

New Study

# SEO and Intent 2020: New Study Reveals True State Of Search

We analyzed 500+ searchers to find out how they search and what impacts their decision to click. Here's what we found out.

**We recently surveyed over 500 respondents aged 25-60 to find the answers to these questions:**

What do searchers look for in the search results, and how accurately do those results reflect search intent?

## Key Findings

- The majority of respondents are not receptive to ads in the search results. Most (85.2%) preferred to click on organic results, and 66.7% responded that if Google added more ads to the results, they would want to use the search engine less.
- Written content is still king. Despite the growing emphasis on video and image production, 55% still prefer to see written content in the search results.
- Web privacy continues to be a concern for users. In the case of ad targeting, 62.1% had no idea why Google was targeting them for certain ads.
- Ranking #1 isn't everything. Yes, ranking higher is better, but most respondents looked at more than three search results before deciding to click.
- Brand awareness matters, but it's not a deal-breaker. The slight majority, 55%, said that they would only click on a brand they knew in the search results, while 44.9% would still click regardless of if they knew the brand.
- Meta descriptions remain a crucial SEO element. When asked which factor has the most significant impact on their decision to click a result, 62.9% responded it was the description.
- Good news for Google: most searchers are satisfied with the search results. When asked, 72% replied that the search engine was mostly accurate at matching their queries will search results.



*"The most significant thing this study shows is how closely search intent correlates with a keyword search. The results show that intent does match searches, and that should be part of every SEO strategy. I was shocked also shocked by how many people prefer organic ads over paid in 2020. Additionally, I feel that this study reveals issues with web privacy transparency and Google's policy for branded paid search."* - **John Lincoln, Ignite Visibility**

The Details:

# Most Feel that SERP Features Are an Improvement to the Search Results

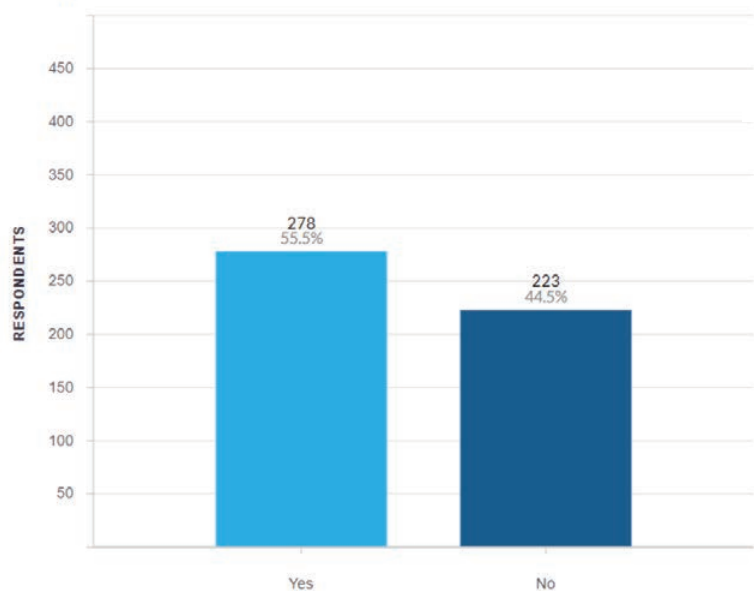
The majority of respondents, 55.5%, think that Google is improving the search results by including featured snippets and SERP features.

**Marketers need to change the way they think about visitors.**

In some cases, they can no longer separate visits from impressions. If a website gets an impression in a Google SERP feature, that should be included in a report.

Going forward, we are going to see impression counts in native platforms like Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, Bing, and more on the rise. Visits to websites will go down. However, conversions should remain the same.

Do you think Google is improving the search results by sending less traffic to websites and instead delivering its own content or snippets of website content in the search results?



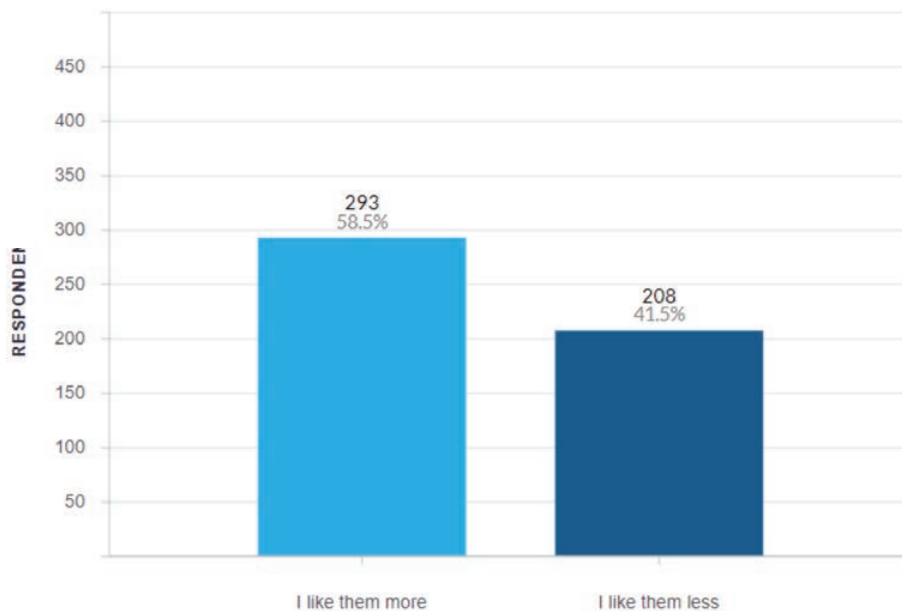
Additionally, Google will be using this data to create audiences that will be excellent for advertising.

