



passion
digital 

The Future of Search... Are You Ready?



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Introduction



Google has long been synonymous with search. The verb 'google' was chosen as Word of the Decade for 2000–2009 by the American Dialect Society, with the generic meaning “to search the internet”, regardless of the search engine used. Very few brand names have made it into common parlance in the same way – but very few brands have had such a monumental impact on our day-to-day habits and processes.

The traditional way to get an understanding of the search landscape would be to look at the market share among search engines – and that market is dominated by Google, with 91.54% global market share. However, to focus on search engines alone would be to look at just a small slice of the search landscape. It has become increasingly clear that user habits are changing and information is sought in more places and through more formats than just a text search on Google.

As marketers we need to understand the shift in habits and adapt accordingly – both to capture the search intent of our audience now and to futureproof our activity going forward.

In this guide we will cover:

- 1.** ● How search habits are changing, especially among younger generations
- 2.** ● How developments in social search, visual search and voice search are broadening the search landscape
- 3.** ● How technologies like AI may further alter the landscape
- 4.** ● How to develop search strategies that bridge the traditional silos of SEO and social media marketing



How search habits are changing

How search habits are changing

The generational shift

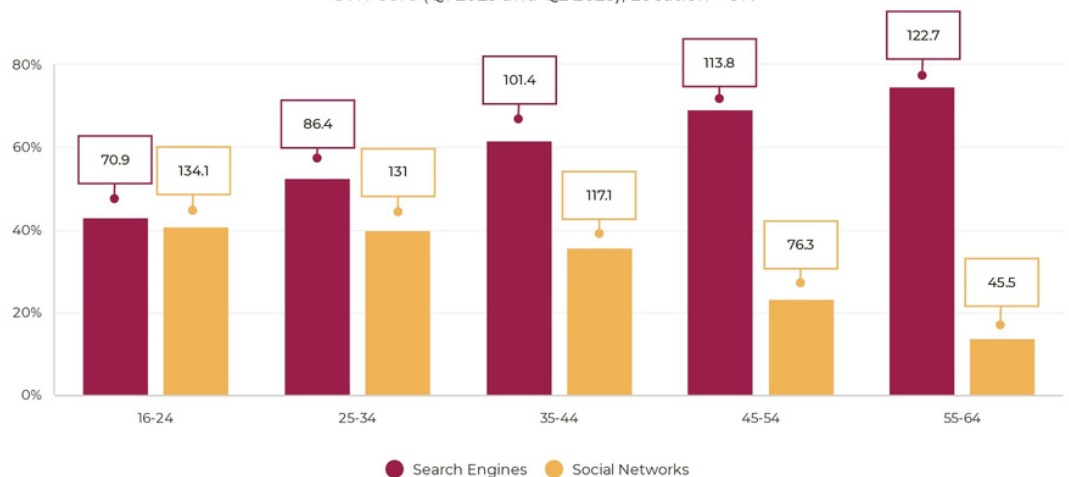
Where are users searching for information online if it's not on search engines? The significant change here can be found among younger demographics.

If we consider online brand research, we can see a clear generational shift. Boomers and Gen X markedly favour search engines over social networks, but this gap closes for Millennials. **Gen Z is the first age group who use social networks more than search engines for online brand research.**

The below chart illustrates this, but what's important to look at is the index number, which is in the box above each bar. An index number above 100 means that this age group is more likely than the general population to use that platform for online/brand product research. So although for the 16-24 and 25-34 age groups, it still looks like search engines are winning out, when you look at the index you can see that for the 16-24 group, they are 34% more likely than the general population to do brand research on social networks and 30% less likely to do brand research on search engines.

Top Channels for Online Brand/Product Research

GWJ Core (Q1 2023 and Q2 2023), Location - UK



How search habits are changing

This is not a close-kept secret. Google's Senior Vice President Prabhakar Raghavan said as much at the FORTUNE Brainstorm Tech Conference in July 2022:

"In our studies*, something like almost 40% of young people, when they're looking for a place for lunch, they don't go to Google Maps or Search, they go to TikTok or Instagram."

*Google USA research among 18-24 year olds.

For these younger age groups, the key reason for this change is that social media is a better provider of the type of content that they want to find. For them, short, fast-moving video content with in-built social proof is easier to consume than long, text-heavy pages on brand websites or online publications.

[Zoë Jenkin's viral LinkedIn post](#) from August 2022 illustrated the disconnect between how marketers understand channel strategy and how young people use those channels. Jenkin asked her 14-year-old niece what she thought of different social media platforms and the answers were enlightening. See following page.

But it's not just social media that we need to consider when assessing the search landscape. Marketplaces are a key starting point for many e-commerce-driven users. In a US survey, [Jungle Scout](#) found that **61% of US consumers start their shopping online on Amazon**, compared to 49% starting on a search engine. Although this isn't a new phenomenon, it is rarely "counted" alongside search engines and social media when understanding how users find what they're looking for online.

So, leaving the Google-centric view of the search landscape behind, in the next few sections we're going to explore the new ways that users are searching online and the platforms that serve them best.

YOUTUBE – “It’s just tv, and better than using Google like dad does, I can find anything on there faster and easier than reading an entire article.”

TIKTOK – “We’re mostly there to watch videos, not to create ourselves. Again better than Google, can find anything with a quick search and plus be entertained for hours.”





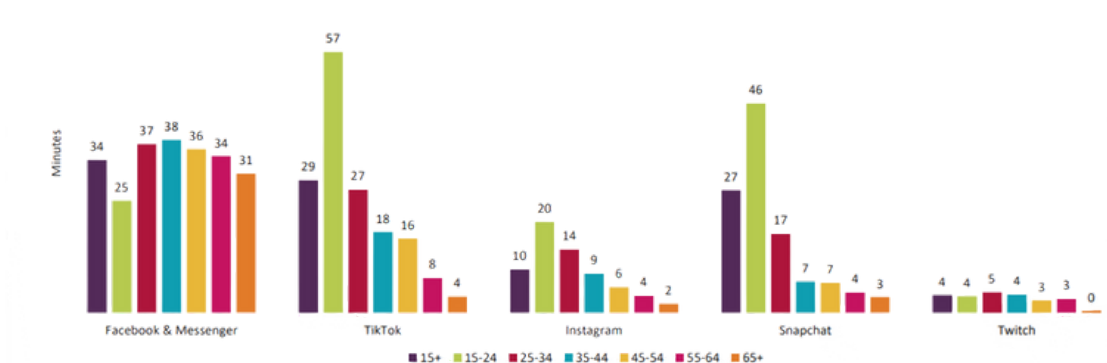
Social search and the rise of TikTok

Social search and the rise of TikTok

The social media channel that has seen the biggest shift in recent years is TikTok. The short-form native video platform may have started as a lip syncing app in 2014 (originally named Musical.ly) but since supercharged global growth during the Covid-19 pandemic, it has become a mainstream social media player. As of January 2023 TikTok had 1 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2022).

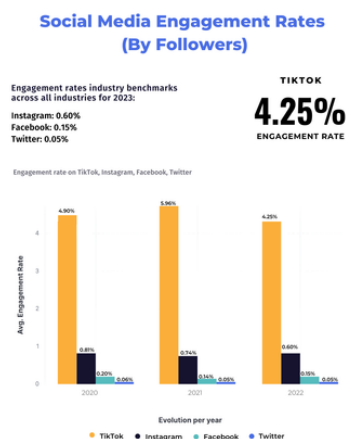
Why should you care about TikTok?

Firstly, it is Gen Z's most used social platform by some margin (in terms of minutes spent per day).



Source: © Ipsos, Ipsos iris Online Audience Measurement Service, 1 March – 31 March 2022, adults aged 15+.

Engagements with brands on TikTok is much higher than it is on other social media



Data source: Socialinsider

But most importantly for the topic of this whitepaper, TikTok is a big part of the reason why younger generations are going to social when seeking information rather than search engines.

Why are people turning to TikTok for answers?

Here is an example. Imagine you are a 20-something woman who wants to find something fun to do in London at the weekend.

If you search 'what to do in London' in Google, these are the results:

The screenshot shows a Google search for "what to do in London". The search bar is at the top with the text "what to do in London" and a search button. Below the search bar are filters: "Images", "With kids", "For a day", "For free", "At night", "Maps", "Today", "This weekend", and "On a rainy day". The search results show "About 6,230,000,000 results (0.48 seconds)".

Sponsored - Tickets and tours

- Colors Festival London's Most... £11 Fever 4.6 ★ (2.1K)
- Street Art Tour and Spray... £35 Viator 5.0 ★ (58)
- Warner Bros. Studio Harry... £104 Headout 4.4 ★ (4.5K)
- Churchill's Life & WW2 London... £52 GetYourGuide 4.5 ★ (15)
- Uber Boat By Thames Clipp... £9 Headout 4.3 ★ (1.1K)

Top sights in London

- The British Museum 4.7 ★ (143K) Museum Free
- lastminute.com London Eye 4.5 ★ (164K) Ferris wheel £27.50
- Tower of London 4.6 ★ (98K) Castle £33.60

More things to do

Tripadvisor
<https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk> > England > London > **THE 10 BEST Things to Do in London - 2023 (with Photos)**
Top Attractions in London · 1. Tower of London · 2. The British Museum · 3. London Eye · 4. National Gallery · 5. Tower Bridge · 6. V&A - Victoria and Albert Museum.
[Tower of London](#) · [London Tours](#) · [London Eye](#) · [Tripadvisor](#) · [Tripadvisor](#)

visitlondon.com
<https://www.visitlondon.com> > Things to do > **101 Best Things To Do in London**
Book popular things to do in London · London Cable Car · London Eye · Tower of London · Warner Bros. Studio Tour London - The Making of Harry Potter · The Lion King.
[Best 37 rooftop bars in London](#) · [IFS Cloud Cable Car](#) · [Hampton Court Palace](#)

Time Out
<https://www.timeout.com> > London > things-to-do > **Things to Do in London - Events, Attractions and Activities**
The ultimate guide to things to do in London. All the events, festivals and activities happening in London.
[London](#) · [Today](#) · [Secret London](#) · [Alternative London](#)

People also ask

- What can you not miss in London?
- What can I do on a day trip to London?
- What are some free things to do in London?
- What are 3 famous things in London?

