



Inside the Neil Patel Interview



AI, SEO, and Consumer Shifts

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT



Andy Sack (00:05)

This is AI First with Adam and Andy, the show that takes you straight to the front lines of AI innovation in business. I'm Andy Sack alongside my co-host, Adam Brotman. Each episode, we bring you candid conversations with business leaders who are transforming their business using AI. No fluff, straight talk, real use cases and insights for you.

Hey, Adam, that was a great episode that we had with Neil Patel. Excited to debrief and discuss with you. Today, I think we want to talk about three things that came up in that interview or that discussion with Neil. And let me just cover them and we'll go through them one by one. The three topics are AI's impact on consumer behavior. The second was GEO versus SEO and what a business leader should do.

Andy Sack (01:02)

And then lastly, to future-proof your business through AI search and marketing, i.e. like a little debrief on GEO. So let's go and pick up right where Neil left us on consumer behavior, because he had a lot of data that he shared and a lot of perspective. Clearly, super well-informed and more expert. mean, this is the first time we really have interviewed.

a true expert in the field. Neil's been doing SEO related activity and is really a thought leader in that space. So let's talk about AI and consumer behavior and the changes that we're experiencing ourselves, but also on Neil's comments and perspective. Why don't you start us off?

Adam Brotman (01:49)

OK, I agree with you. was comforting, irrespective of what his answer was. It was just comforting to talk to someone like Neil, who's you can't talk to a more of a subject matter expert than Neil on this topic. So it was good to be able to be like, all right, Neil, you know, what's how is they affecting this stuff? And and to hear him basically say that in the aggregate,

he sees the same amount of traffic coming to websites, either from Google or as a result of SEO, even after these AI overviews and perplexity and chat GPT searched have been introduced, it was comforting to hear him say, look, it didn't radically change and the way you sort of think about SEO still matters.

Adam Brotman (02:45)

because I was wondering if he was gonna say, to be honest, the biggest, putting aside the details of what he said, Andy, the biggest thing I was wondering is someone like learning by listening to him was, was he gonna say, boy, the game has majorly changed and here's how you gotta think about it. Cause with everything else going on, I wasn't, I don't know if I was mentally ready to hear that and have to get my head around it. Now, I thought it was interesting that during the episode he was like, no, you still gotta, Do your best practices on SEO.

And generally speaking, there hasn't been a major change. And we'll get into in a second the nuances of what he said. And you and I were like, that doesn't drive with our behavior. it was good. It was good. I was just going say it was good. And I'll turn it over to you. It was good that he wasn't saying, yeah, there's this new thing you got to do, or else you're dead in the water. He was kind of saying the opposite, which we had a little bit of dissonance around.

Andy Sack (03:27)

Yeah, we can.

Adam Brotman (03:43)

But I was at a high level, I was glad to hear that there wasn't some new thing that I didn't know about that people needed to know about. And I was like left in the dust. He was basically saying, no, you guys are paying attention to the right things. There is some shift, but it still matters that you do SEO best practices.

Andy Sack (03:59)

Yeah. It makes me want to, I mean, it makes me want, and I've wanted to do this for a long time. It makes me want to dig into the data because as I'm, as I asked him in the interview, you know, the, my own anecdotal personal experience of, of my search behavior is very different than it was before, before AI, before two years ago. So I've noticed a significant shift.

In the way that I work and in the way that I search and in the way that I buy. And anecdotally, we're hearing reports that that for consumer brands, that traffic is down 15%. His response to that was basically to sequester AI search of consumer behavior and basically say, look, you know, question and answer type traffic. Yeah, that's not going to Google anymore. And so that.

That's being driven and people are more in search of answers and that's fine. But when it comes to all search behavior and he lumped in, you know, he has his hands, you know, because of his expertise, he has his hands both on data more readily. Um, and he basically lumped in Amazon search and social social search engine, uh, searches within Instagram, cetera. And I'm.

