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agentic ai:
what does it mean for search marketers and how to prepare?

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Written on behalf of the
IAB Australia Future of Search Working Group

what is agentic ai in search

In the context of Search Engines and Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Agentic AI represents a shift from AI as a "response engine" (finding information) to an "execution engine" (completing tasks).

While traditional AI (like LLMs) focuses on predicting and summarising information, Agentic AI is designed to achieve goals by navigating tools, reasoning through steps and taking actions on behalf of users.

In search, this means systems that can interpret intent and take action across multiple environments to fulfil that intent. Rather than returning static results, they can plan, execute and verify tasks with limited user input, acting as a "digital delegate" for the user.

The key characteristics of agentic systems are as follows:

> Proactive & autonomous: Agents can initiate tasks and make decisions without constant user input.
> Goal-oriented: They are designed to understand and work towards a final objective.
> Multi-step task execution: Agents can break down a complex request into a series of smaller actions and execute them in sequence.
> Personalised & context-aware: They learn from user preferences and past interactions to deliver highly tailored outcomes.
> Conversational & natural: Interaction feels less like commanding a computer and more like delegating to an assistant.

For agents to achieve tasks autonomously on behalf of their users, agents need common languages, just as HTTP and HTML enabled the web to be browsed for humans to interact with.

A new suite of industry-standard protocols are required for agents to communicate, transact and trust one another. While the "agentic stack" is still in its infancy, several specific approaches and protocols are emerging as the most likely building blocks. The most traction has been seen in defining how agents talk to each other, transact on behalf of users and how they are governed.

layer	what does it do?	what problem does it solve?
Agent-to-Agent Protocol (A2A) - Google		
Agent-to-Agent Communication	How agents from different platforms find, trust, and collaborate with each other.	Provides a standardised way for Agent A to ask Agent B a question and actually understand the answer. Handles authentication. It allows agents to verify who they are talking to and ensures that sensitive data (like your credit card info) is handled securely. Allows for "delegation". Instead of one giant AI trying to do everything, one agent can hire another agent to perform a specific niche task.
Model Context Protocol (MCP) - Anthropic, OpenAI and others		
Agent-to-Data: Tools Connection	How agents access real-time information and external capabilities outside their training data to make decisions.	Simplifies how agents connect to external data and tools. Can "plug in" and use external dataset without having to write separate code to integrate with each AI provider and database Provide a secure and standardised way to navigate your data. These protocols provide the "roadmap" for the Agent to move between different data silos safely.
NLWeb (Natural Language Web) - Microsoft		
Agent-to-Website Interface	How agents query and interact with existing websites content	It provides accuracy: When an agent searches the website, it summarises what it finds and reduces reliance on summarised content which can lead to hallucinations. With NLWeb, the agent gets information directly from the source's database reducing risk of guessing. Standardises the way websites look for the machine and make interaction between websites scalable Allows websites to expose "actions" to agents (eg: booking, checking a tracking number, or adding an item to a cart) without the agent needing to "find the button" on the screen.
Universal Commerce Protocol (UCP) - Google led initiative		
Agent-to-Commerce Transaction	How agents complete purchases and transactions on behalf of users?	An emerging approach to standardising transactions Lets the agent talk directly to the store's backend to add items to a cart without clicking anything Allows to securely link loyalty programs so the agent automatically gets users member discount Standardises how payment and shipping info are passed between the agent and the store, turning a 10-minute manual checkout into a 2-second confirmation.

why it matters?

Consumers' expectations and behaviours are evolving as technology enables them to delegate some of their actions taken online.

According to a Microsoft study [1], 58% of consumers are ready for AI agents to replace some of their traditional websites search, particularly for tasks like shopping.

Similarly, 68% of respondents state that they either like using automation for simple tasks or "love it" for making life "easier and more efficient".

Amongst Australian consumers, Agentic AI usage (or plan to use) is growing fast; with 60% of respondents "expecting to be using agentic AI in their daily lives" [3]

In addition, in its annual report Gartner [2] predicts that by 2028, "70% of customer service journeys will begin - and be resolved - in conversational AI using third-party assistants built into their mobile devices".

