



Is Google's Search Generative Experience
the Future of Search?

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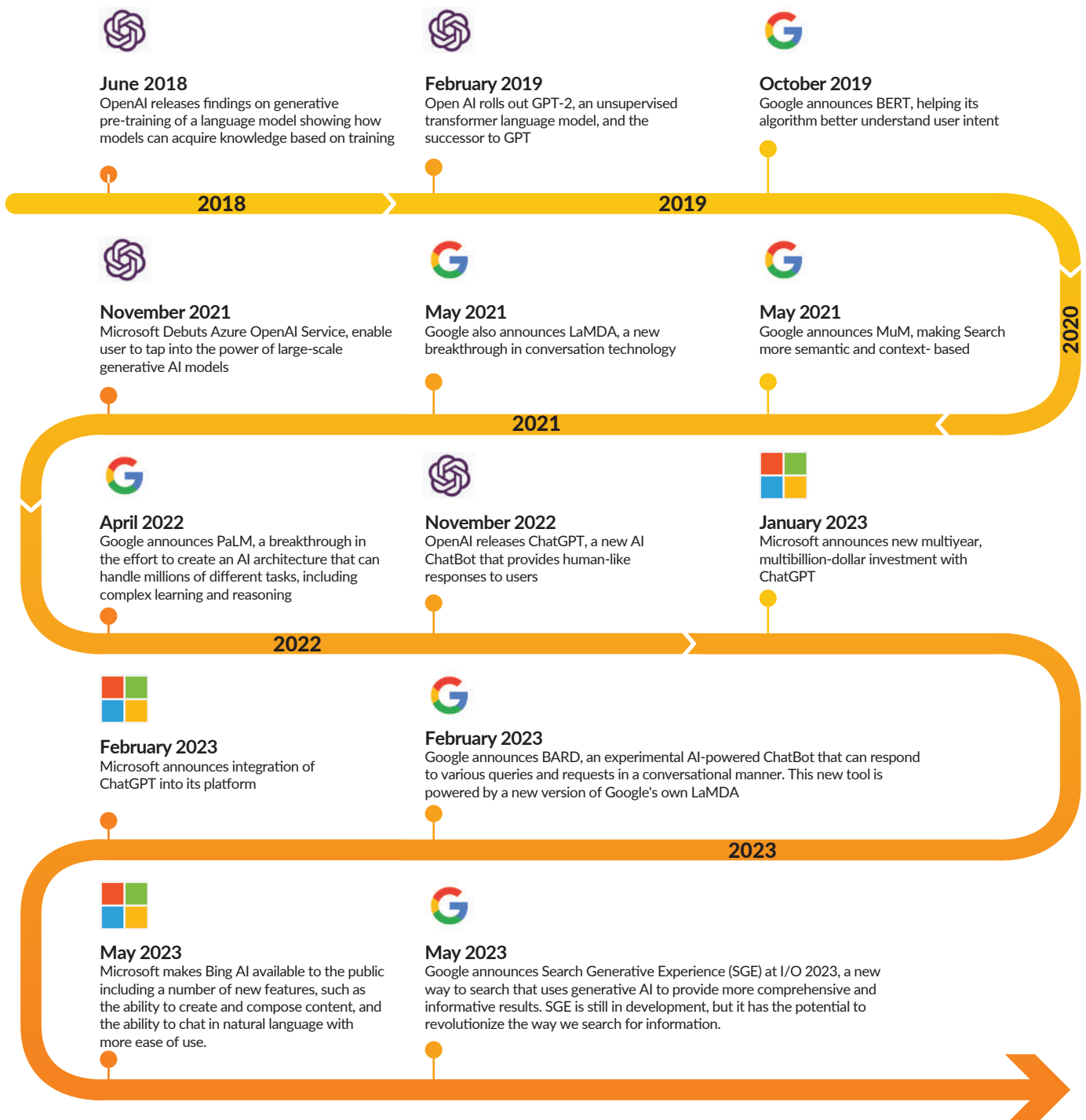
Supercharging Search with Generative AI

With the recent breakthroughs in generative AI, we are witnessing a remarkable reimagination of Search in 2023. Google's Search Generative Experience (SGE) is, unquestionably, the next step in the evolution of the science and craft of Search.

Let's understand the nuances of Google's new AI-powered, contextual, conversational, and multimodal search experience as well as the opportunities and challenges it presents to search marketers.



