

Branding Imperative

The Competitive Edge for SEO in 2025+



PEAK ACE[®]

Bastian Grimm, Peak Ace AG | @basgr

**FRIENDS
OF SEARCH**

The power of brand bias in search

Why people (and algorithms) prefer strong brands





Question for you guys:




Which search result would you click?


Assume you're searching for "Women's running shoes" – which result would you click, left or right?

known brand



 Nike
<https://www.nike.com>


Women's Running Shoes. Nike.com




Stride out mile after mile and attack your courses and routes with the latest women's running shoes at Nike.com.

unknown "brand"



 RunningXpert.com
<https://www.runningxpert.com>

Running shoes for women



From the revolutionary Nike Air to the responsive ZoomX foam, Nike's women's running shoes offer technologies that...

VS.

A dark, low-key photograph of a crowd of people. Many individuals have their arms raised, some holding up phones or cameras, suggesting a concert or a public event. The lighting is dim, with some highlights on the raised arms and hands. The overall mood is energetic and celebratory.

Who would have picked nike.com?



Brand bias in action: people **trust** what they **recognise**

... and NOT just what ranks:

Source: <https://pa.ag/3XspfPd>

Search Engine Land

**Brand Bias: 70% Of
Consumers Look For Known
Retailers When Doing
Product Searches**

They also prefer to **click**
what they **know**...

Source: <https://pa.ag/4buWJ4Y>

Search Engine Land

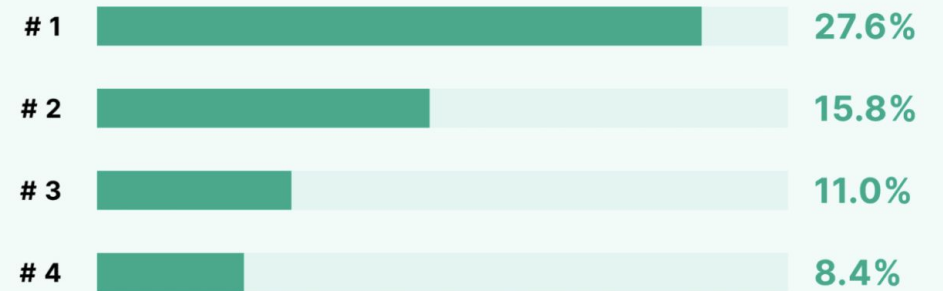
59% of Americans click on brands they know in Google results: Survey

Also, nearly half of Americans trust organic results more than paid results and Google remains the most trusted source for information.

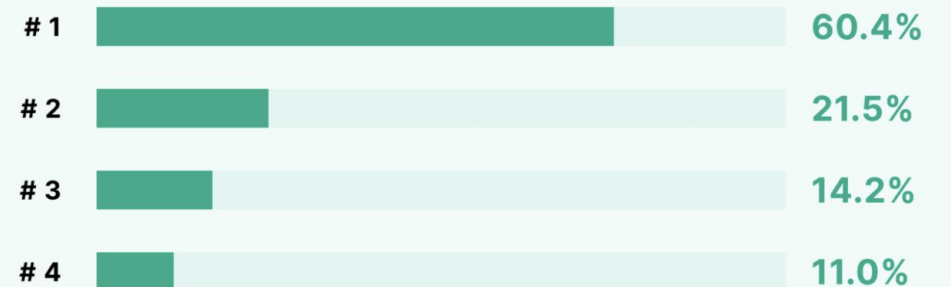
Branded results get a significantly higher CTR than non-branded results

Source: <https://pa.ag/4haZauM>

Google Organic CTR Breakdown By Position



Organic CTR For Branded Keywords or Homepages



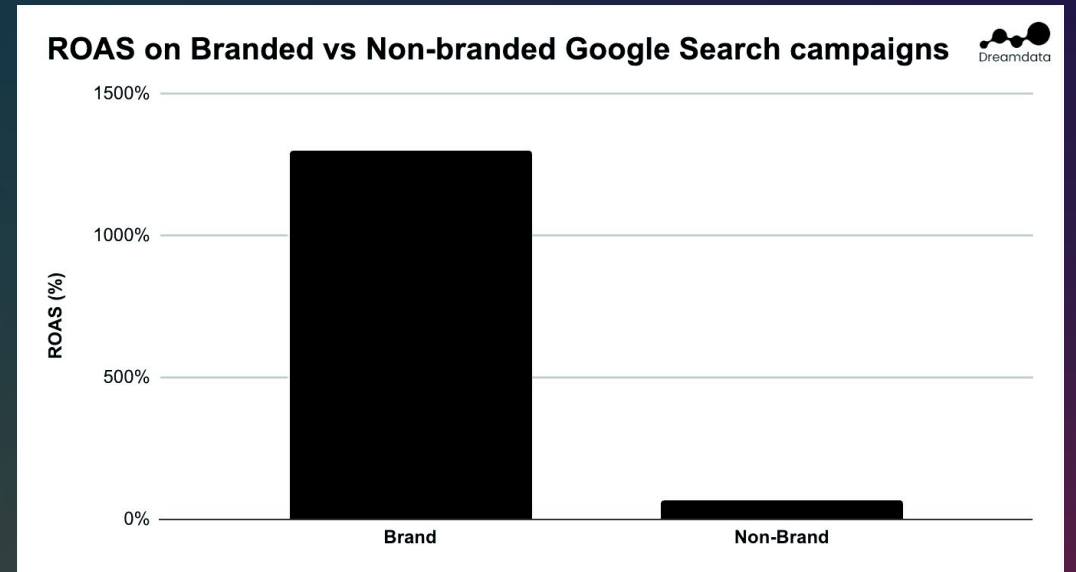
Keep in mind: one third of Google
usage is purely navigational



The same is true for PPC

“Non-branded keywords have 19x worse return than branded keywords”

Source: <https://pa.ag/4bplmQJ>

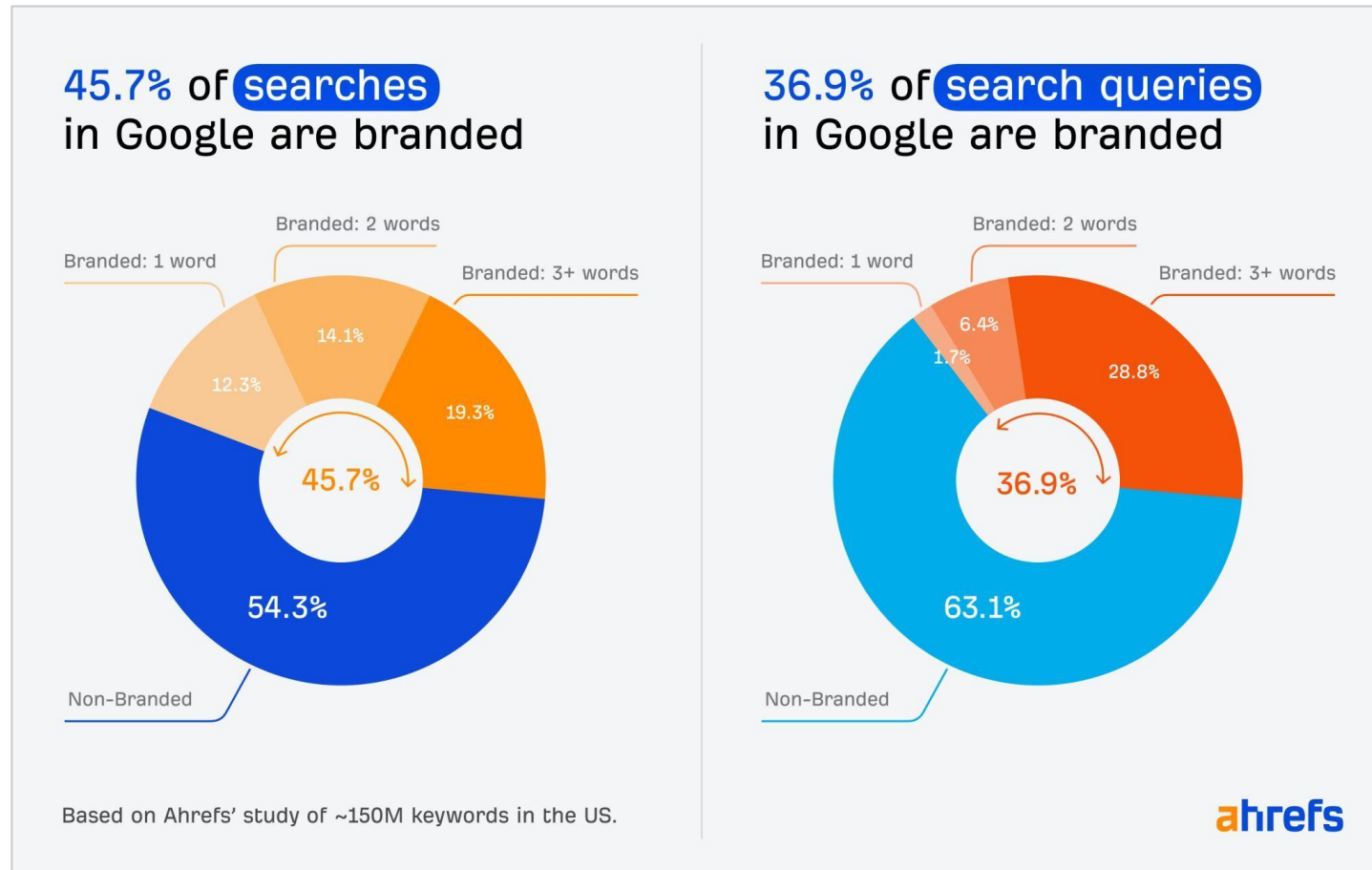


Brand bias drives search behavior –
familiarity wins.



