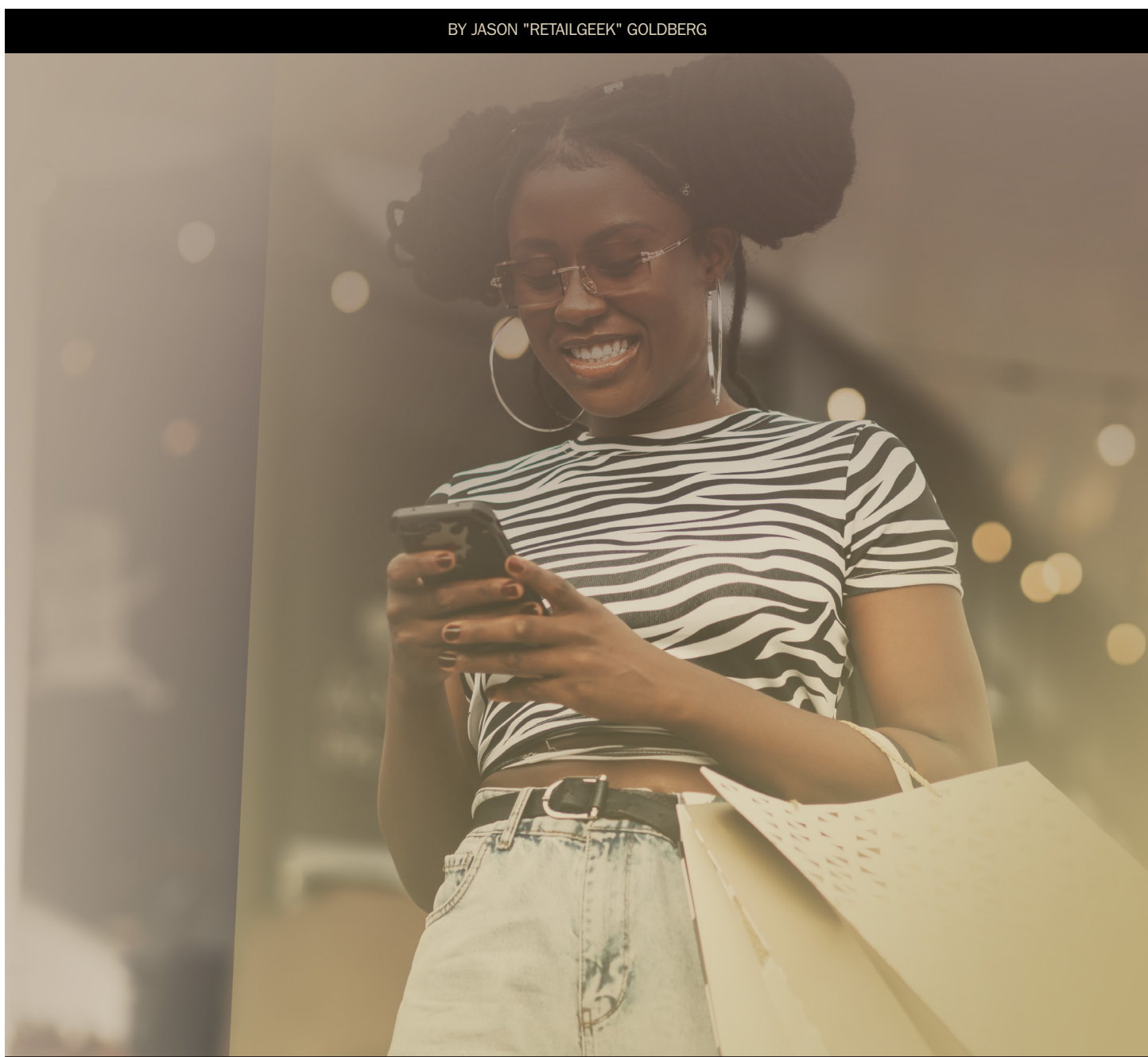


# The *Impending Disruption* of Commerce Search

How **AI** and **agentic shopping** are going to reshape retail

BY JASON "RETAILGEEK" GOLDBERG



Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming the way consumers search for and buy products. While traditional search engines like Google remain dominant for now, a shift is underway. AI-powered tools like ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Amazon Alexa's new "Buy for Me" agent are introducing conversational and autonomous ways to discover and purchase products.