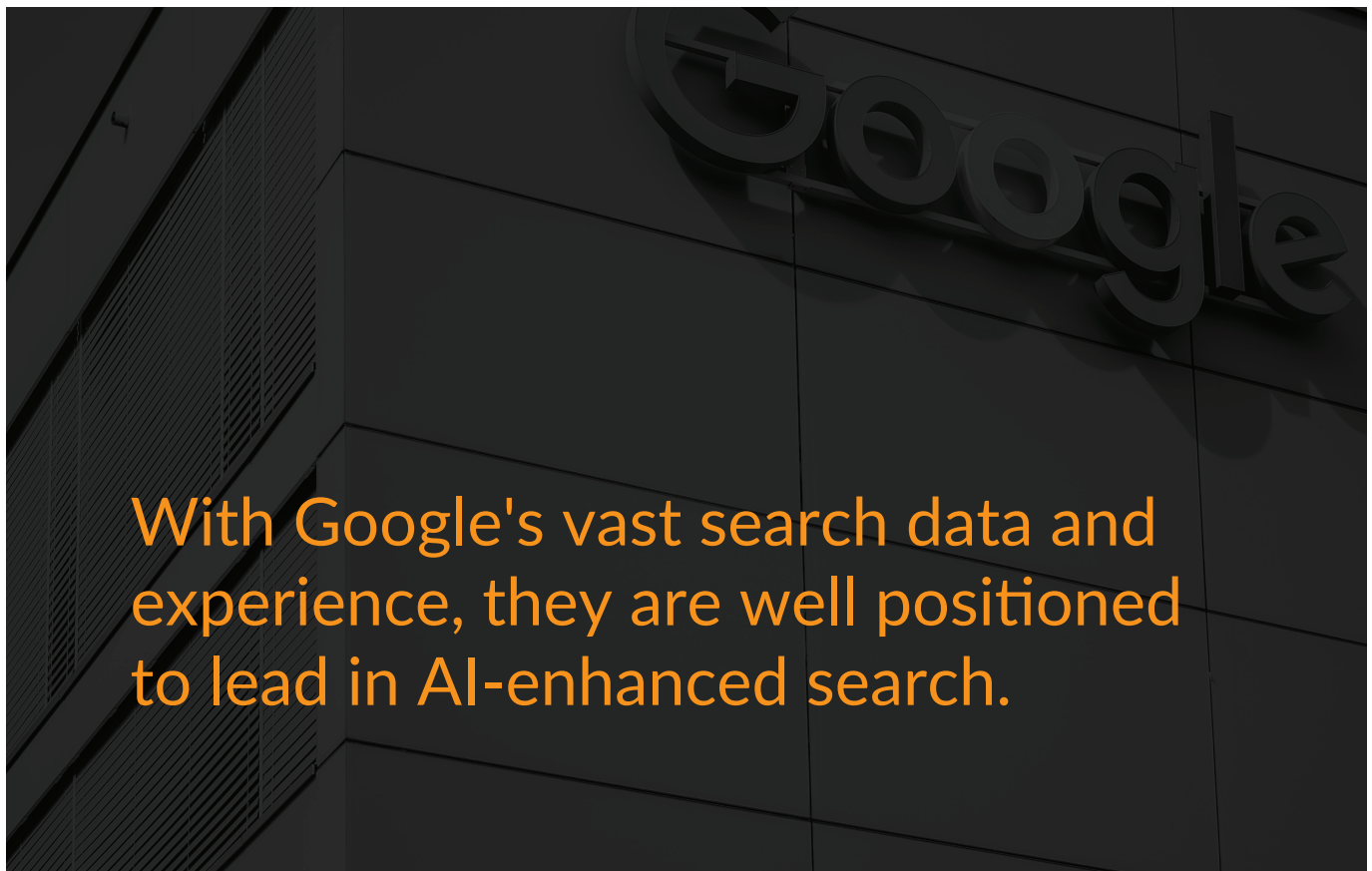
Generative AI is evolving rapidly



ChatGPT's public release in November 2022 sparked widespread excitement and interest in conversational AI. Google soon announced Bard, an experimental chatbot aimed at providing helpful information, powered by its AI language model, PaLM 2. Microsoft also joined the chatbot race, releasing Bing AI with chat capabilities in February 2023 and opening it up more broadly by May 2023.

Now Google has unveiled its Search Generative AI, to bring the power of large language models directly into search. Google's SGE represents the integration of this technology into the world's most popular search engine. With Google's vast search data and experience, they are well positioned to lead in AI-enhanced search.

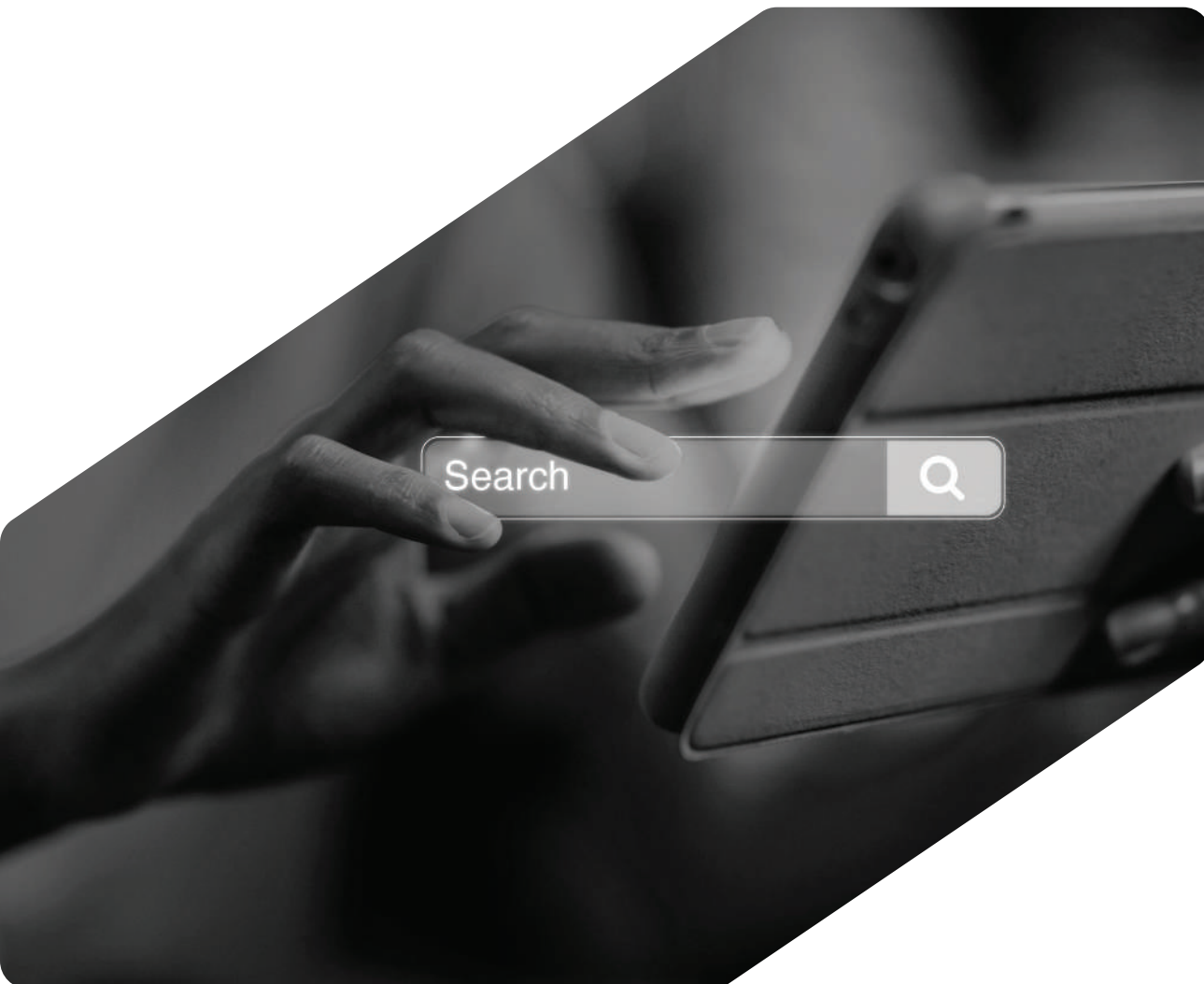
We can expect generative AI to rapidly reshape how we find, consume, and interact with information.



