



Preparing for the AI Search Era

AI is transforming how people discover and decide what to purchase

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The AI Search Era

Why this matters to businesses

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- AI is slowly becoming the first decision layer with consumers increasingly consulting AI when starting their purchasing journey.



- Influence is shifting to brands
- AI favors clear, consistent, trusted brands



- Visibility now determines conversion efficiency vs page ranking
- Fewer AI citations = higher reliance on paid traffic, increasing costs

The AI Search Era

Why this matters to businesses

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- Recommendations will replace browsing (eventually)
- Products and Brands (including retailers) will not be discovered... *they will be recommended.*



- Early clarity creates lasting advantage



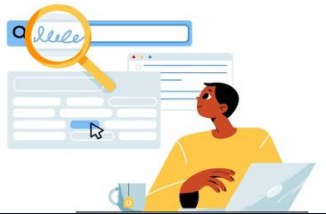
- You may have seen a significant drop in traffic to your DTC in 2025, *AI is part of that reasoning.*

The AI Search Era

State of Search

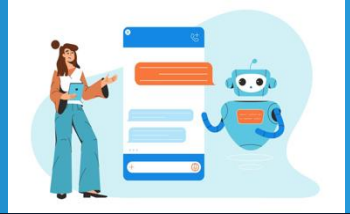
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Search is moving from:



Keyword

Natural Language
& Chat



Ranking on
search pages

Direct answers and
recommendations



Manual product
ranking

AI-driven algorithms
(Google shopping & Personalized shopping)