London
Capital of England

London, the capital of England and the United Kingdom, is a 21st-century city with history stretching back to Roman times. At its centre stand the imposing Houses of Parliament, the iconic 'Big Ben' clock tower and Westminster Abbey, site of British monarch coronations. Across the Thames River, the London Eye observation wheel provides panoramic views of the South Bank cultural complex, and the entire city. — Google

Age: About 1,976 years
Founded: 47 AD
Area: 1,572 km²
Population: 8,982 million (2019) [Eusestat](#)
Metro population: 14,800,000 (London Metropolitan Area)
Weather: 16°C. Wind W at 4 mph (6 km/h). 92% Humidity [More on weather.com](#)
Local time: Thursday 16:33

Events

Thu, 12 Oct 10:30	Baby Rhyme Time at Pinlicko Library (in-per... Pinlicko Library
Thu, 12 Oct 10:30	Get Started: iPad Apple Stratford City
Thu, 12 Oct 11:00	Poetry Workshop and Competition at North ... North Finchley Library
Thu, 12 Oct 11:45	Get Started: iPhone Apple White City

[View 25+ more](#)

The first section is a carousel of ads; one has a picture of the Warner Bros Studio Tour (not in London).

Verdict: not relevant to your search.

The second section shows some of the 'Top sights in London', including the Tower of London, The British Museum and The London Eye.

Verdict: doesn't serve your personal search intent.

A large amount of real estate on the right of the SERP is taken up by the knowledge panel. In some searches this contains useful information to read at a glance, but the year the city was founded and its population is hardly relevant to 20-something you.

Verdict: doesn't serve your personal search intent.



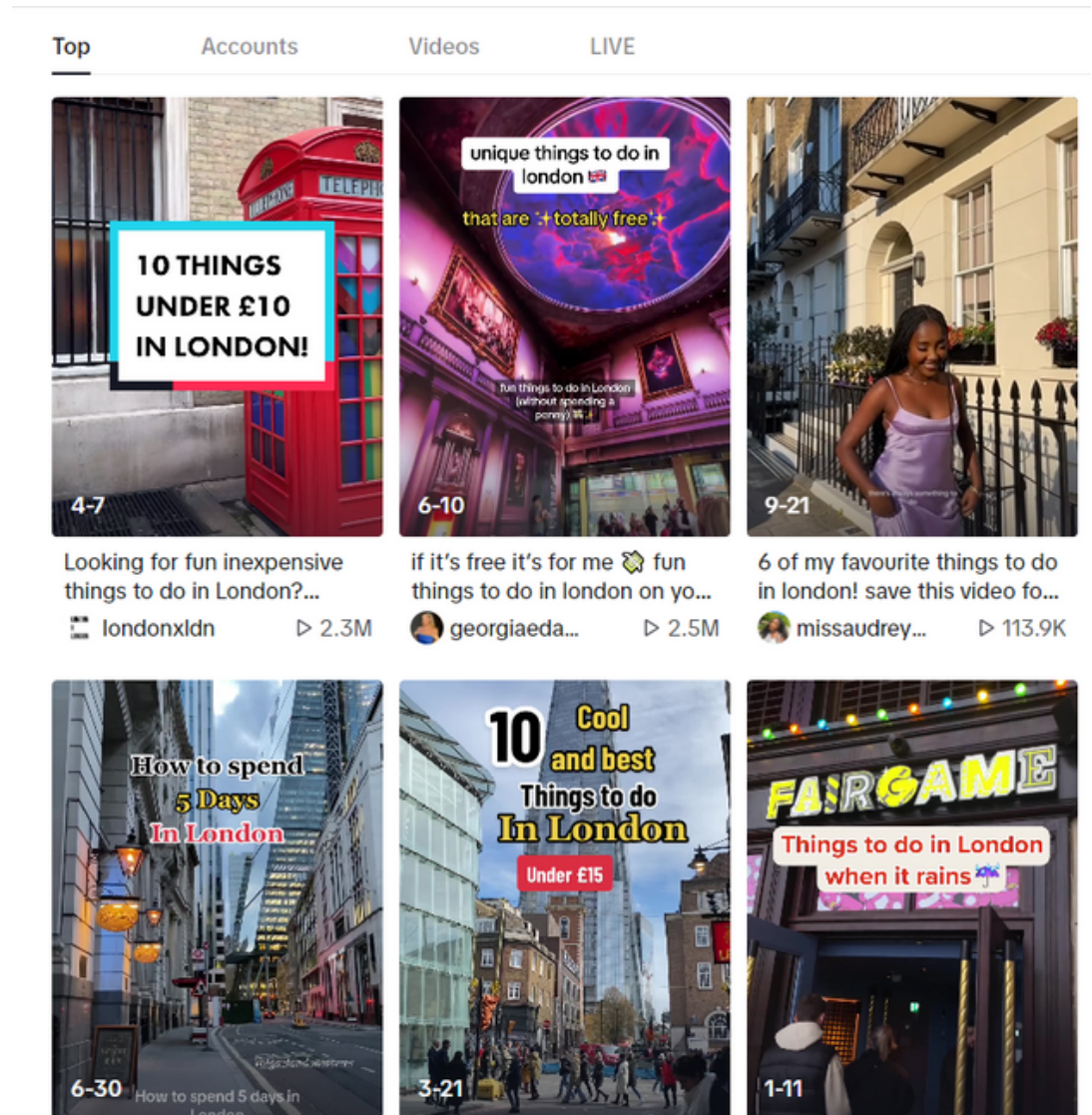
Contained within the knowledge panel is a list of events that someone might be interested in, including a Baby Rhyme Time and Get Started: iPhone at Apple. Again, this is not very relevant to a 20-something.

Verdict: doesn't serve your personal search intent.

And finally we get to the organic SERP – the web pages that are – in theory – most relevant to your specific search. The second result is '101 best things to do in London', which is a common listicle-style article that tends to rank in Google. This is an example of the [skyscraper technique](#), when a website tries to outdo its competitors who only offer '50 things to do' or '75 things to do'. Although the technique may have worked well for Brian Dean back in 2015 when he first publicised it, the top of the SERPs now are filled with ever-expanding listicles that prioritise quantity of options over quality.

Verdict: too time-consuming

Now here is the same search in TikTok. All of the results are videos that you can watch in about 30 seconds.



The activities it recommends are:

1. Immersive art gallery
2. Room of mirrors
3. High-tech mini golf
4. Digital arcade
5. Ping pong and cocktails
6. Private photobooth experience

Each point features footage from the experience by the creator, and it's accompanied by a great soundtrack. It's not surprising that a 20-year-old finds this search experience more appealing and more rewarding than sifting through the overcrowded SERPs on Google.

In May 2022 a tweet by KA went viral when she said that TikTok was a better search engine than Google. The responses give an insight into why users prefer it.



TikTok is becoming an important first step in the online search journey because it offers:

- Short, fast-moving video content that is easy to consume
- Social proof – recommendations are largely driven by creators, who are more trusted than brands and publishers
- A powerful algorithm that serves curated content for you
- Time sensitivity
- An addictive scrollable format

Until very recently, TikTok has been reluctant to see itself as a search engine (or a direct competitor of Google). It doesn't make the search data for its platform public and it hadn't officially acknowledged the use of TikTok as a place for 'active discovery' rather than traditional 'passive discovery' through scrolling.

However, in December 2022 it released its '[Do it with TikTok](#)' campaign, which says:

"TikTok has become the go-to place for everyday tips and tricks. Whether you're after #diyonabudget tips for a new home, #BookTok inspo for an uplifting read, or just #budgetmeals inspo for a dinner that's affordable without compromising on taste, our community has the answer. So you never have to struggle and do it alone."

Although it doesn't explicitly say that TikTok is a vehicle for search, it is clearly edging into the world of information discovery as well as entertainment.

What is Google doing to combat the rise of TikTok?

TikTok may not publicly acknowledge that it is going head to head with Google, but Google – which owns YouTube – is fighting back with **YouTube Shorts**. They satisfy the desire for easily snackable short-form video content, served in a familiar UI (full screen, vertical scrolling). In 2022 there was a huge cash injection from YouTube via the [Shorts Fund](#) to tempt creators over from TikTok and traditional YouTube.

Will YouTube Shorts ever eclipse TikTok? It's unlikely, but clearly Google is recognising the shift in its users' desire for short-form video content for more than just entertainment – for active discovery too.

In September 2023, there were [rumours of a partnership](#) between Google and TikTok as users began to see an option to explore more results for their TikTok search in Google. Neither Google nor TikTok have publicly commented on this partnership yet, but this development demonstrates Google's ongoing efforts to maintain its leadership in the search landscape.





Visual search and the rise of 'lens' options

Visual search and the rise of 'lens' options

One of the important developments in search that is sometimes overlooked is the growth of visual search as opposed to traditional text search. The usefulness of this is [best described by Pinterest](#) when they first released their “crazy-fun new visual search tool” in 2015:

“...we’ve got a new tool that lets you find all those things you don’t have the words to describe.”

Rather than using text to describe what you’re looking for, you can use an image as the search query.

This is not new – Google’s Reverse Image Search has been available since 2011 – but it is growing more sophisticated thanks to developments in AI and machine learning.

