

The background of the top half of the page is a dark, teal-colored abstract network. It consists of numerous small, light-colored circular nodes connected by thin, light-colored lines, creating a complex web-like structure that suggests connectivity and data flow.

AI Impacts & Recommendations

A white paper on advertising & communications

September 2026

State of AI / Impact on Marketing

WHERE ANSWERS ARE FORMED NOW

AI is reshaping the digital front door - not by replacing your marketing, but by changing where answers are formed and which signals earn visibility.

Three shifts defining the AI era

- 01

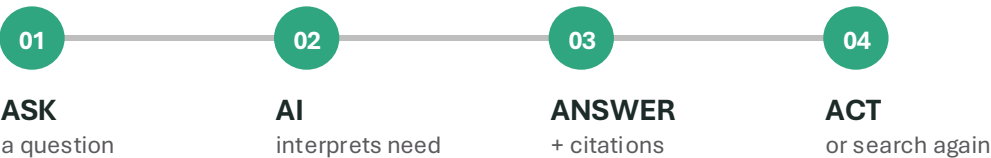
Consumer discovery is conversational
Consumers increasingly ask AI complex, plain-language questions before they reach a website, ad, or product page.
- 02

Search is becoming answer-first
AI Overviews and assistants compress the traditional click path; citation authority can matter as much as rank.
- 03

Media buying is signal-led
Google AI Max and automated campaign mechanics turn landing pages, content, creative, and data quality into targeting inputs.

AI-era customer discovery path

The answer now appears before the click



Click pressure when AI summaries appear

Pew measured the next click after Google searches with / without AI summaries.



60%
use AI to search
US adults, any AI search use

7%
conversion lift
Google: AI Max, full feature suite

75%+
expect AI spend to rise
advertisers who have tested AI placements

80%
still traditional search
of 2026 paid search dollars (eMarketer)

Brand implication: For any brand that competes on trust and relevance, the opportunity is to become the cited answer while protecting existing SEM performance through tighter AI guardrails.

Evolving Search Landscape

HOW PEOPLE SEARCH IS CHANGING

The search path itself is changing, and the click is disappearing from the middle of it.

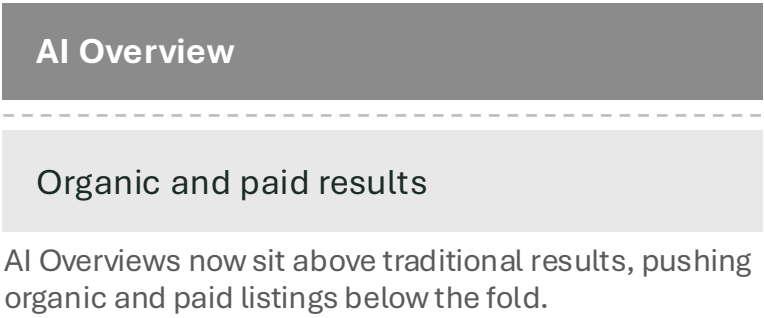


60%

of US adults use AI to search for information

74%

of adults under 30, the fastest-shifting cohort



Brand implication: Visibility is shifting from “being found” to “being selected.” Paid search still matters, but its job moves from click capture to trusted demand capture.

