



Google  YouTube

Supercharge your business this season

The retail marketers' guide to
the AI-powered holiday season

2026

Welcome to the first AI-powered holiday season.

Is your brand ready?

Every holiday season brings pressure, but this year is fundamentally different. Your goal hasn't changed: Get what's on your shelves into the hands of shoppers who are ready to buy. But the biggest shift is how those shoppers find you.

Last holiday season, only 61% of shoppers used AI platforms or features,¹ and 64% of surveyed holiday shoppers wished they had used AI *even more* to help with their shopping.²

This holiday season, AI is no longer a tool shoppers occasionally try. It is the one they rely on to discover, to decide, and to buy.

At Google, we're seeing this shift firsthand. Look at the scale: **AI Overviews now has over 2.5 billion monthly users.**³ AI Mode on Search has already surpassed **1 billion monthly users.**⁴ Driven by our most advanced Gemini models, these experiences are changing how shoppers discover brands, research their options, and make confident decisions.

When consumer behavior shifts this fast, it is easy for marketers to feel like they have to completely rebuild their marketing engine overnight to keep pace.

But keeping up doesn't require a total overhaul.

By investing with Google, you get a powerful compound effect. The foundations you've already established make you ready faster for the next wave. In the following pages, we break down exactly how to win the season.

CHAPTER 1

Top consumer shifts shaping the AI-powered holiday season

1. AI-powered discovery is the default

Winning this peak season starts with understanding the [super-empowered consumer](#).

Their shopping needs have stayed consistent: discovering, researching, comparing, and making a purchase. But the way they shop is getting a boost from AI.

In fact, **94% of U.S. holiday shoppers** that used AI **view AI-powered tools**, resources or technologies **as valuable for their shopping**.⁵

These shoppers expect the ease of a quick purchase, and the depth of a well-researched one. No decision is too big or too small to get personalized, highly relevant answers, which means brand awareness isn't the same shortcut it used to be.

Searches are getting longer and more conversational.

AI Mode searches are, on average, 3X as long as traditional searches.⁶

They aren't just typing two words into a box. They are asking detailed, multi-layered questions, evaluating more brands, comparing more products, and exploring more links and resources — including video — than ever before.

We are in a new era of brand discovery, where the lines between searching, watching, and buying have disappeared.

To meet this shift, brands can no longer afford to think of their marketing channels in silos.

3X

AI Mode searches are on average 3X as long as traditional Searches.⁷

3 in 4

3 in 4 users say Google AI Mode and/or AI Overviews help them make faster and more confident decisions.⁸

2. AI doesn't cut the journey short. It expands the horizon

When finding answers becomes effortless, shoppers don't stop searching. They explore further. AI isn't a shortcut that bypasses the path to purchase. It's an open door to deeper, richer discovery.

They are comparing more brands, diving into reviews, and turning to trusted creators to build buying confidence. Because Google Search and YouTube surface relevant video and creator content directly, video has become a key part of AI-powered discovery.

Since uncovering highly relevant information is now so seamless, consumers are actually hitting *more* touch points along their way, not fewer. The "friction" being removed here isn't about the number of touchpoints. It's the frustration of finding good answers.

By smoothing out the discovery process, AI allows shoppers to thoroughly vet and validate their choices before they even reach your site. By the time they arrive, the decision has already been made.

2.8X

Shoppers who use AI platforms or features in their purchase journey interact with 2.8X more touchpoints, on average, than those who don't.⁹



3. The more options shoppers have, the more they rely on trusted sources

With 61% of shoppers being more deliberate with their spending,¹⁰ trust and accuracy are paramount.

Today's consumers use AI to validate quality and reputation in seconds, relying on Google for product information they can trust.

Compared with other LLMs and video platforms, Search and YouTube remain the foundation for verified, trusted information.



