



SERP Psychology

From WHAT people search
to HOW they search.



Think about the last thing you Googled. Now think about which result you clicked, and why you picked that one. A bit harder, isn't it?

Most of us couldn't tell you. And honestly, most of our reporting can't either. We know exactly what our audience typed. We have almost no idea what happened in the four seconds after the results loaded.

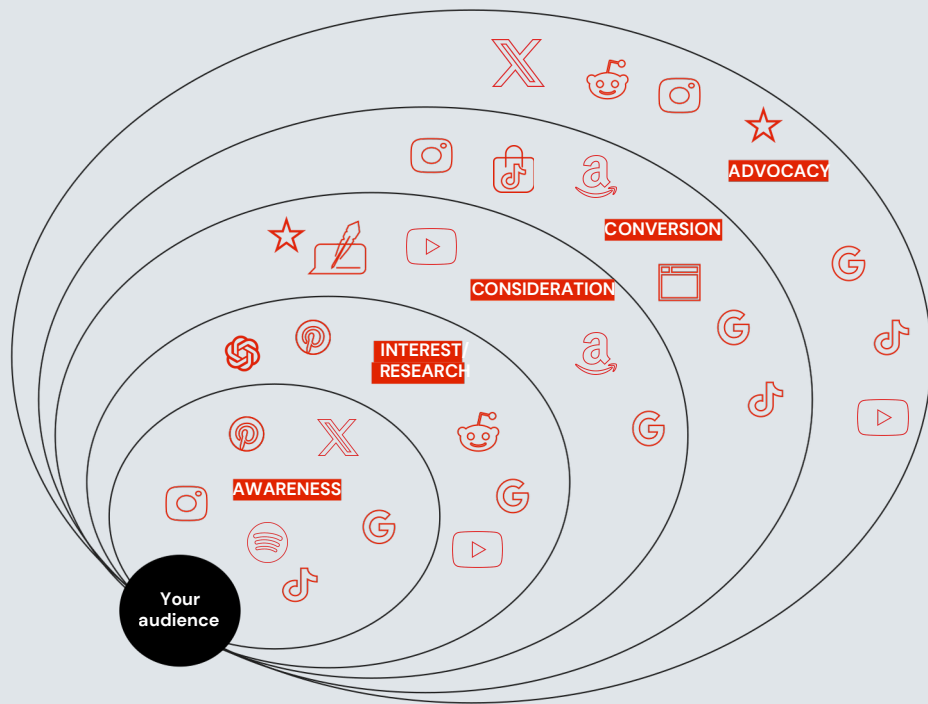
That's what this resource is about.

「We've spent YEARS
understanding what
people search.

But what happens next?

The search orbit

The audience journey isn't linear anymore – audiences jump in and out of different stages and use different platforms at different times.



Over 40 SERP features

When users land on Google in particular, there is SO much competing for their attention.



So where do the users'
eyes typically go?



things to do in brighton



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About 18,600,000 results (0.46 seconds)

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Tripadvisor

https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk

THE 10 BEST Things to Do in Brighton (2024)

Top Attractions in Brighton: See reviews and photos of must-see attractions in Brighton, East Sussex.

Time Out

https://www.timeout.com

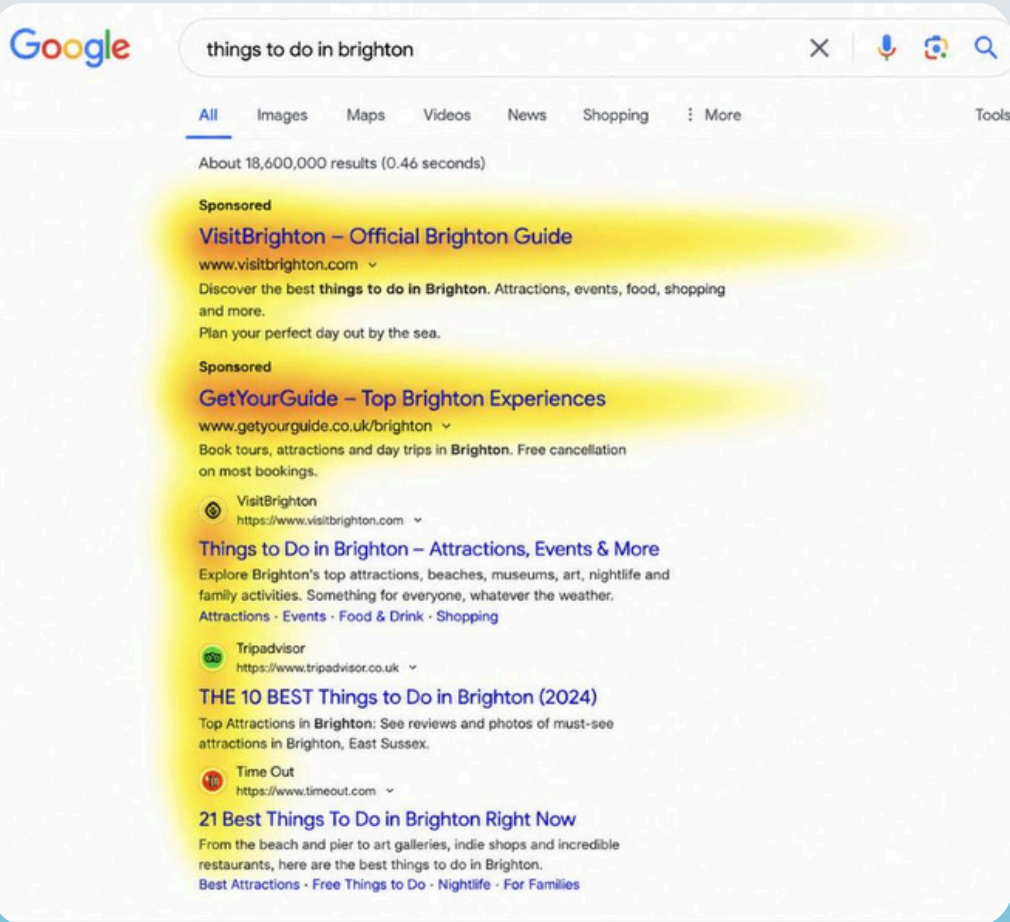
21 Best Things To Do in Brighton Right Now

From the beach and pier to art galleries, indie shops and incredible restaurants, here are the best things to do in Brighton.

