Schema App

Preparing for Generative AI Search

Essential Strategies & Insights

Ushering in a New Age of Generative AI Search Engines

> Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) has revolutionized the digital landscape and, as a result, has introduced a new way to search and consume information. This shift demands adaptation in order to stay competitive.

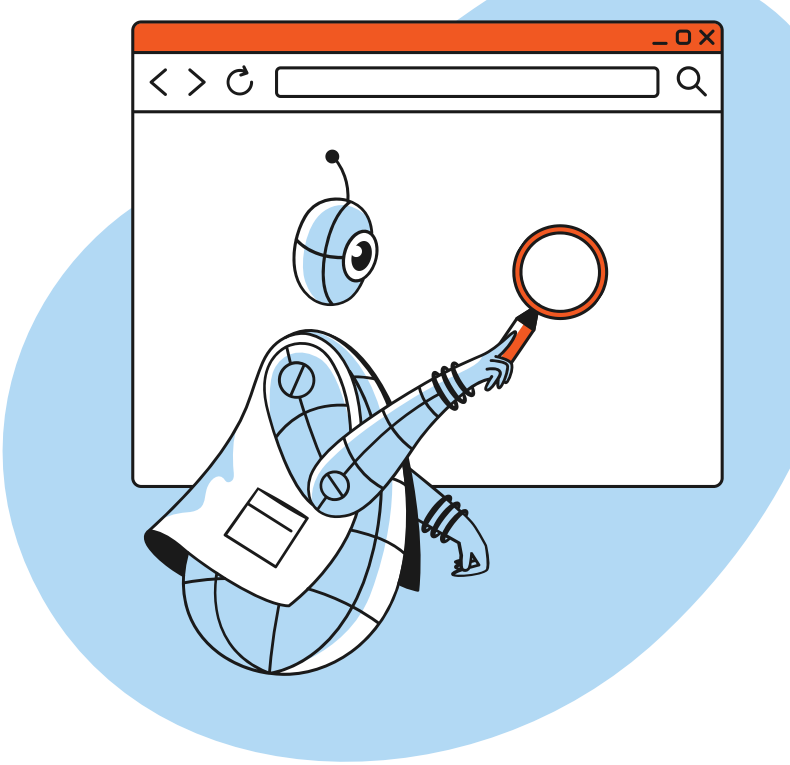
When ChatGPT launched in December 2022, it gave the world a free glimpse into the future of generative AI chatbots. Its capabilities opened the door for a personalized conversational search experience based on the nuances of human language and intent. Bing then announced that they were incorporating ChatGPT into their search engine, claiming to reinvent search using the power of AI to give more relevant, timely and targeted results.

Following suit, in February 2023, Google introduced Bard – their experimental conversational AI service which "draws on information from the web to provide fresh, high-quality responses". In May 2023, Google then introduced its Search Generative Experience (SGE), which uses generative AI to summarize complex search results into contextual responses.

These are just two of the many Large Language Models (LLMs) changing the search landscape. The introduction of generative AI search engines is disrupting the world of search by demanding more topical and specific content, and a need for more Schema Markup to further ground the LLM.

In this eBook, we explore the 3 things SEOs can do to prepare for and adapt to this new way of search. Before that, however, let's dive a little deeper into the impact of Generative AI Search on the SEO industry.

Impact of Generative AI Search on SEO



We are in a transformative era with the AI revolution and search generative experience, where search engines are gaining an unprecedented ability to interpret the nuances of human language and infer new knowledge. As a result, search queries are now returning dynamic and tailored results with the potential for conversational follow-up answers.

With this transformation, comes the need for many businesses to pivot their SEO strategy to stay competitive. Simply put, this new style of search engine requires a new search optimization strategy.

Generative AI search roll out will be good for some industries and less advantageous for others.

"One of the most exciting opportunities is how AI can deepen our understanding of information and turn it into useful knowledge more efficiently — making it easier for people to get to the heart of what they're looking for... People are turning to Google for deeper insights and understanding, and often want to explore a diverse range of opinions."
– Google

A Shortened Buyer Journey

The Good: A Better Customer Experience & Faster Conversion

The e-commerce industry, for example, will see advantages like a shortened buyer journey and increased speed of purchasing decisions.

