

BRUNCH & LEARN

WHY HUMAN EFFORT IS COSTING YOU CONVERSIONS.



R



@reflectdigital



@ReflectDigital_

**Most people in this room
have blamed AI or the
algorithm this year.**

This talk is about why that's the wrong diagnosis.



THE NUMBERS EVERYONE KNOWS.



~68%

*of all Google searches now
end without a click*

SparkToro / Similarweb, 2026

-68%

*paid CTR drop on
informational queries with AI
Overviews*

Seer Interactive, Nov 2025

~50%

*of all searches now trigger an
AI Overview; up from 18% the
previous year*

Advanced Web Ranking, Q4 2025

IF ATTENTION SPANS ARE GETTING **SHORTER...**

...why is this still happening?

4.5 hrs

*Average daily video
consumed at home per
person
(Ofcom, 2025)*

51 mins

*Average daily time
spent on YouTube per
person
(Ofcom, 2025)*

+30secs

*reader engagement for
2,000 words articles vs
500 words
(Chartbeat)*

**People don't have
shorter attention spans...**

...they have a lower tolerance for wasted time.



THE TEAM BEHIND THE DATA.

Many of the AI and search insights in this presentation come from the work our **searchpulse team** do every quarter to track how behaviour is shifting in search.



**THE STORY WE ARE
TELLING TODAY.**



THE WRONG DIAGNOSIS.

The data, the myth, and why AI isn't to blame.



THE ACTUAL CULPRITS.

We would establish the core psychological shifts affecting performance.



THE EFFORT AUDIT.

A practical framework you can apply to your campaigns.



THE COST OF EFFORT.

A practical breakdown of losses made when incremental
impact is neglected.



AI ERA DISCOVERY AND THE NEW DAWN.

What you can take away from here, for Monday.

ACT 02

PSYCHOLOGICAL SHIFTS: THE REAL FACTORS BEHIND DECLINING PERFORMANCE.



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SHIFTS RESHAPING SEARCH.



Psychological Shifts

Cognitive Offloading

The brain outsources effort to available tools whenever doing so costs less than thinking itself.

Pre-Search Bias

People now arrive at search with a decision already forming.

Effort Asymmetry

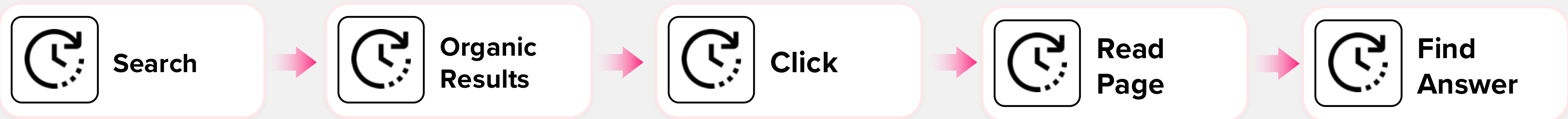
The perceived cost of engaging with your content versus the expected reward of doing so.

SHIFT 01: COGNITIVE OFFLOADING.

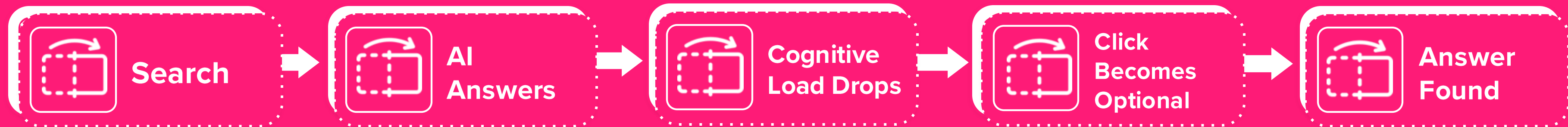


BrightonSEO

WHAT THIS USED TO MEAN:



WHAT THIS MEANS NOW:





Zero-click isn't an SEO problem. It's a tolerance problem wearing an SEO costume.

68%

US searches end
without a click.

Similarweb, 2026

~63%

EU searches end
without a click.

Similarweb, 2026

65%+

Informational queries
end without a click.

DeepMarketing, 2026

For paid: when the answer is free, the click you DO pay for has to work harder.

58%

OF UK 25-34s



REGULAR CHATGPT

-9%

GOOGLE SEARCH
USERSHIP



YOY DECLINE

+12%

GEMINI USERSHIP

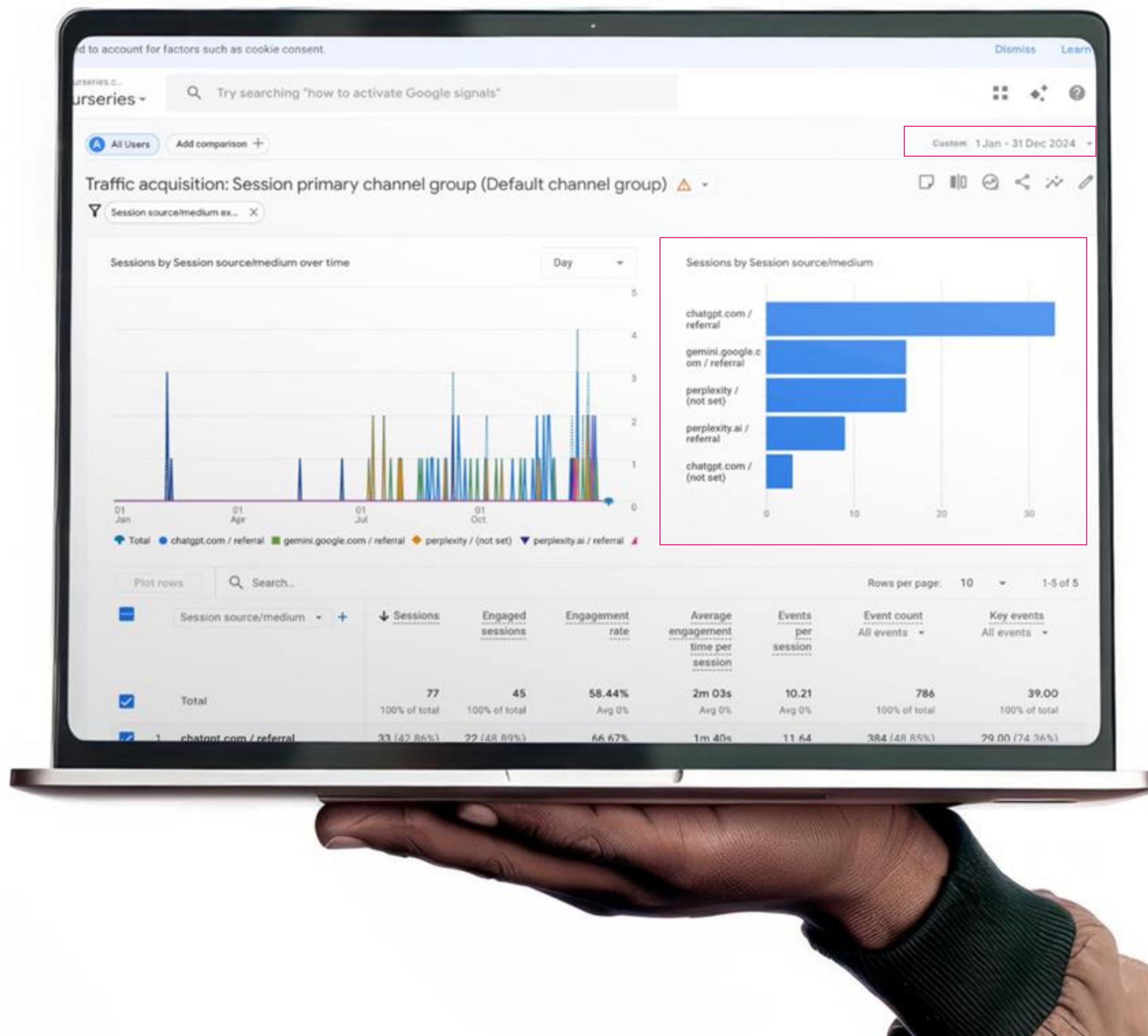
+ 17% USING AI MODE REGULARLY



YOY INCREASE

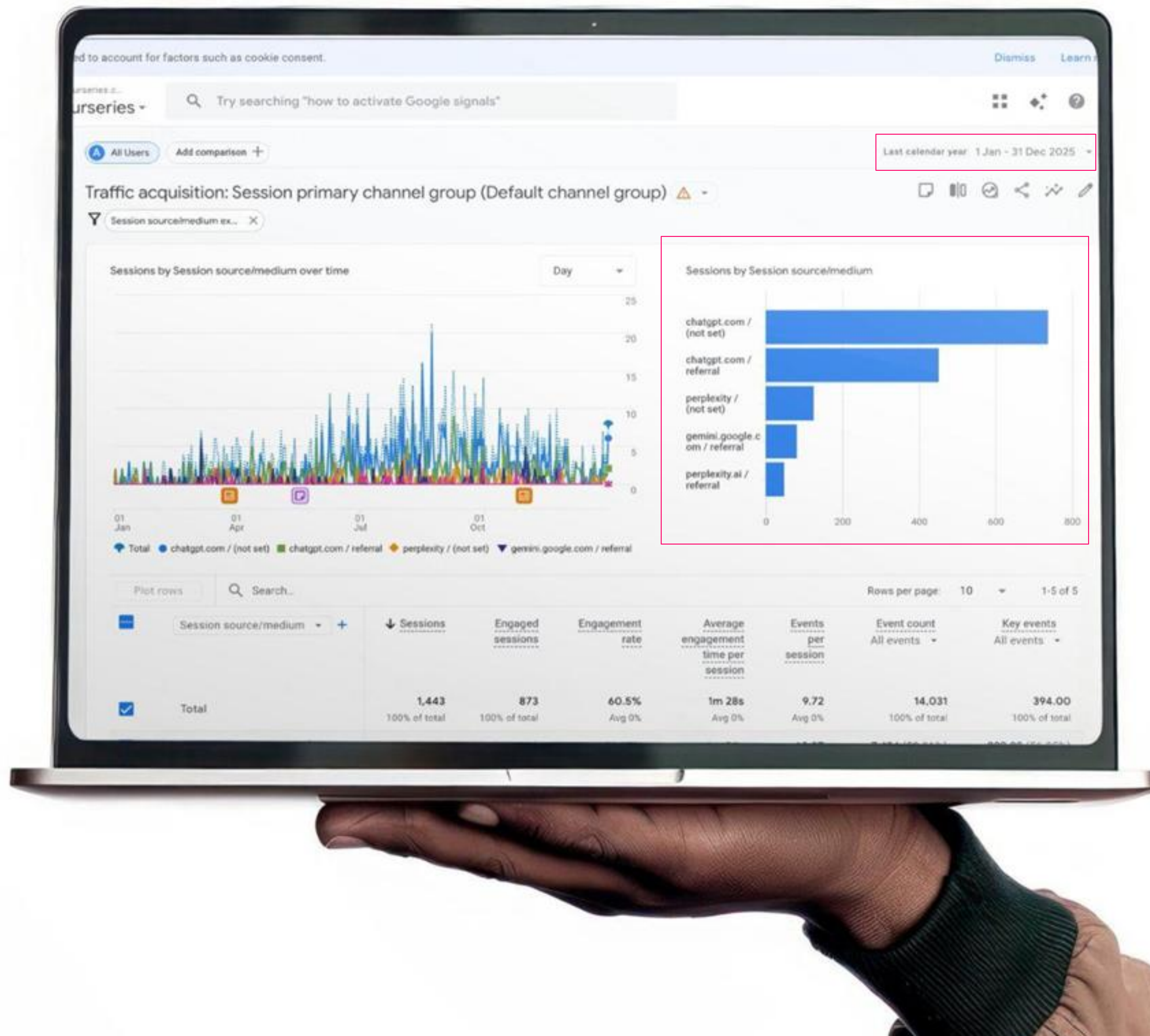


WHAT
THIS
MIGHT
LOOK
LIKE...



