



compete **PRO**

STATE OF SEARCH

2016

THE STATE OF SEARCH

A strong search strategy is vital for digital marketing success.

The 2016 State of Search report provides an overview of search marketing and the key trends influencing the search marketing landscape. Leveraging the Compete behavioral clickstream panel and our 15+ years of digital marketing experience, this report dives into notable trends impacting the world of search today:

- The growth of **paid search**, and the rising importance of **product listing ads** (PLAs)
- The value of using **organic search** to drive visitors to **content that creates value** for your audience
- The role **social media** plays in the search world

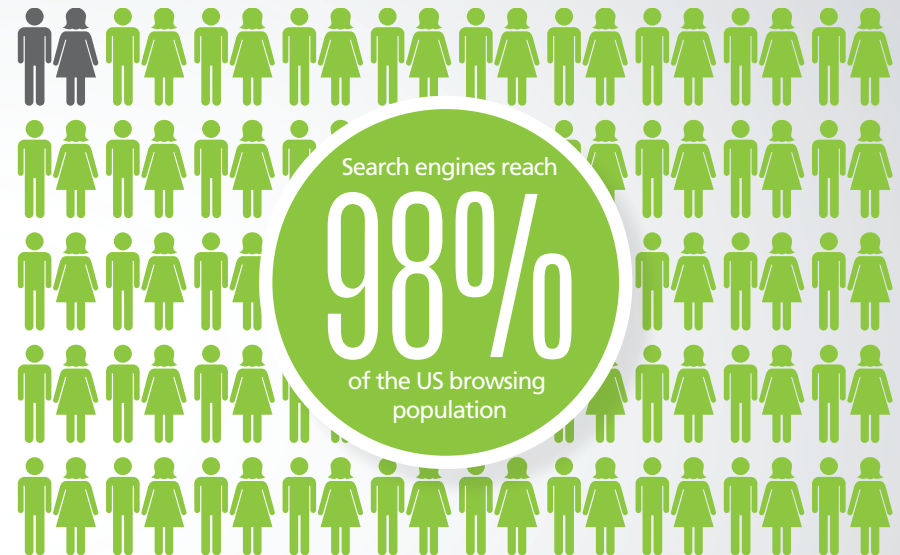


Search Marketing Continues to Grow

Search engines have played an increasingly important role in the marketing ecosystem since their debut over two decades ago. Impressively, even with the plethora of touchpoints consumers interact with throughout their journey, search has stood the test of time and maintained its extensive reach.

Currently search engines reach 67% of the US population and **98% of the US browsing population.**

And with traffic to search engines up 12% since last year, the search category has continued to see strong growth.



Source: Compete PRO General Portals and Search Category Year-over-Year Unique Visitors – 187,271,759, 2014 – 204,322,322 , 2015

Search in Stats



Welcome Back

Search Visits Per Person Are up Year Over Year

Visits per person are **up almost 50%** since last year—meaning that consumers are relying on search engines more frequently each month.



Speed Demon

Each Search Takes Less Time

While collective time spent within search engines has grown since last year, there has been a **17% drop** in average stay on search engines for each visit. When consumers perform a search, they expect to find relevant information faster than ever.

Searching for Answers

Consumers Spend More Time Searching Each Month

Total time spent with search engines has **risen by nearly 24%** since last year—amounting to over 111 billion minutes spent on search engines a month.



Above the Fold

Fewer Pages are Viewed for Each Search

Pages per visit to search engines has **dropped 8%** since last year—highlighting the importance of search engine result rank and prominence (of course, a first page ranking is ideal!).

Source: Compete PRO General Portals and Search Category

Search 101: SERP Listings

Search Engine Results Pages include a variety of media types that consumers can click. Before we get into details, let's define exactly what we're referencing. If you're a seasoned search expert, feel free to skip ahead!

The diagram illustrates a search engine results page (SERP) for the query "Winter Boots". The page is divided into three main sections, each highlighted with a callout box:

- Paid Links & Advertisements:** This section is highlighted with a green circle containing two dollar signs (\$\$). It includes a list of sponsored links at the top of the results, such as "Winter Boots - Zappos.com" and "L.L.Bean Winter Boots - Shop Winter Boots Now". These links are marked with an "Ad" icon and include details like ratings, shipping, and return policies.
- Organic Links:** This section is highlighted with a black circle containing two leaves. It includes a list of natural search results, such as "Winter & Snow Boots Women's Shoes | DSW.com" and "Winter Boots & Snow Boots for Women | Nordstrom". These links are not marked as ads and typically include details like shipping, ratings, and return policies.
- Product Listing Advertisements:** This section is highlighted with a blue circle containing two dollar signs (\$\$). It features a grid of product images and titles, such as "Women's Winter boots" from L.L.Bean, with prices and "Special offer" tags.