The process works as follows:

- A smartphone user uploads or takes a photo with their phone
- The software uses [computer vision](#) to interpret the image and pull relevant results
- Search results, which could be similar images, product listings, websites, translations (the list goes on!), appear on the screen

Pinterest Lens

The most established player in the visual search field is Pinterest, which has been innovating in the space for over a decade. The hard work of their software engineers came to fruition in 2017 when they released three visual search tools:

- 1. Pinterest Lens** – allows users to ‘point and shoot’ their phone camera at something in the real world and generate relevant pins
- 2. Instant Ideas** – allows users to refine their feed by self-selecting which pins they like the look of, which generates a series of more relevant results
- 3. Shop the Look** – allows users to pinpoint different items inside a pin and browse through product listings for them



What is particularly interesting about Pinterest is the sophistication of its AI. For example, if you point Pinterest Lens at an avocado sitting on your kitchen counter, the results won't just be other pictures of avocados. You could get pins that feature avocado recipes, growing tips, DIY beauty treatments ... It's about idea generation rather than just product matching.

Google Lens

While Pinterest may have been the trailblazer when it comes to visual search, Google is responsible for making it commonplace with Google Lens. What started as a standalone app in 2017 has been slowly integrated into other Google products (including Google Photos and Google Assistant) and as of 2022 has now replaced Reverse Image Search and is fully available on the web.

There are so many uses for the technology:

- **Shopping** – like Pinterest, you can take a picture of an item and pull results of visually similar items online
- **Barcode and QR code recognition** – you can follow a link directly from a QR code to a website without having to download a specific app
- **Translation** – taking the smart text function a step further, it allows you to translate menus or street signs by simply holding your camera up to it
- **Location identification** – it can identify your surroundings and provide information like business reviews or opening hours



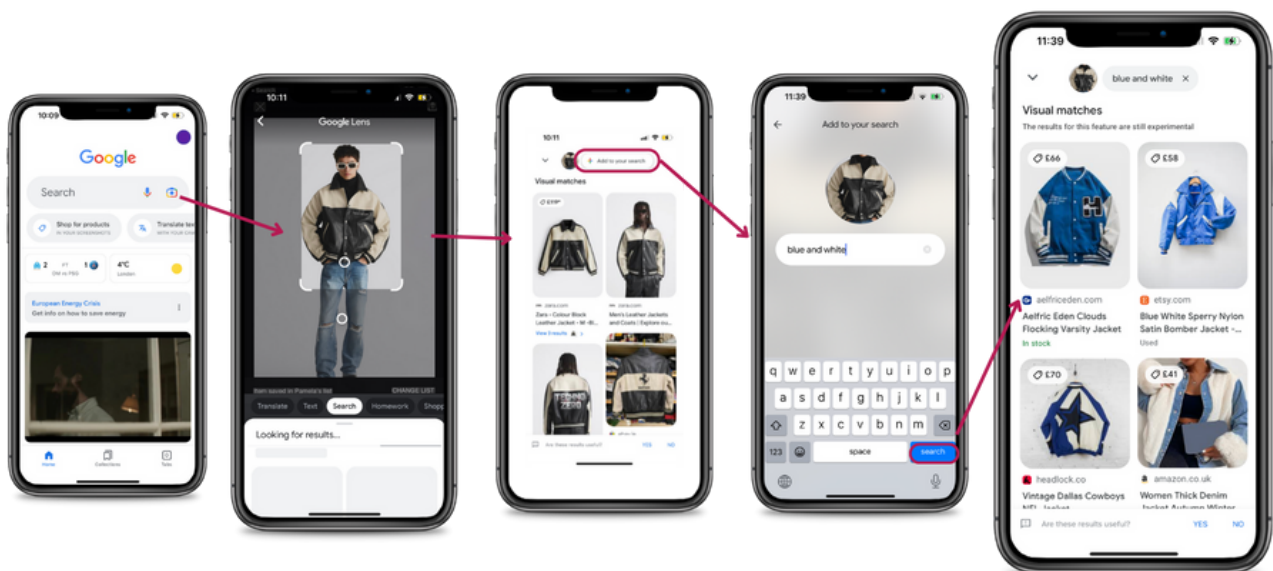
- **Smart text selection** – it can detect written text and allow you to copy and paste it, useful for things like WiFi passwords, addresses and dates and even create calendar invites based on the information
- **Item identification** – it can help you to identify a species of bird or a flower that you snap with your phone

The big jump forward here is the combination of visual search with augmented reality. When you hold your camera up to a menu and click 'translation', the results aren't pulled into a SERP – they are superimposed on the image in real-time.

Google Multisearch

In April 2022, Google announced the next iteration of Google Lens: [Google Multisearch](#), which allows you to augment your visual search using text prompts.

For example, you could use Google Lens to search based on an black and white jacket that you like and then add the query 'blue and white' to change the colour of the results.



Google Multisearch is really where Google is competing with TikTok, rather than YouTube Shorts. It addresses the rising appetite for visual answers and a resistance to waiting, scrolling and sifting through too much information. Ultimately it makes finding answers quicker and easier than ever.

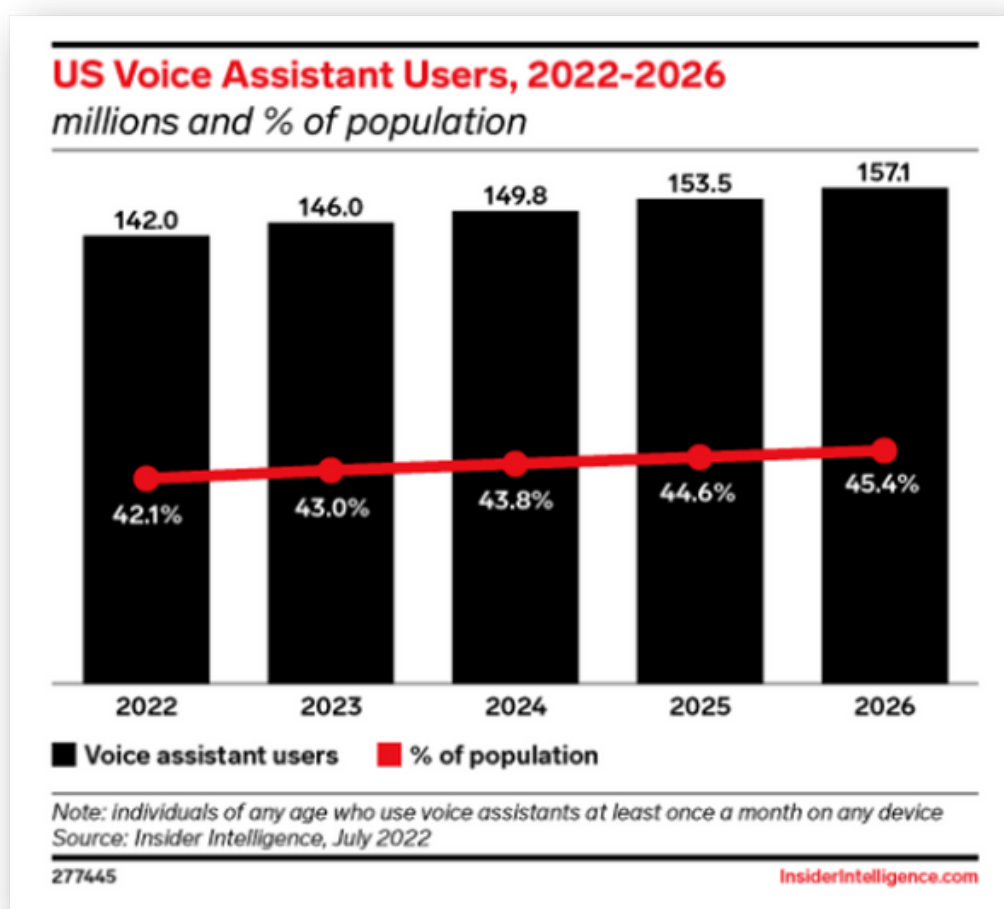


Voice search and the... plateau

Voice search and the... plateau

Around five years ago, SEOs were talking about voice search as a revolution in the way we seek and find information. Voice Assistants such as Amazon's Alexa, Apple's Siri and Google's Google Assistant have become part of everyday life for millions of people around the world.

A key reason for this is ease of use. It's quicker and more convenient for users to say what they are thinking instead of having to type it out, especially while out using their mobile or when they've got their hands full at home. This is exactly the trend we are seeing across social and visual search, too. Usage has plateaued at around 40-45% of the population in the countries where usage is highest, including the UK (46% in 2022, according to [Statista](#)).



However, the difference between voice search and text search is minimal from a technical perspective. Rather than typing out their search query, users speak it out loud and the software uses Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) to turn the audio into text. The impact that this has on SEO is that there are more searches for long-tail, question-based keywords that are phrased more conversationally than text searches.

For example:

Voice search	"Ok Google, who was the third wife of Henry VIII and how did she die?"
Text search	"Henry VIII 3rd wife death"

Talking to tech is the new norm

Now that voice search has been available to the mass market for a number of years, it's interesting to observe how people use it compared with other search channels. Back in 2018, [Bryson Meunier](#) did an analysis of 3,000 voice search queries of his own Google Home and found that 75% of them were 'device actions' like turning the lights on and off, setting timers and controlling the music. As Meunier said:

"When it comes to query intent and categories of queries used by my family over three months, usage may be high, but the opportunity for marketers is relatively low."

While certain content-driven niches may be able to benefit from voice search – for example, recipe providers, cinemas who want to advertise their listings, weather reporters, etc. – users aren't turning to voice search to browse the internet, visit brand websites or make new purchases.

In 2023, the conversation around voice search has died down among marketers, but it remains an important part of the wider search landscape.



Text search and the rise of AI

Text search and the rise of AI

Unless you've been living under a rock for the past year, you will be aware of ChatGPT and its meteoric rise to fame in November 2022. It became the fastest growing consumer application of all time (before Threads beat its record in July 2023) gaining more than 100 million users in the two months after launch. For countless people all around the world, signing up for ChatGPT was their first taste of AI-driven chatbot search.