The New Buying Model

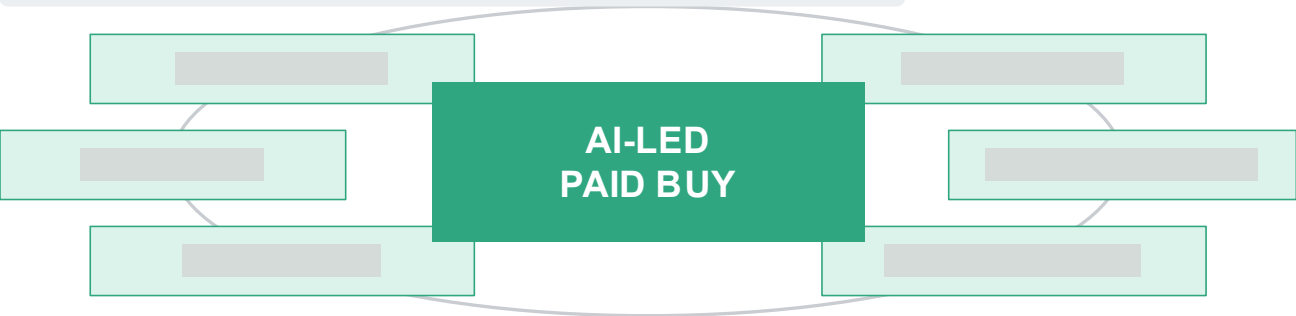
FROM KEYWORDS TO DATA SIGNALS

Google is replacing advertiser-controlled keywords with automated data signals. That changes three things at once: how we buy, what feeds the buy, and how we measure it.

1 HOW WE BUY MODEL SHIFT



2 WHAT FEEDS THE BUY SIGNALS THE PLATFORM NOW USES



3 HOW WE MEASURE REDEFINED KPIS



WHAT CHANGED IN PLATFORM MECHANICS



7% average conversion lift

Google's 2026 internal data on AI Max campaigns using the full feature suite, versus search-term matching alone.

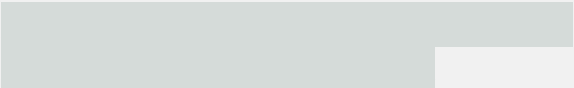
Maintaining Control

GUARDRAILS THAT KEEP TARGETING OURS

Brands can adopt these technologies without handing over the reins. Keyword control is going away; oversight is not.

Six guardrails we apply to data signals

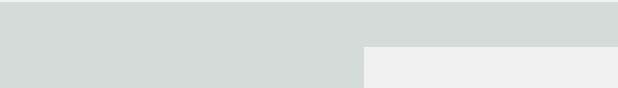
Business Goals



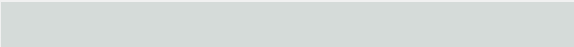
First-Party Data



Creative Assets



Audience Signals



Site Exclusions



Brand Safety



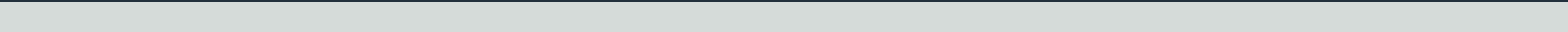
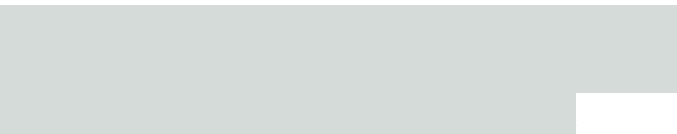
Signals compound



Measurement must catch up



Content stays published



Strategic Recommendations

NEXT STEPS FOR 2027 PLANNING

We do not recommend abandoning ship on paid search. With an evolved approach, we may simply see results differently.