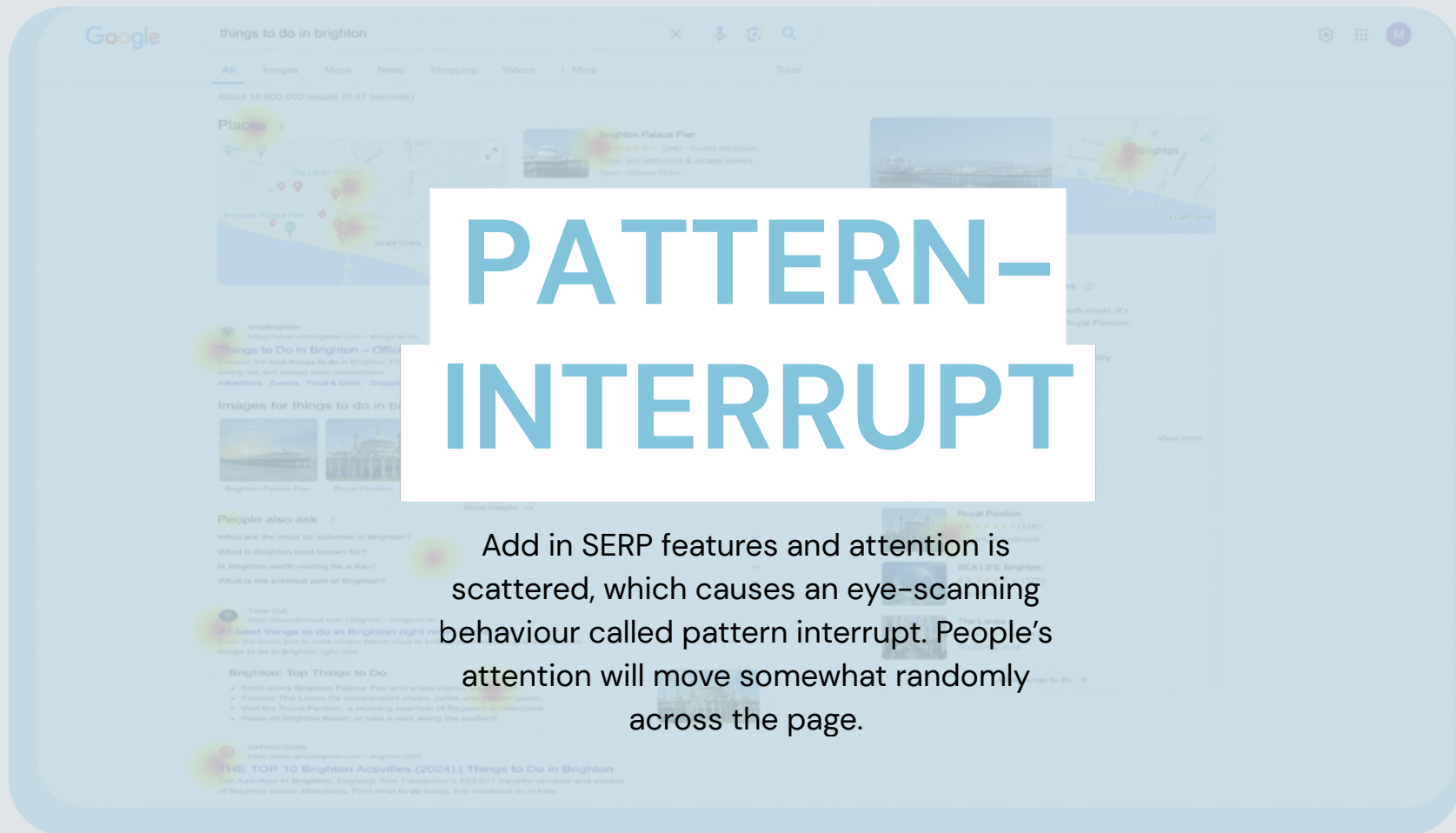
Best Attractions · Free Things to Do · Nightlife · For Families

F-PATTERN

F-pattern is an eye-scanning behaviour where people scan across the top, and then down with shorter scans as they go.

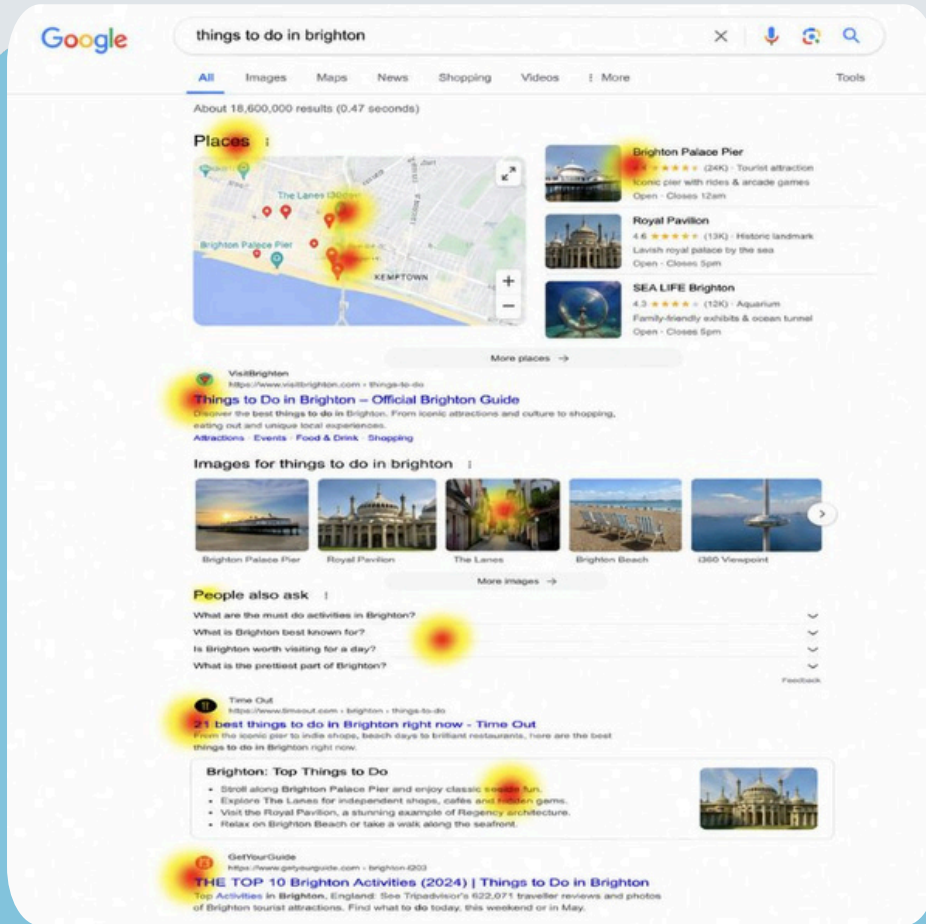


- Eyes scan left-to-right across the top, then drop down and scan a shorter second line, then trail down the left side, scanning vertically.
- Classic for text-heavy, list-style content (traditional blue-link SERPs, blog listicles).
- Why it happens: Users front-load attention on the first result(s), then skim-scan down for a match, reading less as they go.
- SERP relevance: Still applies to organic listings below AI Overviews/ads, but the "F" is getting shorter as more gets pushed above it.



PATTERN-INTERRUPT

Add in SERP features and attention is scattered, which causes an eye-scanning behaviour called pattern interrupt. People's attention will move somewhat randomly across the page.



- Not a scan shape like the others; it's what happens when something breaks the expected flow and grabs a fixation out of sequence.
- Triggered by visual anomalies: an image, a bright CTA, a star rating, a bolded stat, a face.
- SERP relevance: This is why featured snippets, video thumbnails, and rich results outperform plain text — they hijack the pattern before the user reaches them "in order".
- This is why ranking #1 in the old sense doesn't guarantee attention anymore; the SERP trained your eyes out of the F-pattern.

Brand loyalty is eroding

The SAP loyalty index shows that true brand loyalty is down 5% since 2024, and this is the biggest decline they've seen in the past five years.

“Optimise for humans”

This is what we've been saying for years. But we meant “make the page better for when they arrive” – we were optimising for the click & humans are making decisions before they do this.

What we need to do now is optimise before the click.

Optimise for the decision.

SERP Psychology

SERP psychology is a strategic approach that prioritises how humans interact with search results, rather than how algorithms rank them.

How do we talk about search behaviour?

Informational

Navigational

Commercial

Transactional

We talk a lot about search intent in SEO. 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."

We need to reframe from what they are searching to what makes them click.