66%

66% of Google Search users claim it provides information they can easily verify, compared to 36% of ChatGPT users.¹¹

81%

81% of social media users use Google Search to inform and evaluate discoveries they made on social media.¹²

No. 1

YouTube is the No. 1 video platform surveyed viewers in the United States say they trust the most.¹³

4. Google and YouTube are where holiday discoveries turn into decisions

Discovery happens on Google and YouTube. And even if it starts elsewhere, Google and YouTube are also where initial ideas turn into final purchase decisions.

Surveyed viewers in the United States rank YouTube as the No. 1 video platform when they need help making a quick purchase decision, outperforming other online video platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat.¹⁴

Similarly, shoppers are 2.3X more likely to say they use Google Search for purchase decisions than ChatGPT.¹⁵

40% of consumers who use Google AI Mode to help with their shopping and purchases say they're using ChatGPT less now.¹⁶

All of this comes together to make Google and YouTube the only partners that can simultaneously broaden shopper discovery and streamline the journey to checkout.

37%

In MMMs run by TransUnion in the U.S., running Google Search and YouTube campaigns together drove 37% higher ROAS vs. all other media.¹⁷



Q&A with Wayfair CMO Paul Toms

3 ways we're winning over holiday shoppers on Search and YouTube

1. How are you thinking about today's super-empowered consumers, and where is Wayfair focusing its efforts to stay top-of-mind?

Our biggest opportunity is to connect with consumers well before they have active shopping intent, so when a need does arise, Wayfair is already top-of-mind as the place to start their journey. Search remains incredibly important to us, and we're obviously a significant participant there.

But we're also spending a lot of time thinking about what happens before Search: how we build relevance and consideration before a customer is actively shopping. That means showing up in places where consumers are already spending their time, such as YouTube, with creators and live sports.

This fall, we're also launching a new brand platform designed to deepen that connection and keep Wayfair in customers' minds even when they're not actively shopping. The goal is to be there throughout the journey, not just when intent already exists.

2. With a marketplace catalog of over 40 million items, how do you ensure product data integrity and accuracy at scale, especially when rich data is so critical for showing up in Search?

Feed richness is an always-on marathon. Every year, the feed is going to grow because these models are going to need more information, and more information leads to even more data needs.

AI allows us to manage it at a scale that wasn't possible before. It enables us to provide rich data on a set of items in the shoulder or tail of our catalog. It gives those products a chance to show up and be matched to customers as Search looks for more specificity in recommendations.

At the same time, as a retailer with marketplace dynamics, data integrity starts with our suppliers. We hold our supplier partners to a high standard and we have many checks in place to ensure they are trustworthy and committed to the customer experience.

Ultimately, we hold a very high bar on what we call "accurate." We know Google does, too.

3. What is your approach to identifying and capturing new market opportunities to drive growth?

Our muscle — and where we've seen significant results — is our experimentation platform.

It allows us to test novel approaches and ideas in days or weeks, quickly identifying pockets of opportunity where we can offer something different and drive incremental growth.

Just as importantly, it helps us identify areas without incremental growth, so we can avoid wasting time and money.

Our strong, collaborative partnership with Google is a great example of this in action.

Across Search and YouTube, we're constantly testing, learning, and refining new approaches to uncover opportunities and scale what works.



CHAPTER 2

How to supercharge your business this season on Google and Youtube

Do the 'Commerce 4' to stay ahead

1. Enrich your product feeds to boost discoverability

To ensure your products are discoverable and accurately represented across an increasingly fragmented journey, structure your data for the Shopping Graph.

Automation is only as powerful as your data. Maximize its impact by sharing rich product details — titles, descriptions, images — alongside key customer priorities like shipping speeds, return policies, sale prices, and product ratings.

New conversational attributes allow you to easily share rich, natural data directly with our models — such as customer Q&As, detailed variant options, and common use cases.

It complements your existing product feed, answers shoppers' questions automatically, and grounds the AI in your absolute truth.

