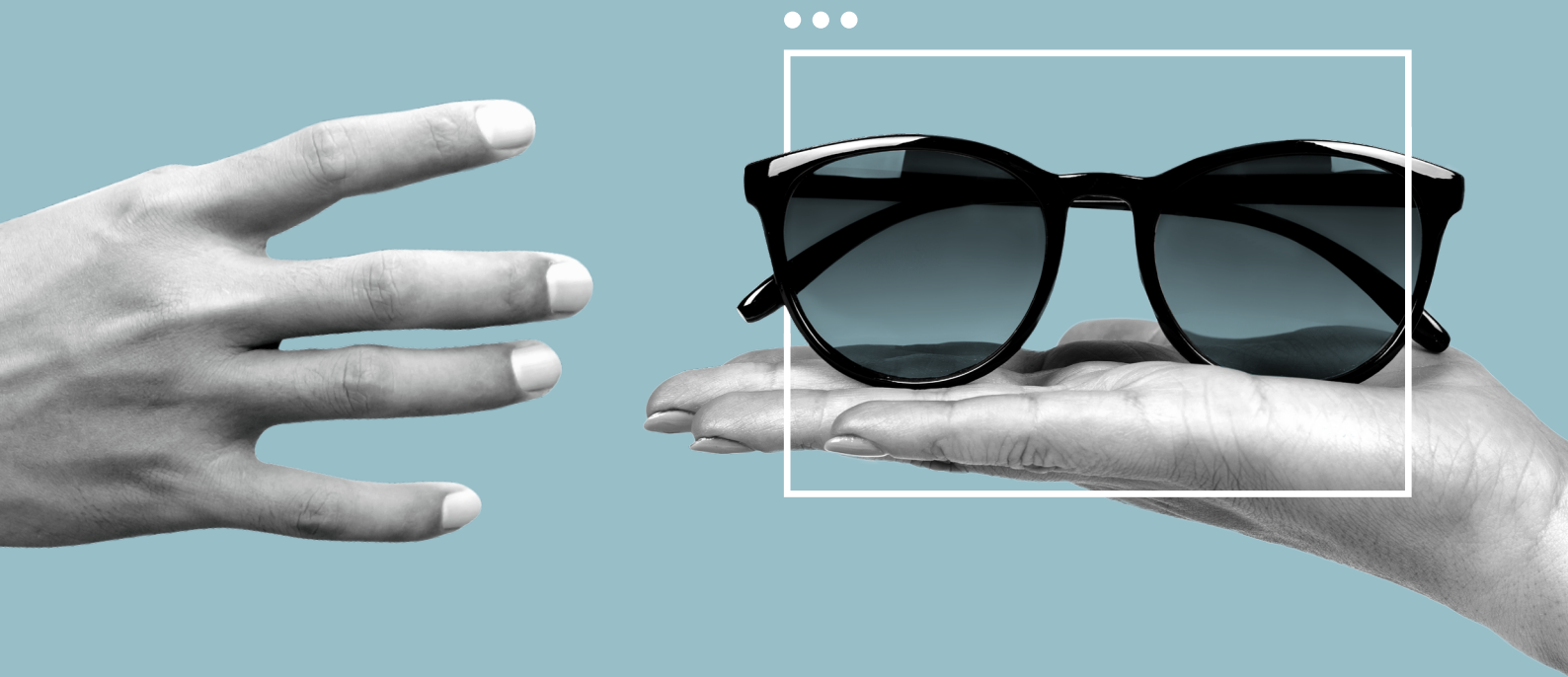




The Complete  
Guide To **Intent**  
**Marketing**



How to Pull in Customers  
Who Are Already Reaching Out

# The Rise of Intent

## How Demographics Gave Way to Something More Precise

Audience targeting once relied on demographic research. Marketers grouped consumers into large buckets based on factors like age, race, gender, or income to understand which people might be interested in their products. To assume that 'women 21–45' were the consumers interested in purchasing baby products was perhaps broad and imprecise, but before the internet, demographic targeting was the only tool marketers had at their disposal.

Today, we understand that consumers aren't homogenous population segments defined solely by age or gender (in fact, marketers who try to reach their audience by relying exclusively on demographics risk missing more than 70% of potential shoppers<sup>1</sup>). Instead, it's critical to understand a customer's real-time mindset based on both their online and offline behavior. This

knowledge of consumer mindset is highly coveted, as it allows businesses to deliver a more personalised experience, maximise spend, and increase conversions. The good news? **Changes in search behavior means that consumers now express their true intent in more places, and more often, than ever before.**

This transformation has given rise to intent marketing, and your brand needs to embrace the new order – or risk being left behind. In **Part One** of this paper, you'll learn why meeting your customers' intent with direct answers to their questions, both on and off your website, enables you to increase clicks and conversion, driving more revenue. In **Part Two**, you'll discover how to build your intent marketing strategy. Then in **Part Three**, you'll learn how to set up your intent organisation for long-term success.



