



## Gartner Predicts 25% Dip in Search Volumes by 2026

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Virtual agents and AI chatbots will be eating into search engine volumes over the next two years, causing them to decline by 25%, according to a report released Monday by technology research and advisory firm Gartner.

It predicted that pressure from competing technologies will create a new emphasis by search engines on quality and authenticity. Search engine algorithms will need to value the quality of content to offset the sheer amount of AI-generated material, Gartner explained, as content utility and quality will still reign supreme for success in organic search results.

Content creators will have to place greater emphasis on watermarking and other methods used to authenticate high-value content, a trend being driven by government regulators around the world, it continued, which will influence how search engines display such content.

“Companies will need to focus on producing unique content that is useful to customers and prospective customers,” Gartner Vice President Analyst Alan Antin said in a statement.

“Content should continue to demonstrate search quality-rater elements such as expertise, experience, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness,” he added.

### **Rethinking Marketing Channels**

Antin explained that organic and paid search are vital channels for tech marketers seeking to reach awareness and demand-generation goals. “Generative AI solutions are becoming substitute answer engines, replacing user queries that previously may have been executed in traditional search engines,” he stated.

“This will force companies to rethink their marketing channels strategy as gen AI becomes more embedded across all aspects of the enterprise,” he added.

Gartner’s predicted search volume drop would have a significant impact on marketers.

“If this prediction turns out to be accurate — and it’s important to remember this is just a prediction, not a guarantee — companies will be forced to reassess which platforms and channels they invest in, and how much,” said Danny Goodwin, managing editor of Search Engine Land, a digital marketing and advertising technology publication.

“For a long time, organic and paid search — namely Google — have been a fairly reliable source of traffic,” he told the E-Commerce Times. “Google delivered searchers who were likely to convert, buy or complete some type of task on your site.”

With AI answer engines in the search mix, marketers will have to optimize their strategies for more than the web and Google. “It may mean learning how to optimize to influence large-language models like ChatGPT,” Goodwin speculated. “It may mean investing in video, doing SEO for TikTok or YouTube.”

“For retail,” he continued, “Amazon SEO may become more critical. It also means optimizing for social media platforms, such as LinkedIn and Meta.”

“Basically, companies will need to assess where their target audience is and optimize for everything to make sure they are present and findable everywhere, all at once,” he added.

### **Diversified Approaches Needed**

Greg Sterling, co-founder of Near Media, a news, commentary, and analysis website, agreed that a volume dip would affect online marketing strategies. “Companies will be forced to act differently and further diversify their channels, but they should be doing that anyway,” he told the E-Commerce Times.

He added that he thought Gartner’s numbers were “aggressive, but the assumptions behind them are directionally accurate.”

Brands are already rethinking their strategies, maintained Joe Karasin, CMO and founder of Karasin PPC, a marketing agency that specializes in Google ads, in Lapeer, Mich.

“This has been a known issue for some time now, and companies have reacted by investing more in alternative platforms,” he told the E-Commerce Times. “E-commerce brands are investing heavily in TikTok, which has become a de facto search engine, particularly among younger consumers. Reddit has also become a more valuable channel for brands, as the trend on search to add ‘Reddit’ at the end of a query has taken off. “

To adapt to the changing search landscape, marketers may pivot towards diversified approaches, allocating resources to alternative platforms such as social media, content marketing, and influencer collaborations, added Mark N. Vena, president and principal analyst at SmartTech Research in San Jose, Calif.

“Emphasizing user experience could become paramount, prompting investments in website optimization and personalized content,” he told the E-Commerce Times.

“A great experience for your users is going to be critical,” added Antin. “If you can’t provide that great experience, you’ll be losing users,” he told the E-Commerce Times.

### **Combating AI Content Deluge**

Vena also speculated that there may be a renewed focus on data-driven decision-making to target audiences effectively across various channels. “This shift could herald a more holistic and

nuanced marketing approach, leveraging a mix of digital and traditional channels to navigate the evolving landscape and maintain brand visibility and engagement,” he said.

He added that as volumes decline, the search engines are likely to intensify their efforts to identify quality content on the web. “To address this challenge, they may enhance their algorithms to better distinguish between authentic, high-quality content and AI-generated spam,” he explained.

“Collaborating with AI researchers and investing in cutting-edge technologies could enable search engines to stay ahead of the curve and maintain the integrity of search results amidst the proliferation of AI-generated content,” he said.

“Google will tell you that its algorithms can already detect low-quality content, regardless of whether human or AI-generated,” quipped Sterling. “In reality, it’s going to be more complex. They will need to use more or different signals to catch cynically produced AI content.”

“Many have been complaining about the quality of Google search of late,” acknowledged Goodwin, “but history tells me that when Google is faced with an onslaught of criticism about its search quality, Google tends to respond with major algorithm updates, such as in 2011 when, following months of complaints about content farms ranking well in Google search, Google launched an algorithm update called Panda that specifically attacked that problem.”

### **Fighting AI With AI**

One way search engines can improve their results and maybe reduce user flight is to crack down on “parasitic SEO,” maintained Aaron Masterson, founder of LinkGenius, a maker of a backlink management tool in Austin, Texas. Parasite SEO content is a strategy where someone creates content on established, high-authority websites to piggyback on their reputation and boost the ranking of their own website.

“Stopping parasitic SEO would allow the blogs and niche sites that work hard to provide great content to be able to properly rank on page one of search results,” he told the E-Commerce Times.

The chief way that the search establishment will counter its AI competitors, however, will be to embrace AI themselves, maintained Will Duffield, a policy analyst with the Cato Institute, a Washington, D.C. think tank.

“We’ve seen that with Bing,” he told the E-Commerce Times. “In time, Google is likely to bring its AI products into its mainline search tool. We already see it in Google’s answer panel. It’s a case of if you can’t beat ’em, join ’em.”

“If a certain number of searches that people always made are best answered by a chatbot rather than a link to content somewhere else, then there’s no reason not to use chatbot tools to answer those questions,” he added.

“People often google things that are a poor fit for a ranked list of websites. They just need an answer to something,” he continued. “To an extent, that will obscure any losses in traditional

search because the user is going to be querying traditional search and AI search at the same time or beside each other.”