



MEDIA IMPACT REPORT

For Women's Sports Fans, Content is Queen

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For Women's Sports Fans, Content is Queen

By [Shuree Jones](#), Group Director, Paid Social & Influencer Media

Sponsorship deals for female athletes grew 20% year-over-year in 2022. Brands raised spending on amateur athletes by 102% last year through NIL deals. Engagement from female athlete sponsorships jumped 70%.

Bottom line—there's never been a better time to invest in female athletes.

We've noted the growing opportunity to invest in women's sports, but the opportunity to invest in the athletes themselves can be a valuable extension to connect a brand with a whole community, particularly in social media spaces. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok allow athletes to show parts of themselves outside their chosen sport, as well as details within it, effectively building a brand of their own.

This opportunity isn't reserved only for superstars like Serena Williams and Candace Parker; college basketball athletes Haley and Hanna Cavinder are said to be the highest ranking female athletes under NIL, raking in a reported \$2 million in partnerships with brands like Under Armour, Crocs, and even Intuit TurboTax since 2021. The Cavinder twins have a booming following on both Instagram and TikTok with over 5 million followers and an impressive 11% average engagement rate across both platforms.

Quality Over Quantity (of Followers)

That engagement rate—much more than the follower count—is what brands should be focused on when it comes to partnerships. The value of these athletes in social lies within their ability to connect with their fans, to engage and communicate, making their following much more of a community than a spectacle. Female athletes are especially adept at this connective piece; according to sports and entertainment

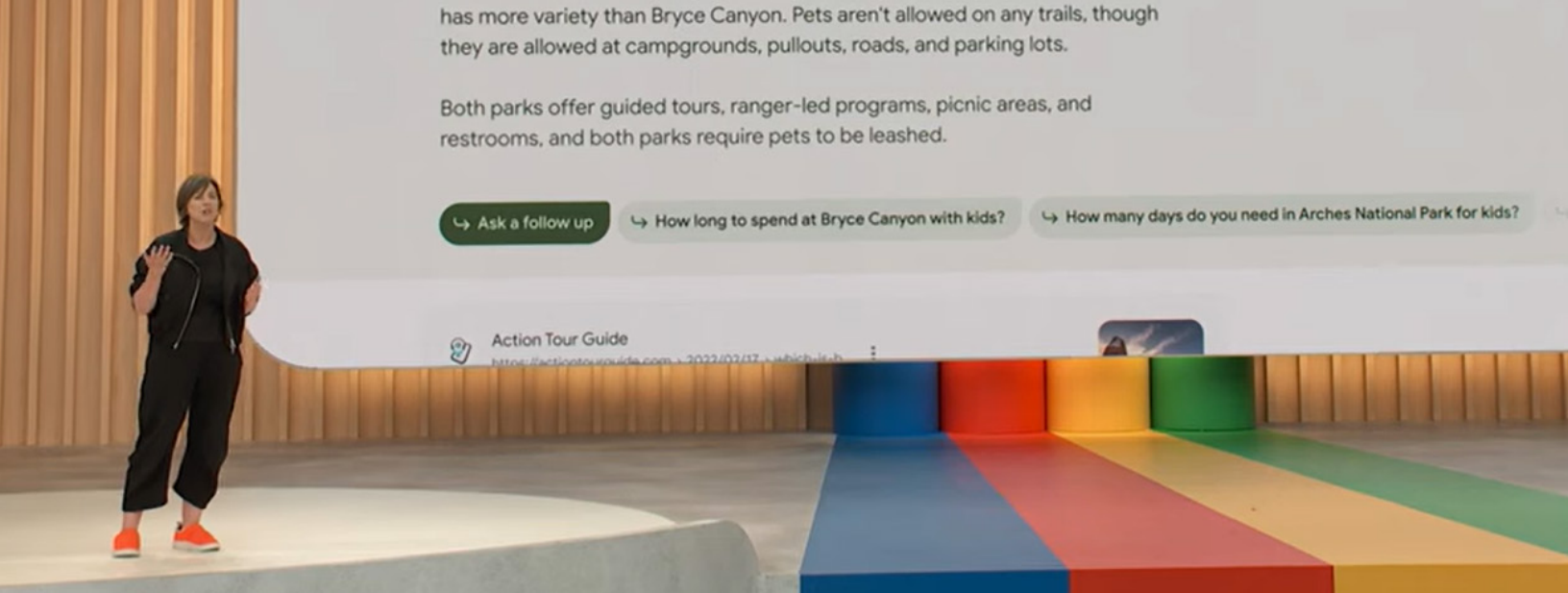


intelligence platform SponsorUnited, female athletes are set to overtake their male counterparts in social engagement in 2024.