PART ONE

# The Case for Intent Marketing

What Intent Marketing Is  
and Why It Matters

Intent marketing is broadly defined as any kind of commercial interaction that is based on an initial action taken by a consumer – like an online search, a click-through on an ad, or a content download. Unlike traditional demographic-based targeting, which makes broad assumptions about customers, intent-based marketing allows you to narrow in on your customer's specific need, based on the actions they have just taken. It's all about understanding each initial consumer input with the aim of *aligning with that user's intent*. In other words, delivering precisely what they want or need in a particular moment.

Here's an example: According to research from Think With Google, 40% of baby product purchasers live in households without children.<sup>2</sup> If you only target women with children in order to sell baby products, you'll miss a huge segment of your potential audience. By paying attention to the actions people take – for instance, if they conduct online research about "best baby shower gifts" and then click on your blog article about shower gifting – you'll gain greater insight into who your customers *really* are and what they need.

Sophisticated understanding of intent lets you reach even "unexpected" customers right at the moment they're most likely to take an action.

**Sophisticated understanding of intent allows you to reach even "unexpected" customers right at the moment they're most likely to take an action.**

# Why Fundamental Shifts in Search Have Changed Customer Expectations

Advances in AI-powered search capabilities have fundamentally changed consumer expectations.

Natural Language Processing (NLP) is the branch of artificial intelligence that enables software to “listen to,” process, and manipulate language. It’s been implemented across many popular search engines (plus more and more messaging services, apps, voice assistants, and chatbots) and consumers have grown accustomed to the experience.

“With the rise of AI and deep learning, people are learning that they don’t have to speak to computers in short keywords,” says Christi Olson, Head of Evangelism at Microsoft. “We’re seeing a shift to conversational questions, which are more natural for us.”

Since these services are now able to process and answer longer, more detailed queries, users can simply ask for something – whether by typing into a search box, or speaking aloud to Alexa, Siri, or Cortana – and the search engine will understand them. They can ask complex questions and expect to get exactly what they want in response. With this important advancement, the search paradigm has fundamentally changed – from keywords and links, to questions with relevant and contextual answers.

Because we can interact more organically with search engines, we’re searching more than ever. On average, people search 3–4x per day,<sup>3</sup> and 90% of consumers report using search at every stage of their customer lifecycle.<sup>4</sup> Google now sees more than 2 trillion overall searches per year, up from 73 billion in 2004 and 1.2 trillion in 2012.<sup>5</sup> NLP has made search engines capable of answering even our most complex questions, and because of that, we want to search even more.

“People are learning that they don’t have to speak to computers in short keywords”