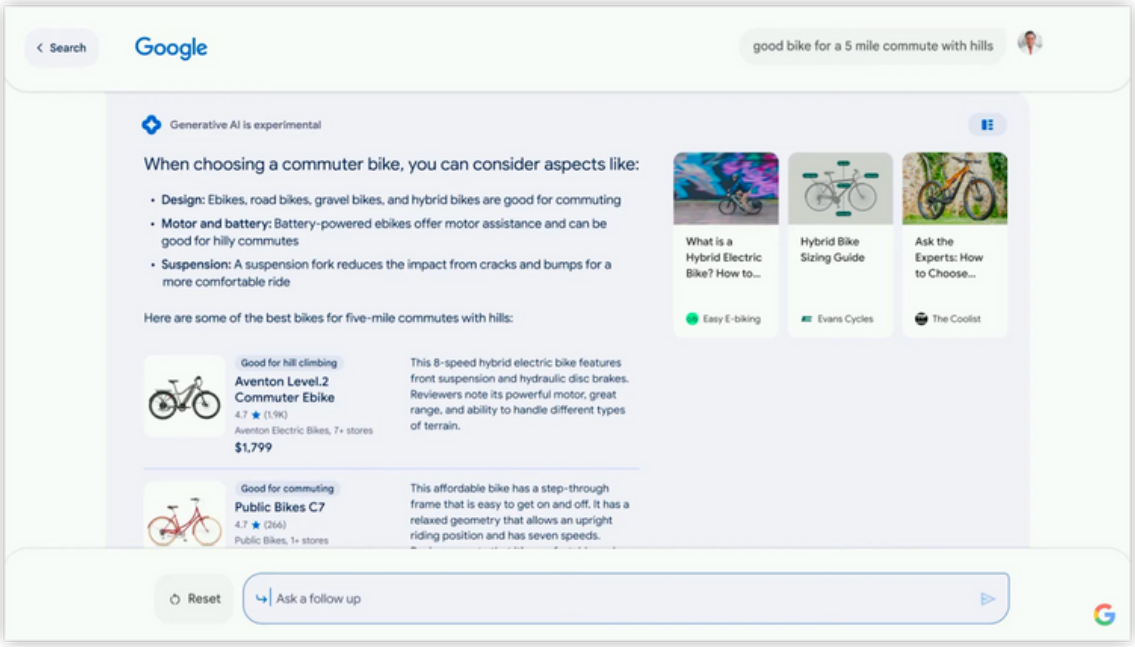


Image source: Google, May 2023

At Google I/O 2023, we saw Google generating product detail pages in the Shopping Graph during the SGE demonstration segment.

With product images, reviews and pricing directly displayed on the SERP, people can have a curated shopping experience with the potential to convert to a sale without having to view the product on the site at all. In addition to Google, new entrants will disrupt where people are making purchases.

The Bad: Potential Loss in Organic Traffic & Content Attribution

With this new generative AI experience, there is a potential loss of organic traffic as users will no longer need to go to the website to get an answer or purchase the item.

Furthermore, rich results, featured snippets and other top-ranking search results could get overshadowed by generative AI search results as it takes up the top fold of search.

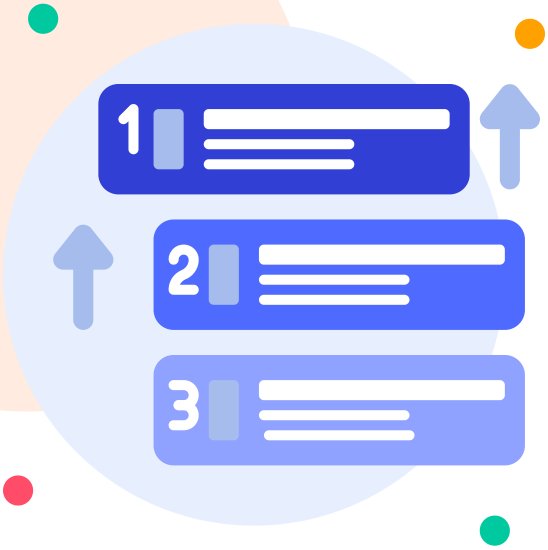
In 2023 alone, we've seen Google deprecate How-To rich results and significantly reduce the visibility of video and FAQ rich results on the SERP. This is partially due to the abuse of these rich results by web publishers, resulting in poor search experience for users. However, we've also seen cases where the same content on the rich result is shown on SGE.