Users trust strong brands – and so does Google

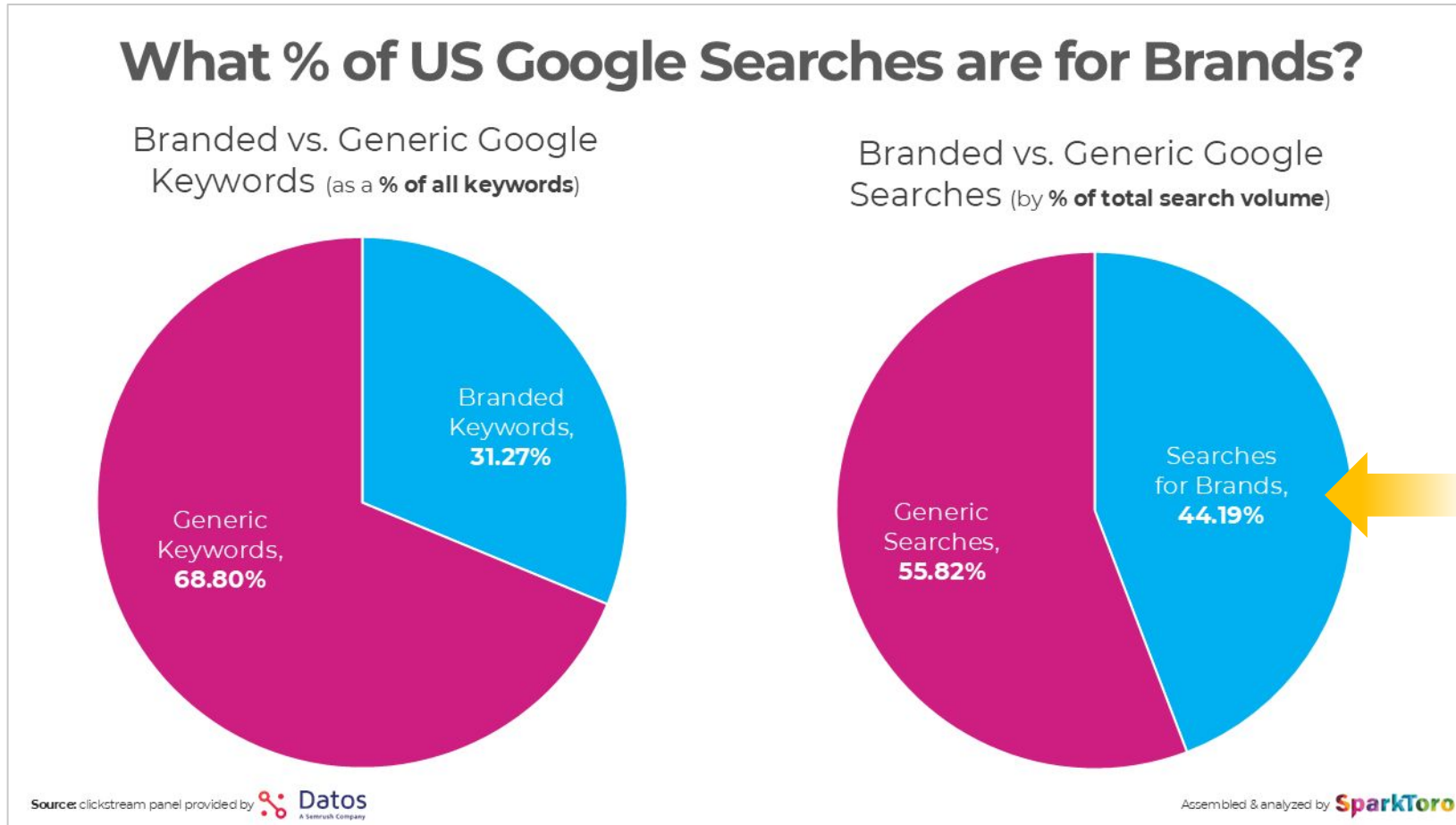
According to an Ahrefs' study from January 2025, over 45% of all searches made on Google US are branded:



Source: <https://pa.ag/3QL0jhW>



This aligns with data from end of 2024 (again, US) as well:



Same here:
-44% of searches are for brands

Source: <https://pa.ag/4bqpEHq>



Google doesn't create demand – it serves it

Branded search demand is not created by SEO (or Google) – it's
a result of brand awareness built outside of Google
(think social, YT, TV, etc.)



Websites with strong branded search demand tend to see higher rankings across all queries



Branded search volume: the shortcut that **really** moves the needle

If people actively search for you, you don't have to fight for rankings - Google will give them to you.

We're doing this over and over:

- 🎯 **Branded search volume increased by >250% MoM**, showing clear uplift in market demand & brand recognition.
- 🎯 **Ranked 400+ new keywords in the top-5 on Google**, improving visibility and organic reach.
- 🎯 **Sustained ranking stability for multiple months**, reinforcing brand resilience against algorithm updates.
- 🎯 **Monthly organic traffic up >70k visits MoM**, driven by higher branded search demand & improved CTR.
- 🎯 **MoM revenue growth from €11M to €13.2M**, reflecting increased conversions from brand-aware searchers.
- 🎯 **2k additional conversions directly attributed to branded search**, improving overall marketing efficiency.

Sadly, it's not that simple...



Even if you *are* a recognised, well-known brand...

74% of brands are forgettable and people wouldn't care if those brands disappeared!

Source: <https://pa.ag/41fE4FL>



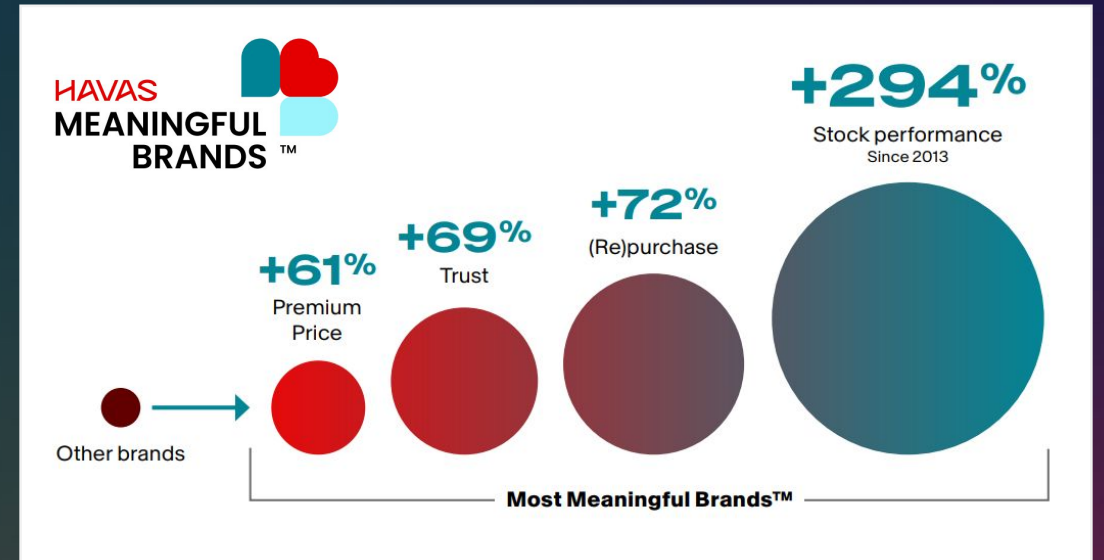
So, how do you get into
the 26% that matter?



That 26% have unlocked how to be more meaningful

...and, according to a study from HAVAS, they are reaping the benefits: More trust, higher repurchase rate, and significantly better stock performance!

Source: <https://pa.ag/41fE4FL>



Unaided brand recall

Paired with strong brand recognition and brand experience, this forms top-of-mind brand awareness for customers.



Source: <https://pa.ag/41jmdxy>

What is 'unaided brand recall'?

“What’s your favourite soft drink?”



Coca-Cola

Did you know?

Consumers face 3,000 brand signals daily but recall only 6-15 max!



What makes brands memorable? What are the key factors of brand recall?

Memorable Brand Personality

A **distinct tone and style** make your brand recognisable and relatable.

Compelling Brand Storytelling

Narratives **create emotional connections**, making your brand easier to remember.

Instantly Recognisable Visuals

A **unique logo, color palette, and design elements** boost recognition.

Clear & Consistent Brand Values

Sticking to core principles strengthens loyalty and long-term recognition.

Strategic Brand Promotion

Reaching audiences where they are, ensures top-of-mind awareness (even when not marketing).

Strong Brand Reputation

Positive word-of-mouth and ethical positioning increase recall and trust.

If no one is searching for you,
SEO won't save you

No searches
for your
brand?
No rankings
advantage



People click what
they know

Google ranks
what people
search for

Branded search
is the shortcut to
the top

Brand strength is SEO's biggest competitive edge

And branded search volume is a key ranking advantage



Let's dive in!



#1

The search funnel you were taught is a lie

The reality is: search journeys are non-linear, multi-touch, and brand-driven. Discovery, intent, and conversion now happen everywhere - across multiple screens, platforms, and moments.



The classic funnel is too one-dimensional

A standard search journey is rarely linear, and therefore cannot follow a rigid model that doesn't allow for flexibility:



The classic funnel is **too one-dimensional** and too ineffective for long-term brand awareness.



People search in response to **emotional needs** triggered by internal and external factors.



The 'new' search journey is **dynamic and non-linear** – it does not follow rigid phases like the traditional funnel model.

Understanding real needs rather than just covering phases in a monotonous sequence



People search either to **obtain information** (*information environment*) or because of **specific problems** (*problem environment*).



In the **information environment**, content is consumed **without brands gaining any long-term recognition**.



SEO really shines in the problem environment, where people are actively looking for solutions.

The big challenge:

Based on emotional triggers, users switch between information and problem environments frequently



New SEO focus: 'buying journey' instead of funnel stages

More impact utilizing a targeted brand and problem-solving strategy

Purchase processes are variable
– they can take minutes or years.
And **require flexibility to cover the entire journey.**

The funnel oversimplifies the complexity but **fails to recognise the dynamic decision-making process** (which is more important today than ever!).

We need to **leave the classic funnel behind** and focus on *'non-linear buying journeys'*.

Brand presence reinforces SEO in the problem environment and contributes to **sustainable conversions.**



Don't believe me?



Who's heard of this study?

"Why brand building and performance marketing are BFF goals [on TikTok]"

Source: <https://pa.ag/3Avzcmv>



Objectives, data selection and methodology of the study

Examining how brand awareness impacts conversion efficiency and performance marketing outcomes through data-driven analysis.

- **Objective:** Measure the impact of brand awareness on performance marketing efficiency and determine awareness thresholds that drive higher conversions.
- **Sample:** Analysis of 147 brands with consistent ad spend (01/21 – 04/24) focusing on brand awareness, ad recall, and conversion rates.
- **Methodology:** Integration of brand and performance metrics using logarithmic regression to pinpoint awareness levels that enhance conversion efficiency.

Source: <https://pa.ag/3Avzcmv>



The Awareness Advantage

Why brand building and performance marketing are BFF goals on TikTok

New research by Tracksuit and TikTok reveals how once bitter rivals — performance and brand marketing — achieve better outcomes together.