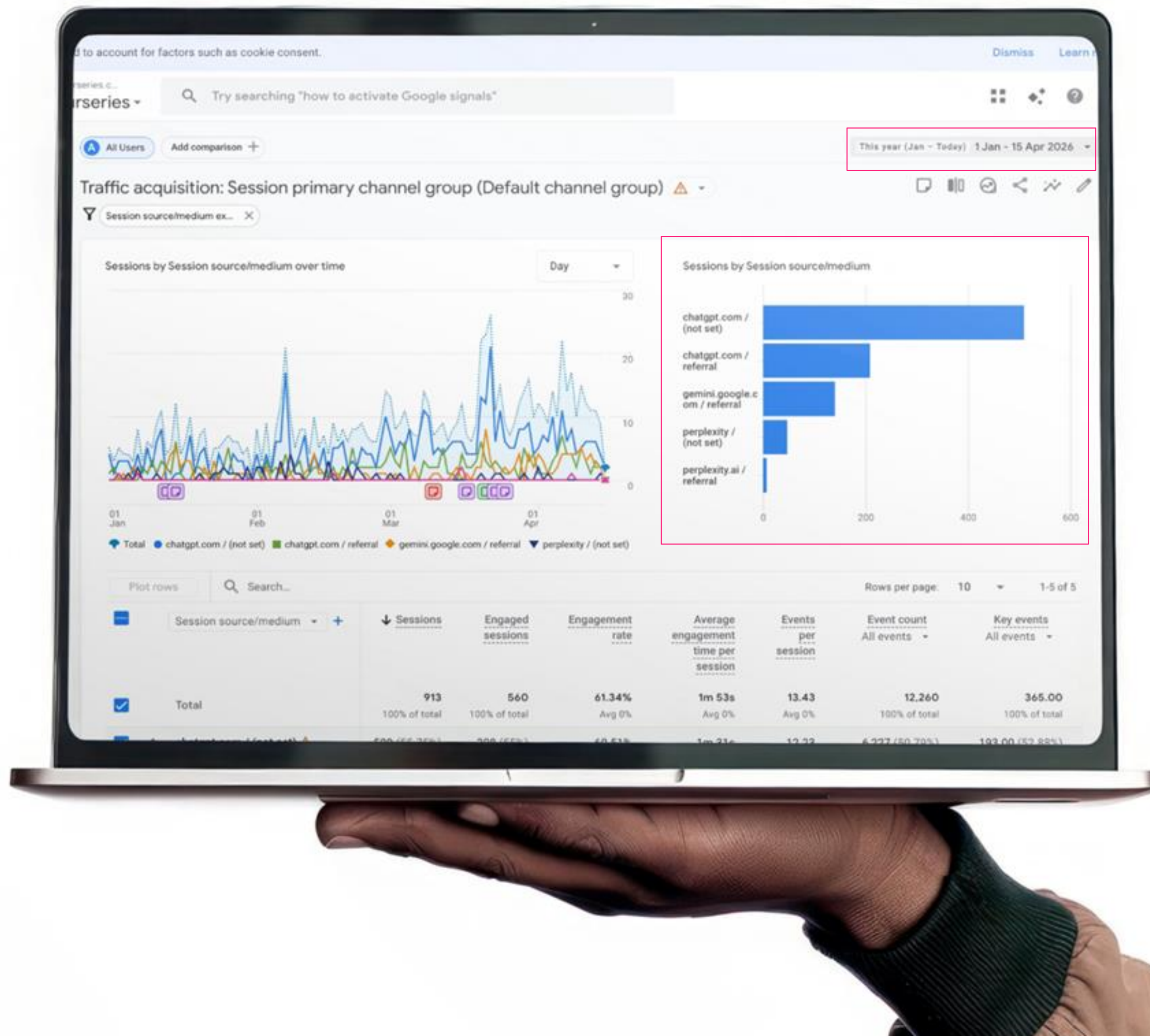
WITHIN
YOUR
ACCOUNTS.

**WHAT
THIS
MIGHT
LOOK
LIKE...**



**WITHIN
YOUR
ACCOUNTS.**

WHAT
THIS
MIGHT
LOOK
LIKE...



WITHIN
YOUR
ACCOUNTS.

SHIFT 02: PRE SEARCH BIAS.



Old Model

Search was exploration and pre-seeding awareness

Users came to discover options , compare and validate

Ad was an introduction and confirmation



New Model

AI and peer assistant pre-seed awareness

Search is validation, not discovery

Ad is a confirmation, not an introduction.

In other words, the click goes to whoever confirms what the user already suspects is true.

PRE-SEEDING AWARENESS: HOW THIS HAPPENS.



Before the user sees an answer,
AI has already asked **2–10 sub-queries on their behalf.**

89.6%

of prompts trigger
two or more sub-queries.

32.9%

of cited URLs are
only surfaced via fan-out.

3.5×

more citations for
pages ranking #1 on
Google.

Source: [AirOps 2026 — Fan-Out & SERP Influence Study](#)

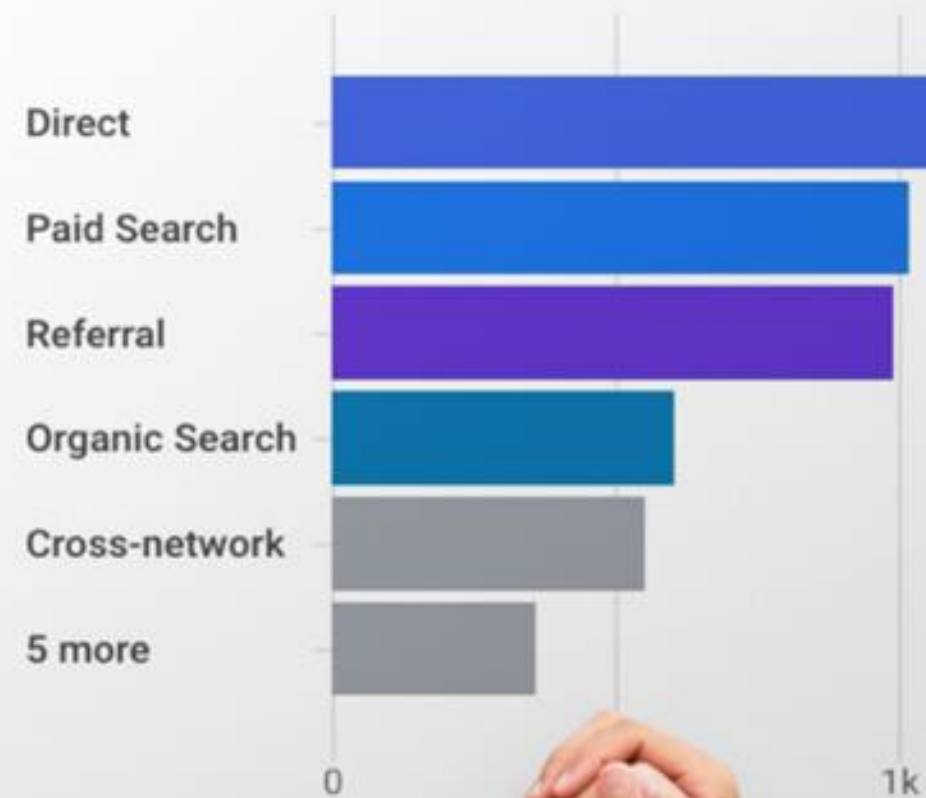
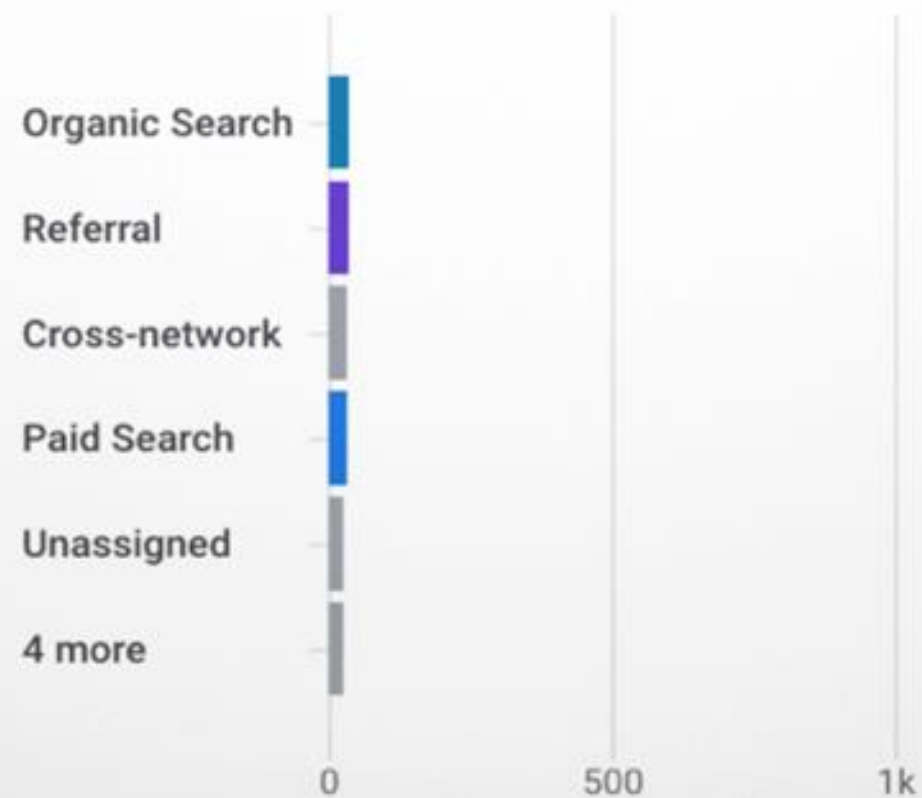
Key events by Primary channel group (Default channel group)▼ using Data-driven (Paid and organic channels)▼