This can lead to a decline in impressions, clicks, click-through rate, and website conversions as user queries could be satisfied within the SERP and searchers won't have to click on links to learn more. This is similar to the zero click search trend we saw with FAQ Rich Results, but on all content, with no control.

With 'how-to' generated results, for example, users will get complete answers to their questions in a series of AI-generated steps directly on the SERP without having to perform research for themselves on specific websites.

There are also risks when it comes to proper citing of sources from generative AI search engines. Google has stated that they will be citing their sources with SGE, but this has not been evident in some experimental use cases, making it difficult for users to assess how trustworthy the results are or click through to source pages for additional context.

In general, there is a loss of control over the user experience and a lack of metrics to measure these new experiences.



Redefining Search Engine Optimization

As mentioned, one of the superpowers that generative AI search engines like SGE have is their ability to interpret queries in natural language. This functionality alone will have a transformative impact on SEO.

During Google's demonstration of SGE, they asked the AI search engine "What's better for a family with kids under 3 and a dog, Bryce Canyon or Arches National Parks?"

To which the search engine was able to provide an informed answer based on multiple facts it had sourced from other sites.

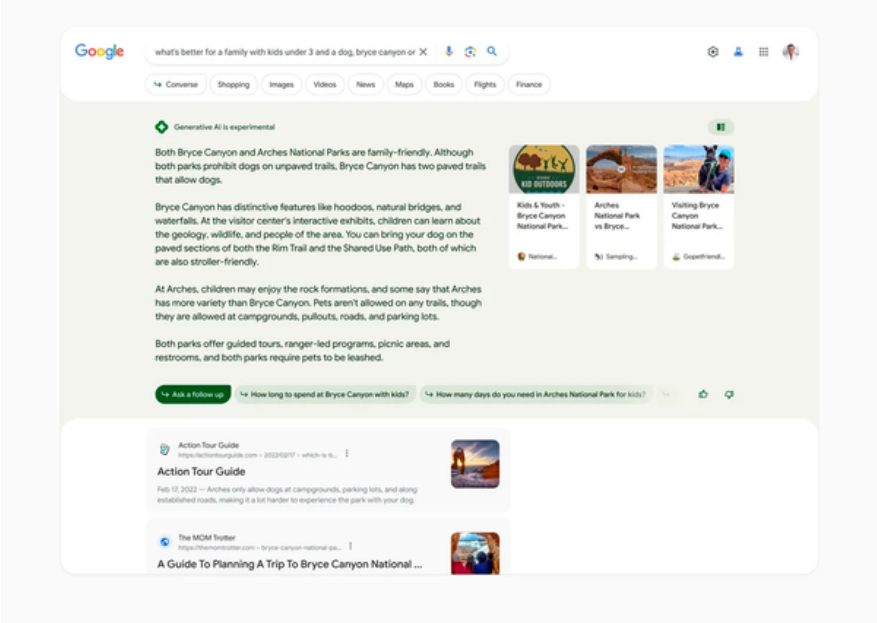


Image source: Google, May 2023

The Uncertain: Changing Search Behavior

The AI search engine's ability to understand hyper-long, specific search queries has the potential to revolutionize the way we search. We might start to see longer search queries with incredibly low search volume, which would disrupt the traditional keyword optimization strategy utilized by many SEOs. And to throw another curve ball into the mix, searchers can ask follow-up questions to their original queries.

