


The Weekly Listen: Google turns 25, what people want from rewards programs, and would you hail a robo- taxi?

Audio



On today's podcast episode, we discuss what to make of Google turning 25 years old, how US shoppers feel about stores, why tiered rewards are all the rage, how Hispanic people think their values are reflected by advertisers and Americans, taxi drivers turning into robots, some mind-bending facts about US geography, and more. Tune in to the discussion with our forecasting writer Ethan Cramer-Flood, forecasting analyst Zach Goldner, and director of forecasting Oscar Orozco.

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Episode Transcript:

Marcus Johnson:

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Hello, everyone, and thanks for hanging out with us for the Behind the Numbers Weekly Listen, an eMarketer podcast made possible by Awin. This is the Friday show that does not endorse Oscar's Barcelona shirt.

Oscar Orozco:

I'm glad you noticed, glad you noticed.

Marcus Johnson:

I'm just glad it's not a video podcast, to be honest, Oscar-

Oscar Orozco:

It should be.

Marcus Johnson:

... so people don't have to look at that.

Oscar Orozco:

Just tell them how beautiful it is, Marcus.

Marcus Johnson:

It's pretty nice. I'm your host, Marcus Johnson. In today's show, Google turns 25.

Zach Goldner:

Even if it's less culturally relevant and maybe if it's not where the next viral trend is happening, it's where the money's pouring in.

Marcus Johnson:

How do Americans feel about stores?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

People want to go to stores, they will go to stores, but you have to give them a good experience, and this is such an obvious takeaway.

Marcus Johnson:

Subway introduces a new tiered rewards program.

Oscar Orozco:

What makes a loyalty program, a rewards program, really elite is when it's automatically applied, and I don't see that enough.

Marcus Johnson:

How Hispanics feel their values are reflected by American brands, will your Uber drivers soon be robots, and some very interesting quirks about American geography.

Join me for this episode. We have three people. Let's meet them. We start with our senior forecasting analyst based out of Colorado, it's Zach Goldner.

Zach Goldner:

Hey, Marcus. Thanks for having me.

Marcus Johnson:

Yes, sir. We're also joined by our principal forecasting writer based in New York, it's Ethan Cramer-Flood.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

You keep inviting me back and I keep showing up.

Marcus Johnson:

I don't know why. I think Victoria's responsible. We're also joined by one of our directors of forecasting based out of New York as well, is Oscar Orozco.

Oscar Orozco:

Hello, everybody.

Marcus Johnson:

Somehow you made it back too, Oscar. I don't know who sent out the guest for this one. Anyway, what do we have in store for you? Well, we're going to talk about Google turned 25, that's the story of the week, then we move to the Game of the Week where our contestants will try to win the championship belt, and we end with some random trivia. Let's get into it. We start of course with the story of the week.

Google Turns 25, that was the recent title of an NPR article. It explained that Google was founded 25 years ago by two Stanford PhD students, Larry Page and Sergey Brin. The company went on to shape the internet and now, after a quarter-century, finds itself at a turning point. With the rise of AI and social media platforms like TikTok, its continued dominance is not assured, the NPR piece suggests.

Gents, Google's just turned 25 somehow. What stands out to you the most about this marquee birthday?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

It struck me that this is a poorly timed birthday for Google because it gives tech journalists and commentators an opportunity to write these massive retrospectives that inevitably are unflattering, and this is coming out at a time when Google is already facing lots and lots of problems and lots of negative attention, government regulatory actions and lawsuits, and seems to be buffeted on all fronts. And now we've got this 25th birthday, which enables all of these people to reflect upon the good old days when Google was a great company and when we all enjoyed its search functionality, and it was so smooth and elegant, and it was so useful, and what a great utility it used to be, and now it is this horrible nightmarish experience for all of us and they've all gone downhill and yada yada, and everybody has all these memories. And I was like, "Well, if it hadn't been their 25th birthday, I wouldn't be reading this right now." Bad timing, but what can you do?

Zach Goldner:

Speaking of the big bad 25, it's almost as if Google is getting kicked off its parents' health plan. You hear that, Mom and Dad? Google Search is pretty old, and at this point, it's the US government that's the one that's kicking it off the health plan. But what that means is the parents, as in the US government, is getting pretty strict with Google. Google, at this point, still controls 90% of search advertising in the US. Even if it's less culturally relevant, and maybe if it's not where the next viral trend is happening, it's where the money's pouring in. Yes,

there's a concern of whether it's able to hold up that 90% share moving forward with the oncoming use of AI, but as of right now, Google Search is a cash cow everyone uses in their daily habit. But, at 25, Google is still running really strong. It's not going anywhere.

