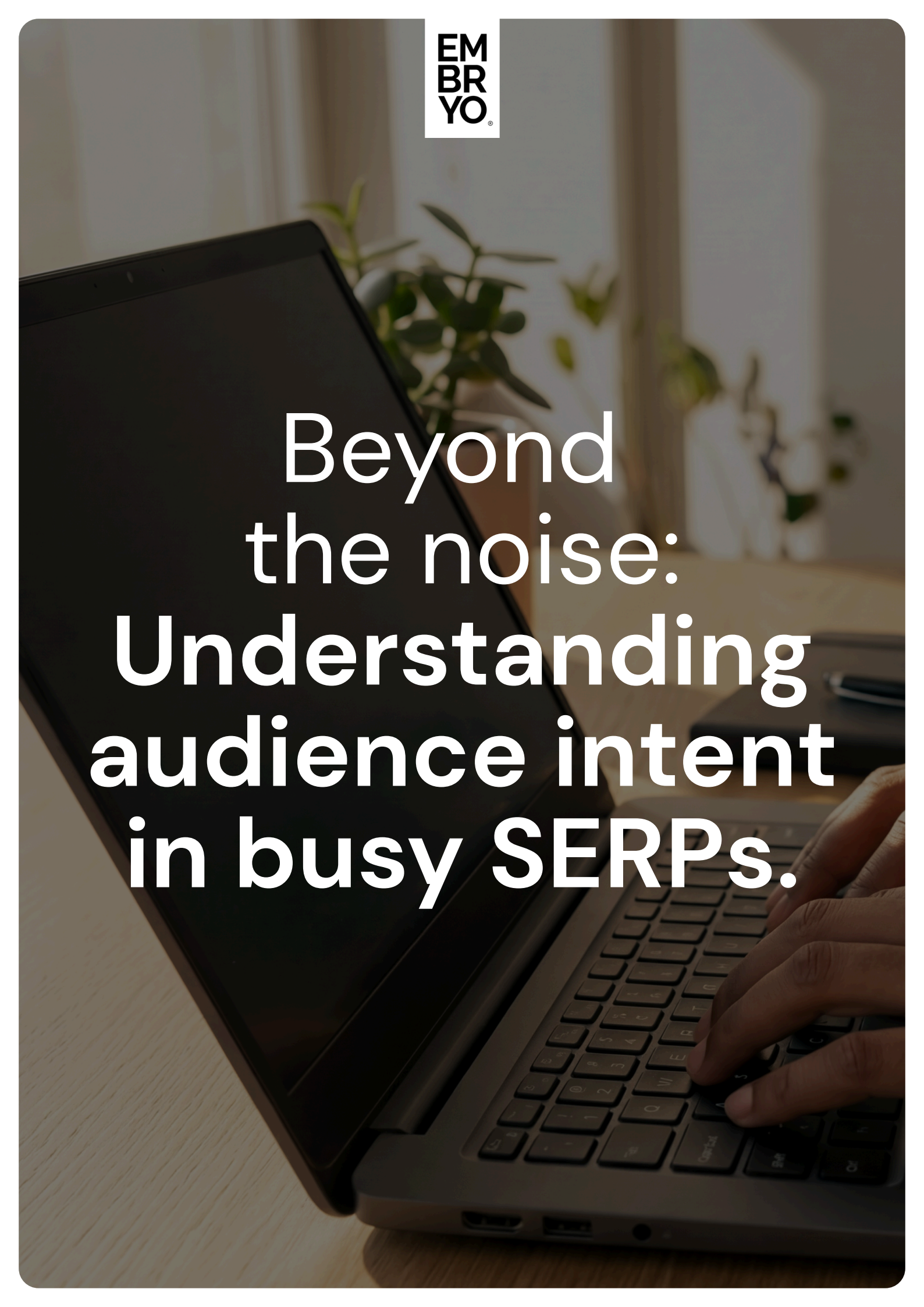


The background of the image is a photograph of a laptop on a wooden desk. A person's hands are visible typing on the keyboard. In the background, there is a small potted plant with green leaves. The image is dimmed and has a dark, semi-transparent overlay to make the white text stand out.

Beyond
the noise:
**Understanding
audience intent
in busy SERPs.**

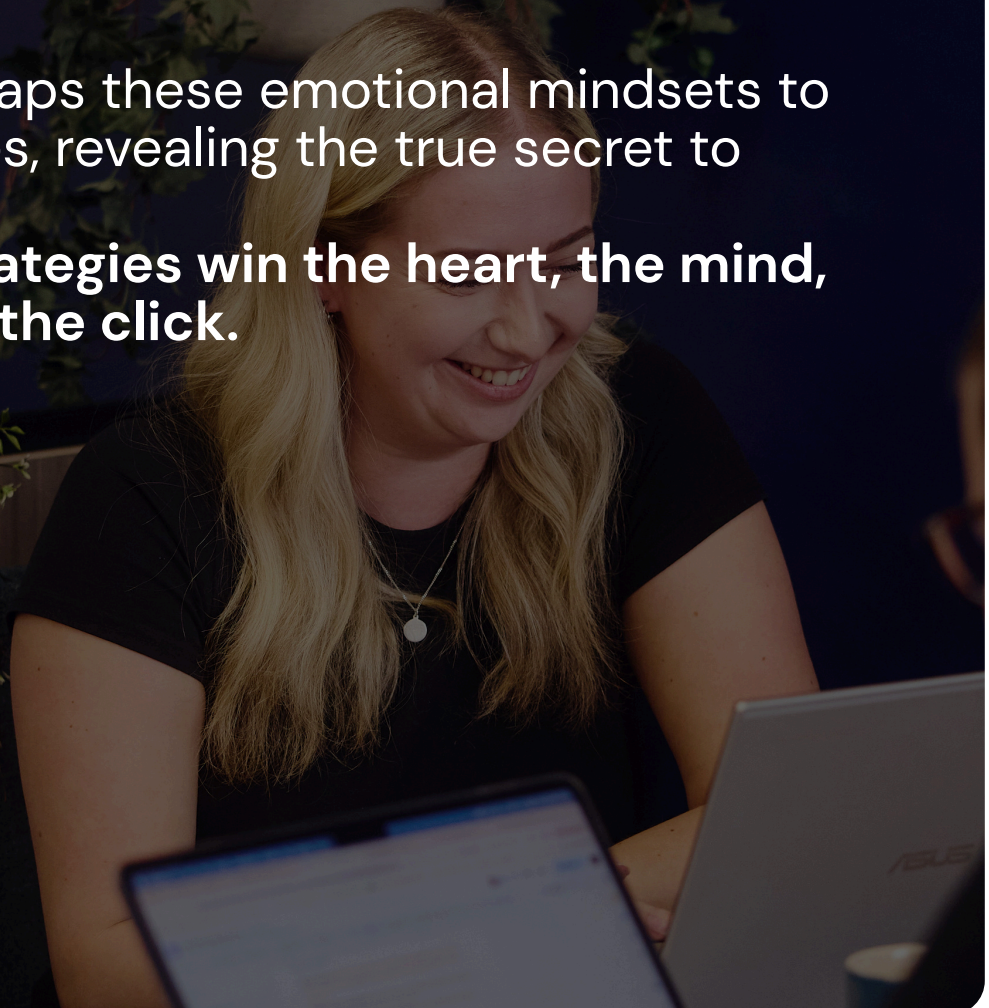
Introduction.

We often build SEO strategies assuming users make logical, considered choices, but the truth is people decide how they feel about a result before they've processed what it says.

The brands winning clicks right now understand this human element; how their audience feels, what they trust, and how those split-second decisions are made.

This resource maps these emotional mindsets to behavioral biases, revealing the true secret to search:

why certain strategies win the heart, the mind, and ultimately, the click.



Remember this?