But this should come as no surprise. In 2019, Google launched BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers) to better understand the meaning and context behind a query. That way, they can serve search results that better match the searcher's intent.

Again, in 2022, Google announced that they utilize Neural Matching, an AI system, in their ranking systems to understand how queries relate to the content on your pages.

> "Neural matching helps us understand fuzzier representations of concepts in queries and pages, and match them to one another. It looks at an entire query or page rather than just keywords, developing a better understanding of the underlying concepts represented in them." – Google

Search engines have been shifting from lexical search to semantic search and we are seeing it truly come to life in ChatGPT and SGE. Instead of using keywords to rank pages, they look at the concepts and entities on a page to provide the searcher with the best results.

Therefore, even if we start using hyper-long search queries, search engines are primed to understand the key concepts in the queries and match them with pages that present these very concepts.

The Good: AI Search Engines Are Not Perfect

Despite the excitement around AI search engines, the technology is far from perfect.

There are also concerns about the bias, trustworthiness, plagiarism and accuracy of the search results generated by AI search engines. Generative AI search engines like SGE are powered by Large Language Models (LLMs) that have known limitations such as hallucinations and inaccuracies, leading to unreliable search results.

As of today, many organizations have websites that consist of large amounts of information about their business such as their products, services, opening hours, locations, and more. However, the information exists as plain text or in media formats, which means that the data is unstructured. Even though LLMs these days are good at processing and understanding texts and unstructured data, the technology is still not perfect. In addition, there is a high cost to compute plain text.

So how can we help generative AI search engines overcome these issues?

The answer is to **produce good quality content** and **use Schema Markup** to describe and link the content and entities on your site. Doing so will help you develop your very own knowledge graph that will continue growing with your site as you add more new content.

A knowledge graph is the collection of relationships between things defined using a standardized vocabulary, from which new knowledge can be gained through inferencing.

When knowledge is organized in a structured format like a graph, it enables efficiencies in the retrieval of information and improves accuracy. This makes it easier for LLMs to consume and infer factual information about your organization while also giving you a control point for how you want your content understood.

Therefore, there is an opportunity for businesses to leverage robust, semantic Schema Markup to develop and manage their own knowledge graph, to provide AI search engines with domain-specific knowledge in a structured manner and control how their content is understood.

3 Things You Can Do Today to Prepare for AI Search

1 Create high-quality content about specific topics

Semantic SEO is the path to success in AI search and creating high-quality content is a step in the right direction. And what does Google consider a high-quality web result? People-first content.

In August 2022, Google launched the Helpful Content System to ensure content publishers were creating content that was “people-first” rather than “search engine-first”.

Sites that employed tactics like ‘keyword stuffing’ or utilized automation to generate multiple pieces of content were penalized, while others that provided useful expert content were rewarded with a higher search ranking.

As previously mentioned, AI search engines are also assessing a query for its context rather than just its keywords. Therefore by creating comprehensive and holistic content around the subject, content publishers can further enhance the accuracy of the results produced by the search engine results page.

> “We recommend that you focus on creating people-first content to be successful with Google Search, rather than search engine-first content made primarily to gain search engine rankings.”
> - Google Search Central

Focus on one topic per page

At its core, high-quality content answers all the questions a searcher might need regarding a specific topic/entity.

Each page should focus on one topic or entity, and include information relevant to the entity to make the content more comprehensive and holistic.

What is an Entity?

In semantic SEO, an entity is a thing with specific attributes.

When you create your website, you create pages or articles that talk about things like:

- your services or your products,
- who you are as an organization
- your areas of expertise.

These are all entities that are related to your organization. Therefore, your website is home to all these entities and you are responsible for helping search engines understand these entities and the relationship between them.

But how do you figure out what relevant information a searcher might want to know about a topic?

You can use tools like **Ask the Public** to see relevant questions that people might be searching for around a topic.

You also use the **Schema.org** vocabulary to see the available properties to make your content more descriptive. This is especially useful for entities like services, physicians, local businesses, products and events.

