☐	**2. Source fields have named owners.** Someone is accountable for fixing missing or incorrect values instead of permanently patching them downstream.	0 1 2
☐	**3. Product IDs are stable.** The ID used to represent an offer does not change without a deliberate migration plan.	0 1 2
☐	**4. Update frequency matches the business.** Price, stock and time-sensitive attributes are refreshed often enough for the rate at which the catalogue changes.	0 1 2
☐	**5. Source changes are traceable.** Teams can identify when a field or mapping changed and connect that change to downstream effects.	0 1 2

2. Identifiers & product identity

☐	**6. GTINs are present where the manufacturer has assigned them.** Do not omit known GTINs and do not invent GTINs for products that genuinely do not have them.	0 1 2
☐	**7. GTINs belong to the exact variant being sold.** Size, colour and other manufacturer variants should not all reuse one identifier if unique GTINs exist.	0 1 2
☐	**8. Brand values reflect the actual product brand.** Do not use the retailer name as the brand unless the retailer genuinely manufactures or owns the private-label product.	0 1 2
☐	**9. MPNs are supplied accurately where available.** MPN should identify the product to its manufacturer and should not be populated with arbitrary values for branded goods.	0 1 2
☐	**10. identifier_exists is used only when identifiers genuinely do not exist.** It is not a workaround for missing data that should have been sourced from the manufacturer or supplier.	0 1 2

3. Titles, descriptions & creative data

- ☐ **11. Titles identify the product clearly before they try to optimise it.** 0 1 2
  A shopper and a platform should understand what the item is without decoding marketing language.
- ☐ **12. Important title details are front-loaded.** 0 1 2
  The most decision-relevant details appear early because titles are commonly truncated in placements.
- ☐ **13. Title logic is category-specific.** 0 1 2
  Apparel, electronics, furniture and consumables usually need different ordering rules rather than one universal template.
- ☐ **14. Variant details are included when they distinguish the offer.** 0 1 2
  Colour, size, capacity or other variant information should help users understand the exact item.
- ☐ **15. Descriptions add product information rather than keyword repetition.** 0 1 2
  Use useful, factual product detail and avoid promotional filler or duplicated title text.
- ☐ **16. Images are high quality and consistent with the offer.** 0 1 2
  Avoid placeholders, promotional overlays and imagery that represents a different colour or variant.

4. Taxonomy, attributes & variants

- ☐ **17. Google product category is valid where submitted.** 0 1 2
  Use the current taxonomy and map products deliberately rather than relying on obsolete or invented category values.
- ☐ **18. Product type reflects the retailer's own useful hierarchy.** 0 1 2
  Product type should support reporting, rules and segmentation rather than being a meaningless catch-all.
- ☐ **19. Decision-critical attributes are populated consistently.** 0 1 2
  Examples include colour, size, material, pattern, age group, gender, capacity and dimensions where relevant.
- ☐ **20. Variant relationships are coherent.** 0 1 2
  Items that belong together share the intended grouping logic while each sellable variant retains its own accurate data.
- ☐ **21. Channel taxonomy does not hide broken onsite taxonomy.** 0 1 2
  Fix customer-facing catalogue structure where it is genuinely weak instead of treating feed mapping as the permanent solution.

5. Price, availability, shipping & landing pages

- ☐ **22. Feed price matches the visible landing-page price.** 0 1 2
  Check sale periods, VAT/tax treatment, member pricing and variant selection logic.
- ☐ **23. Feed availability matches the landing page and checkout reality.** 0 1 2
  The customer should not click an in-stock offer and discover that the chosen item cannot actually be purchased.
- ☐ **24. Structured data agrees with visible content and submitted product data.** 0 1 2
  JSON-LD or microdata should not expose stale price or availability values.
- ☐ **25. Price and availability update timing is understood.** 0 1 2
  Know the lag between source change, feed generation, submission, Merchant Center processing and landing-page update.
- ☐ **26. Shipping information is complete and commercially accurate.** 0 1 2
  Account-level and product-level settings should reflect the real customer promise and any exceptions.
- ☐ **27. Automatic item updates are treated as a safety net, not the operating model.** 0 1 2
  They can help with mismatches, but they do not replace timely and accurate product-data updates.

