SEOpinions

This SEOpinions talks about how CRO & SEO are stronger together, how AI chatbots may influence search, and the wonder of GA4. Learn more from our VP of SEO, **Travis Tallent**!

CRO & SEO, AI Chatbots in Search, and GA4

This is an exciting SEOpinions edition, coming off the heels of SearchLove San Diego. With all the noise in the SEO industry, it can be hard to know what to prioritize.

SEOpinions is a quarterly newsletter by Brainlabs to cut through the noise, inform you of important SEO updates, and predict upcoming changes so you can prioritize your SEO roadmap accordingly. Read the previous edition [here](#).

1 Get ahead of Google's next update: Combine CRO & SEO to win BIG

Google has championed the importance of user experience for years. Fact. But did you know in recent years your SEO now ranks based on how successful your UX is?

Following Google's latest March 2023 core update, where it's expected to have prioritized faster sites and sites with better UX, I only see the importance of combining CRO & SEO strategy increasing in the next couple of years. In a world where brand identity can be hard to differentiate, especially via Google and the rise of zero-click searches, user experience is the way to bring a user back again and again.

Yet, many people aren't talking about this.

So, how can you be a part of the handful that gets ahead of the game?

1. Creating a cohesive user experience with SEO & CRO

While many see "SEO testing" as identical to "CRO testing," they are different in one key way. SEO testing identifies the impact of a change on search engines. CRO testing measures the impact of a change on users. Ultimately, it's vital for both to interplay toward the goal of driving net new conversions.

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Gulny Zileli · Director of CRO

"Pop-ups can effectively encourage visitors to take action—but if overused, they harm user experience and reduce search engine rankings. We ensure that CRO's focus on lead generation never leads to intrusive elements that negatively impact organic rankings. A balanced approach that prioritizes the user experience and aligns with SEO best practices is the best way to ensure overall success."

Gulny is absolutely right—prioritizing user experience over anything else will almost always guarantee better results. Think of this real-life example: you go to a hotel check-in desk. They ask you if you're interested in a room with a view for an additional fee. You decline. Then you get asked again, and again, and again…you'd surely not book with those "pushy hotel staff" again. That is what happens when a website has too many CTAs, pop ups, or is trying to push a user too fast down the funnel. Your brand's website can leave that same impression as the pushy hotel staff if the user experience is not being prioritized.

2. Fostering a culture of marketing innovation

The "conversion" in "CRO" doesn't always mean testing to improve sales. Sometimes it's a matter of testing other conversion tactics like video views, guide downloads, button clicks, consumer sentiment, etc. CRO can be the go-to team to test new brand messaging or identity, new page layouts, and more. Don't leave it to a branding agency to tell you what feels good in their "gut," CRO can drive actionable insights from the experiments run.

We've seen CRO transform the way teams test to yield better marketing and brand campaign outcomes.

Gulny Zileli · Director of CRO

"To build an effective CRO program, companies must foster a culture of innovation that values experimentation and continuous learning. However, many companies don't have the resources, time, or energy to maintain this level of innovation. They may be able to implement basic CRO tactics, such as testing different sign-up forms, but they often struggle to take it to the next level with more creative approaches.

For example, testing adding a short video to a pop-up sign-up form is a creative approach that can significantly improve conversion rates. Companies that take this approach to every important element of their website are more likely to see compounding results over time."

3. Use CRO to get team buy-in

CRO has the luxury of being inherently experimental. This immediately diffuses egos and builds a collaborative culture aimed at finding the best outcome through data.

SEO has the dread of having "best practices" which can often sound preachy even with the best-intended recommendations.

While CRO and SEO are different, their outcome is similar and that means we can use CRO to position SEO recommendations as a "test." For example, imagine the same recommendation positioned two different ways:

- **SEO recommendation:**
  Improve internal linking between pages through hyperlinks

- **CRO recommendation:**
  Test improving the customer journey between pages

Both of these are ultimately recommending the same thing, but this dichotomy shows how CRO can be used to build a more collaborative approach across teams. This also allows SEO recommendations to get implemented faster. A win-win for everyone involved!