What is Search Generative Experience (SGE)?

At the Google I/O event in May 2023, Google announced the launch of the new **Search Generative Experience (SGE)**, integrating Generative AI into its founding product, Google Search.

Google's Search Generative Experience (SGE) aims to use Generative AI to give more information and context to user searches. Google has been testing variants of the SERP* within this experience, and **an eventual change is expected later in 2023**.



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Google's deep understanding of information combined with the unique capabilities of generative AI **can transform how Search works yet again**, unlocking entirely new questions that Search can answer, and **creating increasingly helpful experiences that connect you to the richness of the web.** ”

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SGE is the next step in the journey and over time this will just be how search works.

- Sundar Pichai (CEO, Google)

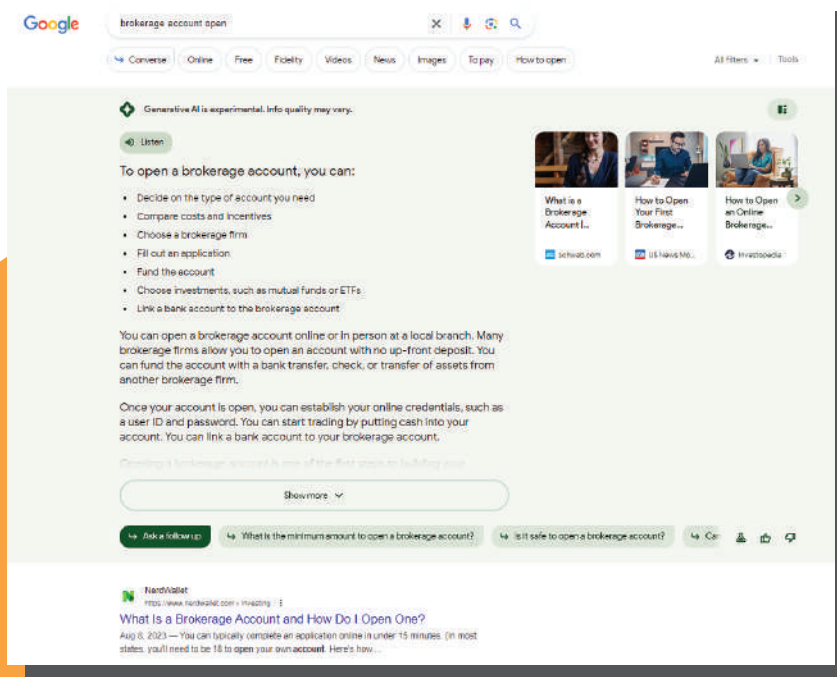
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Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs) are evolving to give users the answers to their questions – in Google itself

While Google's vision to make *information universally accessible and useful* remains the same, how they deliver this experience and reward positions in Search is drastically changing.

The new Search experience would lean toward providing answers or content rather than the traditional blue links. The experience could help streamline users' research journey and potentially reduce the need to navigate to external websites or links outside of Search.

Here's a quick look at what the new **supercharged** SERPs look like, and how they will transform the users' search experience to be more helpful and conversational.



Google has clarified, however, that not all searches will get an SGE response. For example, medical, finance, 'sensitive' topics or anything else that Google finds might be controversial or in poor taste (i.e. certain jokes or politics) will not trigger an SGE response.

In addition to rolling out SGE to users in the US (in English), Google has recently offered the version to India and Japan as well. The global expansion is expected to continue with customizations for the supported regions. SGE is available for trial via [Google Search Labs](#).

The key features and SGE building blocks that will work together to optimize users' search journeys



AI-Powered

SGE will generate unique cumulative, aggregate answers or summaries derived from Google-indexed and rated content.

Conversational

SGE will include a feature to ask "follow-up" questions while maintaining the context of the original search. Expert responses, similar to "People Also Ask," contextual bubble filters and formats will be featured as well.

Perspectives

It will provide different points of view on a given topic. Based on the user search intent, authoritative publication links or brand links, or both may be featured. It will also offer multiple formats like long-form videos, images, posts, etc.

