

Google Discusses Digital PR Impact On AI Recommendations via @sejournal, @martinibuster

Google's VP of Product for Google Search confirmed that PR activities may be helpful for ranking better in certain contexts and offered an explanation of how AI search works and what content creators should focus on to stay relevant to users.

PR Helps Sites Get Recommended By AI

Something interesting that was said in the podcast was that it could be beneficial to be mentioned by other sites if you want your site to be recommended by AI. Robby Stein didn't say that this is a ranking factor. He said this in the context of showing how AI search works, saying that the behavior of AI is similar to how a human might research a question.

The context of Robby Stein's answer was about what businesses should focus on to rank better in AI chat.

Stein's answer implies the context of the query fan-out technique, where, to answer a question, it performs Google searches (*"questions it issues"*).

Here's his answer:

"Yeah, interestingly, the AI thinks a lot like a person would in terms of the kinds of questions it issues. And so if

you're a business and you're mentioned in top business lists or from a public article that lots of people end up finding, those kinds of things become useful for the AI to find."

The podcast host, Marina Mogilko, interrupted his answer to remark that this is about investing in PR. And Robby Stein agreed.

He continued:

"So it's not really different from what you would do in that regard. I think ultimately, how else are you going to decide what business to go to? Well, you'd want to understand that."

So the point he's making is that in order to understand if a business should be recommended, the AI, like a human, would search on Google to see what businesses are recommended by other sites. The podcast host connected that statement to PR and Stein agreed. This aligns with anecdotal experiences where not just Google's AI but also ChatGPT will provide answers to recommendation type queries with links to sites that recommend businesses. As the podcast host suggested and Stein seems to agree, this raises the importance of PR work, getting sites to mention your business.

Mogilko then noted that her friends might not have seen the articles that were published as a result of PR activities but that she notices that the AI does see those mentions and that the AI uses them in answers.

Robby agreed with her, affirming her observation, saying:

"That's actually a good way of thinking about it because the way I mentioned before how our AI models work, they're issuing these Google searches as a tool."

Content Best Practices Are Key To Ranking In AI

Stein continued his answer, shifting the topic over to what kind of content ranks well in an AI model. He said that the same best practices for making helpful and clear content also applies for ranking in AI.

Stein continued his answer:

“And so in the same way that you would optimize your website and think about how I make helpful, clear information for people? People search for a certain topic, my website’s really helpful for that. Think of an AI doing that search now. And then knowing for that query, here are the best websites given that question.

That’s now... will come into the context window of the model. And so when it renders a response and provides all of these links for you to go deeper, that website’s more likely to show up.

And so it’s a lot of that standard best practices around building great content really do apply in the AI age for sure.”

The takeaway here is that helpful and clear content is important for standard search, AI answers, and people.

The podcast host next asked Robby about reviews, candidly remarking that some people pay for reviews and asking how that would “affect the system.” Stein didn’t address the question about how paid reviews would affect AI answers, but he did circle back to affirming that AI behaves like a human might, implying that if you’re going to think about how the AI system approaches answering a question, think of it in terms of how a human could go about it.

Stein answered:

“It’s hard. I mean, the reviews, I think, again, it’s kind of like a person where like imagine something is scanning for information and trying to find things that are helpful. So it’s possible that if you have reviews that are helpful, it could come up.

But I think it’s tricky to say to pinpoint any one thing like that. I think ultimately it’s about these general best practices where you want is reliable. Kind of like if you were to Google something, what pages would show up at the top of that query? It’s still a good way of thinking about it.”

AI Visibility Overlaps With SEO

At this point, the host responded to Stein’s answer by asking if optimizing for AI is “basically the same as SEO?”

Stein answered that there’s an overlap with SEO, but that the questions are different between regular organic search and AI. The implication is that organic search tends to have keyword-based queries, and AI is conversational.

Here’s Stein’s answer:

“I think there’s a lot of overlap. I think maybe one added nuance is that the kinds of questions that people ask AI are increasingly complicated and they tend to be in different spaces.

...And so if you think about what people use AI for, a lot of it is how to for complicated things or for purchase decisions or for advice about life things.

So people who are creating content in those areas, like if I were them, I would be a student of understanding the use cases of AI and what are growing in those use cases.

And there's been some studies that have done around how people use these products in AI.

Those are really interesting to understand."

Stein advised content creators to study how people are using AI to find answers to specific questions. He seemed to put some emphasis on this, so it appears to be something important to pay attention to.

Understand How People Use AI

This next part changes direction to emphasize that search is transforming beyond just simple text search, saying that it is going multimodal. A modality is a computer science word that refers to a type of information such as text, images, speech, or video. This circles back to studying how users are interacting with AI, in this case expanding to include the modality of information.

The podcast host asked the natural follow-up question to what Stein previously said about the overlap with SEO, asking how business owners can understand what people are looking for and whether Google Trends is useful for this.

Stein affirmed that Google Trends is useful for this purpose.

He responded:

"Google Trends is a really useful thing. I actually think people really underutilize that. Like we have real-time information around exactly what's trending. You can see keyword values.

I think also, you know, the ads has a really fantastic estimation too. Like as you're booking ads, you can see kind of traffic estimates for various things. So there's Google has a lot of tools across ads, across the search console and

search trends to get information about what people are searching for.

And I think that's going to increasingly be more interesting as, a lot more of people's time and attention goes towards not just the way people use search too, but in these areas that are growing quickly, particularly these long specific questions people ask and multimodal, where they're asking with images or they're using voice to have live conversation."

Stein's response reflects that SEOs and businesses may want to go beyond keyword-based research toward also understanding intent across multiple ways in which users interact with AI. We're in a moment of volatility where it's becoming important to recognize the context and purpose in how people search.

The two takeaways that I think are important are:

1. Long and specific questions
2. Multimodal contexts

What makes that important is that Stein confirmed that these kinds of searches are growing quickly. Businesses and SEOs should, therefore, be thinking, will my business or client show up if a person searches with voice using a lot of specific details? Will they show up if people use images to search? Image SEO may be becoming increasingly important as more people transition to finding things using AI.

Google Wants To Provide More Information

The host followed up by asking if Google would be providing more information about how users are searching, and Stein confirmed that in the future that's something they want to do, not just for advertisers but for everyone who is impacted by

AI search.

He answered:

"I think down the road we want to get, provide a glimpse into what people are searching for broadly. Yeah. Not just advertisers too. Yeah, it could be forever for anyone.

But ultimately, I think more and more people are searching in these new ways and so the systems need to better reflect those over time."

Watch the interview at about the 13:30 minute mark:

[embedded content]

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