2025 data

Early touch points 7.71%

Mid touch points 3.56%

Late touch points 88.73%



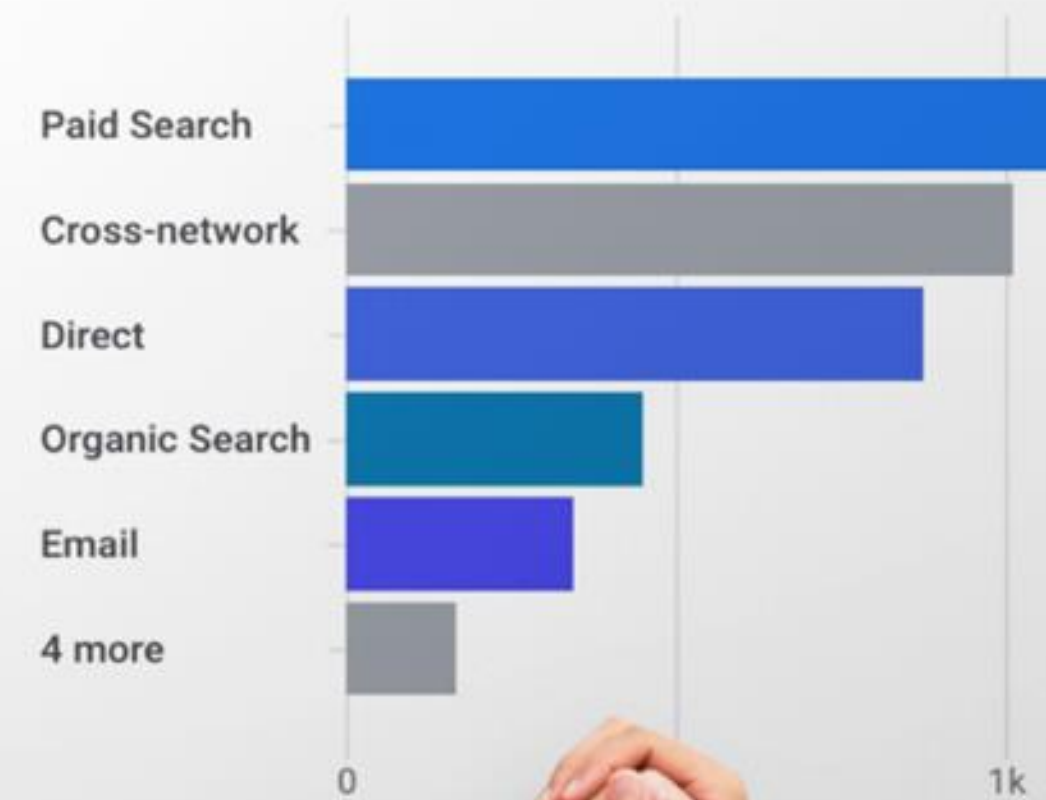
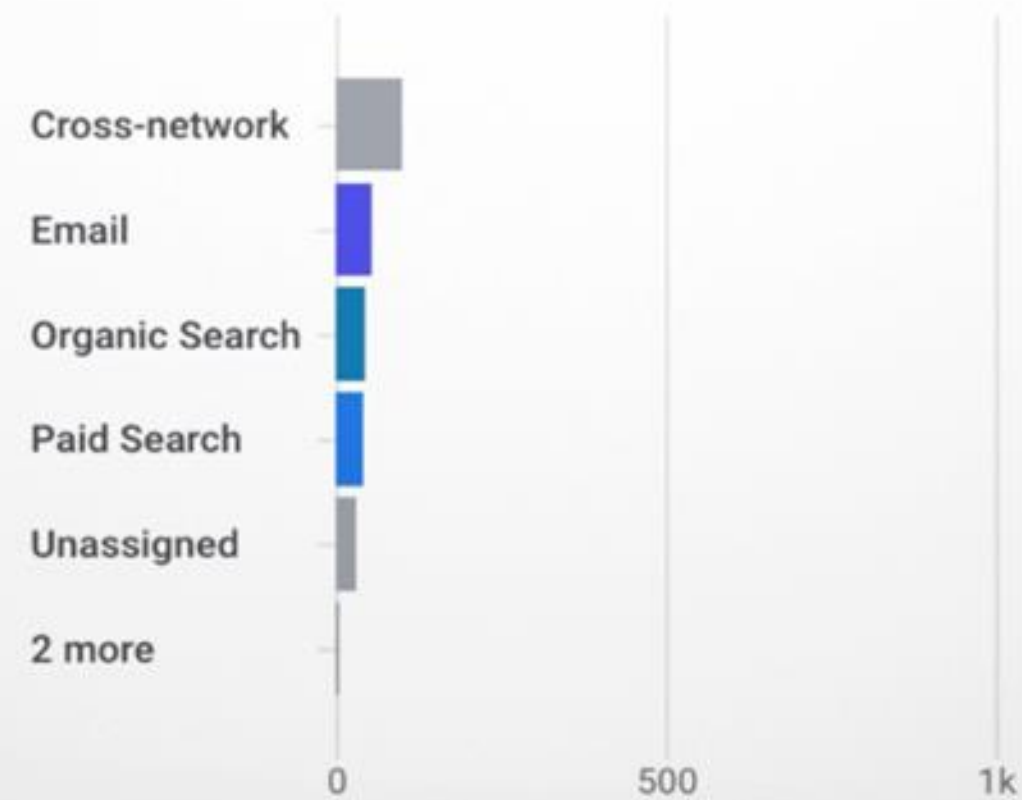
Key events by Primary channel group (Default channel group) using Data-driven (Paid and organic channels)

2026 data

Early touch points 8.47%

Mid touch points 5.84%

Late touch points 85.69%



35%
OF USERS



AI ANSWERS

60%
OF USERS



PERPLEXITY

70%
OF USERS



CHATGPT VS
PERPLEXITY



SHIFT 03: EFFORT ASYMMETRY COMPOUNDS.



SLOW LOAD

VAGUE HEADLINE

VAGUE CTA

**REQUIRES A CALL TO
GET THE PRICE**



Patience drops

Every second delays the reward.

Intent goes unmet

Users still do not know if this is for them.

Momentum breaks

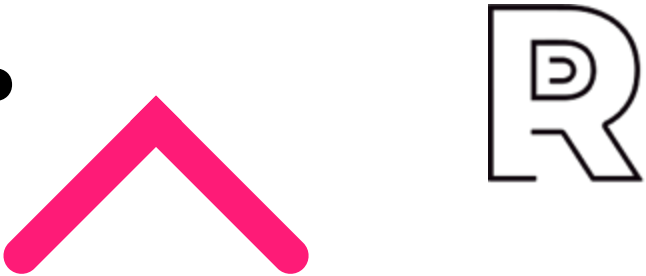
The next step feels unclear or non-committal.

Cost feels too high

Too much effort before basic value is revealed.



IT ALSO BREAKS DOWN & CONVERTS.

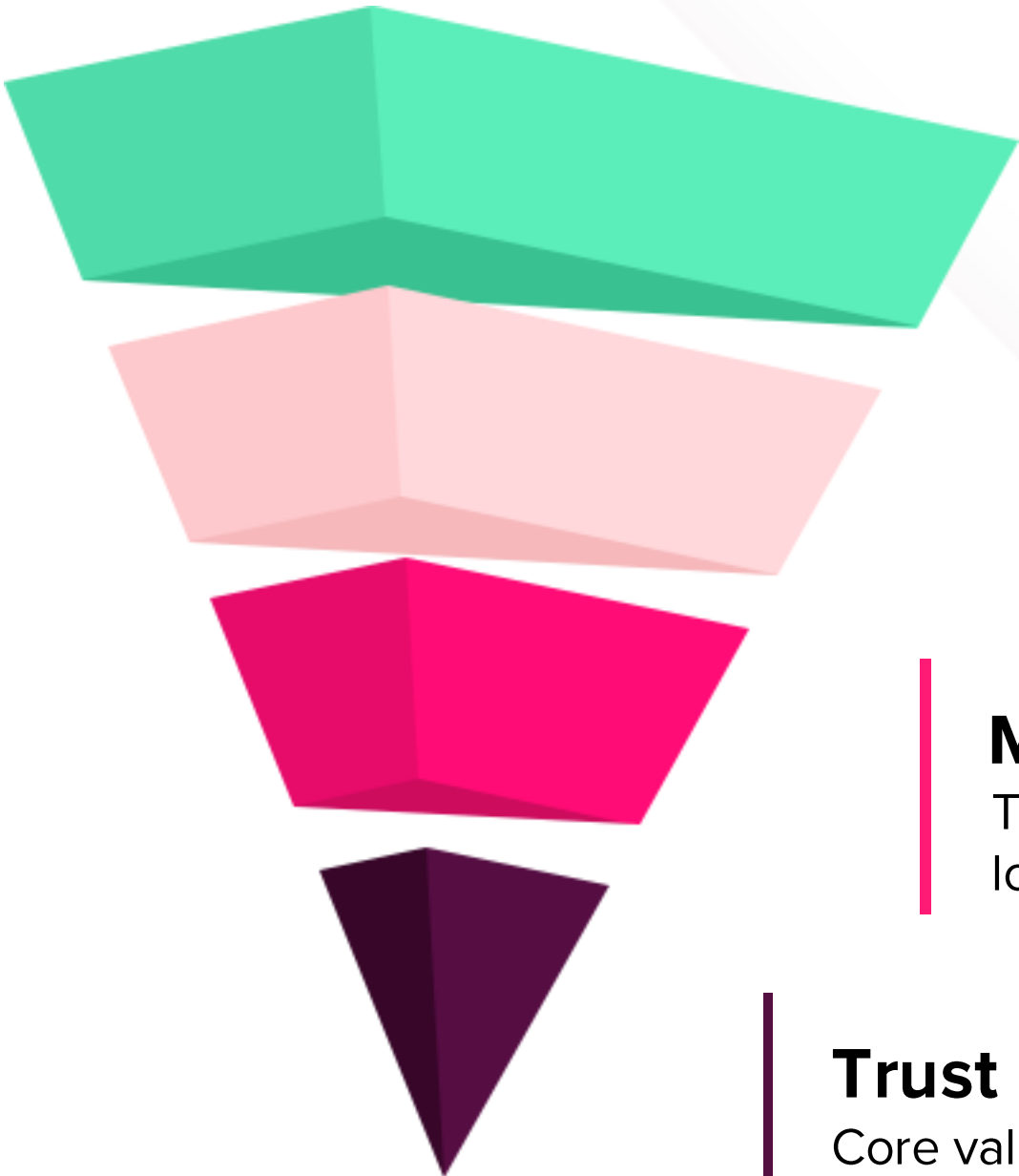


INSTANT LOAD

CLEAR HEADLINE

CLEAR CTA

VISIBLE PRICE



Reward arrives sooner
Value feels close from the very first second.