Action items

Set up a CRO testing program

CRO testing should be an ongoing consideration. No matter if you're trying to boost conversion rate, AOV, or upper-funnel engagement like video views or downloads, CRO can support these efforts.

Identify CRO tests that can impact SEO

Identifying CRO tests that can impact SEO allows you to watch SEO performance closely, while also preemptively preparing for cross-channel collaboration.

Test, learn, earn

In Brainlabs' spirit, you can use CRO and SEO to test initiatives, learn from those, and earn a beneficial outcome. As tests continue and these learnings grow then the earnings compound. This is the beauty of bringing science into marketing.

2 Should AI in Search change your SEO Strategy?

When I'm asked if AI chatbots in Search should change your brand's SEO strategy, the truth is: I don't know. In fact, nobody knows. We're currently just after the shock phase of introducing new technology—and squarely in the chaos phase. However, I do know that a good SEO strategy is required whether chatbots are present or not.

Change is scary. It's also certain. Often, as marketers, we're asked to give our perspective on the future. But, the reality is, no one really *knows* what the future holds. It's always a guess—even if some guesses are more educated than others.

However, we know how to navigate change thanks to a change model from a renowned psychotherapist, Virginia Satir. In Satir's change model, we start with the status quo, then have a shock that alters our world, chaos that ensues as we reach a resolve, the aftermath of resolve where we integrate that learning into our lives, and usually—technologically speaking—a new normal leads to better performance.

searchlove San Diego Source: Satir's Change Model
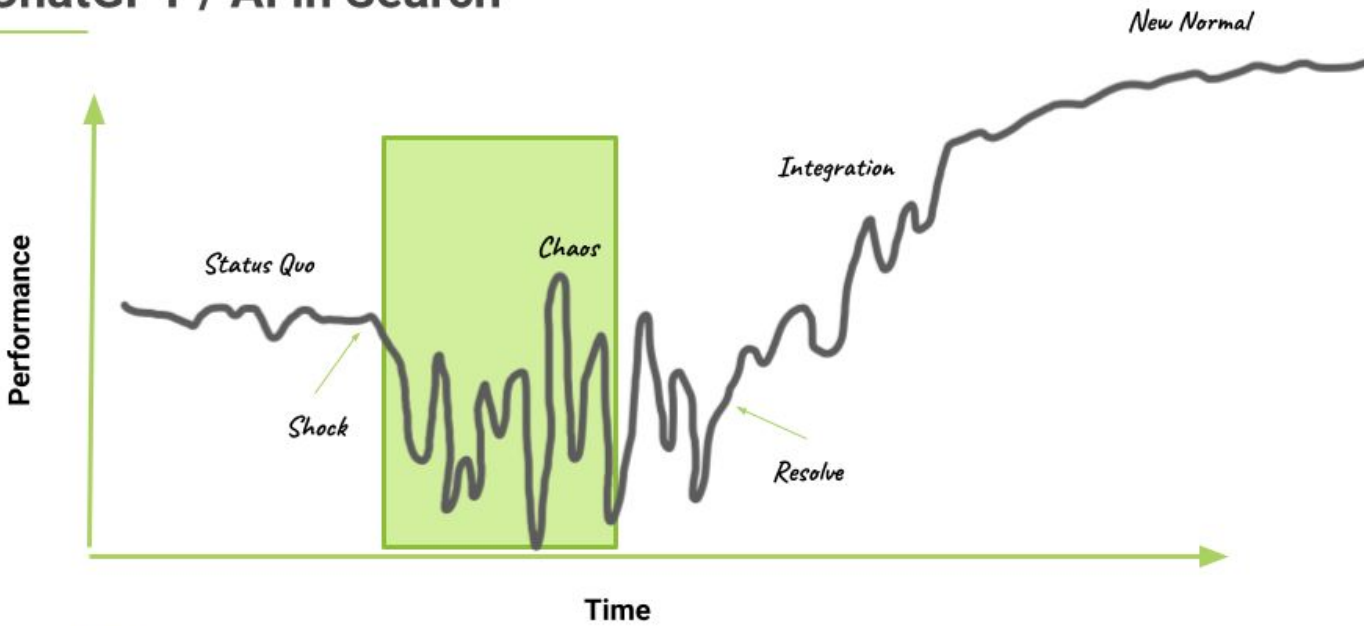
While the full spectrum of use cases for SEO are still being tested, we certainly feel it's a major sliding doors moment for AI. Remember, change doesn't have to be scary. Embracing the chaos phase with a robust SEO strategy will be more important than ever.