Brand and performance marketing have long been locked in a great rivalry. This tension arises from performance having easily measurable short-term metrics such as sales, leads and clicks, which allows businesses to run targeted campaigns and demonstrate ROI. Brand building is less easily quantifiable, which has led marketers to prioritise performance.



It's easy to see why temptation leads here. Performance marketing is defined as paying for results for marketing campaigns, which can be run through sponsorships or advertising on websites. Brand marketing is defined as long-term marketing activity that influences consumers' attitudes, emotions and affinity for a product or service. This could mean everything from out-of-home campaigns, to radio jingles, to blog posts. By definition alone, brand marketing creates more of a grey area, whereas performance is very clean cut.

This great divide has led to marketing teams prioritising one over the other, which is at the expense of a business's overall holistic marketing success.

But it shouldn't be this way. Tracksuit and TikTok's Awareness Advantage study has found that brand building and performance marketing work better together as Best Friends Forever (BFFs) by putting aside their differences to achieve sustained, profitable growth.



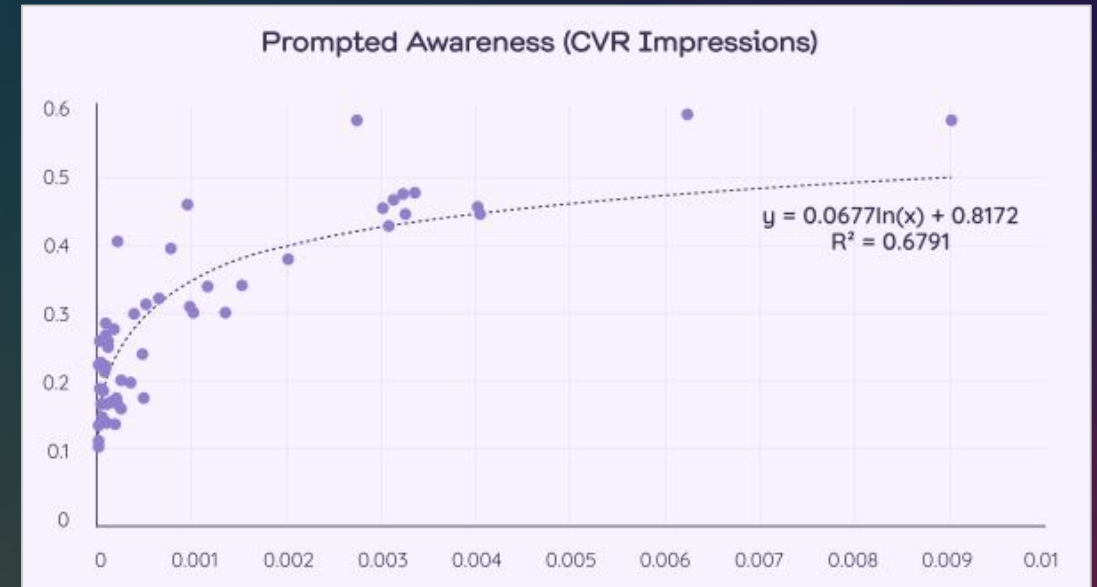
This study proves how high brand awareness correlates with better performance marketing results on TikTok, emphasising the importance of brand building when it comes to long-term growth. For example, one key finding was that a brand known by four out of ten consumers is 43% more efficient in driving performance marketing outcomes on TikTok than a brand known by three out of ten consumers.

This report explores how brand and performance marketing can work more effectively, together.

Brand awareness increases conversion rates

Brand awareness has **no direct impact on CTR** and is therefore less effective when it comes to generating clicks alone; **higher brand awareness correlates with an improved conversion rate**, which shows how much it contributes to meaningful business goals, such as purchases.

Source: <https://pa.ag/3Avzcmv>



High brand awareness increases conversion efficiency

Brands with high brand awareness achieve up to 2.86 times higher conversion rates than lesser-known brands, making performance marketing significantly more efficient.

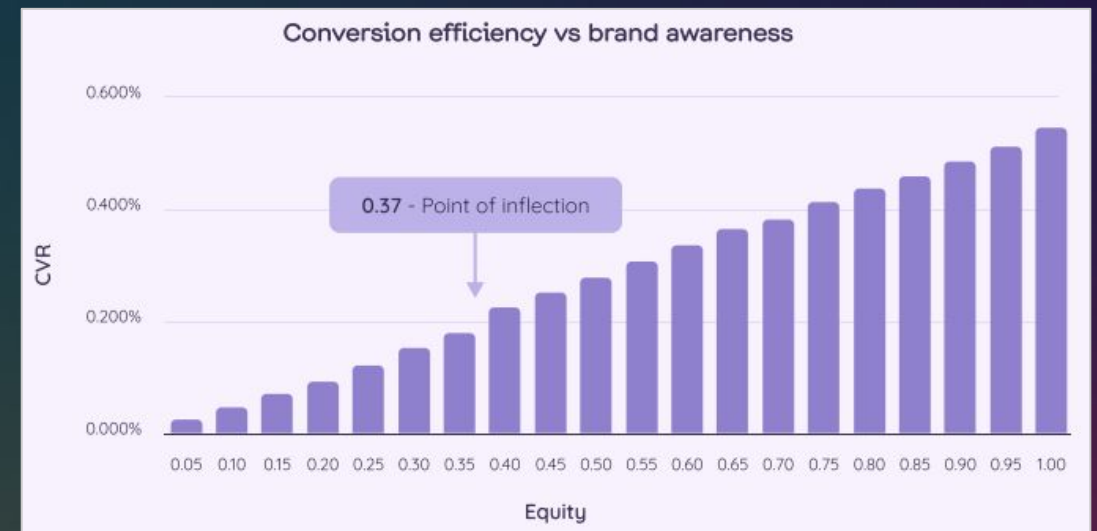
Source: <https://pa.ag/3Avzcmv>



The ideal awareness threshold: 37%

Conversion rates see a boost as brand awareness climbs to around 37%. Beyond this point, the growth continues positively, albeit at a slower pace.

This makes it an ideal stage for growing businesses to allocate resources strategically.



Strategic investments in branding during early growth phases maximises efficiency

They provide the foundation for sustainable success
in performance marketing.

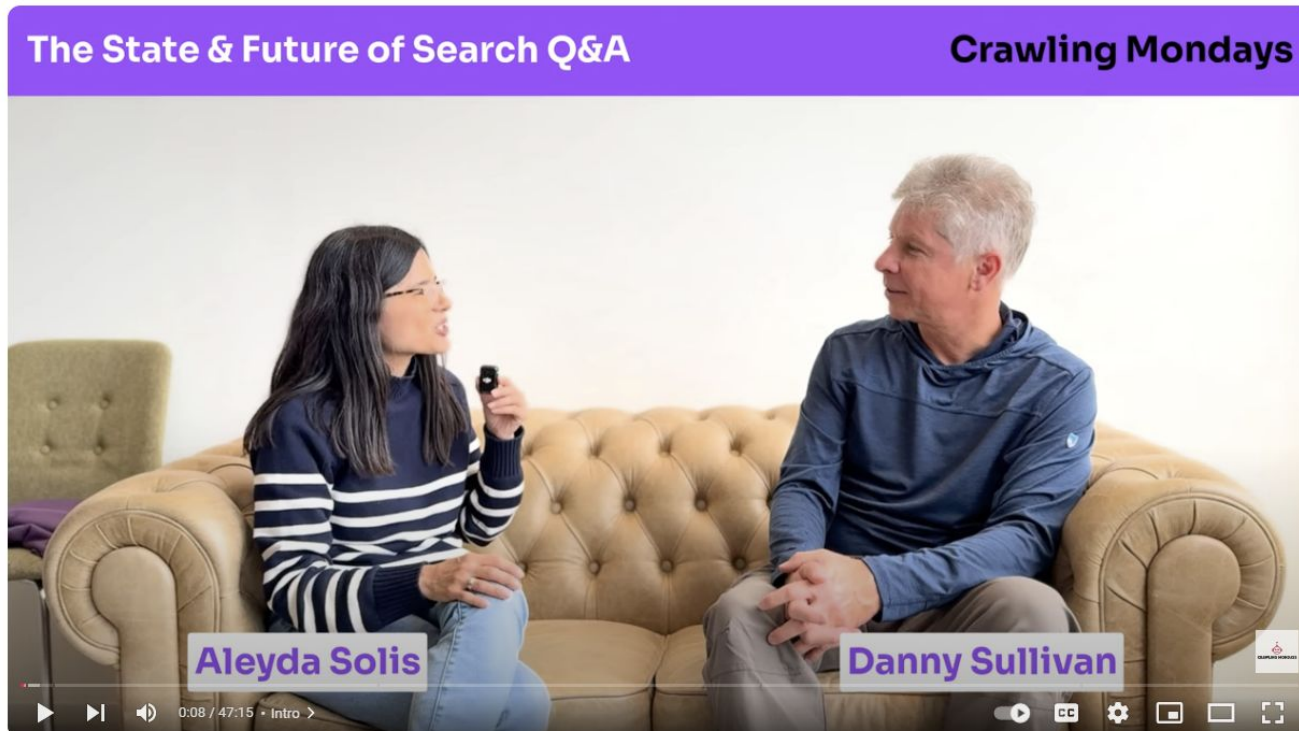


If you are aiming for
true business success,
your brand is key.