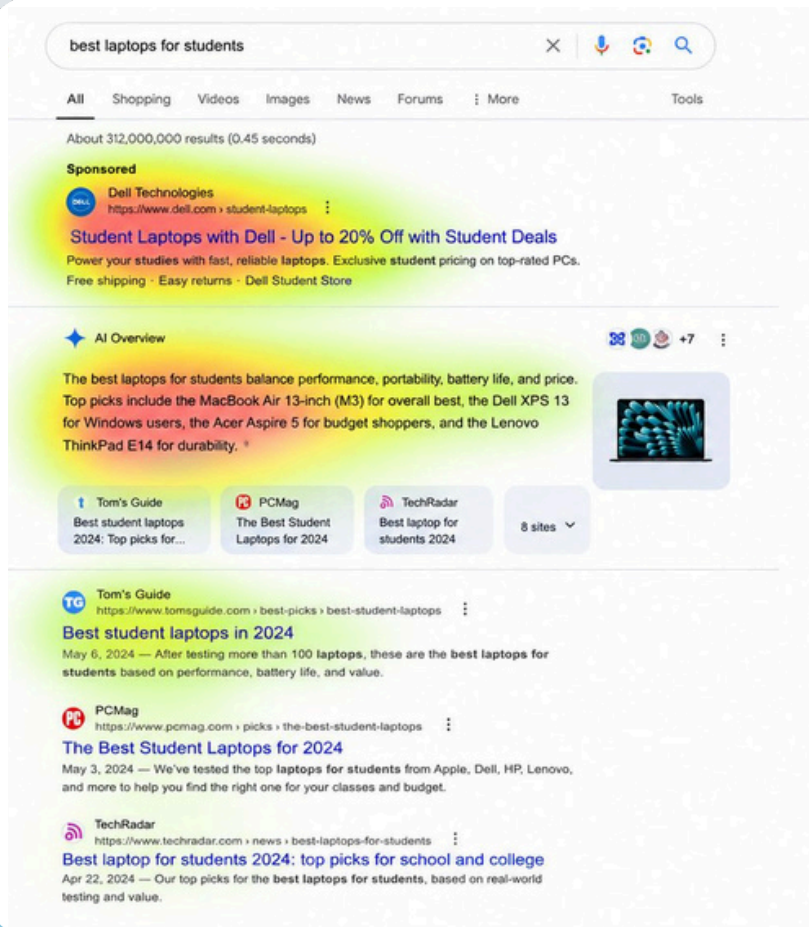
Intent is a useful tool for understanding what search engines perceive the user's intention is – it isn't a true reflection of audience behaviour

recommendations, comparison, proof, evidence, data, statistics, imagery, thumbnail, size, placement, prominence, position, movement, faces, names, brands, wording, headlines, numbers, lists, questions, promises, answers, benefits, outcome guarantees, risk reduction, validation, consensus, endorsement, trust badges, webinars, sitelinks, rich results, featured snippets, AI citations, images, videos, maps, experts, influencers, community, peer opinion, personalisation, location, proximity, very, convenience, speed, ease, accessibility, low effort, familiarity, consistency, then, perceived authority, perceived relevance, perceived risk, confidence, safety, clarity, usefulness, intent match, format, visual hierarchy, pattern interruption, distinct curiosity gaps, surprise, controversy, aspiration, identity, belonging, status, emotional relatability, confidence, credibility, transparency, honesty, detail, depth, simplicity, reassurance, proof points, guarantees, accreditations, credentials, expert authorship, third-party mentions, brand mentions, price transparency, free availability, time-saving, exclusivity, urgency. recommendations, comparison, proof, evidence, data, statistics, imagery, thumbnail, size, placement, prominence, position, movement, faces, names, brands, wording, headlines, numbers, lists, questions, promises, answers, benefits, outcome guarantees, risk reduction, validation, consensus, endorsement, trust badges, webinars, sitelinks, rich results, featured snippets, AI citations, images, videos, maps, experts, influencers, community, peer opinion, personalisation, location, proximity, very, convenience, speed, ease, accessibility, low effort, familiarity, consistency, then, perceived authority, perceived relevance, perceived risk, confidence, safety, clarity, usefulness, intent match, format, visual hierarchy, pattern interruption, distinct curiosity gaps, surprise, controversy, aspiration, identity, belonging, status, emotional relatability,

So what triggers a click?

These are all cognitive biases, mental shortcuts that help to explain some of these snap judgements. They aren't buttons we can press to guarantee a sale, but we can explore them to understand what might be influencing someone, and then test our theories.

Let's look at some examples...



Anchoring bias

The first result is the benchmark

Similar to the F pattern we saw before

The AI Overview the MacBook Air as the best overall, paid mentions Dell. Every result below it is now being read as "do you agree with that or not?" If you're not in that summary, you're arguing against the anchor.

best treatment for migraines

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About 32,300,000 results (0.46 seconds)

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/migraines>

Migraine Treatment and Prevention – NINDS
Learn about medications and nonmedication treatments that can help prevent migraines and relieve symptoms.
[Medications](#) · [Nonmedication Treatments](#) · [Clinical Trials](#)

Mayo Clinic
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/departments-centers/headache-clinic>

Headache & Migraine Clinic | Mayo Clinic
Expert care for migraines and other headache disorders. Personalized treatment options to help you find relief.
4.6 ★★★★★ (1,237 reviews) | Medical clinic · Rochester, MN

People also ask

What is the most effective treatment for migraines?
Acute treatments like triptans and preventive medications such as beta-blockers and CGRP inhibitors are effective for many people. Source: [Mayo Clinic](#)

Are there natural treatments that help with migraines?
Yes. Supplements like magnesium and riboflavin, regular sleep, and hydration may help reduce migraine frequency. Source: [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#)

How can I prevent migraines?
Identify and avoid triggers, manage stress, maintain a regular routine, and talk with your doctor about preventive treatment options. Source: [American Migraine Foundation](#)

When should I see a doctor for migraines?
If migraines are frequent, severe, or interfere with daily life, consult a healthcare professional. Source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

WebMD
<https://www.webmd.com/migraines-headaches/guide>

Migraine Treatment: Medications, Therapies, and Lifestyle Tips
Learn about prescription and over-the-counter medications, alternative therapies, and lifestyle changes that can help relieve migraine pain.

Healthline
<https://www.healthline.com/health/migraine-treatment>

Migraine Treatment Options and Home Remedies
Find out which can help ease migraine pain, including medication options, lifestyle changes, and at-home remedies.

MAYO CLINIC

Mayo Clinic
Medical clinic in Rochester, Minnesota

[Website](#) [Directions](#) [Call](#)

4.6 ★★★★★ 1,237 Google reviews
Highly rated by patients for quality and

Mayo Clinic is a nonprofit academic medical center providing expert, compassionate care to patients around the world. Ranked among the best nationally for neurology and neurosurgery.

200 First St SW, Rochester, MN 55905

Open 24 hours

(507) 284-2511

[mayoclinic.org](#)

Verified organization

Authority bias

We trust what looks official

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

These signals could be

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

Brands should ask themselves: What makes you qualified to answer this and is that evidence clear?

hotels in barcelona

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About 108,000,000 results (0.45 seconds)

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B. Booking.com
https://www.booking.com › barcelona › hotels

Barcelona Hotels – Summer Sale Ends in 02:14:09
Save up to 40% on Barcelona hotels. Don't miss out – prices rise when the timer ends.
🔥 Only today: extra 15% off | Free cancellation on most rooms | No booking fees

📈 **Prices rising for your dates**
Hotel prices in Barcelona are 18% higher than last week for Jul 12 – Jul 16.

