The Agentic Era in Marketing

Navigating Bot Marketing 2.0

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In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, the advent of generative AI has **shifted the marketing paradigm**. However, the reality is that marketers have over two decades of experience marketing to bots—specifically in the form of search engines.

While traditional search-engine marketing (SEM) and the well-oiled machine of what we might call **"bot marketing 1.0"** relied on understanding search-engine algorithms and clear, measurable levers for success, we now stand at the threshold of **bot marketing 2.0**—an era where AI models introduce both **significant opportunities and unknowns.**

The Evolution from SEM to AI-Driven Experiences

Historically, Google and other search engines perfected a model that rewarded brands for optimizing content. Although Google's approach evolved—from a focus on organic relevance to including ad placements—the core philosophy remained: **provide value for both the end-user and the advertiser.**

This not only ensured valuable user experiences, but also enabled brands to understand search ranking mechanics through feedback loops and best practice guidance.

In contrast, generative AI models, particularly **large language models (LLMs)**, present a new set of challenges. These models operate as **black boxes**—marketers lack transparency into their training data and the exact pathways leading to generated responses. This opacity complicates traditional methods of content optimization and tracking.

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The Black Box Dilemma

The critical issue with AI models isn't just their opaque algorithms—**Google's ranking formulas were always proprietary**. The difference is that, unlike Google Ads, today's AI platforms expose **almost no campaign-level telemetry**.

When Google launched AdWords in 2000, it balanced algorithm secrecy with rich dashboards that provided insights into impressions, clicks, quality scores, and conversions. With AI models, marketers face a conundrum: we may have a **partial understanding of the text data** powering these systems, but we lack granular details about how brands influence responses.

Further complicating matters, user prompts in generative AI systems are highly variable. Unlike structured search queries, free-form prompts can lead to **countless response permutations**. This variability makes it difficult for marketers to identify strategies to optimize content for AI ingestion. While SEO enabled predictable alignment with search algorithms, **AI-driven responses defy linear optimization**.

This challenge is illustrated in the visual below, highlighting how today's AI models obscure the decision-making process, leaving marketers with limited insight and control.
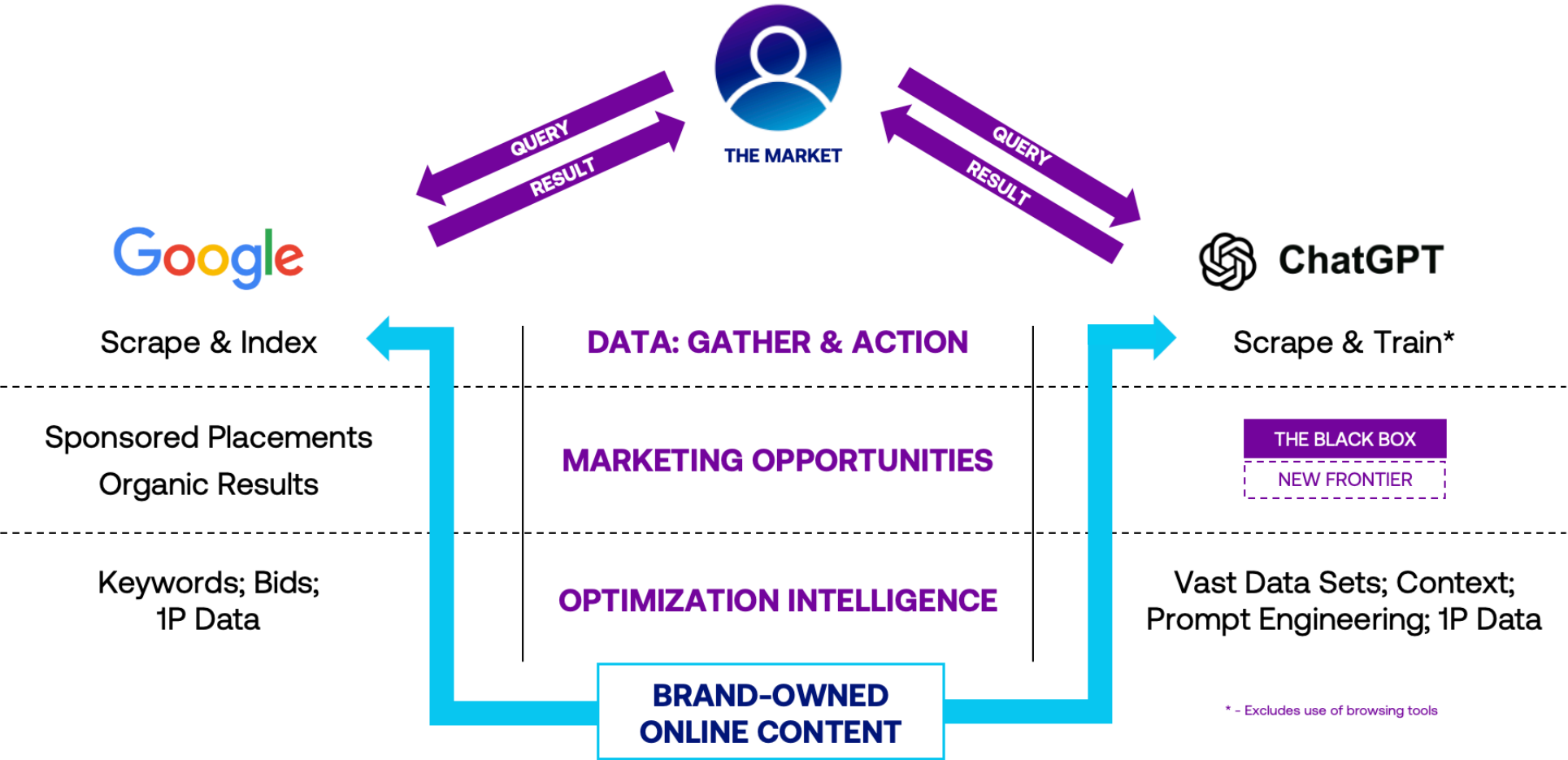

