

THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL MARKETING IS NOW: ARE YOU READY?

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The digital landscape is an exciting environment; it's always shifting based on advances in technology and human behavior, and therefore always new. Google has recently released an [update to its micro-moments research](#), detailing how these moments have changed the landscape.¹ In short, users *expect* to find information that empowers their decision making; they *expect* experiences to be tailored to them with personalization and localization; and they *expect* immediacy.

As consumer expectations for how, when and where they want to receive information continue to evolve, brands must align to user intent in order to remain relevant to their target audiences. This intent shifts based on the consumer's journey over time. Different content, channels and devices are used at each stage and brands need to align themselves with that journey.



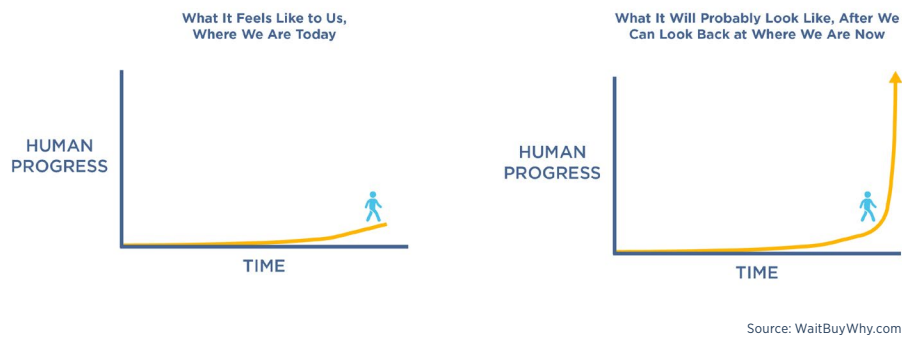
To Address Intent Across the Evolving Customer Journey, Four Emerging Trends are Critical

Artificial intelligence, voice search, the local universe and a mobile-first approach are four key factors that brands must consider in order to align with customers and customer intent.

1. On the Verge of an Artificial Intelligence Revolution?

One thing is certain: we cannot know the future. We can imagine it, we can discuss possible scenarios and we can plan for it. But we can't know it until it becomes the past. What we do know, however, is that the pace of change continues to increase. Ray Kurzweil's [Law of Accelerating Returns](#) addresses this notion, anticipating that the 21st century will achieve 1,000 times the progress of the 20th century.²

Artificial intelligence is the thing that will cause the next major advancement in humanity's progress. The chart below illustrates the "hockey stick" advancement we can expect from artificial intelligence:



Artificial intelligence is a big topic

AI powers everything from the Candy Crush game on your phone to self-driving cars. So let's set a baseline and define AI as using machines to match human capabilities. With that as our framework, we can review the three main categories or levels of AI:

LEVEL 1: Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI). ANI specializes in one area and is supervised by/ receives input from humans. "Machine learning," when we're talking about it in a digital media context, is generally an instance of ANI. Examples include beating a human in chess and making bidding decisions in your paid search campaign.

LEVEL 2: Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). AGI can match human capabilities in multiple areas. It can solve problems based on multiple inputs, learn complex ideas, learn to reason and develop greater understanding by building on pre-existing knowledge.

LEVEL 3: Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI). ASI is the truly futuristic stuff, where the AI is faster and smarter than humans. It's the stuff of sci-fi movies. It's robot overlord time.

So how can marketers leverage AI today?

Many marketers are already using AI in their marketing, from leveraging portfolio bidding algorithms in their campaign management tools to offering users the best site experience for them based on an AI's understanding of their behavior patterns. The true value to be gleaned from AI in today's digital

marketing landscape is the ability to understand, react to and act on patterns and anomalies in the data to make more relevant, real-time decisions than ever before.

One company that features AI heavily in its stack is Adobe. Sensei is Adobe's AI; it powers key features across several of its products. Adobe Audience Manager uses Sensei to understand audience traits, define segments, etc. Adobe Analytics uses Sensei for pattern recognition and anomaly detection. Adobe Media Optimizer uses Sensei for portfolio bidding and optimizations across channels. Adobe Experience Manager uses Sensei to understand the best combination of content for improved performance.