Clarity lands fast
Users instantly know they are in the right place.

Momentum keeps moving
The next step feels obvious, specific, and low-risk.

Trust builds faster
Core value is revealed before extra effort is asked.



WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE...

Website landing...	Engaged Users	First Name Form Click	Last Name Form Click	Email Form Click	Mobile Form Click	Business Name Form Click	Applications submitted	invitee_select_day	Invitee Time Selected	Invitee Meeting Scheduled
118	100	3	2	2	1	3	1	4	4	3
157	80	4	4	6	6	5	3	1	—	—
555	343	18	16	13	11	8	9	6	5	—
828	373	37	35	33	25	5	20	11	7	2
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
57	16	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
15	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
212	136	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	1
802	237	9	6	7	5	3	3	29	21	3
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

5 Fields

-48.6%

9 Field

-

**WITHIN
YOUR
ACCOUNTS.**

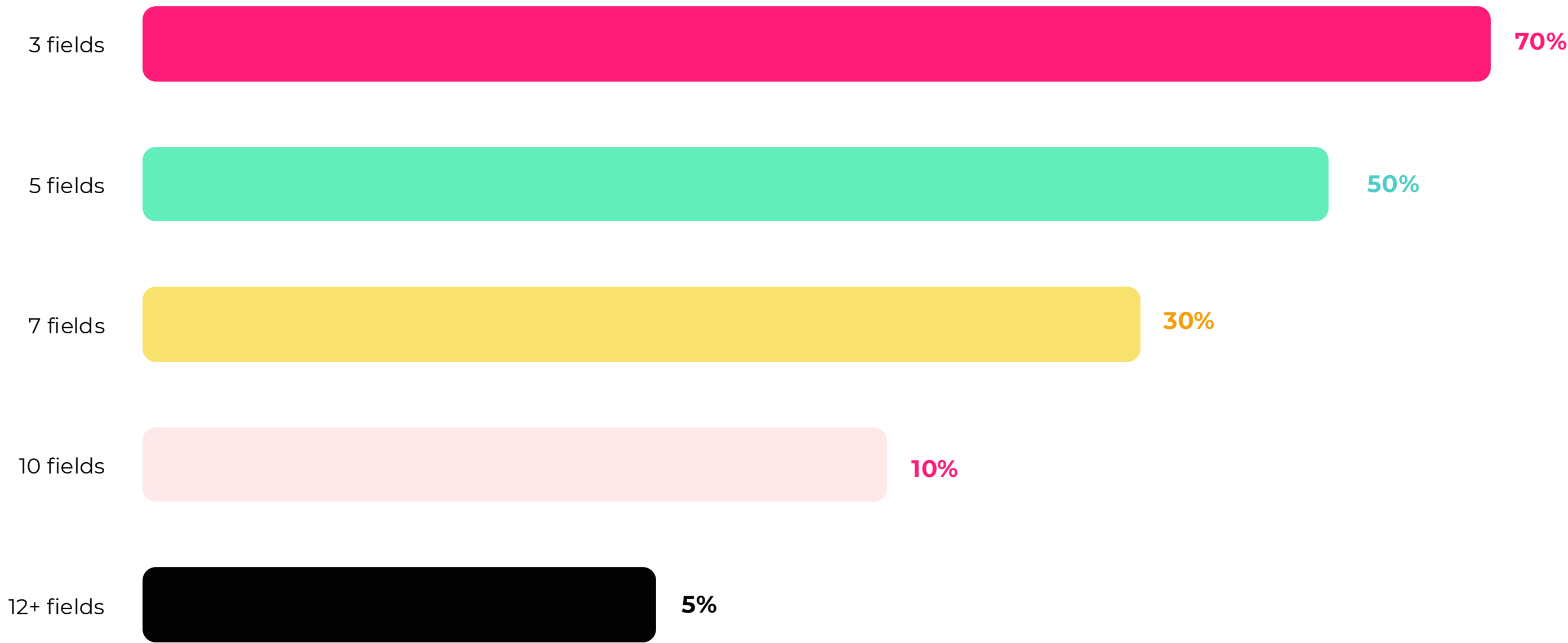
Website landing...	Engaged Users	First Name Form Click	Last Name Form Click	Email Form Click	Mobile Form Click	Business Name Form Click	Applications submitted	Cost per application...	invitee_select_day	Invitee Time Selected	Invitee Meeting Scheduled
2,778 Total	1,308 Total	76 Total	66 Total	65 Total	53 Total	30 Total	39 Total	£214.89 Per Action	55 Total	41 Total	7 Total

EFFORT AUDIT 01 & 02:

WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE WITHIN YOUR ACCOUNTS.



FIELD COUNT VS SUBMIT RATE



WHAT WE'VE COVERED IN THIS SECTION.



Modern
searchers want
the shortest
path to
confidence

AI has not
changed the
human; it has
exposed
existing
preferences for
ease, speed,
and clarity

What looks like
a media
problem is often
a journey
friction problem

In accounts,
that friction
shows up as
drop-off,
hesitation,
lower intent
depth, and lost
conversion
momentum



AI didn't change human behaviour...

...it revealed what people wanted once friction disappeared.



ACT 03

THE EFFORT AUDIT: **ADDRESSING DECLINING PERFORMANCE.**



ONE QUESTION. FOUR STAGES.



"What does the user have to do next and does it feel worth it?"



**THE
AD**



**THE CLICK
DECISION**



**THE
LANDING
PAGE**



THE ACTION

EFFORT AUDIT 01 & 02:

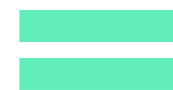
THE AD & CLICK DECISION.



“Does my headline answer what they searched or does it make them guess?”



“Is the perceived reward of clicking higher than the perceived cost of clicking?”



“I will/will not click to know more”

EFFORT AUDIT 01 & 02:

THE AD & CLICK DECISION.



The worst-performing ad is the one that **answers a question the user didn't ask.**

LOW-EFFORT AD

“Buy running shoes size 10 - free 48h delivery.”

Reads the query literally.
Confirms fit. Names the price of effort: zero.

HIGH-EFFORT AD

“Discover our award-winning performance footwear collection.”

Brand-proud. Vague on need.
User has to translate marketing back into a product they can buy.

EFFORT AUDIT 01 & 02:

WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE WITHIN YOUR ACCOUNTS.

Ad type	Clicks	Impr.	↓ CTR	Avg. CPC	Cost	Conv. value	Conv. value / cost	Revenue per impression	Conv. rate	Conversion	Cost / conv.
Responsive search ad A	1,580	2,372	66.61%	£1.10	£1,740.33	20,471.85	11.76	£8.63	3.64%	57.51	£30.26
Responsive search ad B	428	1,108	38.63%	£1.13	£482.48	4,859.34	10.07	£4.39	6.40%	27.39	£17.61

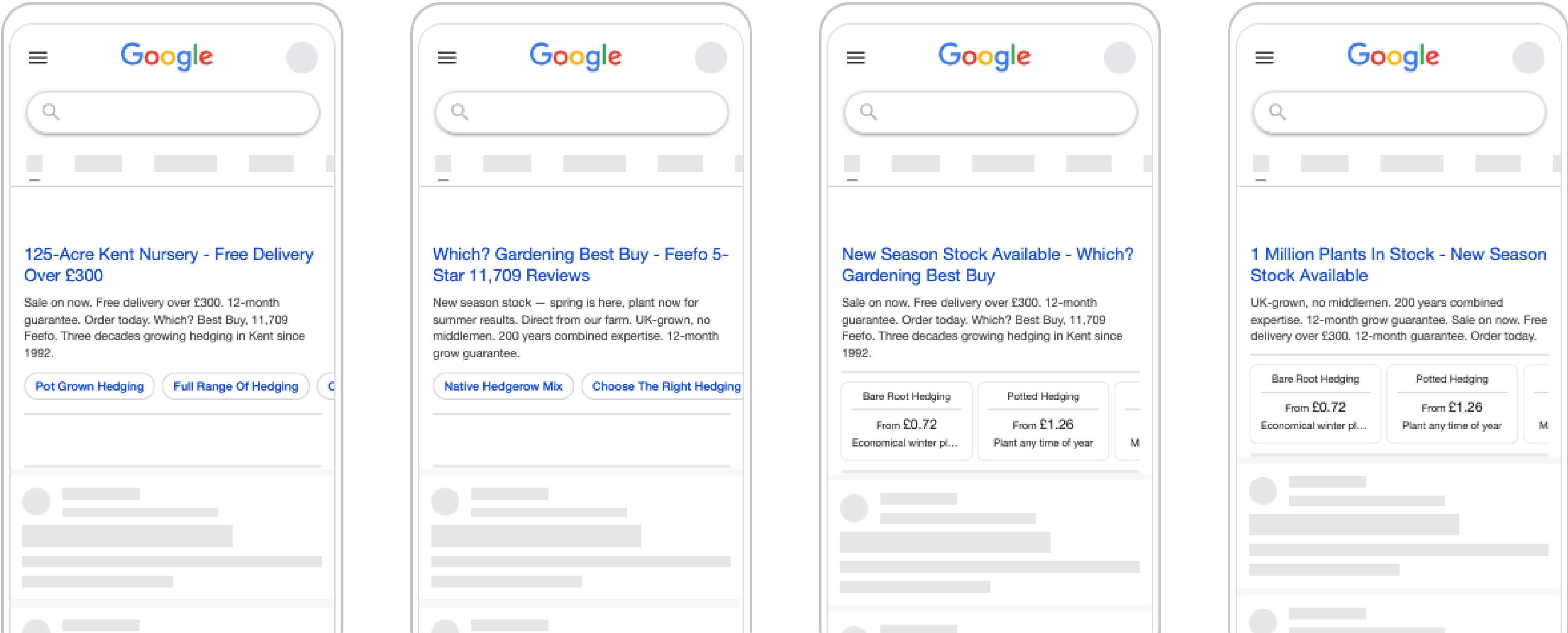
WHICH OF THESE IS THE BETTER
RESPONSIVE AD BASED ON PERFORMANCE?

EFFORT AUDIT 01 & 02:

WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE WITHIN YOUR ACCOUNTS.



RESPONSIVE AD A



EFFORT AUDIT 01 & 02:

WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE WITHIN YOUR ACCOUNTS.