BTW, brands do not automatically receive a *'ranking boost'*

Nevertheless, in an interview with Aleyda, Danny revealed what makes building a strong brand worthwhile:

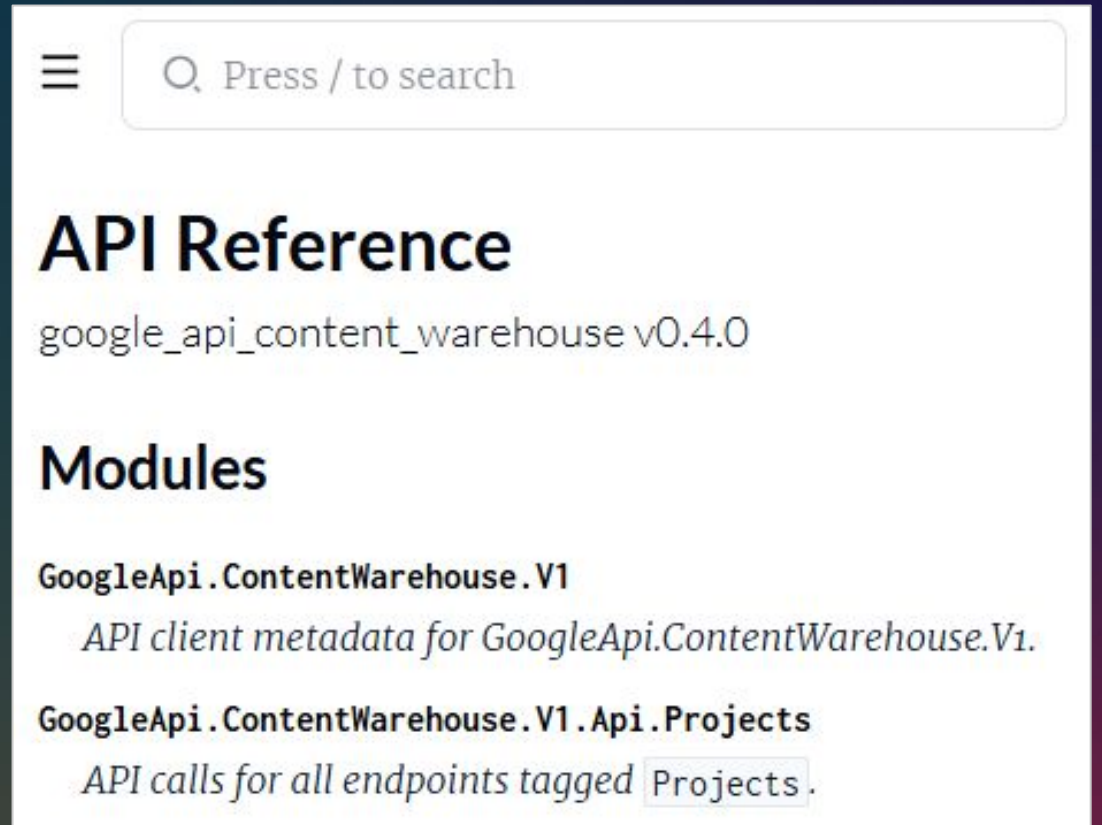


- Well-known/trustworthy brands are not a direct ranking signal
- Despite that, *'brand recall'* causes users to click on their search results anyway
- This **click preference** leads to a **post-ranking boost** (from a Twiddler)

Source: <https://pa.ag/4fyXjgg>

Maybe the Google Leak is good for something after all?

Spoiler: You will find various references to functions for identifying, sorting, evaluating, filtering and using entities (as in: brands including names, official websites, associated social accounts, etc.).



The screenshot shows the Google API Reference interface. At the top left is a hamburger menu icon. To its right is a search bar containing the text "Q, Press / to search". Below the search bar is the main heading "API Reference" in a large, bold font. Underneath this heading is the text "google_api_content_warehouse v0.4.0". The next section is titled "Modules" in a bold font. Below this title, there are two entries. The first entry is "GoogleApi.ContentWarehouse.V1" in bold, followed by the description "API client metadata for GoogleApi.ContentWarehouse.V1." in a smaller, italicized font. The second entry is "GoogleApi.ContentWarehouse.V1.Api.Projects" in bold, followed by the description "API calls for all endpoints tagged Projects." in a smaller, italicized font. The word "Projects" in the second description is enclosed in a light blue box.

#2

Search is no longer just Google –
and that changes everything



If you only optimise for Google, you're
missing out on massive search intents
happening elsewhere.



*“Younger audiences are
'searching', not 'Googling'.”*

At least according to Bernstein Research...!?

- Gen Z prefers 'searching' over 'Googling,' impacting Google's cultural status.
- Gen Z often uses apps like TikTok for recommendations.
- The deverb-ing of Google reflects evolving tech and user behavior.

BUSINESS INSIDER

How about "*Just TikTok it*"?!

Search behavior varies by age: **-40% of Gen Z/Millennials search on TikTok or Instagram.**

If they're your audience, adapt accordingly.

Source: <https://pa.ag/3YZy2cB>

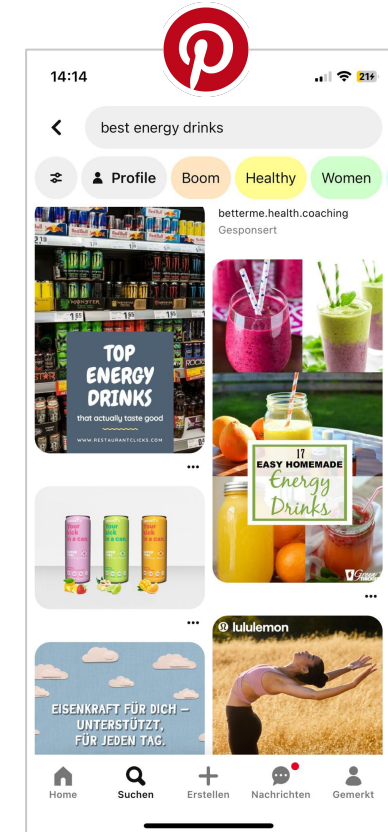
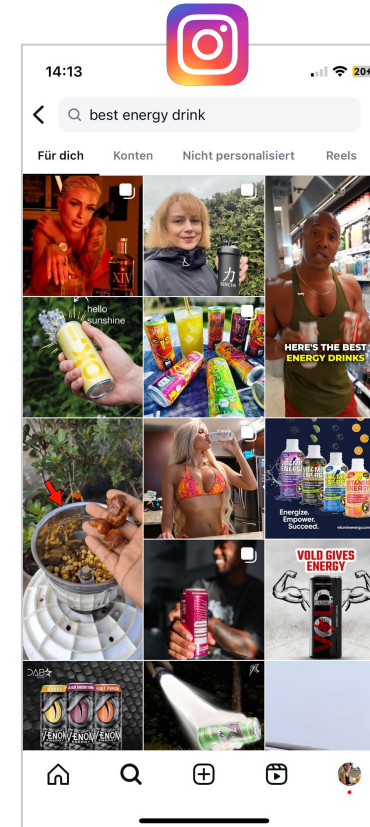
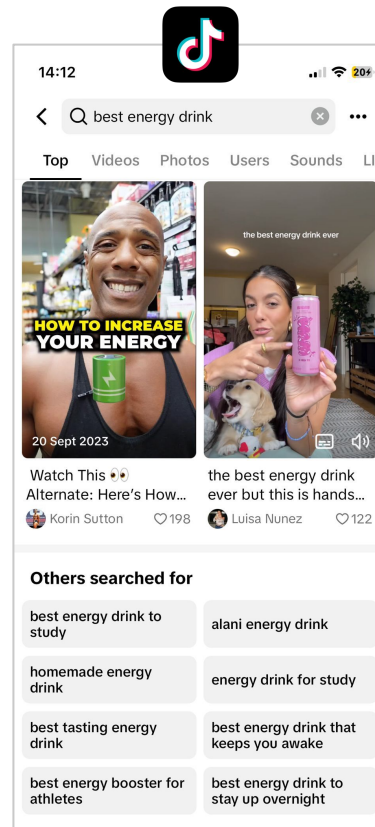
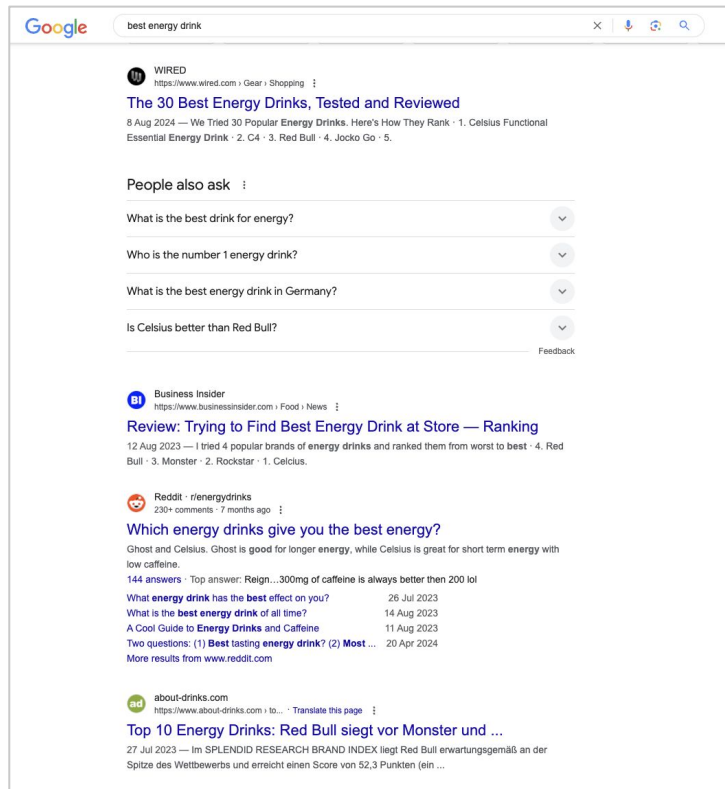
Forbes

FORBES > INNOVATION > CONSUMER TECH

GenZ Dumping Google For TikTok, Instagram As Social Search Wins

Peak Aces' One Search approach to different journeys

Other platforms are actively enhancing their search functionalities, creating a competitive landscape where search is seamlessly integrated into social and entertainment ecosystems.



Did you know...?

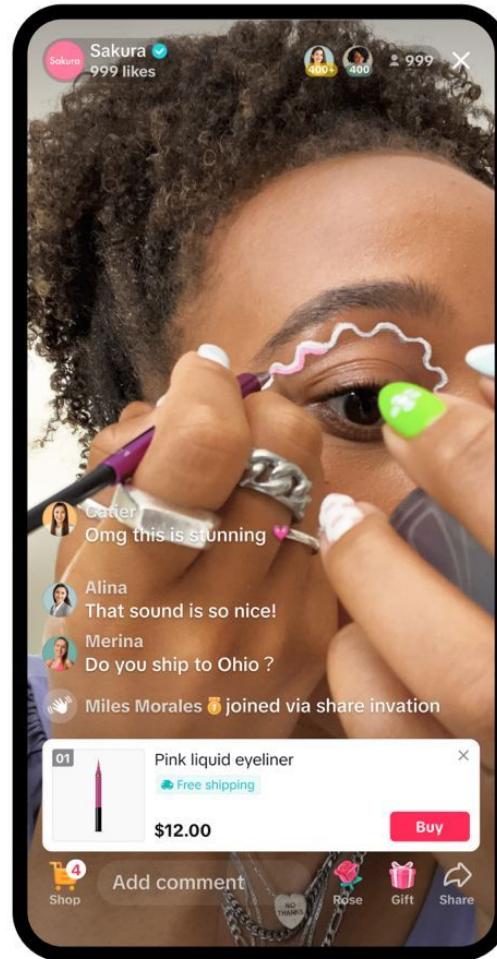
As early as 2022, searches for “*how to*” and “*best*” on TikTok increased by a staggering 684%.