Because the platforms are all powered by Sensei and integrated in the Adobe stack, marketers can now leverage the value of each product's data, using the Sensei learnings to tie data together and identify patterns and trends across products. (Note: this is not an endorsement of Adobe, just an illustrative example – many tools and platforms leverage AI).

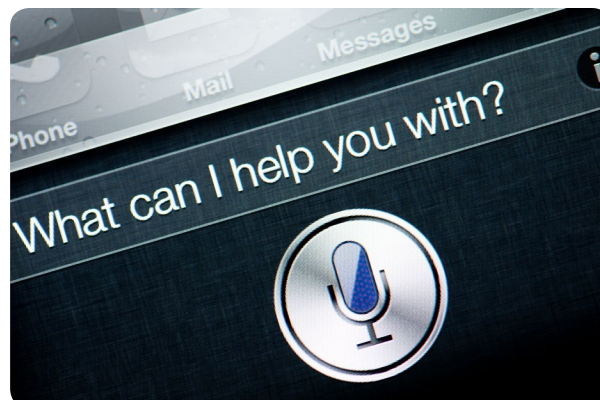
2. The Future of Voice Search is Now: Why It Matters

20% of mobile searches on Google in the US are [voice searches](#) – as of May 2016.³

67 million [voice-assisted devices](#) will be in use in the US by 2019.⁴

Digital assistants are everywhere, and all the major players are racing to make theirs the most accurate and useful:

- Amazon (Alexa; Echo)
- Google (Google Assistant; Google Home)
- Apple (Siri)
- Microsoft (Cortana, Windows 10; Harman Kardon “Invoke” speaker)
- Even [Firefox](#) is getting into the voice search game⁵



As the numbers and the players indicate, voice search is kind of a big deal. Why? Because this is how consumers behave today: “best,” “near me” and “right now” micro-moments continue to increase, as noted in the [Google study](#).⁶ These are all facilitated by voice search; it is a clear indicator of user intent, because users are speaking directly to these devices and asking questions. Brands that are not thinking through this shift will be left behind as this trend in user behavior outpaces their ability to keep up with it.

So how can marketers leverage voice search today?

Though there is no paid search auction model specific to voice search and digital assistants (yet), there are steps to be taken to incorporate this into an SEM strategy today. First, consider capturing relevant “near me” searches in paid search, specifically for mobile device queries. Mobile campaigns with specific, relevant ad groups and keywords can be leveraged to appear on the mobile search results page – a good first start. Second, never forget the value of reviewing your search query reports (SQRs) for long-tail queries. Though you can’t yet see in an SQR whether the search was via voice, you can determine the longer tail “question-style” queries that could be incorporated into your strategy.

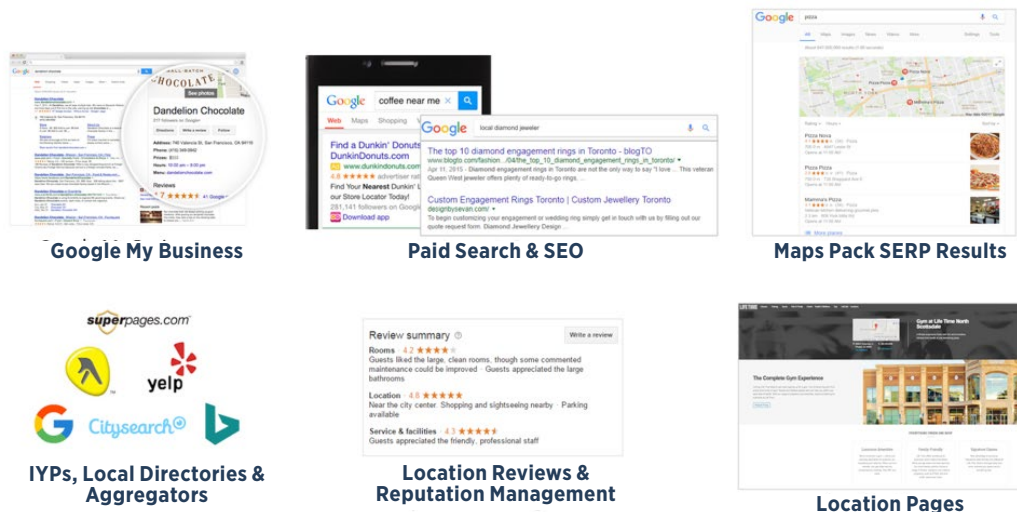
Until there’s a way to bid on voice queries in paid search (which is no doubt soon be forthcoming), SEO offers an ability to address voice search today. Voice search signals a big shift in the focus of SEO. Previously, the goal of SEO was to try to rank for high-volume, competitive head terms. Not the case anymore: the extremely long tail will rule as voice search takes over.