Brands that choose to lean into female athletes should not just look for the stars on the court or field, but athletes that are in tune with their audience, make content that feels authentic, and value community building on their platform. Finding the connection between your brand and the athlete's brand should also be a priority—forcing a fit isn't beneficial on either side, but brands should be open to outside-the-box thinking that can lead to a fun partnership on social.

At Rain the Growth Agency, we're already thinking about the ways brands can tap into the extensive and valued communities built around female athletes, through our newly launched dedicated practice area, [HypeHer](#). Combined with our agency influencer capabilities, we're ready to lead brands into female athlete partnerships that build connection, capitalize on community, and amplify messaging.

Sources: *On3*, an NIL market valuation tool, 2022; *GRIN*, a social media measurement tool, 2023.



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Adapting to AI: Searching in an Evolving Environment

By [Stasia Fulginiti](#), Associate Director of Paid Search + YouTube

As search evolves with the introduction of AI-powered user functionalities, so will the approach to advertising. For over 20 years, how humans leverage search engines has changed drastically. In response, search engines have innovated how they deliver results with updates and new features to campaign types, ad formats and more. However, the adaptation to AI in paid search has been slower than expected despite the demand for more personalization. Due to the exponential growth in computing, we are now at a point of inflection.

You've heard the buzz about Microsoft's ChatGPT, Google's introduction of an AI-powered Search Engine Results Page (SERP) platform Bard, and maybe even whispers about Google's Magi, a new search engine project in development. The common thread through these conversations sheds light on AI and machine-learning coming to the forefront of the user experience. Most of us are used to leveraging these tools behind the scenes of our works mastery via bid strategies, scripts, custom audiences, and more. Search marketers have been conditioned to educate clients on how machine-learning is enhancing performance but have yet to experience the true impact an AI-powered, more visual SERP will have.

With the expedited adoption of these experiences across Google and Microsoft, many questions have arised. When will target audiences see ads? In what format? Will there be fewer opportunities to advertise? Will there be higher costs and more competition? How are these companies maintaining and growing monetization? How can we improve our current use cases for AI with the uncharted territory of the visual, natural language SERP? While all these questions are valid and profound, search marketers remain skeptical of the unknown.

