Here's what happened

Our take on the trends you need to know about from the past month

June 2024

Google Partner
PREMIER 2023

EUROPEAN 2024
SEARCH AWARDS
WINNER

GLOBAL 2023
SEARCH AWARDS
WINNER
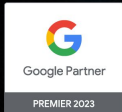
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B
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This company meets the
highest standards of social
and environmental impact

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Recent industry updates to help you stay ahead

- **Amazon unveils cookie-free ad relevance technology**

- **Research reveals link between high quality ads and lower carbon emissions**

- **Google to integrate data from third-party advertising partners such as Pinterest, Reddit, and Snap directly into GA4 properties.**

- **US surgeon general proposes a warning label for social media applications**

- **Marketers' post-cookie preparedness has dropped by 23% since 2022**

- **Gen Z Ditches Google, Turns To Reddit For Product Searches**

- **Study: Google Favors Ecommerce Sites & User-Generated Content**

- **Artificial Intelligence In Marketing 2024 Report**

- **'Navboost': the leaked ranking system Google uses to assess user engagement**

- **How advertisers can prepare for Google's AI overviews**

- **Research shows Advertising generates most profit after first 13 weeks of a campaign**

Trends in focus

The latest trends in digital, plus advice from the experts

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1 **Navboost** - What we know about the leaked ranking system Google uses to assess user engagement.

2 **Google AI Overviews** - Visibility of AI results drops, now only shows for 15% of queries.

3 **Gen AI** - Assessing the rise of auto generated creative and the importance of a creative platform.

1

Navboost

What we know about the leaked ranking system Google uses to assess user engagement.

What is Navboost?

Navboost is **one of Google's core ranking algorithms**. It uses user click data to help refine a bunch of search results into a smaller group. Navboost uses its historical knowledge of what query people searched for and what they ultimately clicked on and found helpful to improve the relevance and quality of search results.

The recent API docs that were discovered this year tell us a lot about the attributes that can be associated with Navboost.

These leaks indicate that websites with a high number of 'LastLongestClicks' are more likely to be consistently providing the answer users are looking for.

While 'BadClicks' aren't defined in the document, we expect them to consider actions such as consistently returning to the search results after clicking on a site and find another site that satisfies their search. A 'BadClick' is likely a click that didn't satisfy the user.

Essentially, **Navboost seems to be using clicks to optimise rankings** — that thing that Google always denied the existence of.
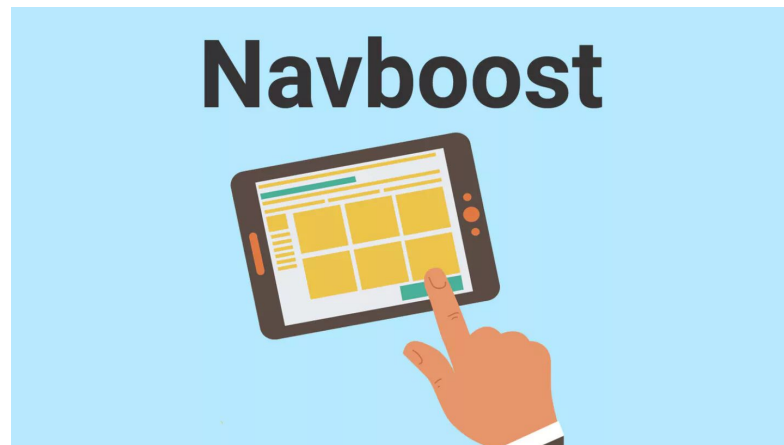
Navboost and the importance of brand

One fantastic piece of analysis of this recently leaked documentation from Mike King finds a reference to Navboost in a 2012 patent that has been overlooked until recently.

This patent refers to Google assessing whether a page has suspiciously too many or too few links considering its **branded search volume**. Or, in other words, is a page being "over-SEOd."

The language used in the patent (see reference 304) is "determine a count of reference queries (brand searches) for the group of resources."

It seems then, that **brand interest might be part of the algorithm that informs non-branded search** — at least, once you're competing at the top for higher-volume terms. And branded search might be defined simply by one page or site being the overwhelming winner of clicks for a given term or concept.