Figure 1: Search scrape and index content that can be measured, optimized, and monetized against well-defined marketing KPIs. However, LLMs ingest vast swaths of online content solely to improve their training; today they offer neither ad inventory nor transparent performance data. Until AI platforms introduce measurable advertising options, they remain a black-box channel—yet they also represent a new frontier where brands can sharpen and structure their content so it resonates in future AI-generated experiences.

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The Future Customer Journey

Adding to this complexity, the business models underlying AI technologies are also evolving. In a March 20, 2025 interview with Stratechery, **Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI,** shared his vision of transitioning OpenAI from a nonprofit research organization to a consumer technology company. While Altman expressed hope that advertising wouldn't become part of the user experience, he left the door open: 'If there is a good reason to do it, I'm not dogmatic about this.'

Google still dominates with over **eight billion daily search queries**. But new AI-powered answer engines like **Perplexity.ai** are growing rapidly—Omnicom Media Group tracked a **750% YoY growth** (2023 - 2024). Though the big shift hasn't fully arrived, it's on the horizon and poised to fundamentally change the customer journey. Rather than moving through traditional multi-channel funnels, consumers will increasingly seek answers directly within consolidated, AI-driven environments.

The visual below demonstrates how the customer journey could rapidly compress, with AI-powered conversations accelerating decisions and reducing reliance on traditional touch points.

THE BEHAVIORAL SHIFT FOR KNOWLEDGE

The search for knowledge ➡ The interrogation of knowledge

93%
(2023 – 2024)