I'm specifically interested in the narrow market of Google search versus Bing, which previously I made, I need, basically makes me want to go dig into the data and probably makes me want to go dig into the data with Neil. Cause I'm not discounting his expertise or, or not. He's just more informed, but there's something that's not sitting right with the public news on consumer behavior. My own behavior left me with more questions than answers.

Adam Brotman (06:01)

Yeah, I hear what you're saying. But even as you were just talking just now, I was thinking about my behavior, which I bet is like yours. So first of all, I use Perplexity and Google and ChatGPT search. Those are kind of the three kind of engines I use, if you will, or answer engines or search engines. And it's actually interesting.

When I, from a commerce perspective, I still do find myself going through Google. Like I don't, can't imagine, I can't think of a time where I've gone to perplexity or not, that often perplexity or ChatGPT search. When I had a commercial intent in mind when I was doing my search and then went to them and then ended up buying through that same session, if you will, or through that same chain link session, like I. I do, I can think of myself using Google and I, and I'm like you, Mike, my behavior has been much different. The interesting thing he pointed out, if you actually, you want to dig into the data and I want to dig into the bottoms up user flow. So it's interesting.



Let's, let's talk about that for a second. The bottoms up user flow is if you actually, if you go to Google now and Neil said this, he said it was like, it was AI overviews were coming up.

And then they kind of went away and now they're back. And when you get the answer you need from an AI overview, you're done, basically. You're not going to click on anything. Whereas it used to be that same question and answer, as you put it, thing would lead to traffic to sites. Because to get to the answer, you had to fish the 10 links and figure out your own answer. Now you don't have to do that. that, you and I would say, that will lead to less referral traffic from Google. And jives is what we're hearing. from the market, anecdotally and otherwise, that there's about a 15 % reduction in traffic coming from Google to sites. But I think Neil was saying that when it comes to commercial intent, where that traffic matters to retailers, it's not down. And then combined with the fact that AI overviews are a top of funnel, so to speak,

Adam Brotman (08:24)

way of getting improving brand awareness in some cases that will lead to more direct traffic. So I think he was saying, yeah, you might lose some of your question and answer traffic, which wasn't that valuable, but you're picking up on top of the funnel related attributable traffic that ultimately leads to direct traffic. If you know what I mean. So he was saying the math in the end, ends up being the same to sites, but the way they're getting it, they think it's down, but it's actually.

down only if you count just the direct from Google traffic, but if you include the fact that these AI overviews are driving direct traffic later, then overall the traffic to sites is the same. That was kind of my way of piecing together what he was saying in a way, if that makes any sense. I know it's kind of convoluted.

Andy Sack (09:11)

It does. Yeah, it was a little convoluted. You want to try again to parse that?

Adam Brotman (09:18)

Yeah, if I'm, what he's saying is I might be going directly to sites more often than I, and I'm not even aware of it because I am seeing the brands and the products show up on AI overviews on Google, on social media, on TikTok and.

Instagram and whatnot, and even on like forums like Reddit and whatnot. So the more I'm seeing brands show up because of the change in consumer behavior, that's more about video, more about AI overviews, that real estate is still important to ultimately, ultimately leading to traffic. But that may not happen as Google search referral traffic. And so therefore you have to break up Google search referral traffic from this

kind of downstream thing that he says is more common now because of the new consumer behavior, you add the two up and the sites are getting the same amount of traffic roughly. Now, I know you and I have talked to people who are saying, my traffic's down and I think it's because I'm not getting as much search traffic. So they're not seeing it be made up for on the direct side. And what I heard Neil say was, well, if you get out of the aggregate and get into the individuals, some people are playing the game better than others.