Google Search Console will soon tell you if the [source of your traffic](#) is from a digital assistant or a voice search, which will provide valuable insight into the way people are searching for content.⁷ To get ahead of this, SEO teams should partner with content strategy teams to create and optimize content for SEO that answers questions, provides quick answers for micro-moment queries like “near me” and “best,” and allows brands to “talk back” to their customers in a more conversational tone.

Additionally, SEO teams should ensure all relevant structured data is in place, so that the engines have the data they need to make informed decisions at hand without needing to look to your website for the information (consider service areas, hours of operation, etc.).

3. The Local Search Universe is Vast

When we talk about local search, what do we mean exactly? When viewed holistically, “local search” encompasses many things:



Though it is vast, local search is vital to the customer journey. Some amazing and impactful stats tell us just how crucial local search is for users today:

- 72% of consumers who performed a [local search visited a store](#) within five miles⁸
- 34x increase in [“near me” searches](#) on Google between 2011 and 2015; continues to increase year over year, doubling in 2016⁹
- 76% of people who conduct a local search on their smartphone visit a physical place [within 24 hours](#)¹⁰
- 1 in 5 searches on Google are specifically [related to location](#)¹¹
- And perhaps most compelling: 55% of [millennials will ignore brands](#) that don't show up in their searches or have poor reviews¹²

So how can marketers leverage local search today?

Addressing the full spectrum of local search requires that attention be paid to multiple touchpoints. As a foundation, brands should ensure they have visible location pages containing accurate information. This is especially critical with the prevalence of the maps stack in the search engine results, and the distribution of local information to directories, IYP and related sources. This is the first step to managing a brand's local presence.

Additionally, brands should include citation management, reputation monitoring and review management, and ensure their pages feature local content including localized reviews and unique content specific to individual locations.

SEO is also a key element in mastering local search. Regular SEO tactics should be deployed at the location page level, including:

- Page structure/template recommendations for ideal user experience and information architecture
- Assess and grade the experience for ranking authority, based on keywords and on-page elements, as well as technical elements
- Perform content gap analyses and make content creation and optimization recommendations
- Insertion of relevant [schema markup](#), which is a code added to a website to help the search engines return more informative results for users¹³

When it comes to paid search, the first element that must be considered is the account structure. The account needs to have the right level of granularity to properly impact locations/geographies. If it's too granular, it won't scale; not granular enough and you're missing out on important levers to pull to drive performance.

Second, mobile-device campaigns designed specifically to send people to stores/brick-and-mortar locations are crucial to a local paid search strategy. Why? Because mobile is local – it's the device always on-hand when people are on the go. Additionally, these campaigns allow for a clear division of mobile-to-local KPI monitoring and optimization, separate from any online activity.

Finally, leverage all the local tools that are available to you. Location and call extensions (if calls are a conversion event for your brand) should be a given for your local campaigns. Local Inventory Ads are another tool to drive sales in stores. Google's Store Visits and Store Conversions tracking are key, as these metrics show the true value of online efforts on brick-and-mortar locations and complete the view of user behavior for a more accurate picture of a customer's interactions with your brand.

