DAC

The Media Forward Series

A Tactical Playbook for AI-Era Growth

DAC

The Media Landscape Is Shifting Beneath Our Feet

We are living through a profound reset in how people discover, evaluate, and engage with brands. Consumer behavior is evolving faster than most marketing strategies can keep up, and the platforms, tools, and formats that once felt stable are now in constant motion.

Linear customer journeys have long since given way to fragmented touchpoints, and this trend is only further accelerating. Attention is more divided than ever, and consumer trust is more social than brand driven. And the moment when a potential customer decides to pay attention or scroll past has shifted across devices, formats, and generations.

Video is no longer just an awareness tool; it's the medium of discovery, evaluation, and action. Platforms like TikTok, YouTube Shorts, and Instagram Reels have trained users to search less and scroll more. In fact, nearly half of Gen Z adults now use social media as their first stop for information, leaving traditional search engines behind. And when they do use search, they're more likely to encounter AI-generated answers than a list of clickable links.

What Fragmentation Means for Marketers: What used to be distinct "channels" in a funnel -- TV, social, search, video, radio -- are now converging into a complex web of influence. The old playbooks no longer work because the rules of engagement have changed. Platforms prioritize immersive in-feed experiences over linking users out to external sites. Consumers expect relevance without friction. And attribution models built for click-throughs buckle under the complexity of AI, automation, and zero-click behavior.

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In this environment, **marketers can no longer think in terms of static media plans or rigid channel roles.** Agility, integration, and measurement built for ambiguity are the new imperatives. The brands that win won't just shift where they spend, they'll shift how they orchestrate and how they measure every interaction. In fact, 60% of marketers who are underperforming against their goals are usually too focused on last click conversion metrics alone.[3]

How we're built for this: DAC's enterprise-to-local operating system [IRIS] ingests these omnichannel signals and applies AI to identify the moments that matter -- before they happen -- so media, creative, and content stay in lockstep with shifting consumer intent.

Our edge: Alongside IRIS, solutions such as [TransparenSEE] keep millions of location and review signals accurate in real time, ensuring generative and traditional engines surface your brand when local relevance counts.

Which Brings Us to Search: When Search Changes, Everything Changes

For decades, search was the engine of digital marketing. Whether through paid or organic, the logic was simple: be there when your customer types in what they want. Clicks led users to a brand's website, and conversions could be cleanly traced back to a keyword. Many brands built their marketing around this predictability.

But that era is ending.

AI is fundamentally reshaping the search experience. Google's AI Overviews, AI Mode, Gemini, and keyword-less campaigns are live today. And Google is simultaneously ceding queries to AI platforms like ChatGPT and Perplexity. We're moving toward a world where users may never click through. Brands must learn to do more with less: fewer site visits, yet higher expectations from better-informed prospects.

Though each vertical or industry will experience these changes at different times as SERPs and user behaviors change, the near future for all brands is one where "search" is a conversation, not a results page full of blue links. Where Google has become a discovery engine, as the search engine includes AI answers and users shift their behaviors to chats and move to LLMs. Where ads aren't triggered by keywords, and where organic visibility depends on structured, AI-optimized content themes rather than ranking for a single query. "Traditional" search as we know it has changed. Though it may still result in buying behavior, the definition and the way it behaves will be different. With AI Max simply a "toggle" on search, the scope of Google's paid search is expanding to capture more conversational queries and has expanded beyond the SERP (Search Engine Results Page) and beyond keyword searches. It's shifting in favor of reaching more users via new Google power pack ad types like AI Max, Demand Gen, and PMax (Performance Max) across multiple Google properties .Google will remain as important as it ever was, but without the granular keyword-level controls and the focus only on the SERP that marketers have been used to for years.

Why we built TotalSERP:
Our AI-powered search solution unifies paid, organic, local, and generative surfaces so brands dominate every flavor of results—traditional links, answer boxes, conversational responses, and zero-click experiences alike.

Implications – and a Path Forward

If your brand relies on search, adaptation is existential. This isn't just another shift in tactics, it's a foundational change in how discovery, consideration, and conversion happen. Brands that fail to adapt risk losing visibility in the very places that once delivered their highest returns. Meanwhile, those that recognize the urgency of the moment can rearchitect their media mix for a more fluid, AI-driven world -- one where influence happens across channels, where measurement isn't linear, and where content must work harder, faster, and smarter.

The good news: with IRIS as the connective tissue, TotalSERP as the search command-center, and TransparenSEE optimizing local signals, you already have a framework built for perpetual change. Layer in dozens of AI-driven micro-services, from dynamic creative generation to predictive budget balancing, and you can move faster than the market, not just keep up with it.

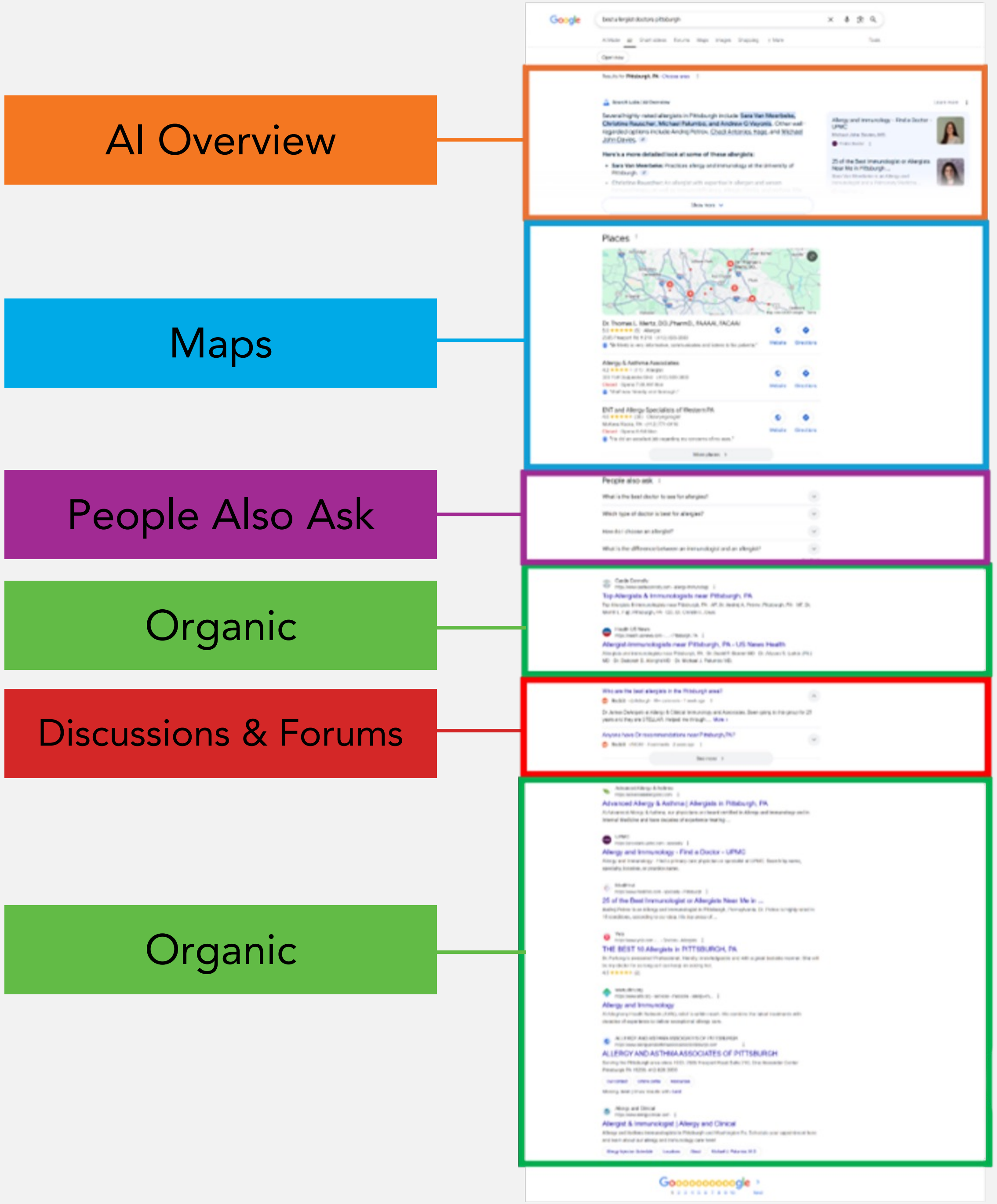
Every brand must adapt. For those built on a backbone of search, that adaptation isn't optional; it's existential. This playbook is your guide to what's changed, what's coming, and what to do about it now.

