MarketingWeek

MARKETER'S MANUAL

THE AI SEARCH PLAYBOOK 2026

Second Edition

Be the most relevant answer: How brands and agencies can create and capture demand in the new era of Search

MarketingWeek x Google

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CUSTOMERS HAVE QUESTIONS.
ARE YOU THE ANSWER?
3

CHAPTER 1

ARE WE THE MOST RELEVANT ANSWER?
5

CHAPTER 2

ARE WE SHAPING PREFERENCES WHILE DECISIONS
ARE STILL FORMING?
7

CHAPTER 3

ARE WE MEASURING WHAT MATTERS?
12

CHAPTER 4

IS OUR BUDGET CAPPING THE AI OPPORTUNITY?
16

CHAPTER 5

ARE WE READY FOR AGENTIC AI?
20

CONCLUSION

RELEVANCE HAS NEVER MATTERED MORE
23

CONTRIBUTORS

24

INTRODUCTION

CUSTOMERS HAVE QUESTIONS. ARE YOU THE ANSWER?

In 2025, AI was reshaping Search. In 2026, Google Search ***is*** AI Search.

AI is making Search more intuitive and natural, giving people more ways to explore, shop and discover through photos, voice and longer, more complex questions. We can already see this in how people search with AI Mode: the average query is three times longer than a traditional search query.[1]

Each interaction gives AI richer context about what someone is looking for, creating more opportunities for marketers to recognise and respond to intent while decisions are still forming.

Those early moments matter even more as AI brings discovery and decision-making closer together. The advantage goes to organisations that recognise emerging intent sooner, respond faster and continually adapt as customer behaviour evolves.

This second edition of The AI Search Playbook translates these shifts into practical priorities for navigating the changing Search landscape.

Across five chapters, we explore the questions every marketing leader should be asking:

- **Are we the most relevant answer?**
- **Are we shaping preferences while decisions are still forming?**
- **Are we measuring what matters?**
- **Is our budget capping the AI opportunity?**
- **Are we ready for agentic AI?**

1 Alphabet Earnings Q4 2025

Industry perspectives: how discovery is changing

Question: Compared with last year, what's changed most about how consumers discover brands?

"People are moving from searching for information to asking for recommendations. Increasingly, the discovery, comparison and shortlisting process happens inside AI-powered experiences before a brand ever receives a click."
Annemarie Noonan, global Search transformation lead, Assembly Global, part of the Stagwell network

"Consumers are searching for solutions, not brands. Discovery used to mean ranking or bidding on product names, now it's being visible as the solution."
Richard Dunton, product partner, Dentsu

"People search like they'd ask a trusted advisor, with longer, broader queries. The brands that win discovery are those built around topics and themes rather than static keywords, showing up for high-intent searches no one has seen before."
Ellen Dunkley, head of paid performance, Havas Media Network UK

CHAPTER 1

ARE WE THE MOST RELEVANT ANSWER?

AI Search is changing how people explore their options and how relevant brands are identified and surfaced in response.

77% of Google AI Overviews and/or AI Mode users agree they're able to make decisions faster because of them, and 75% agree they're able to make more confident decisions.[2]

Because people's questions are now longer, multimodal and conversational, Google's AI can better understand the context, priorities and constraints behind a customer's query – not just the words they've typed. That richer understanding helps identify which brand is best placed to help.

Visibility increasingly depends on helping AI recognise when your brand is a relevant, credible and useful answer.

This requires a fundamental shift in mindset: performance leads must stop asking only how their brand ranks and start asking what would give AI a reason to recommend it.

> **"Being found means AI can see you. Being selected means AI has a reason to recommend you. Most brands are still optimising for visibility when they should be optimising for preference."**
>
> *Miriam Resino, head of PPC, Performics @ Spark Foundry*

AI doesn't create authority – it recognises it. To ensure you have the strongest chance to be surfaced, you need to showcase your expertise through your content and keep product information consistent and up-to-date.

Customer reviews, expert perspectives, consistent brand information and structured product data all provide signals that can help AI understand when your brand may be a credible and useful option. When AI can clearly identify which brands are relevant, advertising can become a natural part of the customer journey rather than an interruption. As Scott Sinclair, head of Search EMEA at Google, notes: "The best answers can also be ads."

