

Organizations Are Turning to SEO Now

Organic search is becoming an increasingly critical business priority as 90% of enterprise companies plan to place a greater emphasis on organic search.

SEO has become mission critical as organizations consider conserving resources and making the best use of their marketing budgets. SEO provides sharp insights, delivers big cost efficiencies and helps build brand equity benefits in ways that are compounded across entire organizations. As a result, marketers are turning even more to organic search to ensure they maximize their digital dividends on their marketing and technology spend.



Overview

According to research from Gartner⁽¹⁾, CEOs are doubling down on digital investment strategies as they look to maximize their marketing ROI. However, Google⁽²⁾ recently reported that ad spending is down and the cost per advertising lead has increased for 91% of industries⁽³⁾. But at the same time, in a recent survey of over 500 enterprise marketers⁽⁴⁾, over 90% of marketers are placing a greater emphasis on SEO this year.

In this paper, we share findings from BrightEdge's processing of trillions of data points about search behavior combined with analyst studies and customer surveys from thousands of marketers to better understand why organizations are turning so strongly to SEO right now.



Five Reasons Why Marketers Are Investing in SEO Now

As organizations maneuver to conserve resources and make the best use of their marketing budgets, BrightEdge has identified five key reasons why investing in SEO now has become necessary for organizations looking to adapt and thrive in 2023.

⁽¹⁾<https://www.gartner.com/en/articles/you-re-investing-more-in-technology-but-is-it-making-any-difference-to-growth?>

⁽²⁾<https://www.reuters.com/technology/google-parent-alphabet-misses-estimates-quarterly-revenue-2022-10-25/>

⁽³⁾<https://searchengineland.com/new-report-shows-google-cost-per-lead-has-increased-for-91-of-industries-389593>

⁽⁴⁾<https://www.brightedge.com/blog/2021-state-of-seo-webinar-research-results>

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Despite economic conditions and investment scrutiny, search is still growing

SEO is a high-yield channel and is less impacted by market conditions.

- *Focusing on high-yield marketing channels during recessionary conditions is essential* to make the most of opportunities and minimize costs. When macro conditions change, consumer behavior fluctuates. Compared to GDP Growth trajectories, search isn't impacted by market conditions.
- *Our data shows that consumers are searching 20% more than in 2021.* Regardless of what you are doing with your own marketing, your audience will still be utilizing search.

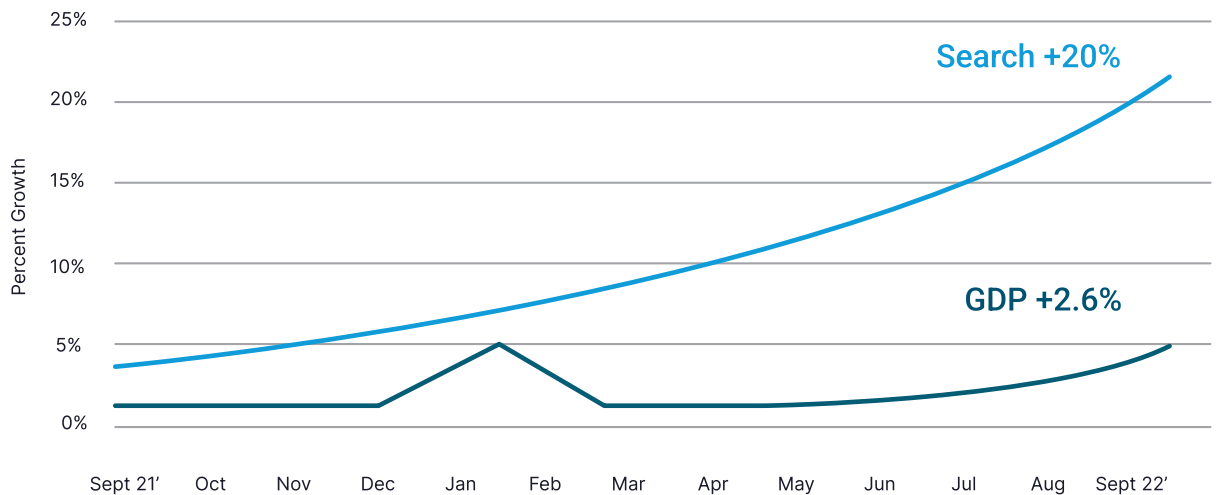
SEO is unique from other channels because realizing this growth is not a function of incremental media investment. SEO requires content that suits their needs in the moment they are in. Organic search delivers traffic to sites regardless of their media spend, as consumers always search in times of need.