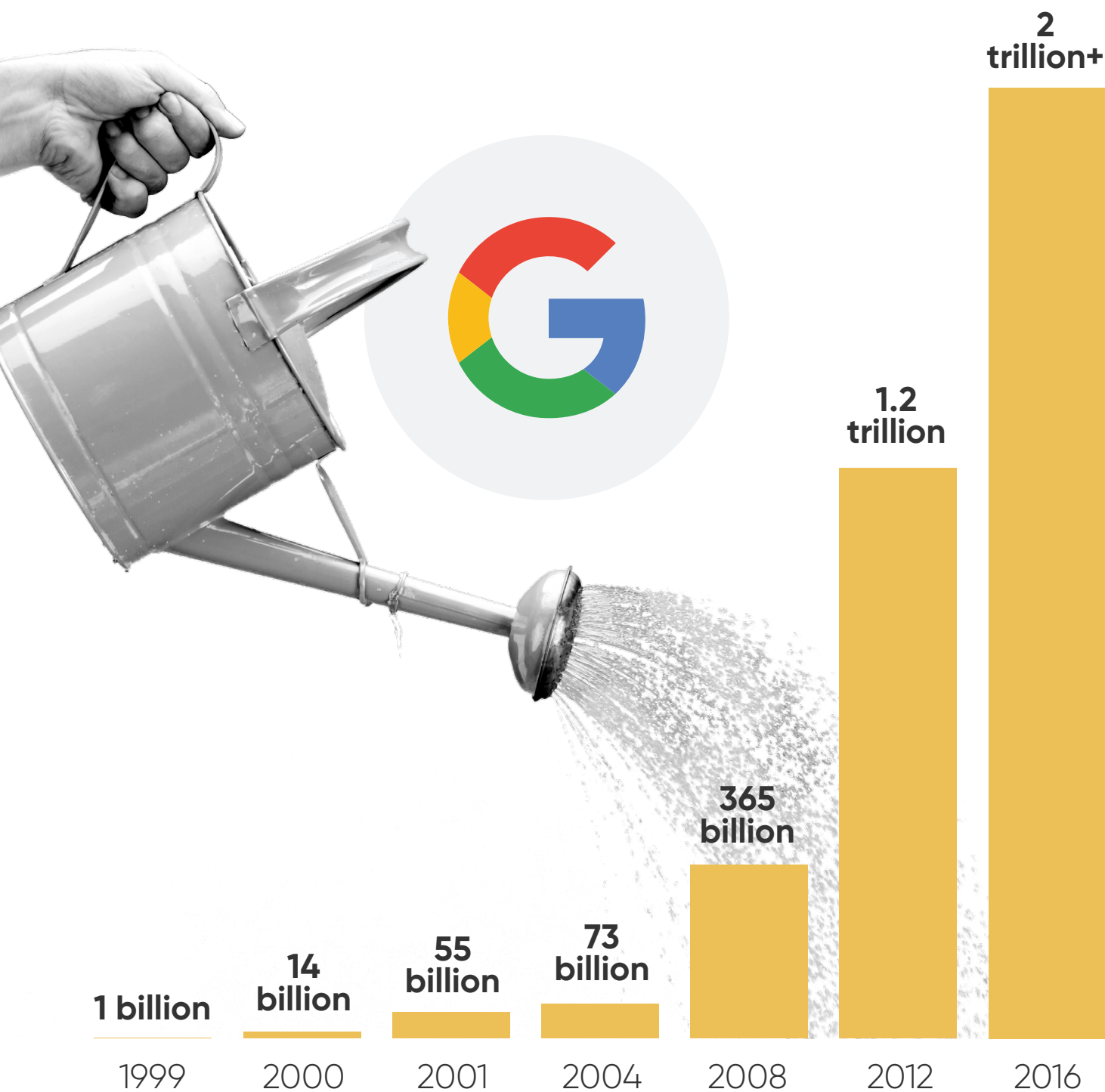


**Christi Olson**

Head of Evangelism at Microsoft



# Google Searches Per Year



# How Meeting Consumer Intent Drives More Revenue



**This fundamental shift in search behavior has brought two major changes for marketers:**

## **1** Customers are now completely in control of their journey.

Because of this shift, “interruption marketing” is less effective than ever. When people realise they can reasonably expect relevant, specific answers that give them exactly the information they need, they’re less likely to engage with ads or content that exist outside of that experience.

47% of all internet users use an ad blocker. So if you’re buying ads, only half of the existing audience is available to you. Alternatively, with intent marketing (also referred to as “pull marketing”), you’re not interrupting your customers, because you’re giving them exactly what they need based on the questions they ask and the actions they take.

## Interruption vs Pull Marketing:

### **Interruption Marketing:**

Interruption marketing is exactly what it sounds like. It interrupts a user’s experience, serving up ads with the goal of capturing the attention of any and every person who might potentially use your product or service. Common forms of this include TV commercials, pop-up ads, email spam, and direct mail.

### **Pull Marketing:**

Intent marketing is in this category. Pull marketing exclusively serves content to consumers who have indicated a need for a specific product or service. Sometimes this invitation to communicate is explicit, like opting in to a company’s newsletter or giving permission for relevant app notifications. Alternatively, consumers also indicate their desires through the questions they ask and the search terms they use. This is where intent marketing comes into play – meeting your customers’ explicit and implicit needs.

## 2 Longer, natural-language searches mean more opportunities for revenue.

Your customers are searching more than ever, and they're asking conversational questions that contain more words. The good news for your brand? These types of questions are easier to convert because they *show a higher level of intent*.

When customers ask long questions – which are associated with a more focused search intent – they're ready to buy. In fact, the longer the query, the likelier a customer is to click on your page: Long (6+) word queries are 55% more likely than short (1) word queries to result in a click.<sup>7</sup>

Why? A consumer searching for a keyword like "law firm," for example, could be doing any number of things – from learning about the way firms are structured, to conducting initial research about which law firms are in their area. But a search like "How do I find a lawyer in Manchester?" reveals a customer further down the purchase funnel. This is someone who is more likely to be ready to take a specific action – namely, to hire a law firm based out of Manchester. If you're a law firm, you should ensure that your organisation can answer that question across all search experiences, or you risk losing out on that highly motivated potential customer.

Here's another example that showcases the need to think beyond keywords: A customer who searches for "Tips to redo my bathroom" might be in the earliest

stages of their research, but they have still expressed intent to undertake a home renovation – a need which a brand like Homebase can and should meet. But Homebase wouldn't be able to service this customer journey if they're focused on keywords like "Homebase" or "home improvement" rather than on intent-based, conversational searches all along the purchase funnel.

Today, the customer journey doesn't start with a trip to the shop. It starts with a question, and it encompasses the non-linear path that follows – which is how intent marketing is redefining the marketing funnel. As search experiences have improved through NLP, search volume is higher than ever. As a result, people are showing their intents more often.