Adam Brotman (10:40)

And so their traffic is fine or even up and other people's traffic is down. And so in the aggregate, he's saying it's flat, but you got to get into the details of like, is a company playing the new game where they're like, they are showing up in AI overviews. are showing up in, search results on Amazon and social. are being talked about with organic social results and

Adam Brotman (11:08)

just word of mouth and I'm piecing together the various things he said throughout just now with Neil throughout the multiple waves that you need to kind of show up. You can't just show up as SEO anymore. You got to show up in this broader way. And that's how I'm sort of parsing together how he or putting together how he was saying it in the aggregate, the traffic to sites hasn't changed, even if there's been some consumer behavior change.

Andy Sack (11:19)

Let's put it this way. think we're going to need to come back to the audience with more direction on consumer behavior, staying under the result of AI, both with data and with bottoms up consumer flows. Because I think behavior has changed. Mine certainly has. And anecdotally, I'm reading and hearing that consumer traffic is down 15%. And that's somewhat at odds with what

Neil was saying, which was what he had to say was reassuring. I do think that, you know, clearly things are in flux, know, perplexity is a player in the in the search space. And, and now agents and operator are going to be a player. Then they're not yet. But certainly, by the time this recording gets mass distribution,

the agentic future that that is our prediction from 2025, I think is like consumer behavior and the way in which purchases happen is going to change. So, you know, I was reassured I do think that certainly like the big platforms, particularly Amazon, which as he pointed out is really heavily transactional oriented searches, and as a huge number of searches, I do think that that

you know, Amazon's going to build AI right into their interface. And so I suspect they probably won't see that much of an impact, but I think a lot of the long tail smaller companies may. So TBD. That's all I have to say. I mean, it's an area of a lot of interest of mine and let's just come back to it to the audience. Yeah. Yeah. Great. So.

Andy Sack (13:40)

The next topic, GEO versus SEO, what should business leaders actually do? What did you think about what Neil had to say? And let's dive into the second topic.

Adam Brotman (13:51)

So he said, effectively, if you want to show up in GEO, AI Overviews from Google, whatever answer you get from Perplexity, whatever answer you get from ChatGPT Search, that's GEO. If you want to show up in that, he said, just do good SEO. And the same things that you do will make you show up there. I am.



Andy Sack (14:17)

Which basically is content links, content velocity, all the well-learned lessons that there's a high correlation between what you do in Google and showing up in ChatGPT. If you do what's

Adam Brotman (14:21)

No, so that's true, and he said something else I thought that was really like a pearl in what he said of wisdom, which he said, he said, well, yes, you should keep doing that, but you should also remember that the more times your brand shows up anywhere.

Adam Brotman (15:00)

It's like real estate, he said, like a billboard or like real estate. He said, the game is to like get as much real estate as possible. And I really, that really resonated with me. Like, I mean, we, we advise in form three, we advise brands every day on both their AI strategy and their overall digital strategy and the combination of the two. And like what comes up over and over and over with consumer brands, whether they're CPG, retail, restaurant, hospitality, doesn't matter. There's this ongoing realization that they need to be more, there needs to be more activities that give more brand awareness for them. And that's similar to what Neil said. And so when he said that, I was like, oh, that's a really good way to like, think about it, which is like, you, and he said, may not happen like that day and people need to get over the, oh, I can like, look at my ROI of my ad spend yesterday combined with my content marketing SEO, and I can immediately tell you my overall ROI, they need to take a chill pill, invest in brand awareness and that real estate strategy that he mentioned over the midterm, which might be several weeks. It's not like that long. just like, if not months or years, they both count.

Adam Brotman (16:23)

I liked how he said, yes, it's the same SEO and you need to keep investing in organic social, keep investing in top of the funnel brand awareness activities. And these AI overviews are kind of a version of that is what he was, he was a segueing from that because he was if you're showing up on an AI overview, somebody may not click on that, even though they could dig in and find the little number or whatever that refers to the source and find the link.

But they're not likely to click on an AI overview as much as they would on the 10 blue links on SEO. But it still matters that you're mentioned. And people should keep that in mind even if they can't attribute it and measure it that same day or the next day.