RESPONSIVE AD B

Google

Get Hedging in Simple Steps - Expert Advice on All Purchases

Discover the best hedges for your outdoor space when you order with us today. Shop our full range of hedging plants and get them in the ground before summer arrives.

Bare Root Hedging

From £0.72

Economical winter pl...

Potted Hedging

From £1.26

Plant any time of year

M

Avoid Summer Planting Stress - 30+ Years Hedging Excellence

Buy with Hopes Grove Nurseries & join the happy customers rating our products 4.8/5. Discover the best hedges for your outdoor space when you order with us today.

Pot Grown Hedging

Online Catalogue

Get Hedging in Simple Steps - Expert Advice on All Purchases

Discover the best hedges for your outdoor space when you order with us today. Shop our full range of hedging plants and get them in the ground before summer arrives.

Bare Root Hedging

From £0.72

Economical winter pl...

Potted Hedging

From £1.26

Plant any time of year

M

Garden With Ease - Get Hedging in Simple Steps

Discover the best hedges for your outdoor space when you order with us today. Easy-care, premium quality hedges - buy industry standard hedging from professionals.

20% off your first order

SAME QUESTION APPLIES TO ORGANIC SNIPPETS.



Does the preview **earn the click?**

 Nike
https://www.nike.com › ...

Nike. Just Do It. Nike UK

Inspiring the world's athletes, Nike delivers innovative products, experiences and services.

Running

Discover everything you need to know about Nike Running ...

>

Nike Running

Discover everything you need to know about Nike Running ...

>

Men's Shoes, Clothing ...

Discover the latest men's lifestyle and activewear from Nike ...

>

Nike Sale(573)

Capitalise on signature trainer & clothing styles with the Nike ...

>

Women

Explore the latest styles and innovations from Nike Women ...

>

[More results from nike.com »](#)

 adidas UK
https://www.adidas.co.uk › ...

adidas Official Website UK | Sportswear

Explore the official adidas shop for a wide range of adidas shoes, sports clothing and equipment for adults and kids. Get free returns for 30 days.

Mens Running Shoes

Morning jog or weekend miles, men's running trainers, like the ...



Running Shoes

adidas designs running footwear with technologies that support ...

>

Men's Shoes

adidas Mens Shoes have been a staple in sportswear and street ...

>

Running Shoes, Clothing & Gear

Shop our collection of adidas running shoes, clothes and gear ...

>

Men

Shop our selection of adidas men's shoes, clothing and accessories ...

>

[More results from adidas.co.uk »](#)

ON TODAY'S SERP, YOUR TITLE TAG IS YOUR AD



Audit your own SERP like a paid ad auction: **every pixel is a click decision.**

Ad

 Google Ad
www.freshkicks.co.uk/running-shoes



Running Shoes | Buy Now | FreshKicks UK

Ad · www.freshkicks.co.uk/running-shoes ▾

Shop the latest running shoes. Huge range of styles and sizes available.
Order today.

 Google Ad
www.freshkicks.co.uk/running-shoes



Running Shoes 2026 — Free 48h Delivery, 30-day returns

Ad · www.freshkicks.co.uk/running-shoes ▾

Get your new running shoes fast with free 48h delivery. Shop with confidence with our 30-day return policy.

Organic

 FreshKicks
www.freshkicks.co.uk › running-shoes-trainers



Running Shoes & Trainers | FreshKicks UK

www.freshkicks.co.uk › running-shoes-trainers ▾

Discover our collection of running shoes and trainers. Find the perfect pair for your run.

 FreshKicks
www.freshkicks.co.uk › best-running-shoes-uk-2026



Best Running Shoes UK 2026 — Tested by Real Runners | FreshKicks

Shop the best running shoes at FreshKicks. Free delivery & returns. Find your perfect pair for 2026. Start running today!

EFFORT AUDIT 03: THE LANDING PAGE.



“Within a few seconds to a minute, can they see what made you earn the click?”

HIGH EFFORT

1

Hero: brand photography, zero copy.

2

First text: awards + 'About Us'

3

Price: below the fold (3 scrolls down)

4

CTA: 'Find Out More' → another page

5

Form: 11 fields incl. 'How did you hear'

6

Load time: >5 seconds

EFFORT AUDIT 03: THE LANDING PAGE.



“Within a few seconds to a minute, can they see what made you earn the click?”

LOW EFFORT

1

Hero: name + price range + CTA button

2

First text: specific benefits, scannable

3

Price: visible at the top of the fold

4

CTA: 'Book a viewing this week' → form

5

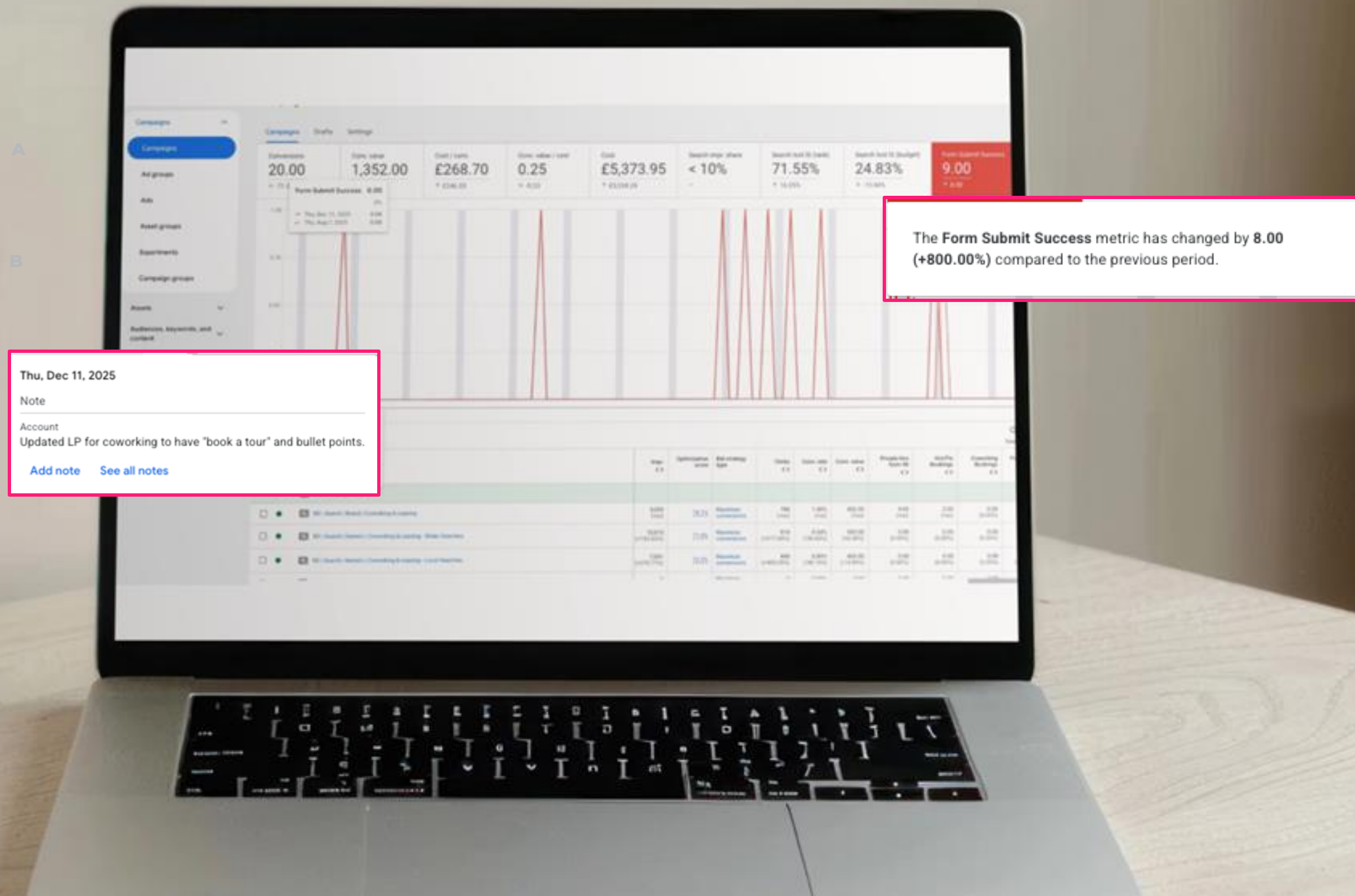
Form: 4 fields - name, email, phone

6

Load time: <3 seconds

EFFORT AUDIT 03:

WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE WITHIN YOUR ACCOUNTS.



EFFORT AUDIT 04: THE ACTION.



“Does converting feel like work or like the obvious next step?”

THE RULE

Match action layer length to the commitment level of the product.

First-touch form:
Max 4 fields
(recommended):
name, email, phone,
intent/timeline

EFFORT AUDIT 04: THE ACTION.



“Does converting feel like work or like the obvious next step?”

THE RULE

Match action layer length
to the commitment level
of the product.



**Anything over 5
fields
on first contact is likely
costing you conversions**

EFFORT AUDIT 04: THE ACTION.



“Does converting feel like work or like the obvious next step?”

THE RULE

Match action layer length
to the commitment level
of the product.

**Every extra
field/step
=
a measurable drop in
submit rate (typically 5–
15% per field)**

EFFORT AUDIT 04: THE ACTION.



“Does converting feel like work or like the obvious next step?”

THE RULE

Match action layer length to the commitment level of the product.



You can qualify leads after the first click, not before.

EFFORT AUDIT 04: THE ACTION.



“Does converting feel like work or like the obvious next step?”

THE RULE

Match action layer length to the commitment level of the product.

Use conditional logic:
show more fields or steps only if they indicate high intent

EFFORT AUDIT 04:

WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE.



Business Name

What is your enquiry regarding? *

Coworking

Enquiry Questions

I would like to sign-up to receive regular news and updates from Design District. By ticking this box you agree to the terms of our Privacy Policy*

☐

Read our Privacy Policy

Submit



3 Nov 2025 - 30 Nov 2025

Applications submitted	↑↓	Cost per application...	↑↓
8		£546.59	
Total		Per Action	

4 Dec 2025 - 31 Dec 2025

Applications submitted	↑↓	Cost per application...	↑↓
6		£142.83	
Total		Per Action	

November 3rd

December 3rd

December 4th

December 31st

WHAT WE'VE COVERED IN THIS SECTION.