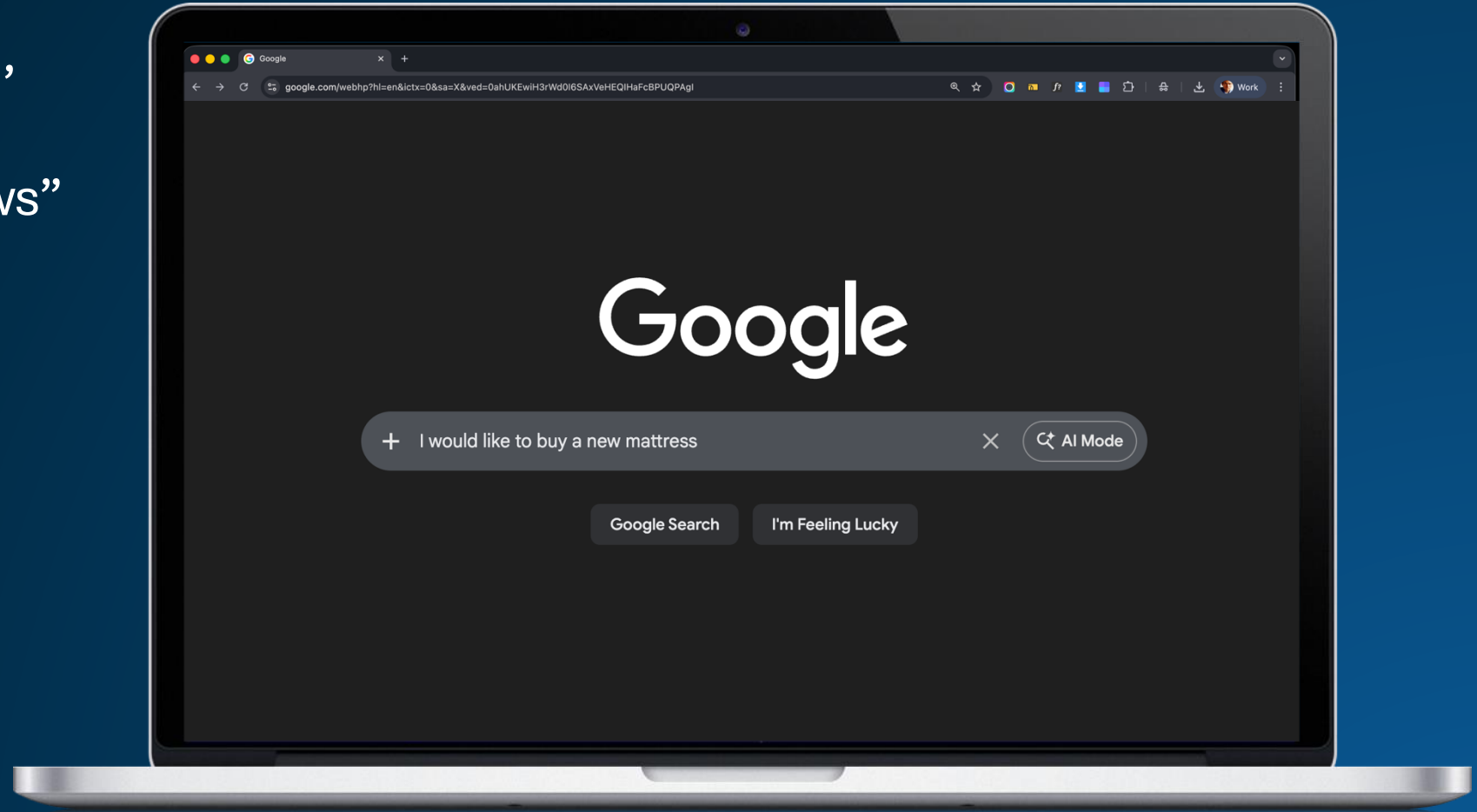


The AI Search Era

State of Search

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- Google is still king of search, they aren't going anywhere
- Launched their “AI Overviews” which appear on **~55%** of searches, and growing
- This change has reduced CTRs to sites drastically



The AI Search Era

State of Search

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- Consumers are getting more comfortable with using AI to search:
 - Stackline reported **~35%** of shoppers used AI to help search during BF sales
 - ChatGPT being current titan of the industry saw **45%** of that usage
 - ChatGPT is also now **a Top-5 global website**, people are trusting it more



State of Search

Terms you need to understand

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SEO

Search Engine

- Is still important — it fuels discovery on traditional search with keywords.
- Provides the “content” for AI

GEO

Generative Engine Optimization

- Builds on SEO by making content understandable to generative models.
- Enables the likes of Google to develop AI Overviews (AIO)
- Provides the “context” that AI need to generate answers/recommendations

AEO/AIO

AI Engine Optimization

- The future: optimizes so AI agents can recommend and eventually transact.
- An AI Agent is a conversational system that understands intent, pulls from multiple sources, and takes action — recommending or even buying products on the user’s behalf.

What does AI look for?

LLMs don't just read our websites... they collect from:

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Authority Sources

- Industry publications, Reviews (Product and Google reviews), Comparison sites, Forums (Reddit, Quora), News & PR mentions, Wikipedia / knowledge bases

• Trust Signals

- Volume and recency of reviews, Consistency across listings, Brand mentions (even unlinked), Third-party validation

• Structured, Clear Information

- FAQs, Tables, Lists, Definitions, Schema-friendly formatting
- Schema is structured data added to a webpage that helps search engines and AI systems clearly understand what the content is about



How People Search for Mattresses Today: Google Search vs AI Search

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Google Search

(Traditional Search)

Best mattress



Queen mattress



Mattress stores near me



Mattress for back pain



Memory foam mattress



- Short keywords
- Product-focused
- Category browsing
- User compares options

VS.



AI Search

(ChatGPT, Google AI Overviews, Perplexity)

"I wake up with back pain-what mattress should I buy?"

"Best mattress for side sleepers who sleep hot"

"Recommend a firm mattress under \$1,500"

"Compare memory foam vs hybrid for couples"
"Is this mattress worth the money?"

