

VOLUME 1 · AI SEARCH & PAID MEDIA

The Demand Gen Guide:

Quick plays to make you a better marketer

B2B demand generation keeps getting harder—not because you're doing less, but because the rules keep changing. In this edition, we're helping you get ahead and stay there. These are the exact plays we use to generate more qualified demand by focusing on:

- Winning visibility in AI search
- Improving paid media ROI

Winning visibility in AI search

What's changed

AI is reshaping how people discover, evaluate and choose brands. 95% of B2B buyers say they'll use generative AI in their buying process this year ([Forrester](#)), and AI search is projected to surpass traditional search within three years ([SEMrush](#)). At the same time, SEO traffic is down 15–25% across industries ([Bain](#)).

On the surface, that might seem bad—but there's a benefit. It's also filtering out unqualified clicks. Buyers are now asking AI full questions and getting clear, contextual answers. This means they arrive on your site with stronger intent and a more targeted need for information.

The new reality: you're marketing to both humans and machines. Staying visible in search requires evolving from traditional SEO to Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) with content that's authoritative and easy for AI to interpret.

Organize content around key topics

WHY

AI rewards depth and clarity. It prioritizes connected, authoritative content that fully explains a subject's overscattered, one-off posts.

HOW

- 1 Identify 10–15 common buyer questions from search data, chat logs or customer conversations.
- 2 Build 1 comprehensive topic page, then link to related articles that answer each question.
- 3 Add summaries, FAQs, and subheads so content is easy for both humans and AI to scan.
- 4 Structure content for AI by ensuring each section provides a complete idea so it can be understood without reading the entire page.
- 5 Share and repurpose this content through trusted third-party and industry sites (e.g. Reddit, G2, MarketingProfs or Demand Gen Report) to earn citations, backlinks and brand credibility.

MEASURE

Use tools like AirOps, SEMrush ONE, or Google Search Console to track brand mentions, backlinks and visibility in AI or LLM-generated answers. Formalize a weekly check to see how often your brand appears in AI summaries for your core topics.

Publish data that proves expertise

WHY

Original, transparent data earns trust from both AI systems and human readers. It signals authority and gives others a reason to cite your brand as a credible source.

HOW

- 1 Publish the results of small, regular surveys or analyses using your customer or audience data.
- 2 Show results clearly with charts, visuals and a short explanation of your method to reinforce credibility and support AI search.
- 3 Distribute findings through industry media, partner sites and your owned channels to drive reach and high-authority backlinks.

MEASURE

Track growth in backlinks, brand mentions and referral traffic. Also monitor brand visibility in LLM and AI search results. Strong PR and earned media exposure amplify your authority signals, improving how often your brand surfaces in AI-generated results.

Make content easy for AI to read and use

WHY

AI systems surface information that's clearly structured and easy to interpret. The better your content is organized, the more likely it is to appear in AI-driven answers and summaries.

HOW

- 1 Use straightforward headlines and question-style subheads to clarify intent.
- 2 Add short definitions, step-by-step sections or comparison tables where relevant.
- 3 Use standard formats for your web pages, like the FAQs created in play 1, so search and AI systems can understand the structure.
- 4 Apply structured data like schema markup so AI and search engines can accurately interpret your content.

MEASURE

Track appearances in AI summaries and referral traffic. Audit your AEO markup using tools like Google's Rich Results Test or SEMrush ONE to ensure content is structured for both LLMs and humans.

30/60/90 quick start

30
DAYS

Audit existing content and identify your 10 most-searched buyer topics. Evaluate how well each is structured for both humans and AI (headlines, FAQs, schema, etc.).

Publish 2 in-depth articles and 1 data-driven report designed for AEO. Share insights through trusted third-party channels to build authority and backlinks.

60
DAYS

90
DAYS

Expand with 2-4 new supporting articles. Promote through earned and owned media. Track improvements in AI visibility, brand mentions and engagement metrics using tools like SEMrush ONE.

Improving paid media ROI

What's changed

Paid media performance is getting tougher to sustain due to increased competition, inflation, and privacy changes. Additionally, most platforms now reward engagement, not intent, leaving marketers with higher click volumes but fewer qualified leads.