If anything, in the light of AI-polluted SERPs and recent HCU and Core updates, **Google seems to be leaning into brand even more** to identify the results that will best satisfy users.
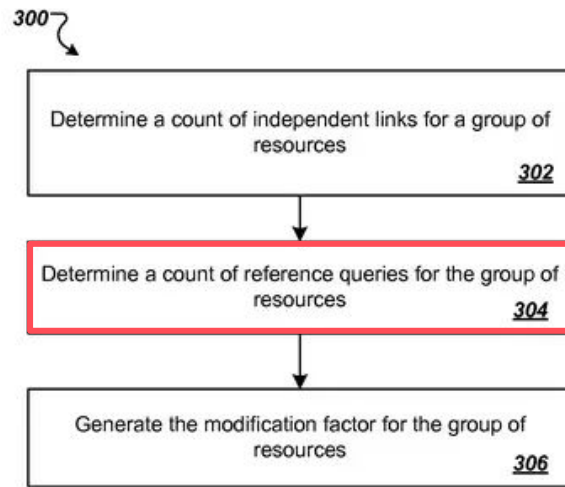

FIG. 3

Source: Google Patent

Navboost: how should you adapt?

Understanding more about the Navboost system helps us to see just how important it is to **focus on user experience** and **building a strong brand**.

It seems that the era when you could win big in organic search without a well-known brand is ending, with Google potentially using brand interest as a way of ranking businesses for highly competitive queries.

With this in mind, there are three areas you should be considering:

1. **Invest in author/entity authority** - basically, put out more posts from authors with strong authority. We already know this is important for E-E-A-T.

2. **Invest in brand building and PR** - it seems the brands that succeed have more coverage and mentions, so brand building is even more important than ever.

3. **Content quality and UX** - user behaviour and click quality are likely being used as ranking signals, so focus on improving user engagement and overall experience to complement technical optimisation.

This isn't the first time we've hypothesised that these areas are important for modern SEO, but it is the first time Google have admitted these leaked ranking signals are legitimate.

2

Google AI Overviews

**Visibility of AI results drops, now only shows for 15% of queries.**

Recap: AI overviews

In May, Google unveiled AI Overviews, a new feature that includes AI generated summaries at the top of its search engine results followed by source articles cited for users to click on.

This feature, formerly known as Search Generative Experience, at one time appeared on 84% of queries. Google's CEO described it as "letting Google do the Googling for you."

That number of AI overview results jumped substantially starting in mid-April and continued into May.

The launch of AI Overviews was followed by numerous examples of incorrect and dangerous AI-generated answers, such as suggesting people drink urine and eat rocks...
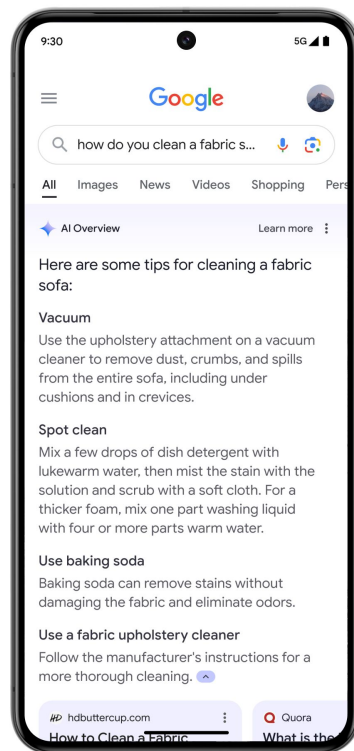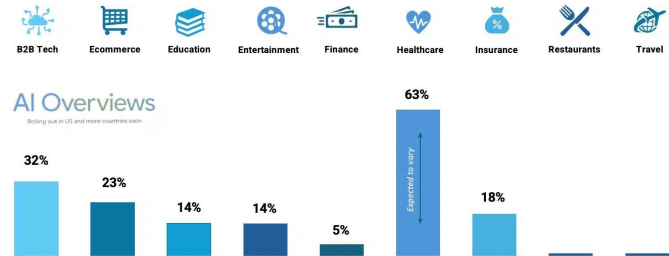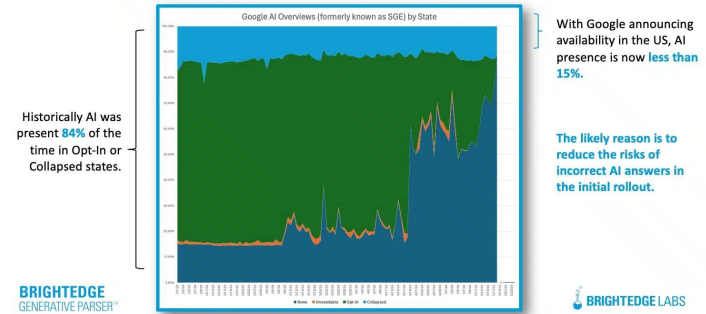
Google now reducing AI results

Data shared by SEO platform BrightEdge, which has been tracking and monitoring SGE and AI Overviews since late last year shows that **Google's AI Overviews now appear less than 15% of the time**, likely due to the volume of incorrect answers during the initial rollout.

This research also showed that AI Overviews are **195% more likely to appear when queries have a featured snippet**. Question-based queries are also more likely to feature AI Overviews.