- *According to Gartner, CMO's are focusing on channels that create efficiencies.* Since SEO benefits from the channel growth without requiring incremental media investment, it produces the efficiencies CMOs are looking for. As a result, we can expect it will receive additional focus in 2023.

Exhibit A

Organic Search vs Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

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BrightEdge measured the top-level growth of searches on Google and compared that with government-provided data on GDP growth over the last year <https://www.bea.gov/data/gdp/gross-domestic-product>

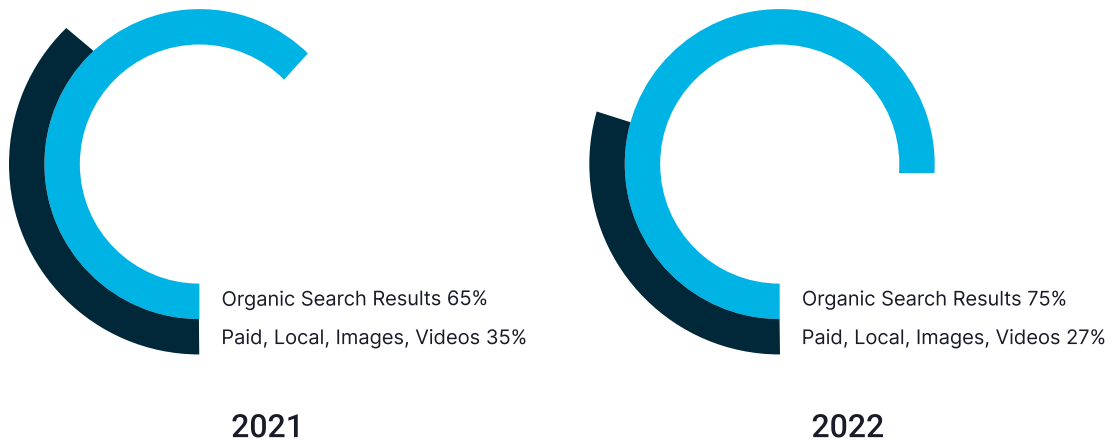
- *73% of clicks go to organic web listings.*
This is up from 65% last year at this time. Companies that are focused on SEO benefit from these behavioral shifts naturally. This is different from other channels that are fueled by media investments.
- *When there is scarcity, people turn to search.*
Optimized content helps protect, build and grow brand equity. Search helps future-proof the business and provides immediate, midterm, and long-term wins. SEO data feeds content and digital strategies.
- *SEO gives brands the highest yield to reach these customers by adding incremental spending to their budgets.*
In addition, it is cost-effective in multiple ways. Beyond being the number one source of traffic and the most cost-effective acquisition channel, SEO also reaches consumers when they are in a state of need.

73% of clicks go to organic web listings

Exhibit B

Share of Clicks on Search Engine Results Page (SERP)

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BrightEdge collected aggregate data on what parts of a search result are receiving clicks for the past year. This is done by ingesting ranking data directly from Google every month and applying a click curve.

Only SEO can provide real time insights into both market demand and customer intent

- *SEO insights provides real time data for understanding macro market demand and consumer behavior during times of uncertainty.* Only SEO can provide this unfiltered view of real-time insights into market demand volatility, granular details into how consumers search online and there is a wealth of data to be activated especially in uncertain market conditions.
- *For example, during the peak of the global pandemic, SEO insights (exhibit 3) informed marketers about consumer demands and interests.* SEO revealed what industries were facing immediate shifts in consumer behavior and where they should prioritize their efforts related to content, product, and sales.

- *Organic keyword data also reveals consumer preferences and preferred content types.* As a result, organizations must be armed with up-to-the-moment insights into what their customers are looking for and what content fits their needs.
- *As more organizations improve their SEO, competition to win rankings is getting more challenging.* Overall searches for SEO content are up 46% from the beginning of 2022.
- *Furthermore, volatility in keyword rankings is nearly double what it was last year.* To maximize online Share of Voice, marketers need to be ready to adapt and have flexible SEO strategies to react to change. Organizations cannot afford to set and forget SEO.