2 The Super-Empowered Consumer, 2026

For marketers, that means creating content that addresses real customer questions clearly and credibly, whether it appears organically or as an ad. AI can amplify good marketing, but it can't compensate for a weak value proposition, poor creative or low-quality data.

This is bringing brand building and performance marketing closer together. As Ellen Dunkley, head of paid performance at Havas Media Network UK, observes: "AI-powered ad formats still depend on strong on-site content and a distinctive brand. In the AI age, brand is performance."

Visibility and discovery: what to ask your agency

Work with your agency to understand how your brand appears across AI Search. They can help identify opportunities, benchmark competitors and prioritise the changes most likely to improve visibility.

Work with them to:

- **Audit AI Search presence.** Identify key category queries where rival brands are currently being surfaced instead of yours.
- **Identify where your brand has authority.** Pinpoint the customer questions and product categories your brand is uniquely qualified to address, then align your content strategy with those conversational moments.
- **Strengthen AI's understanding of your brand.** Improve product feeds, imagery, structured data, customer reviews and other trust signals, giving AI clearer evidence of why your brand is relevant.
- **Ensure information is consistent.** Check that product specifications, pricing and brand details match across owned and third-party platforms, removing conflicting signals that could weaken visibility.

Questions to explore together:

- Which priority questions and categories do we own today and which do we want to own in the future?
- Does every asset we publish help customers make a decision?

CHAPTER 2

ARE WE SHAPING PREFERENCES WHILE DECISIONS ARE STILL FORMING?

If people are asking longer, more involved questions, and keyword lists can't keep up, brands need a better way to understand and respond to the intent behind them.

"In the past, someone might have searched 'marathon shoes'," explains Sinclair. "Today, they're far more likely to ask: I'm training for a marathon and my feet hurt. What running shoes could help and how long should I break them in before race day?

"That query contains multiple layers of intent. The person is researching, evaluating and preparing to buy."

Sometimes this happens in a single search and sometimes over several, but AI is compressing what were once separate stages of the journey into fewer, higher-intent moments.

For marketers, that creates a practical challenge. As Search becomes more conversational, the number of ways people can express the same need multiplies, quickly outpacing what even the most comprehensive keyword strategy can anticipate. AI can recognise the intent behind those varied expressions, allowing marketers to focus less on predicting every possible search and more on identifying demand as it emerges.

AI Max, Google's AI-powered upgrade to Search campaigns, applies this capability to help advertisers capture relevant demand beyond traditional keyword strategies. It connects brands with a broader range of high-intent searches – including ads above and below AI Overviews and, in a current U.S. test, within AI Mode itself.

But the real opportunity extends beyond capturing existing demand. AI is changing not only how people search, but when brands can influence their decisions. By recognising intent while it's still forming, marketers have new opportunities to step in and shape customer preferences before they become fixed.

As Miriam Resino, head of PPC at Performics @ Spark Foundry, highlights, this requires an essential strategic shift: "Marketers need to get comfortable trading control for influence. AI isn't a channel you manage, it's an ecosystem you shape."

AI Max interprets the intent behind a wider range of searches, then uses capabilities such as text customisation and Final URL Expansion to match each query with more relevant ad copy and landing pages.

The data reflects this. Advertisers using AI Max for Search campaigns see an average 27% more conversions at a similar CPA or ROAS compared with campaigns that predominantly rely on exact and phrase match keywords.[3]

3 Source: Google Internal Data, 2025, based on campaigns with more than 70% of conversions or conventions value from exact or phrase match keywords for non-Retail advertisers.

Industry perspectives: rethinking demand generation

Complete the sentence: The biggest mistake marketers make with AI Search is...

"...treating it like a set-and-forget button, instead of a system that only performs as well as the goals and signals you give it."
Claire Stanley-Manock, chief strategy officer, connective3

"...focusing on campaign set-up rather than data sufficiency and quality."
Max Whiting, managing director of Search, Brainlabs

"...approaching it like an SEO update instead of a behavioural shift."
Annemarie Noonan, global search transformation lead, Assembly Global

MINI CASE STUDY

Trustpilot

Trustpilot: when customer language outgrows keyword planning

"The tool was mapping out high-value customer paths that weren't even on our radar."
Manna Faldo, global paid media manager, Trustpilot

Trustpilot needed to reach business decision-makers, but prospective customers expressed the same commercial challenges in countless ways across markets, languages and stages of the buying journey. Manual keyword planning struggled to keep pace with that diversity, making it harder to connect with high-value buyers at the moment they were looking for solutions.