How can AI be used in text search?

AI technology is revolutionising the way we search online. Rather than spending time trawling through endless irrelevant results, AI can help you discover the relevant answers quickly and effortlessly. It can identify keywords and phrases in the data, tailor website rankings to suit your exact requirements and even adjust outcomes based on past searches. Within a few clicks, you'll be able to find precisely what you're after.

What is ChatGPT?

ChatGPT is a particular kind of Natural Language Processing (NLP) that allows conversations with artificial intelligence-driven bots. By assessing the context of a discussion, ChatGPT can answer questions, make recommendations or even complete tasks such as customer service or sales. This groundbreaking technology is quickly gaining traction in chatbot design because of its highly engaging and personalised user experience. It can also be used for larger data collection projects for analytics and research purposes.

Considering the topic of this section, it may not come as a surprise to you that the last two paragraphs were written by AI. There were a few minor tweaks to the copy, but it has been taken almost verbatim from the suggestions given by Jasper, an AI content creation tool that we have been using as an agency for a few years now.

Explain how AI is affecting online search engine experience

AH

AI technology has greatly improved the online search engine experience by making searches more accurate and efficient. AI algorithms can quickly identify keywords and phrases in large amounts of data, helping to produce more relevant results for users. Furthermore, AI can help optimize website results for specific keywords and personalize the search based on a user's previous searches. As a result, searches have become faster and easier than ever before, allowing us to find the answers we need with just a few clicks.



Make it less formal

AH

AI technology is transforming the way we search online. Instead of spending time scrolling through tons of irrelevant results, AI helps you find relevant answers faster and easier. It can pinpoint keywords and phrases in data, tweak website rankings to match your specific needs, and even tailor results based on your previous searches. In just a few clicks, you'll be able to find exactly what you're looking for!



Explain the rise of ChatGPT

AH

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Make it UK english

AH

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The battle between Google and Bing

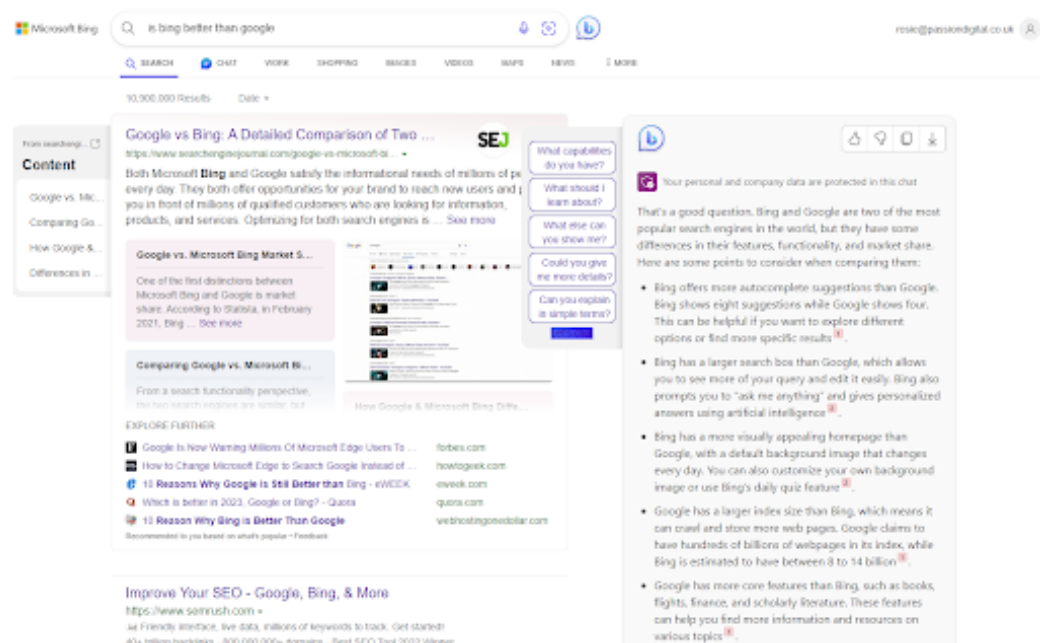
AI chatbot technology has been around for years in various applications – usually gated by paywalls – but we’re at an important break-through moment now as both Google and Bing are incorporating it into their free search offering.

The new Bing

Many commentators are wondering whether Microsoft’s acquisition of OpenAI, the company that developed ChatGPT, is their most significant challenge to Google’s dominance in the search arena to date. [Satya Nadella](#), Chairman and CEO of Microsoft, said the following at a press conference on 7th February 2023:

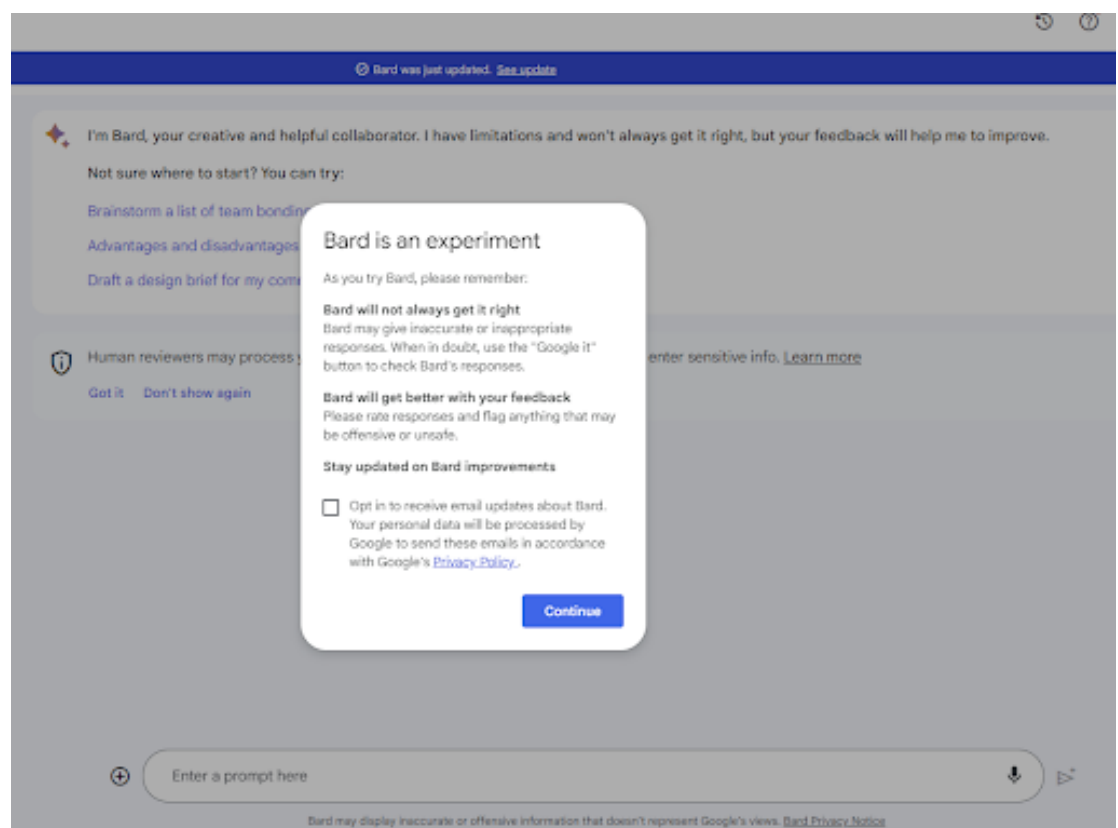
“AI will fundamentally change every software category, starting with the largest category of all – search.”

As of [March 2023](#), Bing rolled out access to its new “AI-powered co-pilot for the web”. When you type in a search query, Bing will generate a traditional SERP with featured snippets, as well as offering an AI-generated response that you can use as a starting point for a chatbot conversation.



Google Bard

Not to be outdone, Google announced the launch of its own AI chatbot, Bard, the day before Microsoft. However, Google stock prices were hit when an incorrect response from Bard caused consumer trust in the technology to wobble. Bard is now available in more than 230 countries in over 40 languages at <https://bard.google.com/>. Unlike Microsoft, Google hasn't yet integrated its chatbot search function into the regular Google search engine. It makes it very clear from the outset that Bard is an experiment that may not provide accurate results.



Interesting fact: when we first wrote this whitepaper in February 2023, we asked Jasper “what is Google doing to compete with AI chatbots?”, it told us about Google Duplex, which is its voice-based AI offering. It was announced that Duplex is being retired from the web [in December 2022](#). So Jasper missed both the Google Bard announcement and the retirement of Duplex and as such gave an answer that was completely out of date in a fast-moving industry.

This exposes one of the main hurdles of the current crop of AI tools: keeping its index up to date. Bing Chat had this to say on the subject when asked “How up to date is the Bing chat database?”:

“The Bing chat database is updated periodically based on the latest data and models available. According to the Microsoft CEO of Bing Search, Mikhail Parakhin, Bing Chat’s models take several months to train, so users can expect the models to be updated maybe three times a year or so. The models are updated outside of some small RLHF tuning runs. The last update for Bing Chat was on June 2, 2023, when the number of chat turns and the image creator feature were improved.”

Google Bard said the following:

“The Bard database is continuously updated with new information from the web. This means that the information I have access to is generally up to date, but there may be some lag time for some topics. For example, if you ask me about a recent news event, I may not have the most up-to-date information if it happened within the last few hours.”