Oscar Orozco:

I agree with both of you guys here. I was actually worried that we might have an argument here today, guys, and it's good to see we're on the same page. I think I'm a bit more nostalgic, I think, than all of you guys, you might know that from hearing me on the show before, but it is crazy how quickly the 25 years have come and gone. But I'm on the same page. I think it's way too early to write Google off. I think what Zach said about, yeah, maybe those big viral moments aren't happening on Google, it's happening on the TikToks and the Instagram and the social platforms, which get a little bit more of the buzz, but the reality of it is, when you look at the stats, and that's what I looked at, you talked about the money they're raking in, \$74 billion in net ad revenue next year, 26% of all digital ad spending.

When we look at Google Assistant, we estimate that 88 million Americans use Google Assistant, 36 million use Google Pay, about 130 million-plus Americans have an Android device, YouTube users, we have that at over 2.4 billion. This is worldwide across the globe. The scale, the reach, of Google is unprecedented and it's not falling if at all. It just feels a little overblown, all of this, and it's what Ethan said, it's just a time to have a retrospective, to look back, but Google is in a strong position.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

This is why I like appearing on these shows with other forecasters because they will bring it strong with the data points, and I don't have to. I can just shoot from the hip because I know that, yeah-

Oscar Orozco:

Always ready, always ready.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

... Oscar and Zach are going to have numbers for me.

Zach Goldner:

And, as the honorary Gen Z member here, I just want to state people are not using TikTok for their business look-ups and their business searches. Yeah, they might be trying to look up cat videos on there, but what share of the search ad market is that going to take up? Very few. I don't think it's something that Google should be all too worried about moving forward.

Marcus Johnson:

The dollars haven't headed over, but it does seem that TikTok is the preferred search platform for younger folks. 75% of Gen Z people are using TikTok as a search platform, just over half, 51%, saying TikTok is their preferred search engine over Google. This was a survey from Her Campus Media. TikTok also introducing Wikipedia snippets within its search results to try to make it a little bit better. It does seem as though younger folks are using TikTok more and more, and yes, Google is still very relevant and they still have the majority of the ad dollars, but that could change pretty quickly.

And actually it seems like the search ad dollars are changing in the US. Google currently has over 50% to Amazon's 22. Microsoft, Apple, they each have 5% share. That's according to you guys. That's our forecast. But that 30% gap between Google and Amazon will fall to a 20% gap, 20 point gap, in just two years. That is heading rapidly in the wrong direction. Now the dollars are still going up for Google, yes, the pie is getting bigger, but it does seem like some of that dominance is waning, especially in search ad dollars in the US.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

To me, the real existential threat for Google here is not so much that there are other ways to find what we want to find out there and that those folks can therefore sell advertising against whatever it is that people are searching for on their platforms, it's just that Google itself, the experience on Google itself, is not what it used to be. Those retrospective writers that are talking about the good old days when you would go to google.com and it would produce this elegant result that would give you exactly what you needed and it was the ideal version of what a website is supposed to be because it was just there entirely to make your life easier and to organize the world's information and give you what you want as quickly as possible, and that's not the case anymore. It is a busy, messy result-strewn page full of headache-inducing advertisements, and instead of giving you what you want, it gives you what it wants.

And we all have a more difficult time with Google Search than we probably used to, but that's just the nature of the beast now. The threat to Google is that it has become less pleasant to

use their search as compared to how it used to be, but they're not going to lose advertising revenue off of that because, as Amazon or TikTok take those ads, then their search becomes less pleasant as well, and the same thing happens to everybody. Amazon.com also used to be one of the most elegant, well-maintained websites, and that has also become a nightmare. This is just how things happen when they grow up, and the way that we use the internet has changed. I don't think Google's in trouble at all. I think they're going to be fine, but that doesn't mean the criticism isn't valid.

Oscar Orozco:

And I think a lot of the criticism is about Google's lack of innovation a few years, but I think it seems like they're in a lose-lose, that people are just ... they just want to criticize, pile it on. If they do lose a little bit of search share, which is happening, our data does show that, doesn't that mean that they might be focusing more of their attention on the cloud and in other parts of their business where they might see more opportunity for innovation? I think you have to analyze the situation in a more holistic way, looking at their different business segments and how those are doing. It's not just a search story, and in that sense, search, as Ethan has said, and I agree totally, is changing for everyone. We have to analyze Google in a more even-keeled fashion.

Zach Goldner:

I do want to give one caveat real quickly to this. Google has entered into binding agreements with Apple and Mozilla Firefox to be the default browser on those different apps. It eliminates the choice as well. That's a lot of where the whole monopoly question is coming from without Google.