The image is a screenshot of a Google search interface from 2004. At the top, there are links for 'Web', 'Images', 'Directory', and 'Groups'. The search bar contains the text 'seo'. Below the search bar, the results show 'Results 1 - 10 of about 194,000,000 for seo. (0.20 seconds)'. The first result is 'Search engine optimization - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia'. The second result is 'SEO - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia'. The third result is 'Sponsors for Educational Opportunity - Home'. The fourth result is 'Search Engine Optimization (SEO) - Webmaster Tools Help'. Below the search results, there is a large banner for 'Ask Jeeves'. The banner features a cartoon character of a man in a suit, a list of categories under 'May I Suggest:', a search box, and a 'Have a Question? Just type it in and click Ask!' button. The banner also includes a 'Most Recent Questions About Business' section and a 'What are people asking RIGHT NOW?' section. The banner is titled 'PERSONAL Jeeves is here!'.

Web [Images](#) [Directory](#) [Groups](#) [Web History](#) | [Search settings](#) | [Sign in](#)

Google [Advanced Search](#)

Web [Show options...](#) Results 1 - 10 of about 194,000,000 for seo. (0.20 seconds)

[Search engine optimization - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)
Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of improving the volume or quality of traffic to a web site or a web page (such as a blog) from search ...
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_engine_optimization](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[SEO - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)
SEO may refer to: **Search engine optimization**, the process of improving ranking in search engine results; **Seasoned equity offering**, a new equity issue by a ...
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SEO](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Sponsors for Educational Opportunity - Home](#)
SEO provides superior educational and career programs to young people from underserved communities, addressing inequities in education and opportunity that ...
[www.seo-usa.org/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Search Engine Optimization \(SEO\) - Webmaster Tools Help](#)
SEO is an acronym for "search engine optimization" or "search engine optimizer." Deciding to hire an SEO is a big decision that can potentially improve your ...
[www.google.com/support/webmaster/faq/faq3.html](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Home](#) [About](#) [Help](#) [Corporate Services](#)

May I Suggest:

- PERSONAL JEEVES
- ANSWER POINT
- MONEY
- TRAVEL
- HEALTH
- COMPUTERS
- ENTERTAINMENT
- HOME & FAMILY
- SHOPPING
- ASK JEEVES FOR KIDS!

[TAXING QUESTIONS?](#)
Jeeves Tax Guide to the rescue!

Ask Jeeves™ Ask.com

Have a Question? Just type it in and click Ask!

Ask!

Most Recent Questions About Business:

Ask!

What are people asking RIGHT NOW? →

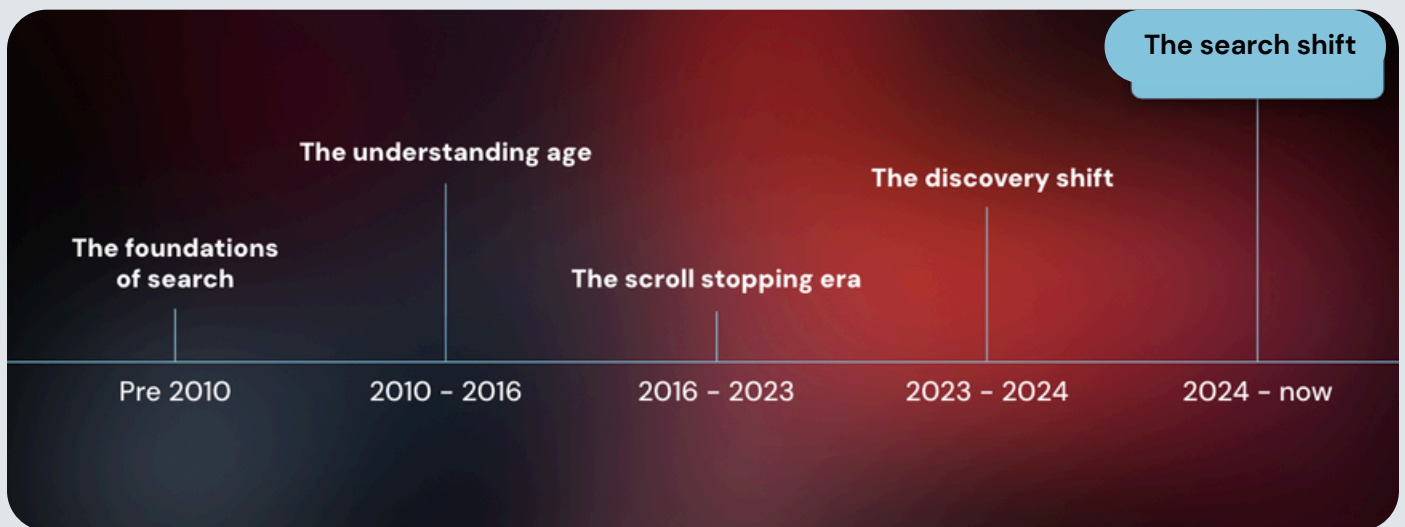
[Make Jeeves Your Homepage](#) [Ask Jeeves U.K.](#) [Advertise On Jeeves](#) [Become an Affiliate](#) [Investor Relations](#)

These were the “olden times”. 10 blue links & people clicked on the first result. If you ranked first here – you won!

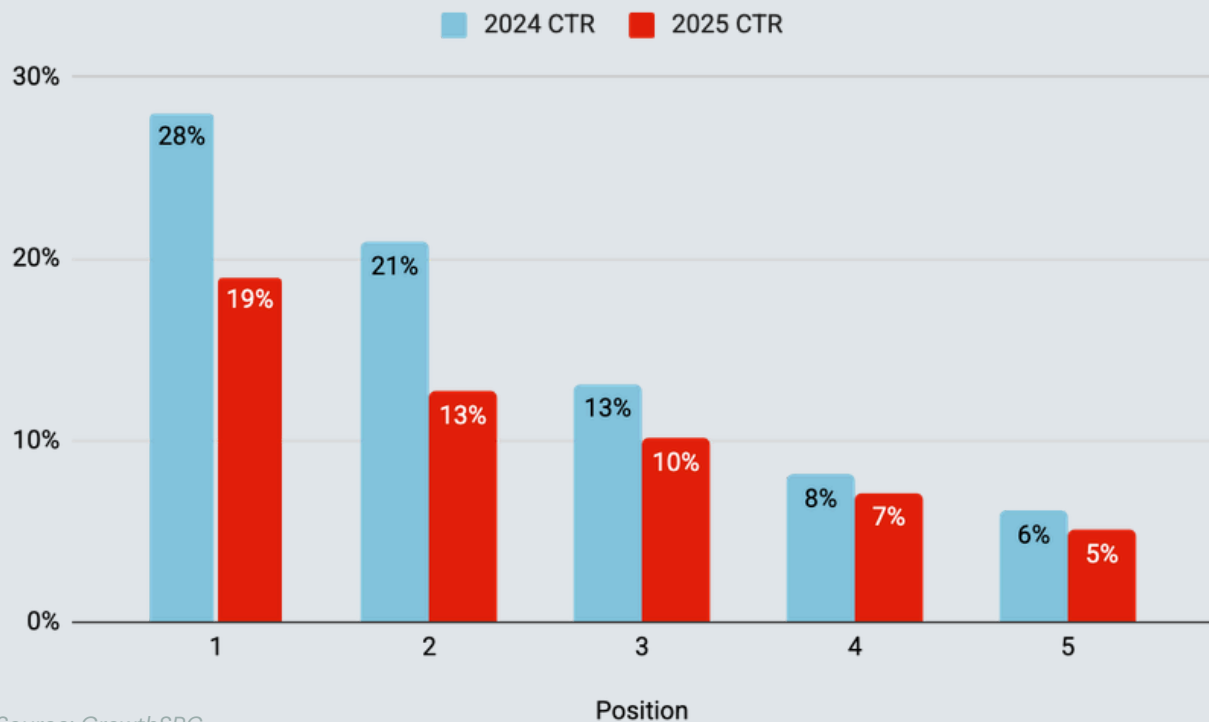
There was less competition for attention because there were fewer things competing within the SERP itself.