By adopting AI Max for Search, Trustpilot was able to capture demand from these broader, high-intent searches. Rather than relying on predefined keyword lists, AI recognised the underlying commercial intent behind a much wider range of queries, helping the team reach valuable audiences their previous strategy had overlooked.

In just six weeks, the pilot delivered:

171%
increase in B2B conversion rate.

148%
increase in total conversions.

61%
reduction in cost per marketing qualified lead.

The takeaway: Demand doesn't always arrive in predictable language. By focusing on underlying commercial intent rather than predefined keywords alone, marketers can uncover valuable customers their existing strategies might miss.

New demand: what to ask your agency

The biggest growth opportunity lies in the new, high-intent searches that your competitors aren't seeing yet.

Work with your agency to:

- **Activate AI Max alongside Performance Max.** AI Max helps uncover emerging Search intent across complex queries, while Performance Max provides broader cross-channel coverage to maximise your total growth opportunity.
- **Move beyond keyword-led strategies** to capture complex, emerging searches no keyword list can fully anticipate.
- **Set clear brand guardrails.** Use AI Brief to specify exact messaging requirements, tone, and exclusions, giving AI dynamic freedom within strict strategic boundaries.

Start by asking your agency what new patterns of customer intent AI Max is uncovering and how those insights could inform wider product and marketing decisions.

Questions to explore together:

- Is our brand actively influencing discovery, or are we only converting existing demand?
- What do these new searches tell us about what our customers actually want?

Upgrading your Search campaigns with AI Max

Search is evolving fast, and AI Max with it. When AI Max is activated, three core capabilities are automatically enabled, working together to find more relevant demand and respond to it:

Find demand keywords miss → Search term matching

Interprets what someone is trying to do rather than simply matching the words they typed, helping surface high-performing queries your keyword list may have missed.

Match the message to the moment → Text customisation

Adapts ad copy to the intent behind each search, helping make ads more relevant to what someone is looking for.

Land people where they're most likely to convert → Final URL expansion

Directs people to the most relevant landing page based on their search intent, rather than relying solely on a predefined URL.

Additional controls and capabilities

Lock in essential messaging → Text disclaimers

Ensures required legal messaging appears in every ad. For businesses with strict compliance needs, this helps keep non-negotiable text consistent, even when dynamic features such as text customisation and Final URL Expansion are in use.

Give AI a clear brief → AI Brief

Guides campaigns in plain language: what your ads should say, what they shouldn't and who they should reach. Just as human teams work better with a clear brief, so does AI.

How AI Max works with your bidding strategy

Broader AI-powered matching does not mean unguided bidding. Marketers retain strategic control through negative keywords, brand guardrails, AI Briefs, and Value-Based Bidding targets. AI Max evaluates real-time contextual signals to match intent, while Smart Bidding calculates the exact valuation against your tCPA or tROAS.

CHAPTER 3

ARE WE MEASURING WHAT MATTERS?

AI is making already complex customer journeys even less linear, as people discover, compare and develop intent in ways traditional measurement cannot fully capture. Last-click attribution gives all the credit to the final step, overlooking the earlier interactions that shaped the decision.

Impressions, clicks and website visits still matter, but on their own they don't tell the whole story.

"The biggest evolution, and perhaps a potential mistake, is marketers holding onto legacy metrics which they've used to measure online success and trying to make them relevant in today's new world," says Sinclair.

Brands therefore need a broader view of success – one that considers not only how often a brand appears, but also how it influences decisions and contributes to business growth. As Noonan puts it: "Being found is a visibility metric. Being selected is a business outcome."

Measuring that outcome begins with marketing and finance agreeing on what value means – whether that is revenue, profit, lifetime value or another commercial result – and building measurement around it.