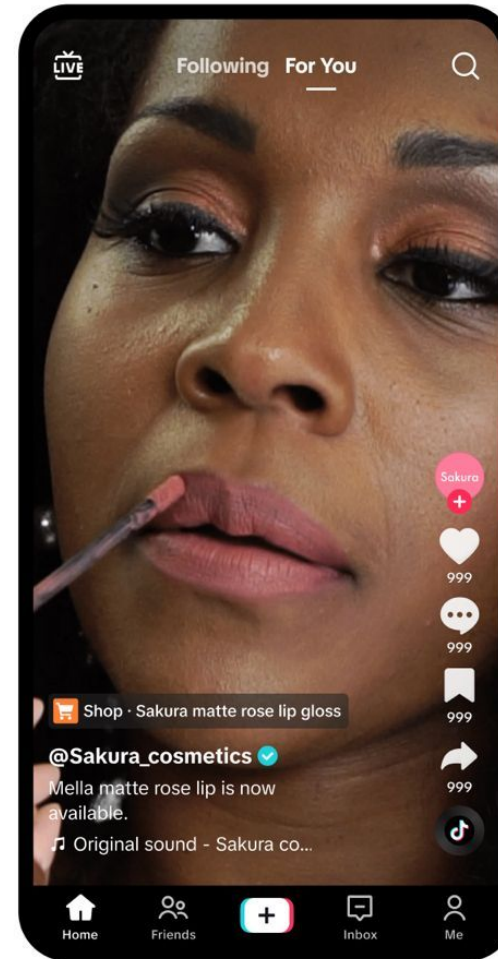
However, TikTok doesn't focus exclusively on search

Storefront, Live shopping and shoppable videos – (EU start: Q2/2025)

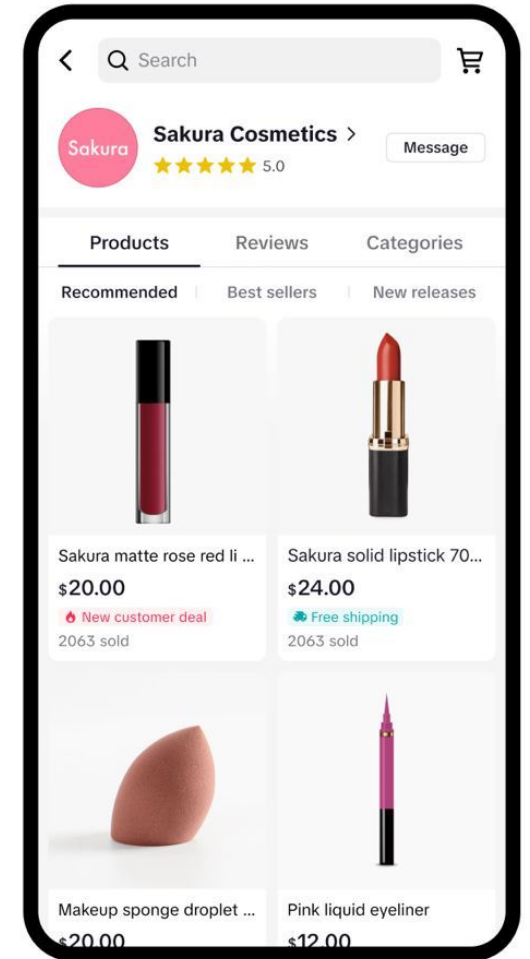
LIVE Shopping



Shoppable Video



Store



Sources: <https://pa.ag/4bJZ3ox> & <https://pa.ag/4fbivMi>



Google owns for a reason

(and not only because it's the #2 search engine)



People don't just want answers
– they want **visual proof before
buying.**

Source: <https://pa.ag/4hglS3v>



of YouTube users watched
YouTube to **help make a
purchase decision.**



of people surveyed say they
typically switch between
online search and video when
researching products to buy.

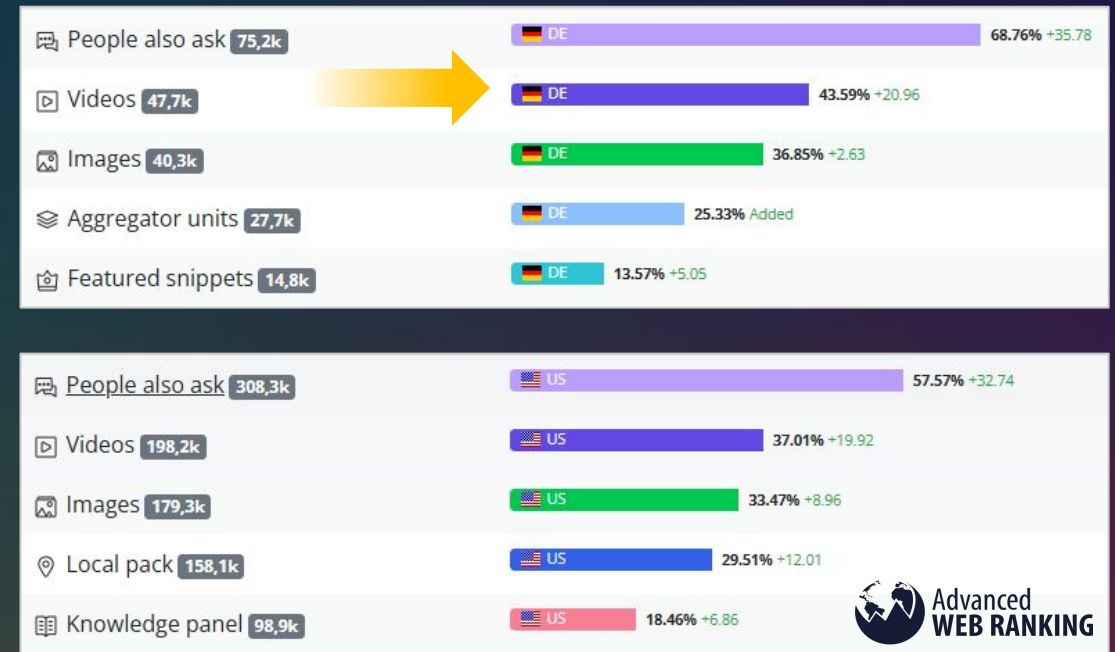
Think with **Google**

Google is pushing hard for videos to be everywhere

+21% YoY in DE (+20% US)



Source: <https://pa.ag/4hA7JRq>



YouTube is also the #1 podcast platform

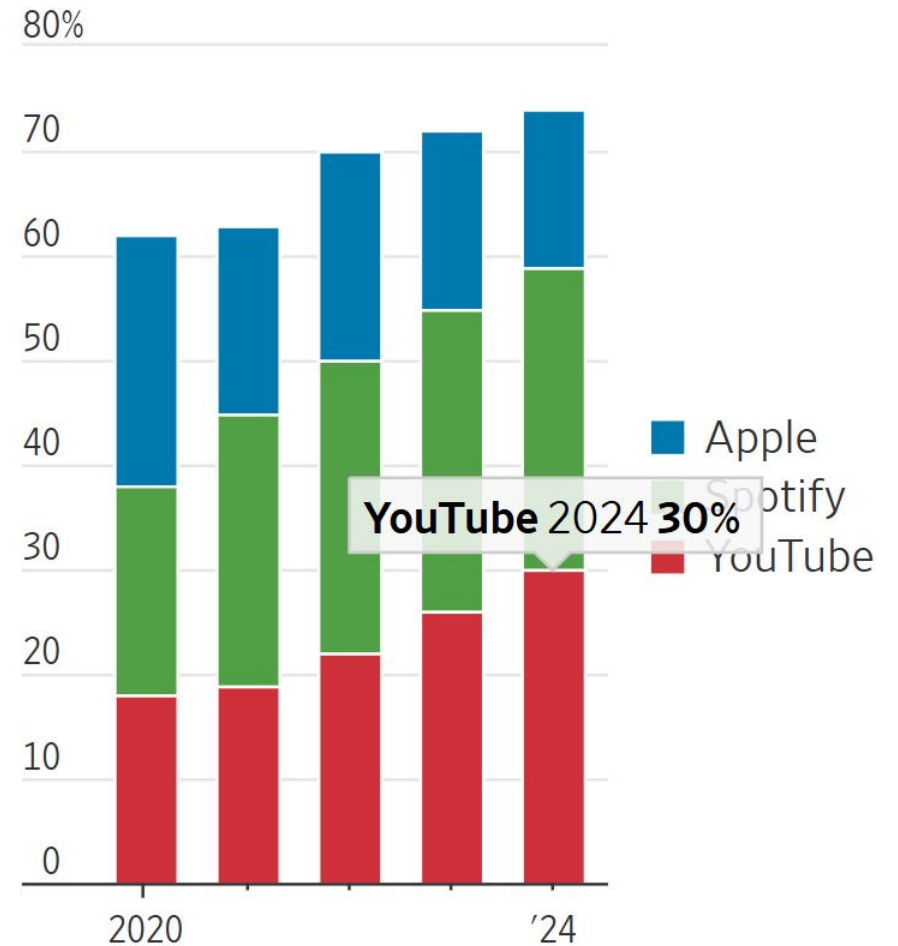
30% YouTube, 29% Spotify, 15% Apple (in 2024)



Multimodality, much?

Source: <https://pa.ag/3ZXEZeq>

Top platforms for U.S. weekly podcast listeners



Source: Edison Podcast Metrics

There is going to be more competition in 'Core Search'

(Less dependence on Bing and Google is Meta's declared goal)

Lots of stuff is happening "*off-Google*"!

Source: <https://pa.ag/3CduV81>

Meta Is Developing a Search Engine to Power Its AI Chatbot

Reports indicate the company wants to reduce its reliance on search data from Microsoft's Bing and Google at a time when all three are battling for AI supremacy.

Published Oct. 28, 2024



#3

ChatGPT (& other LLMs) are definite disruptors in the search market

They are inevitably contributing to a change in search behaviour and in the search market landscape, even though they're currently used in completely different ways.