**Declining
performance can
be audited across
four stages of
effort**

**The ad must
make the click
feel clear and
worth it**

**The landing page
must quickly
confirm value,
relevance, and
direction**

**The action must
feel like the
obvious next step,
not extra work**

**Small friction fixes
across the journey
can unlock
meaningful
performance gains**

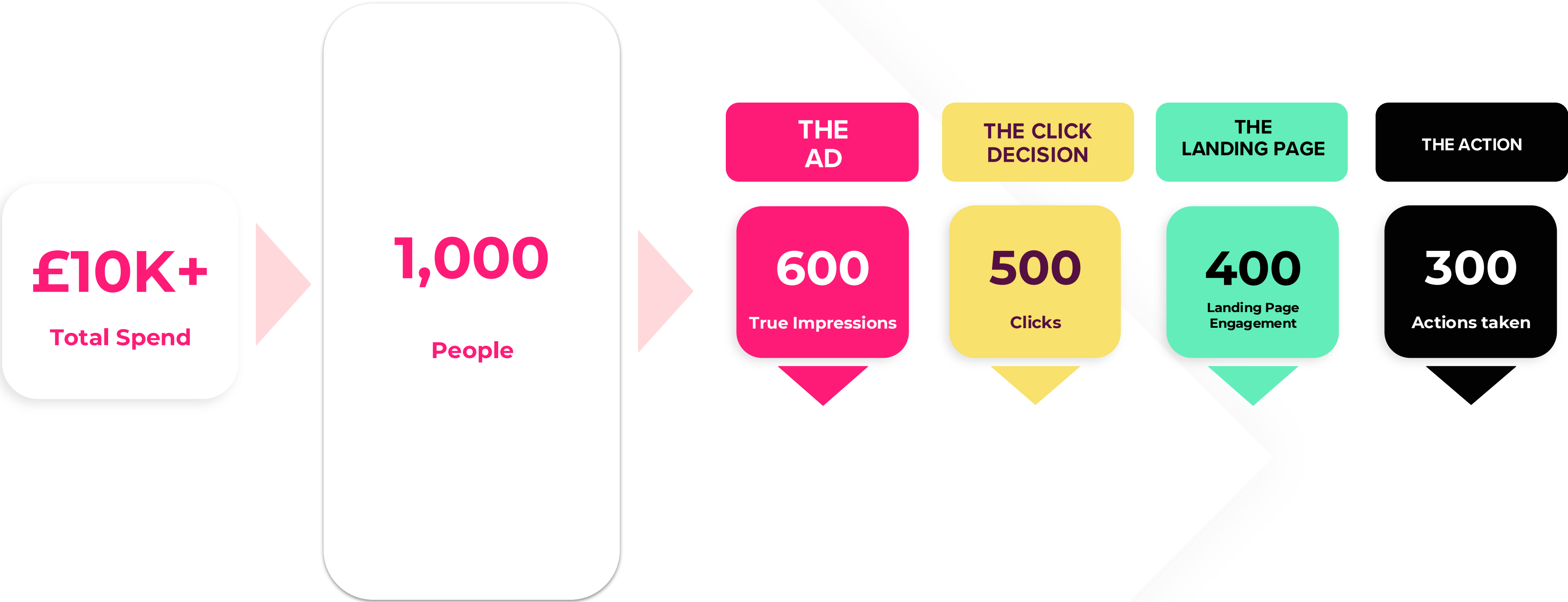


ACT 04

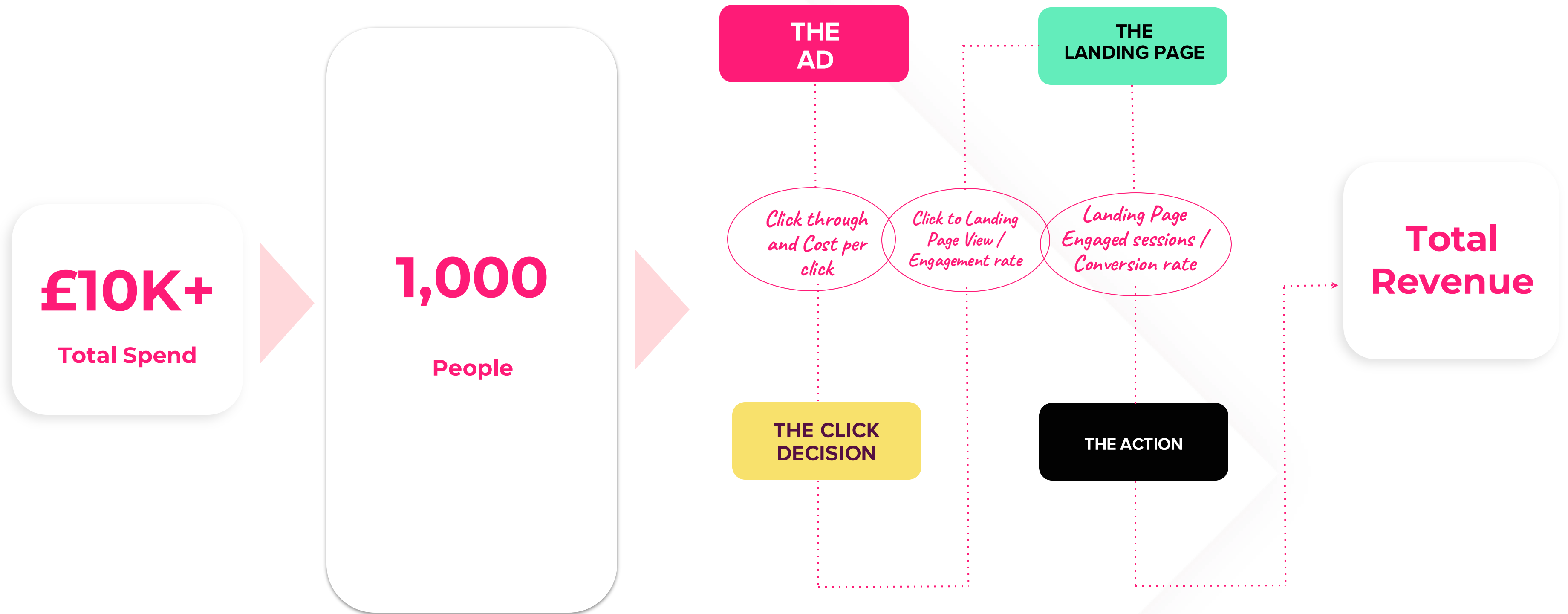
THE COMMERCIAL CASE:
EVERY FRICTION POINT HAS A PRICE TAG.



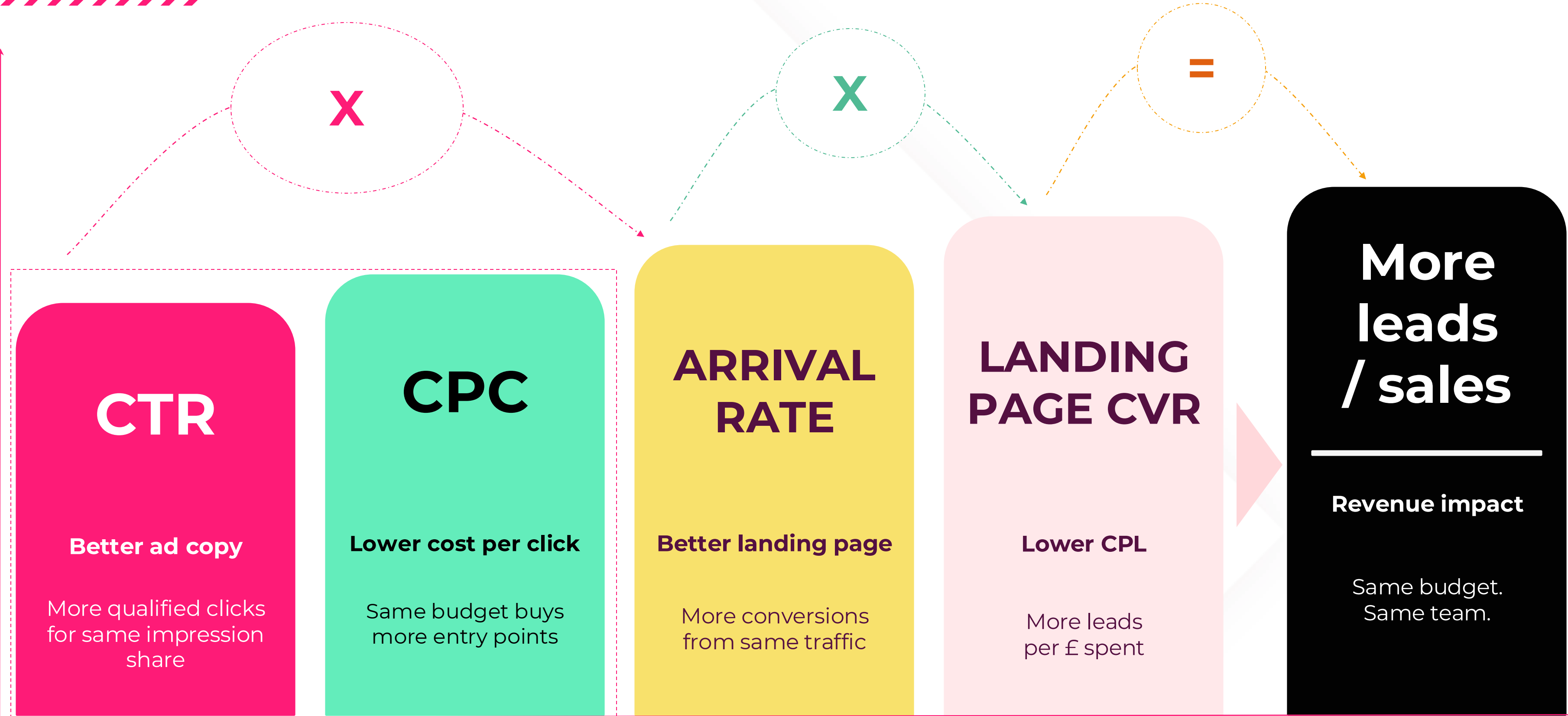
THE OBVIOUS BIT MOST OF US KNOW.



THE OBVIOUS BIT MOST OF US KNOW.



IMPROVEMENTS DON'T ADD UP, THEY MULTIPLY.



IMPROVEMENTS DON'T ADD UP, THEY MULTIPLY.