IMPLICATION #1

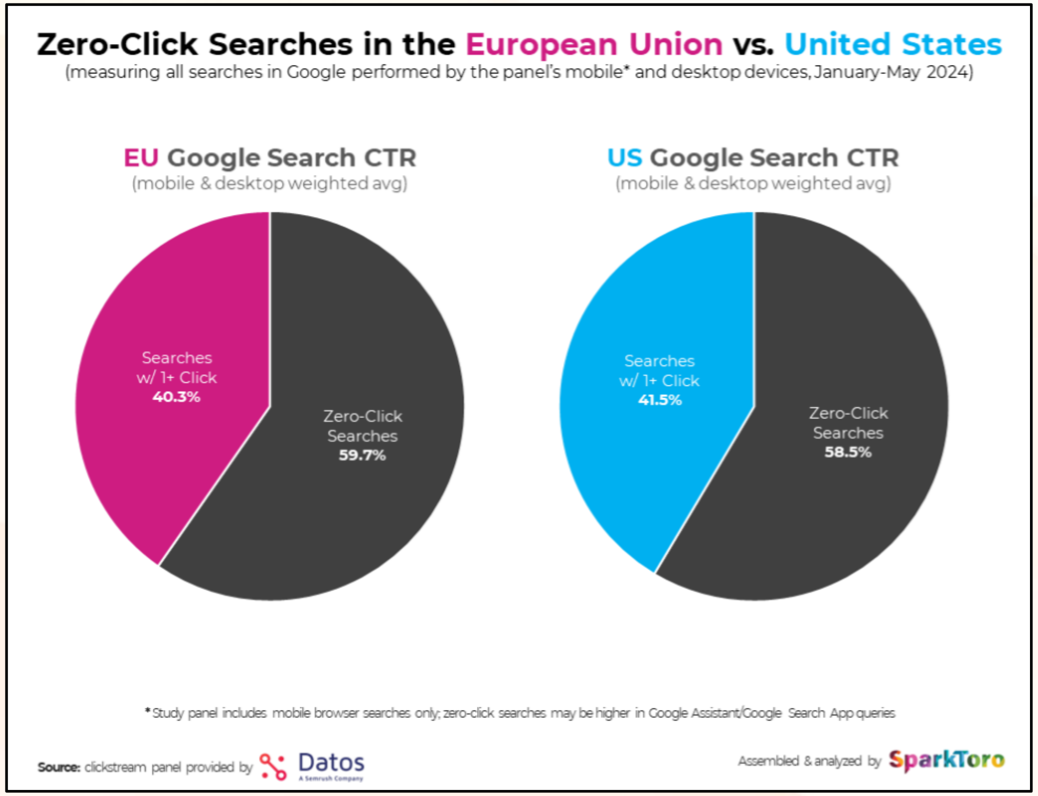
Search is Not What It Used to Be

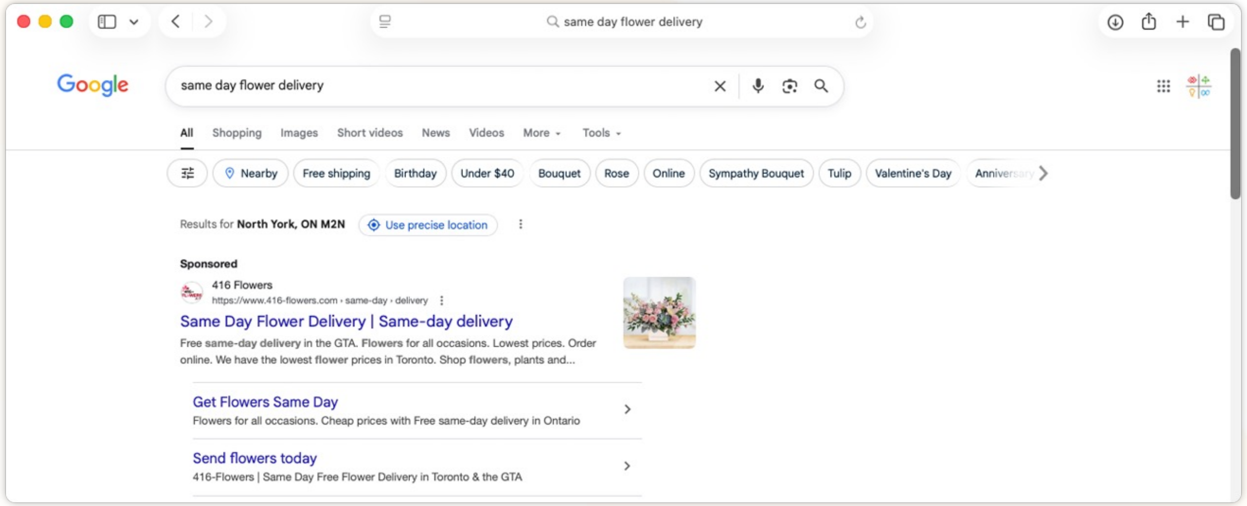
For decades, search was the reliable backbone of digital marketing. It was a channel where user intent was explicit, and keywords were a direct connection between user queries and a brand's website. Marketers built entire media strategies around capturing those clicks, confident that paid search (SEM) and optimized organic results (SEO) would drive measurable traffic and conversions to their website. This model, simple and effective for years, is now fundamentally breaking down.

AI is reshaping the search landscape at an unprecedented pace. Google's introduction of AI Overviews (AIO), AI Mode, and innovative ad types like AI Max for Search are already live, changing how users interact with the search results page. Instead of a list of links or keyword-triggered ads, consumers increasingly get AI-generated summaries that answer questions directly on the SERP, often leaving no need to click through.



This increase in zero-click searches is a major disruption. According to SparkToro and Datos[1], nearly 60% of searches ended without a click, and this trend is accelerating with AI's dominance. Other sources indicate the number may be as high as 70% or more.





Google continues to evolve the Search Engine Results Page (SERP) to better align with user intent and experience. The latest change comes to updated "Sponsored Ad" labeling, which enhances transparency by making it easier for users to identify paid placements. This update also introduces an option to hide sponsored results entirely, giving users more control over their search experience while also impacting overall CTR (Click-Through-Rate). These changes accelerate the shift toward a zero-click search environment, reinforcing that in today's Search landscape, quality engagement outweighs click volume.

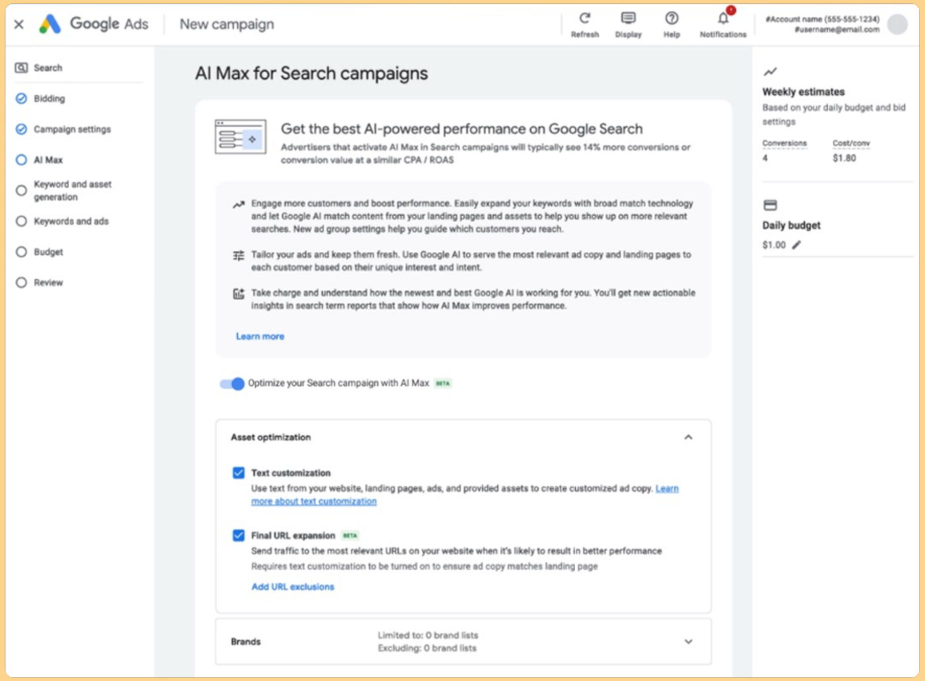
Additionally, traditional keyword-based ad types are giving way to contextually relevant campaigns optimized real-time based on users' intent signals. Google's AI Max uses broad match, text from your landing page copy, and text and assets from your ads to target users beyond a keyword, while Performance Max and responsive ads use automation and machine learning to assemble and optimize ad units and placements dynamically, which also reduces a marketers' control over the precise targeting search has historically provided.

At the same time, AI-powered LLM platforms like ChatGPT and Perplexity are diverting queries away from traditional engines, further fragmenting the search ecosystem and complicating visibility for brands.

SEO is also evolving. Google's AI Overviews blend informational, commercial, and transactional user intent, based on the conversations and prompts entered, within a single response, blurring the classic funnel stages. Brands must shift from optimizing individual keywords to creating robust content encompassing entire themes that can satisfy a conversational query, no matter where the user enters the conversation in their customer journey. Technical SEO elements, such as schema markup, can directly impact whether AI-generated answers pull from a brand's site, and will be even more critical as agentic search takes hold.

The introduction of NLWeb (Natural Language Web), an open-source initiative from Microsoft, turns structured content (like Schema.org metadata, RSS feeds, sitemaps) into a conversational AI interface for both humans and AI agents using the same codebase. This means NLWeb instances become discoverable not just via search engine bots, but by emerging AI agents.

Additionally, users look more and more to social proof rather than brand promises, turning to platforms like Reddit for brand and product information they feel they can trust. LLMs (large language models) also recognize the importance of this type of content, with both Google and OpenAI drafting deals with Reddit to train their models.



Google AI Max shifts paid search from keyword targeting to intent-driven, broad match campaigns optimized by machine learning.