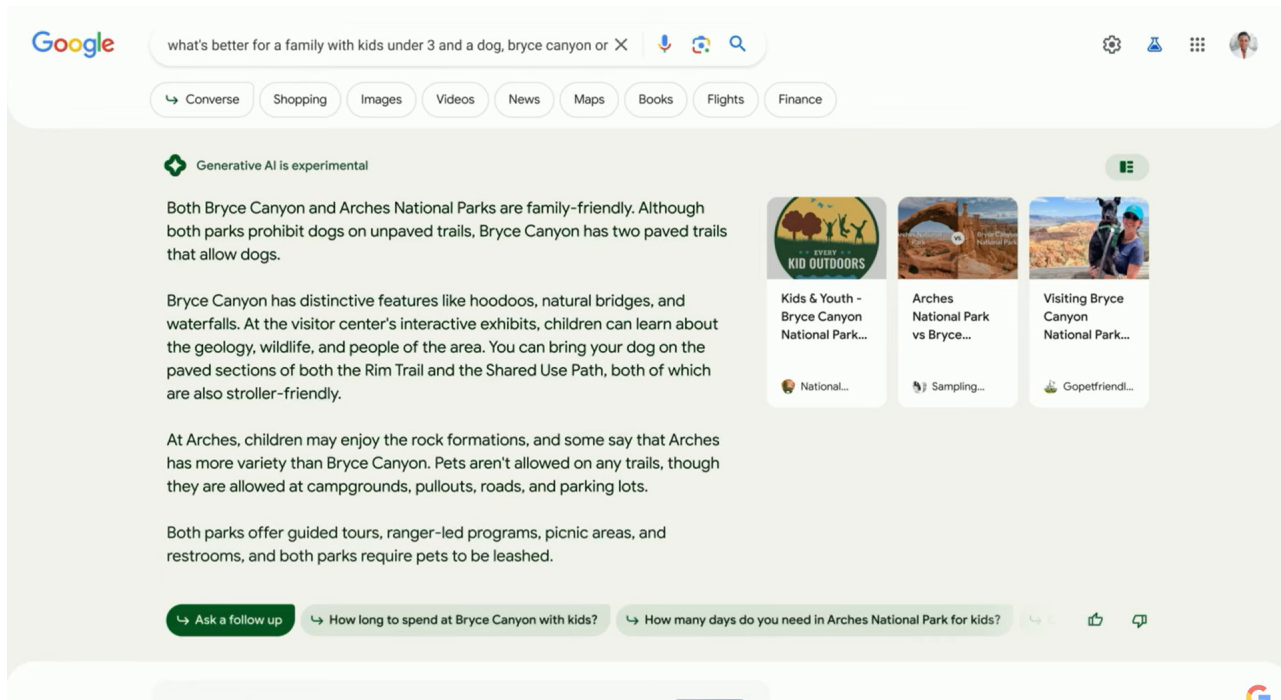
There's one thing we know for certain; paid search will remain relevant, but our approach and strategies must adjust to reach our targets in the "new era" of SERPs. Change is not to be feared as successful pay-per-click (PPC) practices are built on pillars. A world where AI takes over all aspects ceases to exist so long as industry leaders and people managers continue to do the following:

- Carve out the new role human touch will play
- Understand how these tools and technology can identify opportunities faster and cut down on the "less shiny" tasks within PPC
- Focus on cultivating best practices that leverage AI and machine learning

Is AI the New Copywriter?

Personally, I've noticed the increase in LinkedIn thought starters highlighting AI's threat to search marketers' roles. Truly an arguable paradigm considering AI has been an advantage for us to leverage during some more of our daunting tasks such as copy writing. However, what role do humans play in automation?

Creativity: the output is only as strong as the input, and creativity is the hardest advantage for a competitor to copy. If marketers are clear and descriptive, AI-powered solutions will generate more natural language capturing the attention of the target audience more quickly. Attention is the most valuable currency of the future. However, both creativity and attention are deeply rooted in the talent your team holds and simply enhanced by AI, not replaced.



All the Chat About ChatGPT

Early adoption of ChatGPT is helping marketers overcome creative roadblocks, successfully increase efficiency in daily workflow, or in a more casual setting, develop healthy meal plans and resumes. Personally, Power Automate's ability to decode emails, create calendar invites, or even generate to-do lists is quite impressive. The main theme of it all seems to orbit around the need for efficiency in our industry as it evolves. Whether the use case is practical or imaginative—(cue the Mean Girls memes)—“the limit does not exist” with ChatGPT.

There is no doubt that the ChatGPT platform and outputs are more personable and natural. The dynamic experience lends itself well to the everyday user. However, marketers' initial reaction to the release was met with fear of inundating users with false information. Just like human relationships, trust needs to be developed. We've lived in a world of optimizing for ads and rewarding strong, accurate content. If results become monetized, does that not defeat the purpose of AI and will it hinder further adoption in advertising strategies? We may be looking at a new search environment rewarding engagement over answers.

Adapting to AI in Google Search

Speaking to Google has traditionally been keyword based. Pivoting to natural language search is inevitable to keep up with computing. Google will admit to being slow to adopt a more immersive AI-powered SERP for users, but after discussions at the 2023 I/O event in May, change is imminent. Search marketers (though skeptical) will have to pivot and refine best practices.

Google announced a more “visual, snackable, personal, and human” layout to their SERP tailored more to younger searchers. Their new experimental Google Search Generative Experience, or SGE, will not allow advertisers to opt out of showing ads or track their ads. We are being asked to put blind faith in Google’s new initiatives, such as Performance Max, all for the sake of a more human-esque interaction with computing. Will it become too complicated for the less tech-savvy individuals?