When you think about the motivated consumer who is behind these searches, it's easy to see why intent or search drives an estimated 62% of your web engagement.<sup>8</sup> Answers to longer, high-intent queries are 37% more likely to result in a click,<sup>9</sup> meaning greater ROI for the brands who can find customers at the moment they perform those searches, wherever they make them.

Consumers are showing intent in bigger and broader ways all the time. It's up to your brand to answer the call and meet your customers at these key moments – both on your website and across third-party search experiences.

**Answers to longer, high-intent queries are 37% more likely to result in a click**



PART TWO

# How to Build Your Intent Marketing Strategy

So how can you determine consumer intent? By analysing your customers' behavior over time, you can identify trends – like recurring search engine queries, or certain types of content driving engagement on your website – that lead to conversion, like a purchase, appointment booking, newsletter sign-up, job application submission, or in-store visit. You can then target prospects who take those actions.

Here's how to determine consumer intent based on trends you uncover in your search data, and how to optimise your marketing accordingly:

## Conduct keyword research.

Understanding high-intent keywords is a critical aspect of building your intent marketing strategy. There are a few general terms that express intent to transact across verticals.

Type of search	Common words included	Need being expressed
<b>Navigational</b>	"Go" keywords like <i>hours of</i> , <i>near me</i> , or <i>where is</i>	Need for direction
<b>Informational</b>	"Know" keywords like <i>how to</i> , <i>tips</i> , or <i>guide</i> , which imply a need for content (e.g., a blog post or in-depth infographic)	Need for other information
<b>Transactional</b>	"Buy" keywords like <i>buy</i> , <i>visit</i> , or <i>purchase</i>	Need for product

All of these categories of searches reveal important moments in the customer journey, but keywords that place a search in the "transactional" category show the highest purchase intent. For example, a customer searching "Buy car insurance in Maryland" is likely looking to purchase insurance in the near term, while a user searching "What kind of insurance do I need?" will probably need to do a bit more research before making a purchase.

The most important takeaway at this stage is to understand what kind of high-intent searches your customers make, and to prioritise ranking for them with the right type of content (e.g., a landing page where they can take an action, such as getting a free insurance quote). There are a wide variety of free and paid tools – including Answer The Public, Kparser, Google Trends, and Google Search Console – that can help you identify the search terms for which your site is ranking and find related search phrases, potential ways to optimise content, and data on how your competitors rank for those terms.

# Helpful tools for identifying important search terms

## Answer The Public

A free keyword tool that visualises search queries and suggested auto-completes. This resource can help you better understand what your customers are looking for related to your business, at no cost. Categories consist of the “5Ws” plus “how,” “can,” “which,” and “will” – helping to inform your content strategy by providing an understanding of which key questions to answer.

## Kparser

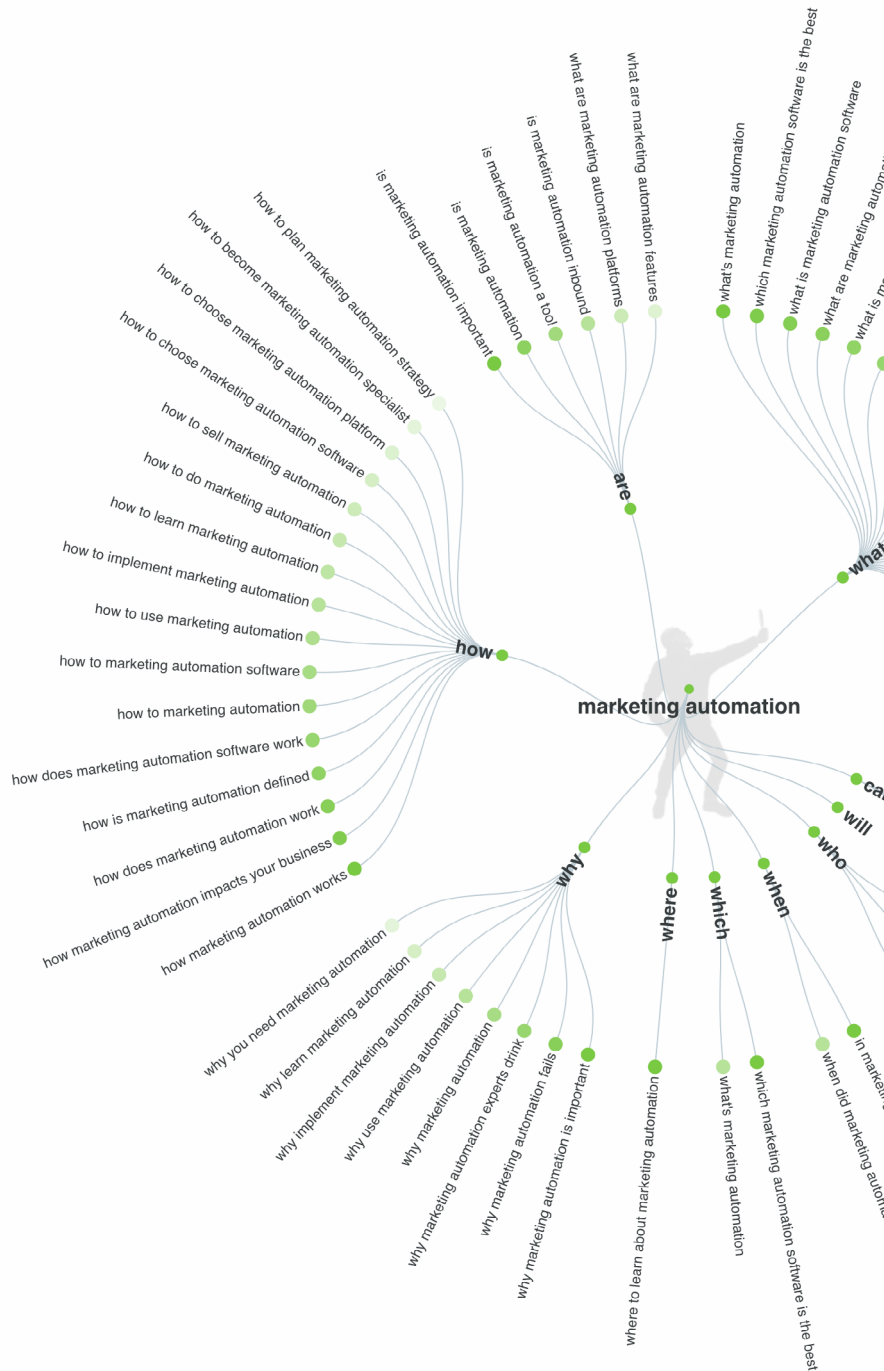
Kparser is another keyword research tool with a particular focus on “long tail suggestions” – helping you understand more about those longer, high-intent searches your customers are making.