Overall, we see that this puts much more emphasis on SERP features and connecting users directly with Google.

# Most Searchers Think the Search Results Have Improved Over the Past Year

**Fifty-nine percent** of respondents are more satisfied with the Google search results as of January 2019 than they were in January 2018

Do you like Google Search results more today (as of December 2019 or after) opposed to in January 2019? Do you feel they more closely match your search intent?



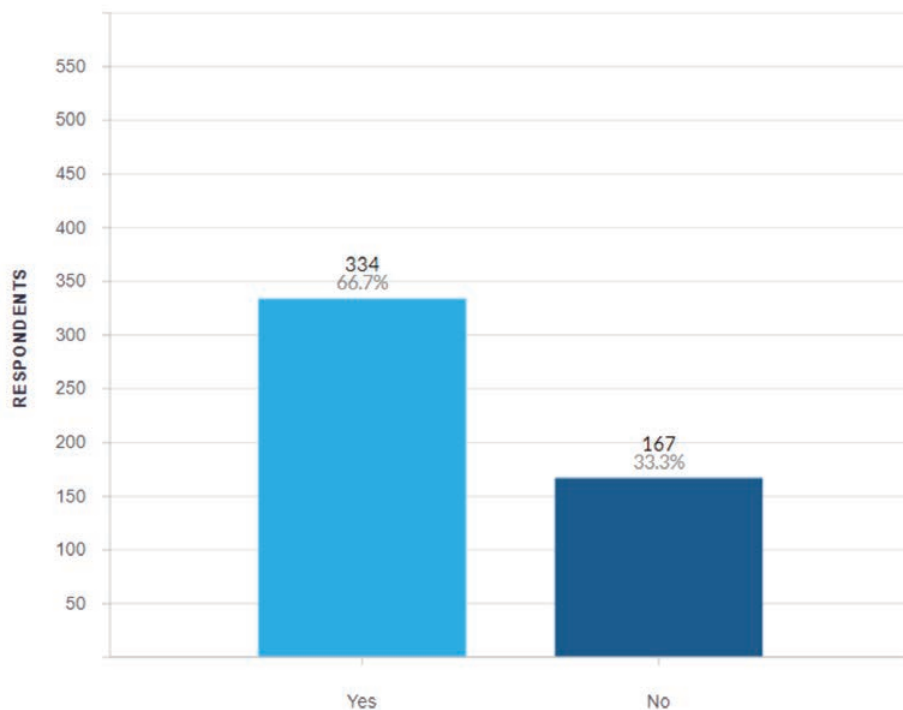
**While only slightly more, consumers generally like what they see in the results.**

This means more features, local pack results, and curated HTML pages are well received, which is great for SEO professionals. We want people to keep using the search engines, after all.

# Study Reveals That Adding More Ads to the Search Results Would Cause Users to Use a Search Engine Less

**Sixty-eight percent** responded that Google adding more ads to the search results would make them want to use the search engine less.

Does Google adding more ads to their search results make you want to use the search engine less?



**It seems Google is putting too many ads in the search results, and users aren't happy about it.**

In the results page, we now see new local service ads, four text ads at the top, and ads at the bottom. Users feel this is overkill, and this should be a warning signal for Google to pull back on the ads.



# Searchers Still Prefer to Click on Organic Listings Rather Than Paid

When asked if they preferred to click on ads or organic results, the majority (85.2%) preferred to click on an organic result.