Defining value, however, is only the first step. Marketers must also establish the incremental impact of their investment. As Jack Stingemore, managing partner, performance strategy at OMD UK, points out, "Incrementality remains the biggest challenge. Measurement has advanced enormously through marketing mix modelling, experimentation and solutions such as Meridian, yet many organisations still judge Search through a last-click lens. The strongest business cases demonstrate the incremental commercial value Search creates, not simply the conversions it receives credit for."

Measurement is now moving beyond explaining past performance to anticipating future value while marketers can still influence outcomes. New measurement tools are making that shift possible. Qualified Future Conversions (QFC), currently in pilot ahead of a wider rollout, uses AI to connect early signals of intent, such as branded searches and engaged site visits, to the conversions they are likely to generate over the following six months. That gives marketers a way to demonstrate the future value of demand generation using metrics the wider business can recognise.

Better measurement can also make AI more effective. Connecting CRM systems and first-party data to Google Ads helps AI understand which customers create the most value over time, so it can make smarter decisions about targeting, bidding and budget allocation.

That makes a balanced definition of value essential. ROAS, while valuable, can become misleading when viewed in isolation. As Max Whiting, managing director of Search at Brainlabs, puts it: "Chase it in isolation and you'll hit the number, but you could well be shrinking the business."

Bringing together ROAS, customer lifetime value, profitability and incrementality creates a more complete picture of commercial performance. It helps marketers invest with greater confidence while giving AI a clearer view of which customers and outcomes matter most.

In AI-powered marketing, measurement does more than prove what worked. The signals marketers feed back into AI also shape what it optimises towards next.

Industry perspectives: rethinking measurement

Complete the sentence: Don't optimise for the last click, optimise for…

"…the customer you wouldn't have got without marketing. Last click is a receipt a sale happened, not proof you caused it – incrementality is what separates the two."
Richard Dunton, product partner, Dentsu

"…total value creation across the whole journey. Most value is now created long before – or entirely without – a click. Being discovered, trusted and recommended is the game; prove that impact with attribution built for a multi-platform world."
Marcus Reynolds, paid search associate director, WPP Media

"… real business value, whether that's margin, profit, in-stock items, new customers or lifetime value."
Claire Stanley-Manock, chief strategy officer, connective3

MINI CASE STUDY

Lenovo & Assembly: proving that new demand was genuinely incremental

"Within the first two weeks, we saw results that drove incremental revenue efficiently. And that's what leadership wants to know: are you delivering against the metrics that matter most?"
Ashwin Naiksatam, senior digital marketing leader, Lenovo

Lenovo had built a highly optimised, brand-focused Search programme, but incremental growth was becoming harder to find. As customers began describing what they wanted rather than searching for specific products or brands, the team saw an opportunity to reach high-value, non-brand demand earlier in the decision-making journey.

Together with Assembly, Lenovo ran a controlled UK A/B test, comparing AI Max for Search directly against its existing approach. Clear commercial, brand and customer experience guardrails were put in place to test new opportunities while maintaining the efficiency of its established strategy.

The test began showing incremental gains within the first two weeks. Across the pilot, Lenovo delivered:

34%
increase in conversion value.

15%
lift in incremental revenue.

10-40%
of operational time freed up for higher-value work.

The results gave Lenovo confidence that expanding beyond its established Search strategy could unlock incremental commercial value. Following the UK pilot, the approach was expanded across multiple markets and is now helping shape Lenovo's wider Search strategy.

The takeaway: Incrementality turns performance into proof. Testing AI against your existing approach helps demonstrate the additional commercial value it creates – giving you stronger evidence to decide when and where to scale.

> **"Last-click ROAS can be one of the most misleading 'good-looking' metrics in today's dashboards. It can over-credit demand that already existed, obscure where influence really happened and create false confidence."**
>
> *Marcus Reynolds, paid search associate director, WPP Media*

Measurement: what to ask your agency

Work with your agency to:

- **Agree on a shared measure of success with finance.** Define the commercial outcomes that matter – whether that's profit, lifetime value or another measure of business value.
- **Connect CRM and first-party data to Google Ads,** so AI can optimise for the customers who create the most value over time.
- **Measure beyond last-click efficiency.** Combine ROAS with measures such as lifetime value and profitability to build a more complete picture of commercial performance.
- **Prove incrementality through testing.** Use causal experiments, geo-tests, and Marketing Mix Modelling (MMM) to understand the additional commercial value marketing actually creates.