## Google Trends

Very widely used, Google Trends is great for comparative keyword research. It also lets you view search volume spikes and dips over time, providing insight into search trends – overall, and in your specific geographical area.

## Google Search Console

A useful tool for anyone with a website, Google Search Console helps you monitor, maintain, and troubleshoot your site's presence in Google Search results. While there are many AI-powered discovery services your business should think about, when it comes to showing up in Google Search results specifically, this is where you should start.



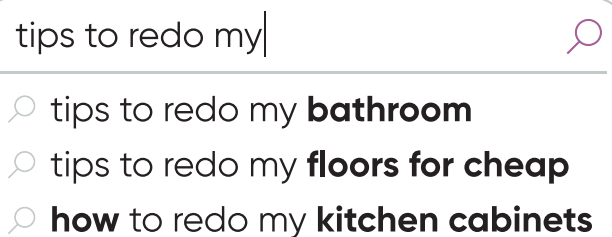
\* Example of results from Answer The Public

# Leverage data from the Search Engine Results Pages (SERP) and optimise for long-tail queries.

In isolation, keyword phrases aren't necessarily enough to identify consumer intent, so it's important to rely on more holistic data to understand what search engines deem most relevant to a high-intent search.

To do this, empty your cache and conduct an incognito search for your identified keywords or phrases. For example, execute the basic search mentioned above for "buy home insurance" and see what appears in Google's recommended searches, the Google Answer Box, and Google's autofill suggestions. This can help you understand the broader context around a search and which topics are seen as most relevant to a given query. It's also important to perform the same search on multiple engines, devices, and voice assistants to gain additional context.

Autocomplete can also help you understand what long-tail queries people might theoretically be making, helping you see that higher return on investment by targeting high-intent *long-tail keywords* in your organic search strategy. Make sure to note that this includes questions indicating intent related to your business vertical as a whole – not just questions about your brand. Keep in mind the previous Homebase example, where "redo my bathroom" is the beginning of the home improvement journey.



Once you've done this research, build and maintain a brand knowledge graph to actually deliver answers to these multi-dimensional, long-tail queries. We'll talk more about this below in the section "*Leverage the power of a brand knowledge graph in your intent strategy.*"



# Optimise your content to match intent.

Once you understand more about how consumers might find your brand through search, you then need to be useful in that moment. Otherwise, your customer will simply move on. Surfacing in search results is the first step, but you have to make sure the content that shows up matches the consumer intent, whether they want to learn more or actively transact. In fact, Think With Google research shows 51% of smartphone users have purchased from a brand *other* than the one they started searching for because the information provided by a competitor was deemed more useful.<sup>10</sup>

“As a marketer, you have to put yourself in the customer’s shoes, looking at what is it they’re asking, and doing the intent mapping behind it,” Olson says. “It’s about not putting our own biases on top of what they’re asking and what they’re doing.”

To do this, make sure you optimise your content to match the right types of queries (informational vs transactional) and that you prioritise long-tail keywords. Crafting specific, structured content for these long-tail keywords can help customers find your business at the moment of highest intent – leading to more traffic and conversions.