Search behaviour has evolved.

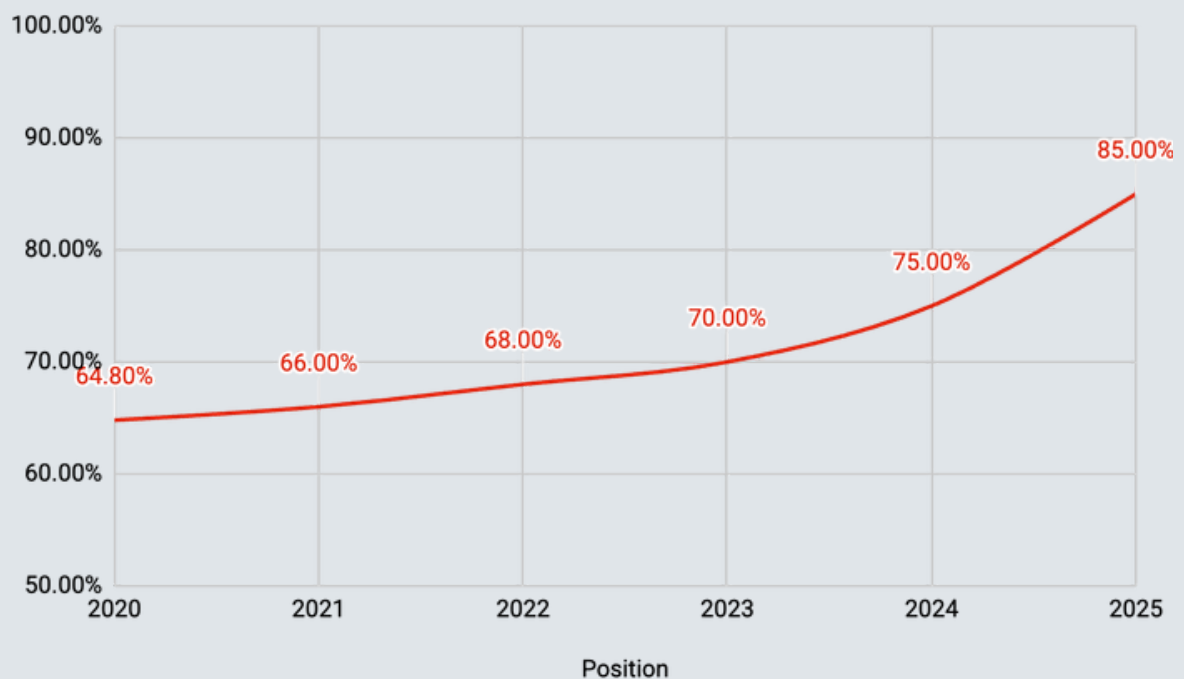
We went from information retrieval to understanding intent to scroll-stopping content to discovery-led behaviour to now... this is what I'd call the '**search shift**.'



What is the search shift? Where people don't just search on Google anymore & every platform has trained audiences to behave differently.



CTRs are dropping, and the top rank is now competing with things like AI overviews etc. so clicks are more competitive

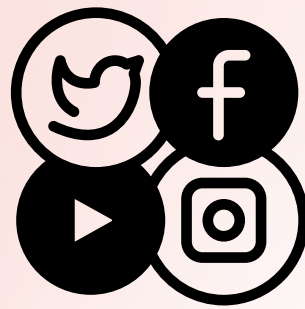


We're seeing this with the rise of zero-click searches too. People will continue to scan, skim and make decisions before the click. So our job isn't just to rank anymore, it's to understand audience behaviour well enough to capture attention wherever the decision is happening

And when clicks do happen from newer discovery platforms, they're still incredibly small.



0.69%



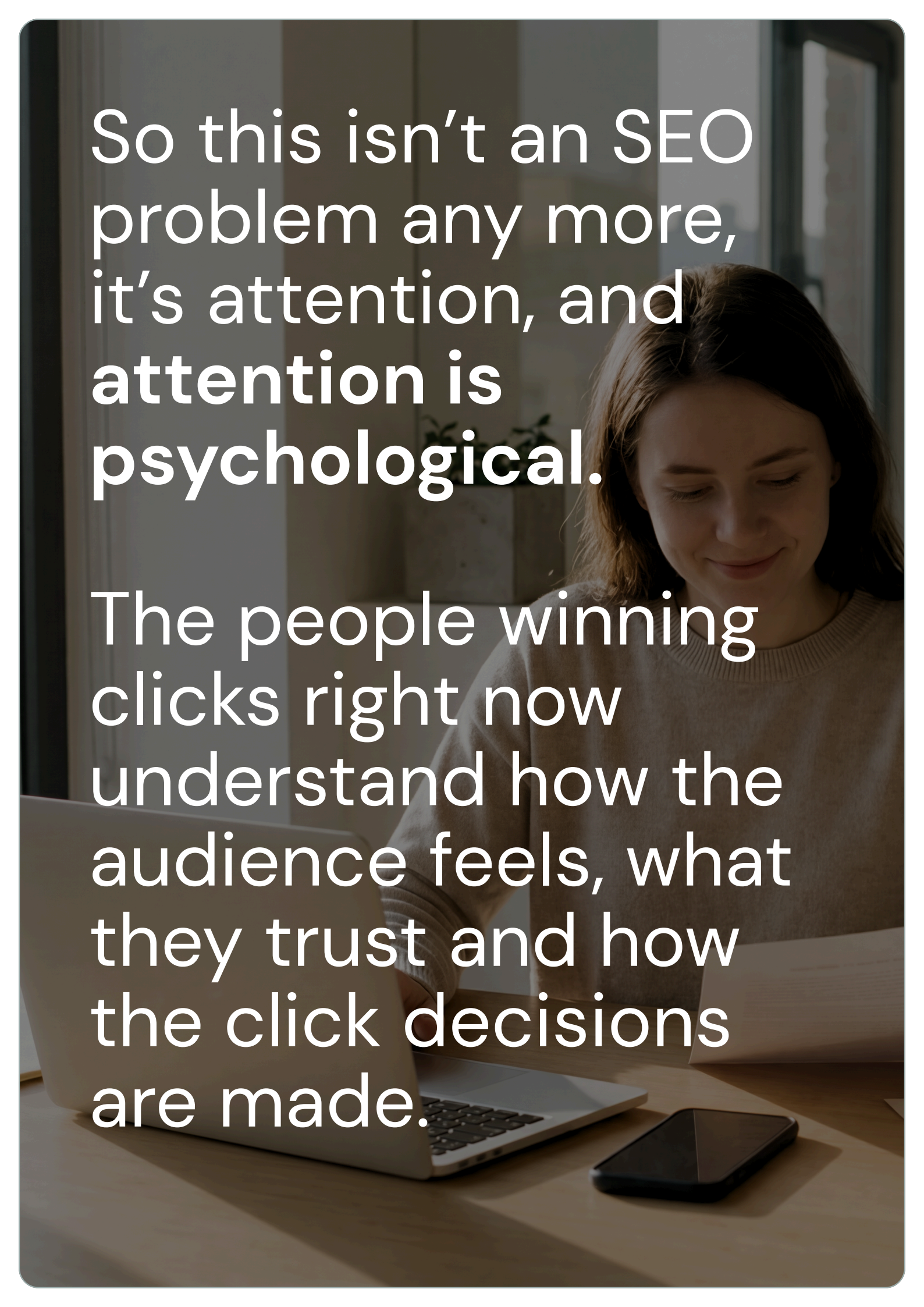
under 1%

Studies are showing ChatGPT CTR sitting around 0.69%, while social media referral CTRs are often under 1%.

So while everyone is racing to 'win' AI search and social discovery, the bigger shift is actually behavioural.