Start with a joint session between your analytics lead and finance to agree on the one business metric both teams will report.

Questions to explore together:

- Where do we still have blind spots in our attribution?
- Are we measuring the value Search creates, or just the conversions it delivers?

New measurement tools

Four new tools helping marketers connect marketing activity and commercial performance.

- Google tag gateway – routes tags through your own website infrastructure (like Content Delivery Networks) to enhance privacy and recover accurate first-party measurement signals.
- Data Manager – a single hub for connecting CRM and first-party data to power smarter bidding and targeting.
- Qualified Future Conversions (QFC) – predicts future revenue from early signals such as branded search.
- Meridian GeoX – Google's open-source geo-incrementality solution for measuring which ads are delivering business impact. Meridian itself is now integrated into Google Analytics 360.

CHAPTER 4

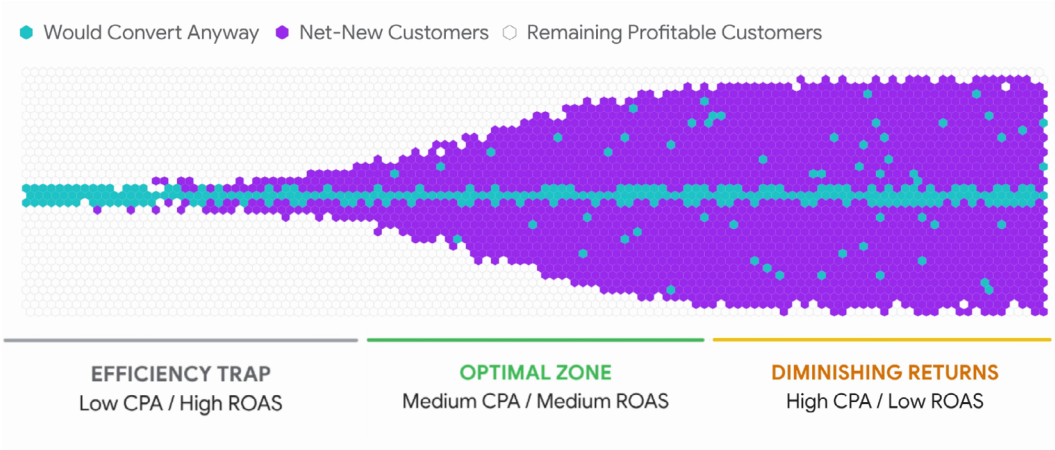
IS OUR BUDGET CAPPING THE AI OPPORTUNITY?

With measurement aligned to business outcomes, the next challenge is ensuring investment can move dynamically as new commercial opportunities emerge.

Too often, an internal translation gap limits growth. When marketing performance is communicated through platform metrics rather than commercial contribution, organisations risk falling into an "efficiency trap" – setting overly rigid target CPAs that constrain AI from identifying and capturing high-value, incremental customers.

As campaigns expand into conversational, non-brand queries to reach new audiences, blended platform CPAs will naturally adjust. Without clear visibility into true incremental value, teams can fall into the "saturation illusion": assuming that rising average costs signal market exhaustion, when they may actually reflect profitable expansion into previously untapped demand.

Overcoming this barrier requires proving incremental commercial return through structured experimentation. By establishing shared profitability guardrails with finance, marketing leaders can confidently transition from static spending caps to agile, demand-led investment.



> **“The biggest barrier in AI Search is a rigid operating model. Success belongs to brands that make agile decision-making part of how they work – testing, forecasting, and modelling scenarios so they can move investment fast and capture profitable growth.”**
>
> *Ellen Dunkley, head of paid performance, Havas Media Network UK*

“Businesses need to brief their agencies and say, ‘We do not want to feed our competitors. You need to capture 100% of the demand we’re about to create through this campaign,’” says Sinclair. “To do that, leading advertisers manage Search ads with performance-based budget guardrails rather than static spending ceilings.”

