

THE CHANGING WEB • 01

Your customers have changed. Has your website?

AI is changing the way people find information.
We're interested in what happens when those
new behaviours meet the traditional business website.

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Think about how you find something online now.

For years, that meant getting reasonably good at searching for it. You worked out the right words, scanned a page of results, opened a few tabs and clicked around until something matched what you were after.

Increasingly, there's another option.

You just describe what you want, in your own words, and expect whatever's on the other end to understand you.

It sounds like a small shift. We don't think it is.

A different way of searching

In October 2025, McKinsey published research on the growth of AI-powered search.

Its survey of 1,927 US consumers found that half intentionally seek out AI-powered search tools when looking for information online. Among people already using AI search, 44% called it their primary and preferred source of insight.

MCKINSEY AI DISCOVERY SURVEY • AUGUST 2025

50%

of US consumers surveyed intentionally seek out AI-powered search tools when looking for information online.

44%

of people already using AI search called it their primary and preferred source of insight.

REPRESENTATIVE US CONSUMER PANEL, n=1,927

Those are solid numbers.

What we find more interesting is the habit sitting underneath them.

Traditional search taught us to meet the search engine halfway. Before you'd even typed anything, some part of your brain was already working out the right phrase, then adjusting it, refining it and trying again if the results missed.

Most of us got pretty good at this without ever really noticing we were doing it.

AI search asks something different of us.

Instead of guessing at keywords, you say what you actually want. You can use a full sentence. Add whatever context matters. Ask another question. Correct it when it misunderstands you.

The job of working out what you mean has shifted from you towards the tool.



Once people get comfortable finding information this way, it's worth asking whether that comfort follows them elsewhere.

What happens when we reach the website?

This is where it gets interesting for businesses.

Most business websites are still built on the older model. The information is usually there. The visitor just has to work out how it's been organised before they can find it.



That structure tends to make perfect sense from inside the business. It mirrors how the company thinks about its own services and offerings.

It may also work perfectly well for someone who is browsing, comparing or exploring. But someone arriving with a specific question has a different task.

They must translate their question into the structure chosen by the business.

It's less clear that it makes sense to the person who's just arrived wanting an answer to something like:

Can you do this particular job?

Will it work with what I already have?

Do you deliver to my area?

Which option actually suits my situation?

What's this likely to cost?

The answer might well be on the site somewhere. But we've made finding it the visitor's job.

Which brings us to the question we've been sitting with at TCB:

If people are getting used to simply asking for what they want, will they stay willing to hunt through a website's structure to find it?

We don't know.

And to be clear, McKinsey's research doesn't answer that question either.

It tells us something real is shifting in how people search. It doesn't tell us what that shift means once someone lands on a business's homepage.

That second part is ours to work out, not theirs to have already proven.

The website isn't disappearing

None of this is us arguing that search is finished, that menus don't work, or that every website needs to turn itself into a chatbot overnight.

Navigation still has an important job. It helps people browse, compare and explore. The question is whether it works just as well for someone who arrives knowing exactly what they want to ask.

What does seem to be happening is that people are getting used to starting from what they want, rather than starting from where they guess the answer might live.

What happens when that behaviour meets a fairly ordinary business website, built the old way?

We genuinely don't know yet.

That's the part we're interested in.

THE SERIES

The Changing Web

This is the first article in The Changing Web, an ongoing series from TCB Media looking at how AI and changing search behaviour might be reshaping the relationship between businesses, their websites and the people trying to use them.

Over the coming weeks, we'll look at who is changing, examine the website experience itself and test some of these ideas on an information-rich public website. We'll share what we find, including when it doesn't go the way we expected.

There'll be no claims that everything's changed overnight.

And no pretending we already know how this settles.

Just a closer look at what's actually shifting, and what's worth paying attention to.

SOURCE

McKinsey & Company — *New front door to the internet: Winning in the age of AI search*, 16 October 2025. McKinsey AI Discovery Survey, August 2025; representative US consumer panel, n=1,927.

[Read the McKinsey research](#)

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