People are discovering more... but clicking less.

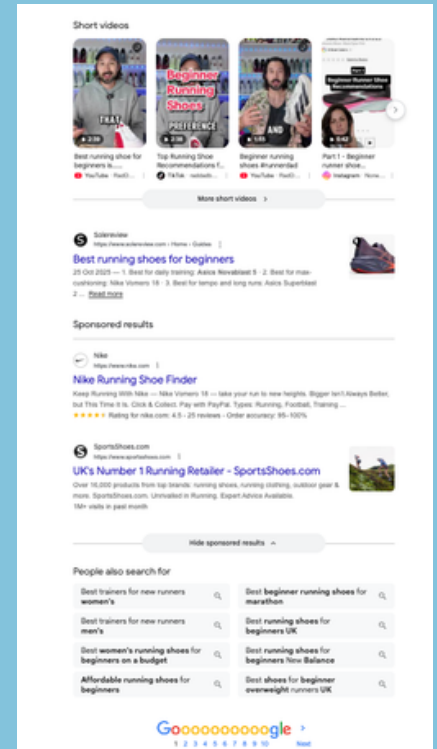
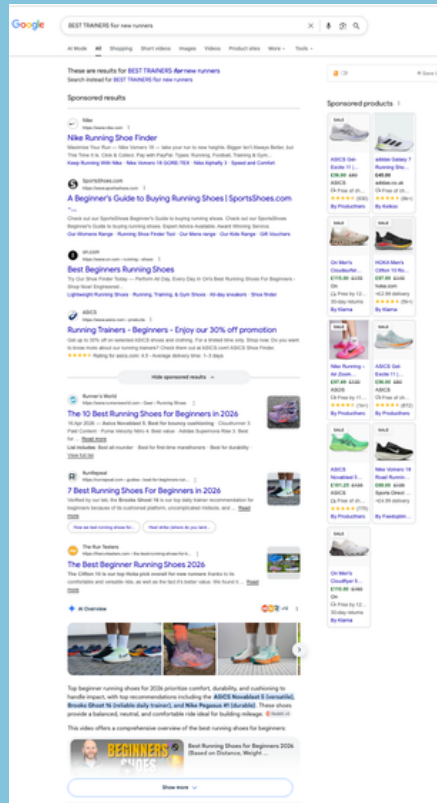
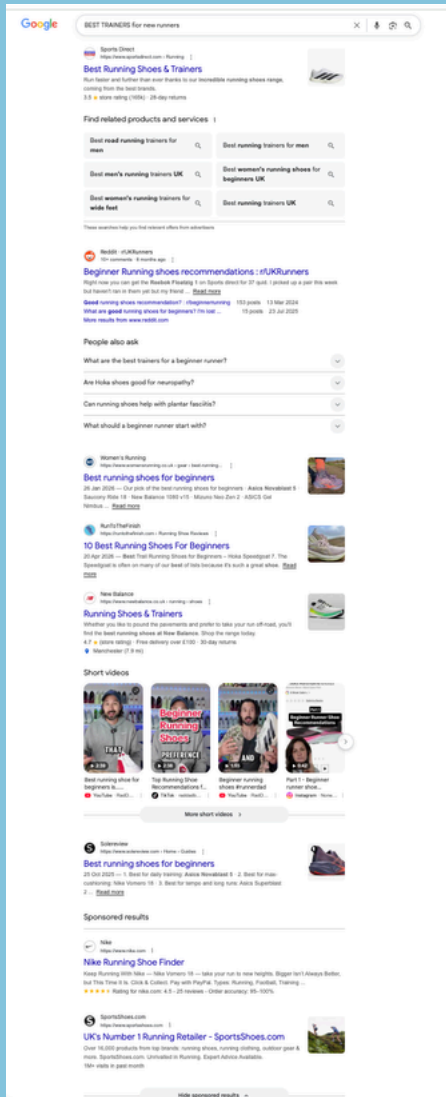
Which means visibility alone isn't enough anymore, **brands need to earn attention, trust and memorability before the click even happens.**

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a light-colored sweater, is sitting at a wooden desk. She is looking down at a laptop screen with a slight smile. On the desk, there is also a smartphone and some papers. The background is a blurred office interior with large windows.

So this isn't an SEO
problem any more,
it's attention, and
**attention is
psychological.**

The people winning
clicks right now
understand how the
audience feels, what
they trust and how
the click decisions
are made.

This is just page one.



This is page one, and audiences are reacting to search results in the same way they react to group chats. People are emotional shortcut takers



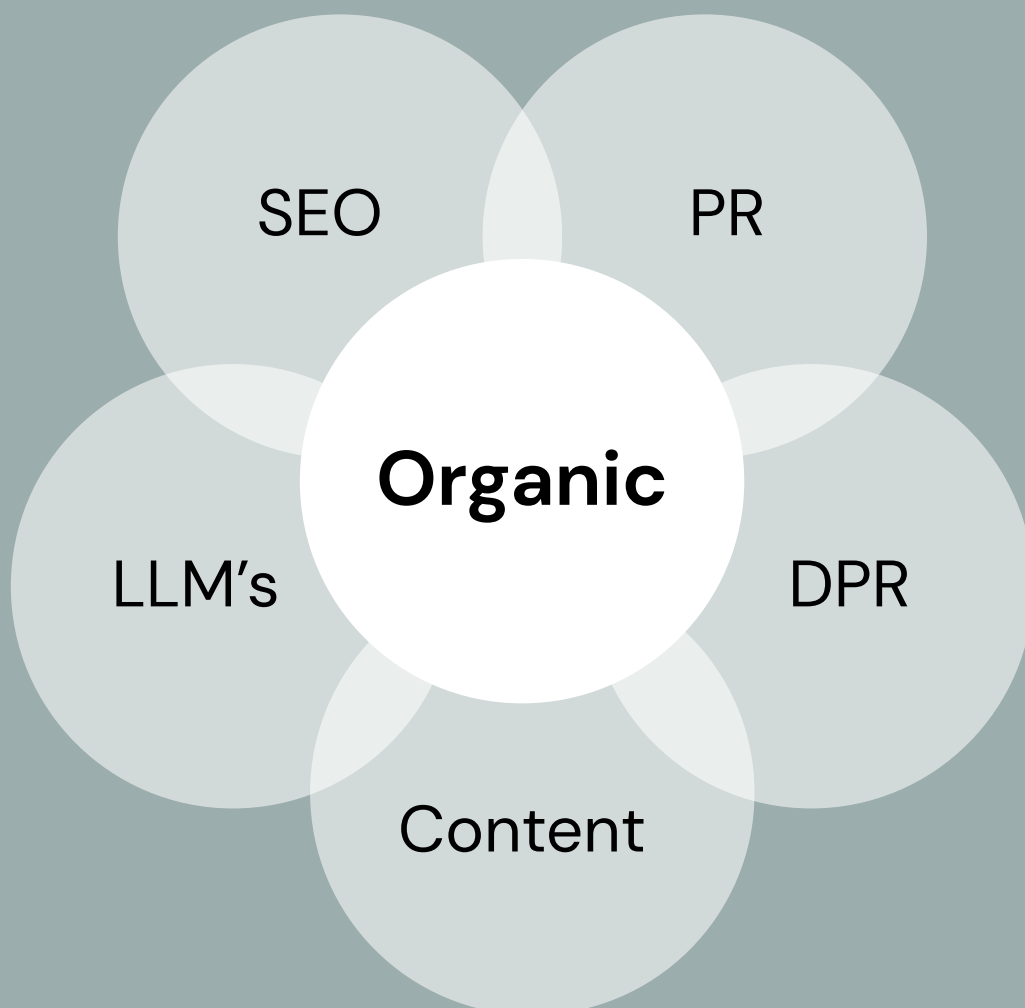
i ain't reading all that

i'm happy for u tho

or sorry that happened

So if you don't understand your audience, you don't get the click.