Hotels | Barcelona

Sat, Jul 12 < Wed, Jul 16 > 2 ✓ Top picks Budget Luxury Deals

	Hotel Barcelona 1882 4.6 ★★★★★ (1,248) · 4-star hotel 0.7 mi to Sagrada Família 🔥 23 people viewed this in the last hour ✓ Free cancellation	~~\$412~~ \$259 23% off Total includes taxes & fees
	Yurbban Ramblas Boutique Hotel 4.7 ★★★★★ (892) · 3-star hotel 0.3 mi to La Rambla 🕒 Only 2 rooms left at this price ✓ Free cancellation	~~\$288~~ \$189 34% off Total includes taxes & fees
	Ohla Barcelona 4.5 ★★★★★ (1,103) · 5-star hotel 0.5 mi to Casa Milà 🔥 Booked 14 times today ✓ Free cancellation	~~\$690~~ \$399 29% off Total includes taxes & fees

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https://www.tripadvisor.com › Europe › Spain › Catalonia

THE 10 BEST Hotels in Barcelona 2024 (from \$72)
Top Barcelona Hotels: Find 250,174 traveler reviews, candid photos, and prices for 542 hotels in Barcelona, Spain.

Urgency bias

We value what feels limited

Ever panic-booked a flight when you see “only 2 seats left”

This happens on SERPs as well; travel brands have been weaponising this for years it captures attention and can get audiences to act fast, but there’s a fine line.

If you give audiences fake pressure, you lose trust. This is why things like free cancellation in this example is a good supporting cue when you’re featured on a SERP that requires a lot of urgency.

best air fryer

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Sponsored · Shop best air fryer

 Bestseller Ninja Air Fryer AF101 \$99.99 Amazon.com 4.8  (12,431) 10,000+ reviews Free delivery	 Most reviewed COSORI Air Fryer Pro LE 5QT \$119.99 Walmart 4.7  (8,904) 10,000+ reviews Free delivery	 Instant Vortex Plus 6QT \$129.99 Target 4.6  (15,230) 10,000+ reviews Free delivery
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Good Housekeeping

<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/appliance-reviews>

The Best Air Fryers of 2026 | Good Housekeeping

Our top picks for air fryers, tested by experts in the Good Housekeeping Institute Kitchen Appliance Lab.

4.8  (2,345) · Updated 2 weeks ago ·  Tested by experts



Reddit · r/airfryer

<https://www.reddit.com/airfryer>

What air fryer do you actually recommend? (2026)

Looking to buy my first air fryer. There are so many options it's overwhelming.

1.2K upvotes · 1.8K comments ·  Popular with shoppers



TechRadar

<https://www.techradar.com/best/best-air-fryers>

Best air fryers 2026: top picks tested and rated

We've tested dozens of air fryers to find the very best to buy.

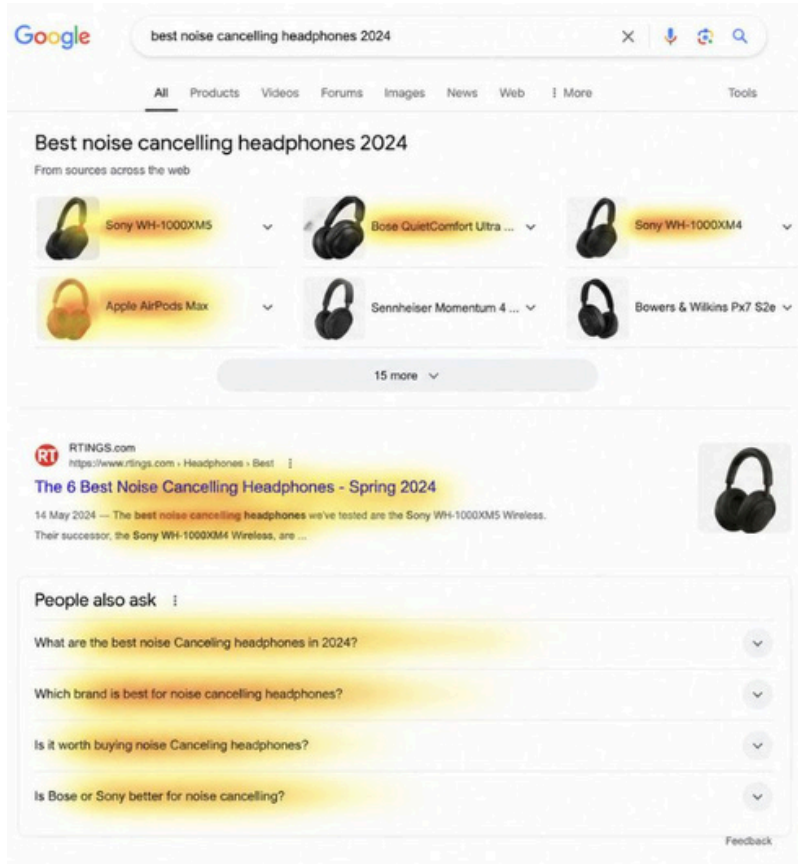
4.5  (4,782) · Updated 3 days ago ·  Review

Social proof

If others trust it, we trust it

There are loads of different reassurance types: customer ratings, reviews, editorial recommendations, forums.

People don't always trust brands telling them their product is good but they might trust a stranger called MrsStyles22 from Reddit telling them it's good.



Choice overload

Decision fatigue can occur when presented with too many options

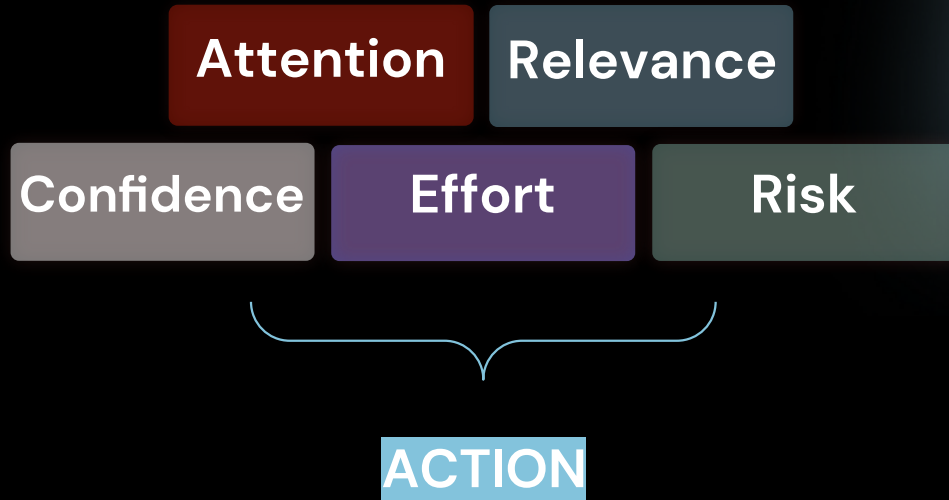
We're presented with more options than ever before, and my god are we tired.

This is prevalent on SERPs as well – lots of similar products and it's overwhelming trying to decide when you don't have any idea to start with.

Ensure your option is the easiest choice in these messy SERPs so audiences don't get worn down making decisions

「 We don't need to change how people think. We need to understand how they choose.

The Decision Stack



Every choice on a results page passes through five questions, mostly subconsciously.

- Attention: did I even see you?
- Relevance: do you look like what I'm after?
- Confidence: do I believe you?
- Effort: how much work is this going to be?
- Risk: what happens if you're wrong?

