

Answering marketers' biggest questions about social search

Article



Last year, Google's senior vice president Prabhakar Raghavan made waves when he said that some 40% of young people turned to TikTok or Instagram when looking for a place to eat for lunch instead of Google Maps, per TechCrunch.

Since then, marketers have been figuring out exactly who is using social search, what platforms they're using, and how to monetize that behavior.

Here's what our analysts have to say.

1. Who is using social search?

While we don't have specific numbers on how many consumers are using social search, we do know Gen Z consumers in the US are more likely to start their online product searches on social media platforms than the general population, according to research from Jungle Scout.

The top platforms for social search among Gen Z are TikTok (43% of US Gen Z adults start their searches there versus 19% of total adults), YouTube (42% Gen Z versus 25% total), and Instagram (36% Gen Z versus 19% total).

"One of the reasons that we found that people, especially young people, turn to social platforms over search engines is that the results are more visual," said our analyst Jasmine Enberg on a recent "**Behind the Numbers: The Daily**" episode. "They're more engaging and they're more interactive than a list of links that you might get on a search engine."

Consumers also turn to social search because they're seeking content from other humans rather than a publication or website.

"People are using social media to search for things to do or things to learn," said our analyst Debra Aho Williamson. "There's a lot of searching going on for tutorials, how-tos, makeup techniques, or something like that."

2. How is social search monetized?

As more consumers use social media for searches, platforms are trying to find ways to monetize this behavior.

"Advertising in search isn't new on social platforms," said Williamson. "We've seen Pinterest and Facebook doing it for years now. But neither of those really caught advertisers' attention the way that some of these new types of search advertising will."

- **Instagram began testing ads in search results** back in March and then **rolled it out globally in May**, just two months later.
- **Snapchat is incorporating sponsored links** into its My AI chatbot.
- **TikTok is also testing search ads**, though it hasn't fully launched them yet.

- “And even **Reddit is launching [search] ads**,” allowing advertisers to select specific keywords with which to associate their brands, said Williamson.

While social search advertising dollars aren't large, Williamson believes momentum will grow.

3. How should marketers approach social search?

Marketers shouldn't abandon Google or Amazon anytime soon.

“People are still using search engines and we're even seeing Google launch things like Perspectives [which surfaces content like video and posts from discussion boards] to try to capitalize [on] this [changing] search behavior,” said Williamson.

And don't forget the importance of making organic content searchable, said Williamson.

“Even if you're not placing ads on these platforms, you want your content to turn up when people are searching for a makeup tutorial or a place to eat,” she said.

Williamson also advised marketers to look beyond the TikTok hype.

“A bunch of platforms are offering search ads, and TikTok is just one of them. There's a lot of attention focused on TikTok for very good reasons. But when it comes to search, I think [diversifying] and testing what you can do with each platform is what makes sense.”

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