



Do You *Really* Know Who Is Answering Questions About Your Brand?



Introduction

Over the last decade, we have seen a paradigm shift in consumer search behavior. The entire search ecosystem has become more conversational thanks to the introduction of natural language processing and the rise of voice assistants and chatbots. Customers today begin their journey with a question or a specific query, like "Does The UPS Store near me have a notary public?" or "olive green canvas slip-on trainers under £50 with overnight delivery." Over time we've been trained to ask more specific questions – whether we're typing in a search box or speaking aloud to a voice assistant – because we trust that the search ecosystem will provide an equally specific answer.

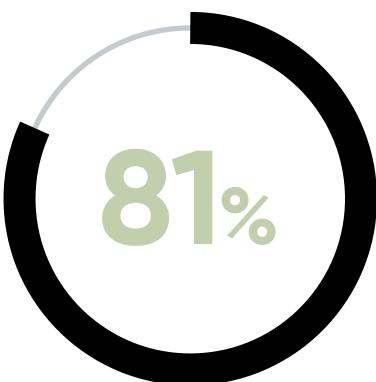
But can we trust the validity of those answers? Content farms masterfully leverage SEO to lure people to their websites. Meanwhile competitive ads take up more real estate than

ever, and while their headline copy appears to answer your question, it's often just bait. So where are the brands? Naturally there's no better authority to answer questions about a brand than the brand itself, from ingredients to store hours to product specs. But businesses are struggling to be their source of truth in search. Yext conducted research to find out how many major brands answer the most commonly asked questions about their business in search results, and found **very few brands are actually in control of their answers.**

In this paper, we'll explore why moving to an answers-ready marketing strategy is critical for brands. We're in a crowded era of search, so it's imperative that brands do everything possible to deliver information directly to consumers and take back control of the customer journey online.

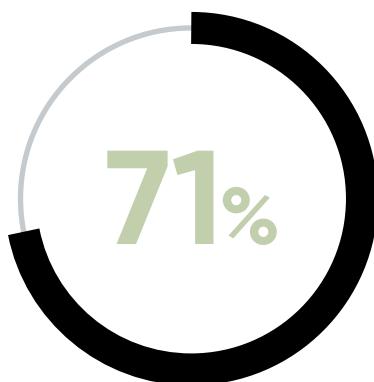
Why Search Matters More Than Ever

Marketers already know that search is crucial to customer acquisition. Organic search drives 51% of website traffic.¹ This fact drives investment: A 2019 survey of digital marketers shows that, typically, 39% of a company's digital ad budget is dedicated to paid search efforts.² And the industry is booming – in the United States, search ad spending is projected to grow from \$55.17 billion in 2019 to \$86.08 billion in 2023.³



81% of consumers

perform some type of online research before making a big purchase⁴



71% of consumers

begin their journey to transaction using a search engine⁵



90% of consumers

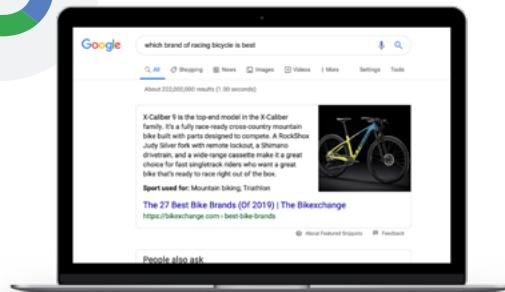
use search at every stage of the purchase journey⁶

The rise in search spend reflects the increasing competition to meet specific consumer intent. Search matters more than ever because it reveals intent more than ever: 50% of searches consist of four or more words.⁷ These multi-word searches indicate that consumers are using more natural language phrases, and that they expect highly specific results. In addition, as consumers move along their journey, they often ask questions across a multitude of platforms, such as Google, Yell, Amazon Alexa, and the brand's website. In fact, 95% of consumers use three or more channels to connect with a company in a single session.⁸ To compete, a brand must be ready to provide answers at any point of the journey – and on any channel.

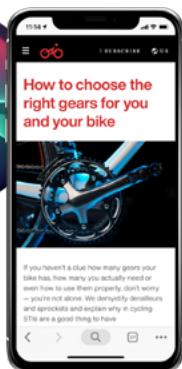
Imagine a customer looking to buy a bicycle for an upcoming race. To start their journey, they open a web browser and ask, "Which brand of racing bicycle is the best?" They get an answer (the Trek X-Caliber 9 bike) in the form of a featured snippet from an independent review site, along with a list of links to blogs, videos, and more reviews. Interested in this model, the customer now wants more information about the bike's gears, so they search for the answer to a new question: "Do the Trek X-Caliber 9 gears slip under pressure?" They select a blog post in the search results to explore the answer. Now armed with all the information they need to make a decision, the customer searches "Where can I buy the Trek X-Caliber 9?" and ends up on the manufacturer's website. On the site, they use a chatbot to ask for the nearest retail location that stocks the bike. And finally, they open Google Maps on their phone to find out what time the store closes tonight. This type of customer journey is now the norm – so how should brands influence it?