16.4 billion queries
per day, globally*

Google

750%
(2023 – 2024)
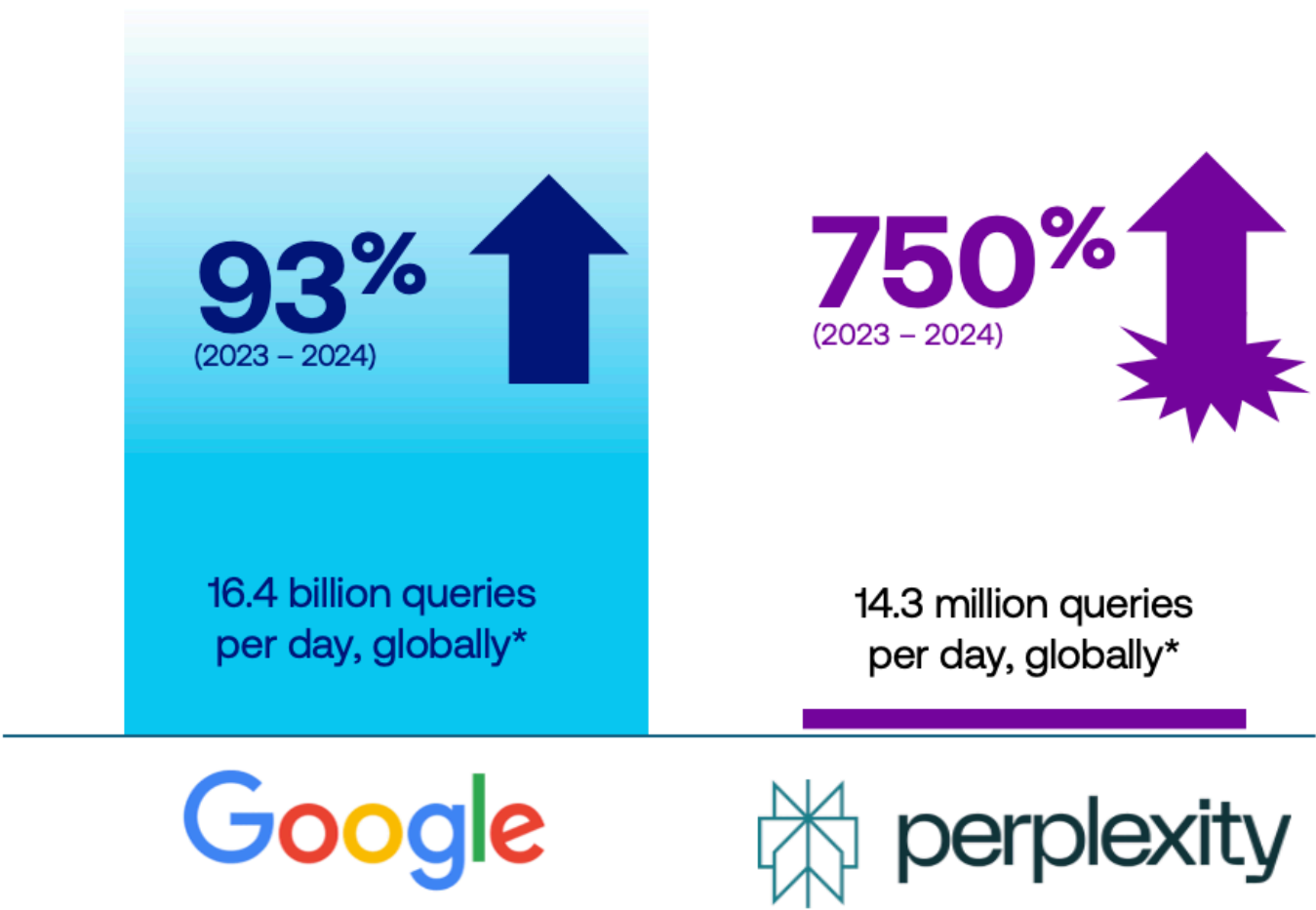
14.3 million queries
per day, globally*

perplexity

Figure 2: Although Google still commands the vast majority of global daily search queries, emerging answer engines like Perplexity are rapidly gaining traction in daily usage.

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New Frontier: Strategic Implications for Advertisers

As the marketing landscape evolves, advertisers must rethink their strategies to stay relevant and competitive in the age of AI-driven interactions. Below are key actions that can help navigate this transition effectively:

Embrace Transparency and Experimentation: In an environment where performance feedback is limited or non-existent, marketers must lean into testing and data modeling. Leverage tools like Google Analytics 4 (GA4) and custom dashboards to approximate traffic sources and test creative and messaging variations to discover what resonates.

Expand from SEO to Knowledge Ecosystem Optimization (KEO): Content optimization must now consider a broader ecosystem—one that includes LLMs, AI engines, and answer-based platforms. Brands should focus on producing versatile, authoritative content that is semantically rich, referenceable, and contextually valuable across various AI pathways.

Prepare for Integrated Monetization Models: With AI tools moving toward consumer-facing engagement and potential ad integration, marketers should begin testing new placements as they emerge. Understanding how AI selects and serves content will allow brands to build influence strategies even before formal ad systems roll out

The strategies outlined above will help brands not only navigate the current complexities of AI-driven marketing, but also position themselves for long-term success as these technologies continue to evolve. Embracing flexibility, experimentation, and a future-focused mindset will be essential for staying ahead in this rapidly shifting environment.

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Key Takeaways: Preparing for Bot Marketing 2.0

As we transition into bot marketing 2.0, here are the most critical principles brands should embrace:

- **Expect Less Transparency:** AI models offer little campaign insight—marketers must embrace experimentation and new analytical approaches.

- **Evolve SEO to KEO:** Build adaptable messaging that resonates across unpredictable AI-driven platforms.

- **Monetization is Coming:** AI-powered conversations will soon dominate customer journeys—prepare for future advertising opportunities now.

- **Experiment Boldly:** The brands that succeed will adapt quickly, test fearlessly, and stay ahead of AI-driven marketing shifts.

For More Information:

Interested in learning how your brand can prepare for the Agentic Era? Contact our experts for deeper insights and personalized strategies.

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