The AI Series

Adapting your media & search strategy to the rise of AI

ACXIOM

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AI is fundamentally reshaping how consumers discover brands. Today's customer no longer wanders the clamor of a digital bazaar; they go straight to a private AI concierge that understands their preferences and anticipates their needs. Your brand is only mentioned if you're mastering the art of AI optimization, not yesterday's SEO. This means curating model-ready facts, licensing premium assets, and tracking metrics like share of voice, citation lift, and AI-driven conversions. To remain visible, brands must embrace experimentation to earn their place at the top of the AI-generated list.

Why AI is rewriting traditional digital playbooks

The rise of AI intermediaries exposes the limits of traditional search and media strategies. Tactics that once worked to reach human audiences through search engines or social media feeds must now evolve for AI experiences. Here's why the old playbook is no longer sufficient:

- Declining Organic Reach: AI summaries now dominate screen space. Early field tests predict an 18-64% drop in organic clicks as users accept AI-generated answers without scrolling.

- Algorithmic Verdicts Replace Traditional Results: Google's "AI Mode" offers instant, conversational recommendations, reducing a brand's chance to appear in even a single synthesized response.

- Audience Migration to AI-Native Platforms: More users are turning to ChatGPT and voice assistants powered by proprietary knowledge graphs. Brands ignoring these channels risk forfeiting the conversation.

- Disrupted Paid Models: Google Ads now coexist with AI overviews, with early data showing lower click-through rates when AI blocks are present.

- Shifting Content Dynamics: Content marketing remains important, but increasingly as AI training material. Models often quote articles users never read. Bain reports that 80% of consumers rely on zero-click answers for at least 40% of their queries, elevating the priority of "train the model" alongside "persuade the reader."

To remain competitive, brands must focus on being part of the answers AI platforms deliver, rather than just trying to outrank competitors on Google.

A new search paradigm

Generative AI is rapidly relocating the "starting line" of discovery. As Google, Microsoft, and others respond with AI Overviews that appear above traditional results, visible link and ad space are shrinking. Gartner projects that this redesign could reduce all search engine traffic by 25% as early as 2026. Additionally, Pew Research Center shows click losses of 26% on summary pages with summary panels.

This shift is impacting the entire ecosystem. Publishers, facing revenue shortfalls, place high-value articles behind paywalls or license entire archives to model makers such as OpenAI and Microsoft. Meanwhile, regulators are loosening Google's decades-old grip on default-search contracts. A recent U.S. antitrust judgment declared the company's advertising monopoly unlawful, opening room for challengers just as the search market begins to fragment.

OpenAI's ad-free product search, unveiled in April 2025 within ChatGPT, further accelerates this shift. It displays prices, images, and reviews for shopping queries in an independent, non-sponsored format. In the week leading up to its announcement, ChatGPT users executed over one billion searches, demonstrating the scale of conversational search.

While Google continues to grow, rising from approximately 8.5 billion daily searches in 2022 to an estimated 13.7 billion in 2025, AI-native engines already process roughly one billion prompts per day. If that share continues to double every three years, half of all fact-finding interactions could begin with chat by 2030. Bain describes this as the rise of "zero-click" answers, which 80% of consumers rely on for at least 40% of their queries.

Action steps for marketers:

- Diversify search strategies to reach audiences across all platforms

- Ensure machine-readable data is available wherever AI models source information

- Adapt measurement frameworks to quantify the impact of AI Search visibility

- Embracing New Engagement Channels in the AI Ecosystem

AI search isn't just a shift in technology; it's a shift in how influence happens. Generative search has tilted the center of gravity from direct audience engagement to indirect influence over the algorithms brokering those contacts.

Google and Bing now weave sponsored product cards directly into conversation responses, replacing traditional ad placements around the results page, a shift Google previewed at Marketing Live 2024. The move is partly defensive, as zero-click interactions now account for more than half of all queries, reducing visibility for both ads and organic links.

While inventory shrinks, campaign automation is expanding. Partner advertising solutions such as Performance Max, Demand Gen, and AI Max aim to automate previously manual aspects of campaign activation, including audience targeting, creative generation, and bid optimization. On the organic side, Google applies its "people-first" content standards equally to AI and human-generated content, using systems like SpamBrain and watermark detection to demote low-value pages.

Publishers, meanwhile, are responding by licensing content directly to large language models (Axel Springer's agreement with OpenAI being the headline example) or litigating over unlicensed use. These deals promise new revenue but also risk narrowing the open web, especially if premium content disappears behind paywalls or private APIs.

