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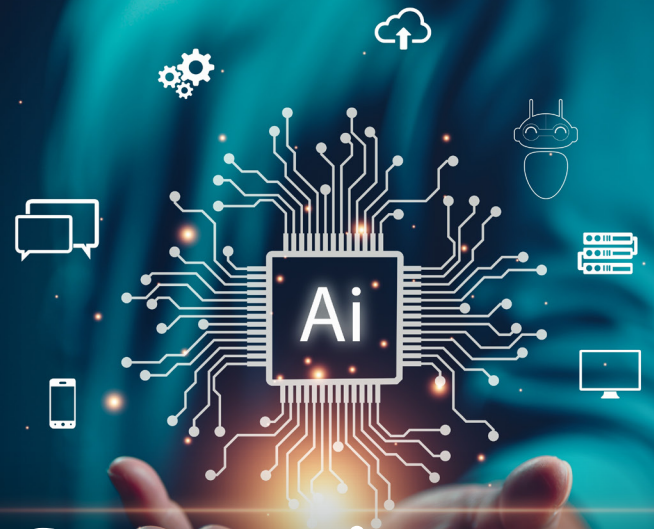
Search: The Next Generation

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transform the way HCPs and
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Search: The Next Generation

Generative AI is going to transform the way HCPs and patients seek information

By Rayman Vaid, Jan-Willem van Doorn

Anyone over 40 in our industry likely remembers quite clearly the first time they encountered an online search engine. It was like Christmas morning for information-seeking, and the gift was something you not only hadn't expected but hadn't even dreamed was possible. In the prehistoric times before Excite, Yahoo, and later Google, while traversing the early web we the users actually had to know the exact addresses of the websites we were seeking, and we had to depend on the kindness (or foresight) of early web developers who might, or might not, have made their sites easy to search and navigate.

One couldn't just go online to one centralized location and ask, "Why is my knee twinging?" or, "What's that drug that rhymes with 'Liagra?'" Search engines changed all that, and in the process changed the entire way we think about information-seeking. Suddenly we all had an inconceivably massive library of information at our fingertips that could be searched in seconds. John Lennon once said (not entirely accurately or fairly), "Before Elvis, there was nothing." Well, before search engines, information-seeking,

if not quite nothing, was exponentially more difficult and time consuming than it is today.

An equally transformative leap is nearly upon us again, brought by the power of generative AI search. Legacy search engines aren't "smart" in the human sense; they can search millions of websites and provide links to content relevant to the search terms, but they can't "think"—they can't parse the context of a question and provide a direct and considered response the way humans do. Generative AI search, though, is going to turn what was essentially an exceptionally fast and broad but "dumb" tool into something else entirely. Ask a generative AI tool a question and it doesn't tell you where to go for more information; it answers the question.

Wiser heads than ours are already attempting to sort out the broader implications of that profoundly impactful new reality. But for the purposes of those of us in medc xomms, the immediate impact seems clear enough. In a world where a patient or HCP can get their question answered by the search engine directly rather than by the link to which the search engine

directs the user, the viability of [brand.com](#) websites as conceived for the past quarter-century becomes immediately suspect. What, after all, is the point of filling your [brand.com](#) site with educational text content for HCPs when a generative AI search engine is just gobbling those texts up, integrating them into its own "consciousness," and using them to respond to questions directly with no direct brand involvement at all? You've benefited the HCP community, sure, but none of them are coming to your website.

This new reality is going to force all of us to reimagine the value exchange that we want—or hope—to see from communications to and with our audiences. Firstly, if [brand.com](#) sites are to live on into the generative AI era, they can no longer merely be warehouses of information. They must offer some value that a generative AI search engine cannot. In our view this means experiences—creating engaging experiences that can't be surfaced through an AI search prompt and are more interesting and "sticky" than anything that ChatGPT might produce. While experiential content is already in the tactical quiver of many pharma brands, the maturation of generative AI search is going to lift this approach from the tactical to the strategic level. Experiences, whether video, audio, 3-D simulation, virtual reality, or anything else we can dream up, are going to have to become the bread and butter of brand web properties.

Secondly, omnichannel will have to make the same leap. Many brands still think of social, email marketing, and online portals as supportive tactics rather than the first chair of the orchestra. The availability and eventual growth in acceptance of generative AI search will likely require an exact inversion of that thinking. With HCPs seeking out content where and when they want, through channels they trust, robust communication through the whole spectrum of

available channels, perhaps pushing back to the very experiences noted above, is going to have to be the engine and not the caboose of the brand communications train.



But possibly the most important long-term implication of generative AI in pharma is what we can do with it ourselves. Pharma brands need to be building their own generative AI tools for HCPs to use, developed with the wants and needs of the medical professional in mind and stocked full of carefully curated material for the AI engine to parse. Because, after all, a general purpose generative AI search engine is all very well, but it is designed for the general user, not the HCP, and the HCP has no way of knowing how credible the information it provides might be. But we have the power to develop generative AI tools that can respond to clinician questions accurately and credibly; we can be sure that our tools earn seals

of approval from relevant medical authorities. While a general purpose generative AI search engine could not possibly filter out all the bias and misinformation that's out there on a very specific medical topic, we can make doing so a focus of any such undertaking. Imagine—a generative AI tool designed specifically for HCPs, or even specific categories or specialties of HCPs, that offers a degree of confidence that the answers are vetted, unbiased (or at least as unbiased as possible), and based on hard clinical evidence. The value of such a tool would flow in both directions; folks on our end of the tunnel would be learning all about the kinds of questions their HCP audiences are asking and would be in a position to continually fine-tune the tool accordingly.