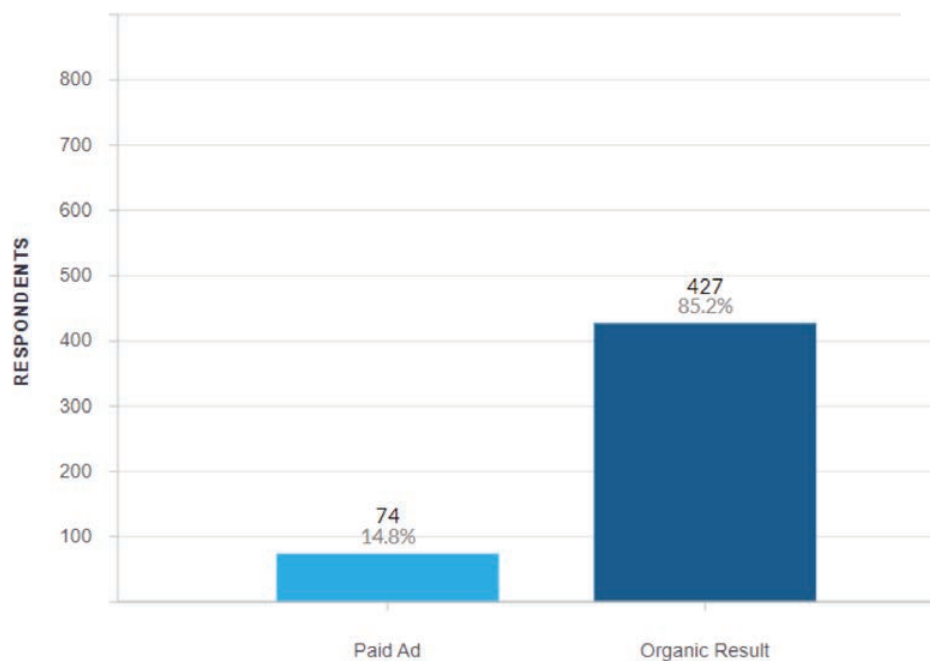
## This is a massive number.

To see that over 85% of people still prefer to click on organic results shows just how powerful it is to rank high in the search engines. Consumers see it as validation.

It also adds to the theory of ad fatigue that we covered in the last point. It seems that additional ads in the search results aren't encouraging more users to click on them; in fact, it appears to have the opposite effect.

For marketers, it shows a focus on ranking high organically will pay off more in the long run than a quick boost through paid search.

When looking for something in Google, do you prefer to click on a paid ad or organic result?

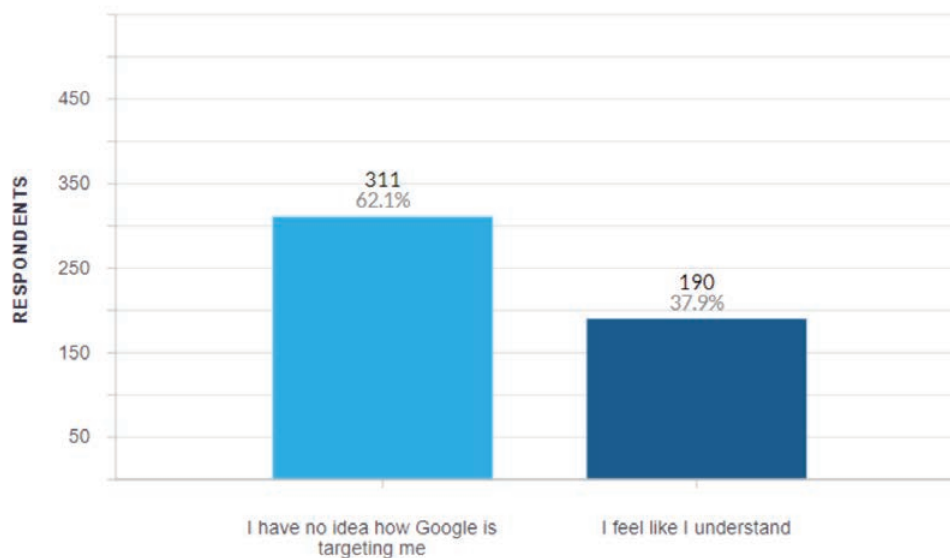


*"Studies like these are great additions to the field -- they don't always reveal the truth of how people use the Internet, but they do show perceptions about how people \*believe\* they use the Internet, and that can be fascinating and useful as well. In particular, I was struck by the degree to which people say they dislike ads and prefer organic results in spite of Google's attempts to make ads more subtle and the increasing click-through rates we know happen on Google's search ads."* - **Rand Fishkin, Sparktoro**

# Most Don't Understand Ad Targeting and Why They Are Shown Certain Ads

When asked if they understood why Google decides to serve them certain ads, **62.1% had no idea why Google was targeting them for specific ads, while 37.9% felt that they understood.**

When you are served an ad in Google, do you feel as though you understand why Google has decided to serve you that ad?



**This shows the lack of transparency and education around how Google targets people,** which has become a major issue around web privacy.

It also signals that while ad targeting has come a long way, it's still far from perfect.