Like anything else, to make progress we must be comfortable with being uncomfortable. Dating myself, but these recent changes bring me back to when text ads became expanded or when new match types were first introduced. Now, we as search marketers must carve a new path without “ten blue links” and a change like such can be met with fear for those responsible for site traffic or content.

A company such as Google is extremely methodical and would not interrupt their ad model overnight. A more AI-immersive experience still requires user input and online behavioral trends, however, attention is critical. Bard will be required to study a user’s preference more intensely than the current to present sponsored ads. The payoff for the user is a more dynamic, natural experience despite their technical ability. For the marketer, the payoff is not as explicit yet. A SERP with fewer links means fewer ads. AI-powered search will better understand user intent, prioritizing more relevant ads to their queries, but it may be more selective about which ads to display. Cue the adjustments in best practices...

Human Touch Meets Machine Learning

Brand awareness and targeting will have greater influence with informed ad buying. Search marketers will be able to derive more accurate insights from larger data sets due to AI’s computing capabilities. The most beautiful intersection of what we do is human touch meeting machine learning. Leveraging these larger data sets in a faster manner will enhance the way we provide a personable experience to our targets. The new-ish age of AI-informed optimization will allow search marketers to become more efficient in keyword, placement and targeting strategies; simply said, trimming the fat early on.

Despite these advancements, Google’s tracking is still muddy. When something new rolls out, search marketers strive to understand the functionality until we can expertly execute and explain. When all the cookies are depreciated from the jar, and they roll out their own version of Intelligent Tracking Prevention, how much fidelity will the data hold? My prediction is that tracking will get more complex before it becomes clear again as we rely more on AI modeling. Take Google Analytics 4 for example; most of us have taken the “learn with us” approach to integration with our client partners. From the bidding side of the aisle, our tried-and-true leverages will pivot more toward adjusting conversion actions and their values.

The driving factor behind these changes will ultimately push advertisers towards ROI-based strategies regardless of vertical. Leveraging that creativity to capture consumer attention is the start to remodeling the ways we work. A successful search practice will continue to build upon machine learning but encourage deeper human investigation into AI-driven results. Keep in mind that we will be learning alongside our client partners more so than ever before. The power to question is the basis of all human (and now AI) progress.

Top 3 Takeaways from Meta's Performance Marketing Summit

By [Shuree Jones](#), Group Director, Paid Social & Influencer Media

Meta's Performance Marketing Summit, held in San Francisco in June, could've been turned into a party game: take a sip of your drink every time you hear "AI."

The irony about so much AI talk from Meta was that machine learning and algorithm-based optimization has been a part of the Meta toolkit for years. (Just ask any paid social marketer about the powers and pitfalls of the "learning phase.") This rebranding is welcome though—brands that have been wary of the concept of machine learning could be more apt to accept testing into products that lead with buzzy AI.

Several themes were present over the day and a half summit, focused on performance marketers including in-house and agency peers. Here are my top three:

1. Creative is the new targeting

I almost dropped my phone pulling it out so fast to take a picture of those exact words on the screen behind Meta's Director of Auction Science and their Creative Shop lead, to send to my team. The concept of building creative that speaks directly to segments of your target audience is something we've been invested in for some time. Meta boldly making the statement to an auditorium full of performance marketers was the best indicator that this is the way forward for targeting.



Creative-as-targeting is also evident in the product roadmap outlined during the summit. Extensions of Meta's Advantage+ product suite (rooted in AI—take a sip) include expansion of objectives, base targeting, and even creative opportunities to include product-level video to your catalog feeds.

2. Gen Z has buying power—but they have requirements for entry



I was surprised to see such emphasis on Gen Z on the summit agenda, but it quickly made sense as a focal point for a few topics, including creative diversification and partnering with creators to build connection. The rise of Reels (as a direct competitor to TikTok) was discussed at length, with Meta executives touting it as the fastest growing element on the platform, particularly for this segment.

I was especially pleased to hear the panel of Gen Z creators talk so passionately about their own brands, and the importance of building trust among their communities. Brands that work with Gen Z creators should bring them in early to the process, allowing these creators to ideate and develop concepts alongside the creative team. The result is not only a concept and execution that connects to the target Gen Z audience, but one that fits on both the brand and creator's sides, cementing that audience trust.