Marcus Johnson:

Well, speaking of the monopoly question, so Ryan Broderick of The Verge saying that, "For two decades, Google Search was the invisible force that determined the ebb and flow of online content. Now its cultural relevance is in question." And so I'm wondering, even though we don't think any of these competitors are close to killing off Google, who's the biggest threat here? Do we think that it is Amazon? Most people starting their product searches on Amazon have done for a short while now, and it's not particularly close either according to Jungle Scout. Do we think it's Amazon? Do we think it's TikTok? Do we think it's Chat GPT? Who should Google be most worried about at this point? Maybe someone else?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Will search remain as vital as it used to be now that the internet is such a mature place and internet users already know what they want? We used to need to go to Google to find anything, and now you don't really start your web-browsing experience on Google very often because you already know where to go. If you're shopping, you're going somewhere else. For social media, you're going somewhere else. For information, you're going to Wikipedia or whatever. You already know what you're going to be doing. If you combine the general decline in the necessity of search with things like AI and increasing the utility of what Bing can offer or even what Google can offer, it just seems like there's potentially just going to be less searching in the future.

Zach Goldner:

I was going to mention, at the beginning of the year, Google gave a Code Red once ... OpenAI or least ChatGPT. I think, once again, you're looking at AI and different competitors, those being the main competitors, and that still does include in those big tech players like Microsoft or Meta as well, which is coming out with its new open-sourced AI platform too. That's going to be where they lose out on some of its search revenue. Google's going to have to focus on Google Bard, where it's not able to pull in some of the aggregate data from that of the socials, from that of Meta or that of Twitter or X, and that's where it's going to face troubles moving forward.

Oscar Orozco:

I was going to agree with my colleagues. To me, it's entirely what search, it's called Search 2.0, is going to look like, and that's just the ChatGPT story. Whatever that looks like, that's really, to me, where the biggest competition or where Google needs to be focused more on, because that's where the biggest shifts are happening and they can't fall behind there. Aside from attributing the competition directly to a particular platform, it's, without a doubt, generative AI.

Marcus Johnson:

People across ages are searching differently. Statista had some numbers, 2019 to 2022, the share of people 18 to 64, so most folks, who research purchases on Google fell from 64% to 54%, and over that time, social media went from 20 to 24. That said, Google owns search. I think, Zach, you said it, at the top, it's not remotely close. Google's worldwide search market

share, excluding China where it's banned and Russia where it pulled out, is 91%. Bing has three, Yahoo has three, and the other folks have three collectively. That's as of June 2023, according to Similarweb data, and in the US, similar story, as Zach mentioned, Google has 90%, Bing has five, Yahoo has 2%.

And we'll keep an eye on this US justice department's civil antitrust suit against Google for monopolizing digital ad technologies. We are going to try to put together an episode on that, looking into the details of that case and what we expect the fallout to be, in the next couple of weeks. That's all we've got time for for the story of the week. Time for the Game of the Week. Today's game, What's the Point?

I read out four stories and Zach, Oscar, and Ethan give me their best take. Possible answers get one point, respectable answers get two, and answers that give you the same feeling as, Oscar, this one isn't for you, a dog greeting you when you walk in the door. Oscar hates dogs.

Oscar Orozco:

Never experienced it, never want to.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

You hate dogs? Oh, man, this is quite the revelation.

Oscar Orozco:

I do not. I do not. The revelation-

Zach Goldner:

Oscar doesn't deserve dogs.

Oscar Orozco:

Oh, my God. This is all exaggerated. Dogs are great.

Marcus Johnson:

He hates [inaudible 00:14:41]. Well, actually I've got another one for you, though, because Oscar hates dogs, so answers that give you the same feeling as holding an adorable little puppy. Actually, no, that doesn't work either. Oscar hates puppies too.

Zach Goldner:

Yeah. No, I hear.

Oscar Orozco:

Mint chocolate chip, are you going to give me that one, Marcus?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

He kicks puppies.

Marcus Johnson:

You're the worst person. Okay, how about this one? A two and 0 start for the San Francisco 49ers, Oscar's team. For some reason, it's not the same. The best answers we'll get you three points. 20 seconds to answer before you hear this. If you run long and get teed up, two technicals gets you rejected from the game. Most points wins. Let's play.

We start with Ethan for round one. "Retailers bet wrong on America's feelings about stores," writes Amanda Mull of The Atlantic. She writes that the internet was supposed to kill in-person shopping, but have you been to a Bass Pro? She explains that the 32-story metal pyramid in downtown Memphis, Tennessee, once home to the NBA's Memphis Grizzlies, is about five times as large as the average Walmart and now houses the largest Bass Pro Shops store. You can buy hunting and camping gear. You can stay in its 100-room hotel. You can fish for sturgeon, or you can eat at its Wahlburg's restaurant chain. But, Ethan, retailers betting wrong perhaps on American's feelings about stores, what's the point?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Yeah. Well, the point of this article is that we like stores, and people want to go to stores, and although most are not going to be able to emulate that Bass Pro Shop in Memphis that's the size of an NBA arena, people want to go to stores, they will go to stores, but you have to give them a good experience, and this is such an obvious takeaway. Anyone in New York right now, like I am, we go into normal retail shops and there's nobody working there. You have to hire people. We need employees. If it's a good, positive experience, if the store is clean, if you can get in, get out, you can get your questions answered, the line isn't 20 minutes long, it's going to be great, people are going to be happy, but it has to be a positive experience. And that's what Bass has figured out, and I wish that all the stores around me would figure that out, because I'd be delighted to use their services.