# Searchers Prefer Written Content in the Search Results

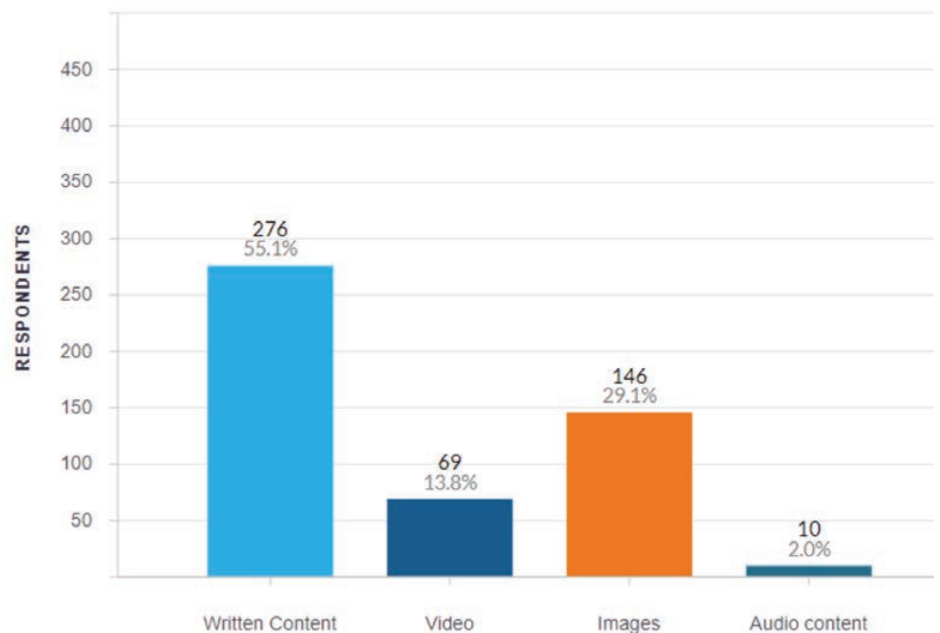
When performing a search online, **55.1% preferred written content**, followed by 29.1% who preferred images, 13.8% who preferred video, and just 2% who preferred audio content.

**There is so much hype lately about other types of content like video killing the demand for the written word. Clearly, text still wins!**

This is an invaluable point for marketers. Though it's important to keep a tab on newer trends and techniques, the value of written content can't be understated.

Those looking to rank higher in the SERPs will need to continue to focus heavily on their content marketing strategy to get ahead.

When you do a search online, what type of content do you prefer in general?

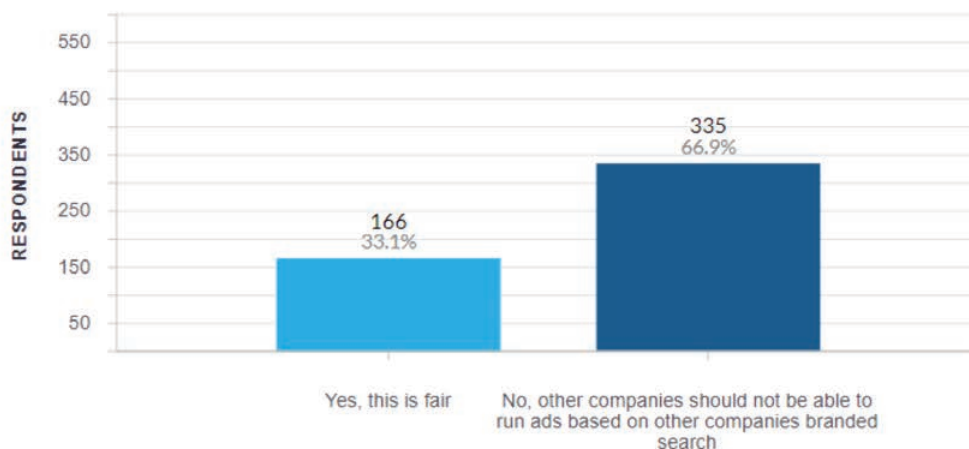


*"I was a little surprised to see that the majority of folks prefer text-based content. With Google putting more video content, images, and even podcasts into the search results, I thought that it would be more like 60/40 multimedia vs. text." - Brian Dean, Backlinko*

# Users Aren't a Fan of Competitor's Running Ads Based on Other Companies' Branded Search Terms

Of those surveyed, **66.9%** thought other companies should not be able to run ads based on other companies' branded search.

When someone does a search for a company name, Google lets its competitors run ads based on that search. For example, if you owned company 1 and someone did a search for "company 1" in Google, Google would allow company 2 to run ads based on that. However, Google does not allow company 2 to use company 1's name in the actual text ads. Do you feel this is fair to company 1?



**This has been a major issue for brands.**

Google has been forcing brands to pay for their brand name advertising and making millions of dollars off of it.

Consumers agree this should be a practice that stops. This will likely soon be a topic in the courts as well.



# According to Searchers, Quick, Thorough Responses Are the Most Important Factors in a Search Result

When given an example search of “[How to fix the kitchen sink](#),” respondents were asked how important specific elements were in the search results. Here are the results:

- **It answers my question quickly:** 48.9% rated it very important
- **It is a very thorough response:** 40.3% rated it very important
- **It has a video:** 24.2% rated it important, and 24.2% rated it very important
- **It has FAQs:** 26.1% rated it important, followed by 25% who rated it very important
- **It has pictures:** 30.9% rated it very important
- **It sources information:** 30% rated it very important
- **It has share buttons:** 36% rated it not at all important
- **It has an author bio:** 31.9% rated it not at all important
- **The page loads quickly:** 40.9% rated it very important
- **It has a date on the page:** 25.5% rated it important, while 23.6% rated it very important

**We can see that when it comes to content, the user wants it all.**

This response shows these are all important elements on a page. However, we see that a quick answer is the most important, along with a thorough response.

We also see that sharing content isn't a priority, as the majority rated share buttons unimportant.