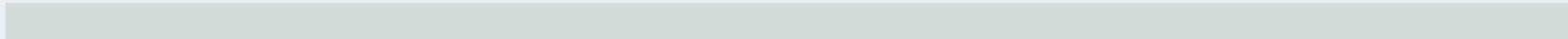
01 Fund the learning



02 Rebuild the inputs and the scoreboard



03 Keep an exit ramp



AI Impacts on Owned / Organic Media

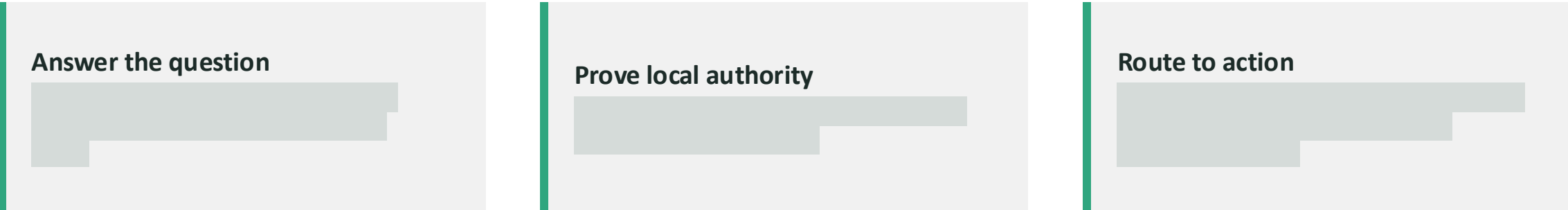
FROM DESTINATION TO SOURCE MATERIAL

AI turns your website, articles and public social content into source material for answers - not just destinations after a click.

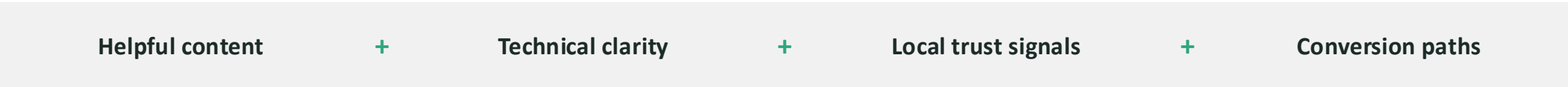
The same discovery path shown earlier, now from the owned-media side



What owned media must do now



The single operating model



Recommended Tactics

BUILD YOUR ANSWER ARCHITECTURE

Four tactics that build the answer architecture

- 1

Enhance article outros with hub-and-spoke architecture
- 2

Corner the “Common Questions” market
- 3

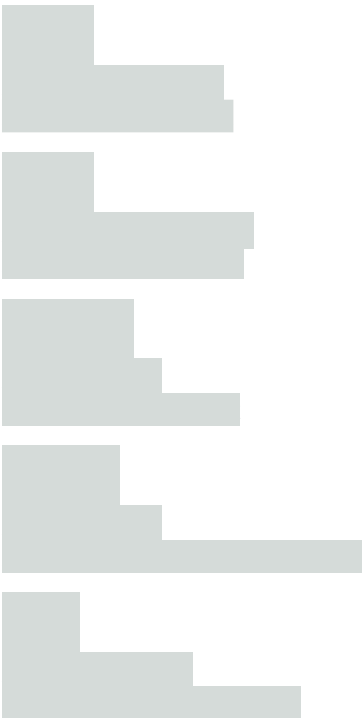
Reinforce your strength in the markets you serve
- 4

Maintain and grow dedicated SEO and search advertising



Case Study: AI Impacts on a Client's Marketing to Date

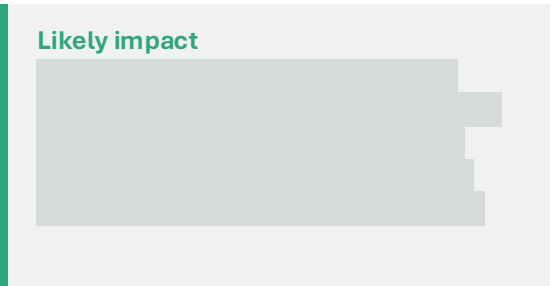
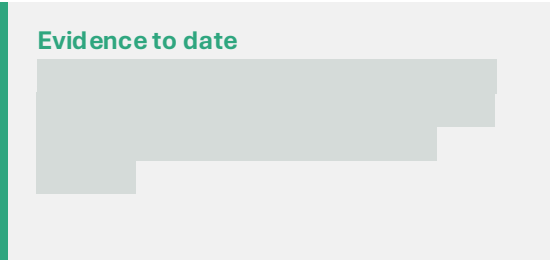
Current client foundation