Marcus Johnson:

Zach.

Zach Goldner:

Yeah, retailers need to have an omnichannel experience. They have to both have the online product, online experience, where someone can do their research and order a product after experiencing it in person, but so even despite the convenience of shopping online, people still really do desire that in-person experience, and that comes to fruition especially when it comes to trying out a product. They can think of different products like that of Casper mattresses or Warby Parker glasses that both started off as D2C companies that started to introduce their own retail brick-and-mortar shops where people could try that on and see if they like it. And whether they order the product online or at the store, it doesn't matter, they'll eventually make the purchase.

Marcus Johnson:

Oscar.

Oscar Orozco:

Yeah. I agree with the guys here. The first thing I thought about was THE shopping mall, and I think we've been ... at least I've personally been researching supposedly the demise of the shopping mall since the Great Recession. It's been a long time now. It has not come to fruition. I was looking at some data from Placer.ai that found that, sure, indoor malls, visits dropped 30% between 2019 and 2021, but what's happened since then? Traffic has bounced back, so just a lot of data out there that shows people really do enjoy the in-store experience if it's done right.

Marcus Johnson:

You can check out an upcoming episode of our Reimagining Retail show coming out October 4th, where we'll dive into what makes a good retail store. Stay tuned for that one.

We move to round two. We start with Zach. "Subway introduces a tiered rewards program," notes our senior retail briefings analyst, Zach Stambaugh. He explains that Subway is replacing its My Way rewards program, with over 30 million members, with a new multi-tiered MVP rewards program that offers enhanced rewards when consumers reach 200 and 400 in

annual spend. Subway will move those existing folks over to the new program. But, Zach, Subway introducing a tiered rewards program. What's the point?

Zach Goldner:

I think that they add an element of excitement. People love their games and rewards. Think about that 10-punch pass you have for your local coffee shop. People want to get that number 10 so they can get a free coffee, or they want to play McDonald's Monopoly. Anyways, with different incentives like this, they are able to track over time. They realize, "Oh, if I'm able to reach X amount of dollars, then I get this discount on it." My recommendation is for people to go to Subway, put their lunch on their corporate card, and rise those ranks.

Marcus Johnson:

Oscar.

Oscar Orozco:

That's a great, great recommendation. I agree about the gamification aspect of it. We've been talking about that since early on in the pandemic and how that's grown. But, to me, what makes a loyalty program, rewards program, really elite is when it's automatically applied, and I don't see that enough. But I think the insinuation of what I'm reading into with this Subway program, I think if shoppers have these rewards coming automatically, I think that's really the way to go because these rewards programs are difficult to navigate and that's really what holds them back from growing. That's what these brands need to do.

Marcus Johnson:

Ethan.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

All I could think about when I read this article, this announcement, is that I really just don't go to Subway nearly as much as I used to. Shout-out to Zach for advocating that everyone jump on this. \$200 per year was the level at which significant benefits started to kick in, and I was thinking, "Boy, before the pandemic, I would've hit that, no problem," because I'd go to the office all the time and then you got to get lunch and I would end up at Subway because you do. And now I just don't. I Wouldn't come anywhere close to hitting that anymore. It's not

Subway's fault, I like them, they do a good job, but our lives have changed and I don't go there anymore. If they can figure out how to get people back into offices, this would really take off.

Zach Goldner:

Quick thing, I'm curious if this incentive itself has to do with ... I believe Subway just sold to another owner. I

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

I saw that. Yeah.

Zach Goldner:

I wonder if this is their first initiative that they're taking, food for thought.

Marcus Johnson:

Possibly. Yeah, Zach Stambaugh, who wrote the piece, pointing out that, over the past few years, a lot of major chains, Dunkin', P.F. Chang's, Sweetgreen, have all introduced multi-tiered rewards programs to boost loyalty.

We are at the halfway mark and Zach and Oscar are tied with four apiece, Ethan just behind with three. We start with Oscar for round three. "Hispanics feel disregarded by American culture and big brands," notes a recent Portada article. Findings from the Hispanic Sentiment Study reveal a worrying drop in how Latinos feel their values are shared or reflected by most Americans and big brands. Less than half, 48%, of Latinos feel their values are shared and reflected by most Americans. That's a 20 point drop from 2018 where it was 68%, and 45% of Latinos think big brands represented their values, down nine points from 54 in 2018.

But, Oscar, Hispanics feeling disregarded by American culture and big brands, what's the point?