The background image shows a search engine results page for "Winter Boots" with a search bar at the top, navigation tabs (Web, Shopping, Images, News, Maps, More), and a search tools link. The results are organized into three columns, each corresponding to one of the callout sections.



PAID SEARCH

Marketers have continued to invest in paid search. Search spend grew by 12% year over year from 2014 to 2015. This strong growth comes after a much weaker 2% growth from 2013 to 2014.¹

Source 1: Ignition One

Paid Search Continues to Grow

Search marketers continue to invest in paid search as a key channel for driving traffic to brand sites. For example, since 2013 paid search referrals to the Apparel category have **increased by more than 50%** for most major brands, resulting in a **total growth of 67%** for the category over two years.

Search Referrals to Apparel Category

2 years trended



Source: The Complete Panel Sep 13 – Sep 15

PLAs Play a Key Role in Paid Search Success

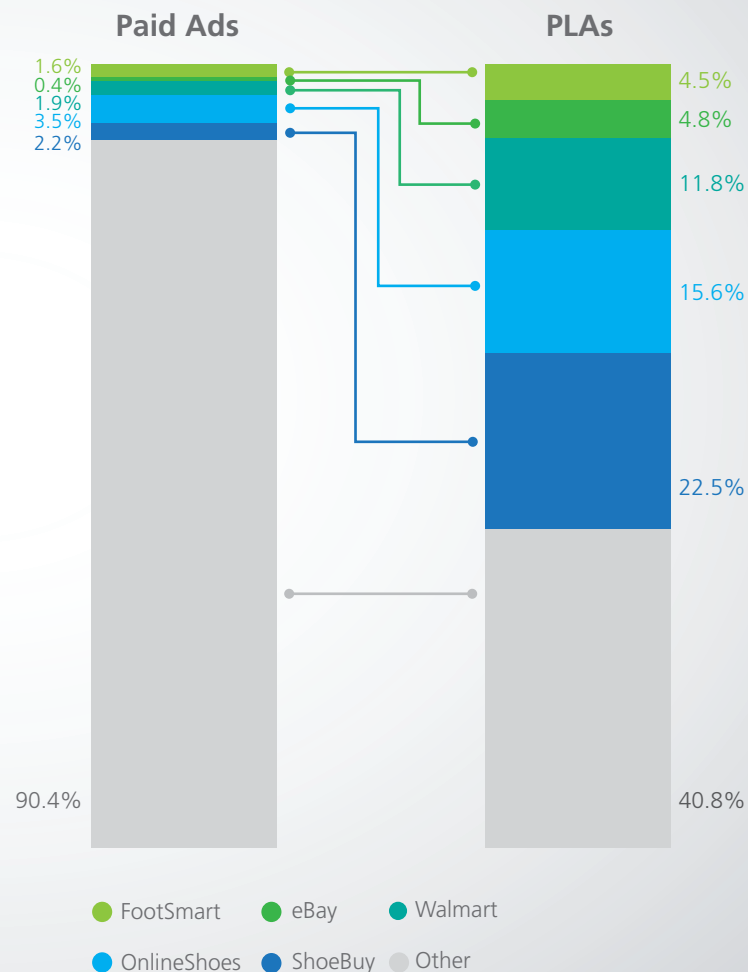
Paid search ads aren't the only form of paid search receiving substantial marketing budget. In preparation for Black Friday 2015, over 6,000 advertisers collectively spent \$22.3 million investing in PLAs, according to AdGooroo?

PLAs are beginning to make impactful contributions as a referral channel. In many cases PLAs can be key differentiators for brands competing for search clicks.

As seen in the footwear example on this page, each of the top footwear brands saw a higher share of traffic from PLAs than search ads, indicating a potentially under-monetized opportunity to capture share.