However, despite the consumer readiness in principle, users are still navigating the changes with control and trust remaining at the forefront of their concerns, particularly in Australia.

In a study published by XM institute, only 14% of respondents in Australia trust organisations to use AI responsibly. When asked about "what are you most concerned about if companies use AI to automate their interactions with customers?"
The top concerns are:

1. **Lack of humans to connect with 61%,**
2. **Misuse of personal data 56%.**

Furthermore, 66% of respondents say the ability to manually override or stop an automated action is critical.

In summary, consumers have high trust in agents particularly for low-stakes tasks but want to remain in control and want to make sure that decisions made on their behalf can be trusted and in their best interest.

why search marketers should care about agentic ai?

In this new eco-system and new way of completing actions in the digital world, marketers need to consider and integrate multiple factors for them to stay relevant, part of the consideration sets and ultimately being chosen by consumers and their agents.

> Impact on traditional marketing funnel

This is a continuation of the IAB Australia's Future of Search Working Group's previous paper on the topic (Instant Answers and Discovery: The Future of Search) where experience from product discovery, consideration and purchase can happen all at once. Agentic AI exacerbates this phenomenon by discovering, considering and purchasing in a matter of seconds.

A marketing funnel that includes consumers agents will start with "discoverability". Can an agent even find your brand, products and services to evaluate them against their tasks. It is awareness but not in the traditional sense.

> Discoverability by the new "customers"

Becoming discoverable by agents becomes critical to not miss an opportunity to reach and convert with customers. Brands who are not discoverable will not be considered.

In addition, agents make decisions based on existing data points and preferences from the users and evaluate brands, services and products to make (rational) decisions that fulfill the task given. The emotional factors are reduced if not eliminated entirely for more factual and credential-based criteria. Brands have therefore a need to fully understand how their brands are perceived online and what type of information and signals their digital infrastructure are sent and perceived by the agents.

> The eco-system is evolving (emerging protocol stack)

Rolling out the emerging protocol stack requires careful planning and time. Brands that take a proactive approach, developing a clear roadmap, evolving their infrastructure, and considering dependencies with existing technology, security protocols, and regulatory/compliance governance, will be best positioned. This preparation will enable them to meet consumer expectations, deliver market differentiation, and capture market share from less prepared competitors.

> Collaboration across marketing systems

Another strong use case is how agents will drive collaboration across marketing systems. They will be able to help marketers and agencies not only run media but run it effectively, not only set your strategy but save time on tactical tasks, understand your data and what works and doesn't work across ads, analytics, feeds/merchant centres and programmatic execution. Agents will be able to talk to each other across the systems and surfaces and reduce the workload of crunching data in a spreadsheet before actioning in another tool.

> Consumer trust

Trust is the primary currency of the agentic era. To earn and maintain this trust, brands must move beyond the simple message "we care about your data and your privacy" and offer transparent solutions for humans to fully understand and control how decisions are made.

That means recording not just the agent's actions but also the "prompts, decisions, internal state changes, and intermediate reasoning" [9] that led to those behaviours. This is essential for auditability, root cause analysis, and maintaining consumer confidence when errors occur.

It also means building trust through tangible and automated actions. For instance, spotting a delayed shipment and proactively reissuing a refund or offering a discount before the consumer reaches out.

considerations on traditional paid + organic search journeys

Agentic A.I is another layer and an integral part of Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO). The same way, content and pages need to be tailored for LLM bot's crawlers, product information feed and catalog needs to be optimised for agents.

> Organic Search:

Before exploring Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO) or Answer Engine Optimisation (AEO), it's essential to have strong SEO and website fundamentals in place. Both Microsoft and Google emphasise that success in AI-driven search is built on core search principles—delivering high-quality, relevant content, ensuring fast and accessible experiences across devices, maintaining strong security, and demonstrating depth or authority in a specific area. These foundations remain critical, as generative search experiences are grounded in existing ranking systems and use techniques like retrieval-augmented generation (RAG), grounding, and query expansion to surface the most relevant, up-to-date content.

