PAID MEDIA REVIEW

Paid Advertising Performance Audit

Apex Sterling - Sterling, VA

Prepared by useAIwell LLC

July 20, 2026

Confidential

Prepared for the owners of Apex Sterling. Contains performance data from your own ad account and CRM.

The Bottom Line

The result in one sentence

Over 101 days, $9,327.77 of ad spend produced 207 form-fill leads and 67 booked trials, of which 15 are confirmed attended and roughly 20 to 24 likely attended once July's unlogged trials are counted.

207	>	67	>	15
Meta form-fill leads		**Booked trials**		**Confirmed shows (logged)**
$45.06 each		$139.22 each		$259 to $622 each (about $425 realistic)

- 7.2% of paid leads are a confirmed gym visit (15 of 207); counting the likely July shows, roughly 10%
- Roughly $6,700 of the $9,328 is attached to leads that never booked anything.
- The 21 unmarked outcomes are almost all July (16 of 21), when attendance logging stopped for every booking source, not just the vendor. So the confirmed count of 15 is a floor: the true show rate sits between 23% (counting only stamped shows) and 55% (if every unmarked trial attended), with the mid 30s most likely. Even the most charitable reading trails the website's self-booked trials.

$259 to $622 per showed trial

Cost per showed trial spans this range, about $425 at the midpoint, because 21 past trials (16 of them in July) were never stamped showed or no-show. The two numbers that do not depend on that stamping are cost per booked trial ($139.22, a hard count of 67 bookings) and the show rate (34% versus 63%). Judge the vendor on those.

All dollar figures in this report are ad spend only. Lead Labz's management fee, whatever it is, sits on top of every number here.

How We Measured

Audit window: April 10 through July 20, 2026 (the current vendor's full tenure).

- The gym's own Meta ad account (act_1210365667850444), read via the Meta Marketing API with owner-granted read-only access: every campaign, ad set, ad, creative, and daily result since January 2026.
- The gym's CRM calendar system: all 125 real trial bookings January through August 2026 with booking source, booking-created time, appointment time, and show/no-show outcome. Test bookings removed.
- Every figure was computed by script from raw exports, then independently re-computed a second time by a separate verification pass before inclusion.

Verification standard

Every figure in this report was computed by script from the raw ad-account and CRM exports, then independently re-computed by a second automated pass. Where the data cannot support precision (unrecorded outcomes, small samples), the report says so and gives ranges instead of point estimates.

The Number That Matters

Cost per lead (CPL) is ad spend divided by the number of form fills. It is useful, but it stops before the business outcome.

Metric	Result	What it captures
Cost per lead	$45.06	207 form-fill leads from $9,327.77
Cost per booked trial	$139.22	67 bookings, 58 unique people at $160.82 each
Cost per showed trial	$259 to $622	15 confirmed shows and 29 no-shows; 21 outcomes (mostly July) never logged, so about $425 is realistic

Gyms are often shown CPL because it is the earliest and easiest result to produce. The business should judge paid media on cost per showed trial, because a form fill that never reaches the gym does not create a membership opportunity.

Buy cost per show, not cost per lead

Cost per showed trial runs $259 to $622, about $425 at the midpoint. The 21 unmarked outcomes are almost all July (16 of 21), when attendance logging stopped for every booking source, not just the vendor. So the confirmed count of 15 is a floor: the true show rate sits between 23% (counting only stamped shows) and 55% (if every unmarked trial attended), with the mid 30s most likely. Even the most charitable reading trails the website's self-booked trials.

What a "Lead" Actually Is Here

A Meta Instant Form is a short form that opens inside Facebook or Instagram and can prefill a person's contact information.

> **The funnel never reached the gym's website**
>
> All 86 vendor ads run Meta Instant Forms inside Facebook and Instagram. The ad's link field is literally 'http://fb.me/'. Not one ad click in 101 days was sent to the gym's website.

A Meta pixel is tracking code on a website that records actions, supports retargeting, and gives Meta a business outcome to optimize toward.

