

ChatGPT is Launching Paid Ads



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WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Paid advertising is rolling out in ChatGPT, with ads expected to begin serving in February 2026 for users on the Free and ChatGPT Go tiers in the U.S. Ads will not be shown to users on Plus, Pro, Business, or Enterprise subscription plans. As of today, this is a managed-service pilot, and a self-serve ad management platform is expected later in 2026.

WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR

TARGETING

OpenAI is taking a deliberately conservative, intent-based targeting approach. Ads will appear only when ChatGPT detects a relevant commercial need and will be visually distinct, clearly labelled, and kept separate from the generated answer to preserve neutrality.

Even with this separation, ads will still sit in the decision layer of user journeys - users will inevitably connect the environment with commercial influence simply because ads exist within it.

DATA PRIVACY

OpenAI has been unequivocal about data privacy: it will not sell user data, and ad targeting will be contextual and topic-driven rather than audience-focused or behavioral.

- Ads will align to the conversation context itself, as opposed to user profiles, demographics, or CRM lists that are popular in traditional search, display and social paid ad programs.
- This means advertisers will have fewer precision-targeting tools vs ads in AI surfaces on Google or Microsoft, but the upside is that this should raise trust, safety, and relevance standards.

CLOSED MARKETPLACE

Unlike Microsoft's open access or Google's eligibility pathways via AI-powered campaign types such as Performance Max and AI Max, OpenAI has made clear that ChatGPT advertising is not an open marketplace yet. The ecosystem is closed, selective, and still being shaped.

WHAT WE EXPECT

1

Early capabilities will be limited. Advertisers should anticipate aggregated performance data such as clicks and impressions, limited control levers, and topic-level visibility controls rather than access to user-level data or traditional optimization strategies. Because ChatGPT will favor relevance-driven product surfacing, our SEO principles on structured data, clean landing pages and AI-optimized product feeds will play a decisive role in both organic and paid discoverability.

2

Impact on organic visibility. When Google or Microsoft have introduced more ads at the top of the SERP, we see organic CTR drop and the presence of ads on ChatGPT could create similar displacement, despite ads being below generated responses. Because organic click-through from AI referrers has been limited and paid placements will open access to visibility that previously didn't exist, we could see incremental traffic overall.

3

Modest scale initially. ChatGPT still represents far less daily query volume than more established advertising platforms like Google and early ad placements are likely to see low scale initially. They'll likely see stronger efficiency due to higher user intent, mirroring the higher conversion rates that we've already seen across AI surfaces in Google and Microsoft. Early success will likely be measured by conversational relevancy.

4

Competition will intensify quickly. Early adopters will face less crowding, build authority faster, and establish positioning before market saturation sets in. This first-mover advantage will matter.

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HOW SHOULD BRANDS PREPARE?

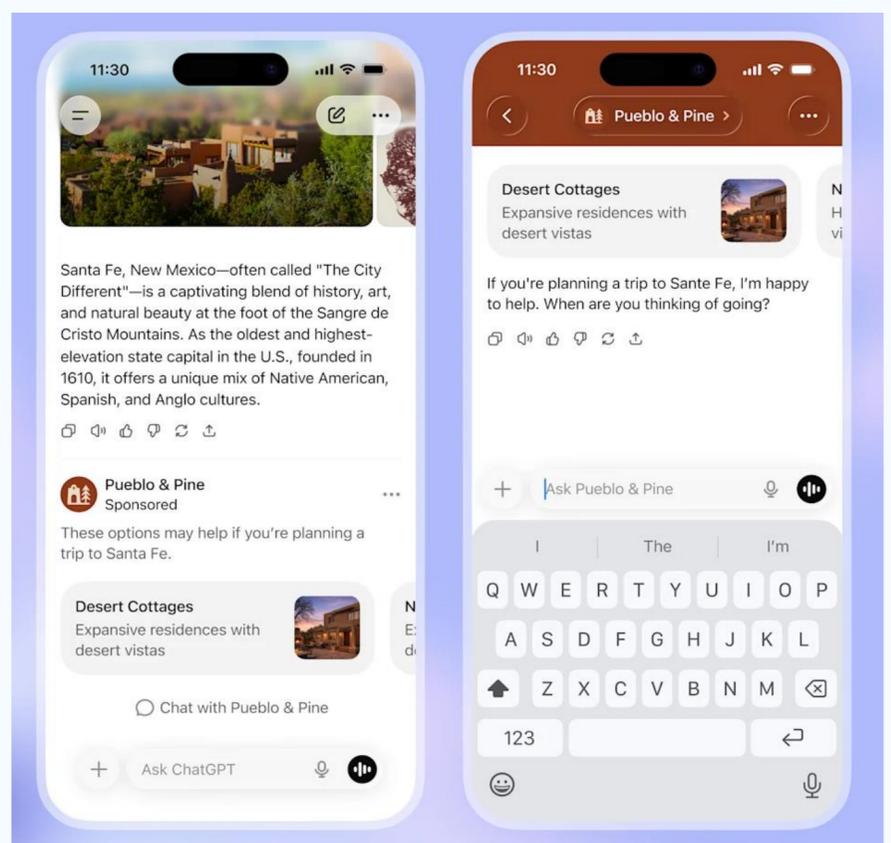
This shift makes one thing clear: brands must ensure they are discoverable across AI-powered search surfaces. This is not traditional paid search; this is AI discoverability, where **structured, trusted, machine-readable data will be the core driver of visibility**.

But beyond ads in AI search landscapes, this shift opens up yet another entry point for agentic commerce and represents another step toward the omnibuyer era. AI surfaces are quickly evolving into the primary end-to-end shopping experience and we breakdown the era of agentic shopping in more detail in our recent POV: [See Assembly's PoV on Agentic Commerce and the future of AI Search here.](#)

Brands should **strengthen their product schema, ensure attributes such as price, availability, delivery, fulfilment and variants are explicit, and prepare to adopt new fields for emerging AI commerce features**. Product information should also reflect conversational attributes so that AI systems can surface offerings more naturally during natural language queries. Understanding the logic of when and why an ad should appear within a ChatGPT experience will become a new optimization discipline within Search.

SUMMARY

The launch of ads in ChatGPT marks another acceleration in AI-native advertising, where ad exposure happens inside a conversation instead of around it. This creates a new intent channel, accelerates the shift from keywords to semantic relevance, and increases the importance of structured product data and conversational context. Brands that move early to refine feeds, elevate product data quality, optimize for natural-language discovery, and prepare for closed-beta ad testing will gain an outsized advantage as the channel matures. Our model for search is already built for this future and designed to unlock brand discoverability and visibility across AI search experiences.



Please coordinate with Dan Roberts, Global SVP Search at Assembly (dan.roberts@assemblyglobal.com) if you want more information.