Below we've listed some important facts that can help guide us on how this could pan out:

Google and Bing are still experimenting with a chatbot product. They've also not yet found a way to monetize their chatbots - let alone be profitable! Though, Bing has confirmed it will be launching with ads in chatbot results.

Speed matters in search (a lot) and chatbots are inherently slower today. Google has spent two decades improving the speed and accuracy of results for users—hence why it's grown zero-click searches.
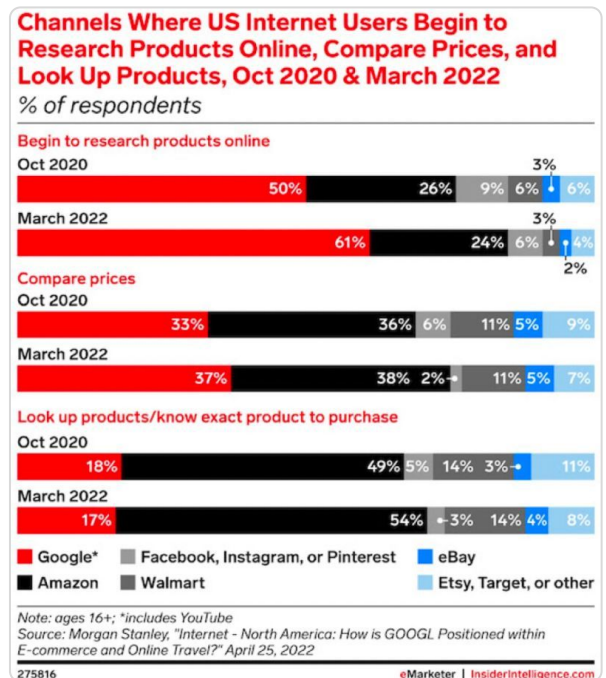
In fact, from an article in 2012 (yes, 2012!), Google states, "Our research shows that if search results are slowed by even a fraction of a second, people search less (seriously: A 400ms delay leads to a 0.44 percent drop in search volume, data fans)."

In any chatbot UI we've seen to date—Google's Bard, Open AI's ChatGPT, or Bing's Sydney –there is less limited space for multiple results. Instead, there is one response with small reference links. Think of this like featured snippets on steroids. Owning the response could become paramount for a brand—especially branded results.

The way people are searching is changing, but this happened even before AI chatbots. We know that Gen Z is going to social platforms like TikTok and Instagram to search for lunch spots. Likewise, we know that Google is the discovery platform, while Amazon is the shopping platform.

Understanding the entire customer journey—and where your audience starts their search—is essential to determining the story you want your brand to tell in each phase and knowing where to invest your time and resources.

Come back and ask me in a year what that chart looks like, and we may be looking at a totally different customer journey—or we may find that conversational AI in search is a niche product that consumers only utilize for very specific use cases. Consumer behavior will determine the value of these new digital entry points, and that same behavior should be the primary source for strategy and prioritization.