4. Mobile-First Will Shake Up SEO

Recognizing the importance of mobile devices in searchers' lives, Google has announced it will be rolling out a [mobile-first index](#).¹⁴ Best guesses within the industry indicate that this will occur in early 2018. When it does, Google will first look to the mobile site experience – not the desktop site – for SEO “worthiness” factors leading to indexation and ranking. This shift is assumed to be more impactful than Panda, Penguin or any other major update to date, as many brands' mobile experiences are not aligned with their desktop experience today.

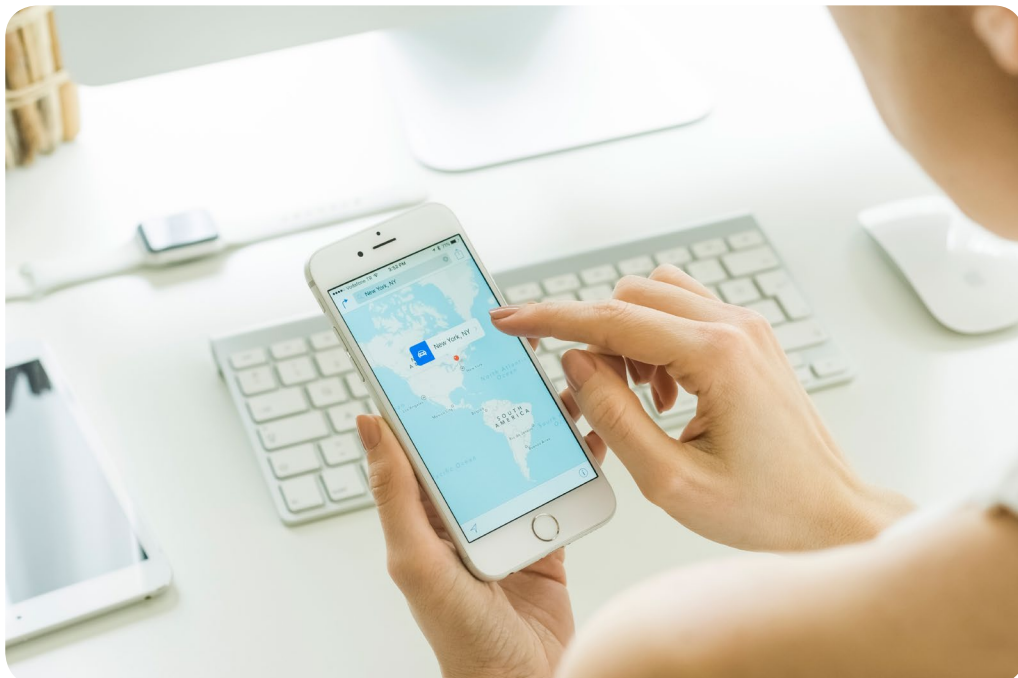
So how can marketers prepare for the mobile-first index today?

It's simple to state, but accomplishing the task may be difficult for many brands: ensure your mobile site content and markup is equivalent across mobile and desktop. The mobile-first index means separate mobile experiences that include lighter or less content or different markups than desktop are likely to be penalized. Poor user experiences on mobile will also be a significant factor; slow load times, small font and rendering issues will all be key to address. This is important for more than just the mobile index – penalties resulting from a poor mobile experience will impact not only mobile rankings, but desktop as well.

The most thorough way to address the mobile-first index is with a responsive site, where a single URL renders the same site experience for users, tailored to the device they're using. If your site is responsive today, you're in good shape for the rollout. If not, a meeting with your SEO and development teams should be a top priority to take steps to prepare for the change.

So, are you ready?

This constant change means brands have a lot to consider, but isn't that the fun of digital? With a well-planned approach that utilizes strategies for each of the above-mentioned topics, brands can not only be prepared to meet these changes head-on, but they can also position themselves with the right messages in the right places at the right times for their ever-evolving audiences.



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