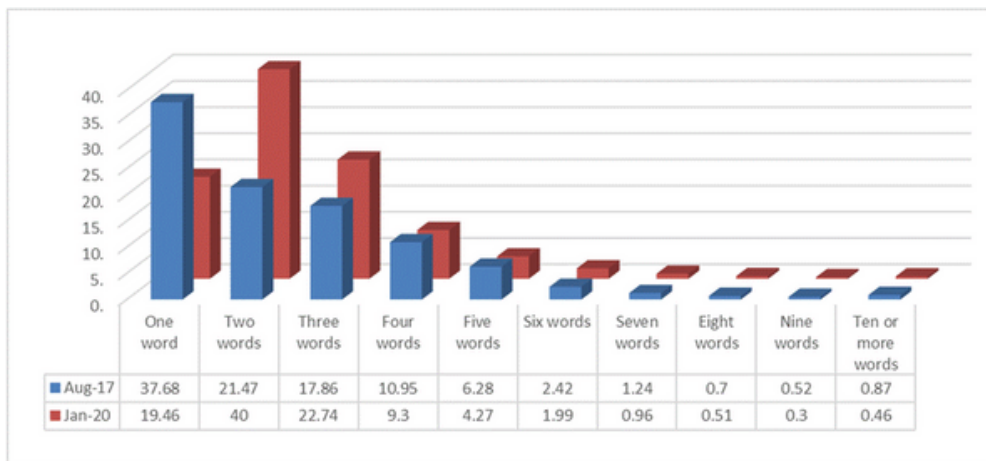
Search Generative Experience (SGE)

In May 2023, [Google launched \(SGE\)](#) currently being tested in the USA, India and Japan, with a potential global rollout planned in 2024. This initiative marks a significant shift in search, with AI-powered results increasingly playing a central role. Google has been on a path of automating search since 2011. Its previous developments, such as RankBrain, BERT AI and MUM, have all contributed to the Search Engine Results Page (SERP) delivering the most relevant outcomes for user queries. Google’s mission to provide the most pertinent results for users continues and with the aid of AI, it has been able to uphold this commitment. SGE represents the next step in this ongoing mission.

What is SGE?

SGE places AI at the forefront of Google searches, offering contextual answers to users' complex questions. Rather than using single words or short keyphrases, users can now input queries in a more conversational style, similar to interactions with ChatGPT. In response, Google provides an AI-generated answer at the top of the SERP.

A notable trend is the increasing use of conversational and lengthier phrases in searches. Over time, users have been expanding the number of words in their queries, as illustrated in the chart below.



Data source: Statista

What does SGE look like?

In the new SGE, users are presented with an AI-generated response in what Google calls the 'Snapshot' section, prominently located at the top of the SERP. Snapshot is a key feature of SGE. Source links will be available within SGE, either to the right of the SERP or as dropdown arrows within Snapshot, determined by Google's ranking algorithm.

SGE also offers a conversational mode, allowing users to interact with the search engine in a manner similar to ChatGPT. Additionally, SGE includes 'Vertical Experiences', a feature that presents users with various options or features related to their search topic upon clicking a designated button.

Another notable feature is 'Perspectives', designed for queries that benefit from multiple viewpoints. SGE will incorporate these diverse perspectives into the SERP.

SGE deliberately excludes topics categorised as 'Your Money or Your Life', such as financial advice or medical information, due to the potential risks associated with AI-generated responses in these sensitive areas.

Beneath these innovative elements, traditional organic search results will continue to be displayed.



Snapshot

unique generational AI results summary



Conversational Mode

answers follow-up questions



Vertical Experiences

lists features/details in product searches



Perspectives

viewpoints to help answer some queries

The screenshot shows a Google search result for the query "how long does it take to learn to drive". The interface includes a search bar, filters (Converse, On the highway, Reddit, An automatic car, A manual car, Motorcycle, Images, Truck, Plane), and a "Tools" button. The main content area displays a "Generative AI is experimental. Info quality may vary." warning, followed by a summary of driving lessons. To the right, there are three "Vertical Experiences" cards: "Can You Learn How to Drive in 2 Weeks?", "How long does it usually take someone to...", and "How Long Does It Take To Learn To Drive?". At the bottom, there is a "Conversational mode" section with a "Ask a follow up" button and several follow-up questions.

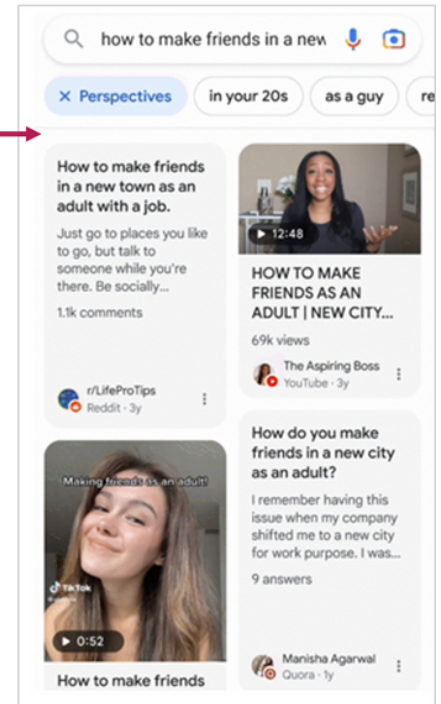
Snapshot →

Conversational mode →

Vertical experiences →

SGE perspectives

- Viewpoints to help answer some queries
- Long and short-form videos, images and posts from discussion boards, Q&A sites and social media platforms
- Helps users explore diverse perspectives and gain a wider understanding of a topic
- Impacts some categories more than others (e.g. travel, hospitality)
- Likely to include YouTube and YouTube Shorts videos



How SGE will change search

SGE will transform search. One anticipated change is a likely decline in organic traffic, as traditional organic results will appear lower down on the SERP. However, this doesn't diminish the importance of an organic strategy. In fact, it's more crucial than ever, since Snapshot – a prominent feature in SGE – will prioritise content based on rank positioning. This approach is rooted in years of establishing trust, authority and credibility, ensuring that highly ranked sources in Google remain relevant in SGE searches.

The nature of searching will evolve towards a more conversational and long-tail approach. SEO professionals must be ready to adapt their strategies to rank for these longer-tail keywords, as this shift is expected to gradually become the norm.

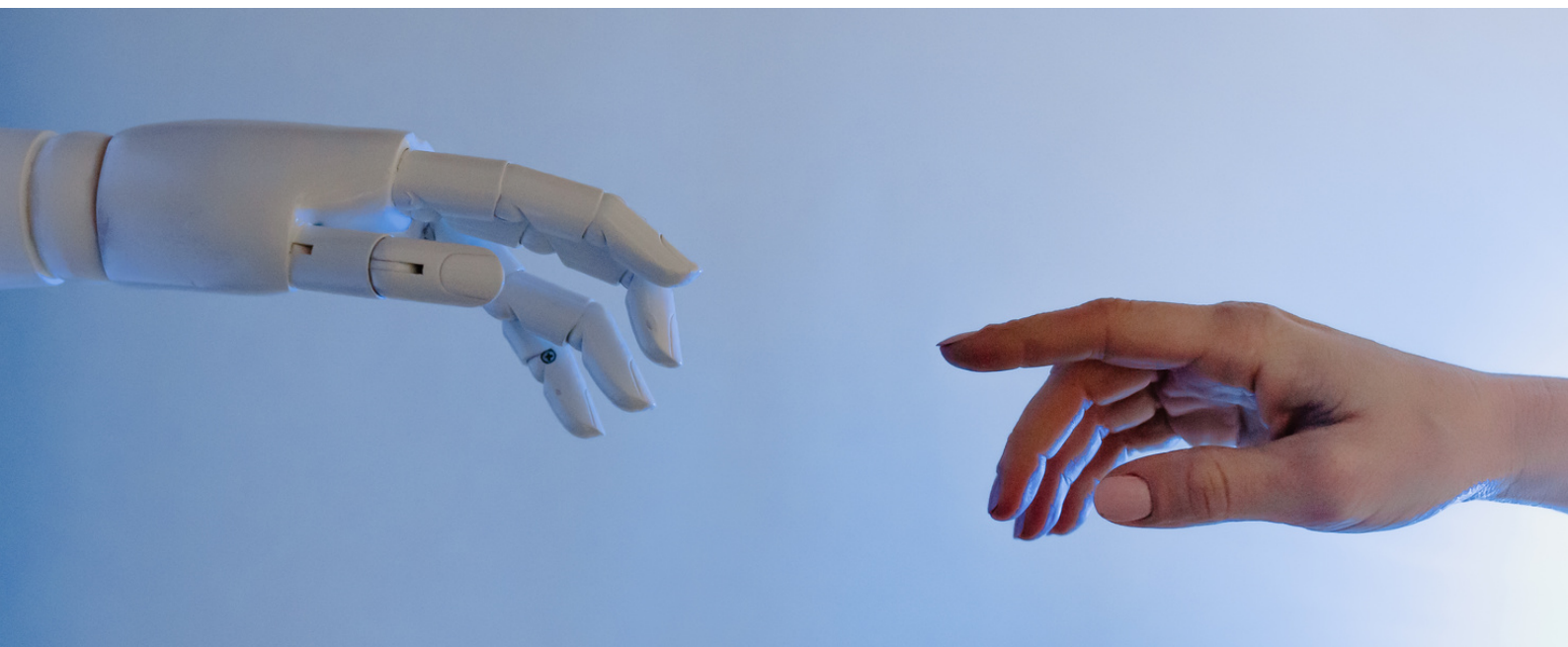
Moreover, there's likely to be greater diversity in the types of queries driving traffic to web pages. Users will be better informed before they even click through to a site, thanks to the comprehensive insights provided by Snapshot. This informed user base means that website visitors are more likely to engage meaningfully and convert once they land on a site.

How do these developments affect marketers?

An entire whitepaper could be written on AI alone – its use cases, weaknesses, developmental issues and the ethical quandaries they present. The focus here is on how they may affect search and the people who harness search engine marketing for a living.