Rich results

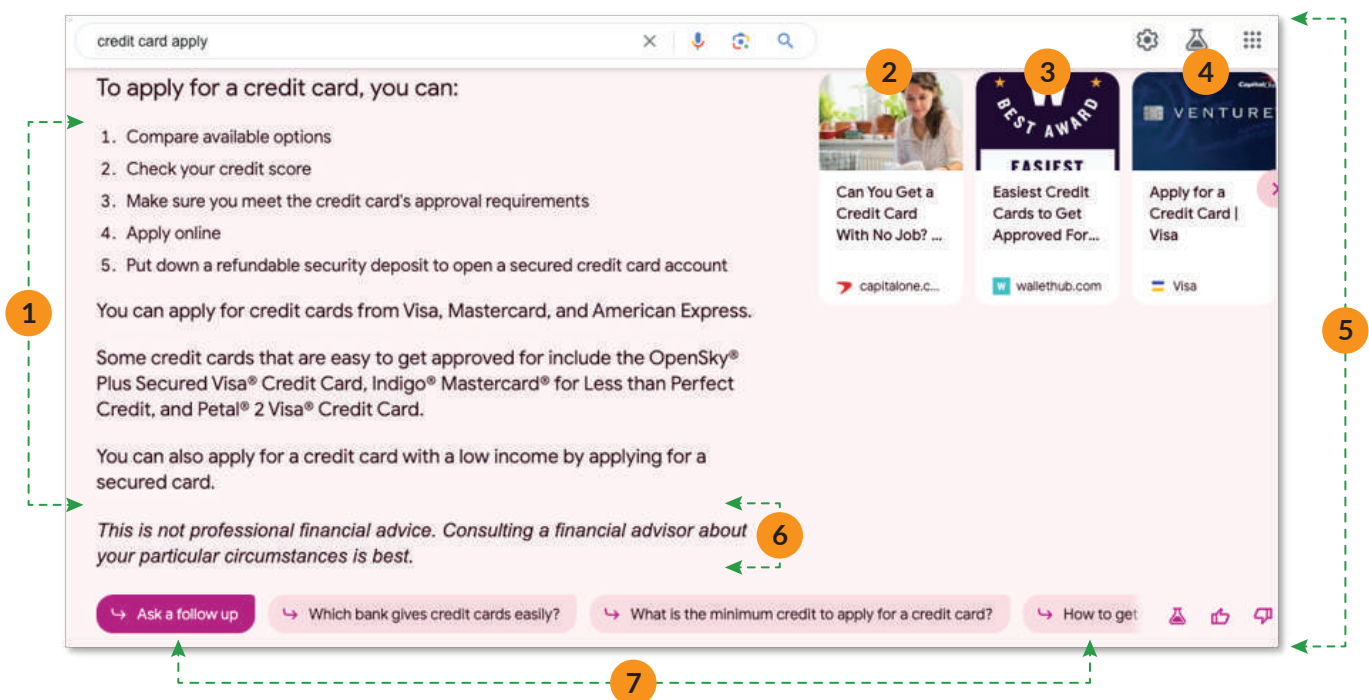
Depending on the search query, the new experience may feature richer results with images, product photos (and descriptions), videos, ratings, "blue links," map links etc.

Vertical experiences

For shopping and local searches, SGE will provide information like noteworthy factors to consider, reviews, etc. to help users make informed decisions.

The search experience varies based on the type of keyword used. Informational searches trigger an experience similar to what we currently see with featured snippets. Local searches prompt a modified version of the current local pack experience. Ecommerce or product queries trigger search results similar to the present-day product carousels. Let's take a closer look at all these different search experiences.

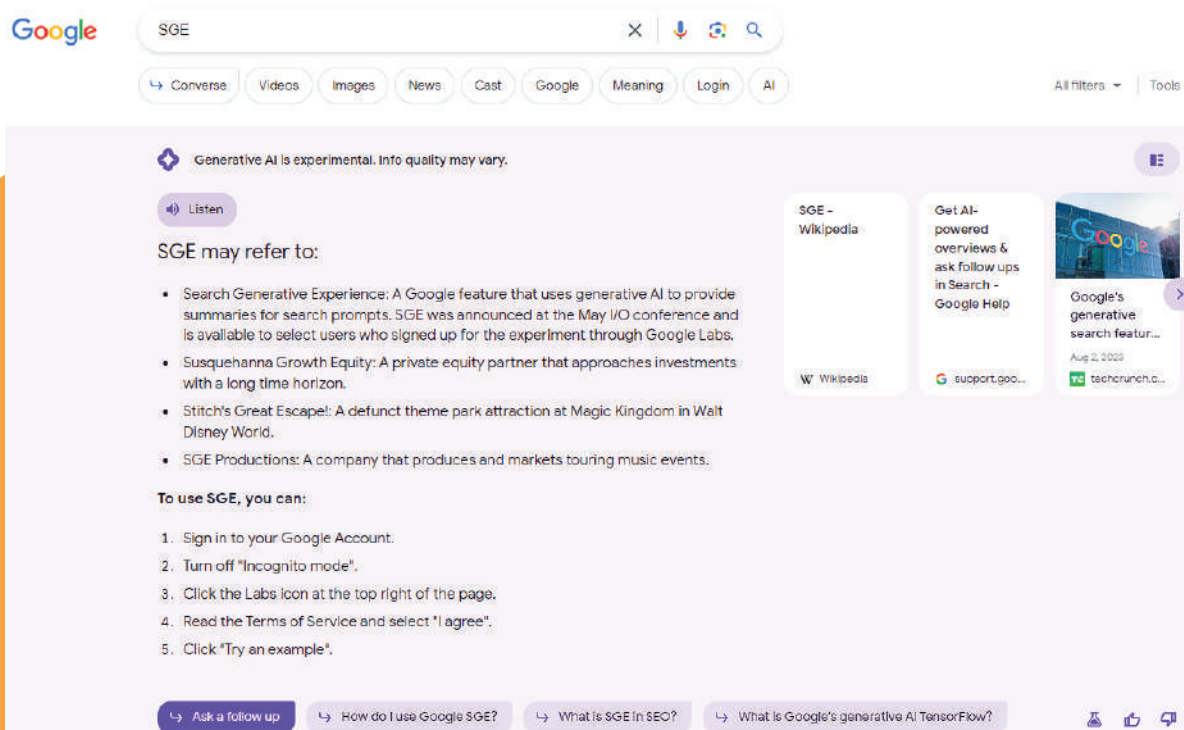
For informational searches, Google may be able to address user needs across all levels of keyword intent via this new proposed layout