**This article examines how artificial intelligence (AI), large language models (LLMs), and agentic AI are disrupting commerce search — and what brand and retail executives must do to stay ahead of the changes.**

# From *Keyword* to *Conversation*: The Search Paradigm Shift

At the moment, search is still largely driven by keywords. Google alone handles over 8 billion daily searches a day, a number that continues to grow. But early indicators find that AI-powered conversational search is gaining traction:

- **Evercore reported that 8% of U.S. consumers now use ChatGPT as their primary search engine — up from 1% just one year ago.**
- **Gartner predicts that traditional search engine volume will drop 25% by 2026 as AI assistants become more pervasive.**

These statistics reflect a deeper shift: Consumers are beginning to expect search engines that understand context, intent, and complexity. Instead of typing, "Best wireless headphones under \$100," users are starting to say, "Find me affordable headphones for working out, with great sound and fast charging." In turn, AI responds not with a list of links but with a curated answer — and, often, a recommendation.

One of the most powerful — and often overlooked — differences between traditional search and AI search is memory. While Google treats each query as independent and context-free, many AI-driven platforms build a persistent memory of user preferences,

past behavior, goals, and even tone.

This memory allows agents to personalize responses in ways that were impossible before now.

For example, a user who previously asked about gluten-free snacks, prefers to shop at Target, and lives in a cold climate might receive very different product recommendations than another user with the same search query but different history. This contextual memory fundamentally alters how product discovery happens and leads to dramatically different outcomes for each consumer.

This shift is also collapsing the path to purchase. For decades, commerce leaders have focused on reducing friction by achieving the holy grail of a "1-click" purchase. AI-driven assistants are now moving beyond that: in many cases, customers don't need to click at all. They simply ask a question, get a recommendation, and confirm a purchase — all in a single conversation. This new paradigm represents the rise of "zero-click commerce," where AI agents collapse search, evaluation, and transaction into one seamless experience.



# Agentic AI:

## Shopping That Shops for You

**Agentic AI refers to systems that act on behalf of users (as an “agent”) to complete tasks. In commerce, this means assistants that don’t just search — they also buy.**

Examples include:

- **Perplexity Pro (launched in late 2024)** allows users to shop by asking natural language questions. The AI fetches recommendations from across the Internet.
- **Amazon’s “Buy for Me” (introduced in 2025)** lets customers ask Alexa to purchase products — even from other retailers.
- **ChatGPT Advanced Voice with Vision (late 2024)** allows shoppers to use their smartphone camera as in a retail store to get answers and product recommendations based on what’s on the shelf in front of them.
- **Walmart’s Sparky (2025) and Text to Shop (2022)** app-based services are adding conversational agents, enabling voice or text-based purchasing.

These tools change the customer journey from "search-click-buy" to "ask-decide-purchase" — increasingly, with AI doing most of the work.

Crucially, agentic AI doesn't just optimize specific shopping tasks; it takes full ownership of them. Rather than simply responding to "Order peanut butter," agents are now capable of managing broader, ongoing goals like, "Never let me run out of anything in my kitchen pantry."

These complex tasks require the agent to access multiple data sources — like purchase history, inventory levels, user preferences, and third-party availability — and then act autonomously across a wide range of decisions. The future of commerce is not just about AI answering questions; it's about AI fulfilling needs.

The implication: If your brand isn't in the AI's memory or recommendation set, you may be invisible to the shopper.



