



the future of search|



Image created with generative AI

A Healthcare Marketer's Guide to Google's Search Generative Experience

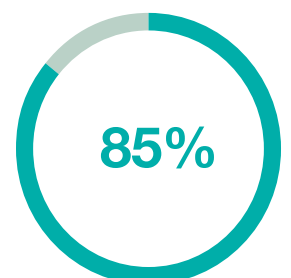
Throughout the past three decades, AI has really picked up steam, with a pivotal moment at the end of 2022 with OpenAI's public release of ChatGPT ([we even wrote about it](#)). The release was the catalyst for a slew of public-facing events, including Microsoft's investment in Open AI and a Bing search implementation. While Microsoft reports its new integration added 100 million daily active users, Google remains the goliath of online searches with more than [85% of the market share](#). Bing's AI integration may have generated a buzz-induced fad, but you can imagine the potential impacts of Google's search generative experience (SGE) for marketers.

Launched in May, Google's SGE has only been available to one million select users on Google Labs (its beta testing platform)—until now. Google has begun gradually increasing its rollout to include 30 million users by the end of 2023, creating a potentially large impact for brands and marketing professionals in 2024.

What Is Google's SGE?

Google's SGE uses AI generative technology to provide new, updated answer fields directly on the search engine results page (SERP). SGE provides paragraph-formatted answers with complete sentences, bullet points in some cases, embedded media such as images and videos, the ability to ask follow-up questions and the sources where the AI pulled information from. With the internet full of crawled website data and the sheer volume of Google searches to train on, SGE has access to the largest AI dataset available with exponential learning capabilities.

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This isn't the first time Google has evolved how its presented its search results. For example, in 2012, Google released its knowledge graph and in 2014, it launched its answer box (known as position 0). Updates such as these are designed to keep users on Google's results page, so it can monetize users' data and interactions. With the forthcoming SGE rollout, that attempt may be more of a reality than ever.

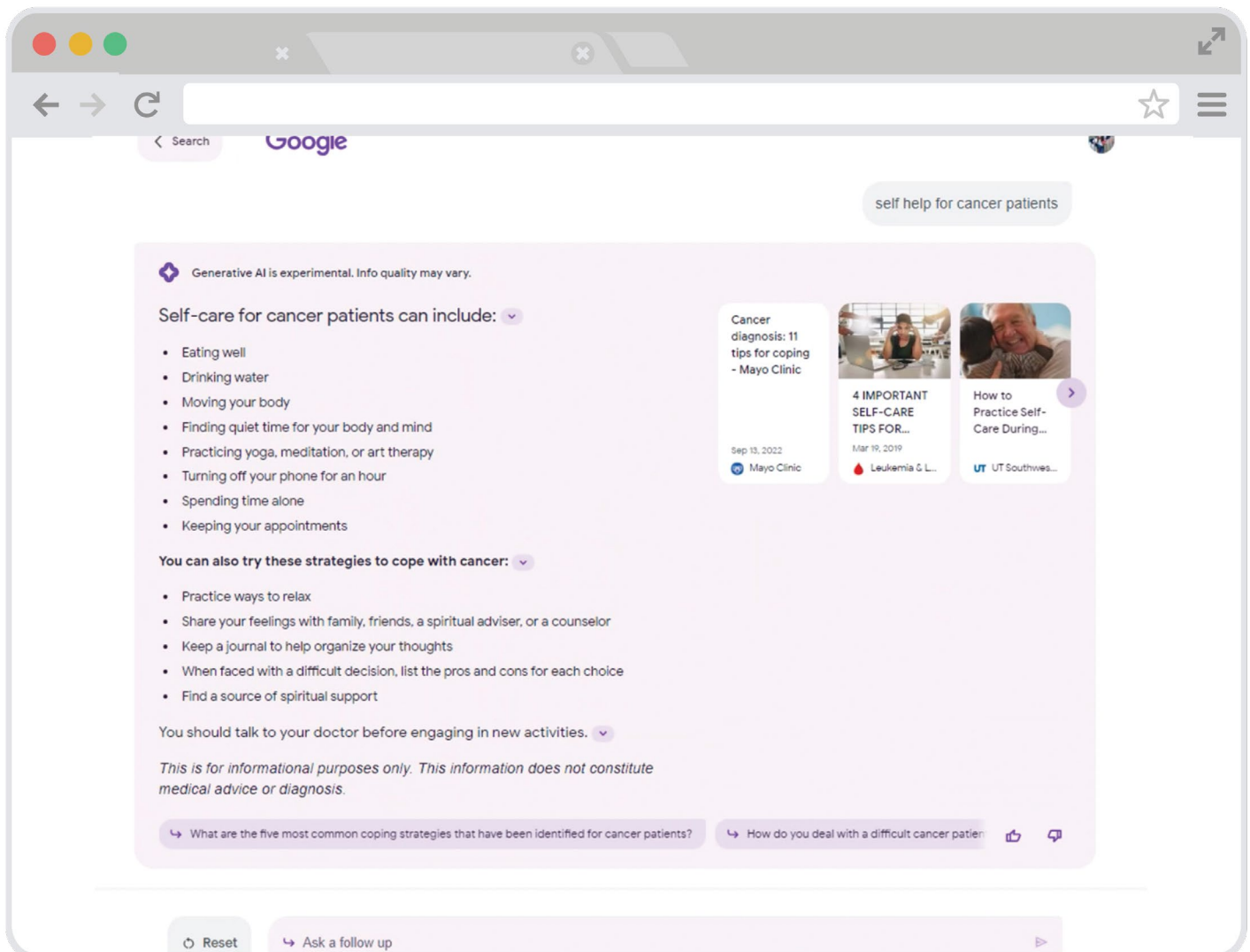
How Will Google's SGE Impact the Healthcare Search Environment?