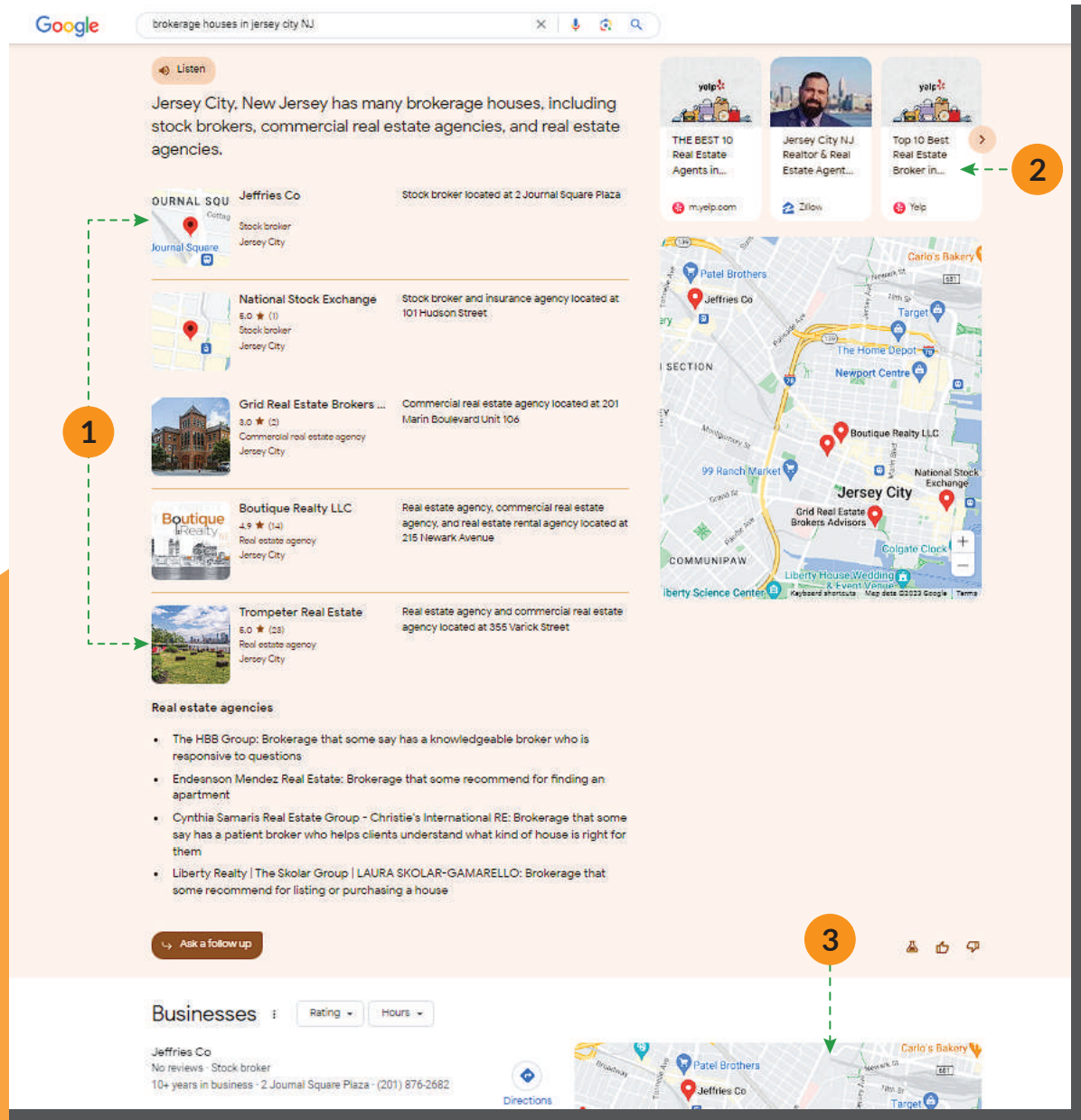
- 1 Best cumulative, singular answer from Google-indexed and rated content
- 2 Upper funnel content
- 3 Comparison or mid-funnel content
- 4 Lower funnel content
- 5 Out research shows, citations will most often match the top 3 ranks but not necessarily always
- 6 Caveat reflects YMYL* sensibilities
- 7 Typical follow-up questions. built from 'People Also Ask'

For users of Search, this is not entirely unfamiliar territory. Rich snippets have been a part of Google's search experience in some form or the other since 2012. In fact, when they reintroduced featured snippets in their current form in 2018, Google talked about how "featured snippets enhance the search experience by making it easier to access information from good sources, big and small." As we can see with the informational query results, Google's objective has remained the same as they are build the new SGE.

For many informational queries, we have also observed that SGE is adept at inferring intents, or where intent is not clear, to guide the user in the right direction.



The new search experience may look different for local queries.



- 1 Local businesses shown like local map pack
- 2 Citations most often match top 3 ranks
- 3 Traditional local map pack

For ecommerce queries, product listings may help convert clicks to more qualified actions.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "best student laptops". The search bar includes filters like "For Gaming", "Under \$700", "Touchscreen", "Windows OS", "Apple", "Dell", "HP", "On sale", and "13 inches". Below the search bar, a Generative AI summary provides advice on choosing a laptop for a student, listing factors like performance, battery life, processor, RAM, and storage. To the right of the summary are three related questions: "What kind of laptops and processor (AMD or Intel) are suitable for students or...", "What is the difference between memory and storage?", and "7 Must-Know Tips for Buying a College Laptop". Below the summary, three product listings are shown: Apple MacBook Air (M2, 2022), Samsung Galaxy Book3 Pro, and Microsoft Surface Laptop Studio (14.4"). Each listing includes a small image, a brief description, a rating, and a price. At the bottom, a "People Also Ask" section contains four questions: "Ask a follow up", "What laptop specs is best for students?", "Which size of laptop is best for students?", and "What is the best laptop?".

1 → Best cumulative, singular answer from Google-indexed and rated content

2 → Zero-click search becomes even more likely, clicks become more qualified actions

3 Citations will most often match the top 3 ranks, but not necessarily always

4 Typical follow-up questions, built from 'People Also Ask'

We expect to see SGE integrated with *Merchant Center* in the future which may enable them to pull in product descriptions, purchase options/stores, reviews, and helpful videos all under one head for relevant search queries.