In addition to your product feeds, consider more ways to manage your brand's organic presence across Google:



Set up your Brand Profile: Customize how your brand shows up on Google by adding rich visuals to connect with shoppers and highlight key information such as promotions, shipping and return policies.



Get started with Business Agent: Make your brand responsive by answering real holiday questions like: "Will this arrive before New Year's Eve?" or, "Is this good for someone who loves skiing?"



Publish rich video content: Detailed reviews, how-tos, and explainers on YouTube and other platforms are vital. Search is surfacing this relevant content directly in results.



Manage community feedback: Manage your brand across forums, communities, and review sites. People want authentic feedback from real people.

2. Transform your data from a look back to a look ahead at your next best customer

During the holiday rush, your proprietary data is more valuable than ever. It isn't just a ledger of past sales; it is the map that trains AI to find new customers as they're researching outside their normal categories. To anticipate what's next, **build your Data Strength today.**



Establish your foundation with [Google tag gateway](#).

Imagine a shopper who visits your site three times before finally buying a winter coat. Without upgrading your tag to Google tag gateway, the AI sees three different people instead of one existing customer. Advertisers who adopted Google tag gateway on average observed conversions uplift of 14%.¹⁸

Connect your signals with [Data Manager](#). Instantly connect your first-party data — from Salesforce to BigQuery — to directly power AI solutions.

Optimize relevance with [cart data](#). These transaction signals show Google exactly which products are purchased together — powering more effective targeting.

3. Stay agile and drive sales with AI-powered campaigns



The traditional retail playbook — planning in Q2, locked-in budgets in Q3, and simply executing/scaling in Q4 — is officially over.

Speed and flexibility are your new competitive advantage. To win super-empowered holiday shoppers, you need AI-powered campaigns that optimize instantly.

[AI Max for Search campaigns](#)

Find untapped holiday opportunities with advanced keywordless technology and deliver personalized creative and experiences at scale. It just takes one click.

[New AI Max for Shopping campaigns](#)

Already using Google's Shopping campaigns? Turn on AI Max for Shopping to turn products from your Merchant Center feed into dynamic, shoppable ads.

[Performance Max](#) Your go-to for cross-channel reach and performance. Advertisers who adopt AI Max in Search campaigns or Performance Max campaigns see an average of 15% more conversions or conversion value overall on Search at a similar CPA/ROAS when they have sufficient budget to capture the additional value.¹⁹

[Demand Gen](#) Serve high-impact ads on Google's most visual surfaces, and drive performance on YouTube. We're putting the latest Gemini models to work for your Demand Gen campaigns. In the second half of 2025, we introduced hundreds of improvements to Demand Gen campaigns that are driving 40% greater conversion value on YouTube when using target-based bidding, according to an internal experiment.²⁰

Pro Tips

Get an extra boost from YouTube creators.

Now, you can turn your high-performing YouTube creator affiliate videos into high-performing ads in Demand Gen with [affiliate partnerships boost](#).

Capture demand, don't cap it.

Use flexible budgets and solutions like [Smart Bidding Exploration](#) as your "scout" to find new queries you weren't targeting before.

Never miss an opportunity. Our new [missed-opportunity reporting](#) tool visually illustrates exactly where you have missed performance due to insufficient budgets or bids during your most critical promotional windows.

Reach new customers.

Activate the [New Customer Acquisition](#) goal to turn your campaigns into active growth engines.

By securely pairing your first-party data with real-time website tagging, you help train Google AI to bid smarter and prioritize finding net-new shoppers.



4. Start building and owning your agentic infrastructure to prepare for the future of retail

Agentic commerce has officially moved from "hype" to "reality." Future-proof your business for agentic experiences by adding these two actions to your roadmap to remove the friction for shoppers:

Evaluate [Universal Commerce Protocol](#) for your business to ensure your product data can be seamlessly read, verified, and acted upon by autonomous AI agents.

Implement [Google Pay](#) for frictionless payment to simplify checkout today and unlock agentic commerce in the future, using your existing infrastructure.