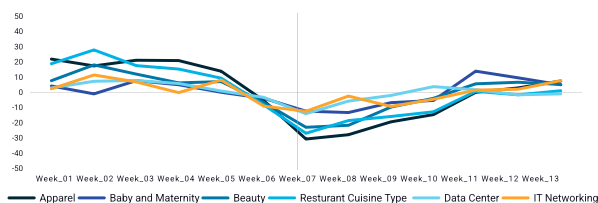
Exhibit C

Search is the Pulse of the Market

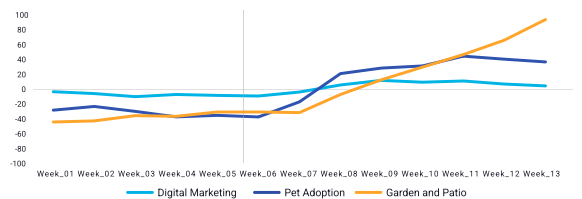
The size and direction varies by industry, but all have felt the impact

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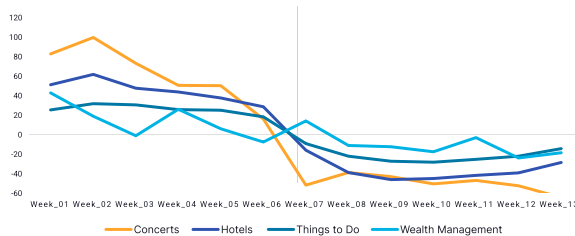
Rebounding - Focus On Winning Categories



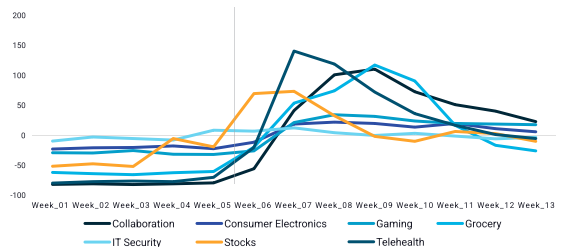
Accelerating - Pour on the Gas



Recovering - Transform and Prepare



Stabilizing - Double Down on Strength



BrightEdge identified ~5,000 SEO-related keywords, measured the top-line volume starting in January, and developed a trendline on the data throughout the year. Using this aggregate number as a proxy for interest level, we see that interest in SEO has sharply increased this year.

2

SEO provides cover for media when media budgets are flat or reduced

As media budgets are scrutinized, CFOs ask CMOS to do more with less

- With organizations reducing paid search investments, they are focusing on SEO more to minimize losses and produce incremental gains. We have found that sites that leverage positive SEO tactics rank better.
- **BrightEdge research found that winning sites leveraged more positive SEO tactics for the top 10 rankings across ten industries than last year**

Saving vs. Spending with SEO

- *In addition to driving traffic, conversions and revenue in its own right*, SEO creates organizational efficiencies by ensuring content is found, optimized and measured. As organizations lean in on SEO, we see more content indexed for more keywords.

- *SEO is progressing to be at the forefront of decisions customers and consumers make.* Organizations that use business insights from it to understand consumer behavior move faster and make more accurate decisions about their products and messaging.

SEO can provide immediate value

- *Now, more than ever, organizations need to show the impact of channel investments immediately.* With search results being twice as volatile as last year - due to the prevalence of SEO among the competition and updates to Google's algorithms, organizations cannot wait to jump into SEO.
- *Repetitive and resource-heavy tasks can be reduced through automation.* This helps marketers quickly demonstrate the value of the channel.

→ **More Clicks**

Users are clicking on regular web listings 13% more

→ **Compounding Gains**

Keyword rankings per page grew by 20% YOY

→ **Competitors**

Searches for SEO content are up 46% this year

→ **Cost Reduction**

Better SEO creates cost efficiencies and frees up budget

→ **Share of Mind**

Searches are up 20% YOY

→ **Volatility**

Rankings luctuate twice as much as last year

3

Compounding benefits

Companies are shifting gears

- *Companies are shifting to generating value (profit) vs. growing at any cost.* SEO is the only channel that provides compounding benefits to a business.

SEO builds benefits over time

- *For every \$1 put into SEO today, organizations find compounded benefits over time.* Companies with sound SEO strategies get more value for their content over time. This is due to the expansion of search behaviors and the compounding nature of SEO. Search isn't impacted by market conditions.