Adobe's 2025 Digital Trends report underscores the operational strain: 56% of marketing teams say generative AI increases workload as it accelerates content production. This has led to deeper platform partnerships where automation offsets complexity. Marketers must now update classic SEO and paid strategies tuned for an answer-first world.

We counsel brands to adjust their playbooks accordingly:

- Design ads for conversational surfaces, not sidebars, by testing capabilities like Performance Max, Advantage+, and similar solutions that embed sponsored content directly into AI-generated dialogues where inventory resides.

- Feed high-quality signals the algorithms crave by combining structured data, watermarked original assets, and "people-first" copy to ensure eligibility for zero-click citations that pass filters like SpamBrain.

- Negotiate data licensing and API partnerships early to convert potential traffic losses into managed distribution deals, before competitors lock in exclusivity with model providers.

- Develop content and metadata schemas that are model-ready. Visibility now depends on content being easily parsed into knowledge bases, not just indexed by traditional web crawlers.

- Leverage first-party data and data clean rooms to preserve audience targeting precision and unlock richer insights as third-party signals diminish.

- Actively craft and test prompt strategies to influence how AI tools summarize and surface your content. Forward-thinking brands reverse-engineer common user queries to inject well-structured, relevant data optimized for retrieval.

- Proactively manage your brand's identity and factual footprint within foundational models such as OpenAI and Google Gemini. If you don't provide accurate, up-to-date information, the models may misrepresent your brand.

Our perspective is that updating the playbook is not about abandoning search, content, or ads; it is about adapting them to algorithmic decision-making.

New metrics for AI generative engine optimization

The new marketing reality demands new metrics. Generative AI is transforming not only how people discover brands but also how marketers must

measure success. Conversational agents can answer a query without ever sending the user to a web page, rendering traditional metrics like sessions, CTR, and pages per visit less informative. Leading firms are therefore implementing AI-first KPIs for Generative Engine Optimization, including:

- Share of AI Recommendations: Audit a fixed set of high-value prompts each month and record how often the assistant surfaces your brand versus rivals. "AI share of voice" is a leading indicator of market presence.

- AI Referral Traffic & Conversions: Isolate visits from ChatGPT, Bing Chat, and other assistants (391 SMB sites already register meaningful volumes) and tie them to downstream orders to prove ROI.

- AI Engagement Signals: Track saves, follow-up questions, and repeat chatbot sessions. Bain's research shows follow-ups are a strong proxy for recommendation quality, while lab studies on ChatGPT confirm higher satisfaction and intent when the advice matches the user's need state.

- Discoverability / Citation Score: Tally how often an AI Overview or similar feature quotes your domain.

- Post-AI Branded Search Lift: Monitor spikes in brand queries that follow chatbot exposure. Reforge recommends correlating these lifts with prompt audits to connect conversational reach to wider awareness.

- Customer Lifetime Value via AI Channels: Segment LTV for cohorts acquired or re-engaged through voice and chat integrations. Amazon case studies show that recommendation-driven buyers purchase more often and stay longer.

- Content Citation Performance: Measure whether AI pulls from your white papers, lists, or comparison tables.

- Sentiment & Accuracy Score: Use monitoring suites like BuildBetter to grade every AI mention for tone and factual correctness, flagging misstatements before they ripple outward.

Leaders are incorporating these indicators into dashboards alongside traditional KPIs. As capabilities evolve, demanding AI-focused metrics today will ensure a complete view of performance tomorrow.

Building a holistic measurement stack

Google Cloud advises pairing business metrics (e.g., revenue, retention) with model-level metrics (e.g., precision, recall, F-score) to understand both performance and accuracy.

Microsoft advocates for evaluators who assess factuality and tone, feeding results into continuous learning loops. LinkedIn suggests adding cost-per-AI-interaction and micro-conversion rates to complete the picture.

Organic traffic and paid-search conversions still matter, but they now sit alongside a broader set of AI-informed indicators. As The Guardian notes, the goal is not to replace SEO, but to complement it with generative engine optimization.

Expanding your scorecard now ensures your brand remains competitive tomorrow.

How we help brands adapt to the rise of AI in search

Our paid and organic services, along with Interact, our AI-powered marketing platform, are designed to meet the demands of AI-driven search. Rooted in Acxiom's connected identity and data foundation, Interact enables brands to deliver and reach audiences at scale across every touchpoint. By leveraging Interact, brands can optimize paid and organic search with deep audience insights, optimized content, and discoverability.