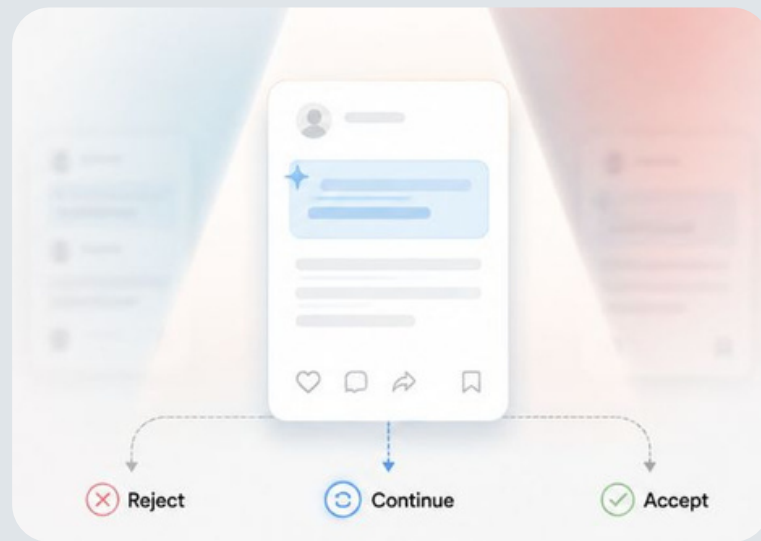
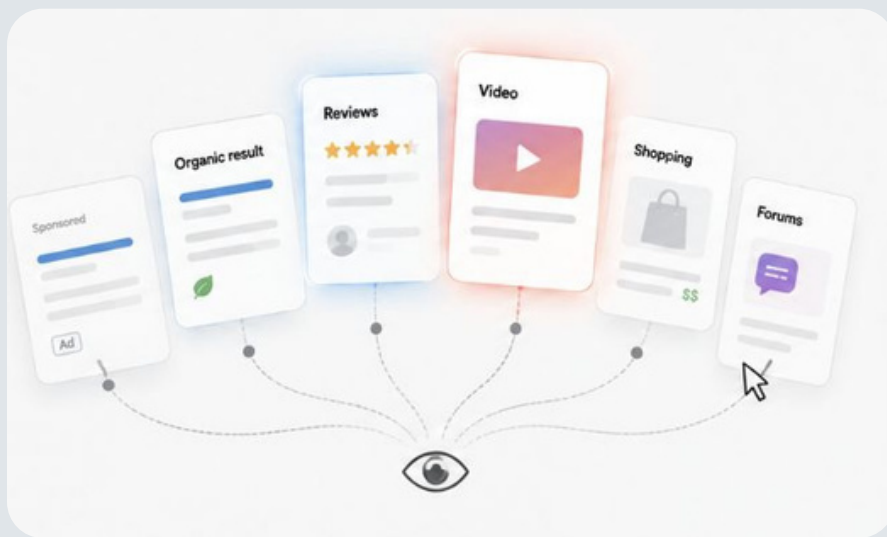
Fail any one of these, and you risk losing the action you want the audience to take



The Decision Stack
isnt just for Google

On Google, you need to win the comparison. In a served environment, you need to survive the gut call.

Google is an active choice environment: you're laid out next to everyone else, and the user picks. Social? That's a served environment; you're not compared to anyone else. & LLMs sit somewhere in between these two environments



In LLMs and AI Overviews, the first hurdle is inclusion.

The AI has already handled attention and relevance for the user, as it's decided who's worth mentioning. If you're not in those handful of brands in the answer consistently, the rest of the Decision Stack doesn't matter



On social, the first hurdle is attention.

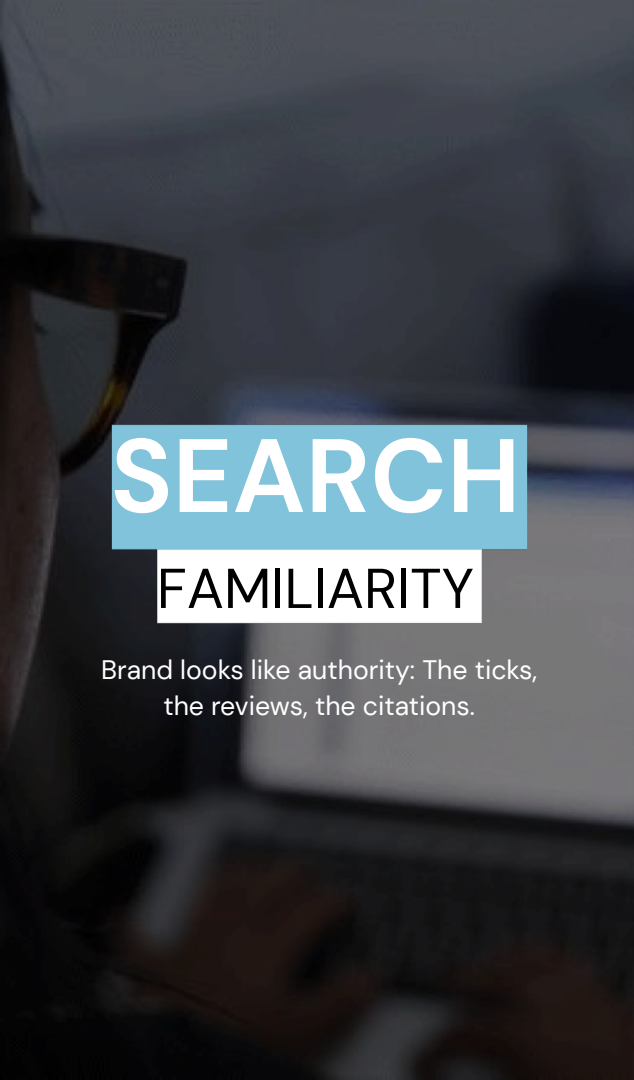
You've got milliseconds to capture attention on social platforms, don't capture that and the user won't even get through the other 4 questions



So the question you need to know the answer to before auditing how your audience is thinking on the SERP is:
Where are they?!

Brand recognition is the shortcut brains make when they are overwhelmed – and if you have brand recognition it's the shortcut to action within the decision stack





SEARCH

FAMILIARITY

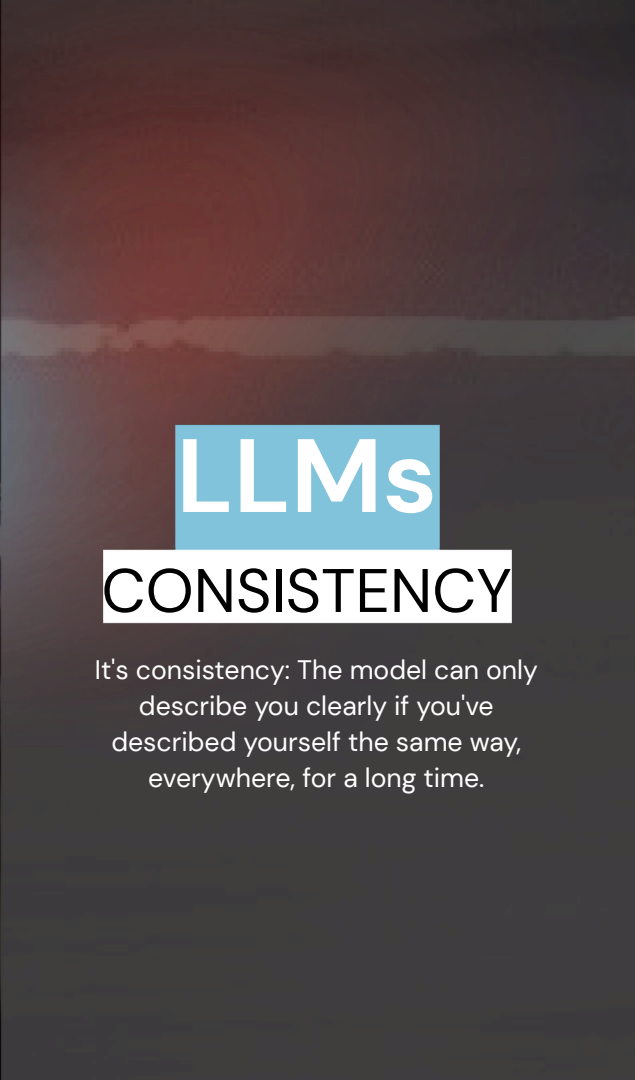
Brand looks like authority: The ticks, the reviews, the citations.