Andy Sack (17:09)

Yeah, I mean, what that does is it really highlights the emphasis of really social, right? So like digital word of mouth through social channels is highly relevant mentions and real estate to capture, think, what that expands Google search to include social mentions.

Adam Brotman (17:33)

Yeah. Yeah, which is hard.

Andy Sack (17:35)

Yeah, the only, the only other thing that I would say on the topic of GEO versus SEO was I thought the discussion, which I think you teed up and he concurred this whole HEO human engine optimization and like really the as, as things become increasingly automated and, as agents increasingly do transact work for us and increasingly do transactions for us.



New work for us as that happens, the need to interface both with humans, let alone search engines goes down in my opinion, because agents are doing it for you. I do think that there's, there's going to be a desire to go into the local coffee shop and like, and how that gets, you know, what that intersection is, what happens with human behavior is one that, you know, I think it's too early to call a trend, but I think that's like,

The other side of GEO, I like this notion of HEO and I thought that was something that was worth highlighting for business leaders.

Adam Brotman (18:41)

You know, I do too, but I'll say something probably wrong. Yeah, probably wrong as well as controversial, but I'll just say it since it's on my mind, which is that like, I think the real answer to that is more complicated. think, I'm not saying that what you just said, I have this nagging feeling that says, on the one hand, we want more human connection because we're lacking it.

Andy Sack (18:45)
controversial.

Adam Brotman (19:06)

And on the other hand, we're lacking it because we're changing as a species and as a society, not for the better necessarily, but you know, we're just becoming addicted to our phones. We're becoming addicted to our AI.

Andy Sack (19:17)
Yeah, we're

we're retreating into our spaceships. Yeah, I think that I think actually, Adam, I think that that's totally true. I do think that this term HEO is going to be a trendy term. And I think people are going to want to talk about the trend, because they're going to want they're going to they're going to want us to be in search of human connection. It sounds good. Exactly.

Adam Brotman (19:20)

I'll tell you, I'll you a real world example of it. It's near and dear to my heart. Like Starbucks is going through this right now. Right. It's not AI versus whatever, but they, you know, they're really trying to get after getting to be more of the coffeehouse vibe and more connection with the barista and Brian Nichol, their new CEO. He was on CNBC today. They reported earnings yesterday. Like, I really like what they're doing. Like they're They're saying like, look, we gotta improve that and that's gonna improve the experience. And it doesn't mean we need to stop doing mobile orders, but when we do a mobile order, you should be greeted, you should be handed your cup with a smile. They're writing Sharpies, they're back to writing the wrong name on the cup, so to speak. Although they can't get the written name wrong on a mobile order, because it's on the sticker and they're gonna keep using the sticker so they can use that as a cheat code. the...



The truth is, they wrote on my cup and said, have a nice day the other day. And I appreciated it. So it matters. And I think that's a good example of the balance. So I appreciated what Brian was doing there. I don't know him. I call him Brian as if I know him. But I appreciated what their new CEO is doing. Because it was like, look, I think he said, we've got to bring order to mobile order. And we've got to bring humanity to it as well. yeah. So I think there's this blend of things.

Andy Sack (20:36)

what that what that touches, which is not HEO is personalization, right? So personalization start, you know, which is the promise of AI, I think is where this where that leads.

Adam Brotman (21:06)

Good point, Andy. That's a really good point that personalization is related but different than HEO or whatever. For this term that we learned yesterday on our community call, one of our community members said, what o you think about HEO? like, what's HEO? And it was great. It's a great term. I'm just in a little bit of a, I'm a little honoring today. So I'm like, you know.

Andy Sack (21:32)

It's true. We as a human species, we do see human interaction and AI is automating and personalizing everything. Yeah.