No doubt as Google fine-tune their systems, the relationship between AI and search will continue accelerate. Additional development involves monetisation (ads) linked to AI overviews, so it's a feature we're obviously keeping a close eye on for our clients.

With Google announcing availability in the US, AI presence is now **less than 15%.**

The likely reason is to reduce the risks of incorrect AI answers in the initial rollout.

Historically AI was present **84%** of the time in Opt-In or Collapsed states.

Google AI Overviews (formerly known as SGE) by State

BRIGHTEDGE GENERATIVE PARSER™

BRIGHTEDGE LABS

B2B Tech Ecommerce Education Entertainment Finance Healthcare Insurance Restaurants Travel

AI Overviews
Rolling out in US and more countries soon

32%   23%   14%   14%   5%   63%   18%

AI overviews: how should you adapt?

While we have to acknowledge that AI Overviews are here to stay, we should refrain from a complete overhaul of our strategy.

- **Don't abandon SEO**: Overviews might hurt organic traffic but can also deliver more traffic to cited sites. Keep producing high-quality, informative content and ensure that your tech setup is correctly optimised for these new opportunities.

- **Diversify your organic reach to include a wider range of platforms**: Search doesn't just happen on Google. It happens on YouTube, TikTok, Reddit and Instagram, just to name a few. Dig deeper into where your audience spends time and go after additional organic reach opportunities outside of Google.

- **Double down on experience investment**: If we believe traffic is likely to take a hit, ensuring that every visit counts becomes even more important. Prioritise UX and Conversion Rate Optimisation to maximise existing traffic and opportunities.

We are already monitoring the impact of AI Overviews for our clients and bespoke advice will be provided where necessary. If you have any questions, please reach out to your SEO Consultant or Account Manager.

3

Gen AI

The rise of auto generated creative.

The rise of automated creative

Most major ad platforms are well on their way to an era of **creative automation.** Google took the plunge in late 2023 with the introduction of its first auto-generated creative tech for Performance Max (PMax).

Since then, Google have launched their first auto-gen video ad tools, and recently announced even more Gen AI features at Marketing Live last month for PMax.

Meta, meanwhile, more recently introduced an auto-generator for text and image ads, as did Amazon with a new suite of tools announced in Cannes last week.

TikTok also used Cannes as an opportunity to launch a more ambitious stab at AI-generated ad creative, with avatars of AI generated creators for sponsored product posts.

However, CMOs should be wary of any ad platform offering an easy route to high-quality creative.
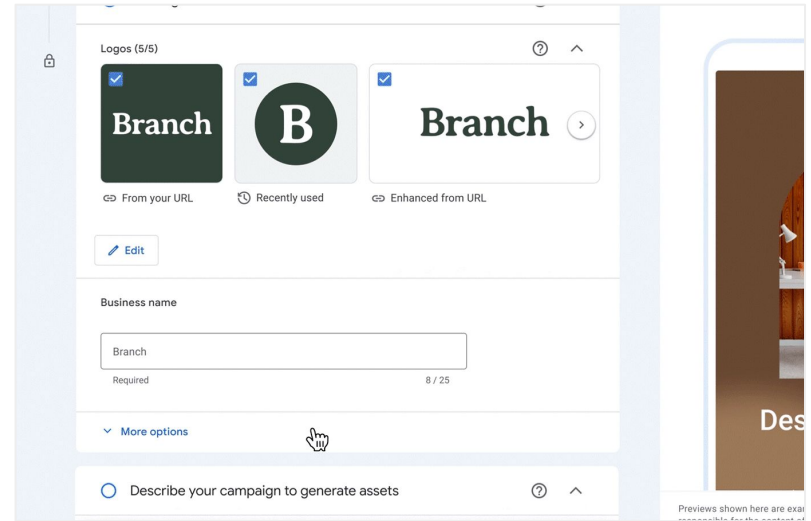
The importance of a creative platform

The demand for AI-generated ad creative comes mainly from two sources: small and local businesses and ecommerce or retail media advertisers who have **a need to scale creative production** across 1000's of products.

The problem is that if you're relying on AI alone for your creative, your ads will likely look the same as many of your peers leaning into the same technology.

AI-generated creative will more than likely miss the mark, especially on social networks like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and YouTube, where individual creativity is the point.

The thing that will stand you apart is a **distinctive creative platform**, which can be used as the basis to scale creative production.

Auto-generated creative will no doubt help increase production scale and enable you to fill more ad slots, but it will not deliver creativity.

Storytelling is integral to strong communication. Having a 'big idea' interwoven throughout all of your marketing efforts is how you get traction. Customers won't necessarily remember individual assets you put in front of them, but they will remember the story that connects them all.

Steve Pannett
Head of Creative @ Hallam

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