SOCIAL

FAMILIARITY

It's familiarity: 'I've seen you so often you feel like a mate.'



LLMs

CONSISTENCY

It's consistency: The model can only describe you clearly if you've described yourself the same way, everywhere, for a long time.

Brand $\neq$ Budget

Visual Consistency



TRIP

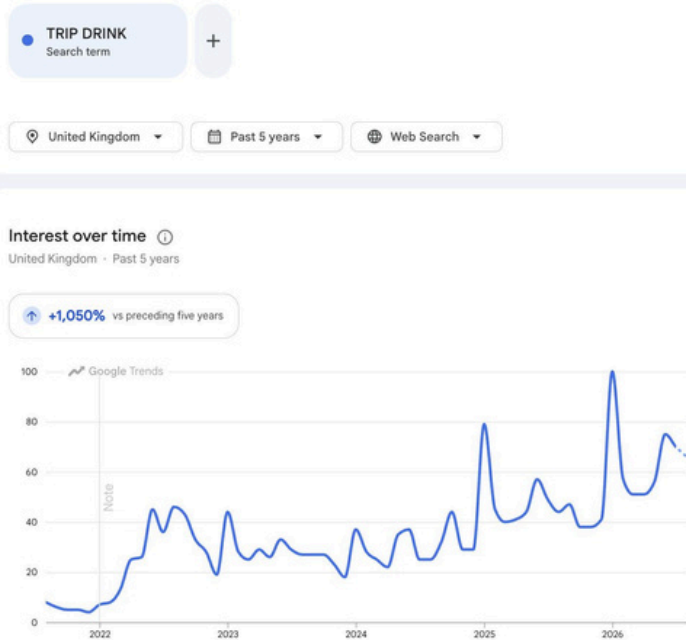


You could crop the logo off any of these and still know whose they are.

My 3 moods



ChatGPT has learned their aesthetic because they never deviated from it. Brand search has also soured due to this brand recognition.



what can you tell me about the trip drink brand

TRIP is a really interesting brand because it has managed to make **functional wellness feel much more like a lifestyle product than a supplement**. It launched in the UK in 2019, originally around CBD drinks, and has since expanded heavily into magnesium and "Mindful Blend" drinks featuring ingredients such as magnesium, lion's mane, lemon balm and chamomile. Its current range includes flavours such as Wild Strawberry, Sicilian Lemon, Apple Blossom, Cherry Lemon and Tropical Mango. TRIP +1

What stands out most to me is the visual brand world. TRIP owns this very recognisable combination of soft pastels + fruit + sunshine + slightly dreamy wellness imagery.

The cans are deliberately pretty enough to function almost like accessories: pale pinks, peaches, lilacs, yellows and blues paired with simple typography and fruit/floral cues. That makes it immediately identifiable without having to rely heavily on the logo.

And importantly, the **fruit isn't just communicating flavour**. It gives the whole brand a mood. Strawberry, peach, orange blossom, lemon, mango etc. make the product feel fresh, optimistic, summery and pleasurable rather than medicinal. That's quite clever for a category built around ingredients like CBD, magnesium and lion's mane, which could otherwise become very clinical. Even TRIP itself talks about creating "sophisticated" flavours rather than positioning the drinks purely around functionality. TRIP +1

Consistent TOV

They sell toilet roll, which is about the least exciting product on earth. But their quizzes, their blog, even their terms and conditions all sound the same.

who gives a crap

SERIOUS QUESTION

How soon after coffee do you need to poop?

- A. Instantly
- B. Almost immediately
- C. Straight away
- D. Promptly
- E. All of the above

Talking Crap

We convinced our landlord to spell out CRAP in solar panels

Jun 27th 2023 | 5 min read |



100% Recycled Toilet Paper

Double length rolls, 400 sheets

48

who gives a crap



Better than good

When you talk about toilet paper as much as we do, sometimes it's hard for us to find exciting new ways to express what makes ours so special.

We've written sonnets about its softness, worn out our thesauruses looking up synonyms for "strong," and don't get us started on the limericks.

Then one day, a customer like Matthew F. comes along to show us how it's done.

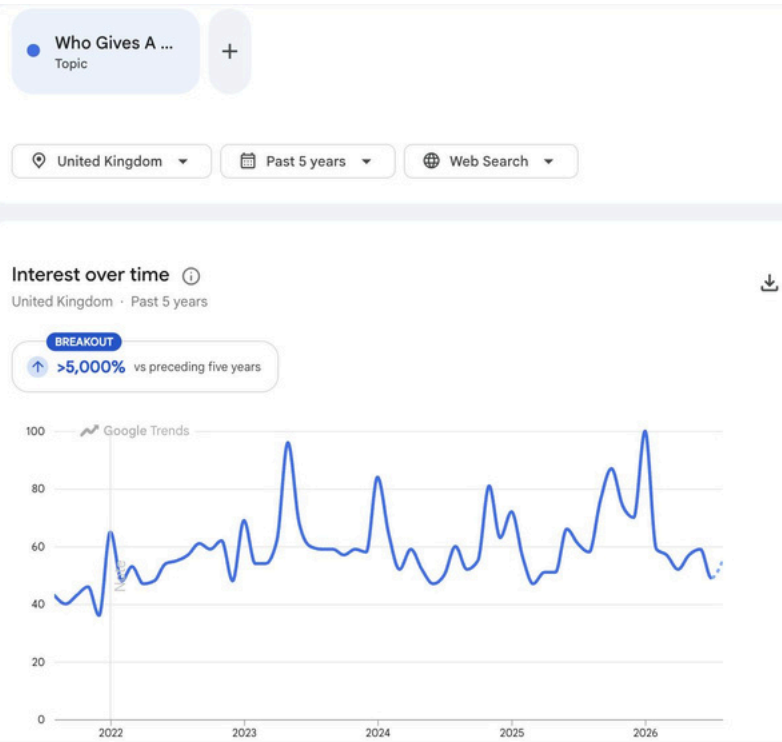


Great

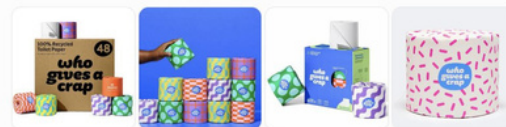
- Matthew F. Verified Buyer

Product review for Recycled Toilet Paper

A personality that is consistent becomes a fact that audiences (and LLMs) can repeat.



what can you tell me about the "who gives a crap" brand



Who Gives A Crap is a great example of turning an incredibly boring, functional category into a brand people actively recognise and like. Toilet paper is normally bought on price, softness or habit; WGAC has built differentiation through a really strong combination of **visual identity, humour and purpose**.