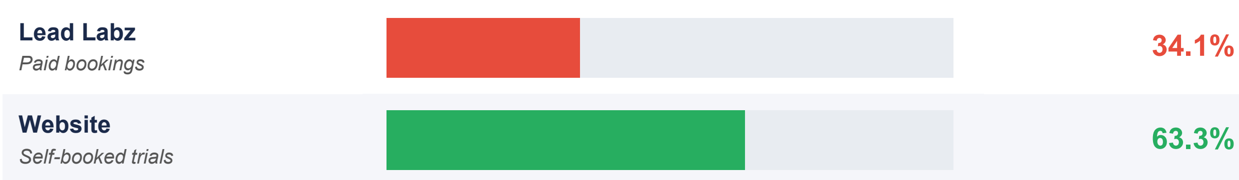
- Instant-form leads are the lowest-intent lead type Meta sells: two taps, autofilled, no view of the gym, schedule, or pricing before submitting.
- No Meta pixel was installed or used, so the account builds no retargeting audience and Meta cannot optimize toward people who actually book.
- Leads are fragmented across 8 different lead forms, which complicates CRM matching and follow-up.
- The prior operator anchored its ads to the gym's real website and mixed website leads with forms. The current vendor removed the website from the funnel entirely.

The Benchmark You Already Own

The most useful benchmark in this data is not 'paid versus free'. It is the vendor's funnel measured against the customer-acquisition system the gym already owns: the website, its search presence, its booking architecture, and the automated follow-up that runs behind it, all built and operated by useAIwell. That system produced 52 booked trials this year with zero ad spend, and at least 19 confirmed shows, edging out the $9,327.77 vendor funnel's 15 (both counts understated by the same unlogged July). The decisive number is the show rate: 63% versus 34%.

Outcome	Lead Labz paid funnel	Gym-owned system
Booked trials	67	52
Recorded show rate	34.1%	63.3%
Confirmed shows (logged)	At least 15	At least 19

Recorded show rate



41.6% of all 125 trial bookings this year, versus 53.6% from the paid vendor. The gym's own funnel generated 78% as many booked trials as $9,328 of paid advertising, and converted them to actual visits at nearly twice the rate.

A person who books through the gym's own funnel is about 1.9 times more likely to walk in than a lead the vendor's automation booked.

Why Higher Intent Is Not the Whole Answer

An easy dismissal of this gap is that website leads are simply higher intent, and intent always wins. Intent is real. But intent does not fall from the sky, and intent alone does not survive a 5-day wait. Three specific mechanisms produce these numbers, and all three are built, maintained, and paid-for parts of the gym's own system:

> ### Intent is manufactured upstream
>
> Nobody arrives at a gym's website by accident. They arrive because the site wins searches, the Google Business Profile is optimized and feeds the booking flow, the site is visible to the AI answer engines people increasingly ask instead of Google, and the content and polish convert a visitor into a booking instead of a bounce. Search position and profile quality are earned assets that require continuous work; they are why this channel has volume at all.

Show-ups are manufactured downstream

Every trial booked through the website enters an automated nurture arc the moment it is created: instant confirmation, reminders, and touches that run from booking all the way to the front door. That is why self-booked trials show at 71% even when the appointment is 4 to 7 days out. Enthusiasm decays over 5 days unless something actively maintains it; a 71% show rate at that distance is the signature of follow-up doing its job, not of raw intent. Vendor leads, by contrast, live in the vendor's separate system until the moment a booking is transferred in, so the gym has no visibility into, and no control over, whatever nurturing did or did not happen before that point. Their bookings show at 29% in the same 4-to-7-day window.

Measurement itself is part of the system

Every number in this report exists only because the gym's current architecture tags every booking with its source and tracks it from booking to show. Before this architecture was built, none of this was visible: not cost per booked trial, not show rates by channel, not the difference between a $45 lead and whether that lead ever shows up. The ability to hold any ad vendor accountable, including the analysis in these pages, is itself a product of the system.

The right frame

So 'the website channel is free' is the wrong frame. Zero ad dollars were spent on it, but its 52 bookings and market-leading show rate are the output of the gym's ongoing investment in that system: the site, the search and profile work, the booking architecture, and the automations behind it. That investment is currently outperforming $9,328 of paid media on the only metric that fills a gym, people on the mat.

Same calendar, different system

The show-rate gap is not about how far out the appointment is. Self-booked trials show at 71% even when the trial is 4 to 7 days away; vendor-booked leads show at 29% in that same window. Same calendar, same gym, same week. The difference is what happens to the person between booking and show-up, and who is managing it.