Gartner predicts a significant shift due to AI

According to Gartner, around 25% of the search market will be served by AI search and chatbots by 2026.

Source: <https://pa.ag/3uG3D6L>

Gartner Predicts Search Engine Volume Will Drop 25% by 2026, Due to AI Chatbots and Other Virtual Agents

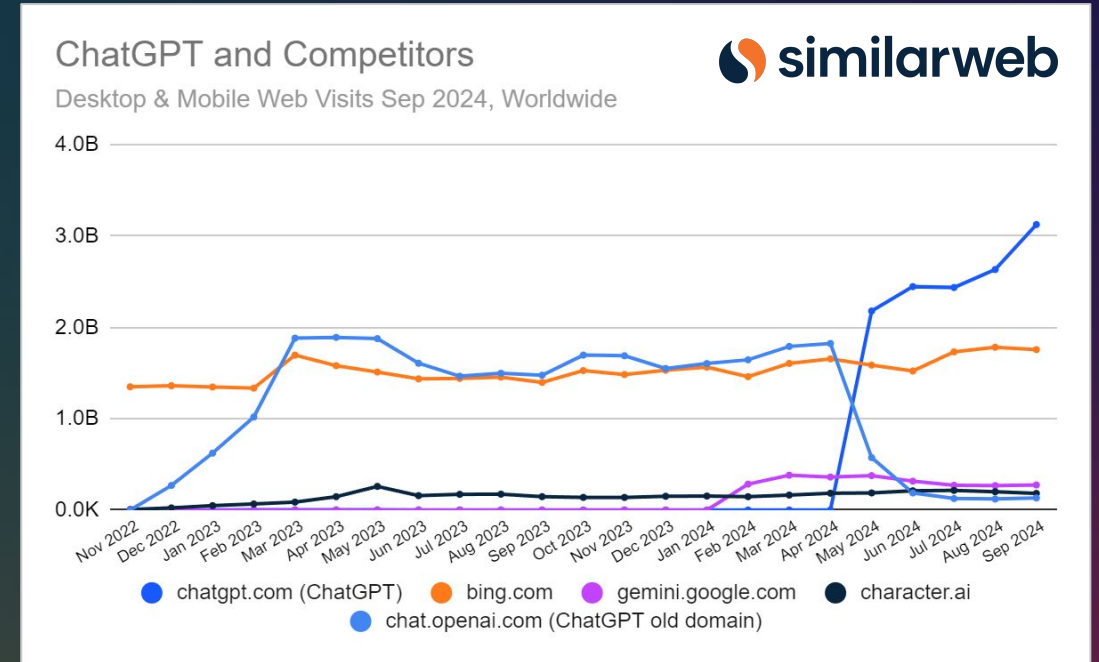
By 2026, traditional search engine volume will drop 25%, with search marketing losing market share to AI chatbots and other virtual agents, according to Gartner, Inc.

OpenAI and ChatGPT are also experiencing rapid growth

"OpenAI growth has been strong, and 300 million active users weekly are using ChatGPT" [12/24]

-400 million active users are expected as of 03/25.

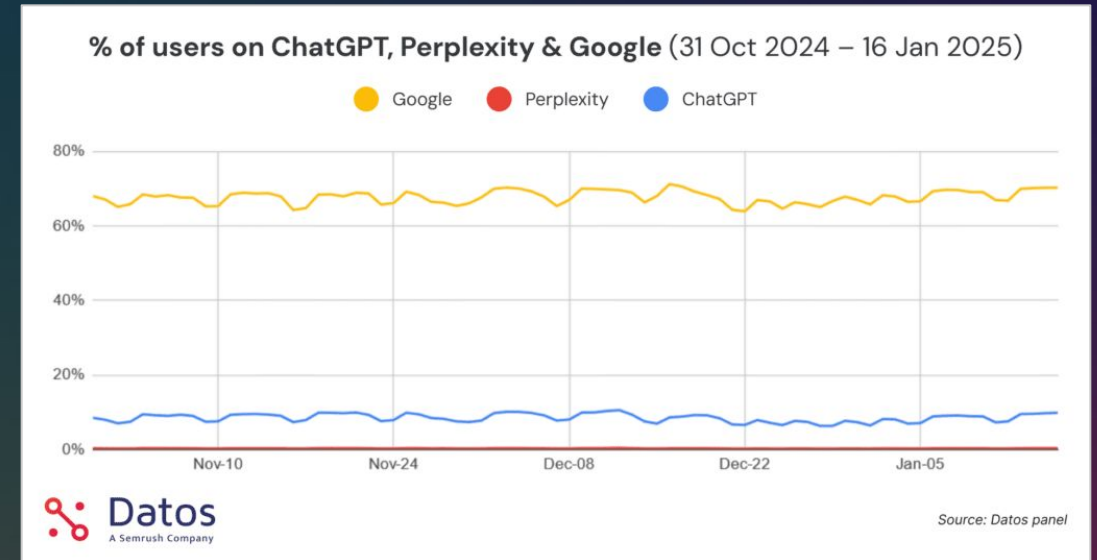
Source: <https://pa.ag/4gESGVq>



You don't visibly see LLMs taking market share from Google at the moment!









"It's clear from the data that ChatGPT is on the rise and likely to continue to be in 2025. However, when it comes to search [...] nothing is about to topple Google any time soon."

Source: <https://pa.ag/4iexkPs>



Different entry points for different mindsets, demographics...

... or different intents (although these are often all part of said user journey!):

<p>Helpful, how-to- & DIY content</p> 	<p>Search for content/facts (single answer)</p> 	<p>Inspirational research (desire for variance / diversity)</p> 	<p>Commercial queries, specific product searches</p> 
<p>Browsing, scrolling and inspiration</p> 	<p>Assistant-like for tasks and research (analysis, comparison, transformation)</p> 	<p>Informational long-tail searches (incl. current data)</p> 	<p>Local searches (by location, things-to-do)</p> 

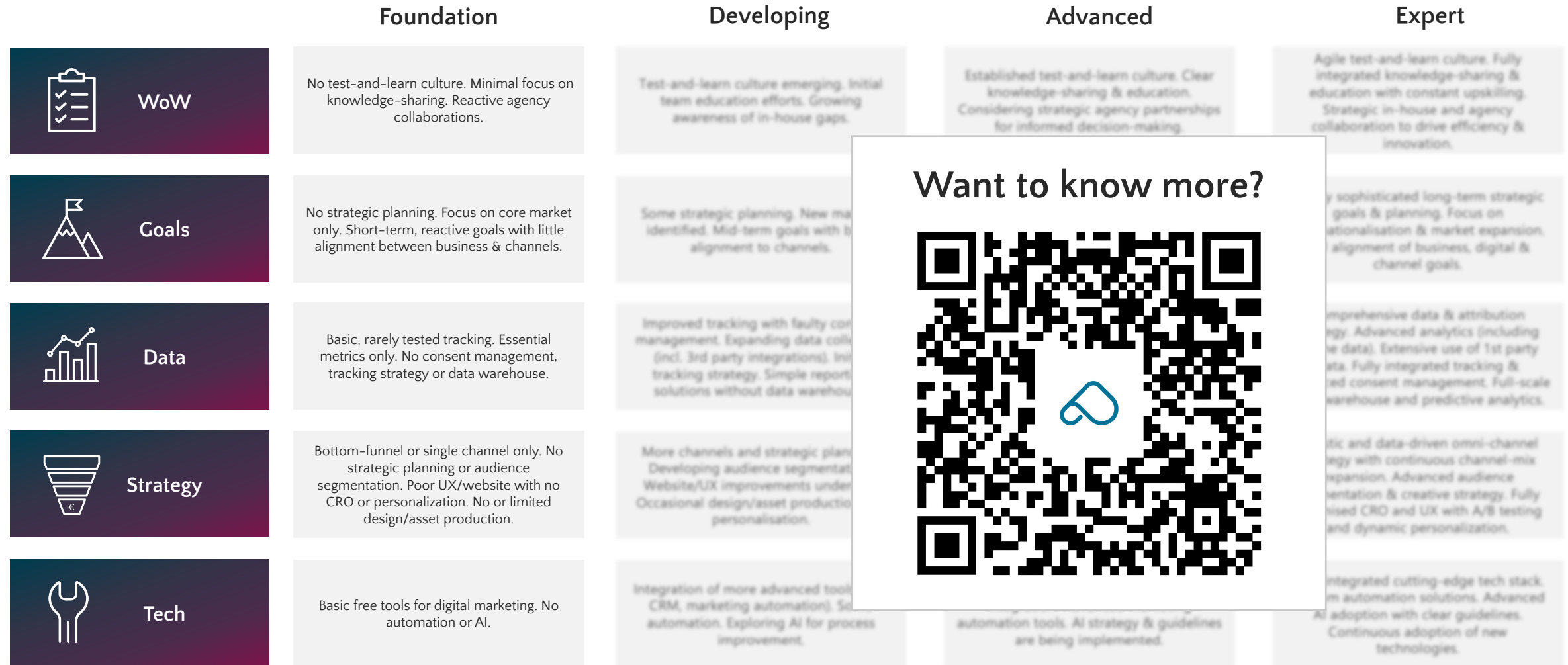
You must be present.

EVERYWHERE.



The Peak Ace Digital Excellence Framework

From foundational to expert level, this framework guides our clients' progression towards digital mastery.



Want to know more?




How do you build a brand that search engines trust?

Branding isn't just logos & colors – it's about becoming the default choice for your audience.



To be clear:
(my) SEO point of view



Consistency is key, build a recognisable digital footprint

Let's start with the basics: If your brand name, messaging, and assets aren't consistent, you'll never be recognised as a strong entity.

✓ **Standardise brand name and identity across platforms**
Ensure uniform naming on **website, all socials, PR** and other business listings.

✓ **Implement structured data for brand entity recognition**
Use **schema.org** markup for **Organisation, SameAs**, etc. to reinforce entity signals.

✓ **Consistent NAP (name, address, phone) data**
Update **GMB, directories** and **schema.org** markup to maintain accuracy.

✓ **Standardise your brand messaging and assets**
Maintain a uniform voice, tagline, and visual identity across all channels.

✓ **Claim and optimise your knowledge panel (GKP)**
Submit updates via **GKP** and **Wikidata**, ensuring accurate brand representation.

✓ **Optimise branded search ownership**
Eliminate confusion with competitors, reinforce brand authority with strong entity home.