To compete effectively, organisations should focus on strengthening their AI Data, Content, and Performance capabilities—leveraging first-party data and measurement, investing in rich and trustworthy content, and using both to power high-performing AI-driven experiences. At the same time, visibility increasingly depends on being "agent-ready," using structured and semi-structured data (e.g., schema.org, JSON-LD, feeds) so AI systems can accurately interpret and surface content. These efforts should come together in a broader GEO strategy that ensures discoverability not just in traditional search, but across chat-based and AI-powered experiences.

> Paid Search:

Product feeds and catalogs need to be upgraded to be able to deliver against agents' requirements and capture sales based on user conversations. The table below provides topline examples and implications of such a change.

Feature	Traditional feed	Agentic search
Primary goal	Drive a click to the site.	Execute a conversion in the chat or completed by the agent on the user's behalf.
Success metric	Click-Through Rate (CTR).	Agentic Conversion Rate (ACR).
Title strategy	Keyword-rich and catchy.	Simple and factual.
Attributes	"Optional" (size, colour).	"Mandatory" (everything).
Inventory	Updated daily (or hourly).	Real-time updates / API sync.

The new metrics to evaluate agentic search:

To evaluate agentic commerce activity, traditional metrics like click, visits, bounce rate or conversion rate won't be relevant. Evaluating agentic activity will rely on metrics that are an intricate combination of human validations and agents' success in completing a given task.

> Consideration: Was the brand discovered and considered by the agent?
Possible metric: Consideration set / shortlist rate

> Confidence: Did the interaction earn the user's trust?
Possible metric: Recommendation acceptance rate

> Completion: Did the agent fulfill the user's intent?
Possible metric: Agent conversion rate.'

> Continuation: Did the session deepen brand loyalty or lead to the next logical step/ action?
Metrics will vary depending on objective

For new measurement approaches, emerging metrics should sit alongside existing approaches such as incrementality and MMM rather than just replace them.

Set priorities based on your role (commerce/retail, content or product-led), including:

-
> product, pricing and availability (commerce)
> content quality and discoverability (publishers/content)
> clarity and completeness of product or service information

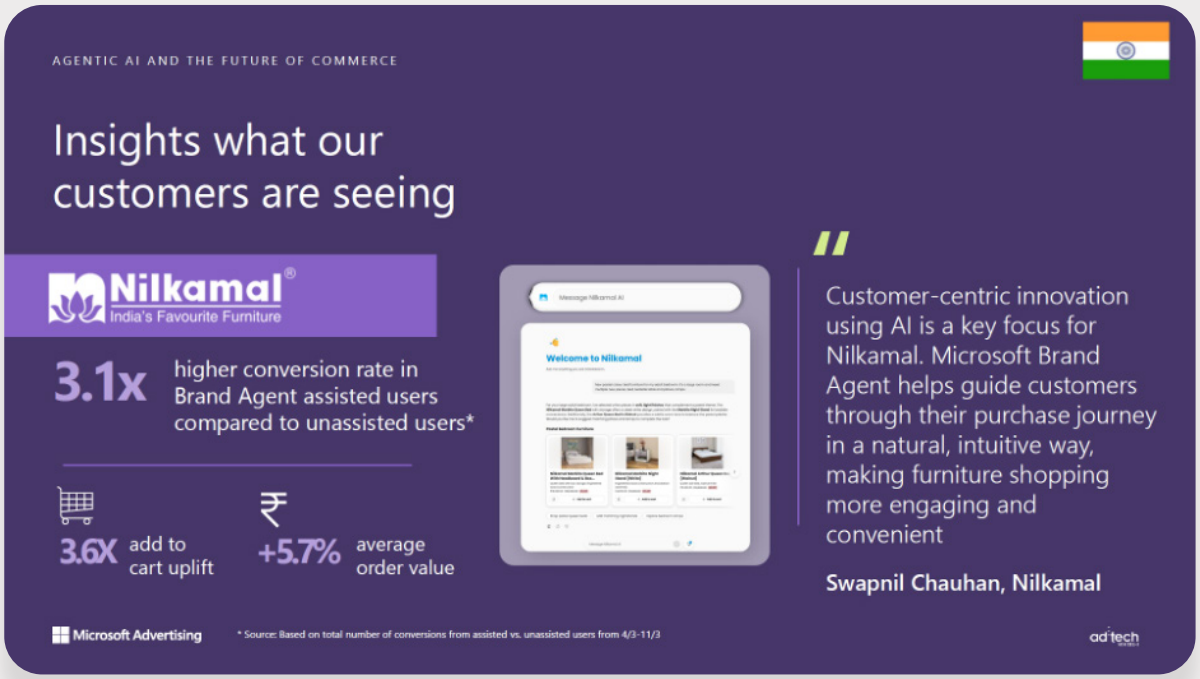
Identify where agent-led interactions are most relevant (e.g. onsite assistants), and for paid media prioritise modernising product feed infrastructure.