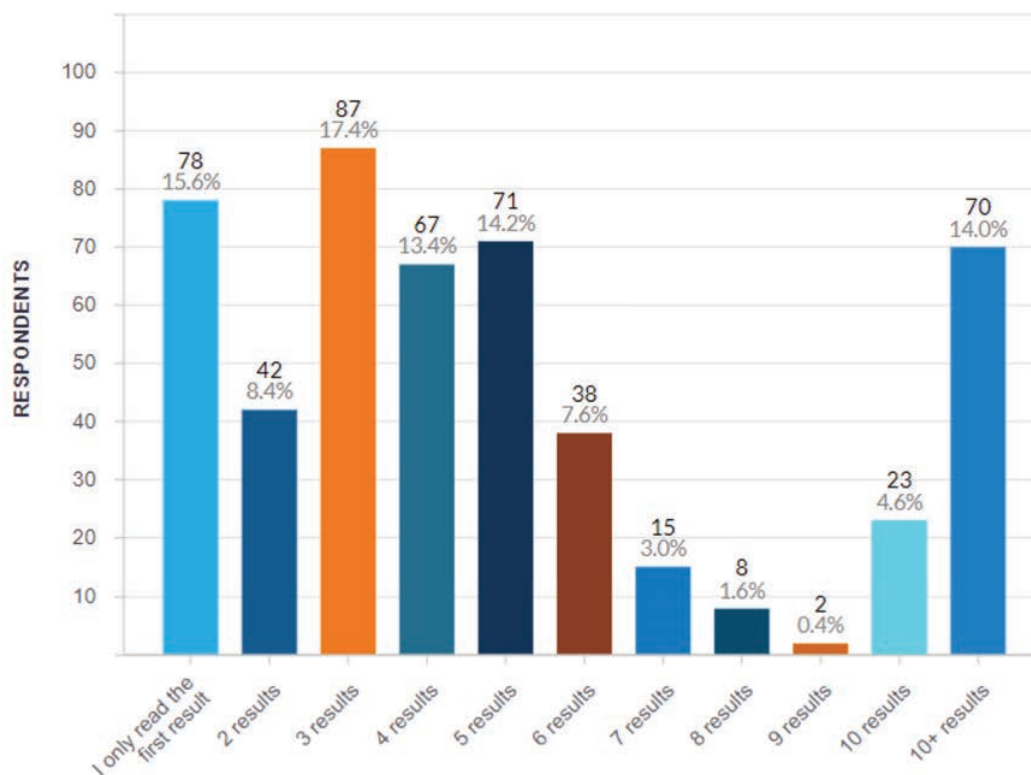
And, though most want to see information sources used on a page, including an author bio was rated not at all important.

This plays heavily into the new emphasis on E-A-T and shows us that while users want to know where their information is coming from, they're not overly concerned with the expertise of the authors themselves.

# Searchers Don't Just Focus on the First Result

When asked how many search results they read before clicking a link, **17.4% said they looked at three results**, followed by 15.6% who only read the first result, 14.2% who read five, 14% who read 10+, 13.4% who read four, 8.4% who read two, and 7.6% who read six.

Before clicking on a search result in Google, how many results do you read?



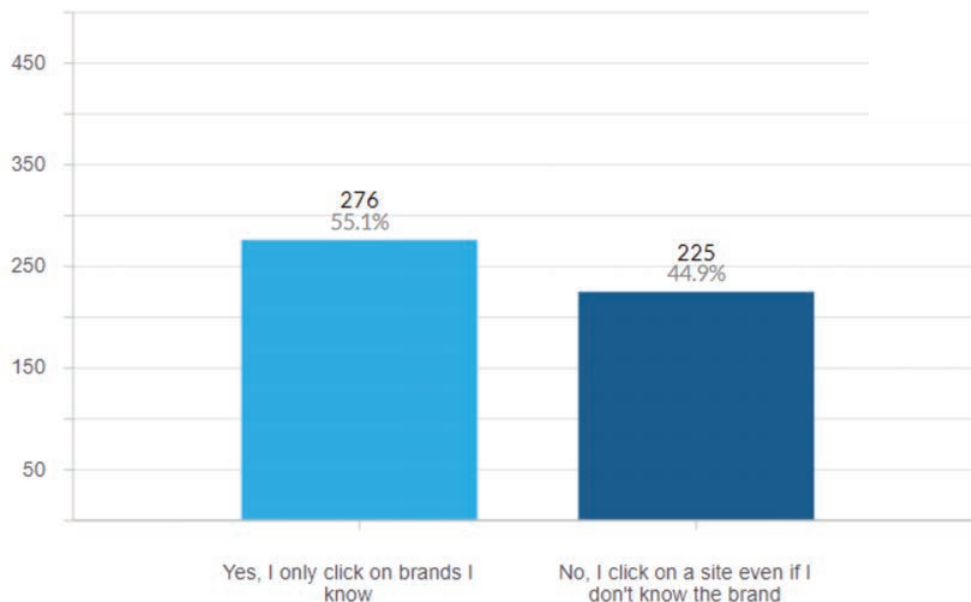
**Clearly, ranking higher is better. But we can see that most people are looking at results past the top three.**

This is good news for marketers who struggle to claim the top spot. It shows us that searchers are more forgiving, and look at more than just rank when selecting a search result.