Paid Search vs. PLAs

Share of traffic from leading footwear referral terms



Source 2: Media Post "Black Friday Keywords Heating Up Desktop Search"

Graph Source: Compete PRO Search Share Non Brand Shoes Keyword List

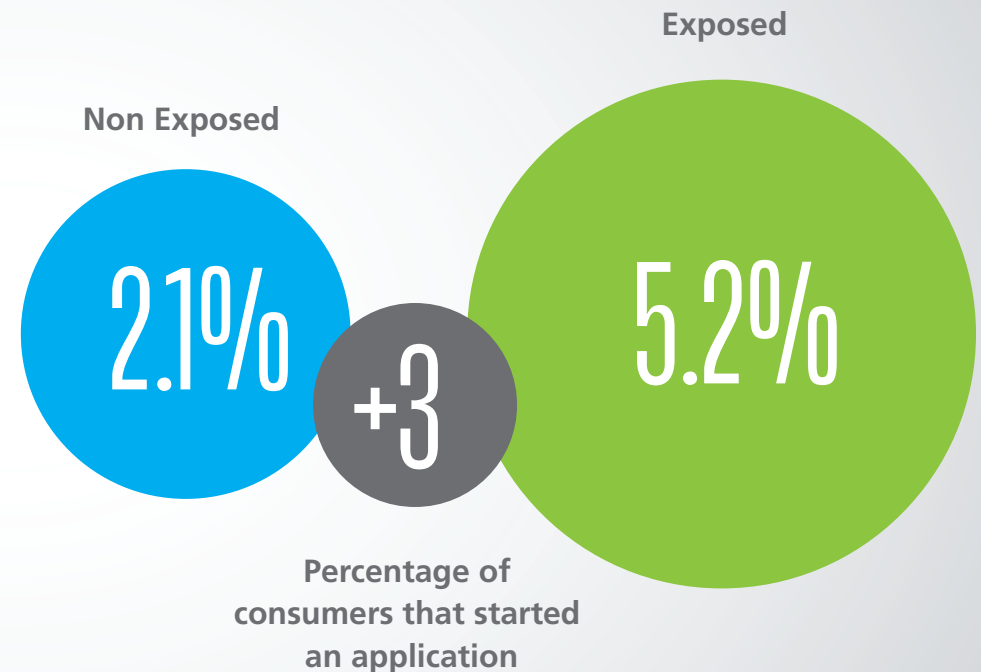
Paid Search: Beyond the Click

Beyond driving traffic, paid search holds the power to expand reach. Even if a consumer ultimately opts to click on an organic link, simple exposure to paid search ads can drive desired behaviors.

For example, a financial services institution compared the actions of consumers exposed to its paid search ads against those that were not exposed. This led to the discovery that exposure increased the likelihood that a searcher would start an application for the institution's financial product, even if the searcher did not immediately click on the ad.

It's important to think about the broader impact of a paid ad, beyond simply gaining clicks.

The Impact of Exposure to Paid Search Ads on Starting a Financial Services Application



Source: The Compete Panel



ORGANIC SEARCH

The lines between content and search marketing have blurred, a phenomenon that is especially true with organic search. Quality content used in conjunction with a strong, content-driven Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategy can demonstrate a brand's industry expertise and therefore influence the consumer purchase journey.

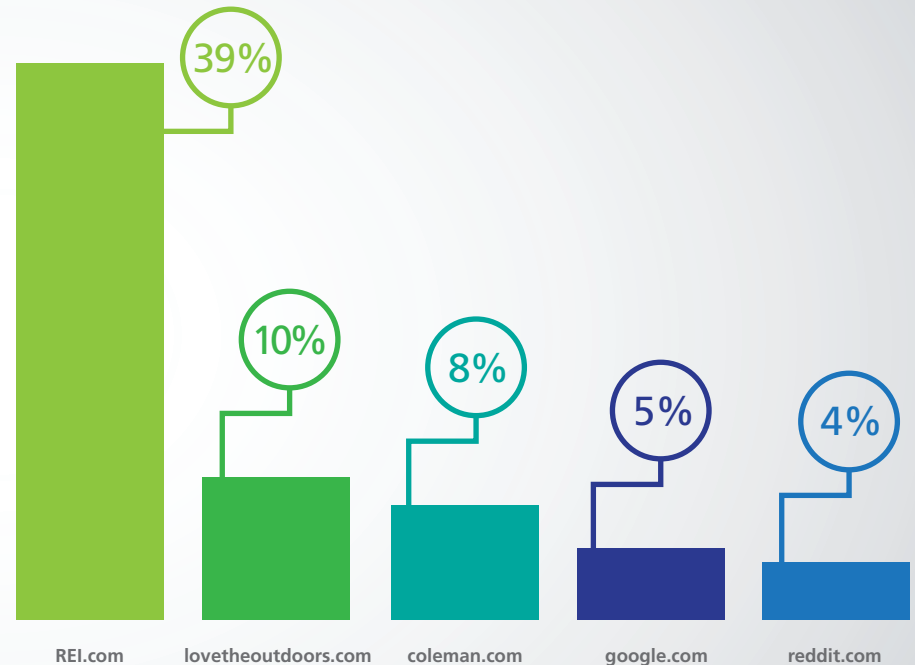
Content is King (Even in Search)