This is why we need to stop talking about SEO in isolation – organic visibility now sits across all of these & they all influence each other.



This is how we think people behave online...



Search



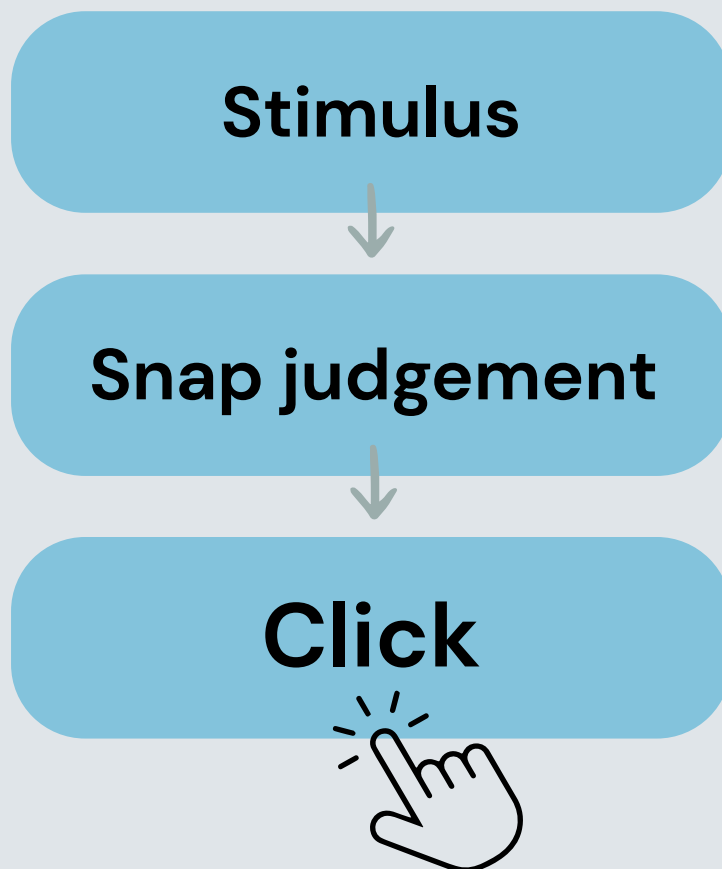
Look



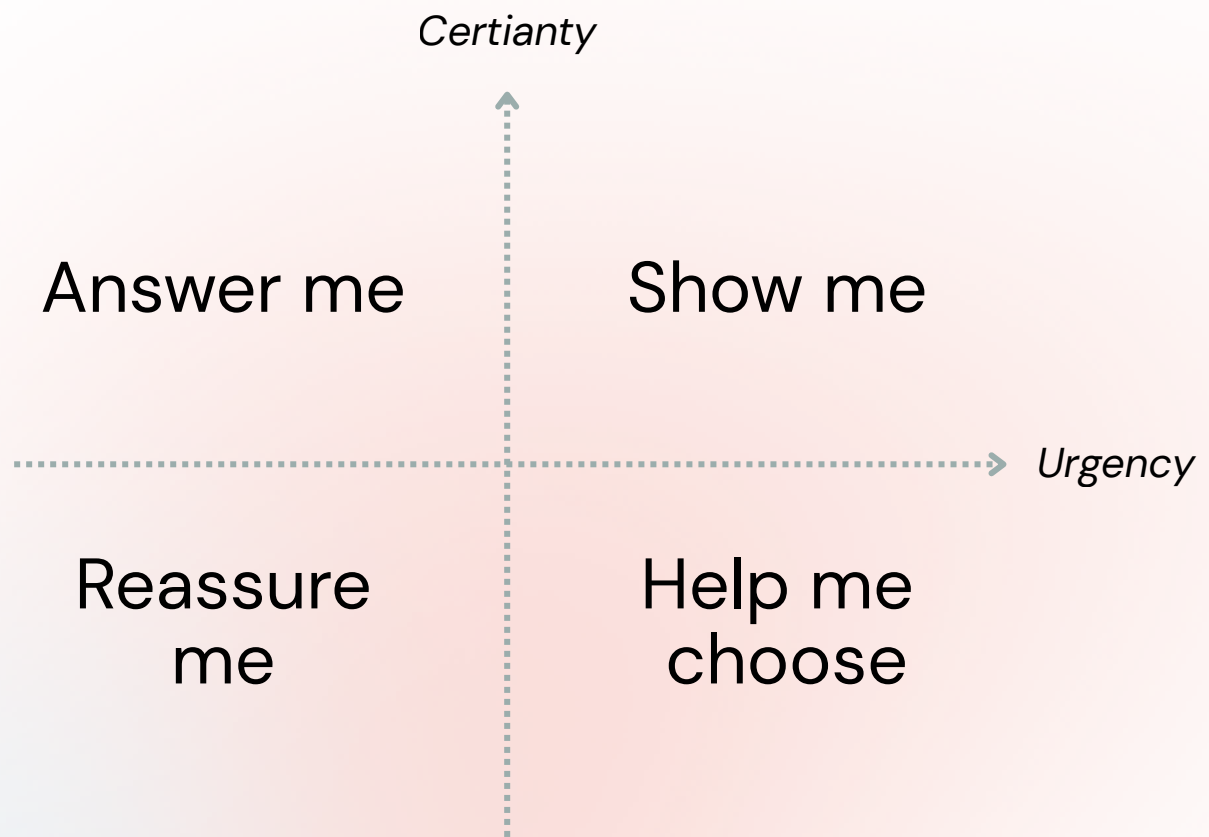
Choose



How people actually search ...



We build entire SEO strategies around the idea that users are making considered choices. But neuroscience tells us that most decisions, including which search result to click, are made before the conscious mind has even caught up. Which means people often decide how they feel about a result before they've even processed what it says.



We talk a lot about search intent in SEO. Informational, navigational, transactional. But those are our categories, not our audience's.

Nobody sits down and thinks 'I'm going to do some informational searching today.' They sit down feeling something. And what they feel determines what they need to see before they'll click.

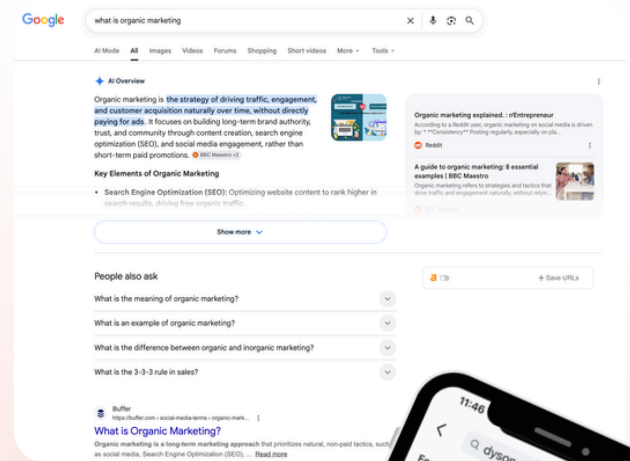
Answer me.

Emotional state:

I need this resolved quickly

Search behaviour:

Specific, traditional SERPs, who, what, where, why how.



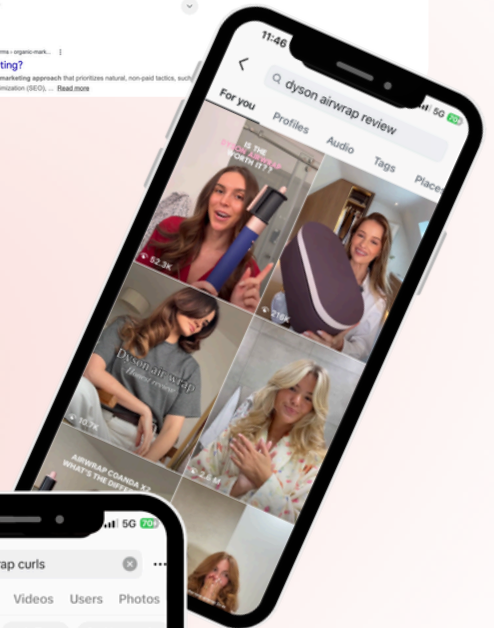
Reassure me.