At the same time, buyers are becoming more selective. They expect relevant experiences after the click and are quick to bounce when they don't get them.

The path to better ROI isn't cheaper clicks, it's smarter targeting, stronger post-click experiences and measurement that ties directly to revenue. From our first hand experience, Marketers who can match the post-click experience with the ad are seeing bounce rates drop by 10% or more.

IMPROVING PAID MEDIA ROI

Focus on the right audience

WHY

Broad targeting wastes budget and dilutes results. The fastest way to improve ROAS is by refining who you reach and how you reach them.

HOW

- 1 Segment audiences by industry, company size, tech stack, buying stage or buyer persona.
- 2 Use AI-enabled insights from tools like Clay or ZoomInfo's Go To Market Studio to uncover patterns in unstructured data to build highly specific audiences. You can now see and prioritize (in tabular format) these hidden signals, such as: role count, fleet size, mentions within LinkedIn or Reddit, promotions, job changes—all to refine targeting and audience design.
- 3 Prioritize verified, permission-based first-party data to ensure you're engaging real, relevant buyers.
- 4 Build and test lookalike audiences modeled after your best-performing accounts.

MEASURE

Track improvements in cost per qualified lead (CPL), and conversion rate from click to sales meeting/opportunity. Over time, expect to see higher pipeline quality and a lower effective cost per acquisition (CPA).

Improve the post-click experience

WHY

Conversions depend on what happens after the click. Most campaign optimizations stop at the ad, allowing weak on-page experiences to drive high bounce rates and wasted spend.

HOW

- 1 Keep messaging, visuals and CTAs consistent from ad to landing page. Use a personalization tool like Webflow Optimize to dynamically update the page depending on the ad or the audience.
- 2 Simplify forms; collect extra info on subsequent visits with progressive profiling to reduce friction.
- 3 Retarget non-converters with relevant on-domain content via personalization tools, or off-domain with ad retargeting.

MEASURE

Track decreases in bounce rates and increases in conversion rates from paid traffic.

Measure what drives revenue

WHY

Clicks and volume metrics rarely reflect real business impact. True optimization starts when you measure what actually moves pipeline and revenue.

HOW

- 1 Shift KPIs from CTR and CPL to meetings booked, SQLs, pipeline value and closed won deals.
- 2 Use multi-touch attribution to see how each channel supports the deal cycle. Focus on what's contributing to conversion, not just the last touch.
- 3 Get clear on what works for each audience type at every stage of the journey. Too often, we analyze outcomes but overlook the path that gets buyers there. Optimize messaging and channel mix based on where prospects are in their journey.

MEASURE

Track increase in share of total pipeline and revenue influenced by paid media programs.

30/60/90 quick start

30
DAYS

Audit paid campaigns and refine audience segments using verified and AI-enriched data. Shift KPIs to focus on pipeline and revenue, not clicks.

Launch two focused campaigns with aligned ad-to-landing messaging and personalized post-click experiences using tools like Webflow Optimize or Qualified.

60
DAYS

90
DAYS

Put more budget into the top performing campaigns that are delivering qualified leads and analyze revenue contribution.

Key takeaways

- **AI is changing how buyers discover and decide.** Brands that adapt their content for both humans and machines will stay visible as search evolves.
- **Precision beats volume.** Smarter targeting and consistent post-click experiences drive better ROI than broad campaigns and vanity metrics.
- **Credibility compounds.** Data-driven insights, trusted placements, and consistent optimization build authority—and stronger, more sustainable demand.
- **The new rule of demand:** Clarity creates visibility. Relevance drives revenue.

Turn these plays into pipeline

Need the Strategy? Partner with Iron Horse to build audience-centric programs.
Need the Buyers? Use NetLine to access active, in-market decision-makers.

iron·horse

Iron Horse is a demand generation agency focused on B2B enterprise and emerging growth companies. We help you build and execute audience-centric programs that deliver the outcomes you want. Discover how at www.ironhorse.io.

NetLine

NetLine is the leader in Programmatic Lead Generation, empowering B2B marketers to engage in-market buyers with targeted content and accelerate revenue growth. Your buyers are everywhere. Now you can be too. Learn more at www.netline.com.