Impact and implications of SGE: Here's what SEO marketers need to know

Google's new search experience, with AI-generated summaries rather than the traditional ten-blue-links, is expected to increase the probability of zero-click searches. What does this mean for marketers and content publishers?

While the market responses have been mixed so far, there is no doubt that SGE is heavily indicative of what Search will look like in the future. It's geared towards being conversational. It's multimodal. Most importantly, it focuses on meeting the information needs of the user, which is the North Star for all effective search engines. With Google continuing to test and improve SGE, it becomes imperative for marketers to understand the changes and their implications to be able to adapt.

Will the SGE snippets steal away clicks and reduce CTR? How much of the Search results listing space would the SGE experience eventually take up? How often will SGE populate? How will this impact organic search traffic? How will Google ensure it is rewarding the website publishers who continue to create original, useful content (which forms the basis of its AI-generated summary)?

These questions have been top-of-mind for SEO marketers since the rollout of SGE.

Here's what SEO marketers need to remember: adapting to SGE is not necessarily about adapting to the generative AI technology. It is about adapting to changing user needs and expectations from Search.

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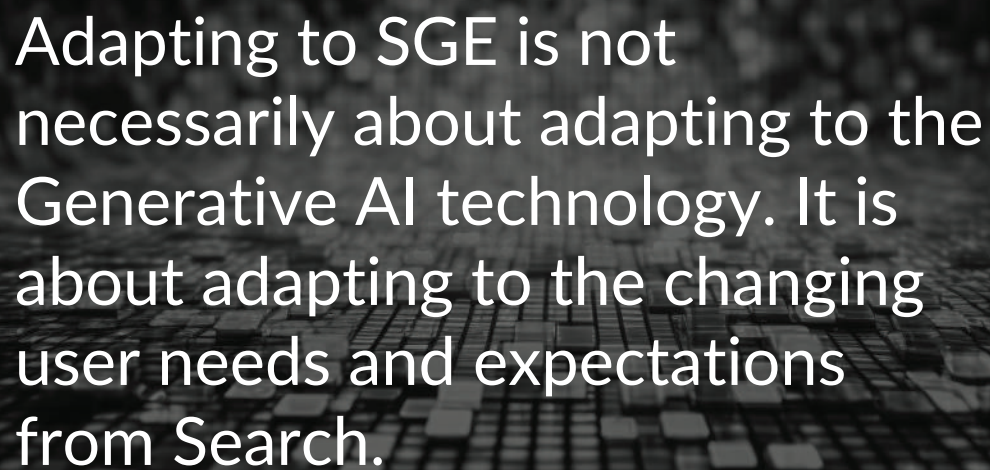
As a publisher or digital marketer, you need to be laser-focused on meeting user intents, it's not going to be optional, but mandatory moving forward if you want to see any success. If you can nail that down, how search engines present this information to the user (SGE) will work in your favor.

Personally, based on Google's product history, I believe that SGE will continue to change and evolve long after its official launch, which is going to be a rough one. Three areas that Google will absolutely need to focus more on: Giving due credit to content publishers/authors, **accuracy of information and easier to digest richer results.**

- Michael Bertini (Vice President SEO, iQuanti)

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Google is continually testing and improving the UI and features of SGE to address some of the concerns that were initially raised, for example, about citations/sourcing. In one of the more recent updates, Google has added publish dates to links to show how recent the cited web pages are.



Adapting to SGE is not necessarily about adapting to the Generative AI technology. It is about adapting to the changing user needs and expectations from Search.

SGE is designed to be **a jumping-off point for exploring helpful information on the web**, with links to search results included alongside each AI overview. We're continuing to experiment with new, easier ways for people to find web pages that support information in AI overviews.

Source: Google's SGE update (Aug 2023)

How can you transform your SEO strategy to stay relevant and continue to drive traffic from Search within the new Search ecosystem?

While there are a lot of iterations going on, and there is still a lot that remains unknown, we have put together a few pointers for SEOs from our initial research:

What is changing?



Keywords

- User behavior change will impact the type of queries
- Keywords could evolve to be more long-tail and conversational.



Content

- Diversity of content will matter for visibility
- Perspectives and regular SERP will be dominated by images, videos, reviews, social feeds etc.



Citations & CTRs

- Citations will hold value as they will point to the source of information. Due to the top-fold placement, they could drive valuable clicks.
- Organic results getting pushed down for some queries will impact CTRs.
- Traffic quality might improve with zero-click answers.

What SEO marketers need to do

- Monitor the shift in keywords and their intent. Long-tail, question-based, and conversational keywords may become more important.
- Address intent with relevant content topics. Topics with no search volume but are informationally relevant may start getting visibility.
- Create unique and valuable content following "Helpful Content" guidelines to enhance your relevance as an information source and increase your chances of being cited.
- "YMYL" content will need strong reliability which is to be attained by focusing on the 'Expertise' part of EEAT.
- Search is going to be more visual and it will prefer content formats like images, and videos even more.
- Support the content with optimized rich snippets (images, videos) and using structured data.
- As SERPs continue to evolve, we need to monitor the key KPI metrics and study how they are changing in response.
- Keywords, CTR, and snippets visibility will continue to change and will need continual monitoring.

Impact and implications of SGE: Here's what Paid Search marketers need to know

While testing is still underway, early indications are that sponsored links/ads will still be a part of the Search experience, with additional sponsored links scattered throughout and following the results.

Google is committed to prioritizing approaches that send valuable traffic and support a healthy open web. We expect to see Google seamlessly monetizing SGE and for sponsored ads to be featured prominently in the new search experience.



Ads will continue to play an important role in this new search experience. Many of these new queries are inherently commercial in nature. We have more than 20 years of experience serving ads relevant to users' commercial queries, and **SGE enhances our ability to do this even better**. We are testing and evolving placements and formats and giving advertisers tools to take advantage of generative AI.