Channels Where US Internet Users Begin to Research Products Online, Compare Prices, and Look Up Products, Oct 2020 & March 2022

% of respondents

Begin to research products online

Oct 2020: 50% | 26% | 9% | 6% | 3% | 6%

March 2022: 61% | 24% | 6% | 3% | 4% | 2%

Compare prices

Oct 2020: 33% | 36% | 6% | 11% | 5% | 9%

March 2022: 37% | 38% | 2% | 11% | 5% | 7%

Look up products/know exact product to purchase

Oct 2020: 18% | 49% | 5% | 14% | 3% | 11%

March 2022: 17% | 54% | 3% | 14% | 4% | 8%

Legend:
- ■ Google* (red)
- ■ Amazon (black)
- ■ Facebook, Instagram, or Pinterest
- ■ Walmart
- ■ eBay
- ■ Etsy, Target, or other

*Note: ages 16+; *includes YouTube*
Source: Morgan Stanley, "Internet - North America: How is GOOGL Positioned within E-commerce and Online Travel?" April 25, 2022
275816   eMarketer | InsiderIntelligence.com

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Action items

Conversational & featured snippet content

Similar to what's been communicated for years, leading with conversational, short content will help perform in featured snippets and voice search results—and now AI chatbots as well.

Lean into multimedia content

While AI chatbots don't integrate multimedia content today I suspect they will soon, given that users have shown a preference for video in their recent search behavior *(hence why Google has added videos and images to so many results)*.

Lean into your brand-forward approach

In a sea of zero-click searches, and chatbot responses, your brand is going to need to stand out. A brand-forward approach can help customers have an experience.

[Read "Use SEO to Fuel Your Brand's Community Flywheel" on Moz](#)

Don't jump too soon

Shifting your SEO strategy before knowing where your audience is could result in a lot of wasted time and energy. I would not recommend shifting your SEO strategy today under the guise of AI chatbots — though, your SEO strategy should be underpinned by quality content.

Build for effortless transactions

Owning top results will become harder as search behavior becomes more segmented. That means investing in CRO and a superior user experience for your site becomes all the more important so you can make the most of the sessions you do get.

3 The Wonder of Google Analytics 4 is Around the Corner

Are you still using Universal Analytics (UA) over GA4? You'll be happy to know that with GA4's new features, it's just as good as UA (if not better)!

Some cool, new(ish) features of GA4 include:

- Landing page report
- Customization galore
  - Custom reports/dashboards
- Cross-domain measurement via Admin panel

There are plenty of others to explore, which you can do via Google Analytics' announcements, but I'm going to showcase a few of the cool, new additions to hopefully inspire you to start using GA4 in Q2 2023.

Ways to win with Landing Page Reports:

The landing page report was a prized favorite among SEOs and content marketers in Universal Analytics. Now, it's available in GA4 in all of its glory!

A **Save custom landing page reports for various business teams.** Most are familiar with a landing page report from Universal Analytics. It's great to see GA4 add this to its platform. And, better yet, with the customization features available, you can create specific landing page reports (and save them) for each segment of your business—e.g., blogs vs. product pages, etc.—which can provide site insights quickly.

B **Track performance MoM & YoY.** I usually recommend looking at the landing page report at least monthly to understand how performance is trending MoM and YoY for pages. This can help identify what content needs to be refreshed or optimized further to regain performance. Typically, if I notice a drop in traffic greater than 5% (assuming the page is in the top 20% of traffic drivers), and a drop in rankings for the same page, then that page is prime for optimization.

C **Use this report for CRO test ideation & internal linking optimization.** Another helpful addition to this report is to add a secondary dimension of "Page Path" to see what pages users go to next from the landing page. This can help identify internal linking opportunities and be a clue to advise future CRO tests to improve folks getting down the funnel faster.

Ways to win with Custom Reports and Dashboards:

Customization in Universal Analytics was limited to dashboards, and it was notoriously difficult to narrow down specific reports/information in real time without creating dashboards. However, the new customization options in GA4 really open the option to do this seamlessly, and then save the reports for future use. This can be incredibly useful when trying to look at a very specific report—like a blog performance report for the content team, or a device report for the dev team—you now can get rid of metrics that may not be meaningful or impactful for decision making.

A **Set up customized reporting & define business KPIs.** GA4 becomes a lot more useful if you take time to customize your reports. While it's tedious at first, it's worth having conversations with stakeholders to identify what should be added to each report for maximum business effectiveness.