For example, top ecommerce sites, on average, have been found to rank for 20% more keywords per page - than they did last year at this time. In addition, these sites drive on average 120% more clicks than they did last year

- *This traffic comes to these sites without any incremental media fees.*

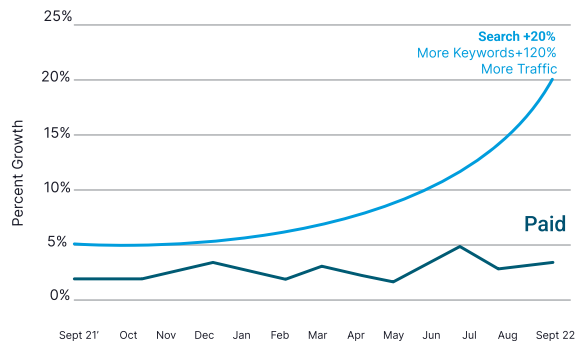
SEO insights fuel impactful content marketing strategies

- *SEO insights are helping marketers decide which content types and platforms make the most sense* for targeted keywords and audiences. Expect it will receive additional focus in 2023.
- *In addition, companies already have content that can drive new traffic.* Content can be refreshed and optimized to enhance their value without incremental media spend. We see that rankings this year have fluctuated as much as 69% this year across all searches. By refreshing existing content, companies have an immediate opportunity to jump into and conquest new markets and traffic. This also demonstrates why SEO is not a set-it-and-forget-it practice. While pages compound, they require ongoing refreshing and optimization to remain competitive.

Exhibit D

SEO Delivers Compounding Value with No Media Cost

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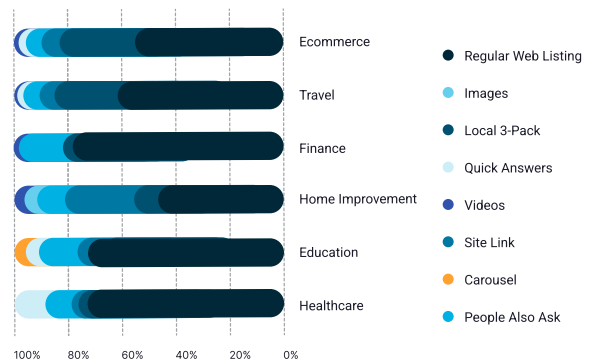


BrightEdge compared growth of the top-ranking 1,000 ecommerce terms to growth of paid keywords performance over the same 12 month period.

Exhibit E

Content Preferences by Industry Vary

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BrightEdge measured the click curve for the top search queries across leading industries.

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SEO builds trust and credibility

During economic uncertainty, it is more important to build trust with customers to improve LTV and retention

- *SEO is the only channel that builds trust with credible and discoverable content.* When executed correctly, SEO helps build an ecosystem of trust that creates a more empathetic experience for the end user.
- *Users click on organic listings 73% of the time.* A significant indication of trust in the SEO channel and Search Engine Result Page (SERP) results. The higher a webpage appears on a SERP's list when users perform searches online, the more likely

they will perceive this site as an authentic source with relevant information. This is especially true as more consumers look for helpful content from video, image, and non-text-based formats.

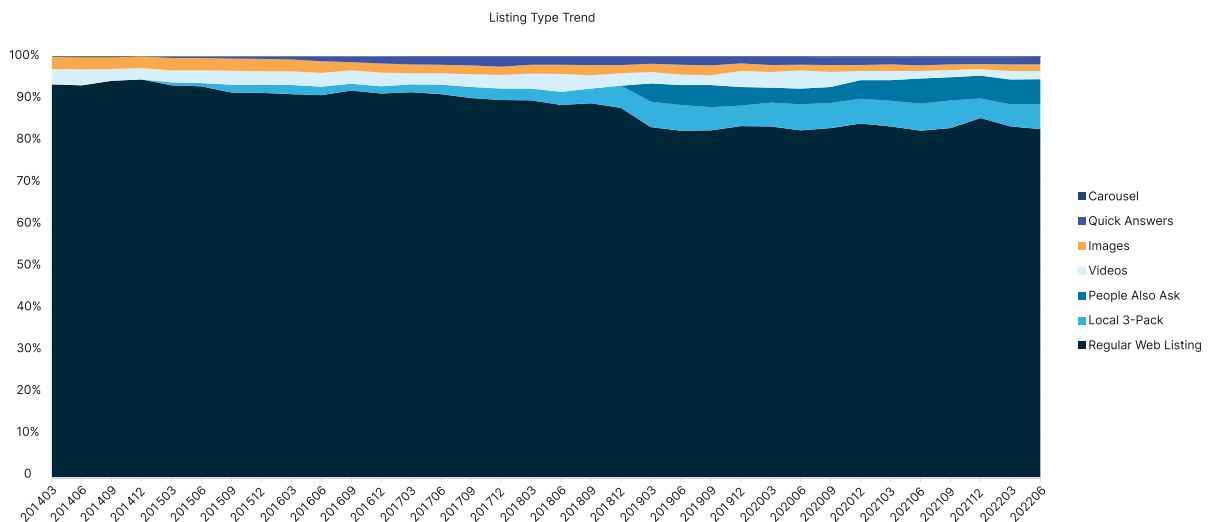
- *When creating and optimizing content, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness (E-A-T) has become essential in building trust.* SEOs that balance on and off-page strategies will find that building trust creates lifetime value. We have found that trust factors such as backlink profiles have proven to be a top-ranking factor across all industries. Combining quality, quantity and authority ensures brands are discoverable and credible.⁽⁵⁾