This should sit alongside other AI visibility actions:

> Audit machine-level discoverability
> Modernise product and content data

These are practical capability shifts, not major transformations, but they will shape how brands are discovered, evaluated and selected.

While Agentic Search is still in its infancy, in terms of infrastructure, consumer habits and behaviours, agencies and brands have an opportunity to build a priority roadmap to be agentic ready. As we've seen in the last 3 years, with AI related technologies, once the technology is available, adoption has spiked rapidly (quicker than any other technology/platform in the past).



Very recent launches from Google have included Universal Cart, an intelligent shopping cart and your new hub for shopping on Google. It works across merchants and across services, so you can add things to your cart while you're browsing Search, chatting with Gemini, watching YouTube, or even reading your Gmail. The moment you add a product, your cart goes to work for you in the background. It finds deals and price drops, gives you insights on price history, and alerts you when something comes back in stock.

actions for agencies and brands

Headline	**Identify where agent-led interactions are most relevant** *(e.g. onsite assistants)*
Actions	Map your customer journey and identify where an agent is likely to act for the user: discovery, comparison, purchase or post-purchase support. Start with the touchpoints that are highest value and highest volume. For paid media, modernising product feed infrastructure should come first, as agent-led conversion depends on it.
Priority: High	

Headline	**Set priorities based on your role** *(commerce/retail, content or product-led)*
Actions	Focus on what matters for your business model. Commerce and retail brands should prioritise accurate, real-time product, pricing and availability data. Publishers and content owners should prioritise content quality, structure and machine discoverability. Product and service brands should prioritise clear, complete product or service information so agents can evaluate them correctly. Assign owners for each so the work does not stall between marketing, product and engineering.
Priority: High	

Headline	**Start building consumer trust**
Actions	Give users transparency and control rather than data-privacy assurances. Log the agent's prompts, decisions and reasoning, not just its actions, so interactions can be audited when something goes wrong. Make it easy to override or stop an automated action as 66% of Australian consumers say this matters. Use proactive service recovery to build confidence, for example flagging a delayed shipment and issuing a refund or discount before the customer asks.
Priority: High	

Headline	**Audit machine-level discoverability**
Actions	Check whether agents can find, read and correctly interpret your brand, products and services. Review structured data (Schema.org, JSON-LD, feeds) for accuracy and completeness. Test how your brand is represented across major AI search and chat interfaces, and fix gaps or misrepresentation. Run this alongside a broader Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO) approach.
Priority: High	

Headline	**Modernise product and content data**
Actions	Upgrade product feeds and catalogues to meet agent requirements: complete attributes rather than optional ones, plain factual titles rather than keyword-led ones, and real-time inventory via API rather than daily updates. Make content agent-ready with consistent structured data. Treat this as ongoing data quality, not a one-off project.
Priority: Medium to High	

Headline	**Look to leading markets to see what's coming**
Actions	Monitor what is live and emerging in leading markets such as the US and UK, which get early access to platform releases and AI-powered search solutions. Review relevant developer documentation and identify how it could affect your brand. Factor in local conditions, as market needs and consumer behaviour can differ significantly
Priority: Medium	

sources & research

(1) Source: the-ai-web-race-to-zero-ui.pdf

(2) Source: https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2025-02-10-traditional-customer-service-channels-are-losing-ground-to-mobile-and-ai-innovations

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(8) Source: Overview | Google Universal Commerce Protocol (UCP) Guide | Google for Developers

(9) Source: https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/risk-and-resilience/our-insights/deploying-agentic-ai-with-safety-and-security-a-playbook-for-technology-leaders

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