Month by Month

Month	Spend	Leads	CPL
April 2026 (from Apr 10)	$1,502.10	35	$42.92
May 2026	$2,592.13	55	$47.13
June 2026	$3,202.12	80	$40.03
July 2026 (through Jul 20)	$2,031.42	37	$54.90

- April 2026 (from Apr 10): Delivery actually began April 13; the first 3 days of the takeover delivered nothing.
- June 2026: Best month. This is the vendor's ceiling so far.
- July 2026 (through Jul 20): 37% worse than June. The most recent full week (Jul 13 to 19) ran $713.41 for 11 leads, $64.86 per lead, the worst full week of the tenure except one week in late May.

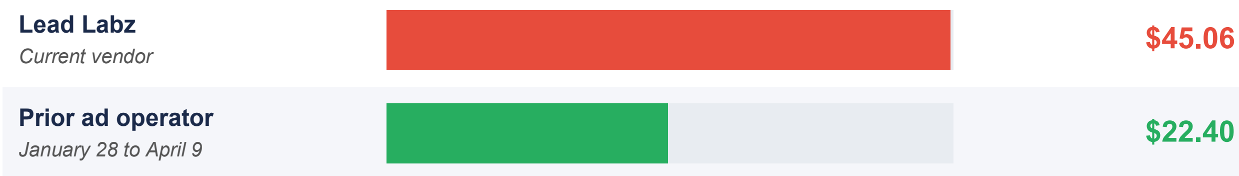
What the trend says

- Cost per lead never improved with time: the first half of the tenure averaged $45.49, the second half $44.72. One hundred and one days and 27 campaign launches produced no learning.
- 11 of 98 delivery days produced zero leads while spending $977.00, and 4 of those 11 fell in the last two weeks.

> **Fair note: the account has recovered before**
>
> The account has recovered from a bad stretch before (a $74.58-per-lead week in late May was followed by a $32.44 week in mid June), so the July decline is a warning sign rather than a verdict.

Before and After

Cost per lead, lower is better



January 28 to April 9, 2026: $5,688.45 spent, 254 leads, $22.40 per lead. The current vendor's $45.06 is 2.0 times higher.

The prior operator ran ONE campaign that delivered every single day for 72 straight days. The current vendor launched 27 campaigns in 101 days.

Fair comparison boundary

The two operators counted different things as a lead. The prior operator mixed website leads (measured by pixel) with forms; the current vendor is forms-only. Website leads typically cost more per lead but show up at higher rates. No CRM booking data exists from before April 10, so the prior operator's show rate cannot be verified. The cost-per-lead doubling is real; conclusions about the prior operator's lead quality would be speculation and this report does not make them.

Where the Money Went

Segment	Count	Spend	Leads	CPL	Booked trials and cost
Kids (campaigns K01 through K010)	10	$2,906.57	47	$61.84	12 at $242.21
Adults (campaigns A01 through A10)	12	$3,826.31	83	$46.10	27 at about $142
MMA (single campaign MMA01)	1	$1,908.52	59	$32.35	28 at about $68
Other tests (AMT, SC, Summer BJJ)	4	$686.37	18	$38.13	0

Segment	Recorded show result
Kids (campaigns K01 through K010)	17% (2 of 12 with outcomes; every kids outcome was recorded); $1,453.29 per showed trial
Adults (campaigns A01 through A10)	41% of recorded outcomes (all 21 unrecorded outcomes are adult bookings, so this could move)

$1,453.29 per showed kids trial

Kids is the most expensive segment at every stage: $61.84 per lead, $242 per booked trial, and $1,453 per child who actually attended a trial.

- MMA, the one campaign left alone the longest (54 days and counting), is the only segment with healthy economics: $32.35 per lead and roughly $68 per booked trial.
- The kickboxing and Muay Thai test ads were actually the account's cheapest leads at $30.80, and were shut off in May anyway.

Fair note: kids genuinely read worse

To be fair to the vendor: kids genuinely read worse than adults in this account. But no kids campaign ever got a clean test. Ten kids campaigns ran an average of 9 days each on $20 to $40 per day, and the program being advertised was switched from wrestling to BJJ in the middle. The three kids campaigns that got 14 or more days produced the best kids costs, which suggests patience was working when it was tried.

Kids advertising is off before back-to-school

As of July 17 the vendor turned kids advertising off entirely. There is zero kids pipeline heading into August and September, the back-to-school window that is the highest-intent season of the year for youth martial arts. This is the most actionable finding in this report.