A high degree of credibility, after all, is what generative AI tools lack right now. That's not so critical for the general user, but credibility is a much higher bar for HCPs making life-and-death decisions than it is for civilians trying to pick a restaurant for New Year's Eve or learn about the Battle of Gettysburg. We see a future, though, of large language-model AI tools that have been trained on very specific subjects or specialties like oncology or neurology and certified by reliable medical authorities—perhaps even developed in partnership with those authorities. A tool like that can be trained from scratch to speak in the language of science and the HCP, to source and cite everything it says. It can be trained in the habits and use cases of actual HCPs. It can, after a fashion, be built from the ground up almost as an extra-human key opinion leader, except without the human limitations of limited time and capacity.

Now, you and your brand might not have the bandwidth or the resources to participate in the development of such a tool, as valuable as it might be. But even if that's the case, you will have to make sure that a tool like that, when it appears, has some possibility of surfacing your own relevant content in its responses. And that new reality is going to change how brands think about SEO—in fact, generative AI search is going to change how everyone thinks about SEO. We don't claim to possess some magical advance knowledge regarding what SEO will look like in the age of ChatGPT and its kin; on that subject everyone is really just speculating at this point. But clearly the rules of SEO are going to be upended in the next 12-18 months. So we at HCG are going to be keeping a close eye on how HCP-facing generative AI tools are picking and choosing their content sources, and all pharma brands ought to be doing the same.

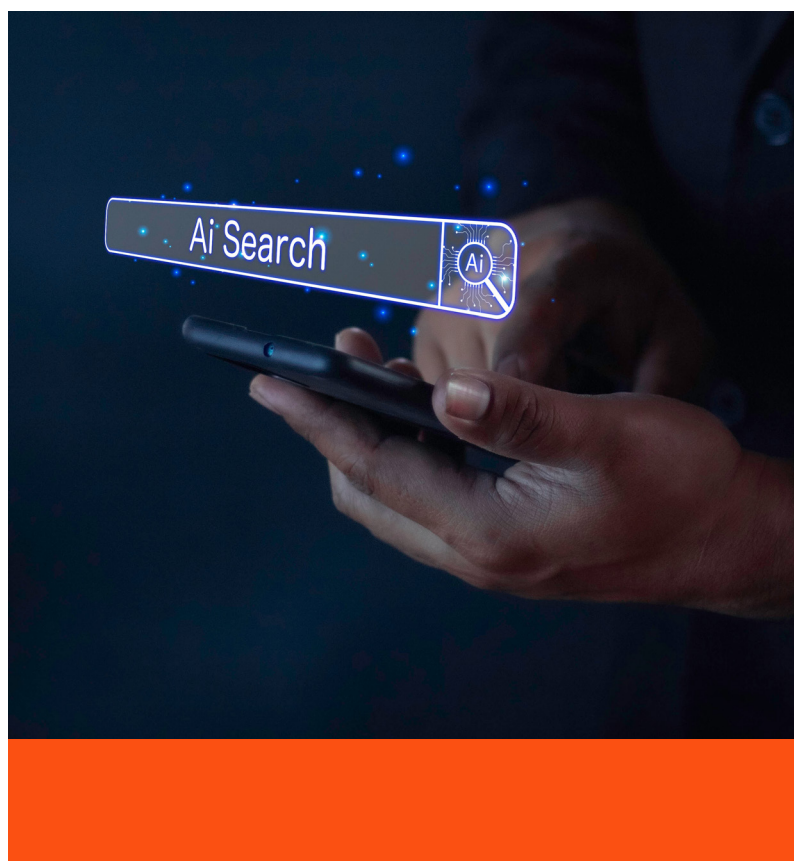
One other offshoot of the coming generative AI revolution, we believe, is the movement toward



the development of hyper-focused content that's already being driven by the needs of omnichannel, and the growing capacity to target on a more granular basis is going to be accelerated. After all, it's going to be pulled hard from both ends. A highly specialized generative AI search tool seems likely to be seeking out highly specialized content. And, on the other side of the fence, content creators at brands and agencies will be able to use generative AI tools themselves to develop more content more quickly—the voracious hunger for highly specialized content required by an omnichannel strategy can be fed least in part by generative AI, so the humans involved can avoid some of the more mundane burdens of producing such highly specialized and segmented material.


However it turns out in the end, this new transformation is happening right now. All of us in med comms will have to rethink most of our strategies and unlearn many of our assumptions. We at HCG and within the Omnicom family have adopted a disciplined approach, scrutinizing each new tool with care to ensure we are fully aware of its capabilities and limitations. In the brave new world of AI it will be crucial for all companies to fully comprehend the risks associated with the use of such tools. We must also demand full transparency from AI service providers regarding their training methodologies and procedures so we can properly assess any potential bias in output. All this is our responsibility now. With generative AI maturing before our eyes, yesterday was one task, and tomorrow will be very much another.

We hope this article inspired you to consider how generative AI search can offer trustworthy solutions to educate HCPs. We'll be digging deeper into ethical, regulatory, and economic considerations arising from the use of generative AI in an upcoming article in the December issue of *Med Ad News*.





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Healthcare Consultancy Group (HCG) is a global leader in medical communications – 7 distinct agencies united in a common vision to accelerate product understanding and acceptance, bringing clients' medicines closer to the patients who need them.

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