Emotional state:

I've nearly decided but I'm not sure I can trust it

Search behaviour:

Reviews, forums, UGC



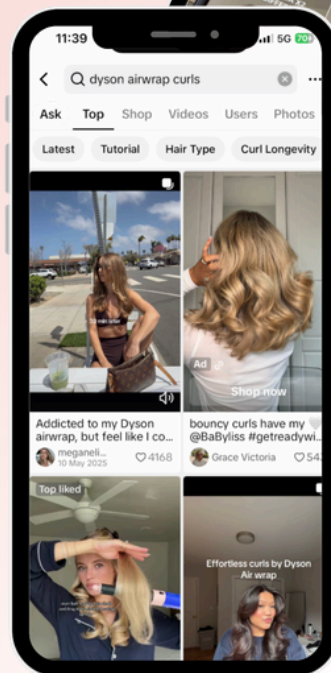
Show me.

Emotional state:

I know what I want, but I need to see it

Search behaviour:

Visual led queries, product searches, tutorials



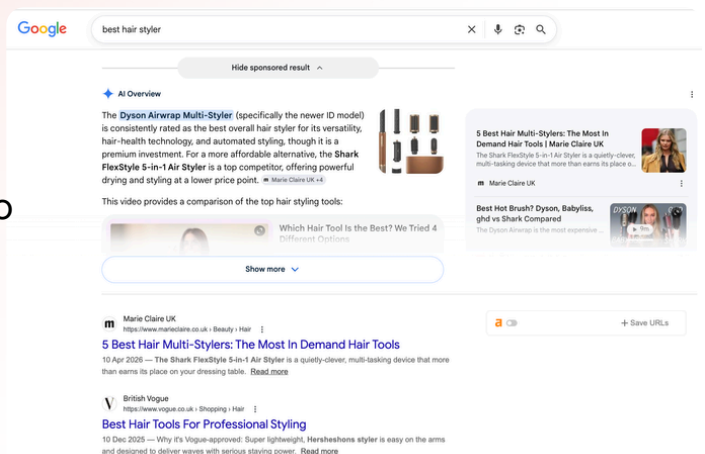
Help me choose.

Emotional state:

I'm overwhelmed and need someone to do the thinking for me

Search behaviour:

"Best" searches, brand awareness, comparisons, DPR placements



**Every result in the
SERP gets filtered
into two buckets
almost instantly:**

Notice

Ignore

Most brands are fighting just to be seen

**Because once a
result is noticed, the
audience
immediately asks
themselves:**

'Do I trust this?'

And that decision is usually subconscious.

Notice

Ignore

Trust

So the real goal isn't just visibility.

It's moving from noticed...to trusted!

Authority bias.

We trust what feels credible.

Authority bias is about perceived expertise and legitimacy.

People are more likely to trust results that look official, knowledgeable or established, even before engaging with the content itself.

That could be:

- expert commentary
- well-known publishers
- statistics and research
- industry credentials
- thought leadership
- strong brand presentation

Authority makes people think:
'These people probably know what they're talking about.'



GOV.UK



Familiarity bias.

We trust what we recognise.

Familiarity bias is different, it's not about expertise, it's about exposure.

People are more likely to click brands they've:

- **seen before**
- **heard mentioned**
- **watched on social**
- **noticed in ads**
- **seen creators talk about**
- **encountered repeatedly online**

Even if its not the best result

Familiarity creates comfort.

And in crowded SERPs, comfort often wins over logic."



Social proof.

We trust what other people trust.

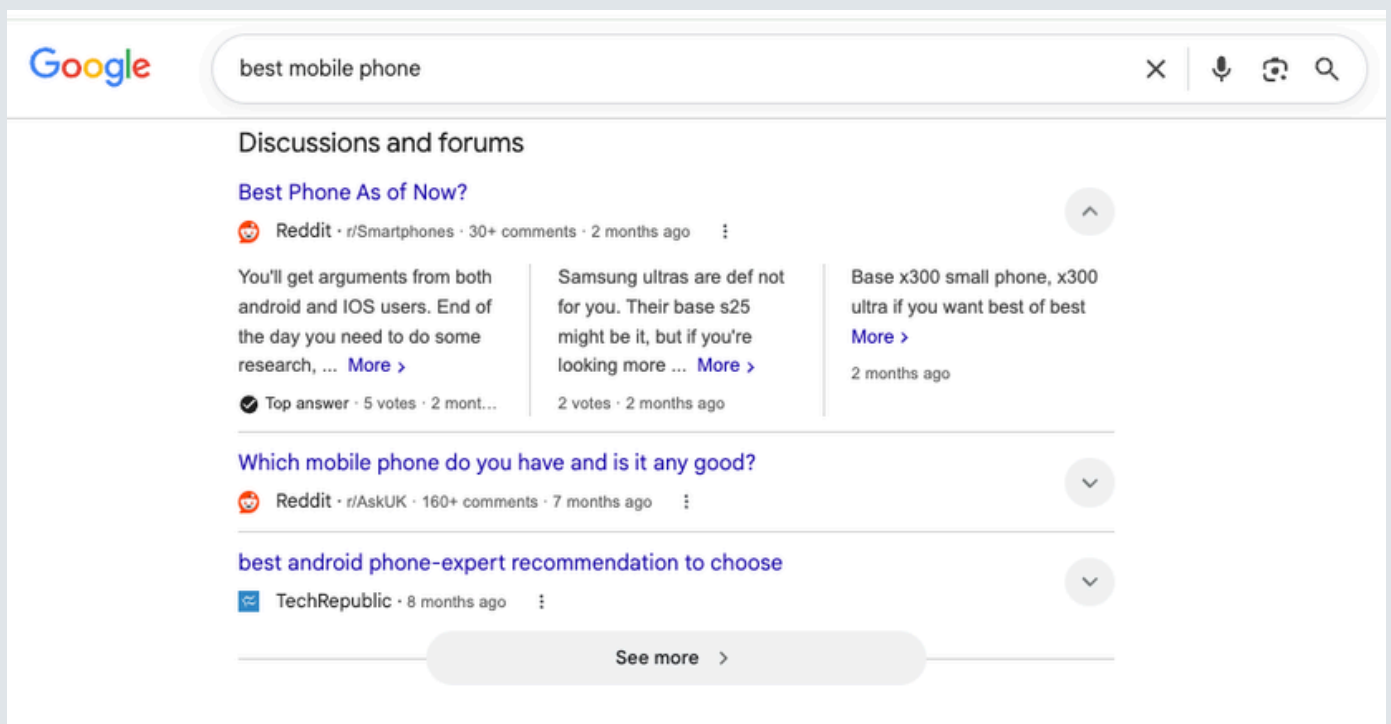
When audiences feel uncertain, they look for reassurance from others.

That's why things like:

- reviews
- Reddit threads
- TikTok comments
- star ratings
- testimonials
- UGC

... have become such powerful click drivers.

“People want validation before they commit.”



Visual prominence bias.

We notice what stands out.