Understanding users' search intent and acknowledging what insights they are looking for in your content will help to provide value, which satisfies Google's preference for people-first content.

Create quality content that falls within your expertise

On top of creating relevant content that meets the users' search intent, you'll also want to ensure that your content demonstrates Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness (E-E-A-T).

Even though E-E-A-T is not a specific ranking factor, it is a criteria Google uses to identify the usefulness of content. Of all the aspects in E-E-A-T, trustworthiness is the most important one because Google wants to ensure the information provided to the searcher is factual and hence useful.

Businesses should focus on producing helpful, high-quality content that demonstrates their expertise in their chosen topic focus, as explained by Google Search Central in their article Creating Helpful, Reliable, People-First Content.

When focusing on E-E-A-T, don't forget to provide details about the author on their webpage. This allows you to add specific details about their expertise and authority, using Person markup.

You can use Schema Markup to showcase what your page is about and demonstrate your E-E-A-T.

Schema.org properties that support E-E-A-T include:

- reviewedBy
- alumniOf
- sameAs
- author
- publisher
- editor

For more information, see our article How to implement Schema Markup to increase E-E-A-T.

2 Implement semantic Schema Markup across your site

Creating high-quality content is great but SEOs can take it one step further by helping the AI search engines understand and contextualize the content on a page using Schema Markup.

Also known as 'Structured Data', Schema Markup is the semantic vocabulary that search engines use to read, interpret and index the content on web pages.

We often see SEOs using Schema Markup for the sole purpose of achieving a rich result. As such, they fail to leverage the semantic side of Schema Markup and use it to showcase the connection of different entities on the site.

Therefore, we recommend adding Schema Markup to your entire site and using the Schema.org Types and Properties to identify and describe the entities. The Schema.org vocabulary is robust and allows you to describe any "thing" in great detail. That way, AI search engines can clearly understand the entities on your site. But wait, there's more.

Create semantic Schema Markup

To provide search engines with greater context about the entities on your site, you can nest these entities within your Schema Markup and link them to external authoritative knowledge bases such as Wikidata and Google's knowledge graph.

When you nest the entities on your site, you are organizing the information in a hierarchical way while providing additional context. This helps search engines understand the relationships between the various entities and concepts across your website so it can provide searchers with accurate answers to their follow-up questions.

By connecting your content to a credible and established knowledge base, the search engine can clearly understand what your entity is to a much greater degree. This improves search engine understanding for more accurate search results that accommodate follow-up responses as user inquiries become more and more complex.

Here's an example of how you can connect the content to other entities on your website and external authoritative knowledge bases.

Connecting to other entities on your website

Connecting to external authoritative knowledge bases

```
@type: Physician
  url
  name
  telephone
  description
  openingHours
  parentOrganization
    @type: MedicalOrganization
      name: Washington Health
      description: Washington Health is a healthcare...
      sameAs: www.twitter.com/washington-health
      areaServed: https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q61
  medicalSpecialty
    @type: MedicalSpecialty
      name: plastic surgery
      sameAs: https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q182442
  availableService
```

Semantic Schema Markup Builds Your Knowledge Graph

When you implement semantic Schema Markup, you are linking the entities on your site and developing your organization's marketing knowledge graph. Your marketing knowledge graph ultimately facilitates the understanding and querying of complex relationships in a clear, coherent manner.

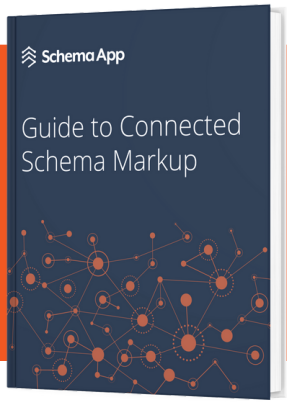
As the generative AI search engine advances, these knowledge graphs can:

1. Help AI search engines understand and contextualize your content
2. Train AI search engines to provide more accurate results by grounding the LLM with your knowledge graph.