OR

*Ad Efficiency Score =
 $(CTR/CPC) \times 100$*

*Effective CPM =
 $(CTR \times CPC) \times 1000$*

*Arrival Rate =
 $(LP\ Views / Link\ Clicks) \times 100$*

*LP CVR =
 $(LP\ Views / LP\ visits) \times 100$*

CTR

Better ad copy

More qualified clicks
for same impression
share

CPC

Lower cost per click

Same budget buys
more entry points

**ARRIVAL
RATE**

Better landing page

More conversions
from same traffic

**LANDING
PAGE CVR**

Lower CPL

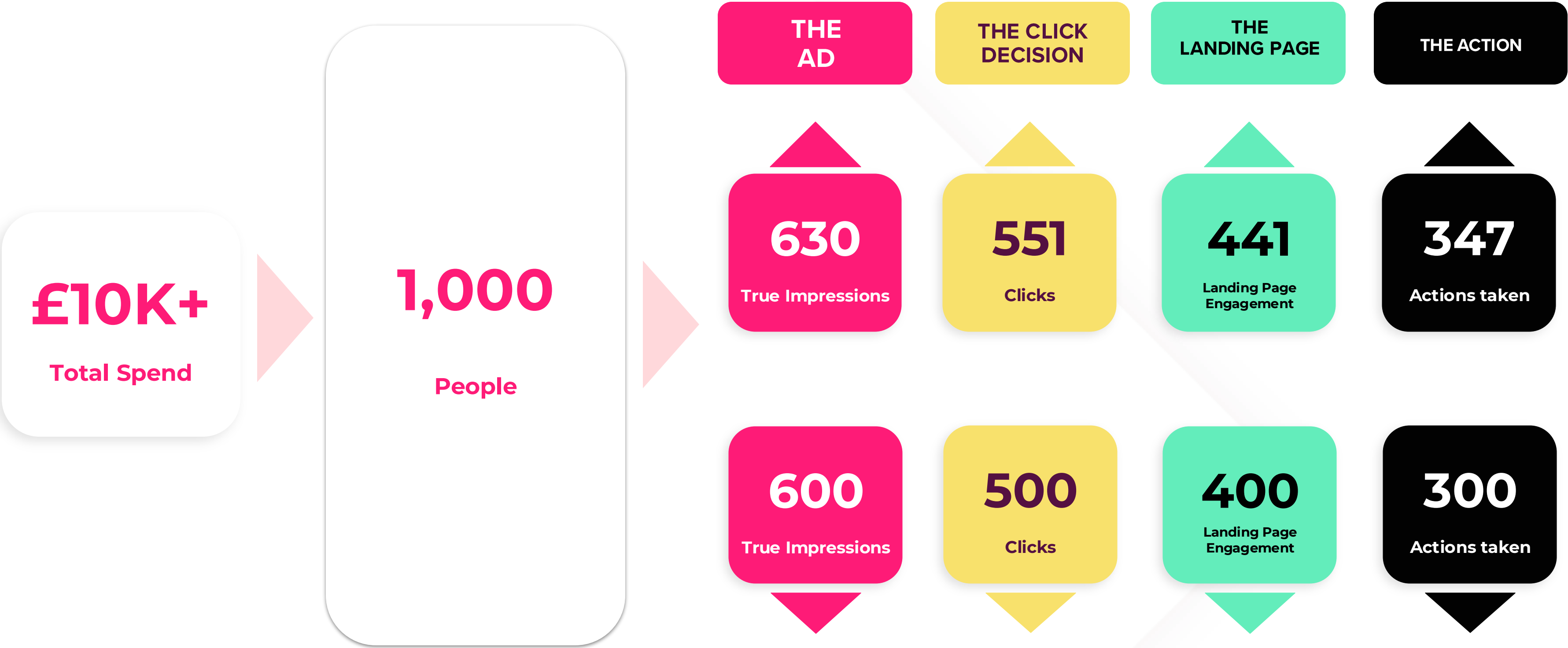
More leads
per £ spent

**More
leads
/ sales**

Revenue impact

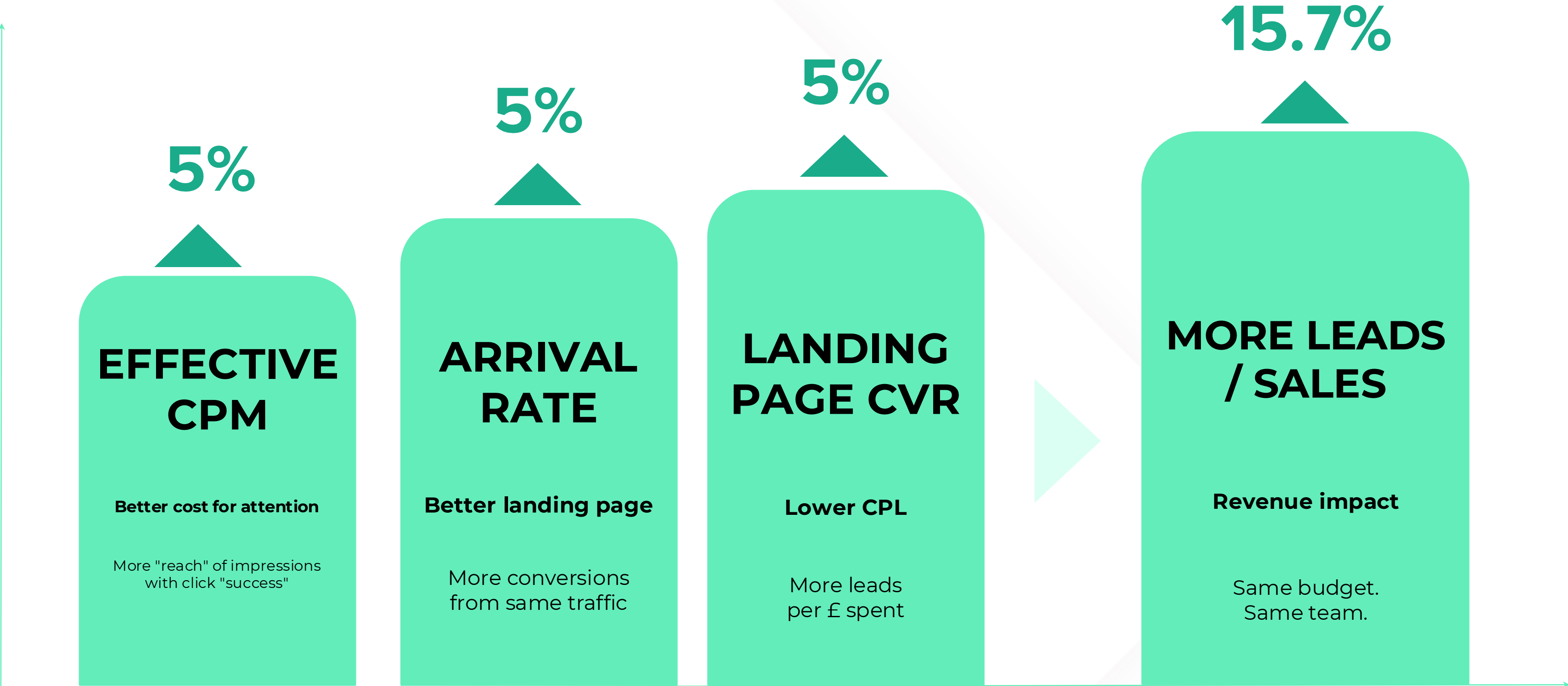
Same budget.
Same team.

IMPROVEMENTS DON'T ADD UP, THEY MULTIPLY.



IMPROVEMENTS DON'T ADD UP, THEY MULTIPLY.

➤➤➤➤➤➤➤➤➤➤



WHY LANDING PAGE CVR MATTERS MORE.



1

AI Overviews cannibalise informational CTR

Organic free traffic at the top of the funnel collapses.

2

Budgets shift to bottom-funnel intent

Advertisers crowd into the few queries still worth buying.

3

CPCs inflate on commercial keywords

Same demand, less inventory, more automated bidding.

4

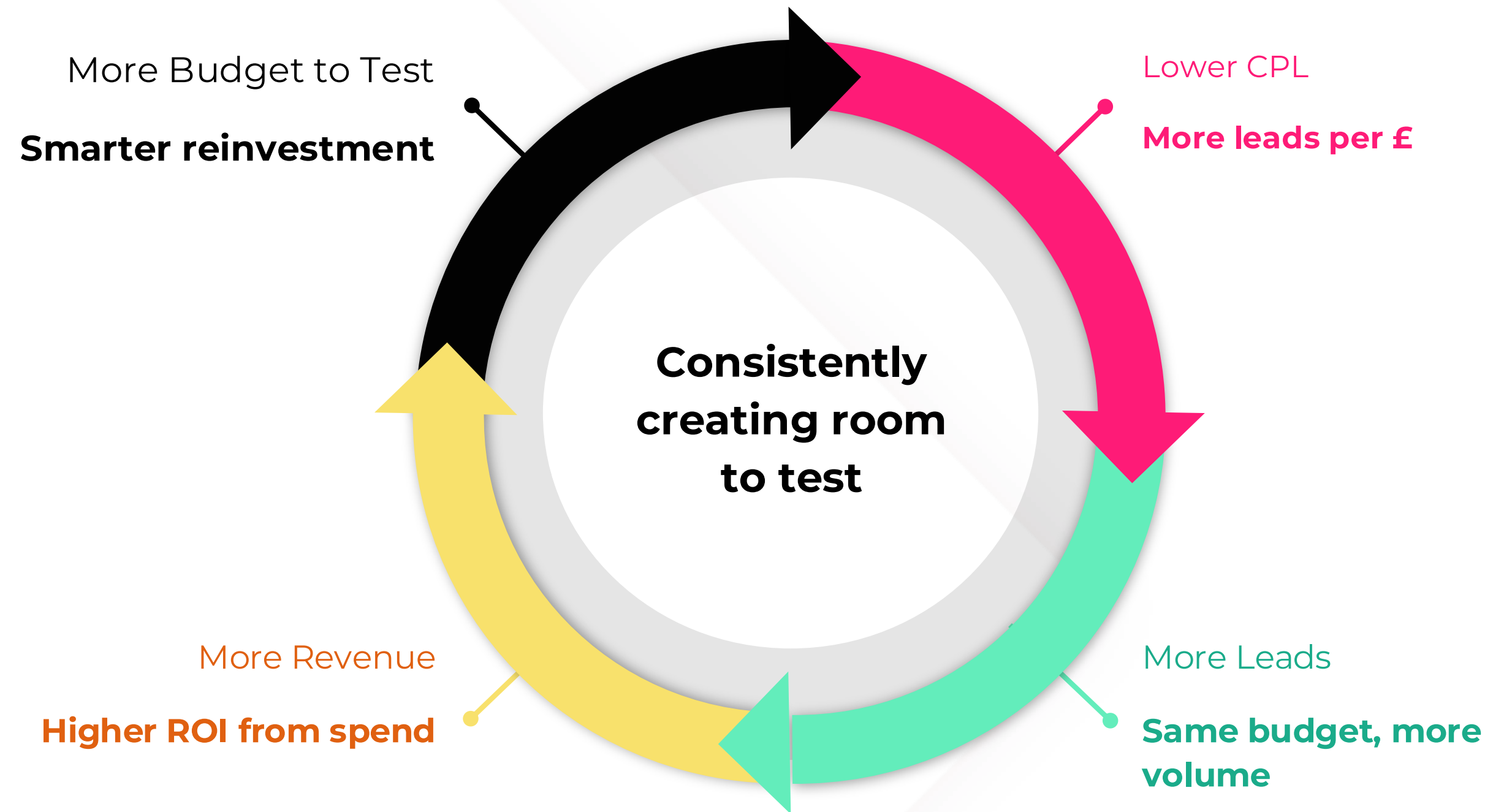
Landing page CVR becomes the battleground

If you can't pay less, you have to convert more. Friction is the final lever.