As AI unlocks the addressable opportunity, budgets need enough flexibility to respond for as long as the marginal return remains commercially worthwhile.

However, greater budget flexibility doesn’t mean every campaign should spend more. The opportunity is understanding where profitable demand is being constrained by fixed budgets rather than genuine market saturation.

Budget governance therefore matters as much as campaign optimisation: investment needs room to respond to incremental demand, within clear profitability guardrails.

Rethinking budgeting: what to ask your agency

Demand-led budgeting doesn't have to be adopted wholesale on day one. Start with a controlled test, using profitability guardrails finance can see and trust, and agree with your agency how investment will respond when valuable demand emerges.

- **Remove unnecessary rigid caps.** To ensure you have enough budget to capture unexpected demand, move from a budget-constrained model to a demand-led one. Anchor campaigns to ROAS or CPA targets and set daily budgets with a comfortable buffer—around four times your expected spend. This gives the AI enough headroom to capture profitable demand spikes.
- **Monitor intraday pacing.** Ask your agency to track when campaigns reach 25% of their daily budget, not just whether they exhaust it by the end of the day. If a campaign reaches that threshold unusually early, assess whether profitable demand is being constrained and agree how additional budget can be released within your established tROAS or tCPA guardrails.
- **Evaluate Search alongside the wider media mix.** Demand created by brand, video and social often converts through Search, so keep Search budgets agile enough to capture the intent you have already invested to create.

Start by identifying if a 'saturation illusion' exists in your account: are certain campaigns truly reaching market ceiling, or are they held back by fixed constraints?

Questions to explore together:

- Where did our budget run out while profitable demand was still available?
- What profitability guardrails would give Finance and leadership the confidence to remove budget constraints?
- During periods of volatile demand, how will we proactively flag campaigns at risk of becoming budget-constrained?

Bidding and budgeting tools are getting smarter

- **Target CPA and Target ROAS** are being updated to deliver more predictable performance as campaigns grow.
- **Smart Bidding Exploration** gives bidding more flexibility to uncover new converting queries while staying within performance targets.
- **Promotion mode** lets advertisers schedule additional budget for seasonal peaks, product launches and other periods of increased demand.

CHAPTER 5

ARE WE READY FOR AGENTIC AI?

Measurement, budgeting and changing consumer behaviour may look different in the age of AI, but for marketers they are familiar territory. Agentic AI introduces a more fundamental shift: AI systems that can search, compare and increasingly act on a customer's behalf.

Moving from conversational discovery to transaction requires deep structural foundations: real-time inventory, pricing accuracy, and unified checkout protocols.

With consumers engaging in more than a billion shopping journeys daily across Google, this shift is grounded in the Shopping Graph, the world's most comprehensive shopping dataset with over 60 billion listings.

Building on these foundations, emerging frameworks like the Universal Commerce Protocol (UCP) and Universal Cart are designed to connect conversational intent directly to checkout, allowing consumers to complete purchases while ensuring brands retain full ownership of customer relationships as the merchant of record.

Yet, even the most advanced agentic protocols depend entirely on the quality of information brands feed into them.

"We are very early on in the days of agentic Search, but the most important thing for brands to get ready is structured and unstructured data," says Sinclair.

When an AI agent comes calling, can it check stock, compare products and complete a purchase? Structured data provides the facts it needs to act – pricing, availability and fulfilment – while unstructured content provides the context: expertise, reviews and brand credibility. Combined with connected APIs, payments and fulfilment systems, these foundations can enable an AI agent to move from discovery and comparison through to purchase.

Beyond technical readiness, however, navigating this shift requires a fundamental strategic reset. As Luisa Del Maschio, analytics director at Jellyfish, points out: "We cannot 'train, hire, or acquire' our way through AI. The best move for CMOs is to refocus on core marketing principles: be brutally honest about what value you bring to market, and use AI to uncover relevant connections."

> **"As AI automates execution, practitioners will shift from channel-siloed activation to holistic, cross-channel strategy. The real differentiator won't just be adopting commoditised AI, but building custom prompt workflows and agents that turn general tools into proprietary business advantages."**
>
> *Richard Dunton, product partner, Dentsu*

As AI takes on more execution, the marketer's role changes too. "AI can already support campaign execution, optimise bids, generate creative and respond to real-time signals… and agentic AI takes that further still," says Sinclair. "That changes the marketer's job rather than diminishing it. Teams are setting the goals and guardrails for AI to work within, while marketers continue to own the things that matter most: brand voice, authority, credibility and authenticity."