By connecting these dots, you make it easier for search engines to understand your content and produce detailed responses to specific queries, effectively reducing processing time and improving result accuracy. At Schema App, we've also seen an increase in click-through rates to pages with semantic Schema Markup.

Download our 'Guide to Connected Schema Markup' to learn how to implement this advanced SEO strategy across your site!

Download Guide



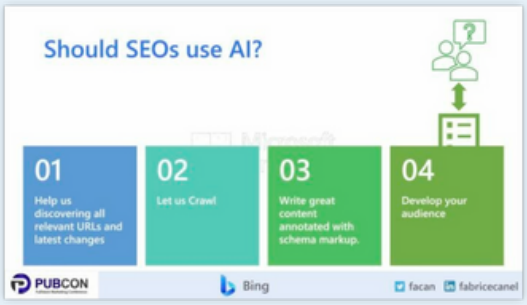
The Experts Have Spoken

When asked earlier this year what Google wants from Schema Markup, Ryan Levering, Google's leading expert for structured data, said: *"Over time, richer/correct semantics will favour more connected graphs"*.

Google has yet to release any official documentation about semantic Schema Markup, but Levering's statement alludes to its increasing importance with regard to search.

The importance of Schema Markup was reiterated further by Fabrice Canel, Product Manager at Microsoft Bing, who stated that SEOs can prepare for AI search by writing quality content and deploying Schema Markup to annotate it. His definition of "quality content" was illustrated in his keynote presentation at Pubcon Austin 2023.

Later in his presentation, he emphasized the importance of utilizing 'semantic markup' to communicate information about web pages, which further highlights the need for investing in a Schema Markup strategy. This statement is now also reflected in Bing's webmaster guidelines.



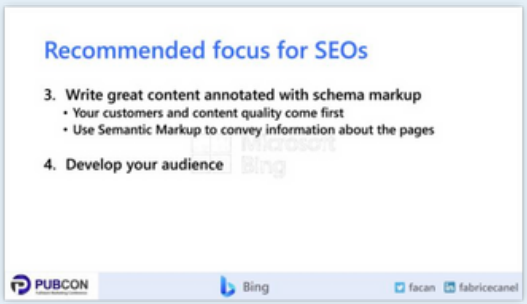


Image source: Bing Keynote Presentation, Pubcon, February 2023

3 Measure and Be Agile

Measure and monitor your performance

The advent of AI has already disrupted the SEO landscape, and this disruption is just the tip of the iceberg. As new experiences are deployed, it's increasingly important to actively monitor, measure and adapt your content to perform.

One crucial aspect to monitor is the evolving search engine results page (SERP) landscape.

At Schema App, we monitor changes to the SERP and the performance of our customers' organic search traffic, including rich results performance. If Google makes any updates to their algorithms, we are able to be agile and respond quickly to minimize any losses in traffic.

Conversely, if there are new rich results or updates on SGE, we are also able to provide quick content recommendations that help them leverage these opportunities before their competitors beat them to the punch.

As search engines evolve at a rapid pace, we recommend looking at traffic by page types, lines of business, and overall to identify the trends and impact of these changes. By staying vigilant and observing these developments, SEOs can maintain this same level of adaptability needed to adjust their strategies effectively.

Measuring and monitoring performance has always been a top priority at Schema App and is a key reason why we have been able to stay ahead, stay competitive, and stay aware of where shifts must happen to leverage the many changes that occur in the tech world.

Long story short, agility is key:
Search engines say "jump",
you say "how high?"

Optimizing for the AI Revolution

As the search landscape evolves with the introduction of Generative AI Search Engines, SEO professionals must adapt to stay competitive. The shift towards a more human-centric search experience demands a new approach to search optimization. Creating people-first, contextually relevant content and translating this content for search engines using Schema Markup is essential for success in the AI-powered search era.

Don't let the complexity of AI search hinder your SEO success.

Get in touch with us to learn more about our end-to-end Schema Markup solution and stay ahead in the ever-changing search landscape. Our experts will ensure your content is primed for AI search, future-proofing your website and keeping you ahead of competitors.

Get in Touch

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