I think it's very clear that the impact of AI developments on search platforms like Google will drastically change what search marketing looks like. However, the fundamentals of search marketing: producing valuable, people-centric content remains vital and actually even more so with Google putting more focus on this.

Consumers are discovering brands without using websites, but the AI still has to find that information somewhere and this comes from the content we as marketers put out onto our websites and other digital platforms. Therefore, marketers are not redundant, the element that's changing is how and where our content is served.





Search strategies for 2024 and beyond

Search strategies for 2024 and beyond

The diversification of the search landscape can feel intimidating. We're at a pivot point of changing user habits and emerging tech that will revolutionise how we search.

This section will highlight some strategies that marketers can adopt to take advantage of the changes in social and visual search.

Unsiloeing search and social

The preference for social search – with a spotlight on TikTok, but not forgetting YouTube and Pinterest – may seem like a massive shift in user behaviour, but from a marketing perspective I would argue that we can adapt pretty easily.

"The search landscape may have shifted into social, but the psychology of how we seek information online hasn't changed."

To understand this we need to wind back to the fundamentals of search marketing. At the dawn of the search engine, marketers had a revelation: they didn't have to identify the right message, find the right audience and engage them while in a buying mindset like they did offline. Instead, the buyer would show up when they wanted something, type in exactly what they needed and all marketers had to do was be found by them. The key to knowing what their audience wanted and making sure that their brand was visible to them was keyword research.

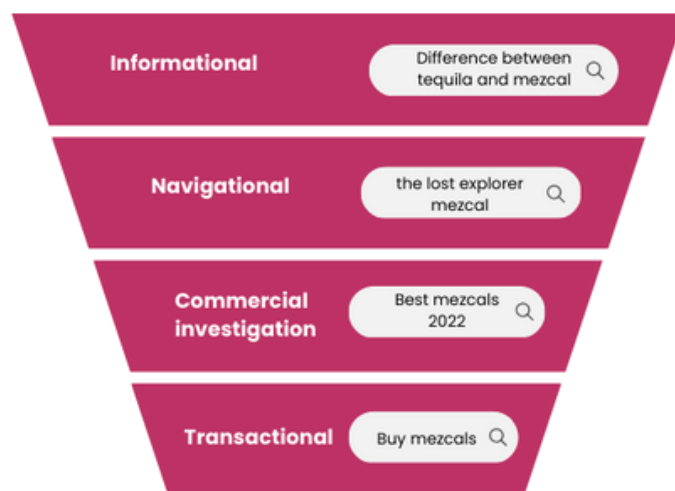


Understanding user intent

Understanding user intent

A huge part of SEO has always been understanding what people are searching for. It is common to use a search intent model like this one as a way of categorising keyword data:

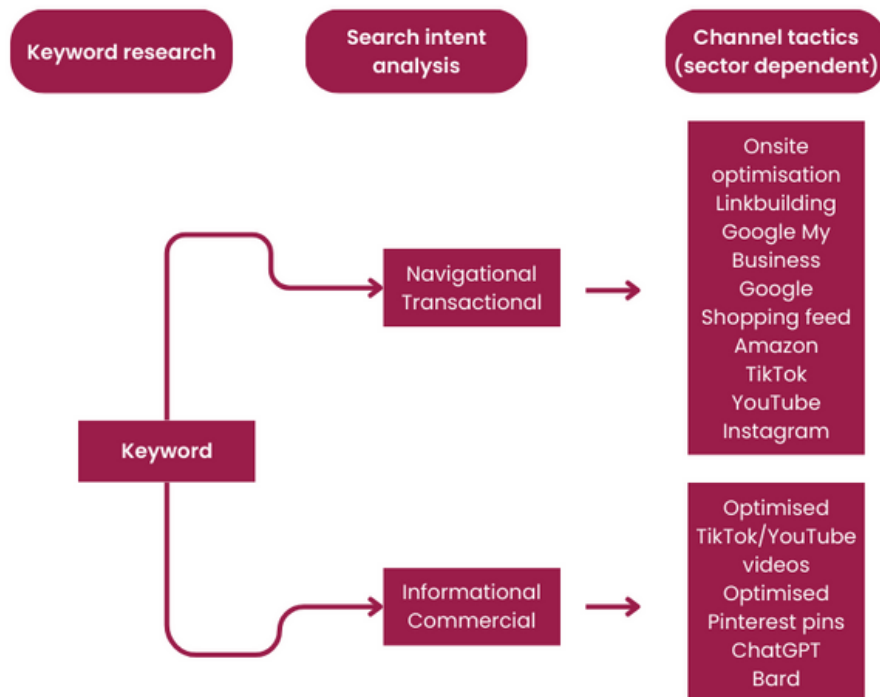
- **Informational** search queries at the top of the funnel show an intent to find out information on a topic; they tend to be more long-tail and often include questions
- **Navigational** search queries show an intent to visit a specific website
- **Commercial investigation** search queries sit further down the funnel at a point when a searcher does seem to be interested in buying something but they're not sure what to choose yet; often modifiers like 'best', 'top' or 'reviews' are used
- **Transactional** key phrases at the bottom of the funnel show an intent to buy



Search marketers are used to serving these intents with different tactics per channel. Traditionally, informational key phrases are served by text-based blog posts. SEO and PPC can be used to target specific key phrases further down the funnel.

And this is still true – but now we have more platforms than ever that can be used to serve those different intents aside from Google.

Serving user intent on more platforms



The process to do social search optimisation is very similar to SEO: carry out keyword research, categorise the data based on search intent, but then consider where your audience is mostly likely to be entering those queries online.

In all likelihood, your website will still be important for navigational and transactional phrases. Traditional SEO techniques such as onsite optimisation, link building and the optimisation of your Google My Business profile and Google Shopping feed are all extremely important for ensuring visibility online. You also need to consider discovery platforms like YouTube, TikTok and Instagram and create specific content for these channels. If you are an e-commerce brand, Amazon is an extremely important player when it comes to taking advantage of transactional searches happening outside of the Google ecosystem.

For your informational and commercial investigation phrases, you must think about providing content in a more visual format on social platforms but also optimise your content for AI search optimisation with ChatGPT, Bard and SGE becoming more and more intrinsic in the informational and commercial search landscape.

TikTok, YouTube or Pinterest?



Demographic

Age 16–34
Male and female
Global

All ages
Male and female
Global

All ages
Female (+75%)
USA, Europe,
S. America

Top categories

Fitness and sports
Home reno and DIY
Beauty and skincare
Fashion
Recipes and cooking
Life hacks and advice

Makeup
Fitness
Tech
Reviews
Gaming
Educational

Travel
Health and wellness
Home reno and DIY
Style and beauty
Food and drink

Format

Short form videos,
shot and edited from
a phone

Long or short
form videos,
edited out of app

Image or video Pins
linking to a
web page



How to optimise for social search

While it might seem intimidating to optimise all of your content across multiple platforms, it's a simple task in reality. The social algorithms for search are much less sophisticated than Google's. Keyword stuffing is not a huge danger and link building is not necessary. You can increase your visibility by using some basic optimisation techniques.

“In essence, social optimisation for search is about helping the crawler to make sense of your content and understand if it's related to a specific search topic.”

Two golden rules for social search optimisation:

1. Wherever a crawler (or reader) may come across text in your post, you can add a key phrase

Add your key phrase to the video or pin title and description, in any on-image text (the crawler can recognise text over graphics) and in hashtags.

2. Structure your content thematically on your profile

This is important for YouTube and Pinterest, which allow you to group content together in playlists (YouTube) and boards (Pinterest). Make sure that their titles use a relevant key phrase and select any relevant categories to give the crawler as much context for your content as possible.

TikTok optimisation guide

Optimise your videos for search:

1.

Do keyword research and choose a topic that you could answer.

Eg. Secret Santa gift ideas, Secret Santa under £10



2.

Add your keyword as in-video text.

E.g. Secret Santa gift ideas for under £10

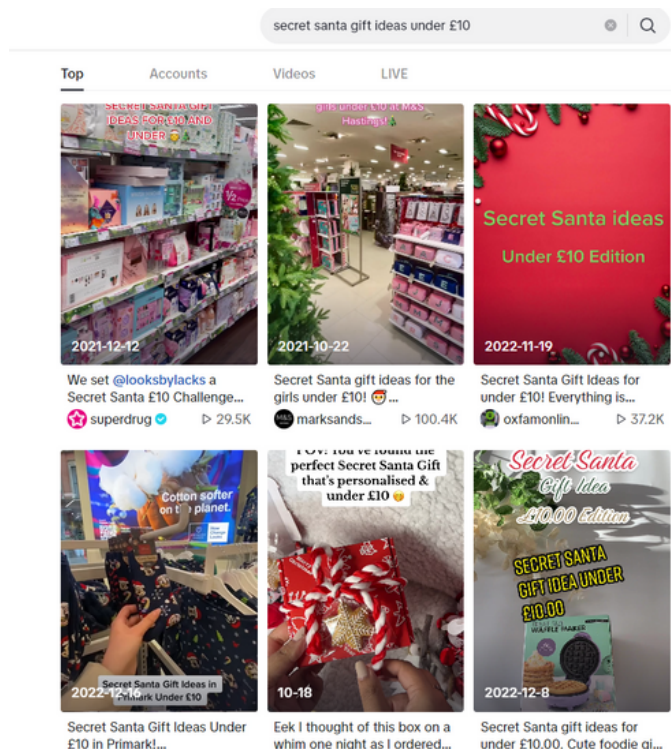


3.

Include relevant keywords in the caption and hashtags, like:

Secret Santa gift ideas for under £10. Find the best Christmas present for your budget this year.

#secretsanta #christmaspresent #giftideas



TikTok optimisation guide

Optimise your videos for the platform:

Search is only one way that users might encounter your videos. It's important that you remember TikTok best practice when it comes to video creation and posting.