Exhibit F

SEOs Are Competing Against More

What wins in organic is becoming more diverse over time

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BrightEdge has collected aggregate data on what parts of a search result are receiving clicks for the past year. This is done by ingesting ranking data directly from Google every month and applying a click curve.

⁽⁵⁾<https://www.brightedge.com/resources/whitepapers/brightedge-seo-industry-radar-report>

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SEO provides marketers flexibility

With so much of the buyer's journey happening online, brands must have the content in place to meet customers where they are on their purchase journey.

- *To maximize digital return on investment, organic and paid search marketers must understand online commercial intent* and combine their efforts to meet and convert customer demand.
- *Forward-thinking companies are integrating SEO and PPC due to existing channel and team synergy.* By combining paid and organic strategies, organizations can measure where they need to dominate a search result with both paid and organic or rely on organic. These produce incremental savings and companies can choose to reinvest those resources in other markets or save and realize a higher yield.

- *SEO team combined with PPC have more control over the customer experience.* Since both paid and organic listings give the marketer a chance to create copy, holistic teams can do more for less. By oriented paid search messaging to customers ready to buy, PPC receives a higher conversion rate, where organic can focus on more upper funnel users who are in a different mindset.
- *By creating this interplay, brands don't waste pay per click budget on users not ready to buy.* Of course, this is only possible if the brand is investing in SEO and paid in a collaborative fashion.

Conclusion

The combination of data, survey responses, and analyst conversations show that SEO investments now solve many challenges marketers face.

Despite market fluctuations, SEO continues to be a channel that has grown over 20 years. As traditional and paid media costs rise, SEO has become the go-to marketing channel that provides the most profitable return on investment and offers vital business insights across all digital channels.

SEO has become mission critical as organizations consider conserving resources and making the best use of their marketing budgets. From the insights it provides across whole organizations to cost efficiency, brand equity, and compounding benefits – marketers are tuning to organic search to ensure they maximize their digital dividends on marketing and technology investments.

Key Takeaways

- SEO reaches the consumer when they are in a state of need.
- SEO is the voice of the consumer and provides vital insights into behavior.
- When there is scarcity, people turn to search.
- SEO is affordable and efficient for ROI.
- Optimized content helps protect, build and grow brand equity.
- Search helps future-proof the business and provides immediate, midterm, and long-term wins.

Recommendations

For marketers who need to focus on SEO, the following steps are recommended:

- **Organize** your SEO data so you can visualize market trends – organic search is the most precise arbitration between what an audience wants and what content fulfills that need. Ensure your view of your organic landscape makes this easy for your organization to understand.
- **Define** where search must lead, compete and participate. Integrate your SEO and PPC programs to determine where both channels must be active or where you can conserve resources and preserve traffic.
- **Benchmark** competitors and define what wins for your market – leverage insights from competitor attributes to determine what is required from your content to remain competitive. Update benchmarks regularly to ensure SEO stays current.
- **Apply** SEO best practices as you optimize websites and content for new customer journeys to improve your user experience and ensure your content is optimized for the reader not just the search engine.
- **Leverage** technology to automate repetitive tasks. Reduce your teams' manual work by automating reporting and repetitive SEO work such as internal link optimization. Ensure your resources have the bandwidth to be creative and strategic in their work.

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