The thing that stands out most is how **visually distinctive** it is. Instead of the whites, blues and soft "clean" cues you typically see in toilet paper, its packaging uses bold combinations of **orange, pink, yellow, green, blue and purple**, with oversized checks, dots, waves and graphic patterns. Individual rolls essentially become little pieces of **branded design**. [Who Gives A Crap <1](#)

Their **tone of voice** is just as recognisable. They deliberately talk about sustainability and sanitation without sounding worthy or corporate. Product messaging includes phrases like "soft on your bum," "picky bums," and jokes about recycling old maths homework. Even their terms and conditions use playful language. [Who Gives A Crap <1](#)

That humour matters because the underlying mission is actually quite serious. **Who Gives A Crap** donates 50% of its profits to organisations working on **clean water and sanitation**, and says it has raised more than \$20 million to date. The playful branding makes that purpose more accessible rather than making the entire brand feel like an environmental campaign. [Who Gives A Crap](#)

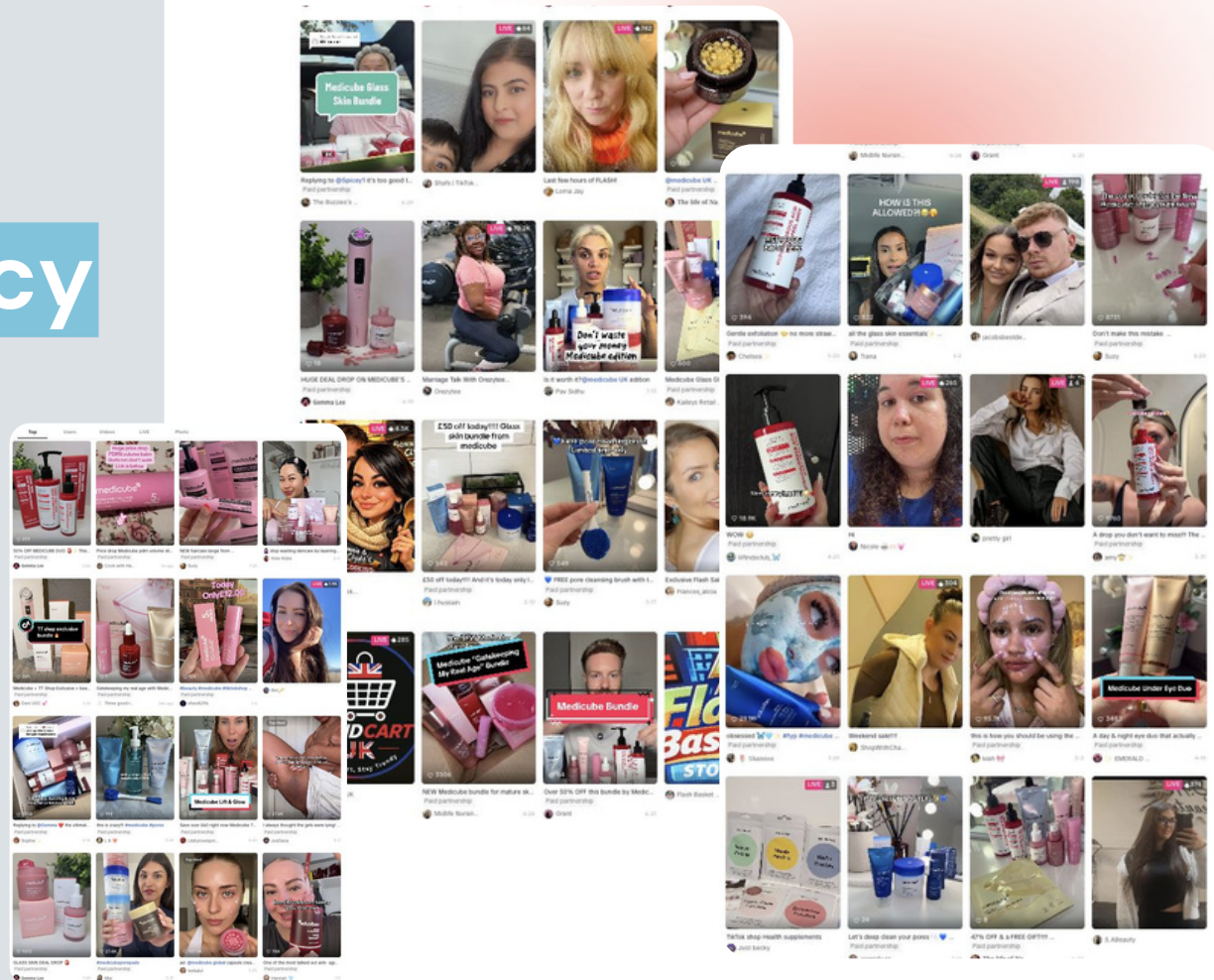
There are effectively **three brand layers** working together:

- **Distinctive visual world:** bright colours, graphic patterns, chunky rounded typography and highly recognisable packaging.
- **Distinctive personality:** irreverent, conversational, pun-heavy and deliberately unserious about a mundane category.
- **Distinctive purpose:** recycled/bamboo products, plastic-free packaging and the sanitation donation model. [Who Gives A Crap <1](#)

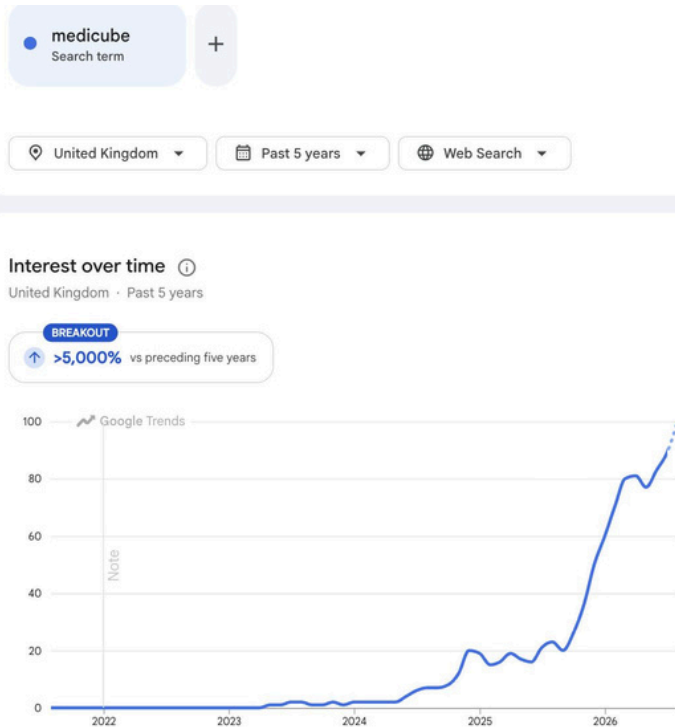
Format Consistency

We can almost guarantee if you use TikTok you've seen Medicube. They use the same creator-led format, over and over: someone holding the product to camera, often live, often with a deal.

medicube



Search interest went from basically zero to off the chart. The AI's summary? They flooded the feed.



what can you tell me about medicube as a brand

Medicube is a really interesting example of a **modern K-beauty brand that has built dominance through creator volume and UGC, rather than relying primarily on traditional brand advertising.**

At its core, Medicube positions itself as **clinical, results-led skincare + beauty tech**. It started in South Korea in 2014 and has become known for problem/solution products — pores, texture, pigmentation, firmness, acne — alongside its AGE-R beauty devices. That gives it a slightly more clinical, efficacy-driven identity than the softer, lifestyle-led aesthetic you see from a lot of K-beauty brands. Vogue +1

But the bit I think is most interesting about Medicube is how aggressively it has used UGC and creator content to create the feeling that the brand is everywhere.