6. Data sources, attribute rules & transformations

- ☐ **28. Primary and supplemental data sources have clear purposes.** 0 1 2
  Teams know which source can add/remove products and which sources only enrich or override existing offers.
- ☐ **29. Attribute rules are documented.** 0 1 2
  Google now calls feed rules “attribute rules”; important rules should have an owner and a business reason.
- ☐ **30. Rules solve channel adaptation rather than permanent source-data debt.** 0 1 2
  Use rules for channel-specific formatting or enrichment; move shared product facts upstream where practical.
- ☐ **31. Draft rule changes are tested before being applied.** 0 1 2
  Preview the impact on representative products and edge cases before changing a large catalogue.
- ☐ **32. Rule order and dependencies are understood.** 0 1 2
  Cascading transformations can produce unexpected results if one rule changes a value used by another.

7. Merchant Center diagnostics & policy

☐	**33. The Needs attention view is reviewed by issue impact, not just issue count.** Prioritise problems by business impact, affected product groups and lost visibility rather than fixing the easiest warnings first.	0 1 2
☐	**34. Issue examples are traced back through the data chain.** Compare the affected offer in Merchant Center with processed data, source data, landing page and structured data.	0 1 2
☐	**35. Policy and data-quality issues are separated.** They may require different owners, evidence and review processes.	0 1 2
☐	**36. Review requests are made after the underlying cause is actually fixed.** Repeatedly requesting review without addressing the cause wastes time and can obscure what changed.	0 1 2

8. Monitoring, QA & operating model

☐	**37. There is a recurring feed and Merchant Center QA routine.** Do not rely on somebody noticing a sudden drop in Shopping performance before checking catalogue health.	0 1 2
☐	**38. Key error classes and product coverage are trended over time.** Track whether issues recur and whether fixes improve eligibility and usable catalogue coverage.	0 1 2
☐	**39. Changes have rollback or comparison evidence.** Keep enough history to compare before/after data, rule changes and significant source updates.	0 1 2
☐	**40. There is a prioritised improvement backlog.** Separate blockers, recurring operational debt, performance optimisation and longer-term architecture work.	0 1 2

Turn the checklist into an improvement backlog

A useful review does not end with a score. Convert the findings into four workstreams so teams can act without mixing urgent fixes with longer-term optimisation.

1. BLOCKERS	Disapprovals, broken price/availability, invalid identifiers, missing required data or anything materially suppressing eligibility.
2. RECURRING OPERATIONS	Update timing, monitoring, ownership, QA and recurring errors that keep coming back after one-off fixes.
3. PERFORMANCE	Title structure, attribute depth, product types, imagery, segmentation and controlled testing once the basics are reliable.
4. ARCHITECTURE	Source-system ownership, PIM/ERP changes, feed-platform simplification, data contracts and removal of long-term rule debt.

Official references used for this edition

- Google Merchant Center Help: Product data specification
- Google Merchant Center Help: Issues / Needs attention and Issue Details
- Google Merchant Center Help: Unique product identifiers
- Google Merchant Center Help: Price and availability mismatch guidance
- Google Merchant Center Help: Structured data and automatic item updates
- Google Merchant Center Help: Data sources and attribute rules (formerly feed rules)
- Google Merchant Center Help: Title attribute best practices
- Google Merchant Center Help: 2026 product data specification update

About FifteenFold

FifteenFold combines web design with 15+ years of ecommerce experience, including senior work at Google across Shopping & Commerce and enterprise product-feed strategy. The consultancy approach follows problems across the storefront, catalogue, feed, Merchant Center and technical delivery rather than treating each layer in isolation.

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