As with all users of AI, there are concerns regarding the validity and credibility of sources provided by Google's SGE. To address this, Google is slowly rolling out its

SGE and the model will opt out of topics that could cause harm to people's financial stability, health and well-being (e.g., [Your Money or Your Life \(YMYL\) topics](#)) or those that don't have enough data. While the update topics identify healthcare as a sensitive topic, it is expected SGE will still answer health-related questions but with an additional disclaimer.

Today, the largest competitors of target audience visibility in healthcare and pharmaceutical searches are less likely to be direct competitors and more likely to be encyclopedia-style publications, such as Healthline or WebMD for general disease education queries, as shown in the image below.

Google appears to rely heavily on these trusted sources to create credibility for its SGE results. However, despite favoring these sources, your brand may still show up in SGE results if people take their inquiries deeper and your brand is following search best practices.



How Can Marketers Get Ahead of Google's SGE Impacts?

1. Make Content Optimizations

Now, more than ever, brands must develop robust website content that covers keywords and related topics. SGE will pull in content from cited sources and link out from the conversation box. But, conversational queries aren't new. Users have been typing full questions into search bars since Ask Jeeves, now Ask.com. This, paired with the maturation of search algorithms and the explosion of content competition, created a need for long-tail keywords. Long-tail keywords use longer query strings, which allows marketers to target more nuanced subjects and rank for conversational behavior patterns. The SGE update doesn't change that—it builds upon it. Long-tail keywords will remain important for SERP visibility, as will creating deeper meaning and content depth. It's important to remember that with AI language processing capabilities, your SEO strategy should be based around the intent of information rather than a singular set of keywords.

For example, content that explains treatment options for multiple sclerosis (MS) is more important than using a keyword or phrase, e.g., "MS treatment," repeatedly.

2. Manage Reputation and Relationships

With so much scrutiny around the accuracy of AI-generated information, Google will rely on the established [EAT guidance](#) as a foundation for SGEs. This means trust and credibility of original website source material will be a factor for SGE's answer results. Brands can increase

their credibility by crediting authors when relevant, citing trustworthy sources and running link-building campaigns with other relevant and authoritative websites that link back to their site.

In addition to establishing authority and trust for brands' websites, link building can improve the frequency with which brands are included in Google's SGE answer box from sources other than the brand itself. Applying this concept outside of the realm of SEO, consider the potential of earned media when being referenced in queries.

3. Invest (More) in Paid Ads

If the concept of Google ads were a person, they'd be of legal drinking age in the United States. That's how long marketers have been *paying to play*. Since launching ads, Google has continued to show preference to its ad placement on the SERP. We don't expect Google to forgo its booming advertising platform with SGE. Rather, we expect even more competition. Because SGE may reduce click-throughs for organic traffic, we can expect a significant increase in paid search in an attempt to compensate for potential drops in website traffic.

Similar to SEO, it's likely that broadening keywords to strengthen meaning and increase content depth will be beneficial.

4. Actively Monitor SEO Performance

If you're not receiving regular SEO reporting, consider starting. SGE is constantly learning and because it provides personalized SERP pages like never before, the same query can draw many different results. This makes for an evolutionary search landscape.

Furthermore, SGE will likely increase no-click searches where website traffic and click-through rates won't show the full picture. To address this, we recommend brands shift to an impressions-based or inclusionary reporting system.

5. Drive Conversion and Retention Through User Experience

Google SGE will likely include more of the awareness and consideration of audience search journeys. Not only will users be able to find out about brands through Google's AI conversation box, but they can learn more about their key benefits and high-level messages, and compare across competitors through SGE. While it's important to populate your website with substantive content to improve the chances of being sourced by SGE, audiences will likely turn to brand websites later in their search journeys. As a result, focus user experience efforts to facilitate conversion and retention rates.

SGE may draw out a user's time spent on the SERP, but audiences who ultimately land on brand sites from SGE organic searches will be more engaged with those brands. So, while brands may expect total organic search traffic to drop, they're more likely to be a qualified audience. Brands can take advantage of this by capturing audiences' interest in the moment with clear and prominent conversion opportunities such as customer relationship management that nurtures relationships with target audiences.

Finally, consider what SGE won't be able to provide. Interactive tools, direct sourcing material (such as clinical trial data) and community building will prove to be valuable content additions to support users entering brand websites from an SGE.

Is SGE the Next Frontier for Digital Marketers?

While digital marketers may expect some changes following the rollout of Google's SGE, ultimately adhering to today's best practices of putting audiences first will best serve brands through this rollout. In an age of technology and AI, SGE suggests human intelligence and engagement is still a priority.

When planning for 2024, teams should focus on strong communications, digital strategy and the intricacies of telling an inherently human story.

[Contact us](#) for a more in-depth conversation on how to prepare brands for Google's SGE impacts.

Disclaimer: Google algorithms are always changing and updating, and the SGE rollout is no different. The information in this point of view article reflects the state of SGE at time of publication.