- **Keep them short** – video completion has a high weight in the algorithm, so keep them short and make the first 2-3 seconds count
- **Use trending sounds** – when users interact with a video that uses an audio track, the algorithm recommends others that feature the same track, so using trending sounds can improve visibility
- **Post timing** – post regularly (several times each week) and use analytics to identify when your audience is most active



YouTube optimisation guide

Optimise your videos for search:

1.

Do keyword research and choose a topic that you could answer.

Eg. Sustainable cities, Sustainable cities and communities, Why are sustainable cities important



2.

Add your most important keyword in the video file name and video title (<70 characters).

E.g. Why-are-sustainable-cities-important, Why are sustainable cities important? | With Professor Expert



3.

Include your keyword(s) in the video description (<1,000 characters, truncated after 100).

E.g. As populations rise and resources are strained, it's more important than ever that we focus on sustainable cities and communities... [etc.]



4.

Select relevant video tags that relate to the video itself and its wider relevance.

E.g. Sustainable cities, sustainability, urban planning



5.

Select a video category from YouTube's list – this can help it to become 'recommended for you' content.

E.g. Education, science and technology

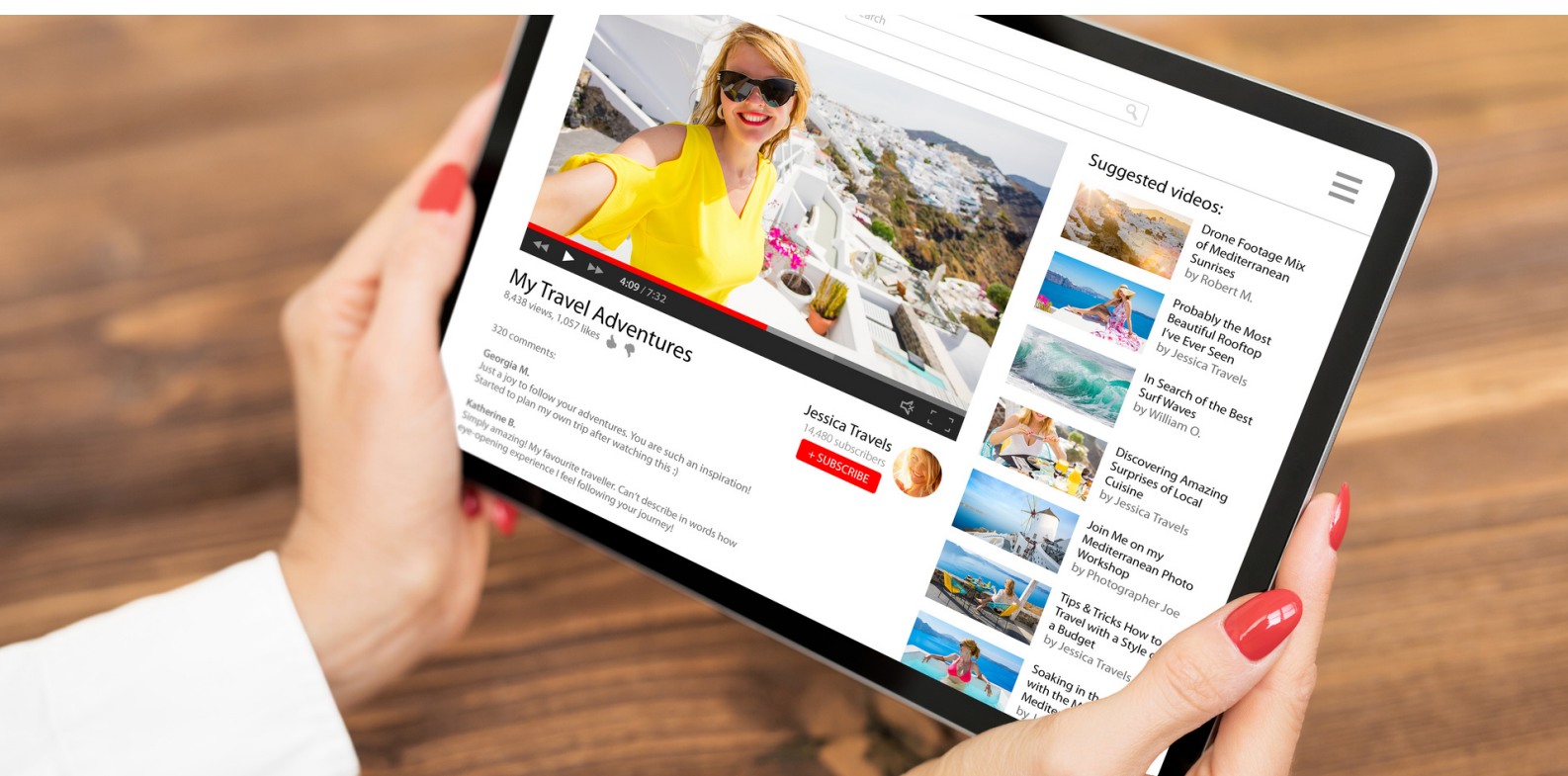


YouTube optimisation guide

Optimise your videos for the platform:

It's important that you consider the user as well as the algorithm. Here are some recommendations for improving click-through rates to your videos from YouTube search results.

- **Custom thumbnails** – create a custom thumbnail for each video that will entice the searcher to pick your video from the search results; include a small amount of text in a large font that communicates what the video is about
- **Video title** – as well as the SEO recommendations above, keep it snappy and engaging
- **End screens** – these appear at the end of the video and allow you to add links to various places on YouTube; take advantage of YouTube's templates that allow you to link to another video, a playlist and a subscribe button



Pinterest optimisation guide

Optimise your pins for search:

1.

Do keyword research and choose a topic that you could answer
Eg. *Small kitchen ideas Kitchen design small*



2.

Include 1-2 keywords in your pin name and pin description
E.g. *Small kitchen ideas | [Brand Name] When it comes to kitchen design, small spaces offer lots of opportunities for clever storage solutions. Take a look at our blog post for some innovative small kitchen ideas. #smallkitchenideas #smallkitchen #kitchendesign*



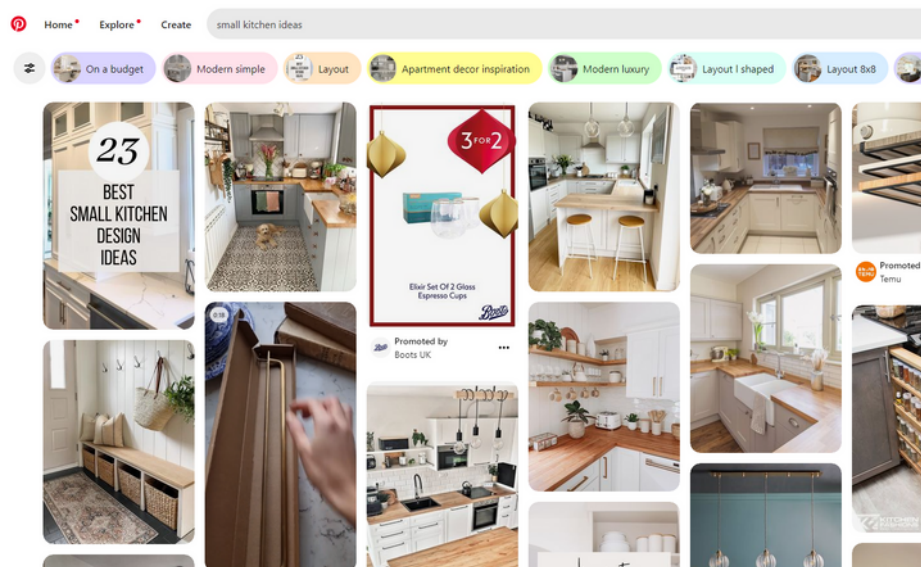
3.

Include your main keyword in a text overlay on the pin image itself
E.g. *Small kitchen ideas*



4.

Save pins to relevant boards that share keywords on the same topic
E.g. *Kitchen design*