CHAPTER 3

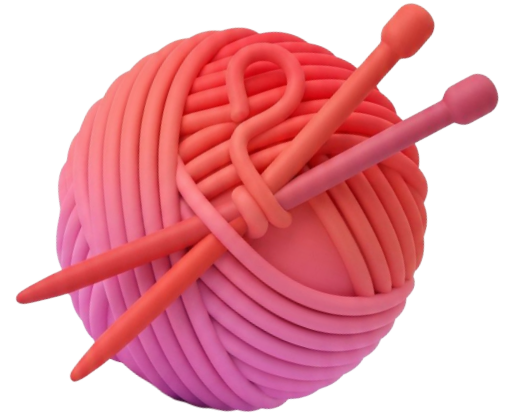
Case studies

Holiday inspiration from brands
driving performance on
Search and YouTube

Etsy connects shoppers to unique inventory at scale

For Etsy, matching millions of one-of-a-kind items to the right shoppers is highly complex. To help solve this, they used AI Max to better understand a shopper's intent in search and automatically tailor ad headlines that reflected what shoppers were looking for.

They paired this with shoppable YouTube videos to grab shoppers' attention early in their journey.



The result:

During the 2025 holiday shopping season, Etsy drove a 36% year-over-year increase in gross merchandise sales, partially attributed to AI Max, with unbranded Search ads while maintaining strict ROI targets.

The synergy between its data strength setup and AI Max supported a 21% surge in new buyer acquisition.

Wall Blush shatters its social ceiling to scale globally

Premium wallpaper brand Wall Blush hit a growth ceiling when spending more on social media platforms brought fewer results. To scale up, they turned Google Ads into a seamless loop, using Demand Gen video ads to spark visual inspiration during the design phase, then automatically closing the deal with Performance Max product feeds once those inspired homeowners showed intent to buy.



The result:

Wall Blush drove a 98% year-over-year surge in conversions, a 13% clickthrough rate increase, and a 111% increase in revenue, successfully fueling its expansion into international markets.

Nex Playground gamifies living room discovery

Nex Playground defined an entirely new category of active gaming using AI motion tracking, which meant they couldn't rely on existing search volume alone.

To build immediate awareness, they used YouTube Connected TV to establish their presence right in the living room.

Then, they used Demand Gen to capture that momentum on mobile, turning household excitement into sales.



The result:

This living-room-first approach tripled Nex's year-over-year sales, proving 14X more effective at converting new families than social, and kept users on-site 5.5X longer