B **Set up BigQuery integration to avoid data sampling.** If your report processes more than 10 million data points, you will receive sampled data. You can know this by anything other than the green checkmark at the top of the report. If you don't see a green checkmark on some of your most useful reports, I highly recommend setting up a data warehouse with something like BigQuery so you can view unsampled data. GA4 makes BigQuery integration seamless. More info [here](#).

Ways to win with cross-domain measurement:

Cross-domain setup—even between subdomains—used to require a dev team implementing cross-domain tracking. It was notoriously tricky to QA and ensure that it was tracking appropriately.

Nevertheless, there are some important updates to cross-domain tracking with GA4:

1. As long as you have the same GA4 ID on all subdomains, you do not need to set up cross-domain tracking for subdomains.

2. Beyond that, as long as you have the same GA4 tag on all domains, you can set up cross-domain tracking with the new GA4 admin panel with a few clicks so then you can track a user journey across the various sites.

Ways to win with cross-domain tracking:

(A) **Set up cross-domain tracking.** I cannot stress the importance of setting up cross-domain tracking if you have traffic coming from subdomains or sister sites. Without cross-domain tracking set up, your insights will be wrong—especially your source/medium insights, which dramatically hinders the decisions you're able to reliably make with your site data.

(B) **Analyze the user journey across your domains.** Ideally, a user should be able to complete their entire journey with your own domain. But, if there are instances where that is not the case, you can use cross-domain tracking to ensure there is no data loss along the way. However, if you run many domains of sister sites or sub-brands, etc., setting up a GA4 view that can track the user journey across all of those domains can be a powerful way to find your power users (and/or where you are cannibalizing your audience). This would then allow you to build audiences of those power users and identify new ways to engage them.

⚡ Action items

Ensure GA4 is set up ASAP

If you haven't set up GA4 yet, you should absolutely prioritize that by the end of April (at the latest). Universal Analytics will be sunsetting on July 1st, 2023 (for non-360 users) and you do not want data loss on your site.

Blend your Universal Analytics & GA4 data

You will likely have year-over-year data loss unless you blend your UA and GA4 data using a visualization tool like Looker Studio. You can do this by blending your data source and then creating regex for that particular chart/table that reads "Use GA4 Data if Date is after XYZ."

Ensure that your conversions and revenue tracking are set up *(if applicable)*

Google Tag Manager should still be your go-to for setting up event tags, then stitching them up to GA4.

Set up & save custom reports/dashboards

Different views don't exist in GA4 like they did in Universal Analytics, so creating custom reports and dashboards could be a great way to segment out various data views for teams—like content teams, marketing teams, etc.

In conclusion

In this edition, you've learnt how CRO & SEO are stronger together, how AI chatbots may influence search, and how GA4 is actually better than UA with its latest updates. Here's your final roundup:

1. **Combine CRO & SEO to win BIG**

Use SEO & CRO together to create a cohesive site user experience, build an innovative marketing culture, and get to SEO implementation faster.

**2.** **Future-proof your SEO strategy for changes in AI**

AI chatbots in Search are sure to change some of the ways people search, but we don't know what that looks like yet. Therefore, I wouldn't throw your eggs in a basket for "optimizing for AI chatbots." Rather, continue a sound SEO strategy, keep your ear to the ground, and you'll be just fine.

3. **Explore GA4's new features –**
they're just as good as UA *(if not better)***!**

There is a lot left to explore with GA4, especially as Google rolls out even more features, but I hope I inspired you and your team to dip your toes into the GA4 water—it's nice and warm!
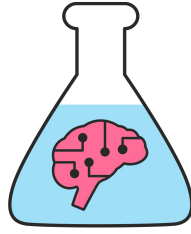
Thank you!

That's all for this SEOpinions newsletter! As we've always said in SEO, the only constant is change. 2023 is going to be a year filled with even faster change. I'm confident that as long as we continue to invest in continuing education and testing, we'll be able to stay on top.

Travis Tallent

VP, SEO

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[SEOpinions Q1 2023](#)

[SEOpinions Q2 2022](#)   [SEOpinions Q3 2022](#)   [SEOpinions Q4 2022](#)