In short, search is no longer the predictable, click-driven channel marketers have become accustomed to. It has become a new environment where visibility means being present across paid, organic, local, and AI-generated surfaces, and where the focus on keywords continues to decline. Brands that believe their existing search strategies based on keywords and clicks are at risk of becoming invisible to users as their journeys become increasingly conversational and fragmented.

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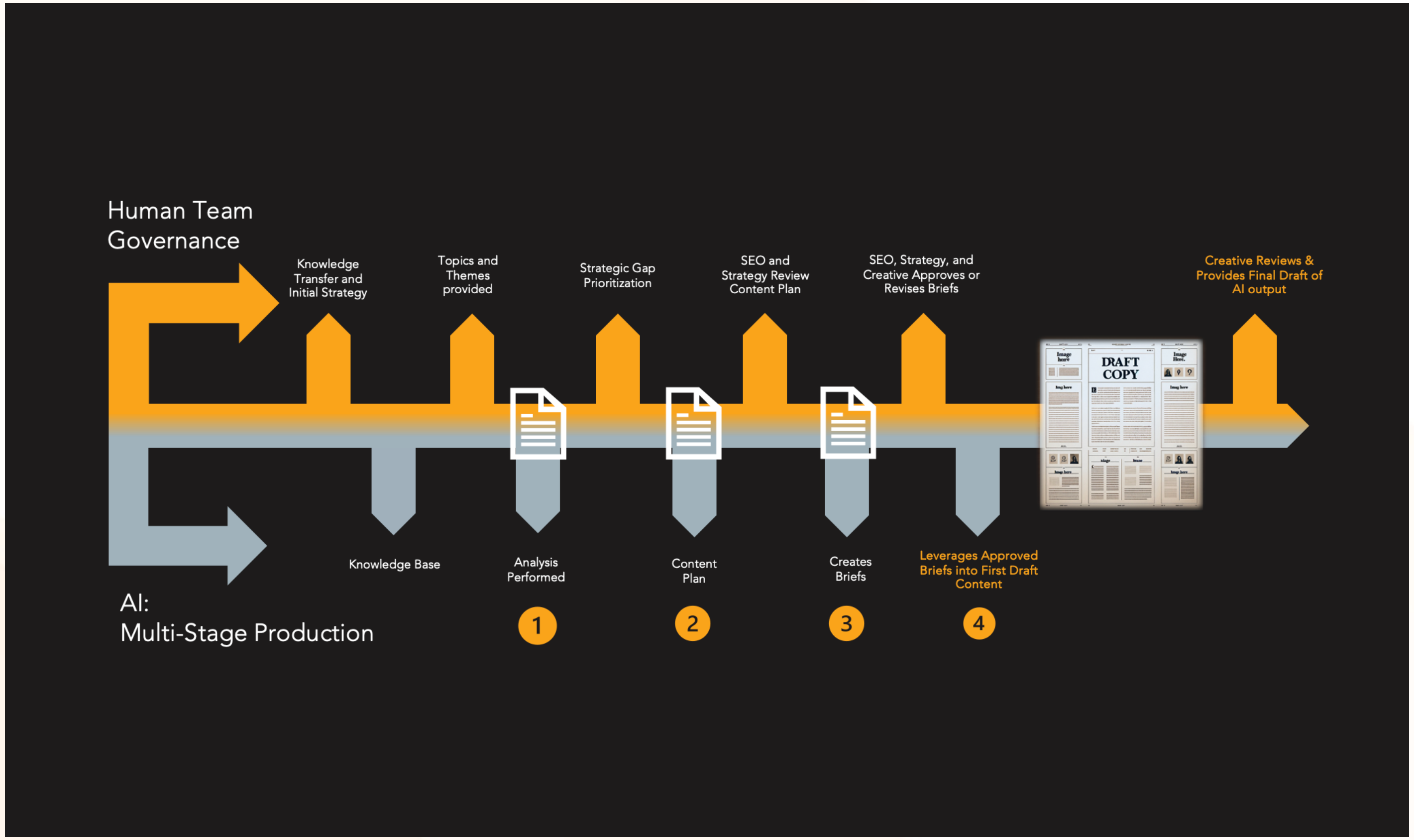
Search readiness now requires a truly audience-first approach. Campaigns must begin with audience intent and flow seamlessly across surfaces and journey stages, not simply optimize around keywords. This shift depends on first-party data readiness, including server-side tagging, loyalty programs, etc. to ensure visibility, retargeting, and performance in a post-cookie environment.

DAC was proud to work with a major US-based travel brand on their SEO and Content engagement. In a highly competitive landscape, they were losing share of search for a travel destination they had long owned in SEO. However, with the changing SERP, old SEO tactics at the keyword level were no longer enough. We drafted a new strategy that would allow the brand to own the entire topic surrounding this destination – including weather patterns, top-rated things to do, activities for adventurers, families with kids, or foodies, to what type of clothing was best to wear for certain activities in the area. We leveraged our AI Content Engine, which we built to assist our subject matter experts in rapidly creating brand-safe, search-ready content. This process brings together human and AI in a multi-step process, where stakeholders from Strategy, Content, SEO, and Creative provide strategy, input and oversight at each step.



The output of this initiative was a **54% increase in organic traffic** and **136% more revenue** from sales to that destination.

DAC recognizes that adapting to this new search reality is not optional, it's critical. We have developed a comprehensive approach to help clients navigate this transformed landscape and maintain competitive visibility.

What DAC is Doing About It

In Paid Search (SEM):

DAC is redefining paid search measurement and execution to move beyond the traditional keyword-to-click model. We emphasize intent mapping, broad match strategies and AI-optimized and generated ad types, enabling campaigns to capture user signals that go beyond keywords. Our team is actively testing Google's AI Max for Search, an ad type that leverages machine learning to match intent dynamically, optimize ad copy, and direct users to the most relevant landing pages with flexible URL control. Early beta testing informs how we advise clients on landing page optimization and campaign structure to maximize performance in this new AI-dominated search environment.

Additionally, we are broadening acquisition strategies for our clients to diversify beyond paid search into channels where the impact of AI on the existing way of doing things is less pronounced, such as multi-screen video and social platforms.

Within our IRIS platform, the **Pulse** module allows for anomaly detection in real-time, and gives paid media subject matter experts a toolkit to create brand-specific AI "screeners" that will automatically watch for specific performance patterns or behaviors, based on that particular client's brand, products, KPIs, and performance.

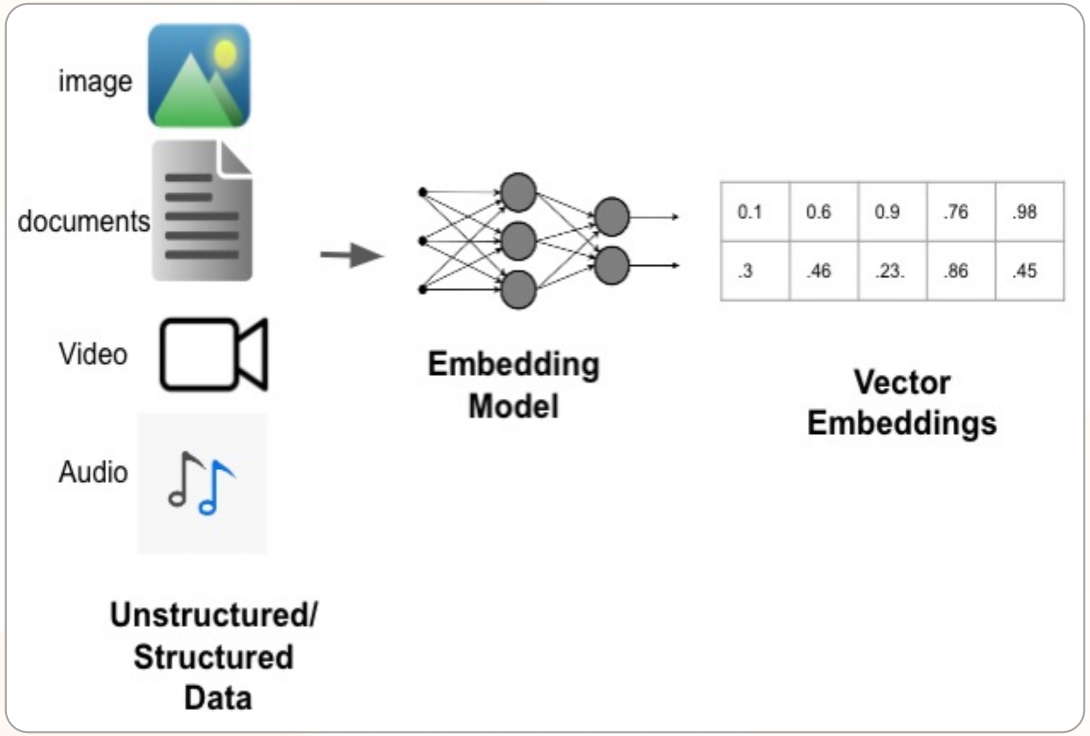
Ultimately, DAC's approach is designed to help ensure brands are part of the conversation with users, even as clicks and keyword controls diminish. Our AI-driven strategies and tools position our clients to dominate the evolving search landscape by anticipating consumer intent and meeting it wherever it surfaces.