How the Account Was Operated

Meta's ad system rewards stability. Its 'learning phase' needs roughly 50 conversions per ad set per week to settle; until then, costs run high and unstable. Meta's own guidance is to avoid significant edits for about a week after launch.

Zero campaigns exited learning

Zero of the 27 campaigns could have exited Meta's learning phase. Every dollar of the $9,328 was spent in the phase where Meta says costs run highest.

- 27 campaigns launched in 101 days, a new campaign every 3.7 days. The median campaign was killed in under 5 days. 14 of 25 completed campaigns died inside a week, 20 inside two weeks.
- The median campaign spent $218.51 total before being killed. At $45 per lead that buys 3 to 8 leads, nowhere near enough data to judge anything. These were coin flips dressed up as optimization.
- Zero of the 27 campaigns could have exited Meta's learning phase. 26 of 27 never reached even 50 leads in their lifetime, let alone 50 in a week. Every dollar of the $9,328 was spent in the learning phase, where Meta itself says costs run highest.
- The daily budget (about $95 per day on average) was routinely split 3 to 6 ways across concurrent campaigns, in slivers of $15 to $35 per day that can never feed an algorithm that wants 50 conversions a week.
- In 101 days the vendor built zero audience assets: no retargeting audience, no lookalike audiences from the 460+ leads sitting in the CRM, and no exclusion lists to stop paying for clicks from existing members.
- Targeting was redrawn constantly: 11 different age windows across 39 ad sets, and Meta's Advantage audience-expansion setting was flipped on and off 10 times with no discernible test design.
- Housekeeping tells the same story: two different campaigns both named 'Apex Sterling [A05]', a raw duplicate named '[A01] - Copy', and an off-convention 'Summer BJJ' one-off. The five zero-lead campaigns that wasted $328.55 are almost exactly the sloppily-named ones.
- The one campaign left alone, MMA01, became the account's best performer. The vendor's own account proves stability works; churn was chosen 25 more times anyway.

What was managed well

Geographic targeting is genuinely good: consistent, tight 2-to-5-mile pins around the gym on every ad set.

Total daily spend was managed steadily, with no runaway days. The problem is allocation, not discipline on total spend.

The Ads Themselves

Creative concentration

59% of the vendor's ads never produced a lead, while one static image carries 29% of all vendor leads.

- 59% of the vendor's ads (51 of 86) never produced a single lead. Spend was spread across dozens of duds rather than concentrated behind winners.
- The vendor's best ad is one static image in the MMA campaign: 59 leads at $32.09, which is 29% of all their leads from a single ad. Everything currently live rests on that one static plus one duplicated video.
- Their biggest copy bet was their worst: 22 ads pushed a '20% off' discount angle at $60.24 per lead, and the same discount ad body was relaunched under four different campaign numbers at $55 to $123 per lead after it had already proven expensive.
- Their best angles were 'beginner invite' copy at $36.49 and 'we are recruiting 15 beginners' scarcity copy at $38.78. Both outperform the discount angle by roughly 35%, and neither was scaled.
- The best ad in the account's entire history belongs to the prior operator: a 'Stop renting your fitness. Own a skill instead.' identity angle that produced 251 leads at $21.35. The current vendor never ran anything like it. The winning playbook is sitting in the account's own history, unused.
- Video versus image made no difference ($44.42 vs $45.45 per lead). Anyone proposing 'more video' as the fix is misdiagnosing; the problem is the message and the funnel, not the format.
- Only about 19 distinct ad texts exist across 86 ads, and headlines were never tested at all: every single ad uses a variant of the same 'BOOK YOUR FREE...' call to action. The 27-campaign churn was re-shipping the same handful of messages under new campaign shells, not creative testing.
- The median ad lived 4 days before its campaign was killed.

Copy angle cost per lead, lower is better

Timing Patterns

Day	CPL	Leads
Monday	$38.24	35
Tuesday	$47.00	29
Wednesday	$40.32	34
Thursday	$53.54	25
Friday	$59.10	21
Saturday	$42.38	30
Sunday	$42.53	33

Friday leads cost 55% more than Monday leads and arrive 40% less often, yet Friday gets the same budget as every other day. There is no day shaping and no ad schedule at all; about 1 dollar in 6 runs between 11pm and 6am. The best-performing hour of the day is 7pm at roughly $21 per lead.