# The Majority of Searchers Only Click on Brands They Know in the Search Results

Fifty-five percent responded that they only click on a brand they know in the search results, while 44.9% click on the site regardless of whether they know the brand.

Do you only click on the websites of brands that you recognize in Google search results?



**To think that the majority of people will only click on a brand they're familiar with is amazing!**

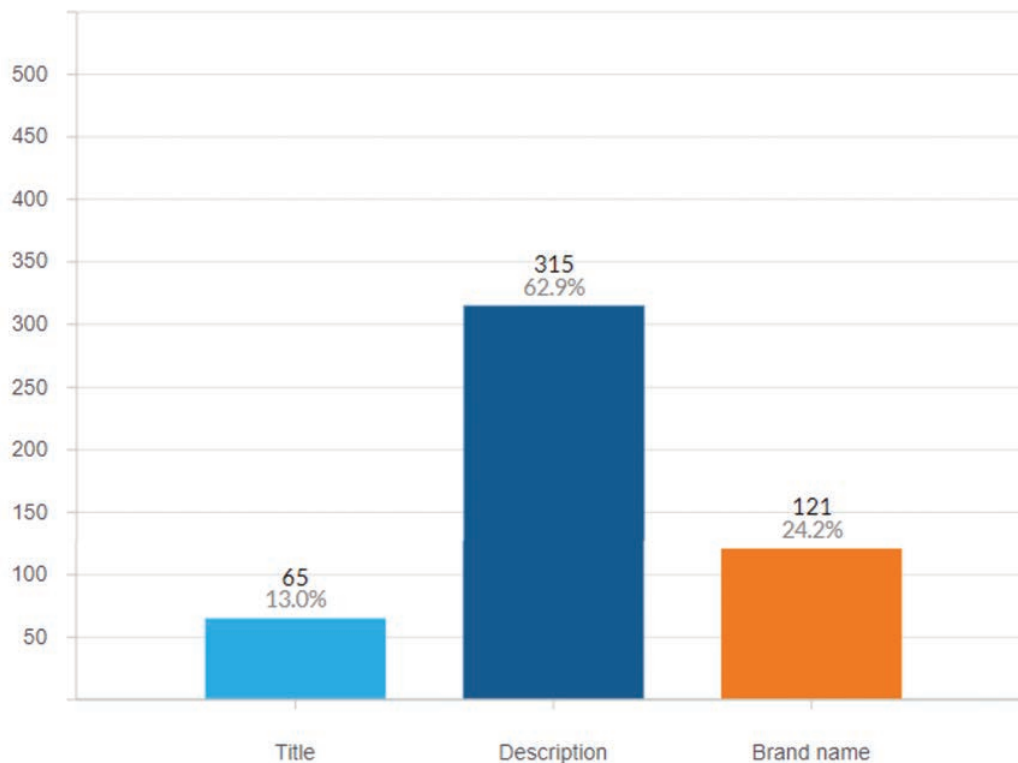
This certainly makes a case for branding, as it means over 50% of people will not click on your result if they don't know you.

That said, close to half of the respondents are still willing to give a result a chance even if they're unfamiliar with the brand. This means that creating quality content that lands itself on the first page can still get you traffic, even if you aren't yet well-known in your industry.

# The Description Plays the Biggest Part in Influencing a User to Click a Result

When asked which factor had the most significant impact on their decision to click a result, **62.9% responded it was the description**, followed by 24.2% who said the brand name, and 13% who said title.

What has the most impact on your decision to click on a search result?



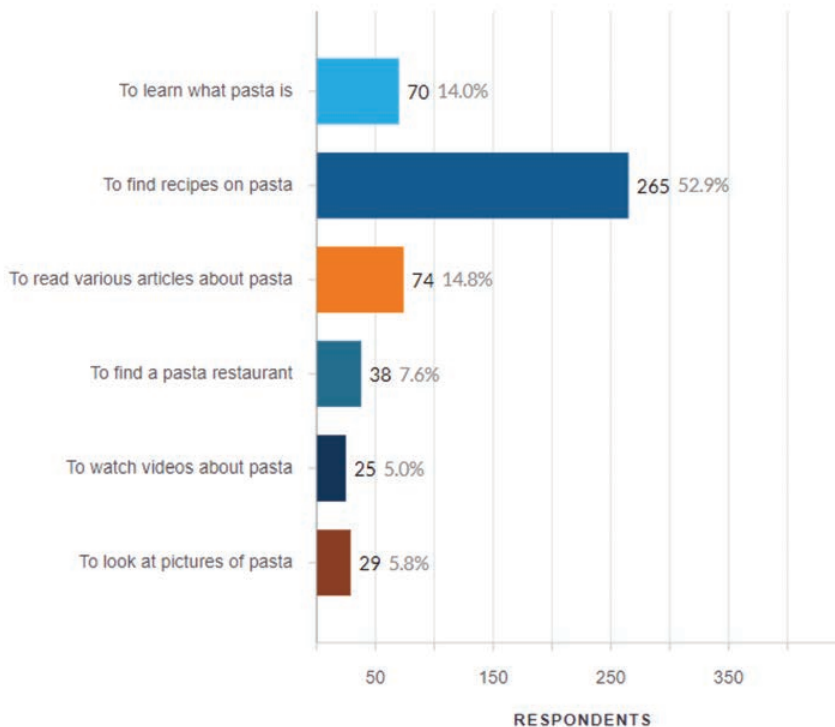
**The meta description is the most important element and outweighs even the title of a piece.**