In SEO

Our AI / LLM Optimization strategy is grounded in reverse-engineering what content AI-generated search results are likely to include. By analyzing embeddings and similarity scores, we identify topical gaps and structure content to align with hybrid intent, covering informational, commercial, and transactional queries within a single content cluster. We help clients fully own an entire topic or theme, ensuring the content is clear, scannable, and authoritative, using headings, comparisons, and expertise-driven narratives to improve the likelihood of AI inclusion. This strategy, sometimes referred to as Generative Engine Optimization (GEO), involves layering structured data, topical depth, and readability to secure AI inclusions.

Through proprietary AI-enabled processes like TotalSERP, we unify paid, organic, local, and AI visibility data into a single command center. This holistic process allows DAC the ability to uncover opportunities across Paid Search/SEM, Organic/SEO, and Local/Maps, enabling agile responses to shifts in search behavior and increasing a brand's chances of maintaining visibility when and where it matters.

Local Presence Management (LPM), which involves local listings and maps optimization, Google Business Profile management, and reputation management, can be a game changer for your business. But it's not just about keeping your location information clean and accurate, it's also about showing up stronger across the entire search experience, including paid media. In one client example, we saw that locations with more Google reviews aligned with stronger Paid Search click through rates (38% correlation), and about a third of all Paid Search clicks went directly to the local listing. On top of that, stores with higher click through rates in LPM also pulled in higher SEM click through rates, while locations with many (7+) higher-ranked competitors saw CTR drop fast. The biggest win? Paid search leads tracked closely with overall growth, an 82% correlation to new customer count and 84% to sales. Now, these numbers are from one client case study, and won't look exactly the same for everyone, but the takeaway is clear: getting LPM right doesn't just boost local, it makes all of your marketing work harder.



AI-powered embeddings measure content relevance beyond keywords, emphasizing topical depth, structured markup, and clear headings.

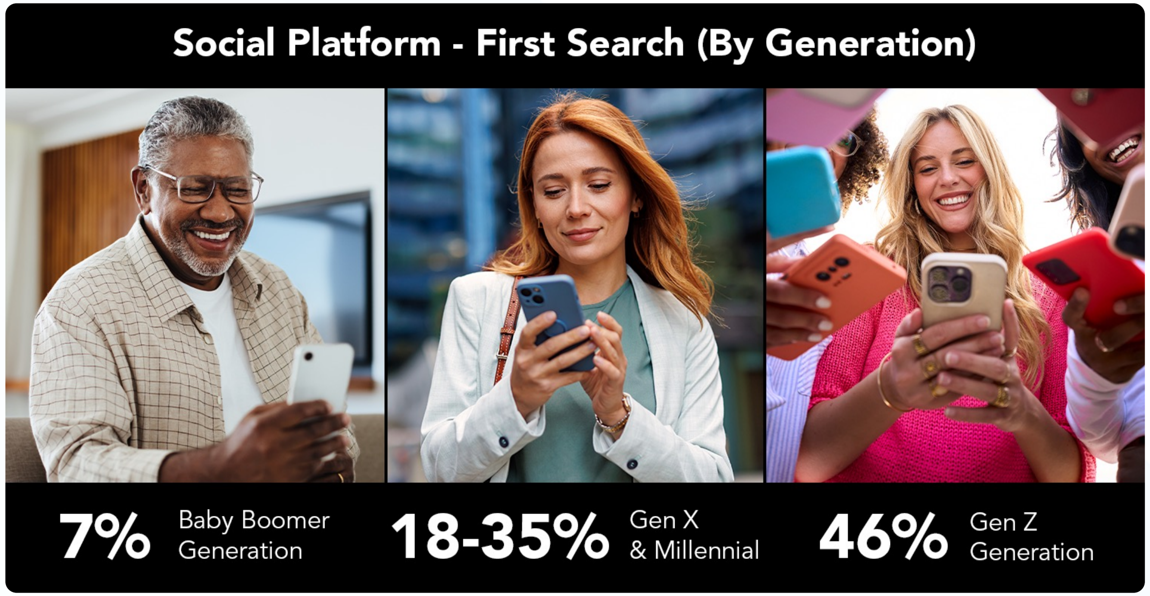
IMPLICATION #2

Video is the New Search

The ways consumers discover brands and products has undergone a dramatic shift in recent years, especially among younger generations. For Gen Z and Millennials, platforms like TikTok, YouTube Shorts, and Instagram Reels have become the primary go-tos for exploring brands and products, often replacing search engines as the first stop in their journey.

This evolution is more than a change in channel preference; it's a fundamental transformation of how consumers gather information and make decisions. Instead of typing queries into a search box, users scroll through immersive video feeds that combine entertainment, education, and commerce in a single experience. These platforms employ sophisticated algorithms that serve personalized content, making discovery more engaging than the search-and-click model marketers have long relied on.

TikTok, for example, positions itself explicitly as a "search and entertainment engine," blurring the lines between scrolling and searching. It has developed features like TikTok Shop, enabling users to move directly to purchase without leaving the app. YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels mirror this approach, focusing on "searchability" through hashtags, captions, and sound, allowing content to surface based on context and relevance rather than just keywords.



Nearly half of Gen Z adults now use social video platforms as their first stop for discovery, leaving traditional search engines behind. (Statista 2024)

The impact of this shift is profound. Short-form video formats demonstrate exceptional attention efficiency: even clips as brief as two seconds can drive meaningful brand recall and product association.[2]

Mid-funnel video placements, which are often undervalued in traditional click-based models, actually play a critical role in driving consideration and engagement. New attention-based metrics from measurement firms like Lumen and Adelaide emphasize quality of attention over video view counts, reinforcing video's unique power to capture consumer attention.

One of our fashion retail clients was experiencing an increasingly tough environment, with established competitive brands holding higher market penetration. Meanwhile, our retail client had been focused almost exclusively on lower-funnel performance media, resulting in audience fatigue and decreasing returns. We crafted a new media mix with the goal of driving increased awareness amongst their target audience. This included tailored CTV (Connected TV buys), Video placements targeted to niche audiences, TikTok targeting GenZ users who showed an interest in fashion, and Google's DemandGen to intercept audiences open to discovering new brands. In just four weeks, we drove a **16% increase** in new users to the site and saw a **10% increase** in their Branded SEM demand.

Short-form video should not only deliver reach and views but also demonstrate assisted revenue and brand lift. Attention-based metrics such as time-in-view and cost per viewable second must be measured alongside engagement. AI-driven creative repurposing should be leveraged to maximize impact, transforming one hero video into multiple TikTok, Reels, or Shorts edits localized with dynamic text and voiceovers. This approach ensures both efficiency and relevance. For marketers, this means a complete rethink of the role video plays in the funnel. It's no longer just a top-of-funnel awareness tool but a discovery, evaluation, and conversion driver rolled into one. Video content must be designed with search intent and shoppability in mind, optimized for platforms' native algorithms, and integrated strategically alongside search and social channels.

What DAC is Doing About It

At DAC, we understand that video is no longer just a complementary channel, it's rapidly becoming the new frontier of brand discovery. Our approach helps clients harness video's full potential across platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Connected TV (CTV), and social video to engage audiences throughout the entire customer journey.

Integrated Video Blueprinting:

We create coordinated video strategies for our clients that layer cross-surface video, from Linear TV, CTV, and YouTube, to short-form social video, based on each platform's unique role, alignment to our clients' target audience(s), and its ability to deliver impact. Linear TV drives broad cultural awareness with trusted, high-attention placements, while CTV serves as a premium upper-funnel storytelling environment offering immersive brand experiences, deeper audience targeting, and more easily measured real-time performance. YouTube connects mid-to-lower funnel, enabling direct response and conversion-driven engagement with precision targeting. Short-form video platforms such as TikTok and social video capture awareness and consideration moments with highly shareable and algorithmically surfaced content.

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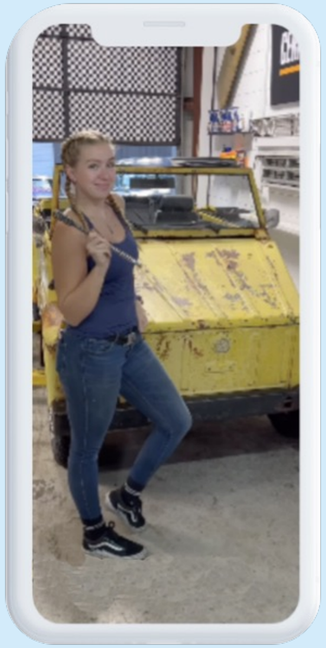
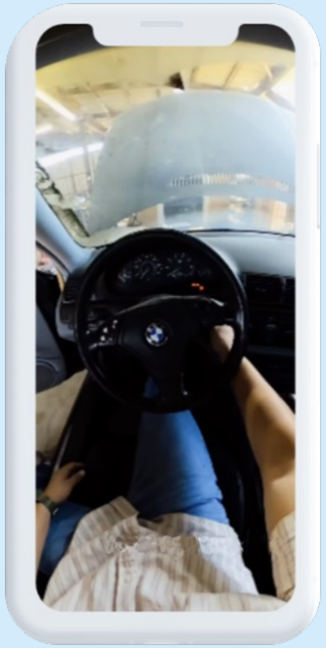
Influencer & Short-Form Testing