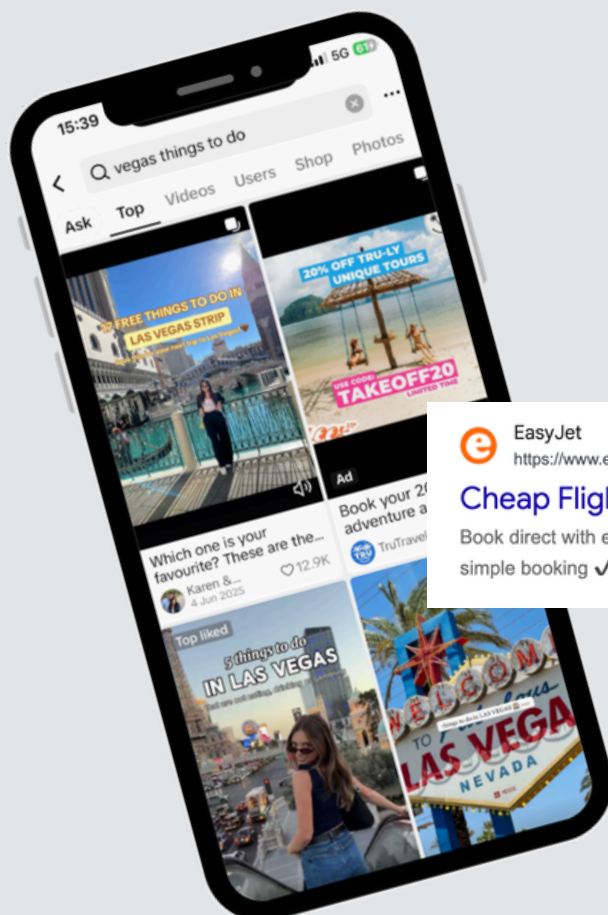
SERPs are visual environments now.

Images, videos, ratings, thumbnails and formatting all influence where attention goes first.

People naturally gravitate towards results that:

- **catch the eye**
- **break patterns**
- **feel more engaging**
- **look easier to consume**

The most visually dominant result often gets the first consideration.



EasyJet

<https://www.easyjet.com> › cheap-flights

Cheap Flights ✈️ | **Compare Airfares & Book Flights**

Book direct with easyJet ✈️ **Compare cheap flights** ✓ Access the latest deals & offers ✓ Secure & simple booking ✓ Direct, quality customer service.

Cognitive ease.

We choose what feels easiest.

People rarely want to work hard to make decisions online.

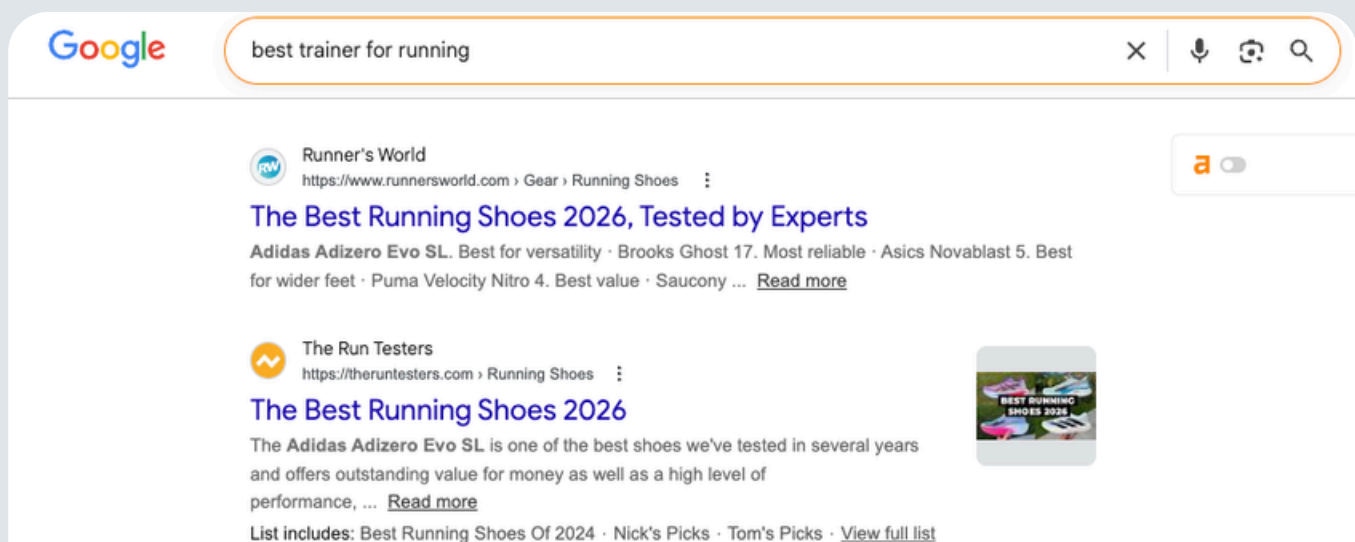
They're drawn towards results that feel:

- **clear**
- **simple**
- **familiar**
- **quick to process**

This is why, the below, perform so well:

- **strong titles**
- **obvious answers**
- **clean formatting**
- **featured snippets**
- **AI summaries**

When something feels mentally effortless, it feels safer to click



Turn bias into a brief.

Can we turn behavioural psychology into marketing strategy?

Because every bias maps to activity.

Bias

Authority

Familiarity

Social proof

Visual prominence

Cognitive ease

What this tells us

DPR, brand mentions,
thought leadership

Brand awareness,
social visibility

Reviews, UGC, Reddit

Schema, metadata
tests, video

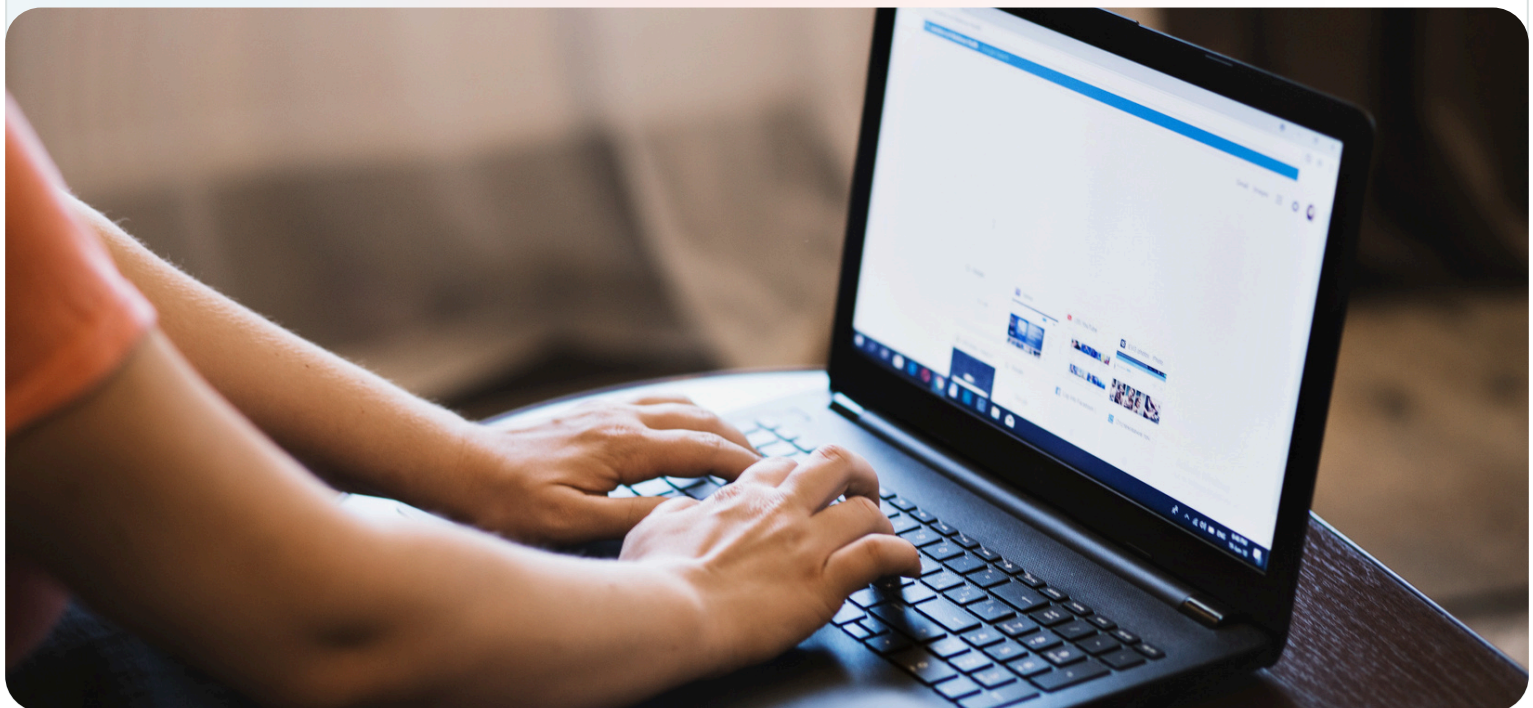
Clear titles, featured
snippets, AI overviews

Clicks are driven by a feeling...