Pro Tip: build a brand-focused FAQ page

Control the narrative - make search engines and AI crawlers/LLMs better understand your brand.

- ✓ Create a dedicated **FAQ page** to answer branded queries and reinforce your brand's positioning.
- ✓ Use **GSC/PAA** to identify frequently searched questions (e.g., "*What is Product X?*") and provide structured, clear responses (**bullets** work best).
- ✓ Implement **FAQ Schema-markup** to enhance visibility in search engines and improve AI-driven citations.

Structured data helps search engines **connect** the **dots** and **confirm** your **authority**.



Authority building

Getting mentioned, cited or linked by authoritative sources increases brand trust and visibility in search (and LLMs)



Strengthen brand authority with mentions, links & citations

Getting mentioned, cited or linked by authoritative sources increases brand trust and visibility in search (and LLMs)

✓ **Earn brand mentions, citations & links:**
Secure references and earned links from trusted sources to reinforce credibility and rankings.

✓ **Focus on shareable content & linkable assets:**
Leverage research, reports, and unique insights that attract natural links and shares.

✓ **Position owned media as authority source:**
Publish expert, well-structured content that reinforces entity recognition and earns authoritative citations.

✓ **Grow branded SV & link equity via digital PR:**
Leverage press coverage to increase direct brand queries and domain authority.

✓ **Create co-occurrences with relevant entities:**
Get featured alongside key industry topics in authoritative media.

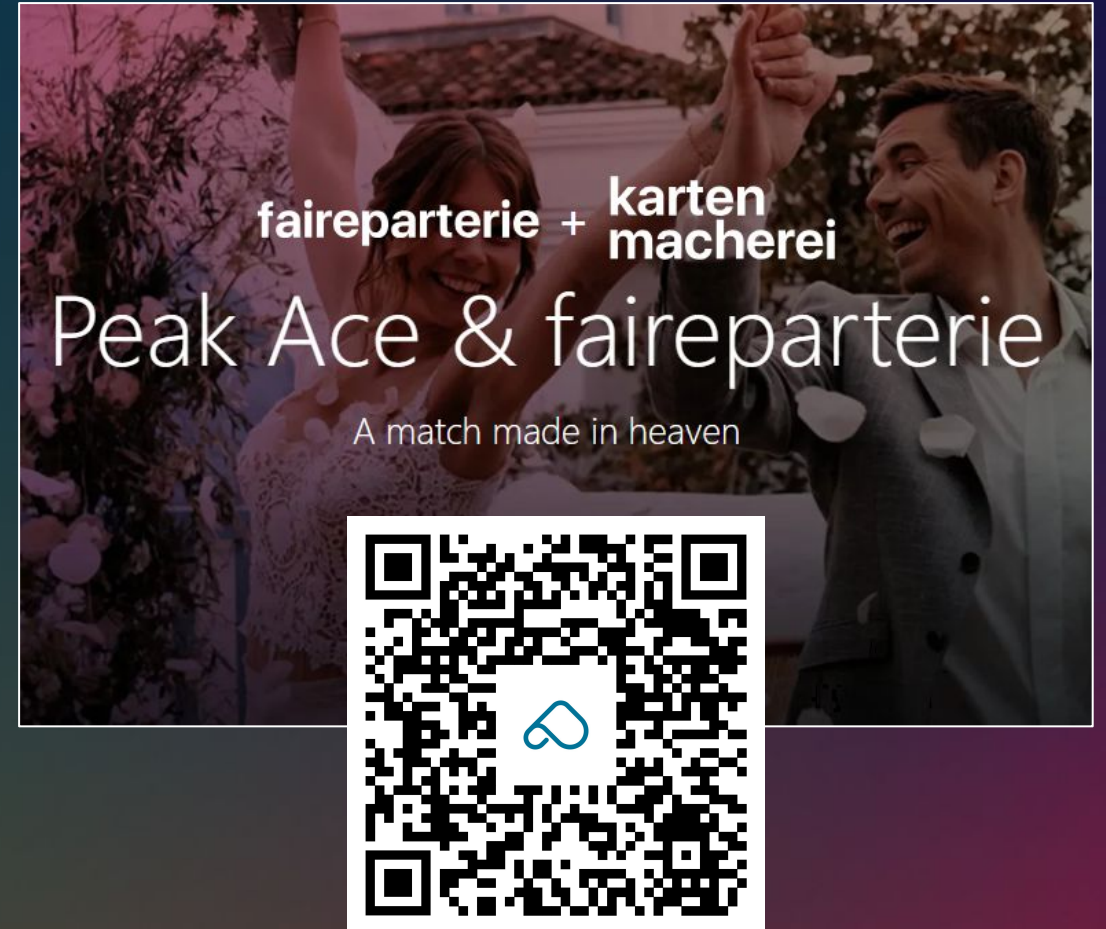
✓ **Secure coverage & links through strategic PR:**
Proactively pitch stories to journalists and industry publications to earn editorial links and citations.

One campaign, multiple wins

Strategic campaigning ensures brand visibility, shareability, mentions and links - all in one effort.

Create authentic content assets focussed on maximum information gain.

Source: <https://peakace.agency/en/case-study/faireparterie/>



To reap maximum benefits, SEO needs to be well integrated not only with PR but also with paid media, and social.



Strengthening your brand's share of voice in LLMs



Strategies to improve your brand's visibility in LLMs

Focus on consistent, high-quality content updates that provide **genuine** value to keep your brand relevant and authoritative, as AI models prioritise the latest and most trusted sources.

✓ **Create detailed, structured content:**
Publish **in-depth, well-organised content** to improve entity recognition and relevance.

✓ **Summarise key takeaways:**
Place a **concise summary at the top** or bottom of each page to enhance scanability for AI-driven search.

✓ **Secure authoritative media coverage:**
Get **featured or mentioned in industry-relevant news and media outlets** to strengthen brand trust and authority.

✓ **Obtain citations in books:**
If possible, get referenced in published books within your industry to enhance long-term credibility.

✓ **Maintain up-to-date profiles:**
Keep business and brand listings accurate on global and regional platforms.

✓ **Be visible on community platforms:**
Establish and maintain an active presence on Wikipedia, Reddit, and Quora to reinforce credibility.

✓ **Optimise page speed & rendering:**
Keep page load times below 500ms and minimise rendering delays by reducing heavy scripts and elements.

✓ **Ensure content is visible without JavaScript:**
LLM crawlers fail to render JavaScript-dependent content, so **key information must load natively in HTML**.

Source: Malte Landwehr via <https://pa.ag/3EA0mug>

And don't forget to start tracking stuff such as...



New success metrics
(higher CTR than
expected, branded
platform visibility,
demand, ...)



Growing number of
branded keywords
and phrases (plus
branded content)



Brand recognition
(NPS) and reputation
(digital footprint)



Significant and
growing search
volume for the brand
itself (or domain)

From rankings to attention ownership

The SEO mindset shift



SEO isn't about ranking #1
in Google anymore

(even though that's still cool!)



It's about directing attention

... and actively guiding and controlling where, how, and why your brand captures consumer attention across multiple search and discovery platforms



Brands, not just websites, win in search

Google updates and changes shake up SERPs,
but authoritative brands stay visible and resilient.

Source: <https://pa.ag/41lgy5S>



Search intent is everything

Google ranks you based on why people search, not just what they type

Source: <https://pa.ag/4bqZrc1>

How to use 12 micro intents for SEO and content journey mapping

Analyzing the SERPs for these micro intents will help you create the right content that a searcher will want to find. [Search Engine Land](#)

AI is reshaping how people search
– and who they trust



Google is just one of many
touchpoints



The new consumer journey: beyond Google

Modern buyers don't search in a straight line – they discover and navigate across platforms before making a decision.

#5 Buys on
Amazon/
G-Shopping



#1 Watches a
product video on
YouTube/TikTok



#2 Searches
reviews on
Reddit/
Quora



#4 Asks
AI-search for
comparisons



#3 Checks the
brand's website
via Search



How to win in an omni-channel search world

“Be everywhere your customers search” – users don’t just search once, they search across channels

Be discoverable across all key platforms

(Brands that optimise for multi-platform search see 30-50% higher engagement)

Maintain brand presence at every stage of the journey

(The average buyer interacts with a brand across 6+ digital touchpoints before converting)

Prioritise real business impact over vanity metrics

(Traffic alone is meaningless – brands that optimise for conversions see higher long-term ROI)

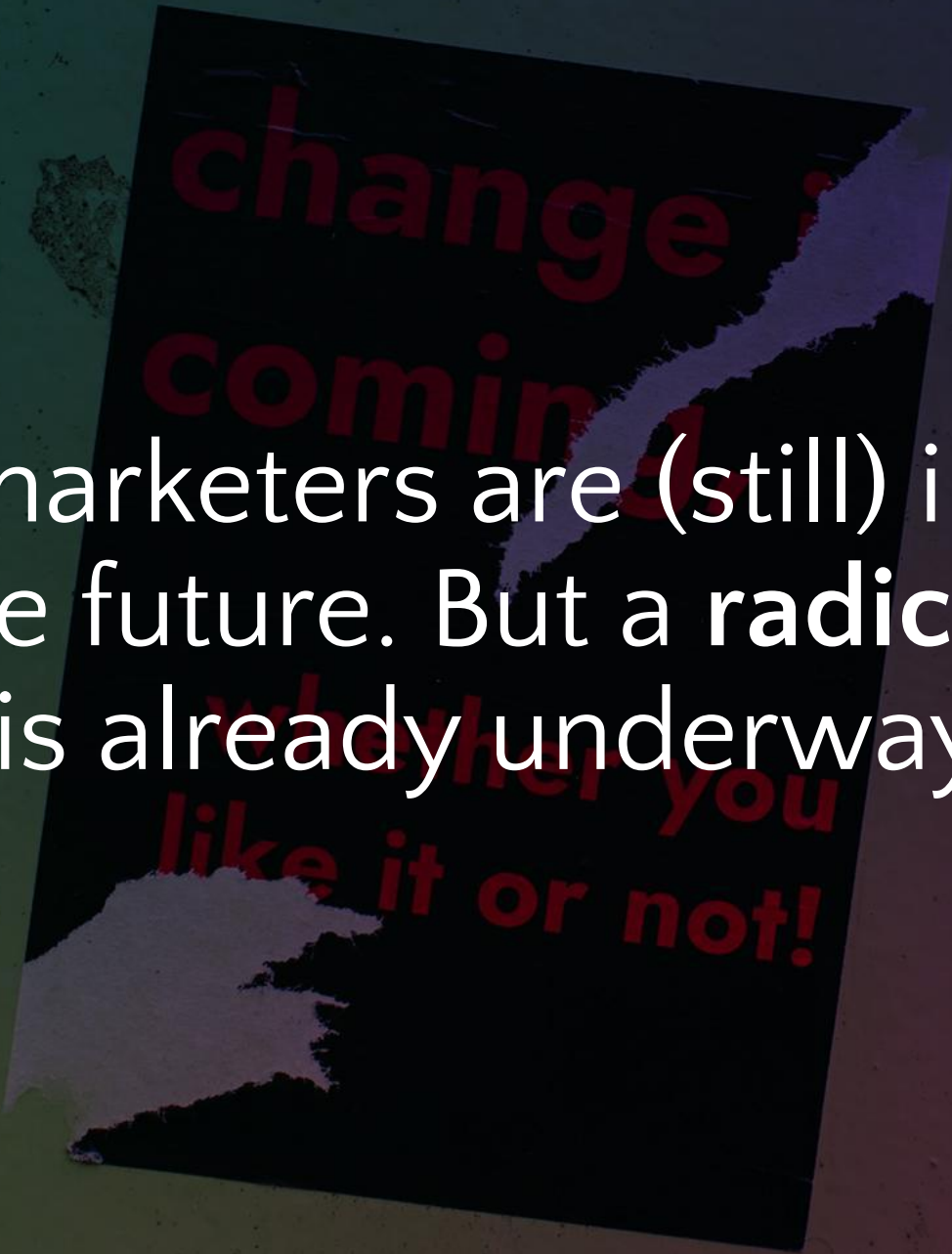
The future of SEO is omni-channel...