Oscar Orozco:

Speaking from experience. I think this study actually truly reflects how the general Hispanic community is feeling, but I'd like to say a quick thing on this. According to the census in 2020, so it's probably increased since here, about 19% of the US population is classified as Hispanic, over 62 million Americans. That's a lot of people. I do think that there's this overgeneralization. We've been talking about marketing to Hispanics for a long time as well,

and it's a lot of people. It's people that hail from different continents, 20-plus countries, different walks of life and cultural experiences, and I think that's, honestly, what this study reflects is that it's very hard and probably the wrong thing to bucket them all into one type of person and think of them that way because there are many, many differences. It makes a lot of sense to me that these numbers are down across the board.

Marcus Johnson:

A lot of people, Oscar, and to that point, it's grown significantly, 16% share in 2010, now closer to a 19% share, that's an additional 10 million people. That's basically about a million new folks in this demographic added to the US population every single year. Ethan?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Yeah, \$2 trillion in purchasing power, so nothing to sniff at here. The takeaway for me for this one was just the downward trajectory on the results. It's not so surprising that you would have negative answers to a survey like this. I think you would actually find negative results almost any way you slice it when you do a demographic, any category or subcategory. If you ask people, "What do you think of the national media? What do you think of multinational companies and brands?", you tend to get negative results no matter what age group, race, religion, nationality, gender you're talking to. But, in this, case it was like, oh, it's getting worse all the time. Things are heading in the wrong direction for whatever reason. There is this opportunity set though. When the question became more specific about certain individual brands or individual media, you had more positive results, which is, again, the kind of thing you would find in other demographic surveys as well. This can be resolved if people put effort into it. And, yeah, 2 trillion, come on, folks, get on it.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. Zach.

Zach Goldner:

I think Oscar and Ethan both hit home here. I just want to reiterate what Oscar said. Over 60 million Hispanic people in the US, that's not a small amount, something companies need to look towards. What the survey also mentioned is that small companies have done a better job at attracting these Hispanic audiences. It's something that bigger brands need to look forward to, that they need to be their authentic selves. Instead of chasing after what the next

big awareness campaign is for that month, I think they need to be authentic. What that means is investing in bilingual advertising, cultural insights, and knowing it's not a one-size-fits-all for the Hispanic community, and that way, that they'd be able to reach these audiences.

Marcus Johnson:

Nice game so far, gents. We've moved to double points, round four, and Zach and Oscar still just one point ahead of Ethan, but it's double points, round four, of course, [inaudible 00:24:43] play for. Ethan will start.

Round four, "Cherish your Uber drivers, soon they will be robots," suggests an article from The Economist. It explains that the article was written whilst riding in the back of a Waymo self-driving taxi in San Francisco, "an office on wheels," it says. The robo-taxi arrives once you summon it through an app. It arrives showing your initials on a display on the roof. You wave at it to make it stop. You climb in once it finds a safe place to pull over. The piece notes that, after years of testing, Alphabet-owned Waymo and its rival crews, owned mostly by GM, got permission from California regulators in August to sell driverless taxi rides across San Francisco in one of up to 500 available vehicles.

But, Ethan, Uber drivers may be becoming robots soon, what's the point?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

I'm jealous of the people who write these. Every time I read an article like this, I'm like, "Oh, man." But here's the thing about living in New York, when you're in New York City, and Oscar's in this boat with me, we either experience things before everyone else in the world or just dead last, and there's nothing in between. For fashion or music or devices or new kinds of food, we're first. This is the best place to be. But, for this, I have no idea. It's going to be years before we get this in New York City. It's not going to come here. I'm never going to have any insightful thing to say about what this is like because I can't even imagine a scenario when New York City starts to ... Zach is in the boonies in Colorado, he's going to get to ride a driverless taxi before I do. I have no idea what's going on here, but I can't wait until someday, 20 years from now, when I get to ride one.

Marcus Johnson:

Is the point you need to move? Is that what-

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

No, because I'm here for the food and the music and the fashion. I'm not here for driverless taxis.

Marcus Johnson:

All right. Fair enough. Zach.

Zach Goldner:

Yeah, and I think there are a lot of different benefits of this automation of driverless car. The thing is, consumers, they're scared of it at this point. I think you may have heard in other articles, people are putting traffic cones on top of those Waymo cars to stop them from going. But my takeaway from this is what's going to stop automakers from producing these cars themselves, these driverless taxis? Think about Uber or Ford. What's going to stop them from using their own autopilot technology and starting their own taxi companies? Just food for thought.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. In terms of the people putting cones on these cars, so, yeah, not everyone is sold. It's an anonymous activist group called Safe Street Rebel. They're protesting driverless cars in their city, in San Francisco, putting traffic cones on the hoods of the cars, the bonnet, if you're not in America, or hoods of cars to confuse their sensors and immobilize them. Oscar.