DAC leverages a data-driven mix of influencer partnerships, organic content, and paid boosting to unlock video's multiplier effect on reach and brand recall. Our recent campaign with a specialized hand tool client demonstrated that combining authentic influencer stories with paid short-form video can **triple ROAS and increase Share of Voice by over 7%.**

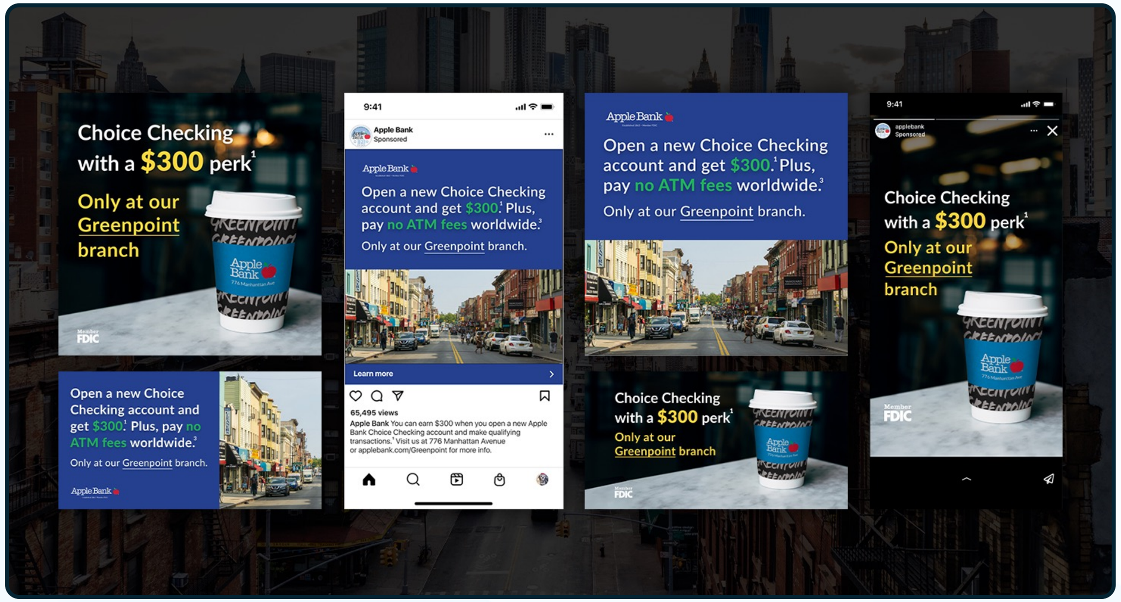




- Curated mid to micro-level influencers deliver engaged, local, national or global audiences
- Video formats prioritized by algorithm
- Story and serial content captivates users across the journey

Scaled Creative Activation

Recognizing the growing importance of location relevance, DAC activates creatives for local and enterprise-driven value propositions. With AI-assisted end to end strategy, ideation and production, we tailor narratives and buying strategies by DMA, connecting national brand stories to local consumer intent and behavior, enhancing both awareness and conversion at the market level. This integrated local approach is amplified by real-time AI-driven creative iteration, enabling rapid personalization and testing.



DAC creates and activates assets for local markets, connecting enterprise brand narratives to location-specific audiences for measurable conversions.

Reddit & Social Search Integration

Beyond traditional video platforms, DAC incorporates insights from Reddit sentiment and topical analysis to inform video content planning and organic visibility strategies. This integration helps brands tap into authentic community conversations and emerging trends, further fueling content relevance and search visibility in social and video environments.

IMPLICATION #3

Your Media Mix and Planning Must Evolve

For years, many brands have relied heavily on paid search as the cornerstone of their direct-response marketing efforts. The channel's perceived efficiency, measurability, and intent-driven nature made it the obvious choice to drive conversions and revenue. And SEO was "the old reliable," as it was viewed as a consistent source of free traffic. However, the evolving search landscape and broader shifts in consumer behavior now challenge this dependency, exposing significant risks and limitations.

With the rise of AI-driven search interfaces, zero-click behavior, and the diminishing control marketers have over granular keyword targeting and optimization levers, paid search alone can no longer be assumed to maintain its status as a reliable keyword-to-click-to-conversion machine. Lower click-through rates, increased ad complexity and the nuances required to make the newest AI ad types perform to peak efficiency, means that focusing too strongly on SEM restricts a brand's ability to reach consumers across the diverse touchpoints that influence today's nonlinear purchase journeys.

Given this complexity, no single media channel can reliably deliver performance at scale in today's landscape, nor considered a "sure thing" for acquisition. DAC's research and experience finds that integrating Linear TV, Connected TV (CTV), YouTube and social video – both short and long-form --, influencer marketing, and specific media or retail media networks based on the audience(s) a brand wants to attract, with compelling national and localized content creates a strong full-funnel approach that helps build brands and strengthen the pipeline to conversion.

The democratization of retail means that media networks are also expanding well beyond traditional e-commerce sites, offering new inventory that taps into niche audiences with deep audience insights available for the media buyer. Entrants like RE/MAX Media Network and Marriot Media, for example, can provide details on users who may be moving, as in the case of RE/MAX, or those who regularly travel to specific destinations, or those who tend to stay in higher-end hotel brands, as an example for Marriott. The recent announcement that Criteo retail inventory will be purchasable via Google's Search Ads 360 platform is yet another example of how the retail media environment is moving past its original boundaries and becoming more integrated.

The brands that are winning are those that plan for influence before conversion. That means not only rebalancing the mix across upper, mid, and lower funnel, but also thinking in terms of other environments adjacent to the customer's intent, where they aren't actively searching but are open to influence. Examples include:

- **Streaming audio or radio** where contextual targeting can align ad messaging to the genre of music, the content of the podcast or news show, and the location of the listener.
- **Traditional out-of-home** to attract the attention of people in key physical locations, or digital out-of-home where mobile location data can improve targeting and connect DOOH to store visits.
- **Programmatic display & content syndication** that put brand messaging into editorial environments with high contextual alignment.
- **Retail and other media networks beyond retail,** such as real estate or travel, which provide niche audience access unavailable on mass platforms.
- **Influencers and creators** who provide authentic, platform-native content that can amplify both reach and credibility in communities where brand messages are harder to deliver through paid alone.

Modern media planning must be built on agility and resilience. Brands should design plans with the ability to shift at least 20% of spend (20% generally being a good guidepost for a spend amount that's being enough of the total to be measurable and impactful, without sacrificing budget from other channels) in any given quarter as performance changes. Additionally, every strategy should include a 10–15% reserve for testing for opportunistic investment when CPMs fall or competitors pull back. This approach reflects the spirit of the 70/20/10 model originally used by Coca-Cola, which balanced core investment, adaptive spending, and innovation testing [4]. To prevent decision-making bottlenecks, brands should maintain or utilize upfront scenario planning with each scenario tied to clear business or media triggers such as revenue trends or CPM thresholds.

Moreover, local market activation has become an essential pillar of modern media strategy, and local context is now a competitive advantage, allowing for personalization that doesn't require cookie-based behavioral tracking. Consumers today expect advertising that feels relevant to their specific geographic, cultural, and contextual environment, whether they're in a major city area or a small rural town. DAC's proprietary Enterprise to Local approach addresses this need by seamlessly bridging national brand storytelling with local or even store-level precision. This strategic approach ensures that brands maintain consistent, high-impact messaging at the enterprise or national level while also delivering tailored creative, spend/budgeting strategies, and offers that resonate with local audiences.