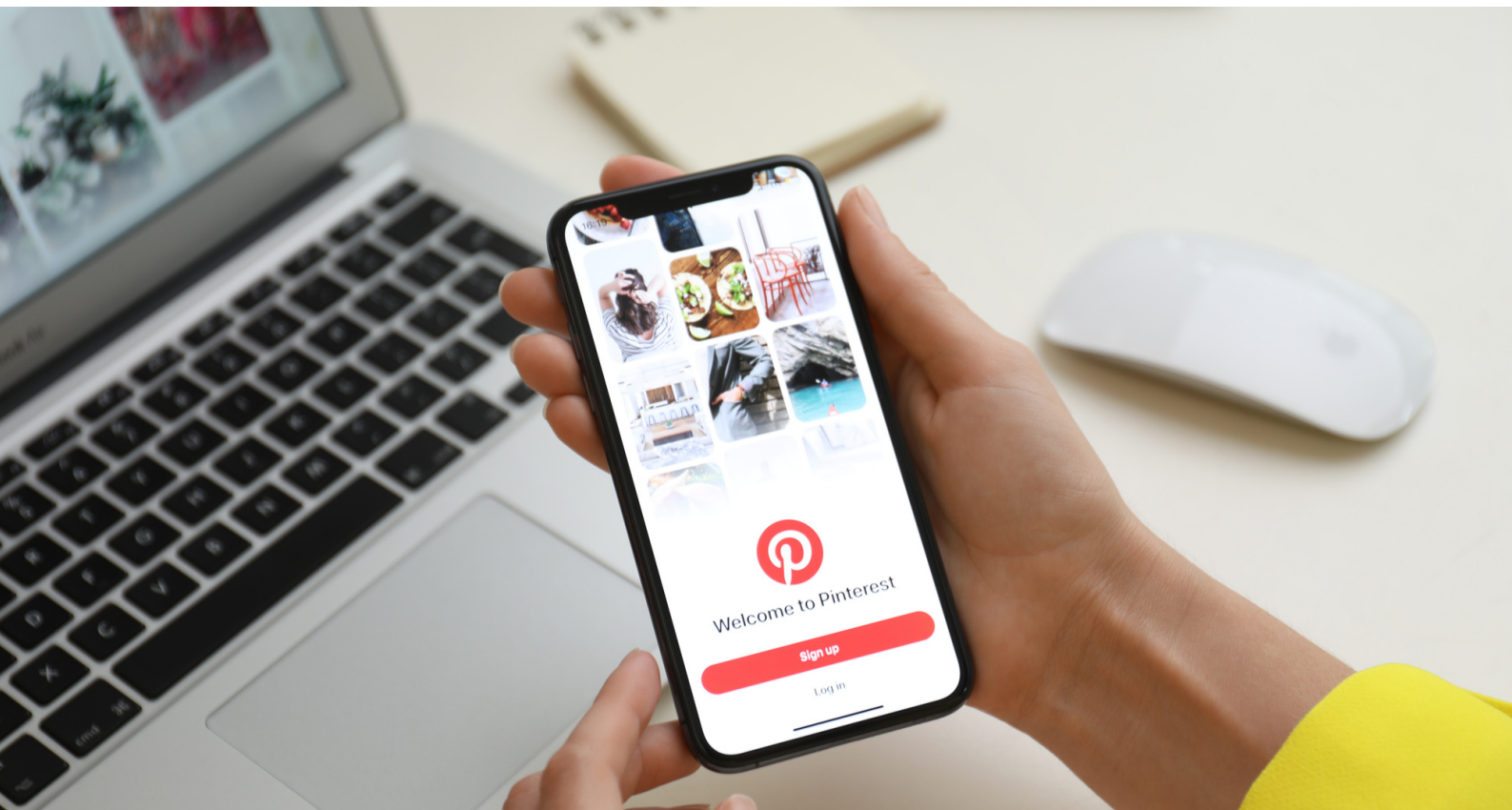


Pinterest optimisation guide

Optimise for the platform:

While TikTok and YouTube are geared towards keeping their users on the platform by serving native content, Pinterest is more of a traffic generation tool. Every pin has to link to a URL, so it offers a great opportunity to get new users to your site.

- Make sure that **each pin links to your site**, not to your Instagram page or other online sources, to take advantage of referral traffic
- **Link to the most relevant page** on your website (eg. a blog post) rather than your homepage to ensure a seamless user journey from Pinterest





How to optimise for visual search

How to optimise for **visual search**

Earlier in this section it was stated that the way we seek information online hasn't fundamentally changed – and that is correct, in the context of social searching. The same is true of voice search, which still relies on a user inputting (ie. speaking) keywords into a search engine to return relevant results. These keywords can be analysed to understand the searcher's intent.

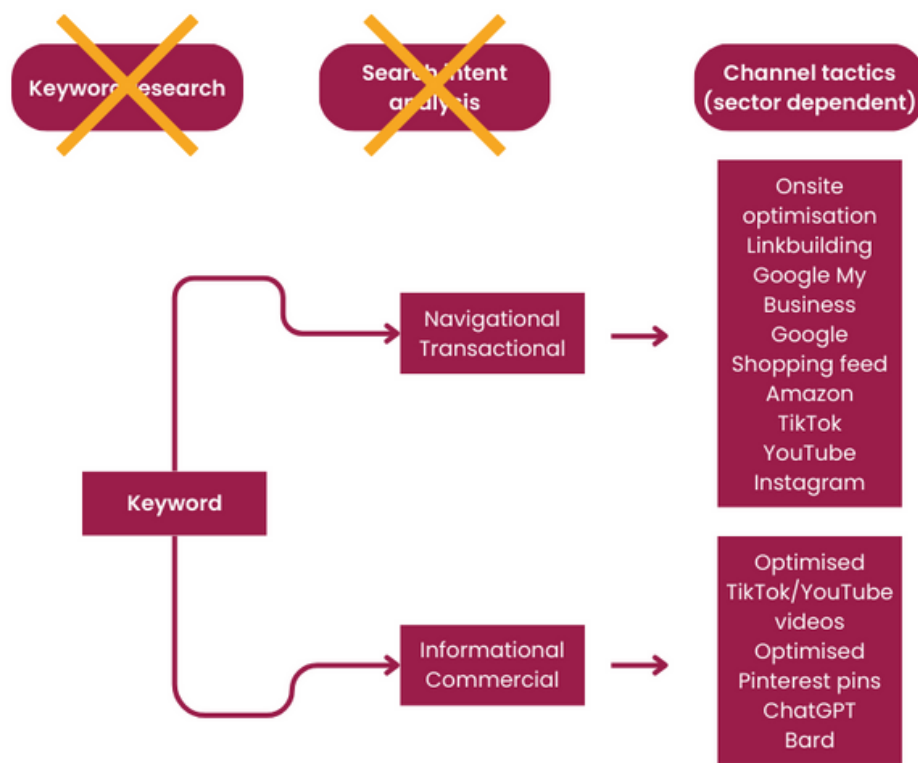
Visual search

When it comes to visual search, the intent-based model that SEOs are familiar with is being disrupted. Rather than providing a key phrase with modifiers that help to return the right kind of result, searchers input an image they have taken with their camera.

Why is this important?

1. As every image is user generated and reflects what the searcher sees in front of them at that time, every search query could potentially be unique – making search volume hard to accurately quantify
2. An image on its own doesn't indicate any search intent – on Google Lens, users select what they intended to find out using their image by scrolling through the ribbon at the bottom of the screen

To our knowledge, Google does not give SEOs any information about what identifiers are most used in images for visual search or what intent the searcher went on to select. This essentially means that keyword research is impossible for visual search.



How can SEOs optimise for visual search queries?

Visual search is never going to completely replace text search, because it has its limitations. While it might be quicker to snap a photo of a plant you pass in the park and do a Google Lens search to find out what species it is, how would you perform a visual search for something like “what is hyperconverged infrastructure” or “best places to travel in April”? Keyword research – based on text searches – is still going to be a vital source of information when it comes to understanding what users want and creating content to serve it.

The big change is how those users access your website from the search engine. Anyone who has used visual search will have noticed that the SERPs tend to be more visual. Although the ‘Search’ tab can pull through traditional text results like a mobile search, often queries will generate image-led results. The ‘Shopping’ and ‘Places’ tabs are entirely visual. This drives home the need for a proper image optimisation strategy for your website.

“If you want your website to be found in visual search, image optimisation is vital.”

Image optimisation guide

1. Balance image quality and file size

Tech SEOs will always recommend reducing the size and weight of web images in accordance with Google's [guidelines on site speed](#). While it's still essential to keep images as light as possible, images shouldn't be low-resolution or blurry. This might make it more difficult for Google to identify it as a match for a visual search query – plus, it's likely to get a bad CTR if it isn't clear to users what is being shown in the image.

2. Optimise image file names, alt tags and captions

The AI that is used to interpret images does so by generating descriptors for what it finds (eg. green, shoe, lace-up, Nike, etc.). These descriptors are then compared with all of the results in its index. The more context you give to the images on your site, the easier you make it for the crawler to find and retrieve a visual result to pull into the SERPs.

For example:



File name: pink-axolotl-on-rock.jpg

Alt text: A pink axolotl perches on a rock in an aquarium

Caption: We think that axolotls rock!

Note that, regardless of image optimisation, alt text for images is also an important accessibility measure. People who use screen readers rely on it to understand what an image is about.

3. Use proper structured data markup and add an image sitemap

Again, this is about making it as easy as possible for a search engine crawler to navigate your site and retrieve the information it needs to rank your images. You can find out more about schema markup options [here](#) and image sitemaps [here](#). PAGE 52



How to optimise for visual search

How to optimise for AI search

There are still many unknown factors and moving parts when it comes to AI and chatbots, but there is one actionable insight that search marketers can take away at this point in time:

“AI and chatbots can only analyse what they find in their index. And their index is the internet.”

Without web content, AI and chatbots are useless. They only work if brands, institutions, publishers and individuals are continuously adding new, fresh, accurate information to websites. The relationship has to be symbiotic.

It can be easy to use new AI tools to make content production quicker and cheaper, but brands should think carefully before relying wholly on AI-generated content for their websites. Instead, think about how to provide your audience with a fresh take, a tailored response or a new insight. Rather than churning out four generic AI-made blog posts a month, concentrate on one human-made piece that offers something new to the user – and the internet.

As SGE undergoes testing in various markets, search marketers in the UK should begin to consider adapting their content strategies. This adaptation is essential to increase their likelihood of featuring prominently in the new SERP layout offered by SGE.

- ✓ Increase long/short form content, focus on search intent and questions
- ✓ Trustworthy, authoritative, educational, focused, expert opinions and advice
- ✓ Snackable components in larger content pieces
- ✓ Multimedia – posts, articles, podcasts, images, audio, video

Key Takeaways

The search landscape is much broader than just text-based search in search engines, driven by:

- **Changes in user behaviour** - users are searching for information, inspiration and social proof in more platforms than ever
- **Developments in tech** - there have been gigantic leaps forward in AI and how it can improve voice, visual and chatbot search



Users want a simpler, easier and more visual search journey than they find in traditional text search

- The popularity of TikTok as a search engine stems from the ease with which searchers can find and consume the information they're looking for, provided by creators they can "trust"
- Voice and visual search both cater to those who don't find it convenient to type out search queries, or find it hard to express what they want to search for with words

Key Takeaways

Younger demographics have been the first to branch out from traditional search, but it's likely that older generations will follow

- Brands need to be aware of these developments and how best to serve their audience's search intent on whatever platform they choose to find information



Now is the time for brands to engage with these behavioural shifts and technological developments – can you truly say that you're ready for **the future of search?**



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