... which means every SERP is really a mix of emotional needs and psychological shortcuts.

And those needs change depending on the audience mindset. Because someone searching in a moment of urgency behaves very differently to someone who's overwhelmed, uncertain or looking for reassurance.

So when we map these biases back to the emotional states we talked about earlier... we start to understand why certain types of results win the click.



Answer me.

Cognitive ease & authority win when urgency is high.

- When people need answers quickly, they gravitate towards results that feel clear, credible and immediate.

Reassure me.

Social proof & familiarity reduce risk.

- When audiences feel uncertain, they look for signals that other people have already validated the decision.

Show me.

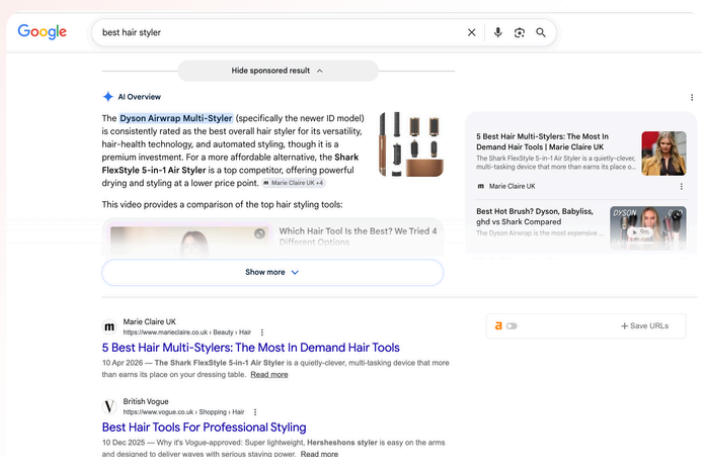
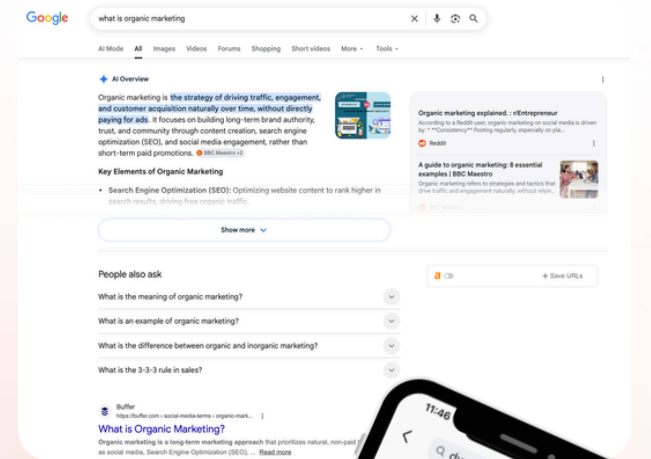
Visual prominence earns attention first.

- When people want inspiration or proof, the results that stand out visually get processed, & trusted, faster.

Help me choose.

Authority & familiarity simplify decisions.

- When choices feel overwhelming, audiences lean towards brands, and sources that feel established, recognisable and easy to trust



The 5 minute SERP read.

How do we actually use all information explained in the pages before?

1 Format?

What the audience wants?

2 Brands?

Which bias is winning?

3 Trust signals?

Which bias the audience needs satisfied?

4 Q's answered?

Where is the decision being made?

This immediately tells us:

- What audiences want
- What they trust
- Whether this is even a battle worth fighting

Stop chasing every SERP.

We need to stop thinking about Organic as just a rankings battle.

Because in some SERPs, the audience has already subconsciously decided what feels trustworthy before they even click.

And that's why not every SERP is worth chasing.

The real question becomes:

'Can we realistically build enough trust to compete here?'"



Brand is the shortcut to building trust.

This is why brand and Organic can't really operate separately anymore. Because the brands winning clicks in search are often the brands building attention everywhere else first.

All of it feeds into how familiar and trustworthy a brand feels when it finally appears in the SERP.

And that's important because Organic doesn't just shape brand visibility anymore...

Brand visibility shapes Organic performance too.

The stronger the brand, the easier it becomes to earn trust, attention and ultimately the click."



Familiarity & bias in action.

This becomes even more interesting when you look at the scale of branded search behaviour.

Almost half of all searches are branded.

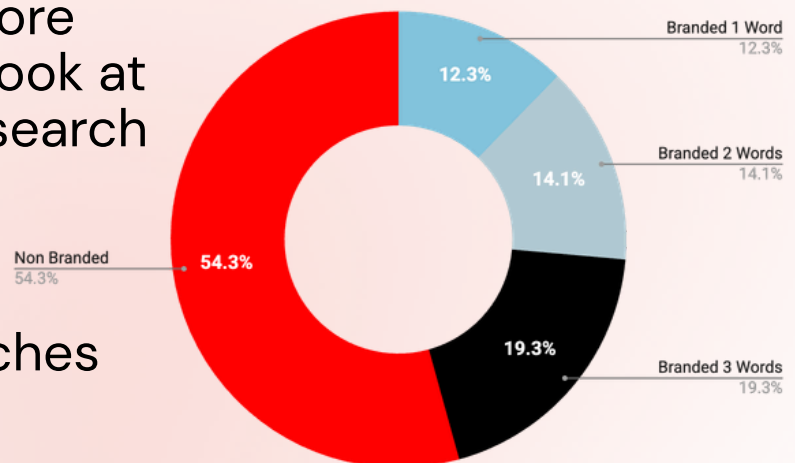
That's massive.

Because it shows that while generic search is incredibly important for discovery, people naturally gravitate towards brands they already know as they move closer to making decisions.

That links directly back to the biases we talked about earlier.

Familiarity bias makes recognised brands feel safer. Authority bias makes established brands feel more credible.

So yes, generic visibility gets you discovered.
But brand familiarity is often what actually wins the click.



Familiarity & bias in action.



Two brands I think are really interesting examples of this are Medicube and Poppi.

Medicube is a skincare brand that exploded through TikTok and creator-led content. Poppi positioned itself as a modern soda alternative through social-first branding and huge cultural visibility.

Neither brand built growth through traditional search-first strategies.

They built familiarity first.

Through:

- creators
- social visibility
- PR
- community conversation
- repeated exposure

And now we're seeing that visibility spill directly into Google search demand.

People aren't just searching the category anymore ... they're searching the brands themselves.

Which is a really important reminder that smaller brands can absolutely shape search behaviour too.

You don't need decades of awareness. You just need enough visibility to become recognisable.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard. The hands are positioned over the keyboard, with fingers pressing down on the keys. The person is wearing a silver metal watch on their left wrist and a thin gold ring on the ring finger of their right hand. The background is slightly blurred, showing the laptop's keyboard and the person's arms. Overlaid on the image is a large, white, sans-serif text that reads: "The brands winning attention in search are often the brands already winning attention everywhere else." The text is centered and spans across the middle of the image.

The brands
winning attention
in search are
often the brands
already winning
attention
everywhere else.

What to do next?



Run the 5 minute SERP read



Audit which bias you're losing to



Consider how you can build your brand outside of Google

Because rankings might earn visibility ... but **familiarity & trust are what earn the click.**



Transforming potential. Fuelling growth.

Growth partners for ambitious businesses.



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