Which brand of racing bicycle is the best?_



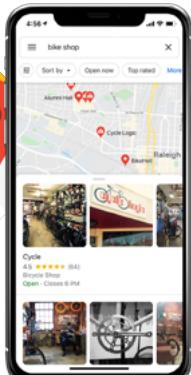
Do the Trek X-Caliber 9 gears slip under pressure?_



"Where can I buy the Trek X-Caliber 9?"



What time does the bike store close tonight_



The Three Types of Answers in Search

Because the customer journey comes with a number of questions along the way, the search ecosystem is designed to deliver both fact-based, or **objective**, answers, as well as provide opinion-based, or **subjective**, answers in the form of opinions, reviews, and recommendations. In fact, Google reports an 80% increase in mobile searches including the phrase "should I" in recent years.⁹ Consumers actually want third parties to weigh in on their decisions, and that makes sense. (It's also worth noting, though, that brands can influence the subjective answers consumers find about them with effective reputation management – by encouraging, monitoring, and responding to reviews across digital properties, plus taking action on negative reviews to ensure consistency and quality throughout the customer experience.)

However, the shifting search ecosystem has opened up room for a third type of results: **deceptive** answers. The proliferation of, and consumer desire for, subjective information online has allowed search to become murky and crowded with disinformation and misinformation alike. Disinformation is low-quality content designed to take advantage of search algorithms to drive ad impressions; misinformation, meanwhile, is simply inaccurate or out-of-date information on unmanaged digital properties. Paid search ads are also a source of deceptive answers – your



competitors may be running ads on your branded keywords, driving up the cost-per-click for you and driving consumers to "comparison" landing pages that include disinformation about your product.

Because of this rise in deceptive answers within search, **it's never been more imperative for marketers to take control of the objective answers that are delivered to their customers.**

Customers ask questions looking for the essential facts about a business's products, service, people, and places. These questions show intent to transact with a brand, which means that brand should be in control of those facts – and the answers to those questions. But right now, they're not. Marketers believe that only 35% of the information available about their brand in the digital ecosystem is accurate and up-to-date.¹⁰

Brands Are Failing to Deliver Objective, Brand Verified Answers

If brands don't provide the objective, accurate answers to questions about their business directly, someone else will earn the clicks, transactions – and most important – the trust of their potential customers. But for a brand to maintain control of its **brand verified answers** (information about a brand, delivered by the brand itself) requires a structured, single source of truth for all of its potential facts.

Brands need a knowledge graph – the same kind of technology that powers search engines.

Here's why:

In the past, brands could simply prioritise ranking for the blue links that lead to a click. But because search engines now serve consumers direct, contextual information in addition to blue links in order to make their experience better, that's no longer enough. If brands are the ones delivering the information in these new layouts – including featured snippets, local packs, shopping cards, FAQ answers, and more – the new search experience presents no problem. But we suspected that because search has gotten more and more crowded, the objective facts surfaced to searchers were being delivered by sources other than the brand. We hypothesised that brands had not evolved in lock-step with quickly changing search engines.

Unfortunately, Yext research uncovered that **brands are often not the ones delivering much of the information found in search results.**

Here's how we uncovered the data:

To understand how effectively the world's biggest brands answer consumer questions in search, we ran brand name searches and measured the results of the "People Also Ask" search results feature within Google, which is used to surface a fixed set of popular related questions to a given query in order to help guide consumers. When one of these suggested questions is expanded, one answer – presumably the best or most accurate – is displayed, with a link to the website from which the information is sourced. In our study, only answers and links to the actual brand's website were labeled as "brand verified answers" when we simply typed the brand's name into the search bar.

Running this analysis across each of the Fortune 500 brands, our results showed these **top companies only answer 18% of the most common questions about their own brand**, with the vast majority of answers delivered by a random assortment of third-party websites – including uncited sources and competitor domains.

This means that brands are having fewer and fewer direct conversations with their customers, which also means they are ceding control of the customer journey.