The vendor's automation books trials instantly (median same-day) but parks them far out: the median vendor-booked trial is scheduled 5 days after the lead came in, and 69% of their bookings are dumped into just two weekly slots, Monday and Wednesday. Monday bookings show at 25%; Wednesday bookings show at 53%. A Saturday lead waits until the following week's slots, and enthusiasm has a half-life.

Lead time and show rate

Lead time	Lead Labz show rate	Website show rate
Booked 0 to 1 days out	1 of 2	2 of 2
2 to 3 days out	38% (5 of 13)	2 of 5
4 to 7 days out	29% (5 of 17)	71% (12 of 17)
8 or more days out	33% (4 of 12)	3 of 6

Trials booked within 3 days show better than trials booked further out (40% versus 31%) and two thirds of vendor bookings sit in the far-out window. But the website contrast proves lead quality matters more than calendar math: self-booked website visitors show at 71% even 4 to 7 days out. Small sample sizes in some cells; treat single-digit cells as directional.

Operational gaps

- Nobody is recording outcomes anymore: nearly every July trial in both groups still sits as 'confirmed' with no showed or no-show mark. July show performance is unmeasurable until the calendar is updated, and this hygiene gap belongs to the whole system, not only the vendor.
- Not one of 67 vendor bookings was ever cancelled or rescheduled. There is no reschedule flow at all, so a no-show is simply lost instead of recycled.

June improved

One bright spot to state honestly: show rates improved sharply in June (13 of 22 decided June outcomes showed, about 59%, versus 7 to 17% in April and May). Something got better mid-tenure; with July unrecorded, nobody can say whether it held.

What We Recommend

This plan applies to Apex Sterling regardless of which vendor operates the account. Every item traces directly to a finding in this audit.

For Apex Sterling, Regardless of Vendor

1. Send paid traffic to the website funnel, not to in-app forms. The data in this report says a self-booked website visitor is worth roughly twice a form-fill lead at the show-up stage.
2. Install the Meta pixel and conversion tracking so the ad account optimizes toward booked trials instead of cheap form fills. This also unlocks retargeting and lookalike audiences from the 460+ leads already in the CRM.
3. Consolidate to 1 or 2 campaigns and leave them alone for at least 30 days. The account's own history (the prior operator's single 72-day campaign, and the vendor's own MMA campaign) shows stability is what works here.
4. Restart kids advertising immediately for the back-to-school window with committed budget and a full-month test. Going into August with zero kids pipeline is the costliest gap in this report.
5. Book trials into near slots (0 to 3 days out) wherever possible, add more than two weekly trial slots, and build a confirmation plus reschedule flow so no-shows are recycled instead of lost.
6. Reinstate outcome logging (showed or no-show on every past appointment) so performance is measurable again. This is a 2-minute daily habit for front desk staff.
7. Judge any ad vendor on cost per showed trial, not cost per lead. A $45 lead that never walks in is worth less than a $90 lead who does.

What useAIwell Would Run

- One consolidated campaign at a steady daily budget, held stable past Meta's learning phase, with 3 or 4 genuinely different ad concepts inside it, judged on cost per booked trial.
- All clicks to the gym's own trial page with self-scheduling, the funnel that already shows at 63%, with full tracking from click to booked appointment to show.
- Angle mix drawn from what this account already proved: the identity angle that produced $21 leads for the prior operator, the invite and scarcity angles that were the vendor's best, and a proper kids campaign for back-to-school. No discount-led creative; this account has paid $60 per lead to learn that discounts attract the wrong crowd.
- Evening-weighted delivery and near-slot booking, per the timing data above.
- Weekly one-page reporting on the only numbers that matter: spend, booked trials, shows, and cost per show.

Why this operating loop fits

These recommendations are the direct consequence of the data above; each one traces to a numbered finding. The common thread is that paid advertising only works when it is plugged into a system that manufactures intent before the click and protects the booking after it. The gym already owns that system: useAIwell built and operates the website, the search and profile presence, the booking architecture, the automated follow-up, and the measurement that produced this report. The highest-performing acquisition channel in this data is that system. The recommendation is not to buy more things; it is to point paid traffic INTO the machine that is already winning, instead of around it.

Closing

Verified from source systems

Every figure in this report was computed by script from the raw ad-account and CRM exports, then independently re-computed by a second automated pass. Where the data cannot support precision (unrecorded outcomes, small samples), the report says so and gives ranges instead of point estimates.

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