# Rethinking Search Visibility:

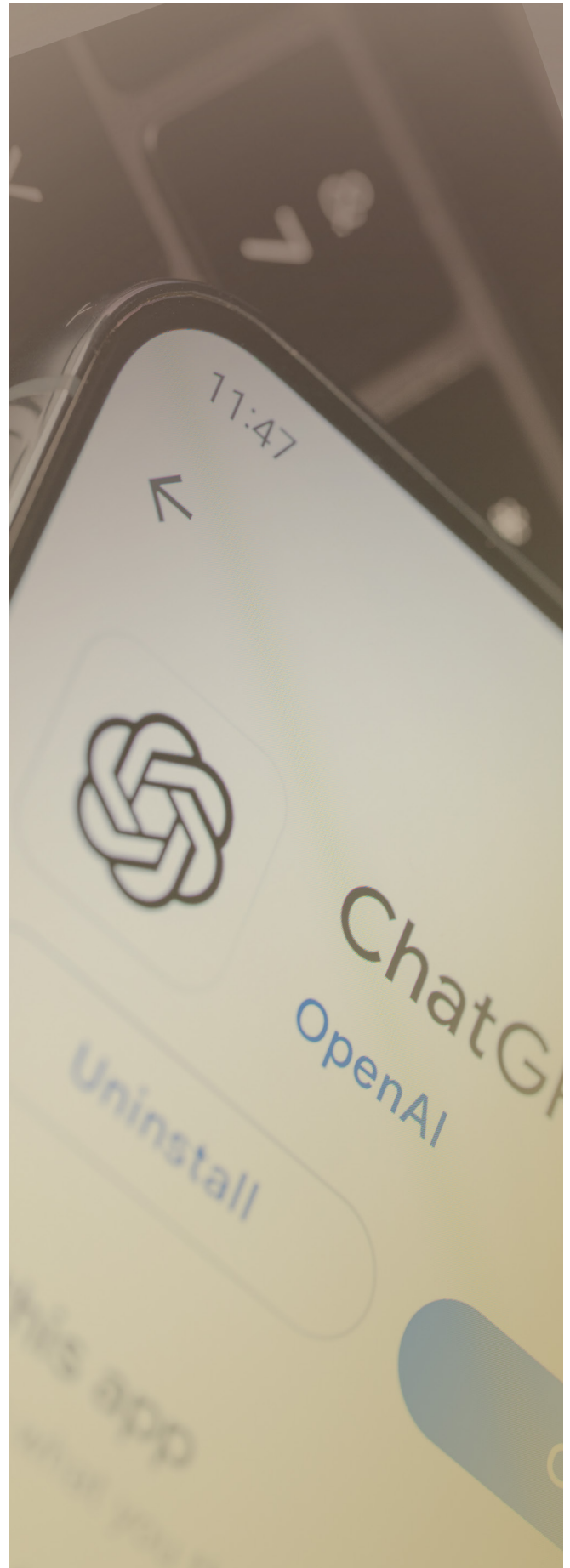
## Beyond SEO

Clearly, traditional search optimization is no longer enough. As LLMs generate answers instead of serving up links, brands must optimize for AI visibility — a practice emerging as "Generative Engine Optimization (GEO)."

Key tactics for GEO include:

- **Structuring product data with schema markup and clean metadata.**
- **Ensuring brand content is AI-readable (FAQs, expert reviews, rich text descriptions).**
- **Participating in AI ecosystems (e.g., building ChatGPT plugins or submitting product feeds).**
- **Emphasizing third-party content from AI-trusted sources such as expert websites and social media influencers.**
- **Monitoring how AIs like ChatGPT or Perplexity describe your brand (using tools like Revere.ai or Evertune.ai).**

**Like SEO pioneers did 20 years ago, early movers in GEO can gain long-lasting advantages.**



# Monetization & New Rules of Discovery

**AI-driven search results don't look like a classic Google page. And that means advertising and attribution models are changing rapidly:**

- **Google's Search Generative Experience (SGE) presents fewer ads, reducing the overall ad real estate.**
- **Sponsored results within chatbots are emerging, but it's unclear how scalable or transparent they will be.**
- **Affiliate-style commissions and data-sharing partnerships may be the new route to monetization, as seen in Amazon's Buy for Me model.**

**Retailers and brands must rethink how they acquire customers in a world where agents may own the point of discovery.**





# AI Agents:

## Friends, Foes, or Frenemies?

As agentic AI becomes a primary interface for commerce, retailers must grapple with a strategic question: *are third-party AI platforms allies, competitors, or something in between?*



On the **positive** side, third-party agents can drive incremental traffic, streamline customer acquisition, and reduce friction in the path to purchase. Retailers that surface prominently in these experiences can benefit from higher conversion rates and broader reach.

On the **negative** side, these same agents pose a risk of disintermediation. By owning the discovery experience — and increasingly, the transaction — AI platforms can effectively become marketplaces in their own right. If shoppers rely on agents to find, compare, and purchase products, the relationship and subsequent shopper loyalty may shift from the retailer to the agent.

Retailers therefore must assess whether to integrate, partner with, or compete against these AI intermediaries. Success will require careful negotiation with data sharing, branding control, and long-term platform dependency. Much like marketplaces before them, AI agents offer growth — but at the potential cost of customer ownership.

In a similar vein, brands must decide if they are willing to look at these AI engines as a new commerce channel, or merely as a new touch-point on a purchase journey. The traditional mix of consumer marketing tactics for a brand, intended to win SEO and on-shelf discovery, is likely not the right mix for this new Agentic Commerce world. Certainly, brand marketers will need to adjust their content strategies to accommodate this new AI persona.