Sources

1. Google commissioned Ipsos Holiday Shopping, Oct 2025-Jan 2026, Online Survey, US consumers 18+ who conducted Holiday shopping activities in the past two days, n=8237.
2. Google commissioned Ipsos Consumer Continuous, Jan 2026, Online Survey, Global average of select countries (US, CA, UK, FR, DE, IT, AU, JP, IN, CN, BR, MX, ES, ZA, KR) not weighted to reflect population size, n=2241 consumers who shopped for the holidays and used AI tools or resources.
3. Google commissioned Ipsos, Post-Holiday, Jan 2026, Online Survey, US Consumers ages 18-64 who who shopped online for the 2025 holiday season, n=1275, who used AI during their holiday shopping, Top-3 box on a 5pt scale
4. Google I/O 2026.
5. Google I/O 2026.
6. Google internal data, May 2026.
7. Google internal data, May 2026.
8. Google commissioned Ipsos Global Consumer Journeys, Dec 2025, Online survey, Global average of select countries (AR, AU, BR, CA, CL, CO, DE, ES, FR, ID, IN, IT, JP, KR, MX, NL, PE, PH, PO, SG, SW, TW, TH, US, UK) adults 18+, n=13,189 online shoppers who made a consumer good purchase requiring consideration in the past week (range of categories) and used Google AI Overviews or AI Mode.
9. Google commissioned Ipsos Global Consumer Journeys, Dec 2025, Online survey, Global average of select countries (AR, AU, BR, CA, CL, CO, DE, ES, FR, ID, IN, IT, JP, KR, MX, NL, PE, PH, PO, SG, SW, TW, TH, US, UK) adults 18+,online shoppers who made a consumer good purchase requiring consideration in the past week (range of categories) n=14,305 and used AI platforms or features in their journey, n= 21,881 and did not use AI platforms or features in their journey.
10. Google commissioned Ipsos Consumer Continuous, Online survey, Global average of select countries (US, CA, UK, FR, DE, IT, AU, CN, JP, IN, BR, MX, ES, ZA, KR) not weighted to reflect population size, adults 16-74 or 18-74 in US and CA, n=10,046 online consumers. June 2025.
11. Google commissioned Ipsos Global Consumer Journeys, Dec 2025, Online survey, Global average of select countries (AR, AU, BR, CA, CL, CO, DE, ES, FR, ID, IN, IT, JP, KR, MX, NL, PE, PH, PO, SG, SW, TW, TH, US, UK) not weighted to reflect population size, Adults 18+, n=12,594 online shoppers who made a consumer good purchase requiring consideration in the past week (range of categories) and have discovered brands and/or products on social media.
12. Google-commissioned Ipsos Global Consumer Journeys, online survey, global average of select countries, AR, AU, BR, CA, CL, CO, FR, DE, IN, ID, IT, JP, KR, MX, NL, PE, PH, PO, SG, ES, SW, TW, TH, U.K., U.S., not weighted to reflect population size, adults 18+, n=12,594 online shoppers who made a consumer good purchase requiring consideration in the past week (range of categories) and have discovered brands and/or products on social media, Dec. 2025.
13. Google/Kantar, Future of Video, US, n=968 YouTube viewers, n=7621 weekly video viewers 18-64, fielded from 12/10/2025-1/12/2026. Competitive set includes 9 market competitors: Linear TV, Netflix, Disney+, Amazon Prime Video, Max, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat.
14. Google/Kantar, Future of Video, US, n=968 YouTube viewers, n=7621 weekly video viewers 18-64, fielded from 12/10/2025-1/12/2026. Competitive set includes 9 market competitors: Linear TV, Netflix, Disney+, Amazon Prime Video, Max, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat.
15. Google commissioned Ipsos Global Consumer Journeys, Dec 2025, Online survey, Global average of select countries (AR, AU, BR, CA, CL, CO, DE, ES, FR, ID, IN, IT, JP, KR, MX, NL, PE, PH, PO, SG, SW, TW, TH, US, UK) not weighted to reflect population size, Adults 18+, n=37,261 online shoppers who made a consumer good purchase requiring consideration in the past week (range of categories) and use search engines and/or AI platforms.
16. Google commissioned Ipsos Global Consumer Journeys, Dec 2025, Online survey, Global average of select countries (AR, AU, BR, CA, CL, CO, DE, ES, FR, ID, IN, IT, JP, KR, MX, NL, PE, PH, PO, SG, SW, TW, TH, US, UK) not weighted to reflect population size, Adults 18+, n=9,347 online shoppers who made a consumer good purchase requiring consideration in the past week (range of categories), use ChatGPT, and use Google AI Mode for shopping.
17. Google-commissioned TransUnion MMM Meta-Analysis & Synergy Simulations of YT + Search vs. All Other Media in aggregate, US, all verticals n=40 and 800 + Models Q1 2024 – Q4 2025.
18. Google Internal Data, Global, Finance, July -Dec 2024 vs Jan-June 2025.
19. Google internal data, Global, 2026-02-27 to 2026-03-12; average uplift on Search text ads for non-Retail advertisers adopting with at least 30% of their Search text ads conversions or value coming from AI Max using the full feature suite (search term matching, text customization, and final URL expansion) or Performance Max campaigns.
20. Google Internal Data, Global, H2 2025, DemandGen Experiment results.