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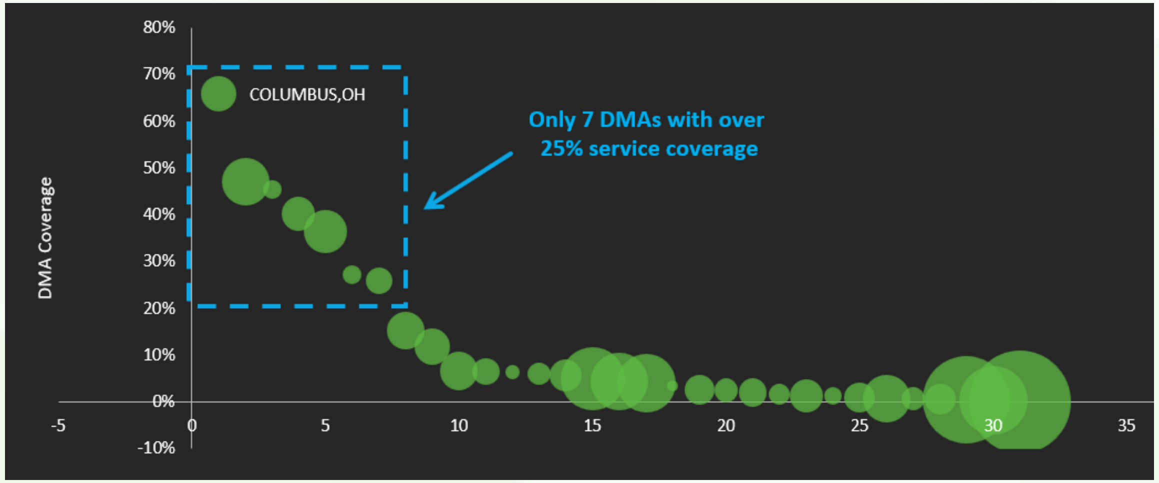
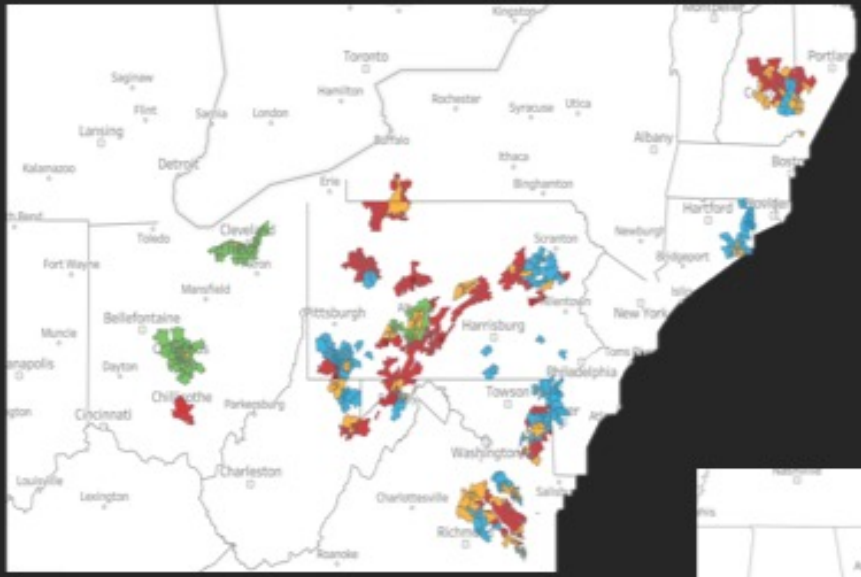
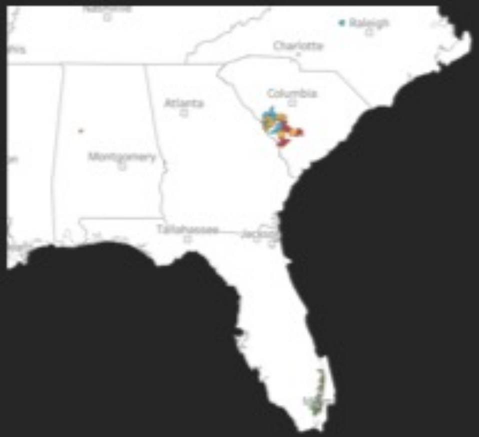
Enterprise to Local is not simply about replicating national ads in local markets; it's about intelligently adapting content to reflect local nuances such as regional preferences, competitive landscapes, seasonal demand, and point-of-sale availability, while optimizing performance across all media channels. DAC leverages AI-driven creative iteration based on a blend of first and 3rd party data to generate thousands of localized content variants, enabling rapid testing, allowing for the creative to work as hard as it possibly can.



Localized campaign adjustments, supported by real-time insights, maximize impact at both national and local levels, enhancing ROI and consumer relevance.





Group

- Crowded Competition
- Fiber Frontiers
- Outskirt Opportunities
- Rural Roots

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A DAC Case Study

Flexible, Full-Funnel Media with Local & B2B Integration

Challenge

- Heavy reliance on SEM amid rising CPCs and AI-driven search shifts limited scalability; SEO weakened by zero-click behavior
- Brand demand declined after years of limited brand-building/awareness efforts
- Competition, capacity constraints, and in-store conversion shaped requirements at both national and local levels
- Needed to deliver **+4 incremental customers per store per week** across 2,024 locations, balancing B2C and B2B priorities

Approach

- **Always-on foundation:** YouTube, Meta, and Audio (Pandora/SiriusXM) for efficient reach + recall. Platforms selected using an audience-first approach, prioritized by the highest indexing.
- **Promotional/event pulses:** Seasonal and promotional peaks, reinforced by premium sports/streaming
- **Local activation:** DMA-level tiering (Tatari CTV/Linear + premium placements) to balance scale with regional needs and seasonal demand as well as optimal frequency and coverage
- **B2B integration:** Incremental funding and SEM alignment added into planning flowcharts
- **Agility:** 20% budget shiftable + 10–15% reserve for testing (retail media, influencers, OOH near underperforming/B2B-sensitive stores)
- **Operational tie-ins:** Finance-aligned projections, scenario planning, competitive SOV monitoring, and conversion pacing

Outcomes

- Goal achieved: **+4 incremental customers/store/week**
- **42K incremental customers**, 30% new
- +22% lift in branded search impressions during test; +7% sustained in cooldown
- Organic branded search widened from **+4ppt** → **+38ppt YoY** with sequential flights
- ROI: **+15% within 9 weeks**; agile approach allowed for sustained SOV when channels underperformed

Key Takeaway

A diversified, flexible plan, integrated with local activation and B2B support, reduced SEM dependency, delivered measurable growth, and created a resilient enterprise-to-local program. Audience-first planning, DMA segmentation, and budget agility proved critical for both short-term performance and long-term brand demand.

A DAC Case Study

This approach aligns media investments with consumer intent and behavior at every level of the funnel, from broad brand awareness nationally to highly targeted, conversion-focused activations locally. It also enhances measurement and spend, allowing brands to optimize budgets dynamically across markets based on local performance insights. By uniting enterprise-level strategy with localized execution, DAC empowers brands to achieve both relevance and efficiency, driving deeper consumer engagement and stronger ROI across today's diverse media ecosystem.

In sum, the old playbook of "search-first" marketing will no longer suffice, even/especially for brands that consider themselves focused heavily on direct response. The winning brands will adopt a flexible, full-funnel media mix that aligns channel strengths with their customers and prospects' behaviors, competitive realities, and shifting business needs.

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What DAC is Doing About It

DAC helps clients evolve their media mix from a model heavily dependent on Search to a fully integrated, outcomes-driven program. Our approach combines strategic media plan diversification, advanced measurement, Enterprise to Local execution to ensure brands reach consumers wherever they are in the journey, and wherever they are physically, and data ingestion processes and dashboards that allow us to measure effectively.

Full-Funnel, Cross-Channel Architecture

We build media blueprints that treat every channel as part of an interdependent system, assigning budget based on their influence in the journey for the specific audience(s), not on historical norms. This can mean pairing DOOH with high-reach mobile display in commuter corridors, or syncing CTV storytelling with programmatic retargeting to capture exposed audiences.

Creative to Channel Synchronization

Our creative process runs in lockstep with media signals so that asset variations, formats, and copy are continually adapted to the role of the channel and the state of the audience.

Media North Star

Aligning our investments to purpose fulfillment

Designing intentional brand moments

- *Audience architecture*
- *Communications framework*

Fueling our curiosity with continuous experimentation

- *Learning agenda*
- *Test prioritization rubric*
- *Testing briefs*

Developing media strategies for greatest impact

- *Channel mix and strategic guardrails*
- *Flighting strategy*
- *Scenario planning*

Setting standards for executional excellence

- *Media KPI framework*
- *Scenario projections*

DAC's Media Blueprint framework keeps brands focused on the why behind each investment, not just the what.

Enterprise to Local Strategy

Our proprietary Enterprise to Local methodology enables brands to simultaneously deliver consistent national messaging while tailoring creative, offers, and bidding strategies to specific local markets or stores. AI-powered creative iteration allows us to generate thousands of local variations efficiently, ensuring relevance for local consumers while maintaining performance across all channels. This approach ensures that national campaigns are amplified and adapted to local context, driving stronger engagement, conversions, and ROAS at every market level. Our local media optimization layers DMA-specific targeting, budget allocation, and content personalization on top of national campaigns. By leveraging real-time data, local performance insights, and predictive modeling, we dynamically optimize media spend across regions, maximizing the impact of each dollar while maintaining unified enterprise-level KPIs.

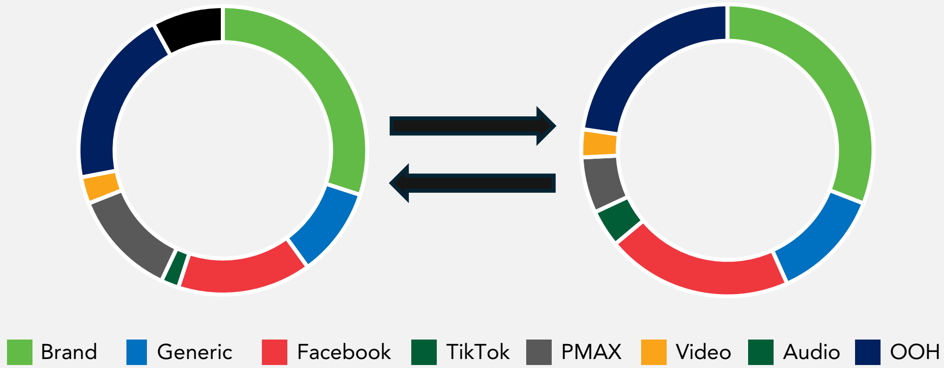
AI-Supported Budget Allocation

Through IRIS, we can create MMMs to identify where media dollars are underperforming so that we can redeploy that budget into higher-yield channels. We also provide clients with an integrated dashboard that captures performance across national and local campaigns, paid and organic media, with the views that lead to real insight. This enables real-time decision-making, continuous optimization, and precise attribution across all media channels.