# Privacy, Trust, & Ethical Imperatives

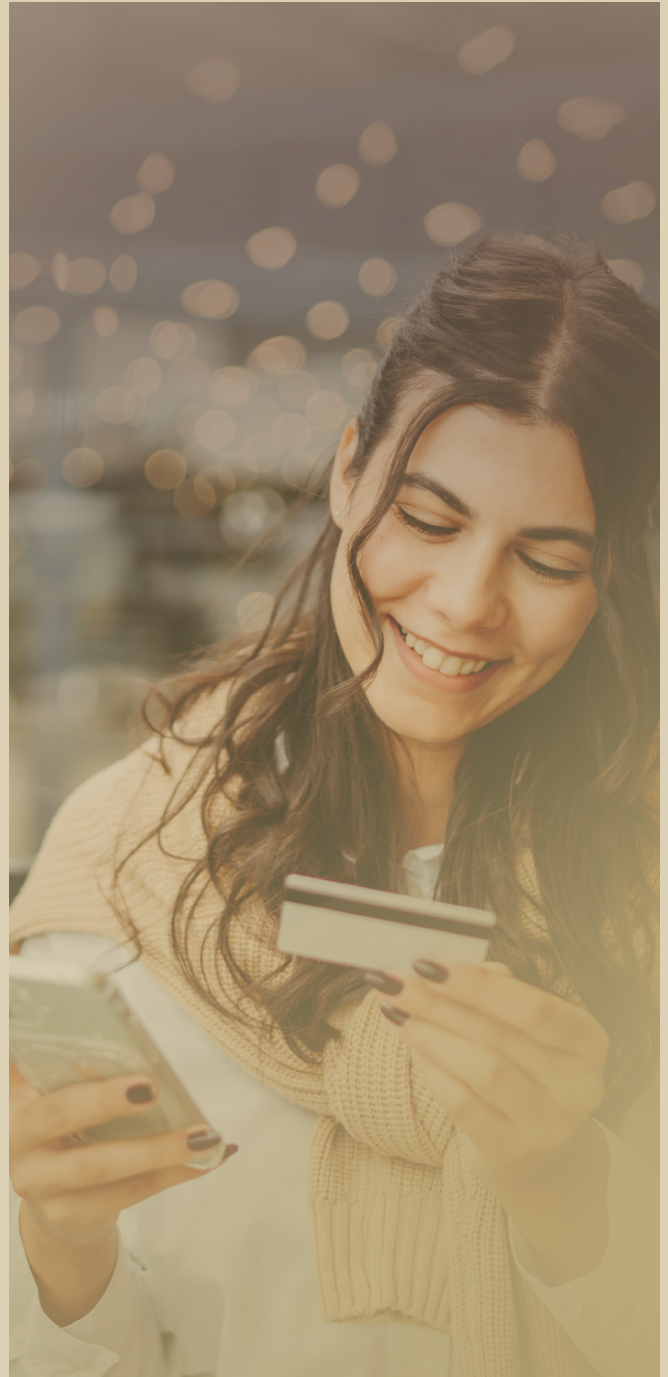
**With great personalization comes great responsibility. Both consumers and some practitioners remain wary:**

Sixty-six percent of shoppers say they would not let an AI purchase on their behalf, even if it delivered better results. Ethical concerns around dynamic pricing, bias in AI models, and data usage are mounting.

So marketers must proactively address:

- *Data access and governance issues.*
- *Clear consent and opt-in experiences.*
- *AI fairness, especially in how recommendations are ranked or explained.*
- *Ethical use of AI policies.*
- *Remediation strategies for when issues do arise.*

**Winning the consumer's trust will be a competitive differentiator.**



# What to Do Now

The companies that thrive in the new AI search landscape will not be the loudest — they'll be the most adaptable.

Here are some key actions to consider now:

- 01 **Optimize products and content for LLMs:** Focus on quality, structure, and clarity that AI models can ingest.
- 02 **Deploy AI-powered search on your own platforms:** Upgrade your site search to be conversational and intent-aware.
- 03 **Monitor your brand's presence in AI agents:** Use new tools to track brand mentions and citations.
- 04 **Pilot AI commerce partnerships:** Work with emerging AI platforms to ensure your brands are available in the new discovery layers.
- 05 **Align marketing KPIs to AI performance:** Introduce metrics like "LLM referral traffic" and "AI share of voice."
- 06 **Invest in data governance and transparency:** Prepare your teams to use AI ethically and competitively.

## The Future of Discovery Is Agentic

Commerce search is entering its most significant transformation in decades. Traditional engines will still matter, but AI assistants and agents will increasingly dominate discovery, consideration, and even purchase.

For brands and retailers, the opportunity is massive. Those who learn fast, optimize for AI-first discovery, and embrace the trust economy will capture the next era of growth.

Search used to be a battle for clicks. Now it's a fight for memory — **and AI is watching.**

AI is watching

Sources: Evercore, Gartner, McKinsey, Harvard Business Review, PYMNTS, Sparktoro, Perplexity.ai, OpenAI, Reforge, Evertune.ai, AvenueZ, Autoritas.







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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Jason Goldberg is a fourth-generation retailer who has helped envision and shape the ecommerce landscape for decades. With a focus on ecommerce and digital marketing for omnichannel retailers, he has worked with over 100 clients on the Internet Top 500. Under his social media handle, @retailgeek, Goldberg is one of the most-followed ecommerce subject matter experts in the digital arena and a renowned speaker at industry events.