Oscar Orozco:

To Ethan's point, it's also a by choice thing. Would I ever choose to get into one of these in New York City if I had the choice to? Absolutely not. I think Zach mentioned it, I pulled some data on this from AAA that found that 68% of Americans are afraid of self-driving cars, and that's jumped up. That's jumped up from 2022, where it was at 55%. Just 9% of Americans say they trust these cars. We're a long way from really making these feel like a comforting type of experience for people that are hailing cabs. We're a long way from these really catching on. We even have our own forecasts that show it's really only caught on in San Francisco a little bit, maybe in Austin, Miami. This feels very, very, very far off from anything that's going to happen.

Zach Goldner:

Oscar and Ethan, be real with yourselves, are you comfortable with a New York taxi driver driving you around? Are you comfortable? Is that a word you use?

Oscar Orozco:

Yes. Absolutely. They're the best drivers in the world.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

This doesn't have anything to do with safety for me. I would happily get into one of those driverless vehicles. I just don't think that they're going to be able to manage New York. I think it would go five feet and its brain would be fried and overwhelmed with the amount of hospitals.

Oscar Orozco:

So you are scared? You are scared of an accident?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

No, I don't think it's going to work. You can't even get down the street. I wouldn't get where I was going [inaudible 00:28:49] a person.

Marcus Johnson:

It'd be too much for it to take in perhaps.

Zach Goldner:

I can see Oscar secretly being a taxi medallion holder himself and that being his side gig.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Oh, man. Yeah, don't even give me started on the interest groups that are going to stand in the way of this here. We didn't even let Uber and Lyft have competitive pricing. There's someone who's standing in the way of this.

Marcus Johnson:

Oscar moonlighting as a cab driver.

Oscar Orozco:

I've heard of weirder things. You never know.

Marcus Johnson:

The safety concerns are interesting here because any time that one of these things does go wrong, it makes headlines. An NPR article from Dara Kerr was noting that driverless cars have run red lights, rear-ended a bus, blocked crosswalks and bike paths, but it sounds like they've behaved pretty similar to how humans already behave, and humans are responsible for 40,000 car crash deaths every year. And so you would think that the bar would be pretty low in terms of trying to improve upon that horrific number, but because it's a very new technology, it is just going to take people a bit longer to get used to them even if their safety rates are higher. We'll see.

That's what we've got time for for the Game of the Week. This week's winner, drum roll, Oscar, this week's winner of the Game of the Week. Very close, neck and neck with Zach going into the final round, pulls ahead, 12 points. Zach, 10. Ethan, seven.

Oscar Orozco:

Was that Zach?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

I demand an audit.

Oscar Orozco:

What's going on here? I haven't been here in a month and we're all getting competitive.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

No, just kidding. You earned it.

Oscar Orozco:

Thank you. Zach, I also heard that.

Marcus Johnson:

Turning into Susie, Ethan. What?

Oscar Orozco:

Maybe it was just Ethan. Heard some sort of sigh. Oh, it's been a while,

Marcus Johnson:

Congratulations, mate. Championship belt, it has [inaudible 00:30:35], and you get the last word.

Oscar Orozco:

Last word. Came prepared. Well-

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, hello. Expecting to win, were we?

Oscar Orozco:

Not really. I usually talk about either sports or shows. It's my time to recommend a good show we just started watching on Peacock, not really a platform I've watched shows on before. I think totally only one's Premier League.

Marcus Johnson:

Love Island? It's amazing.

Oscar Orozco:

No, no, no, no, no. I wouldn't talk about that publicly, but it's called Poker Face.

Marcus Johnson:

Privately, it's all that he messages me about. Poker Face, okay.

Oscar Orozco:

Pretty much. Poker Face, we started season one. Natasha Lyonne is brilliant in it. It has, I wouldn't say, an all-star cast, but they rotate in very well-known actors for every week or every episode, and it's really entertaining. It's funny. It's really engaging. So if you're looking for anything to watch, totally would recommend it on Peacock.

Marcus Johnson:

I don't know why, Oscar, but for some reason, when you give these recommendations, they seem very promotional. It's like maybe you were the director of the film.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Yeah. Is he getting paid? I don't get a cut of anything over here.

Oscar Orozco:

It's just, naturally, I'm just super into it.

Marcus Johnson:

Oscar directs on the side, as well as drives a cab around New York City.

Oscar Orozco:

Yeah, [inaudible 00:31:49] from the cab.

Marcus Johnson:

All right, that's what we got time for.

Oscar Orozco:

Cash Cab, remember Cash Cab?

Marcus Johnson:

That's what we've got time for. But the Game of the Week, congratulations to Oscar. He is this week's winner. It's time now for Dinner Party Data.

This is the part of the show where we tell you about the most interesting thing we've learned this week.

We start with Oscar because he won. What you got for us, mate?

Oscar Orozco:

Yes. Well, I came across ... the last time you yelled at me, Marcus, because I was talking about something work related.

Marcus Johnson:

Sounds like me.

Oscar Orozco:

Remember that?

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, yeah.

Oscar Orozco:

I tried to steer very clear from that.

Marcus Johnson:

Horrific episode.