- Sundar Pichai (CEO, Google; Q2 2023 Earnings Call)



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From a digital ad strategy perspective, there is not a lot that needs to change immediately.

In many ways, a lot of changes that Google has been making to their platform over the last few years have been leading up to this point, where advertisers are focused less on keywords and more on audiences and the intent of those audiences.

- Matt Boland (Senior Director Paid Solutions, iQuanti)

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Google Ads ecosystem has seen a systematic integration of AI-powered features towards this – from simpler changes in keyword match types to larger campaign-type shifts like the Performance Max, which allows advertisers to create custom assets and scale them in a few clicks.

For example, earlier in 2023, Google Ads introduced a feature enabling advertisers to "ask Google AI for ideas" – the AI would then use content from the landing page and existing ads to generate relevant and effective keywords, headlines, descriptions, images, and other assets. Generative AI-powered Product Studio could create unique product imagery from within the Merchant Center, increase the resolution of images, etc. Google estimates that nearly 80% of advertisers already use at least one AI-powered search ads product. Google's approach to AI and ads remains grounded in *"understanding what drives real value for businesses right now and what's most helpful for users."*

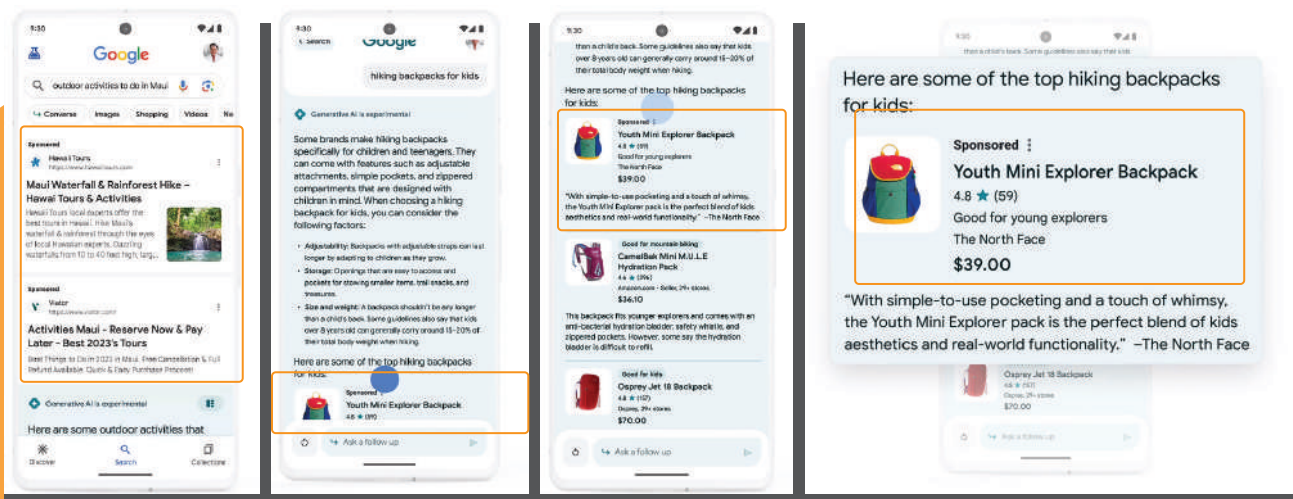
At this point, we expect ads or sponsored links to be featured prominently in the SGE layout.

According to a recent update from Google,

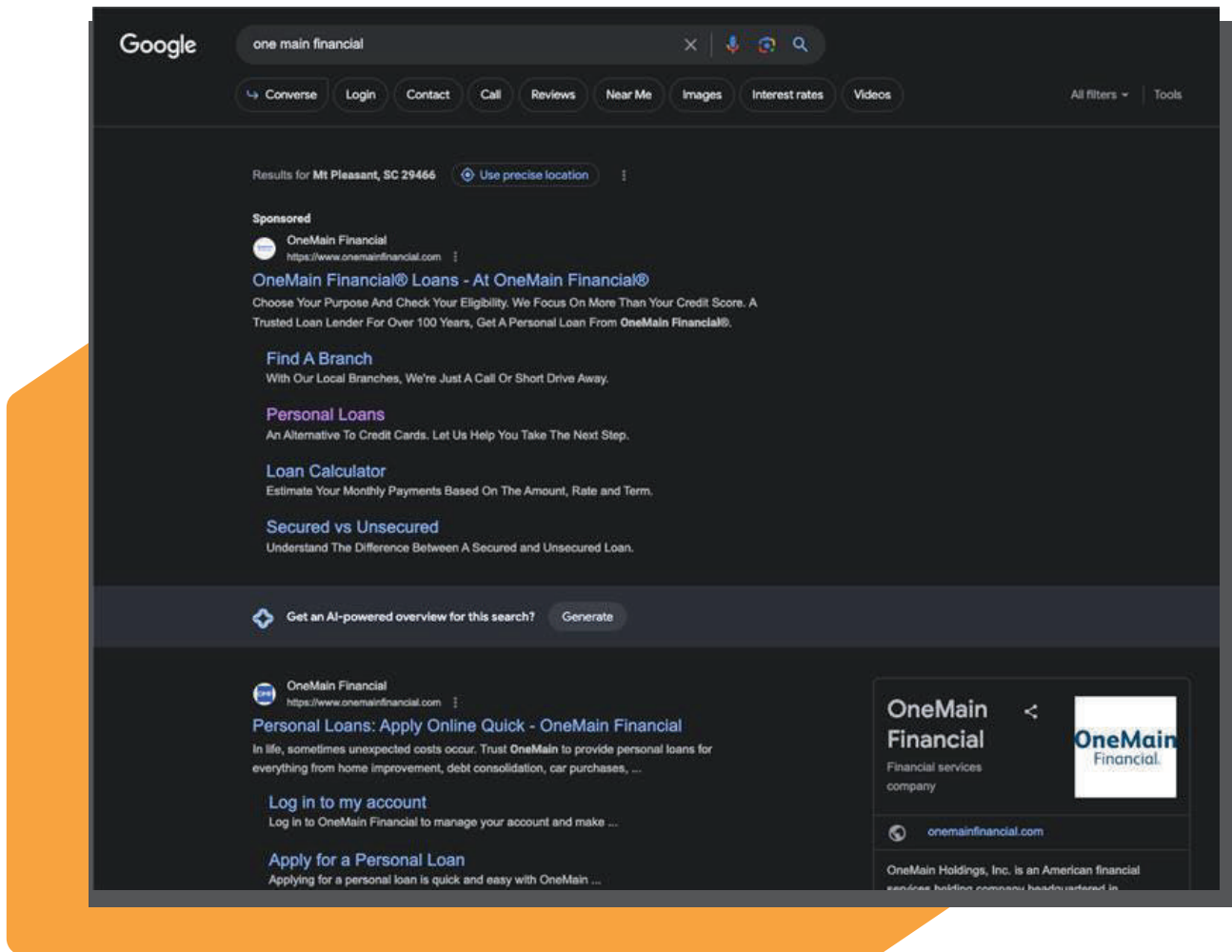
With SGE, Search ads will continue to appear in dedicated ad slots throughout the page. In this new experience, advertisers will still have the opportunity to reach potential customers along their search journeys. We'll test and evolve the ads experience as we learn more.