AI-driven marketing: audience insights and optimized experiences

AI is rapidly transforming how brands interact with their audiences, impacting everything from search behavior to content consumption. To succeed in this evolving landscape, brands need to deeply understand their audience's AI usage and create optimized experiences that resonate with both human users and AI systems.

Understanding your audience in the age of AI

Acxiom's connected identity and data foundation provides an AI-ready, privacy-compliant environment for brands to gain deep audience insights from diverse data sources. This enables brands to understand how and where their target audiences are searching and using AI throughout their buying journeys. Key strategies include:

- Monitoring AI Adoption and User Behavior: Younger audiences are adopting AI at a quicker pace, requiring brands targeting Gen Z to adapt more quickly. We help brands track adoption trends across their high-value audiences to ensure their approach meets them where they are.

- Analyzing AI Search Performance: By leveraging their first-party data, brands can gain visibility into how AI web crawlers and agents interact with their content and how that impacts traffic and conversions. These insights are further strengthened with Acxiom's third-party data to monitor visibility and performance across AI search engines.

- Mapping AI-Powered Search Journeys: We leverage our proprietary data and Interact's predictive modeling capabilities to identify audience search journeys and build media plans that reflect key touchpoints across conversion paths. This allows us to deliver timely solutions to both humans and AI agents, influencing discovery.

Creating optimized experiences for humans and AI

AI is rapidly transforming the owned and paid surfaces where customers engage with brands. Despite these changes, the fundamentals of good user experiences and high-quality content remain relatively constant, whether the "user" is a person or an AI system. Our approach includes:

- Ensuring Content is Discoverable: We help brands structure and code their websites with both people and AI in mind. For example, because AI web crawlers often struggle with rendering JavaScript, we guide brands in delivering critical content through HTML and server-side rendering. For

paid search, we ensure AI-enabled ad solutions can access complete and diverse asset libraries, centrally managed and deployed through Interact. We also support the optimization of product feeds (e.g., Merchant Center) and location listings (e.g., Google Business Profile, Yelp, etc.), with Interact facilitating feed ingestion and enrichment.

- Adopting a Cross-Platform Content Strategy: We create helpful, quality content that addresses audience needs and maintains consistent messaging, while adapting tone and format to each platform. With Interact's generative capabilities, marketers can produce brand-aligned content at scale, guided by voice and style guidelines.

- Adopting AI-Powered Ad Solutions: We leverage the latest partner technologies to deliver campaign goals and drive operational efficiency while collaborating with brands to test new advertising opportunities across AI search environments.

- Experimenting with Dynamic Creative: Using proprietary and third-party technology, we converge audience data, AI ad solutions, and creative asset libraries. With Interact, we generate personalized content and digital experiences that meet audiences where they search, with messages relevant to their needs, in the moment.

Aligned reporting

We help brands create search measurement frameworks that uncover the biggest drivers of their success in the AI search landscape. Interact's measurement dashboards aggregate paid and organic search performance data into a single, unified view for more comprehensive insight. This centralized reporting powers Interact's keyword optimization capabilities, which identify where organic visibility can offset paid investment. By highlighting areas where organic content is already performing well, Interact enables brands to reallocate budget to campaigns or keywords with lower organic presence, maximizing efficiency across search investments.

Looking ahead

The rise of AI presents both challenges and opportunities for marketers, and Acxiom is committed to helping brands navigate this evolving landscape. Acxiom empowers brands to leverage AI responsibly, maintaining trust and upholding ethical standards. We unlock the full potential of AI-driven marketing. Specializing in data orchestration for the AI era, we unify, connect, and ready your data, accelerating your success with innovative solutions from our expertly curated AI ecosystem.

Contact us to learn more about how we can help you adapt and thrive in the AI era. info@acxiom.com

About Acxiom

Acxiom puts data to work. We solve complex challenges for the world's leading brands and agencies by unifying, connecting, and preparing data for AI-driven marketing and decision-making, maximizing technology investments. As leaders in data ethics and governance, Acxiom brings a privacy-first approach to serving clients globally, with locations in the U.S., UK, Germany, China, Poland, and Mexico.

Connect with Acxiom on LinkedIn and discover more at Acxiom.com.

About IPG's Interact

An AI-powered, end-to-end marketing platform that enables brands to deliver hyper-personalization at scale across every touchpoint, rooted in Acxiom's connected identity and data foundation, activated wherever it is needed.

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