Oscar Orozco:

Yeah, it was terrible. This one's about a fascinating study. You know me, sometimes it's weird stuff. It was actually reported by the Wall Street Journal. It was a study in Italy that found a correlation between severe COVID risk and finding the Neanderthal gene in the people that they studied the samples. This was in Bergamo, Italy, and they were trying to figure out why this city was hit so hard by COVID, and COVID is something we talk less and less about, but it still feels relevant, of course. And they found, looking to a sample of 10,000 people from Bergamo, Italy, which was hit very hard, and found that there was an increased risk of severe COVID, which actually meant having intense pneumonia and higher hospitalization in the intensive care units, but if they had this Neanderthal haplotype, it was, I think, three times more likely that people got sick if they had it.

I found that to be very fascinating because it seems crazy that-

Marcus Johnson:

Wow. Seems high.

Oscar Orozco:

... very high, but also that they could even track that, the fact that people have Neanderthal haplotype still. Apparently, in Europe and in Asia, about 2% on average of people have some sort of Neanderthal haplotype gene. So I found that to be very, very fascinating. But the other

thing that I thought of was, now that we've figured this out, I feel like academia should be putting all their research dollars into figuring out if we can find any other correlation with really bizarre behaviors that humans have and see if that's related back to that Neanderthal gene perhaps. No offense to Neanderthals, of course, but if we could figure that out, that means we'd have some sort of cure.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

No offense to Neanderthals.

Oscar Orozco:

No offense to Neanderthals.

Marcus Johnson:

None taken.

Oscar Orozco:

That's the second thing I thought of, really cool stuff.

Marcus Johnson:

That is pretty cool. It's remarkable what you can find in people's DNA. This is through a blood test?

Oscar Orozco:

Yes, yes, exactly.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay. Yeah, it's amazing what you can find out, and be like, "You, sir, are sick and also a Jets fan, which we found out through the blood test.

Oscar Orozco:

We might be able to figure that out.

Marcus Johnson:

Well, we could tell that because you came in crying and just assumed that you were a Jets fan. Very nice, very nice. Let's move to Ethan.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Sure. I've got a short one for you now and it's about the Hollywood strikes that are going on still. I was hanging out this weekend with an entertainment industry buddy of mine who is on strike with the actors, actually, and it was suddenly occurring to me how long this has been going on. It really is quite severe at this point, I think more so than one of us expected. And so I was like, "Boy, this is going to matter for 2024." We're at the point now that season two of Poker Face isn't going to be happening, and all the other stuff that we're waiting for, next year. What are we going to be doing? I was wondering how long it had been going on and what the longest strike ever was so we could get some assessment of what kind of ramifications. This has been going on for about four and a half months now, somewhere into the 140-something day degree, which indeed is very long.

And the longest writer's strike of all time was in 1988, and it was 154 days. We are extremely close to this being the longest strike in Hollywood history among the writers. Of course, the actors only joined in July, but the writers has been going on since May. We are very close to uncharted territory. This length of a shutdown just hasn't happened before. Who knows what next year is going to be like? There doesn't seem to be any progress. It doesn't seem to be nearly being solved. But I think a lot of us that thought that this wasn't really going to matter that much for TV and streaming services for next year were probably wrong. I think this probably is going to matter.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. Me and Paul Verna were talking about this and about how, yeah, the fall window has pretty much been missed, and even if they turned on the taps today and got a deal done, by the time they got production back up and seasons recorded, the new content really wouldn't hit the shelves until maybe end of Q1, start of Q2 maybe. But a lot of it's going to carry over into next summer already, and it doesn't look like they're close to a deal. Yeah, people might have forgotten a bit about this, because it's fallen out of the headlines and it doesn't affect everyone who's not directly involved, but I think, once the new content doesn't start flowing next year, and no season two, season threes, whatever, new movies don't start hitting people's screens, they will start to notice a lot more.

Zach, you're up.

Zach Goldner:

My data point comes from a personal story of mine. Well, today, I did not get nearly enough sleep as I should have. Naturally I looked up sleep facts. Well, fun enough, the average person spends 26 years of their life sleeping, and so I thought, who's the lucky person of who slept the most that I can maybe take some inspiration from, and his name is Randy Gardner. Back in 1965, he slept for a record 11 days and 25 minutes. I don't care for 11 days, maybe a few more hours on my sleep-

Marcus Johnson:

11 days? Wait, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.

Zach Goldner:

... [inaudible 00:37:41], 11 days.

Marcus Johnson:

Straight? Is Randy a brown bear? What do you mean he slept for 11 days?

Zach Goldner:

He's a 17-year-old boy that probably took his [inaudible 00:37:47]-

Marcus Johnson:

It sounds like something was up with Randy. Did someone check a pulse or rush him to the-

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Seems like a severe medical situation. The guy's asleep, it's fine.