Adam Brotman (21:48)

Yeah, and I think the reason that I liked your personalization point because it sort of bridges the gap. I think we want that humanity as a as long as it doesn't get in the way of our digital lives that we want. So if you can find a way to do it that like complements the digital life, then great. Like the writing on the cups and the greeting at the door on a mobile order. Like the personalized email, the personalized message that you're talking about. I think it's like

This notion that I'm gonna like wanna come into the store now more than I did before because I'm seeking human connection. I hate to say it. I think there'll be a little bit of that, but I don't think it's, I hate to say it. I think it's counter trend to be honest.

Andy Sack (22:33)

mean, the thing, let's go back just for a moment and then I want to conclude this and move on to the third topic. You mentioned Starbucks and I'm just wondering, I know Starbucks has, there's been question about mobile ordering and the really the, how much mobile ordering overtook the business and sort of made and took away from the human interaction that existed, that now exists in independent coffee shops.

and that balance between effectiveness and, efficiency for their human purchase of their coffee versus that human interaction of the third place. I'm curious to how you balance that, like how you see that playing out. You really invented the, you know, the mobile app and you drove that automation. do you have any comment on the current state of that?



Adam Brotman (23:33)

Yeah. Yeah. I, I have mixed feelings about it because I, I feel like it's, it's the, think that issue that you're bringing up is the embodiment of the broader issue we were just talking about. feel like the, we as human beings now are very convenience driven and digital tools and platforms are feeding that.

Adam Brotman (24:03)

I think the mobile order phenomenon in Starbucks and their need to sort of balance it with human connection. And Jim Cramer was saying this morning, and he's right, like, wait a minute, like if mobile orders clog up and I come in in person, then why is it that the mobile orders get ahead of myself? And I heard this morning on that, that Starbucks is experimenting right now with ways to sort of sequence, do a better job, maybe a sequencing who's in the cafe and who's a mobile order. And like, that's great. Like I think that they'll get

I think that they'll solve it. The answer to your question is, I think they'll solve it through a combination of technology and processes and whatever, and the people, and they'll get there. But I also feel, so on that I feel like that's where that's at. I think they're doing a good job and they're going to figure it out. I think that, and by the way, I think that there's no going backwards on it. I don't think there is.

Adam Brotman (25:01)

And I don't say that with a smile on my face. Like, oh, it's somehow, it doesn't need to be balanced. It does need to be balanced. And I think when it is balanced, it's better. And yet, I think the mobile orders are up to what, over 32 % of all their orders. And my guess is it's going to become like 50 % someday. It's not going to go down to 15%. And I think about like,

Adam Brotman (25:30)

Outside of my driveway, there's all these Amazon boxes right now, right? And I start to get frustrated, then I realize, like, it's with all the boxes. But then I go, yeah, it's because, like, our daughter needs a, you know, a new shirt, and she knows exactly what she wants, and she wanted her and her mom ordered it on Amazon. And, like, they don't need to go into the store. Like, they don't want to go into the store. So, like, you know, we're... So it's...

It's there these weird things that are going in a certain way. And yes, it is taking away from our ability to connect. But I think it's probably endemic or symptomatic or whatever of whatever the word is of. What's happening with social relationships right now and like how people meet and how they hang out or don't hang out or whatever like, you know, you and I used to talk about it as like this metaverse trend and stuff, but it's, you know, I.

The AI thing is going to make it worse. Unfortunately, it is going to make it worse because you're going to start using these agents to do your shop. It's like, it wasn't enough that we weren't going into the store. We're not even going to do the online shopping. Yeah. Yeah. But maybe, you know what, in all seriousness, maybe that will be the tipping point that drives us back to your HEO point. Maybe that will be the thing that drives us back to being more connected because we'll have these agents giving us more time back maybe. I don't know.

Andy Sack (26:43)

That's right. That's right. We're going to send the agents out. Exactly.



Andy Sack (27:02)

Maybe. Let's go to our next topic. How to future proof your business for AI search and marketing. You know, I think I mean, I think Neil, you know, Neil, I think covered this really well with do something different, like basic marketing advice. I really liked that part of the interview with Neil, specifically

Adam Brotman (27:15)

What are your thoughts?