**“As a marketer, you have to put yourself in the customer's shoes, looking at what is it they're asking, and doing the intent mapping behind it.”**

**Christi Olson**

Head of Evangelism at Microsoft

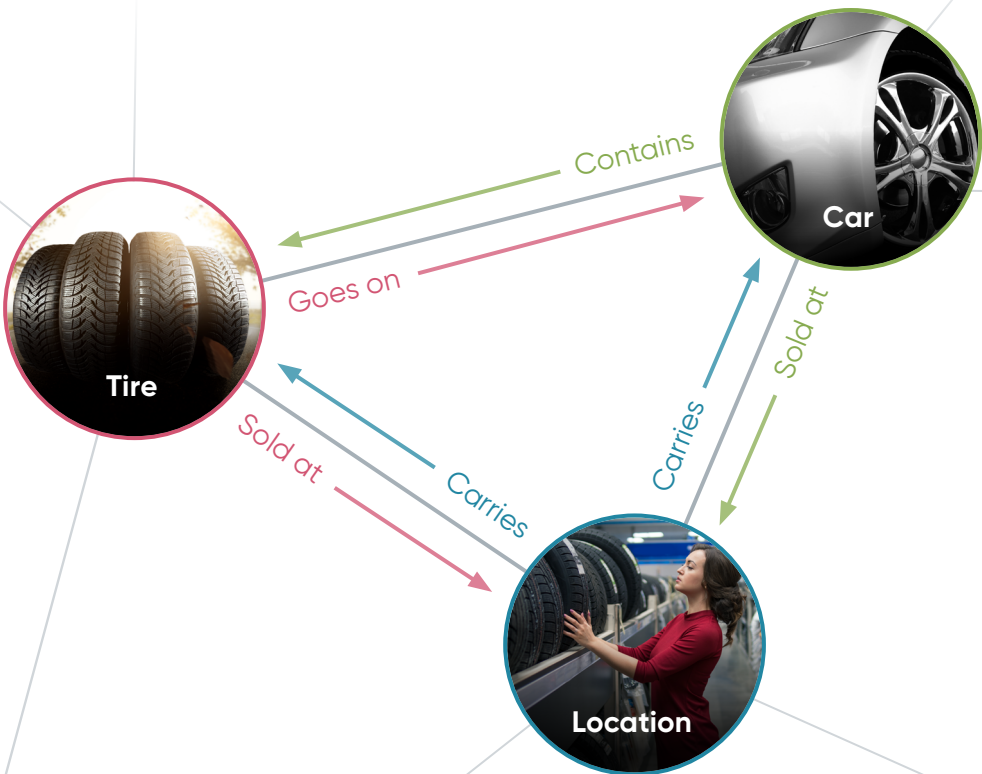
# Leverage the power of a brand knowledge graph in your intent strategy.

Customers who make the multi-dimensional, long-tail searches described above are valuable. They're also more likely to transact when they make these searches *directly on your website*. Users who search on your website are 1.8x more likely to convert than those who don't – and the 15% of visitors to your website who use the site search feature account for 45% of website revenue.<sup>11</sup>

But too many brands are missing a major opportunity – they're not delivering relevant, direct answers in *both* places. If your brand can't answer a multi-dimensional question in Google search results, you won't rank for that query. And a competitor will. Likewise, if a customer can't find a satisfactory answer on your website within a couple of clicks, they're likely to give up. Research suggests that most users will abandon a website if they can't find what they're looking for within 15 seconds.<sup>12</sup> Then where do they go for information? They bounce back to a search engine where – you guessed it – they're likely to find a competitor.

Delivering answers in both third-party search and on your owned properties pays off. A knowledge graph is how you achieve that. A brand knowledge graph allows you to store your own facts (or *entities*) linked with flexible, bidirectional relationships. This is the foundation for leveraging artificial intelligence across your martech stack and answering questions everywhere consumers search.

When your customers search for things like stores, advisors, offers, or events, they're not simply searching for those words – they're really searching for specific details. The knowledge graph can understand what they're actually looking for in the real world, and help you provide the answer. Here's how.



## Deliver answers via third-party search.

Let's say a potential patient searches on Google for "Best dermatologist near me open Saturday through Bupa." Delivering the correct answer requires information from across your organisation: **ratings** ("best"), **specialty** ("dermatologist"), **office location** ("near me"), **hours of operation** ("Saturday"), and **insurance accepted** ("Bupa"). How can your organisation deliver an answer that requires information from marketing, operations, facilities, compliance, and more?

With your knowledge graph, you can define the relationships between all these entities (your ratings, professionals, locations, and insurance) so that a search engine can answer this question, and your organisation increases its chances of ranking – and of meeting the consumer in their moment of high intent.

## Deliver answers on your own website.

You also need to provide the same quality of experience when a customer performs a search like this on your organisation's website. To deliver an answer that allows your customer to take a specific action, you need to understand all parts of this query and how they relate to one another.