One such DAC client example is with a clothing retailer based in the US. With more than 50 brick and mortar stores across the US, we needed to identify the optimal media mix to ensure media was having an incremental impact at the regional level. We began by clustering stores based on similar characteristics and performance, then leveraged our local-first MMM functionality. Our model results provided recommendations at both the national and regional level. After implementing this new media mix, our client saw a 59% incremental lift in store visits.

Optimized Media Mix

Cluster A Actual vs. Optimized Budgets



Model results indicated areas that required more investment vs. areas with saturated spend

IMPLICATION #4

A Measurement Reckoning is Upon us

As the media landscape becomes increasingly fragmented, the traditional metrics and attribution models that marketers have relied upon for decades are failing. The more fragmented the path to purchase becomes, the more dangerous it is to rely on oversimplified metrics. For years, last-click attribution and simplistic ROAS or ROI goals offered a comforting sense of measurement clarity. It gave marketers an easy "dollars in, revenue out" view of their marketing success. These approaches grow out of an assumed linear journey from impression to click to conversion, but that is now increasingly incompatible with today's consumer behaviors.

Consumers move fluidly across multiple devices, channels, and touchpoints. A single conversion may be influenced by linear TV exposure, CTV ads, video views, influencer/creator content, co-branded sponsorship impressions, programmatic multi-format advertising, and AI-enhanced search results, just to name a few. Attempting to measure impact with legacy click-through metrics dramatically underestimates the influence of upper- and mid-funnel activity. WARC research demonstrates that paid search ROI can be overstated by up to 190% if incrementality and upper-funnel contributions are ignored, while nearly 35% of last-click–driven spend generates zero incremental sales.[3]

The rise of AI-driven discovery further complicates measurement. Zero-click search, AI Overviews, LLM platforms, and integrated search behaviors on social and video platforms mean that traditional direct response signals no longer capture the full picture of brand influence. Metrics like click-through rate and conversion rate remain useful for tactical optimization, but they are insufficient for understanding long-term growth, brand lift, or consumer intent.

Step 1
Identify test market
# of occupancies and pentration

Step 2
Design media test
Develop media with focus on audience segments and media consumption behaviors

Step 3
Evaluate results
Evaluate total business growth in test market compared to marketers that did not receive funding

Step 4
Develop scaling
Plan with investment needs for evergreen media

Incrementality testing includes identification of the right markets, creation of controlled media tests, and evaluation of business lift.

To address this, marketers are increasingly turning to Marketing Mix Modeling (MMM) and incrementality testing, which evaluate the real contribution of each channel to business outcomes. DAC has seen these methods reveal hidden value in channels previously underestimated by last-click metrics, such as mid-funnel YouTube placements and episodic CTV advertising, and provides clients with actionable insights.

Creative measurement also needs a refresh. Marketers must move beyond clicks and views, adopting attention-based KPIs such as time-in-view and attention scores. Just like media dollars, creative iterations should be validated through incrementality testing, including geo-split or holdout designs, to prove business impact. To maintain brand strength, measurement frameworks must also include **brand health KPIs** such as recall, share of voice, and favorability alongside direct performance outcomes.

Measurement cycles also need to accelerate over time, from quarterly reviews to more frequent loops, powered by small geo-tests and lightweight MMMs as a baseline is established. This enables continuous budget realignment and rapid response to market signals.

The industry is facing a reckoning: measurement is no longer just about clicks or last-touch conversions. Brands that fail to evolve their approach risk misallocating budgets, undervaluing the impact of channels or tactics, and optimizing for signals that do not reflect true business outcomes. Conversely, organizations that embrace holistic measurement models that combine MMMs, incrementality studies, and AI-support insights are better positioned to understand their real impact, uncover hidden opportunities, and drive sustainable growth in a rapidly evolving media environment.

What DAC is Doing About It

DAC helps brands navigate the complex measurement environment with solutions that go beyond last-click attribution. Our approach ensures that every channel and tactic is properly evaluated for its true contribution to business outcomes, and that every dollar spent is held accountable to an outcome.

Embedded Optimization Loops

We align measurement to business objectives at each stage of the journey, from awareness KPIs like ad recall and reach and frequency, to mid-funnel metrics like consideration lift and video views, to conversion metrics both online and offline. Measurement is wired into media planning and creative decision-making, so budgets and tactics adjust continuously, not quarterly. For example, if incrementality testing shows podcast ads in key markets are delivering higher downstream conversions than display, budget will be shifted accordingly mid-flight.

Incrementality and Media Mix Modeling

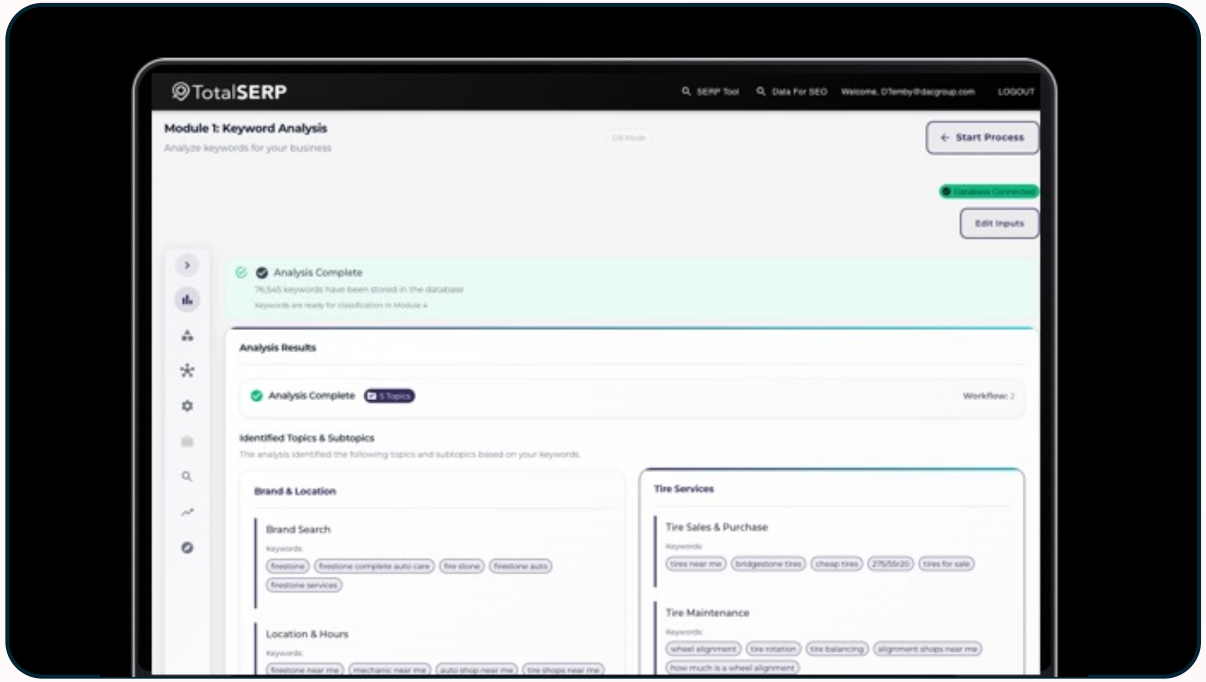
Incrementality testing allows us to help brands evaluate the true impact of campaigns. MMM rollouts in IRIS allow us to uncover value in specific media activations, even down to the market level with Local MMMs. These insights inform budget allocation and flighting strategies, ensuring that media spend drives genuine growth.

We understand it’s not only enough to get sign-off from the marketing team on the impact of these tests; they must translate into actual business revenue. Getting CFO buy-in means translating marketing results into profit, not marketing metrics.

A test vs. holdout lets us measure the incremental % lift in sales and gross profit, then turn those numbers into real dollars. In one retail example, an approximate 4% weekly lift added up to $35M in incremental profit on $16.8M of spend -- over $18M in net gain. Rather than talking about "108% ROAS" or "a 4% lift," it's much more powerful to say: *"This program drove $xMM in incremental profit during the test period."* Since brands often won't share full financials, our job is to give them the framework so their analytics, finance, and marketing teams can align. And most importantly, so the CMO can walk into the CFO's office and confidently say, *"We made money, not just impressions."*

TotalSERP Brand Visibility in Paid, Organic, and Local

Search results today are highly fragmented: Paid ads, Shopping Ads, Organic listings, Reviews, Images, Videos, Local listings and Maps, and the increase in Zero-Click features like AI Overviews, AI Mode, and People Also Ask. Relying on siloed search channels leaves whitespace for competitors and allows for missed opportunities to drive your business. TotalSERP, DAC's proprietary approach to understanding and optimizing a brand's entire presence across the search engine results page (SERP). Unlike siloed SEO or SEM strategies, TotalSERP treats the SERP as a single ecosystem, ensuring brands capture the full range of opportunities available to them. Our TotalSERP solution unifies paid, organic, local visibility data, giving brands an actionable view of their presence across traditional and AI-driven search surfaces.