Let's take a quick look at an example featured by Google.

- In a mobile search for “outdoor activities to do in Maui,” there are normal sponsored links above the brand-new SGE experience. Those ads push SGE nearly off the page.
- After tapping the “Ask a follow up” in the SGE results for the Maui query, the GIF simulates somebody typing “hiking backpacks for kids.” The new SGE results that appear have some listings for backpacks, including one link at the very top of those listings that are marked as Sponsored.
- Additional sponsored shopping listings were included below the remaining content.



We've also started observing sponsored listings above the SGE snippet for branded keywords as well. An example below:



The response rate and CTRs on your ads would evolve, of course, based on how ad placements get finalized in the SEG UI layout. But as of now, we do not expect advertisers to need a significant change in direction or focus because of the shift to a conversational search experience or long-tail keywords.

The final word

Generative AI will have a significant impact on the SEO strategies of companies, small and large, for years to come. It opens up new and exciting opportunities for proactive marketers.

The final version of the Search Generative Experience will have key implications for users and performance marketers alike. As Google rolls out to a broader audience, how people search for information, how marketers engage with the evolved SERPs and measure the value of engagement will be upended significantly. This effectively means users and performance marketers will need to adapt to a new normal.

We expect to see Google rolling out these changes to a broader audience in a phased manner (queries, verticals, geographies). This would give Google an opportunity to fine-tune the UI and features as they collect more feedback.

At iQuanti, we have been testing the existing Generative AI tools to determine potential use cases, best practices, and risks. Our initial testing has identified rapid changes to the experience, and we will be watching closely as this space evolves.

Have questions?

Reach out to us at marketing@iquanti.com

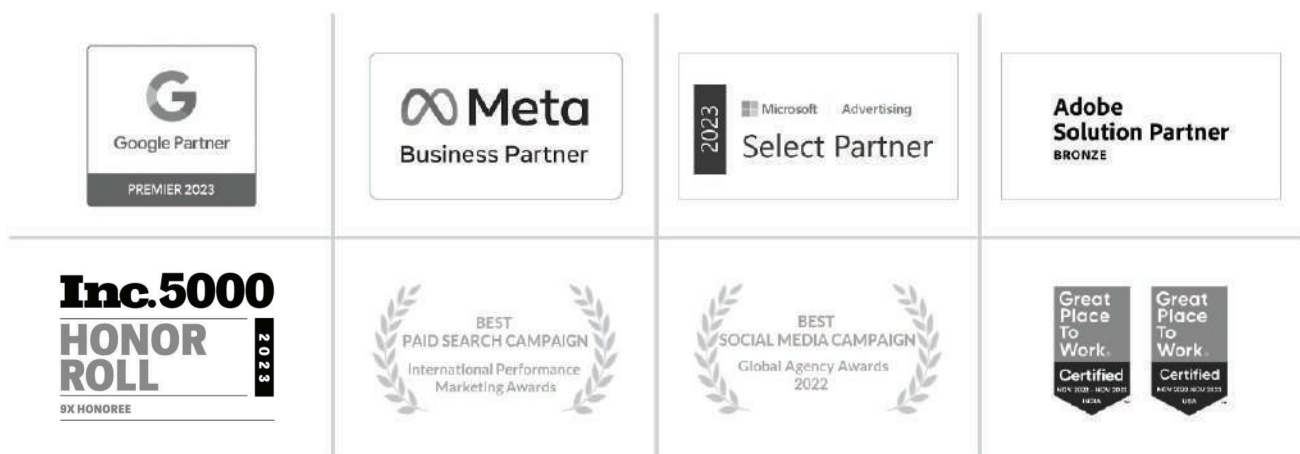
About iQuanti

iQuanti ignites powerful and predictable digital marketing performance for global brands with an approach rooted in data science and deep vertical knowledge.

iQuanti offers a unique blend of channel management services, strategic consulting expertise, and proprietary product offerings to empower brands to exceed their customer acquisition, engagement, and conversion goals.

iQuanti's award-winning and patented enterprise SEO platform ALPS™ uses proprietary data science and machine learning to build predictive enterprise level SEO roadmaps that deliver stronger ROI.

Founded in 2008, iQuanti now has 600+ employees across New York, Chicago, Dallas, and San Francisco, as well as Bangalore, London, Singapore, Mexico City and Toronto. In 2022, iQuanti's top performance marketing results were recognized on multiple global platforms including the Global Agency Awards, UK Search Awards, and International Performance Marketing Awards. iQuanti was named to the Inc.5000 list of fastest growing private companies in the U.S. for the ninth time in 2022.





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