Want that patient to convert if they perform the same search on your website? Your site search experience can't deliver a list of links that just contain the keyword "through" or "Bupa." Instead, you should be serving up results that showcase healthcare professionals who take the right type of insurance – with a clear path to take the action your patient came for, like a click-to-call or click-to-book appointment button.

"Managing user expectations on your landing pages is more important than ever," says Fili Wiese, an SEO expert and former Google engineer. "The important question for every single, indexable landing page is, 'What is its unique selling proposition?' This question is central when addressing user intent."

"Our websites need to be designed to address intentions of consumers and focus on converting these consumers at their moment of intent," Wiese continues. "Isn't that why we have our websites in the first place, to drive business and conversions?"

PART THREE

# How to Set Up Your Intent Marketing Organisation for Long-Term Success



# Who You Need: The Key Players

Once you've mapped out your intent marketing strategy by following the guidelines above, the final step is to create an effective plan for ongoing organisation and implementation. This will help you streamline the process of reaching customers at the moment of intent (and maximise your ROI). But it can be difficult to determine what responsibilities belong to each member of your internal teams.

The most important thing to establish is the set of responsibilities. Position level and title will be specific to your organisation, but these skillsets should be representative of what is required to build an effective intent marketing organisation. A larger marketing team will likely divide these responsibilities between more people, but this plan is still more than achievable for a smaller business.

Think of your intent organisation like a football team. You'll need a head coach and several key role players, but the complexity of your strategy – and how many people are involved in it – depends on your org chart.



## Your head coach

### Marketing Director

Functioning as the “head coach” of your organisation, this is a skilled director-level individual who develops a game plan for the team to execute. They manage the development of your intent marketing strategy as a whole, bearing responsibility for overseeing the other players below.

It's this person's job to not only *create* your intent marketing brand strategy, but to ensure that it is actually carried out. This means evangelising the importance of intent throughout your organisation, and getting buy-in from key teams like sales and product. This leader is tasked with keeping a trained eye on consumer intent behavior trends on a macro level, and then using this information to guide the day-to-day activities of your marketing team.

## Your striker(s)

### Systems Analyst

Focused on “scoring,” this person is at the heart of your intent marketing organisation. They are the owner of your brand knowledge graph, and they sit at the head of optimisation and strategy, listening to overarching objectives from your head coach and taking primary responsibility for getting the ball into the net.

As a marketing leader, you can tailor this role to your organisation, and it can technically be internal or external. What's critical is that this person leads the project of analysing the data about what consumers are searching for and what experiences are happening in search for your business category – using that feedback to help your organisation provide the answers that customers are looking for. This person will work with all of the below roles to use website and search data to own the process of structuring your knowledge – anticipating and delivering the answers your customers need.

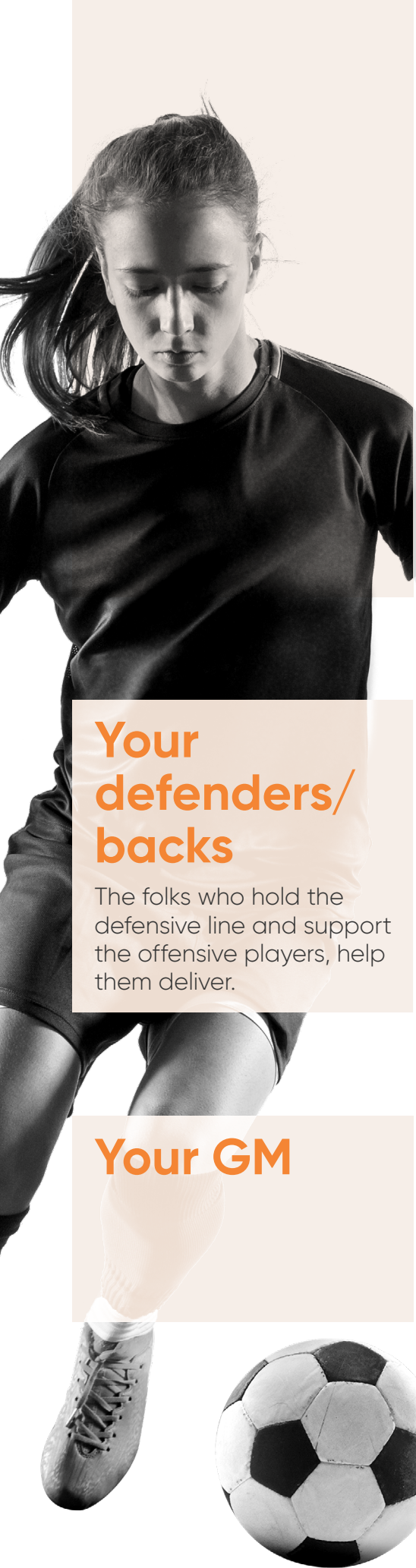
## Your mid-fielders

Skill position players who connect the offense and defensive lines, transitioning the ball and making sure everything is moving smoothly – with the number and task breakdown depending on the size of your org.