Average % of Brand Verified Answers

Financial Services



23%

Food, hospitality, and leisure



14%

Healthcare



23%

Retail



14%

All Verticals (including, but not limited to, those listed above)



18%

Why Publishing Brand Verified Answers Should Matter to Your Brand

It's critical for businesses to earn a large share of the featured results for relevant searches because consumers are increasingly relying on the information they find in search without ever clicking through to the source. More than half of mobile searches on Google now end without a click.¹¹ No-click searches don't mean fewer transactions – but they do reflect the changing customer journey. According to a 2019 survey by Path Interactive, people ages 13–21 were twice as likely as respondents over 50 years old to **consider their search complete once they'd viewed a knowledge panel.**¹² So if your brand hasn't shown up in that knowledge panel, or that featured snippet, you're simply not in control of the answers consumers are getting.

The fact is, consumers are relatively confident in search results: 65% of consumers trust search engines, according to the 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer¹³, and 42% of consumers new to a brand trust search engine results over the brand's website.¹⁴ They assume that the answers that search yields are accurate. But our research reveals that often, brands – which are the best authority on their facts – aren't the one delivering those answers.

42%
of consumers
new to a brand trust
search engine results
over the brand's website.



Further, when consumers do navigate directly to your site, they expect its search capabilities to match the experience they get on third-party search services. If they struggle to find what they need on your site, they simply return to external search engines: 68% of consumers won't return to a website that provided a poor search experience.¹⁵ Structuring all of the facts about your brand into a knowledge graph, and then using that knowledge graph to power brand verified answers everywhere consumers search – starting on your own website – helps your brand answer customer questions, and take back control of the customer journey.

The bottom line is, meeting customers at their moment of intent with the answers they need is key to driving digital discovery, engagement, and revenue. Now is the time for brands to catch up with, and get ahead of, the evolving customer journey across channels and devices. If your brand doesn't fight back against deceptive answers in search by providing brand verified answers, you're quite literally asking a competitor or a chameleon looking to profit off your brand name to answer the question for you. And if your own site can't provide a search experience equal to that of search engines, you're asking your customers to give up on you.

Text can help you deliver brand verified answers to the questions your customers are asking every day. Here's how:



The Yext Advantage

Your Yext Knowledge Graph
– what we use to help brands power brand verified answers
– is the single source of truth online for the many public facts about your brand. It is the centralised hub for all the data that defines your stores, events, offices, physicians, branches, ATMs, agents, dealerships, restaurants, service centers, and more.

Whether it's information about a product offering, store location, job opening, or professional credentials, our Search Experience Cloud allows you to provide people with actionable answers to the questions they're already asking. Yext works with you to define the custom fields that represent your data management strategy best – like brand, open status, or square footage – and helps structure your data for use in first-party experiences like your own website. Add custom fields that support URLs, photos, yes/no answers, or additional data types to manage the facts about your brand on your own terms.



Yext also reaches more than 150 maps, apps, directories, search engines, GPS systems, social networks, and digital assistants, including:

- Global search services like Google, Apple Maps, Facebook, Bing, and Yahoo
- Digital assistants like Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant, Cortana, and Siri
- GPS and navigation services like HERE, TomTom, and Waze
- Regional services like Gelbe Seiten, Yell, and YP Canada
- Industry-specific services like EZDoctor and Vitals

Directing more mobile consumers to your door and driving great brand experiences all starts with clean, accurate data about your brand. Upon implementation, all Yext clients benefit from our rigorous data cleansing

process to format their data consistently and completely, whether they have two locations or 20,000 agents. Our world-class Operations Team reviews your data to detect inconsistencies, discrepancies, or missing fields, so you can be fully confident in the information you provide to customers.

The Yext Knowledge Graph allows companies to model the complete set of public facts about their brand, and how those facts are related, ultimately providing their end consumers with the right information – wherever they're looking. Our primary goal is to make it as easy as possible to get a brand's information into the Search Experience Cloud so that we can deliver lasting value.

Discover more about the [Yext Knowledge Graph here](#).

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The customer journey starts with a question, and every day consumers search for answers about brands. However, they are increasingly served false or misleading information from sources other than the brand. Yext, the Search Experience Cloud company, exists to help brands regain and maintain a direct relationship with their customers. With a mission to provide perfect answers everywhere, Yext puts businesses in control of their facts online by delivering brand verified answers straight from the source – wherever their customers are searching. Companies like Tesco, Marriott, Jaguar-Land Rover, and businesses around the world use Yext to take back control of the customer journey, starting on their own website.

Yext has been named a Best Place to Work by Fortune and Great Place to Work®, as well as a Best Workplace for Women. Yext is headquartered in New York City with offices in Amsterdam, Berlin, Chicago, Dallas, Geneva, London, Miami, Milan, Paris, San Francisco, Shanghai, Tokyo, and the Washington, D.C. area.

Learn more at yext.co.uk