Impact map: AI moves value from clicks to signal quality

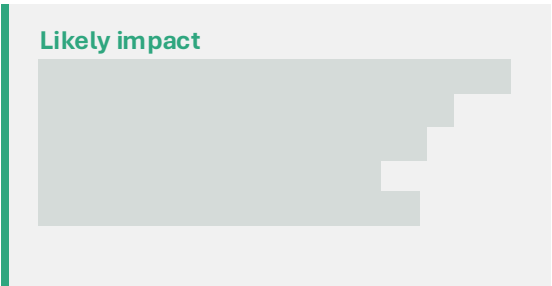
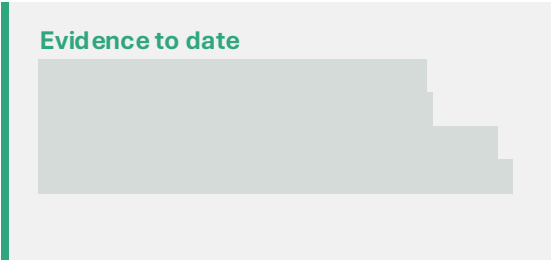
01 PAID MEDIA

Performance is strong, but buying control is shifting.



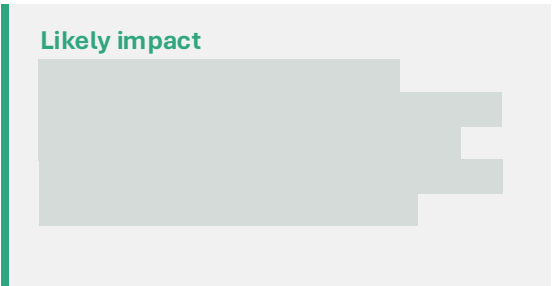
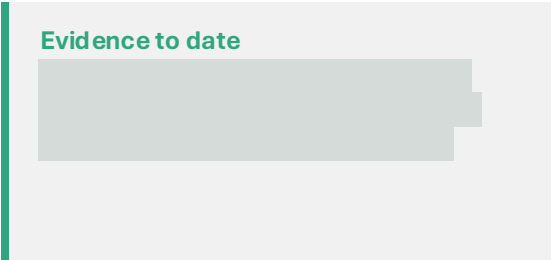
02 DIGITAL / SOCIAL CONTENT

Published authority matters more than dark reach alone.



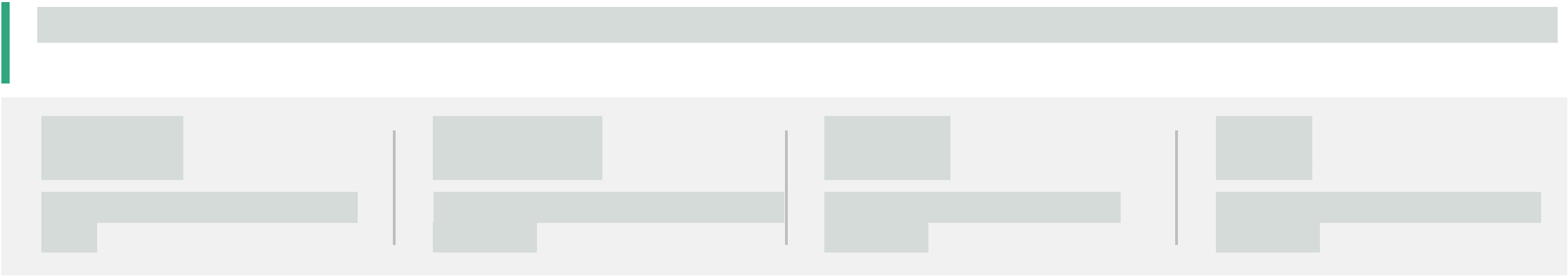
03 OWNED EXPERIENCES

The client site is the signal layer for AI-era discovery.



Case Study: What We Did

RESULTS FROM THE APPROACH WE RAN FOR THE CLIENT



Held the Line

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

Tracked the Shift

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

Prepared the Pivot

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

