How shopping has changed

The 4 sustained shifts that matter for every purchase journey

The events of 2020 drove a seismic shift in consumer behavior, with many retailers adapting at lightning speed to respond. And, while it was reasonable to assume some of these adjustments would be temporary, Google Search interest reveals that many consumers have transformed for good – and the future of retail marketing is evolving as a result.

To help you connect with a new age of consumer, we've identified four sustained trends that every retail marketer should know and act on in 2021, and beyond.

TREND 1

Digital
inspiration

G   'house ideas' **+100%**[1]

'short natural haircuts for' **+200%**[2]

'ideas for small spaces' **+100%**[1]

Global growth year-over-year

Necessity spurred the acceleration of e-commerce in 2020, with consumers turning online to browse and buy after much in-store shopping became impossible. Search interest across Google platforms highlights how consumers have found new ways to gain inspiration and replicate the window-shopping experience online: image searches including 'unique gifts for'[3] and 'last minute gifts for'[4] saw dramatic global growth in 2020.

Consumers are also finding inspiration in their everyday online activity, underlining the very real value of showing up throughout the decision journey —70%, for instance, report buying from a brand after seeing it on YouTube[5]. As the "messy middle" of the purchase journey becomes even messier, brands have a key opportunity to shift consumer preference — four in five consumers say they discovered new brands online during COVID-19.[6]

Show up in decision-making moments

Be present at decision-making moments across the purchase journey. This means not only providing high quality information on what people are actively searching for, but serving up inspiration-based content to pique their interest.

How an apparel retailer diversified and boosted online sales

Traditionally relying on wholesale channels for the majority of its revenue, sportswear retailer Ariat needed a new way to reach its customers during COVID-19 closures. The retailer built a full-funnel strategy to drive brand interest and affinity, using YouTube at the top end and Google Ads to deliver more promotional messaging. The strategy delivered a 700% increase in sales year-on-year and 300% increase in online conversions.

TREND 2

Supportive spending

G 'ethical brands' **+300%**[7]

'black owned' **+700%**[8]

'ethical online shopping' **+600%**[9]

Global growth year-over-year

With more time at home and in our local communities, we reevaluated what's important - for ourselves and the brands that represent us. This, coupled with rising movements championing racial equality and sustainability, has significantly impacted search interest, with people actively looking to support businesses that align with their personal values. Increased search interest for terms such as 'ethical brands'[7], 'support local businesses'[10], and 'Black owned shops'[2] highlights just how important aligning purchase decisions with their values has become to consumers.

Wear your brand values like a badge of honor

As consumers become increasingly socially conscious, surface-level statements and 'greenwashing' aren't enough. Share as many details as possible about what you stand for to build loyalty and trust over the long term.

How one eyewear brand grew a global community

Founded to create fashionable, sustainable eyewear that gives back to local communities, Bôhten Eyewear initially struggled to connect with customers online. But by using Google Analytics and leading with values and impact in their messaging, Bôhten has grown its business and their following.
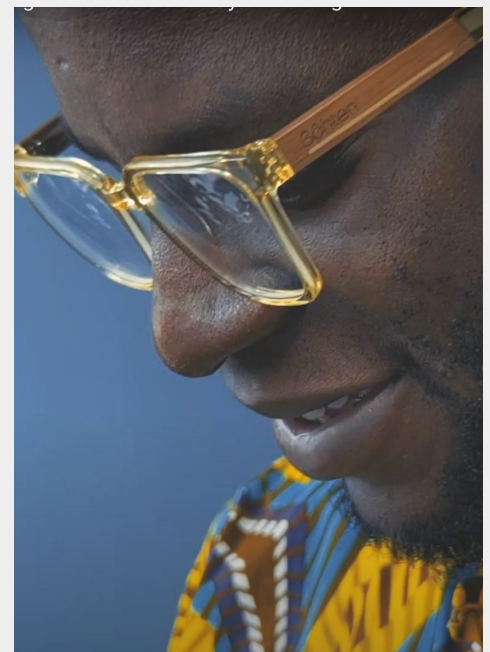
TREND 3

Counting on
convenience

G   'milk delivery' **+800%**[11]

'in stock' **+800%**[3]

'along my route' **+1000%**[12]

'curbside pickup' **+3000%**[13]

'try on' **+100%**[2]

Global growth year-over-year

Rapidly closing stores and safety concerns increased adoption of digitally-enabled services such as curbside pickup and same-day delivery almost overnight. After significant time operating in this new hybrid of digital and physical shopping, consumers have come to expect and rely on the flexibility and ease it affords. Increased searches for 'along my route'[12] and 'in stock'[3] tell us that convenience is king for today's consumer. Beyond location and availability, retailers have been tapping into this quest for convenience through innovative services such as DIY meal kits or virtual try-ons.

Deliver a new level of service to meet expectations

Consumers will continue to expect businesses of all sizes to offer choice and flexibility in where they can make a purchase and how it gets fulfilled. To meet their expectations, retailers should continue to refine and optimize service offerings for consumer convenience—and highlight those offerings in your marketing across the purchase journey.