Marcus Johnson:

Should we check on Randy? He's fine. He's fine. Sleeping it off.

Oscar Orozco:

Randy was in a coma.

Zach Goldner:

Well, it said that he experienced a number of side effects-

Marcus Johnson:

It sounds a lot like he was-

Zach Goldner:

... coming from it, hallucinations, memory loss, and concentrating, but after a few days, who knows, maybe he got some more sleep in that time, he fully recovered.

Marcus Johnson:

If you sleep for 11 hours-

Oscar Orozco:

Is this verified by Guinness? Or else I don't believe it.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

[inaudible 00:38:16]. I was told a while ago that we do not fact check Dinner Party Data, Marcus does not like it-

Marcus Johnson:

Not mine.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

... if anyone asks any questions.

Marcus Johnson:

Please. Yeah. I don't need that kind of heat. All right, let's move on to the last one. I've got one for you.

Zach Goldner:

Oh, I just looked this back up.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, there's more.

Zach Goldner:

That's the most amount of time someone's been awake for, my apologies.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, my God.

Zach Goldner:

I just fact-checked myself.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Well, that ruins the entire thing.

Zach Goldner:

It makes a little more sense.

Oscar Orozco:

Leave this as is.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

This is our senior forecasting analyst, folks. He gives you the numbers that you rely on.

Marcus Johnson:

It feels like it's equally as unhealthy. 11 days, why? That's too long either way. Jesus.

Oscar Orozco:

Oh, man what a great laugh.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, let's look further into that. I'm worried for the welfare of this individual. All right, I've got one for you.

Oscar Orozco:

Where'd Zach go? Is he there? Okay.

Zach Goldner:

I'm here, I'm here.

Oscar Orozco:

I love it.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, God. Okay. I've got one for you real quick, some facts about American geography. I've got four for you. One, if you drive directly south from Detroit, you hit ...

Oscar Orozco:

Austin.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

New Orleans.

Marcus Johnson:

Canada.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

South?

Oscar Orozco:

South?

Marcus Johnson:

You hit Canada first.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Ah, trick question.

Oscar Orozco:

Ah. You got me.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, trick question. Oh, I see what you guys have done. But, yeah, no, you hit Canada, because Canada curves round and underneath Detroit. Second one for you, Portland, Oregon, in the US, is further north than Toronto in Canada. Toronto is further south than [inaudible 00:40:02].

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Is that a true or false question or are you telling us?

Marcus Johnson:

I'm just telling you.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

I would say true.

Zach Goldner:

That adds up, yeah.

Marcus Johnson:

Given what happened with Zach's facts, I feel like there's no point in assuming you guys have any credibility.

Zach Goldner:

I just want to-

Marcus Johnson:

We're all just making stuff up.

Zach Goldner:

... say I did use AI for my fact and it gave me the wrong fact.

Marcus Johnson:

Here we go, he's blaming the robots. Okay. Number three, if you drive west from Nashville, Tennessee, which I think it's fair to say is considered in the South, you run into Las Vegas. Las

Vegas is as far south as Nashville, Tennessee, and finally-

Oscar Orozco:

Explains a lot, explains a lot.

Marcus Johnson:

... and finally, Reno in Nevada is further west than Los Angeles in California.

Oscar Orozco:

Really?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

No, it isn't.

Marcus Johnson:

[inaudible 00:40:55]. That's going to take a map for you to believe me. That's going to take a map for you to believe me.

Zach Goldner:

Was that another AI fact?

Marcus Johnson:

Wait, pull up a map, gents, pull up a map. I can't have folks on the podcast thinking I'm talking nonsense like Zach. Can you see it?

Oscar Orozco:

Oh, my. You're right.

Marcus Johnson:

Folks listening in, pull up a map too.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Oh, my God, you're right.

Marcus Johnson:

There it is, bang, Marcus Johnson, bringing the truth. That's what we've got time for this episode. Thank you so much to my guests. Thank you to Oscar-

Oscar Orozco:

Thanks for having me, Marcus.

Marcus Johnson:

... this week's winner of the Game of the Week. Thank you to Ethan.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Man, I don't know if I'm that grateful now, but maybe I'll come back again.

Marcus Johnson:

We'll see. Thank you to Zach, of course, apart from that last, really the last five minutes.

Zach Goldner:

Thanks, Marcus. I started strong, then the sleep caught up to me, and it all unraveled from there.

Marcus Johnson:

Really dragged down the whole show with that bit. Thanks, Zach. Thank you to Victoria who edits the show, James who copy edits it, and Stuart who runs the team. Thanks, everyone, for listening in.

If you want to say hi to us on Instagram, we are moving. We are moving over over to InsiderIntelligence, one word. InsiderIntelligence, one word, is where you can find us on Instagram if you want to say hi, and we'll see you guys hopefully on Monday. The Behind the Numbers Daily, an eMarketer podcast, made possible by Awin. Happy Weekend.