Andy Sack (27:32)

when he said

do something differentiated in a category and that's what which that which is differentiated will people pay attention to. So I really like that comment.

His comment, basically my takeaway from the interview with Neil, which I want to dig into some more is basically what's good for SEO is good for GEO and, and yes, consumer behavior has changed, but it hasn't really changed the basics of digital marketing. so, so that was my takeaway. So in terms of, in terms of future-proofing, you know, I don't yet have clear guidance to give a business leader on.

Adam Brotman (28:13)

Yeah.

I mean, he, yeah.

Andy Sack (28:25)

what to do other than I think that organizations and specifically marketing organizations do need to be advancing their use of digital tools and getting moving now on AI digital transformation. Leaders need to get up to speed on what these tools can do and start changing their own work behavior to start having their own assessment about.

and gaining the productivity that's inherent in AI tools.

Adam Brotman (28:58)

Yeah, so an example, let me try and take it down to ground level to connect the dots and what you just said. So for example, your point just now around, look, what really moves the needle more than anything else, more than even SEO is like word of mouth marketing. And similarly, the corollary is you can't fake that. You can't just have great SEO and a bad product or bad experience and think that you're going to have a great business, even though you're a great SEO practitioner.

Adam Brotman (29:27)

He was making the point like it doesn't, you know, the number one thing to keep in mind is that your product or your service is great. The brand experience is great. The differentiation is there. So how does AI come into that? Well, like if you're an AI first organization, like AI is an incredible tool for effectively holding a mirror up to your company. Like if you want to ask, if you want to screenshot your competitor's website, your website, your product, you want to describe what you're doing.



et cetera, to AI in detail, it will do an amazing job. And it's getting even better at giving you back feedback, unemotional feedback, unbiased around things that you could do to improve your product or your service or your brand experience. you know, we think this is the fallacy that I think that a lot of people have is they're like, why would I do that? That's like, I don't need AI for that. can, I'm, that's my job or my team's job.

And yet, is really good at it. And like really good. Like it's getting good and getting better. Like this operator agent program from OpenAI, like I saw yesterday, somebody said, yeah, you could tell it right now. You could tell AI, you have to be the pro subscriber to use it, but this is going to become Gemini and OpenAI are going to all have this tool. You could ask AI right now, go.

search around my website, go search around my Facebook and social feeds and like give me back a review of and do the same thing with my competitors and give me back a review of all the things that you think I could be doing better to either improve my process, improve my product or stand out more so I can have more word of mouth. And I promise you, if you did that with these tools, like you'll be shocked at how good they are and how helpful they are. And so it's an example of like, you're an AI first organization,

It's not just about like chat bots for your customer support or, you know, some automation of some thing. Like these, the best and highest use of these tools is to help you be better strategically at some of these things. So when Neil Patel says, you know, I need to be better. You should be good at SEO, which is a tactical thing, or, you know, make sure you're, you're, you're thinking about word of mouth or real estate. Like ask AI can help you with that. right now.

Andy Sack (31:46)

So, thank

Adam Brotman (31:54)

And so I, I feel like to your point,

it's just to make it like tactical and tangible for our listeners. Like there are things you could be doing right now with AI 10 times a day, 20 times a day. It's instead of wondering what you would do, it's like everything, everything you're working on, you could be running through the AI and like, that's our biggest mission right now is to get leaders to realize like what a powerful tool this is. And we talked to some that get it and some that don't. And the ones that get it like,

you couldn't pry it out of their hands right now. It is so helpful to the things that the Neil Patels of the world are advising you to do. If you're not sure how to do them or how to get after them, use AI.

Andy Sack (32:38)

Awesome. With that, thank you all for listening to AI First with Adam and Andy. For more resources, go to our website. You can get a PDF summary of the episode with Neil as well as this episode. Be sure to follow us on LinkedIn. We have lots of other resources on the site. Check it out. We truly believe you can't over invest in AI. Onward.



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