- Full sentences
- Problem-focused
- Multiple constraints
- AI makes the choice

Google = Find Options

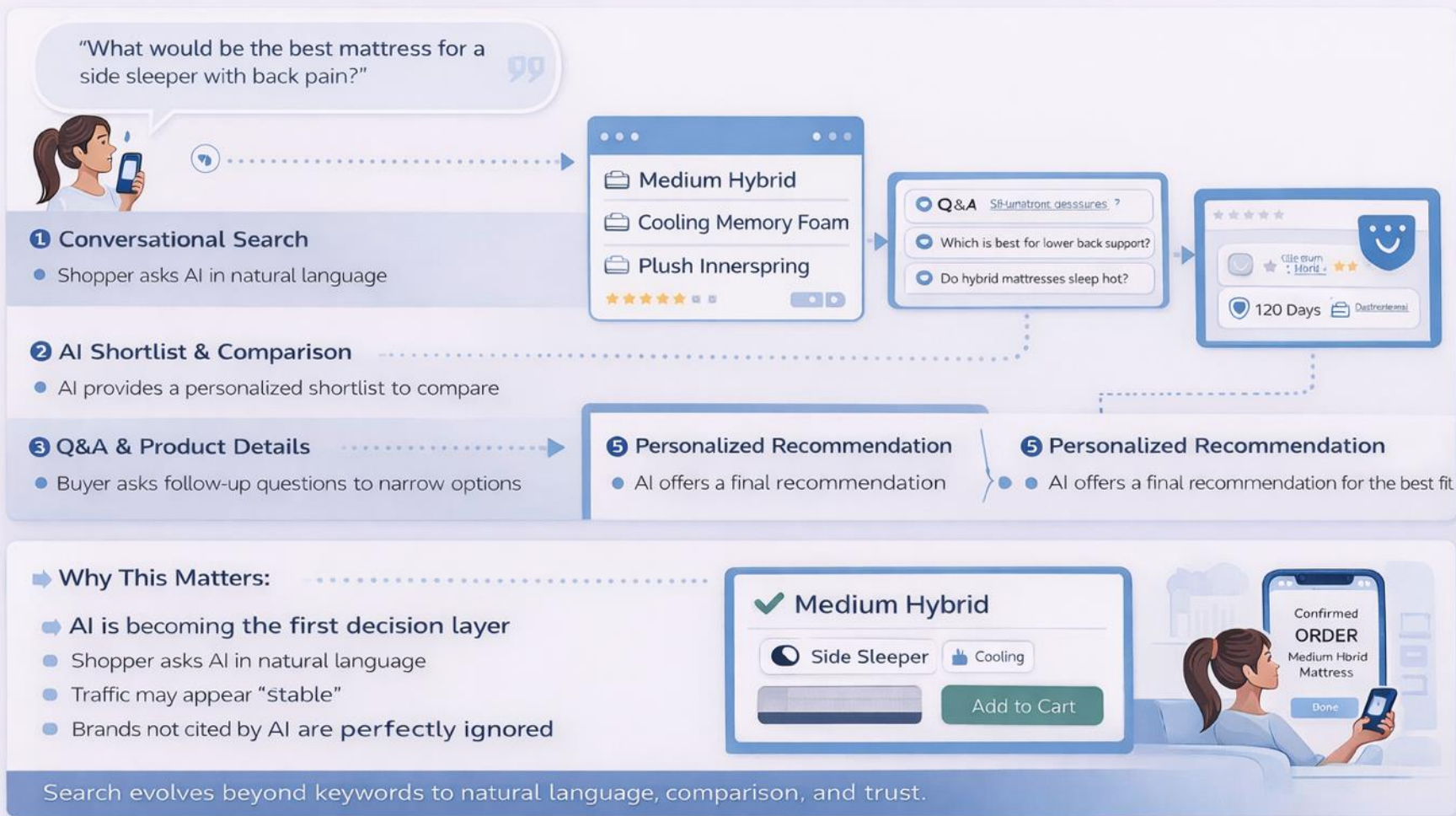
AI = Decide for Me

The AI Shopping Revolution



Appendix

The Future Shopper Journey with AI: Buying a Mattress



Evolution to Relevancy

Product Tagging	Focus	Mechanism	Winner's Edge
SEO	Traditional Content, Keywords, links	Manual optimization for Search Engines	Content, Keyword density, backlinks
GEO	Generative content (Context)	Optimizing for AI Overviews	Rich structured data, clear authority
AEO	AI agent discovery	Feeding AI assistants & chatbots (LLMs)	Human conversational language, structured, trustworthy data across surfaces

- AI is transforming how people discover and decide what to purchase

Evolution to Relevancy - Detailed

	SEO - Search Engine Optimization	GEO - Generative Engine Optimization (New)	AEO - AI Engine Optimization (New)
Definition	Optimizing content to rank in search engine results (SERPs) based on keywords, links, and technical SEO.	Optimizing content (context) to be included in AI-generated search answers (e.g., Google SGE, Bing Copilot, Perplexity).	Optimizing content to be discoverable, recommended, and actionable inside AI agents (e.g., ChatGPT, Bing Copilot, Alexa, retailer chatbots).
Primary Goal	Rank and earn organic clicks.	Be referenced in AI-generated summaries.	Be chosen and acted on by AI agents to recommend, compare, transact.
Where It Happens	Google/Bing SERPs, retailer search results.	AI-powered search engines and GenAI answers.	AI agents, voice assistants, shopping copilots, retailer AI assistants.
Content Focus	Keywords, meta tags, links, crawlability, UX.	Structured data + authoritative, conversational content for summarization.	Machine-readable data + real-time syndication + trust signals for recommendation and action.
User Experience	User clicks through search results.	AI answers inline , often with citations and less need to click.	AI acts on behalf of the user — recommends, compares, or buys directly.
Key Tactics	• Keyword research • Metadata & headings • Backlinks • Site speed • Technical SEO	• Schema markup • Natural language answers • Authoritative buying guides • E.E.A.T. content	• Complete, structured product feeds • Attribute-rich PDPs • Real-time syndication • Retailer + AI model integrations • Conversational content
Example	Ranking #1 on Google for “best camping tent under \$200.”	Google SGE cites your buying guide in its AI-generated answer.	Bing Copilot or Alexa recommends your mattress in a product card and provides a “buy” link.

AI Search and Consumer Behaviors

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80%

of search users rely on AI summaries for a substantial share of results.

~60%

of traditional searches end without clicking through to a site.

61%

of consumers have used AI tools (ChatGPT/Gemini) in their shopping journey.

57%

report increasingly conversational search habits.

71%

want generative AI integrated into their shopping experience.

43%

use AI search daily, and 62% trust AI for brand decisions.