But too many businesses do not take nearly enough time to optimize it. This shows that those hoping to see significant traffic from the search results will need to put the effort in to ensure their descriptions are optimized and eye-catching.

# The Intent of a Search Plays a Huge Part in the Results Users Expect to See

When asked what their intent for a search like “pasta” would be, **52.9%** said it would be to find recipes, 14.8% to read various articles about pasta, 14% to learn what pasta is, 7.6% to find a pasta restaurant, 5.8% to look at pictures of pasta, and 5% to watch a video about pasta.

When you do a search for a term like "Pasta" what is your intent?



**There is a clear winner for this query. Over 50% of people want a recipe.**

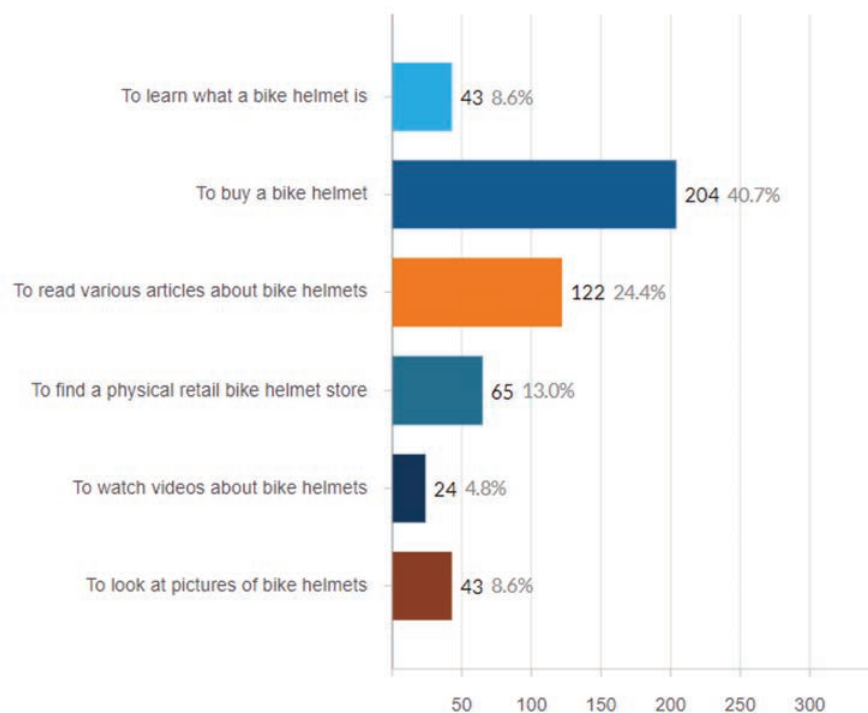
Google has made it its mission to better understand the intent behind searches and match them to results appropriately. This means that marketers need to shift their focus towards searcher intent if they want a shot at a high ranking or featured snippet opportunity.



# Ecommerce Queries Remain Heavily Sales-Focused

When asked what their intent would be for a search like “bike helmet,” **40.7% said it would be to buy a bike helmet**, 24.4% to read various articles about bike helmets, 13% to find a retail bike helmet store, 8.6% to learn what a bike helmet is, 8.6% to look at pictures of bike helmets, and 4.8% to look at videos of bike helmets.

When you search for a term like "Bike Helmet" what is your intent?