Non-branded keywords are an important indicator of purchase intent along the consumer purchase journey. Understanding which keywords are drivers of traffic can help guide a brand's content strategy and strengthen SEO.

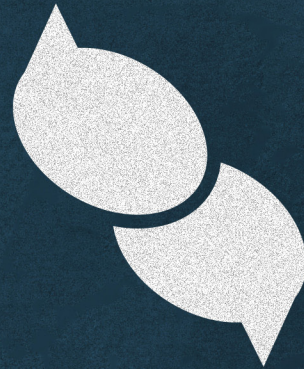
For example, REI is the top destination for the keyword "camping checklist." This term is also REI's top traffic-generating non-branded keyword. By understanding the target consumers and the topics that are relevant to them, and then ensuring that this content is a top search result, REI shows us how search and content work together.

REI is just one example of a major shift in online marketing. By uniting search and content, brands have enormous opportunity to capture audience attention and loyalty through their ability to drive and promote value.

Volume of traffic from the keyword 'camping checklist'



Source: Compete PRO Keyword and Search Referrals



SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media may seem irrelevant in a conversation about search, but social media content has a more prominent place in search results than in the past. Even when social search results don't drive traffic directly to a brand's site, they can still benefit consumers, as 51% of Americans trust user-generated content over company-generated content when researching.³

Source 3: *Bazaar Voice* "Talking to Strangers: Millennials Trust People over Brands"

Search & Social: A Perfect Pair

To better investigate how marketers can leverage social in the search context, we explore the case study of mattress retailer, Casper. Unsurprisingly, branded search is a large driver of on-site traffic. The term “casper mattress” drives nearly half (45%) of overall search traffic to the website. However, a bit more surprisingly, the first results page for “casper mattress” contains several customer-created YouTube mattress unboxing videos.

At first glance, you could think that YouTube is disrupting a streamlined consumer journey and distracting customers by leading them away from the brand’s site. However, YouTube is the third highest traffic referrer to casper.com —demonstrating the value of the social content within the consumer purchase journey.

For a search marketer, social media can feel like uncharted territory. But websites with the most overall traffic growth are experiencing a trend of increasing referral traffic from both search and social platforms.

Source: Compete PRO Incoming Traffic – casper.com

Search casper mattress

Web Shopping Images News Maps More Search tools

About 34,400,000 results (0.27 seconds)



[Casper.com - The Casper® Mattress](#)

www.casper.com/ (888) 498-0003

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Try sleeping on a Casper for 100 days, with free delivery and painless returns.

Takeaways

The days of search as a marketing silo are over. To be successful in the current environment, marketers need to integrate their search strategy with other marketing strongholds like branding, social, and content marketing.



PAID
\$\$

Paid search is still worth the investment

- Not only have clickthrough rates on paid search ads continued to rise, but paid search has emerged as a valuable brand awareness driver even for consumers who don't click
- The PLAs have become an additional way for brands to stand out in a highly competitive paid search space



ORGANIC

Marrying search and content marketing drives consumer value

- Use content-driven search marketing to establish brand credibility
- Influence the consumer purchase journey with an SEO strategy



SOCIAL
MEDIA

Social plays an important role in the search world

- Social plays a more prominent role in search than it ever has before—it shows up in SERPs and drives significant traffic to brand sites
- Being cognizant of the social content that resonates with your audience can help you craft a more effective search strategy



CONTACT US

Looking for more information about how you can use Compete PRO to optimize your Search Marketing strategies?

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