OPTIMISATIONS DON'T JUST LOWER CPL, THEY ALSO FREE UP BUDGET FOR TESTING.



**EFFICIENCY
CREATES
REINVESTMENT**



The most expensive thing in paid media isn't just your CPC...

..it's also paying for traffic you haven't made easy enough to convert.



WHAT WE'VE COVERED IN THIS SECTION.



**Every friction
point has a price
tag**

**Funnel leakage
shows up in lost
progression and
lost revenue**

**Improvements
across the
journey do not
add up; they
multiply**



**Better efficiency
lowers CPL and
frees up budget
for reinvestment**

**The most
expensive traffic
is often the traffic
you have not
made easy
enough to convert**



ACT 05

A NEW DAWN: **AI ERA DISCOVERY AND WHAT'S NEXT.**



THE NEW DISCOVERY STACK



Layer 3 • The Answer

AI Overviews, ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity.

Layer 2 • The Retrieval

Fan-out queries. Citations. The 43,233 sub-queries behind 15,000 prompts.

Layer 1 • The Index

Classic SEO + paid. Still the ground truth the AI layer pulls from.

Found does not mean chosen

Being retrieved is only the first hurdle.

Google still influences AI visibility

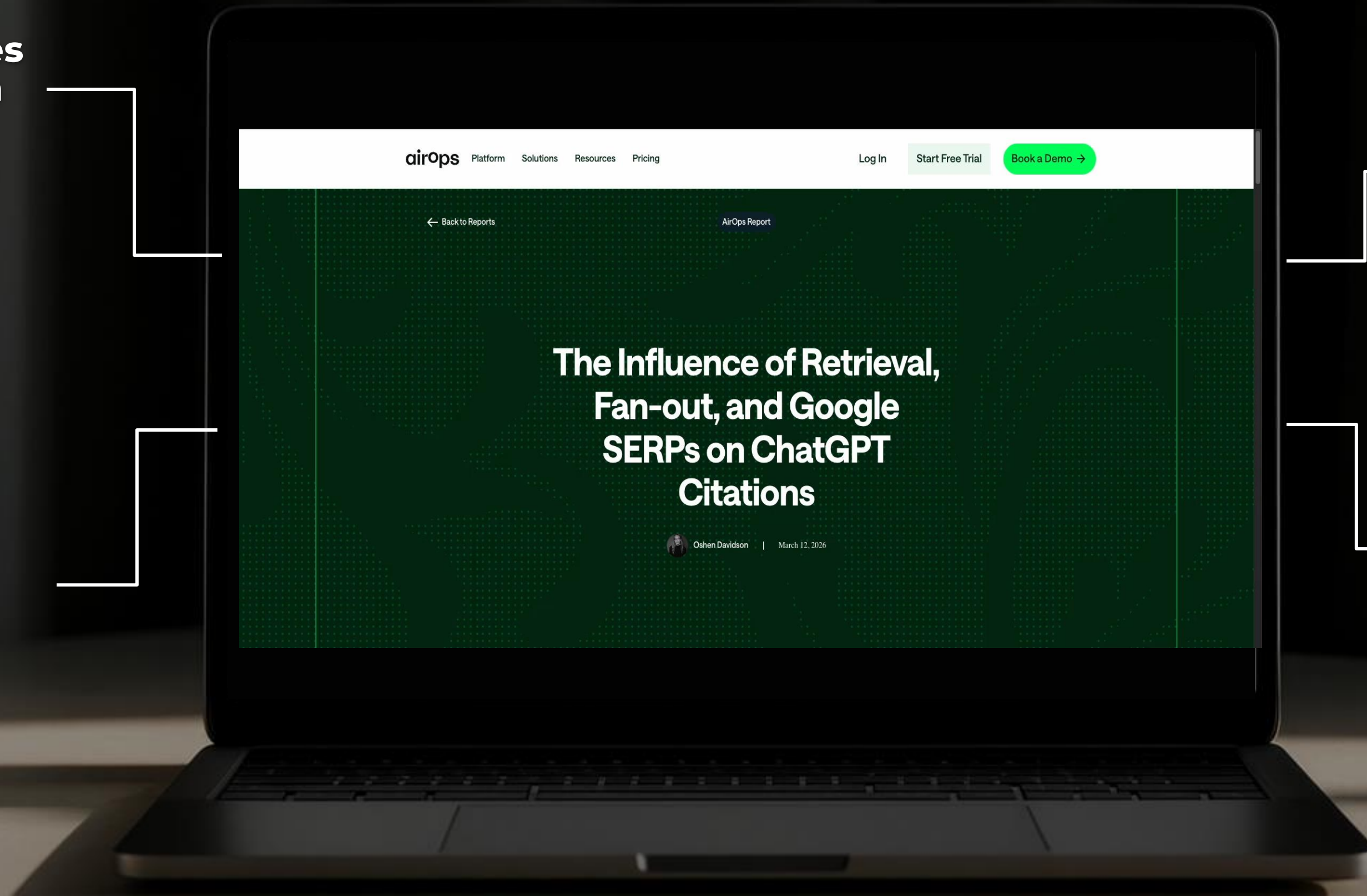
Search strength still carries into AI discovery.

Fan-out widens the discovery path

The goal is not just to match the first query, but to stay relevant as discovery expands.

Clarity increases citation likelihood

The easier you are to understand, the easier you are to cite.



ONE PROMPT NOW BECOMES 10 SEARCHES



If you only answer the headline query, you’re competing for ~10% of the citation surface.

CITATION: MACHINES REWARD THE LOWEST EFFORT-TO-PARSE ANSWER



2.2×

**Title vs query
overlap**

3.5×

**Top-of-SERP
advantage**

+89%

**Real-time
verifiable facts**

50+

**Readability
(Flesch)**

CITATION: **PAID & ORGANIC** OPTIMISATION METHODS ARE **SYNCING QUICKLY**



IN PAID

**Structured data improves
ad assets.**

Product feeds, pricing, review snippets, sitelinks. More machine-readable = more auction relevance = cheaper clicks.

IN ORGANIC

**Structured data improves
AI citation.**

Schema, FAQ markup, semantic headings. The easier to parse, the more likely you get cited in an AI Overview or LLM answer.

THE ANSWER: DO WE THEN BUY OUR WAY INTO AI ANSWERS?



*Before you buy your way into the AI answer,
it might be worth asking **what showing up there does to the brand on the way out.***

41.5%

of UK searchers say they would
trust a brand **LESS** if they saw it
advertising in ChatGPT.

Clarity beats creativity

When answers compete with ads, ambiguity loses.

Context beats generic messaging

Relevance now has to sound situational, not broad.

Specific value beats vague claims

Relevance now has to sound situational, not broad.

Low-friction offers reduce resistance

The easier the next step feels, the easier the choice becomes.

April 13-17
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{ ! N 1 O N # H W V ! % }

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ChatGPT ads favor clarity over creativity, new data shows

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Written by Anu Adegbola

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Add us as a preferred source on Google

ChatGPT ads favor clarity because the platform rewards precise, context-driven messaging that delivers immediate value.

The new ChatGPT ad format is standardizing, according to a new Adthena analysis of 40,000+ daily placements. What once felt experimental is becoming a disciplined, high-intent system for users already deep in decision mode.

The big picture: ChatGPT ads are converging on a short, structured, highly contextual style that favors precision over persuasion and utility over storytelling, marking a shift from creative-led advertising to real-time, intent-driven assistance.

By the numbers. Every word must carry weight and contribute directly to clarity or conversion:

- The average headline clocks in at just 30 characters and around 5 words.
- Body copy averages 116 characters and roughly 10 words.

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THEREFORE, THE EFFORT PRINCIPLES NOW APPLY AT MACHINE LEVEL TOO.



Be the lowest-effort answer to a specific question



Nurture authority through entity density



Pre-search bias applies to AI too

***THE NEW
FRONTIER:
AI-LED DISCOVERY***



Structured data is the new SEO



Effort asymmetry now works at brand level



AI favors content that predicts the next user need

Don't just optimise for the click...

Optimise for the cost of the thought that leads to it.



WHAT TO DO ON MONDAY.



WHAT TO DO ON MONDAY (PAID).



1



Audit ad to LP match

Read your top ads and top LP H1s side by side. Rewrite for the word the user used.

2



Cut a form field

Pick one field. Drop it. Measure the delta. Repeat until CVR stops climbing.

3



Add conditional logic

Hide anything irrelevant on first load. Progressive profiling in CRM, not on the LP.

4



Build a mobile sticky CTA

+14% conversion on scrolling pages. One line of code.

5



Price your effort tax

Pick your worst offender. Quantify the cost in lost CVR × monthly traffic.

WHAT TO DO ON MONDAY (SEO).



1



Map fan-out coverage

For your top 10 head terms, list the 5 sub-questions each implies. Do you answer them?

2



Fix title overlap

≥50% title-query overlap = 2.2× citation rate. Rewrite titles as the literal question.

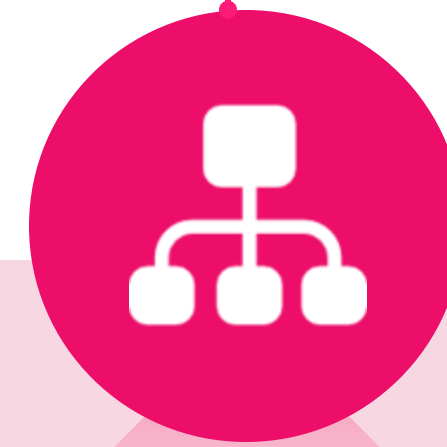
3



Audit your SERP snippet

Title + meta description = your ad auction. Treat it like one.

4



Add structured data

FAQ, HowTo, Product schema. Machine-readable = citation-eligible.

5



Ship a number of the week

Recent, verifiable stats get cited 89% more. Become the source the AI trusts.

THE STORY IN 5 SENTENCES.



Zero-click, fan-out and AI citation are all symptoms of one thing: lower tolerance for wasted effort.

AI didn't change human behaviour; it revealed what people wanted once friction disappeared.

Small frictions compound. So do small wins - that's the whole commercial case.

In paid, the CPC isn't your biggest cost. It's the traffic you haven't made easy enough to convert.

In organic, the ranking isn't your biggest win. It's being the lowest-effort-to-parse answer.



The algorithm didn't change your results...

...your users' tolerance for inefficiency did.





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INSIGHTS BEFORE
ANYONE ELSE.**



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THANK YOU.



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