### Director of Digital

This position may be titled Director of eCommerce, depending on your company, but the critical duty in either case is to be your organisation's “site search expert,” taking care of optimising for intent on your own website.

This person should intimately understand what kind of questions customers are asking once they land on your website. What kind of answers are they seeking? What do they click on? What types of journeys are leading to transactions – and how can you improve both the layout of your site and its functionality to create the most seamless user experience? With this understanding, this skilled position player will then build strategic and tactical changes to your online properties that drive revenue – by increasing visitors, managing margin performance, and improving conversion rates.



## Digital Marketing Strategist and/or Marketing Analyst

The digital marketing strategist is responsible for optimising for intent *off* your website, focusing on organic SEO in third-party search. This person oversees organic traffic, optimising website copy and other key materials to surface at the moment of intent when customers are asking questions related to your business on search engines.

The digital marketing strategist should be adept at optimising for business-specific high-intent keywords, and should be an expert at understanding customer intent overall.

This role or a second role is also responsible for looking at the performance data around SEO, analysing the customer journey on your website, and surfacing the proper intent insights to other key stakeholders within your organisation. Essentially, this person focuses on surfacing insights to help make decisions about how your knowledge graph is leveraged.

The supporting roles in your organisation should assist the above leaders. Your **project manager** ensures that the intent marketing strategy you develop is implemented in all of your team's actions. Then, your **content** and **design teams** can work in tandem with your digital marketing manager to produce and optimise designed content that coordinates with top-down intent marketing strategy.

## Your defenders/ backs

The folks who hold the defensive line and support the offensive players, help them deliver.

## Your GM

### CMO

Finally, the CMO is responsible for all top-level game planning, development, implementation, and monitoring of your overall business marketing strategy. This person will be your foremost intent marketing leader on the macro level, working to ensure execution as well as integration with all of your existing marketing – so that you build a fully integrated marketing strategy.

# What to Do: Your Intent Action Plan

Once you're certain you have the key roles covered, it's time to take action. Your detailed action plan should be tailored to suit your existing resources, but it should include three key steps:

- Research what your consumers' intents are, and use that information to figure out what content to put on your website to match those intents. This sets you up to capture search share in third-party search experiences, and allows you to answer questions on your own site. For how to get started on researching intent, refer back to "*How to Build Your Intent Marketing Strategy*."
- Once you know what content you need, make sure that content is pre-built for machine readability, with attributes like Schema tagging.
- Finally, ensure that these structural attributes are wrapped up with beautiful design. Your website should be easily navigable, display a prominent search bar, and look aesthetically pleasing. After all, your website is designed to answer questions; it should be simple and intuitive for your customers to ask them.

## When to Start: Now.

### Change must begin today.

Why? Because the entire marketing technology stack was conceived in a world where computers didn't speak our language. Now they do.

The fundamentals of strategy and technology need to shift, or you won't be able to reach and engage your customers in the way the world now demands. Inbound marketing-dominated organisations experience a 61% lower cost per lead than organisations that predominantly leverage outbound marketing<sup>13</sup> and building an effective intent organisation will drive more of these valuable leads and maximise your ROI. But it will take time to realise this goal at any company, so it's imperative that you start now. And with 68% of consumers already stating that they would not return to a brand whose site provided a poor search experience, the opportunity cost of waiting is high.<sup>14</sup>

If you set up your intent marketing organisation for success today, you'll be able to deepen your understanding of your customers over time – and seamlessly adapt as the consumer journey continues to change.

Shifting to an intent marketing-first approach doesn't happen overnight, but the rewards of meeting your customers' needs at their exact moments of intent pays dividends. Intent marketing is worth more than traditional marketing. While you avoid wasting money on ineffective interruption marketing, you'll create a tailored experience, deliver valuable answers, and increase clicks-to-conversion – creating happier customers and driving more revenue for your organisation.

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The customer journey starts with a question, and every day consumers search for answers about brands. However, they are increasingly served false or misleading information from sources other than the brand. Yext, the Search Experience Cloud company, exists to help brands regain and maintain a direct relationship with their customers. With a mission to provide perfect answers everywhere, Yext puts businesses in control of their facts online by delivering brand verified answers straight from the source – wherever their customers are searching. Companies like Five Guys, Marriott, Jaguar-Land Rover, and businesses around the world use Yext to take back control of the customer journey, starting on their own website.

Yext has been named a Best Place to Work by Fortune and Great Place to Work<sup>®</sup>, as well as a Best Workplace for Women. Yext is headquartered in New York City with offices in Amsterdam, Berlin, Chicago, Dallas, Geneva, London, Miami, Milan, Paris, San Francisco, Shanghai, Tokyo, and the Washington, D.C. area.

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