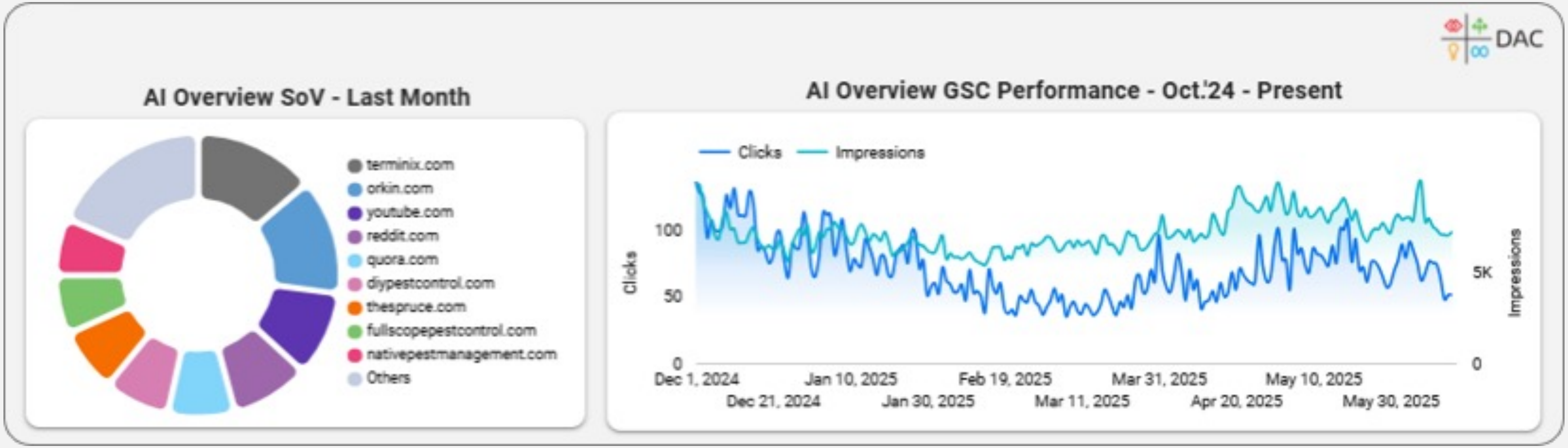


DAC's TotalSERP methodology is backed by our proprietary AI-driven platform.

AIO Impact Modeling

DAC integrates AI into our SEO programs, focusing on how AI changes brand visibility. We optimize content and technical SEO so our clients appear in zero-click and conversational search outputs, not just traditional organic listings. DAC has the tools and has built processes to measure brand influence within AI-generated search results, capturing visibility and engagement even when clicks are decreasing or absent.

In short, DAC isn't just monitoring AI Overviews, we are building SEO strategies and tools around them so that our clients continue to earn visibility as Google evolves its SERP experience.



Cross-Functional Alignment and Flexibility

Measurement is embedded across media, creative, and analytics teams to ensure that decisions reflect true business objectives rather than simplified or siloed channel metrics. Budgets and media mix decisions are continuously updated based on real-time insights, incrementality results, and predictive modeling, allowing brands to adapt to market and performance changes.

DAC helps brands accurately capture the influence of every channel and maximize performance outcomes while building long-term equity.

What Brands Must Do Next

The media landscape has changed, and it isn't waiting for anyone. AI-driven search, zero-click behaviors, fragmented attention, and the rise of video-first discovery demand a radical rethink of how brands engage consumers, measure performance, and allocate budgets. Especially for brands that rely heavily on search, incremental tweaks won't cut it. This is a moment to hit reset.

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1. Rethink Channel Roles:

Channels no longer live in siloed stages of a linear funnel. Search, social, video, influencer content, and retail media now coexist in the same discovery moment. Brands must move beyond default assumptions and assign channel roles based on actual impact, not historical convention. Upper-funnel video can drive mid-funnel consideration; short-form social can catalyze both discovery and direct action; and search must be evaluated not only by clicks but by visibility across AI-generated and zero-click surfaces. Our planning process is designed to help brands prioritize the channels and tactics that will be most impactful to their target audience and drive the best outcomes.

2. Build With AI, Not Against It:

AI isn't a threat; it's the new mechanics of discovery. Brands must align content, creative, and media strategies with AI logic: structured data, hybrid-intent content, and relevance to conversational search. Keywords remain a tool, but they are now part of a broader ecosystem of influence that includes AI Overviews, embeddings, and generative search surfaces. Brands that resist automation or ignore AI-driven trends risk losing visibility, while those that embrace it gain first-mover advantage.

3. Shift From Campaigns to Systems:

Legacy media planning, including episodic flights, static KPIs, and locked-in channel plans can't keep pace with today's customer journeys. Brands must implement learning systems: modular creative, flexible budgets, and continuous optimization loops that respond in real time to performance signals. Enterprise to Local strategies ensure that national campaigns dynamically adapt to local contexts, maximizing relevance and ROI for every market, every store, and every consumer touchpoint.

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4. Measure for Influence, Not Just Clicks:

Last-click attribution is dead. True marketing impact comes from cross-channel influence, brand lift, and long-term equity. Invest in holistic measurement frameworks to capture the full value of media. Measurement is no longer just a reporting exercise, it's a critical tool for optimization, alignment, and decision-making across creative, media, and brand teams.

5. Operate for Speed and Agility

The future belongs to brands that can move fast, test smarter, and adapt continuously. This means flexible budgets (+/- 20%), scenario planning for supply chain, market, or performance fluctuations, rapid creative iteration, and cross-functional alignment. Establish benchmarks for launching new creative and landing page testing. Work in tandem with media, creative, and even finance to build shared dashboards to continuous feedback loops. Brands must be flexible in a constantly changing and sometimes uncertain marketplace, leveraging imperfect data and agile decision-making as a competitive advantage.

6. Protect Brand + Performance Balance, Even in Downturns

Safeguard long-term brand equity by maintaining a ~60/40 brand-to-performance spend ratio, even in downturns. Be prepared with scenario planning to reallocate +/- 20% of spend at any given time within reason (monthly/mid-quarter), and maintain a 10–15% budget reserve in flexible channels (search, CTV, creators) for opportunistic activation. Use pre-set budget tier scenario planning to ensure resilience and avoid stall-outs during volatile periods.

7. Invest in Full Funnel, Integrated Growth:

The smartest brands are unifying efforts across paid, owned, and earned media, bridging search, video, social, influencer and local content into cohesive, omnichannel experiences. Enterprise to Local strategies tie national storytelling to local execution, while AI-driven tools scale creative and optimize placements to the right audience at the right moment. The payoff: better reach, higher engagement, and measurable outcomes across every layer of the consumer journey.

How DAC is Helping Our Clients Evolve and Thrive

DAC operationalizes these principles through proprietary frameworks, processes, and tools that turn strategy into measurable results:

Media Blueprint Framework:
Aligns flighting, testing, KPIs, and local-to-national strategy into a flexible foundation for growth, ensuring campaigns remain adaptable to changing market dynamics.

Platform-by-Platform Mastery:
DAC teams are embedded with Google, Meta, TikTok, Reddit, and other platforms to stay ahead of beta tests, AI innovations, and evolving SERPs, translating platform evolution into competitive advantage for clients.

AI

AI-Fueled Content Engine:
Combines structured briefing, SME oversight, and AI output at scale to power advertising, short-form, blog and on-site content, ensuring creative matches consumer intent across channels.

Proprietary AI-Enabled Processes and Tools: IRIS, TotalSERP, and TransparenSEE

Together, these platforms form DAC's intelligence engine, connecting audience, media, creative, and performance data in real time. IRIS powers budget allocation, media mix optimization, and unified measurement across channels. TotalSERP delivers a complete view of brand visibility across paid, organic, and local search surfaces, enabling clients to dominate every discovery environment on the SERP. TransparenSEE safeguards and enhances local trust signals by monitoring and optimizing millions of listings, reviews, and location details. Integrated, they give brands the ability to see more, act faster, and influence the moments that matter most.

Adjusting Expectations Across the Funnel:

Brands can no longer rely solely on traditional metrics, especially as visibility within interactive AI-enhanced search results may be more meaningful than a click, and users look to new platforms to find new brands and products. DAC ensures that every channel is measured and optimized for both influence and performance.

Conclusion:

The Future Doesn't Wait

Search is shifting. Video is leading. AI is rewriting the rules. And attribution is murkier than ever. The brands that thrive won't be the ones who hold on to what worked, they'll be the ones who move first, test smarter, and adapt faster.

That's where DAC comes in.

We're not reacting to change, we're building for it. From reverse-engineering AI Overviews to integrating full-funnel video and redefining measurement, DAC is helping brands navigate complexity and find clarity in the chaos.

Success in today's marketplace will depend not only on adapting to AI, video, and fragmented search, but also on embedding speed, agility, and creative measurement discipline. With these principles, this playbook becomes more than just a strategy, it becomes an operational tool to maintain a state of readiness that will allow you to achieve your brand's goals. If your media mix feels outdated, or your search performance less certain, now is the time to rethink.

We'll show you how.

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About DAC

Founded in 1972, DAC is an international leader in full-funnel media, mastering the art of media application from enterprise to local. As a digital-first agency with expertise across the entire media landscape, we ensure that our clients stay ahead of the curve with innovative solutions that drive success.

We thrive in the evolving media environment, building on our core strengths while continuously seeking new, groundbreaking methods to serve our clients better. We help brands gain awareness and achieve performance both globally and locally through our comprehensive range of services, including paid media, SEO, content strategy, local presence management, reputation management, and data analytics. Our team of high-quality, knowledgeable professionals works in an integrated environment, leveraging unique expertise and technology to deliver powerful outcomes.

At DAC, we partner with you to achieve exceptional success, driven by our dedication to your goals.

Let's Talk

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