... spanning search engines, social, AI-driven discovery/comparison, and vertical search (Amazon, YouTube, TikTok, ChatGPT, Apple Search, etc.).



This is cool and all...
but far from *all*



A torn black sign with red text is positioned diagonally in the center of the image. The sign's text reads: "change is coming whether you like it or not!". The background is a gradient of green on the left and purple on the right, with some white speckles and a small white icon in the bottom right corner.

Most marketers are (still) in denial about the future. But a radical change is already underway.





We are transitioning from the
mobile-first to the **agent-first** era



Beyond traditional UI

“A preview of an agent that can go to the web to perform tasks like filling out forms, booking travel, [...] – by remotely interacting with a web browser [...] via mouse clicks, scrolling, and typing.”

Source: <https://pa.ag/3WWTWf9>



OpenAI

January 23, 2025

Introducing Operator

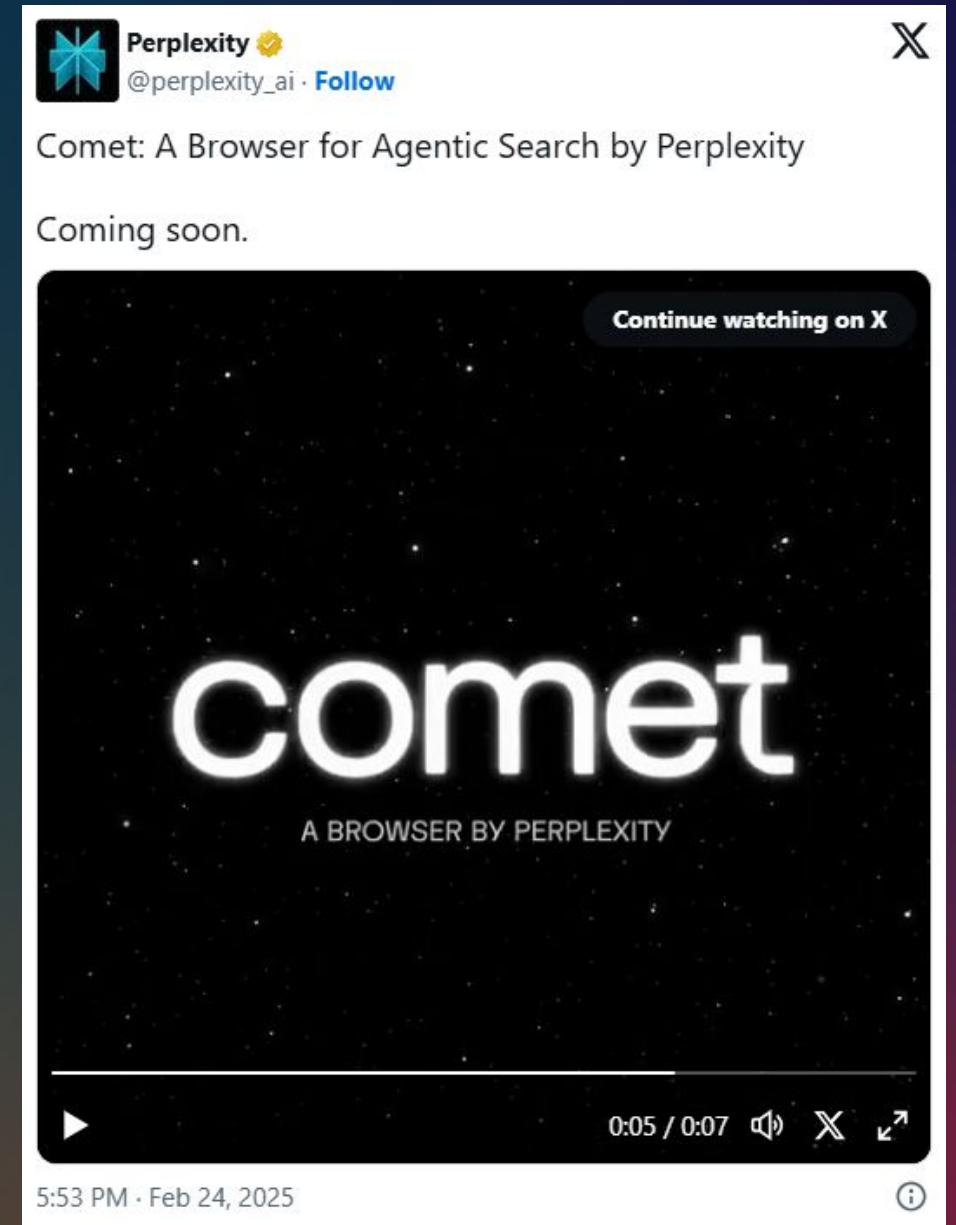
A research preview of an agent that can use its own browser to perform tasks for you. Available to Pro users in the U.S.

[Go to Operator ↗](#)

Seen this?

“Just like Perplexity reinvented search, we’re also reinventing the browser” – not sure about that, but...

Source: <https://pa.ag/3Dk8qyT>



The image shows a tweet from the account 'Perplexity' (@perplexity_ai) on X. The tweet text reads: 'Comet: A Browser for Agentic Search by Perplexity' followed by 'Coming soon.' Below the text is a video player. The video frame shows a dark space background with the word 'comet' in large white lowercase letters, and 'A BROWSER BY PERPLEXITY' in smaller white uppercase letters below it. A 'Continue watching on X' button is in the top right of the video frame. The video player controls at the bottom show a play button, a progress bar at 0:05 / 0:07, a volume icon, a close icon, and a share icon. The tweet timestamp is '5:53 PM · Feb 24, 2025' and there is an information icon in the bottom right corner.

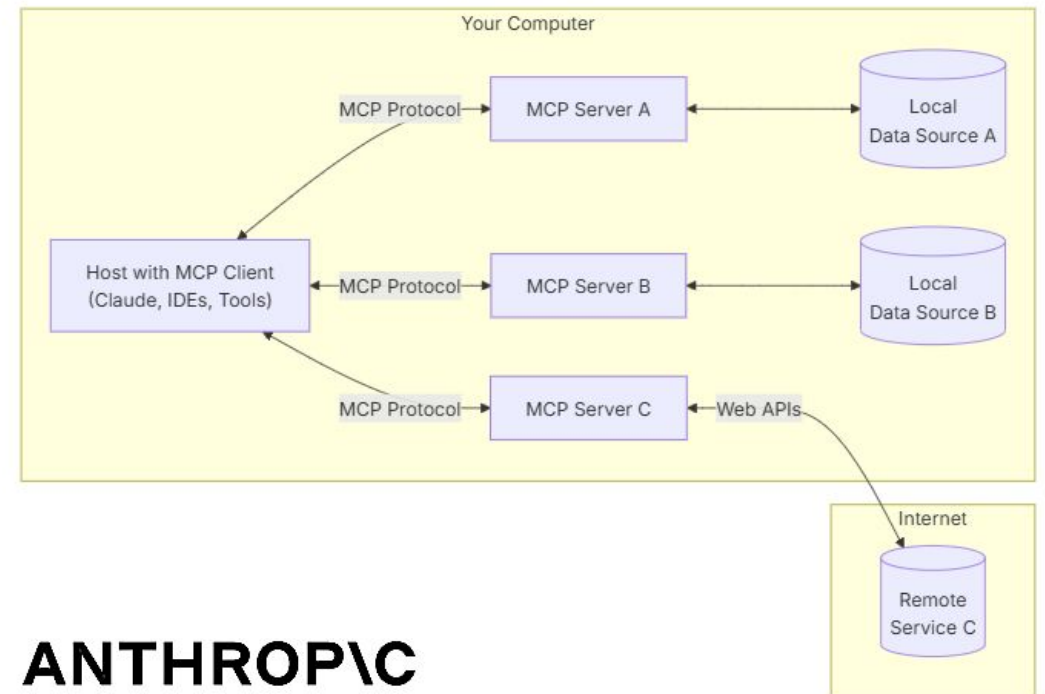
Model Context Protocol (MCP)

The hottest open-source projects for AI agents right now: MCP is set to become the 'new standard' for connecting AI agents and systems to where data resides.

Source: <https://pa.ag/3QJwE8K>

General architecture

At its core, MCP follows a client-server architecture where a host application can connect to multiple servers:



ANTHROPIC

**Data-driven interactions will replace
traditional interfaces**
– despite current challenges.



The end of traditional search and websites?

The internet is evolving into a decentralised network with AI-driven connectivity.

Highly personalised interfaces (*think Subdermal Implants*) are replacing traditional search engines and websites.





We're in for an exciting ride!




Thank you, Friends of Search!



Get this presentation
and deep-dive into all things
branding & SEO!

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