Medicube has essentially flooded the feed

Rather than putting all of its money behind a handful of traditional influencers, Medicube has built an enormous creator ecosystem. Recent influencer-tracking data estimated **41,000+ influencers producing around 164,000 sponsored posts over 12 months**, with TikTok particularly prominent. Modash

Vogue also reported that Medicube had enlisted **more than 34,000 creators** as part of its TikTok-driven expansion. Vogue

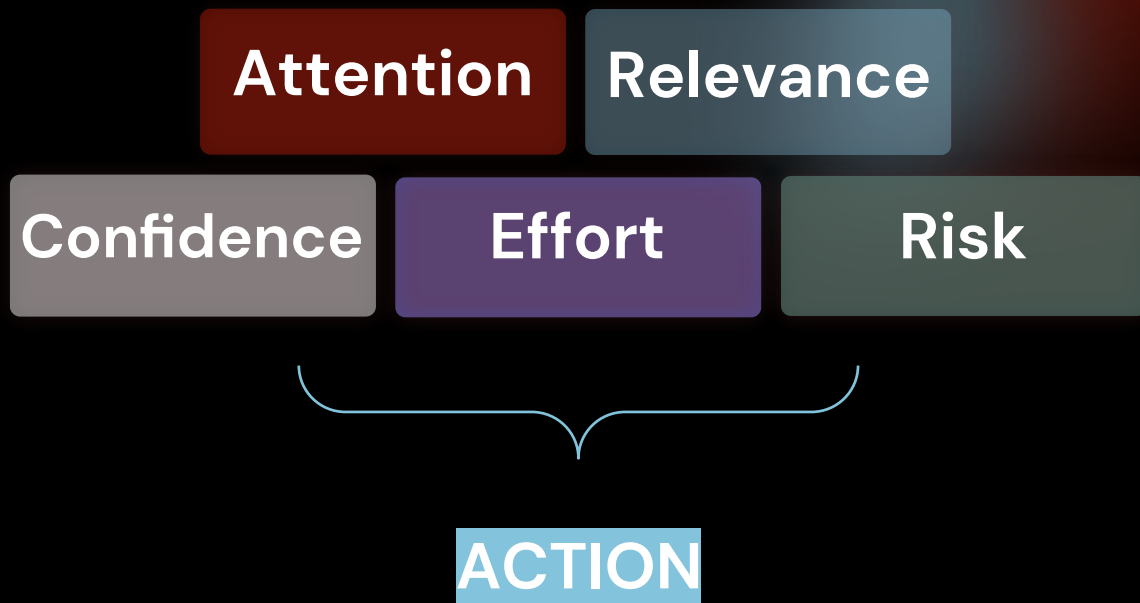
Brand 🤝 Consistency

Three brands, three different levers, one common thread. They picked a thing and did it relentlessly. Those examples do have budgets behind them, but the level of consistency can be achieved at any budget level.

That's what builds the shortcut.

Ok, so now what?!

You take a priority query; it may already be ranking or not have visibility yet. Open the SERP, and walk it through the stack. This should take you 15 minute tops and give you an idea of how you create a strategy to win for this result.



Attention

What wins the eye first?

Is it rank or a feature?

What do we need to do to capture that position?

What wins the eye first? Squint at the page, literally blur your eyes/take your glasses off, and see what jumps out. Is it a ranking or a feature? And what would we need to do to be that?

If the eye goes to the image pack, a better meta description won't save you. You need an image. If it goes to the video carousel, you need a video. Stop competing for the position. Compete for the element.

Relevance

What formats
are present?

Do we have
those formats
available?

Are brands or
publishers showing
up?

Those SERP features that are capturing attention – do you have them available/are they relevant? Let's dip into intent here – what kinds of websites is the SERP presenting: you and your competitors or publishers?

If it's all publishers, we need DPR support, if the SERP is showing TikToks or YT shorts, we need to speak to the social team.

Confidence

What trust signals are present?

Are there any gaps we can leverage?

Do any brands have a high SERP share?

What is giving the audience confidence in their choice? Literally, count the trust signals, for you and for every result above you.

Audit your listing against everyone else's and fix the biggest gap first. If every competitor has review stars and you don't, that's your job this quarter. Not another blog post

Effort

How fast can
people get the
answer?

How can we
entice a click?

If the search is zero-
click, is it worth
chasing?

Search a query and set a timer – how many seconds did it take you to find an answer before making a click.

How much effort is the user going to need to take to make a decision – if it's an easy choice, how can we make sure we're making it just as easy, and if it's a messy, difficult SERP, how can we make the choice easier?

Risk

How high are
the stakes
here?

How are we
demonstrating
reassurance?

Are our reinsurance
claims being
reinforced?

What does it cost? Something that's £3 doesn't have the same risk as a £3k purchase. Cost isn't just money, though – cost can be the time, or the hope people put into a decision.

How hard is it to undo? Free returns/cancellation – great; subscriptions with longer-term commitment, the risk feels higher here.

How bad would someone feel if it went wrong? If a personalised gift costs £30 and you can't return it – the risk feels low, but if it turns up late or with the wrong name on it – that's the risk here.



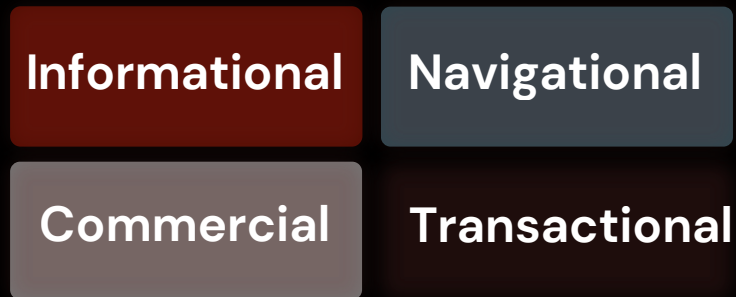
Ranking isn't the
goal anymore.

It hasn't been for a while

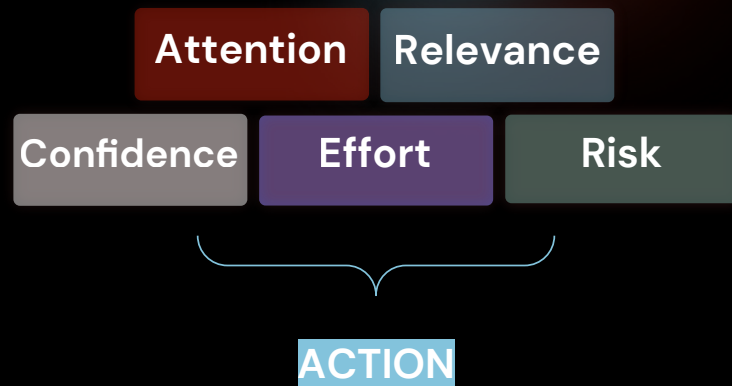


Continue to optimise
for humans, but
optimise **BEFORE** the
click

Keep using intent to understand what SERPs consider important and are surfacing for audiences.



Then add the decision stack to understand the choice the audiences make





Transforming potential.

**Growth partner for
ambitious businesses.**



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