Whether it's a person visiting your site or an AI agent acting on their behalf, those fundamentals remain the differentiators. The technology will continue to evolve, but brands built on trust, relevance and credibility will remain the ones AI – and customers – choose first.

Industry perspectives: preparing for an AI-first future

Complete the sentence: The role of marketers in the AI era is shifting from… to…

"… siloed, tactical practitioners to 4P fundamentalists who seek to understand customer value before acting."
Luisa Del Maschio, analytics director, Jellyfish

"… optimising channels to orchestrating influence. The role of marketing is no longer to drive traffic, but to shape the signals that influence choice."
Miriam Resino, head of PPC, Performics @ Spark Foundry

"…tactical implementers to strategic data and commercial partners, ensuring AI has the right goals, the right signals and the right commercial outcomes to optimise towards."
Max Whiting, managing director of search, Brainlabs

Agentic readiness: what to ask your agency

Agentic readiness depends on whether AI can understand your offering, access the systems it needs and act within clear boundaries.

Work with your agency to:

- **Make your offering understandable.** Ensure product, pricing, availability and fulfilment information is accurate, consistent and accessible.
- **Connect the systems agents need to act.** Prepare product feeds, APIs, payments and fulfilment infrastructure so agents can move from discovery towards transaction.
- **Set clear human guardrails.** Define what AI can handle autonomously and where human judgement remains essential.
- **Test the journey end to end.** Identify where an agent can successfully discover, evaluate and transact with your brand – and where the experience still breaks down.

Questions to explore together:

- Where are the biggest gaps in our agentic readiness today?
- Which decisions should remain human as AI takes on more execution?

CONCLUSION

RELEVANCE HAS NEVER MATTERED MORE

Relevance has always determined which brands customers choose. AI is changing how that relevance is recognised, evaluated and surfaced throughout the customer journey.

Turning relevance into growth depends on the foundations marketers put in place: strong content and data, measurement tied to business outcomes, flexible investment and clear guardrails for AI. Get these right and you can recognise emerging demand, respond while decisions are still being formed and remain relevant as customer behaviour evolves.

Five priorities for AI Search

- **Be the best answer.** Help AI understand why your brand is the most relevant choice.
- **Shape intent with AI Max for Search.** Capture complex, high-intent conversational queries rather than competing solely on static keyword lists.
- **Prove business value.** Measure commercial outcomes and prove incrementality, not just clicks.
- **Fund demand.** Transition to a demand-led budget model, with targets aligned to your business objectives.
- **Prepare for agentic experiences.** Structure your data, connect transactional systems, and set clear brand guardrails so AI can understand your offering and act within clearly defined boundaries.

Whether the question comes from a customer or an AI agent, relevance still determines who gets chosen and which brands grow in a new era of Search.

CONTRIBUTORS

A huge thank you to the industry leaders, brand innovators and Google experts whose valuable insights and practical perspectives made this second edition possible. We are deeply grateful to all our featured contributors for sharing their expertise to help shape the future of AI Search.

Google perspective



Scott Sinclair
Head of Search, Google

Agency perspectives



Annemarie Noonan
Global Search transformation lead, Assembly Global



Max Whiting
Managing director of search, Brainlabs



Claire Stanley-Manock
Chief strategy officer, connective3



Richard Dunton
Product partner at iProspect



Ellen Dunkley
Head of paid performance at Havas Media Network



Luisa Del Maschio
Analytics director, Jellyfish



Jack Stingemore
Managing partner, performance strategy, OMD UK



Miriam Resino
Head of PPC, Performics @ Spark Foundry



Marcus Reynolds
Paid search associate director, WPP Media

Brand perspectives



Ashwin Naiksatam
Senior digital marketing leader, Lenovo



Manna Faldo
Global paid media manager, Trustpilot

MarketingWeek

MARKETER'S MANUAL

MarketingWeek X Google

© MMXXVI Marketing Week / Haymarket Media