CASE STUDY

How a hardware retailer highlighted local services for digital growth

As search interest spiked for local and convenient shopping options during the pandemic, cooperative retailer Ace Hardware knew they needed to empower their store owners to meet rising demand. The retailer enabled local store owners to run Google Search ads within their communities. By showing their local inventory, curbside pickup, and in-store pickup options online, Ace Hardware drove a 23% increase in store visits and 133% increase in omnichannel ROAS.

TREND 4

Dynamic demand

G   'patio heater' **+600%**[14]

'candle making kit' **+300%**[15]

'best mattress for back pain' **+100%**[1]

'small garden ideas' **+300%**[3]

Global growth year-over-year

Faced with new ways of working and living, consumer demands changed rapidly during the pandemic. Demand for items such as 'breadmaker'[16], 'hammock with stand'[8] and 'mesh wifi'[12] spiked as consumers were forced to find entertainment at home.

Search interest will continue to surprise as people react to unpredictability in their environments—every day, 15% of Google Search queries are brand new[17]. Brands must balance the need for longer-term planning with digital strategies that can respond to these shifts at pace.

Prioritize data in your entire strategy

To meet the dynamic demands of consumers, brands need to take an agile approach to everything from merchandising and promotion to content strategy. <u>Insight tools</u> can help marketers stay abreast of consumer signals, while <u>automated solutions</u> support real-time action.

How an outdoor retailer capitalized on new demand

To identify areas of opportunity as consumers looked for outdoor activities, L.L.Bean leaned on Google insights for information on spikes in searches for terms like "cozy" and "outdoor gear." By using an almost fully automated bidding strategy to capture rising demand, the brand saw a 72% increase in ROAS—while giving its team bandwidth to focus on other strategic priorities.
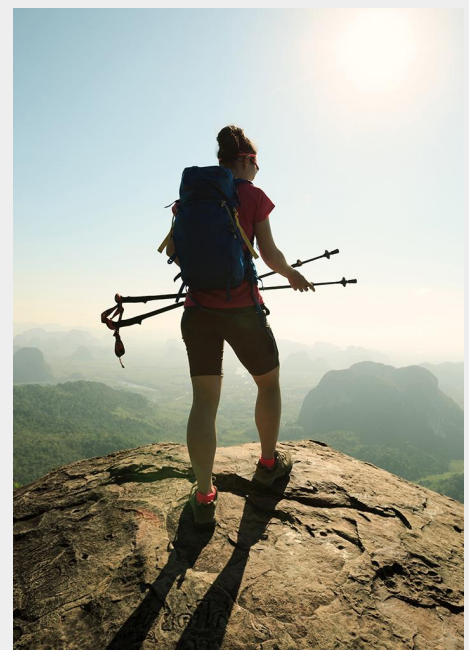
Be ready for every shopping journey

1 **Be visible**
Show up throughout the purchase journey with clear information on products, services, and availability.

2 **Take a stand**
Give people a reason to support you by making your stance on sustainability, environmental concerns, or other key issues clear — and find authentic ways to follow through.

3 **Be flexible**
Provide choice and flexibility in your delivery and collection options to improve convenience and conversion.

4 **Embrace change**
Prepare for rapid, short-term shifts in demand with automated tools, while adapting to longer-term changes in the landscape by considering your digital strategy.

For more information, we've created a straightforward retail guide to help you get the most out of Google — check out our 2021 Retail Marketing Guide.

Think with Google

1. Google Data, Global English, Dec 22, 2020 - Feb 19, 2021 vs Dec 22, 2019 - Feb 19, 2020
2. Google Data, Global English, Jan 26, 2021 - Mar 26, 2021 vs Jan 26, 2020 - Mar 26, 2020
3. Google Data, Global English, Nov 3, 2020 - Jan 1, 2021 vs Nov 3, 2019 - Jan 1, 2020
4. Google Data, Global English, Sep 29, 2020 - Nov 27, 2020 vs Oct 1, 2019 - Nov 29, 2019
5. Google/Talkshoppe, US, whyVideo study, n=2000 A18-64 Genpop video users, Feb 2020
6. Google-commissioned Ipsos COVID-19 tracker, AU, BR, CA, CN, FR, DE, IN, IT, JP, MX, KR, ZA, ES, U.K., U.S., n=1,000 online consumers 18+ per market, May 7, 2020–May 10, 2020
7. Highest YoY growth for search interest in a single week. 2020 vs. 2019. Google Trends.
8. Google Data, Global English, Apr 15, 2020 - Jun 13, 2020 vs Apr 15, 2019 - Jun 13, 2019
9. Google Trends Data, Global, 2020 vs. 2019
10. Google Data, US, March - May 2019 vs. March - May 2020
11. Google Data, Global English, Feb 26 - Apr 25, 2020 vs Feb 25 - Apr 25, 2019
12. Google Data, Global English, Jul 29, 2020 - Sep 26, 2020 vs Jul 29, 2019 - Sep 26, 2019
13. Google Data, Global English, Mar 18 - May 16, 2020 vs Mar 18 - May 16, 2019
14. Google Data, Global English, Aug 26, 2020 - Oct 24, 2020 vs Aug 26, 2019 - Oct 24, 2019
15. Google Data, Global English, Nov 24, 2020 - Jan 22, 2021 vs Nov 24, 2019 - Jan 22, 2020
16. Google Data, Global English, Mar 11 - May 9, 2020 vs Mar 11 - May 9, 2019
17. Google Internal Data, July 2019