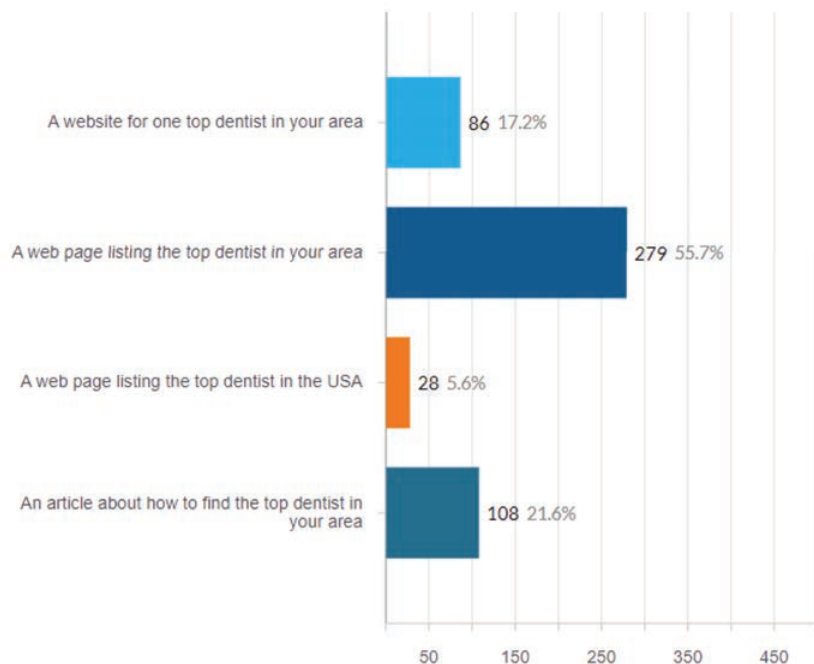


**Here we see an example of a heavy eCommerce related query.** If you were an SEO trying to rank a definition page, you would be in a tough spot. Google wants to show products for sale.

# Local Searchers Most Often Want to See Directories in the Search Results

When asked what they prefer to see when performing a search for a service provider like a dentist or lawyer, **55.7% wanted to see a website listing the top providers in their area**, 21.6% wanted to see an article about how to find a top provider in their area, 17.2% wanted to see a website for the top provider in their area, and 5.6% wanted to see a page listing the top providers in the USA.

If you search for a service provider such as a dentist or lawyer, what do you prefer to see returned in the search results?



**Here we see a clear winner.**

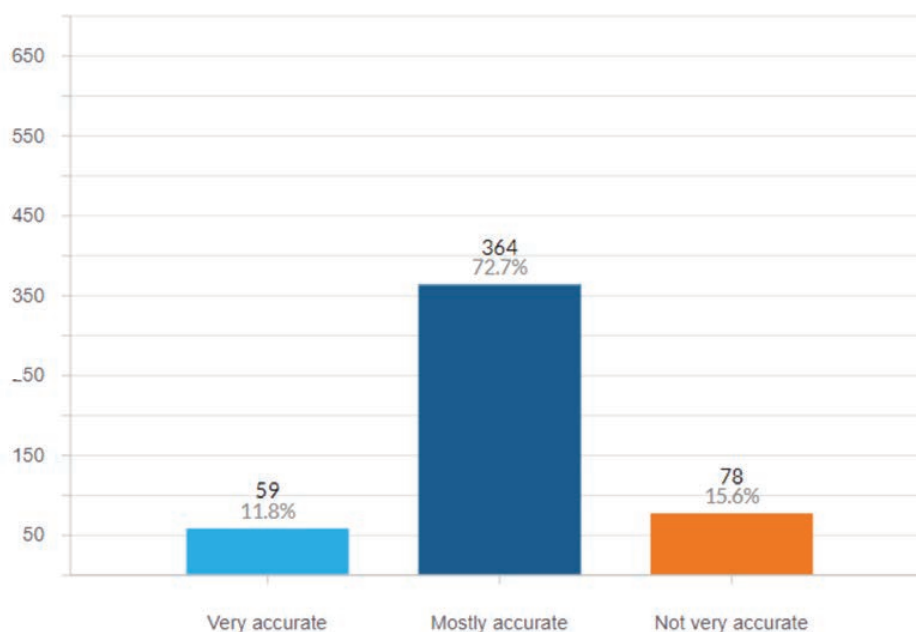
User intent is focused on finding a list, or a directory website, not a single provider. This is true 55% of the time. This was a big change to the search results with BERT and Google got it right.

For local service providers, this means staying up to speed on citations and local listings will be an increasingly important part of your SEO strategy.

# Overall, Searchers Feel That the Search Results Accurately Match Their Search Queries

Seventy-two percent felt that that search engines were mostly accurate at matching their queries to search results. Only 11.8% thought that they were very accurate, while 15.6% responded that search results were not that accurate.

Overall, how accurate do you feel search engines are at matching results to your search queries?



Generally, 72% is a very good number and signals that Google and other search engines are moving in the right direction.

# Conclusion

All-in-all, we see that some old ideas remain standbys. Content is still king, ads still prove frustrating to users, and optimizing for featured snippets is still critical for SERP success.

**But there were certainly a few surprises in the mix.**

Video, for one, may not be the traffic-driver we once thought it was, and impression count may soon matter more than total site visitors in terms of search engine success.

As for the search results themselves, it's most important to users that a result load quickly, answers the given question quickly and thoroughly, and includes pictures and information sources.

Overall, most believe that Google has gotten better at matching intent in the search results, and feel that the results have improved over the past year. This makes sense, as one of the significant changes made over the year was a shift towards intent-driven results.

For marketers, continuing to optimize not just for keywords, but for searcher intent will be a critical component of their SEO strategies going forward.



*"My main takeaway is that, even though Google has changed quite a bit over the last few years, the goal from most users is exactly the same: they want a quick and easy answer to their questions. And more often than not, written content does that best."* - **Brian Dean, Backlinko**

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