

The Search Box and the big update

And how artificial intelligence is driving every bit of it.
Mathures Paul reports

The world's most-used website has run on the same basic premise for 25 years — type a few keywords, get a list of links and figure it out yourself. That, Google has now decided, is no longer good enough. "Because your curiosity doesn't always fit into keywords," said Elizabeth Reid, Google's VP of Search. She added, "We're introducing the biggest upgrade to our Search box — now completely reimagined with AI."

For example, instead of typing "India World Cup chances", you could ask, "What are the chances of India qualifying for the Fifa World Cup 2030? By when do you think India will qualify?" The engine handles both questions at once. Upload a photo of a dress and ask for something in the same cut. Fire follow-up questions at a chatbot sitting right on the search page. Let automated agents hunt down apartment deals on your behalf. Powering all

tion instantly rather than browsing for the right links."

But for publishers whose content sits behind a paywall, or who depend on users arriving at their sites to drive subscriptions, the dynamic is punishing — readers get the answer and never show up.

News publishers in Britain, however, will have the option of blocking their content from appearing in Google's AI search results, the Competition and Markets Authority announced last week. CMA is the principal competition regulator and consumer protection watchdog in the UK. The feature is being trialled in the UK before rolling it out to "website owners globally".

The stakes extend well beyond media companies. Driving users away from web searches and towards AI interactions risks what analysts have started calling the "Google Zero" scenario — a world in which AI queries throttle traditional search

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of it is Gemini 3.5 Flash, a new AI model that is not just smarter but faster — Sundar Pichai puts it at four times quicker than comparable frontier models.

The big update, though, is personalisation and it cuts both ways.

Two people searching for laptops may soon receive entirely different results. Google insists it will

stay anchored to authoritative information where it matters most — health queries, for instance, will continue to surface reliable answers. But for softer searches — weekend trips, fashion choices, fitness plans — the engine will increasingly tailor what it shows you, drawing on the richer data that more conversational queries naturally provide.

Google has been building towards this moment for two years. In 2024, it launched AI Overviews — automatically generated summaries that answer questions before a user ever clicks a link. Last year came AI Mode, a dedicated tab built around conversational, multi-question search. Gemini, Google's AI chatbot, has more than doubled its user base in a year and now counts 900 million monthly users.

Neil Shah, research vice-president at technology market research firm Counterpoint Research, sees a split picture. He told *The Telegraph*, "AI Overviews has been a blessing for the majority seeking informa-

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and unravel the Internet's click economy. Online shops, web advertisers and news organisations that have long depended on Google-referred traffic could all find themselves on the wrong side of that shift.

The numbers suggest it may already be underway. McKinsey & Company reported in October that 50 per cent of Google searches already feature AI summaries — a figure expected to cross 75 per cent by 2028. Half of consumers surveyed now actively seek out AI-powered search engines, with a majority calling it the top digital source they use when making purchasing decisions.

Adoption spans every generation, including, notably, a majority of baby boomers. By 2028, McKinsey projects, \$750 billion in US revenue will flow through AI-powered search.

Google, for its part, is pressing ahead. Paid subscribers will soon be able to build custom dashboards in Search to manage specific goals — wedding planning, fitness routines and more. Coding features are on the way. And this autumn, Gemini will arrive on smart glasses in partnership with Samsung, Warby Parker and Gentle Monster.

Search, as Google built it, made the Internet navigable. What Google is building now is something closer to an answer machine. The question is who benefits and who quietly disappears.