3. Measurement isn't one-size-fits-all



Meta goes one step further here for performance marketers, outlining the new “Performance 5”: a framework to maximize performance in key areas. The Performance 5 levers include Account Simplification, Creative Differentiation, Automation, Data Quality, and Results Variation. Our agency’s Meta reps have developed client-specific scorecards for the Performance 5, which has given us a clear view of next steps to improve performance based on this framework.

In the years since iOS 14 rocked the paid social marketing landscape, advertisers have struggled to find ways to measure the channel’s impact. Meta’s investment into AI and measurement tools has eased that struggle, complete with a heavy emphasis on a 360 approach. The summit directive was to evolve your measurement approach by triangulating methodologies and data sources to get a more complete view of impact outside of last touch measurement.

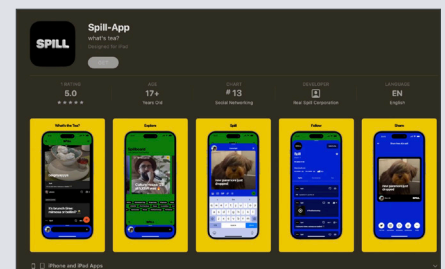
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Weak TV Upfront may spur media companies to bet heavy on ‘scatter’ ads
[\[Variety\]](#)



Disney is pitching advertisers on a new framework for women’s sports sponsorships
[\[Marketing Brew\]](#)



Spill is a new black-owned Twitter alternative. Here’s what to know about the app
[\[Time\]](#)

Meta Drops Threads, the Diss Track to Twitter

By [Shatesha Scales Flanigan](#), Supervisor, Paid Social

What happened: On July 6, millions of users flocked to the Threads platform, Meta's newest Twitter contender, seemingly overnight. By Friday, July 7, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg reported that the platform had hit 30 million users. As of July 10, it was at 100 million users and counting. Zuckerberg said, "That's mostly organic demand, and we haven't even turned on many promotions yet."

Why this is a big deal: This level and speed of user growth on a new consumer social app is unheard of, and Threads has been setting records ever since. To put it in context, TikTok hit its first 100 million users nine months after its launch and took Instagram 2.5 years. ChatGPT, the former fastest-growing consumer platform, hit an average of 13 million users daily and reached 100 million users two months after launch, according to a study by UBS.

How it works: Threads is a supplement to Instagram, so users must connect an existing account to use it. Most users opted to use their current Instagram account, which made signing up for a new account seamless. The good and bad news is you can deactivate the Threads profile but will need to delete your Instagram account to completely delete Threads. Instagram accounts typically have a lot of history, so users who attached their accounts to Threads are less likely to delete.

- To sign up, users can tap the login with Instagram button and transfer over all accounts they're following for ease.
- The feed focuses on people you follow and other suggested users based on what the algorithm thinks you'll be interested in.
- For now, the platform is still in development, so users are limited to replying, reblogging, and liking posts. There are options to make your profile private, but most people have opted for the public view. The platform is reminiscent of young Twitter, where it was cool to chat organically with friends and strangers without consequences, and users are still in the honeymoon phase.



- Users can control privacy settings to mute, block, hide offensive words and phrases or custom words, and hide likes, etc., so there is a level of brand safety control for casual browsing.
- Users are still trying to figure out how to navigate and use the platform, so the potential is unlimited, and users and brands can make an impact in this infancy stage.
- The algorithm and users favor threads that ask meaningful questions and encourage engagement. However, keep the questions short and use numbers or bullets to summarize key points.

Can brands advertise?: Paid advertising isn't available yet and won't be for some time. Meta wants to focus on the user experience and aims to hit the one billion mark before monetizing. "We hope to take what Instagram does best and create a new experience around text, ideas, and discussing what's on your mind," said Zuckerberg. However, brands have potential to grow with the platform and establish a community with users. Community is and will continue to be a crucial part of brand awareness and consumer loyalty in this evolving social landscape, so brands must tap in now versus waiting to see what everyone else does. However, Threads is a conversation platform, so like Twitter and other social media, be prepared to engage with users. Gone are the days of just posting content, and Threads is a great space for brands to tap into their followers.

Why it's here to stay: While it's still early to tell how this platform will evolve, we believe it will be around for a while. The platform came at the perfect time, and with some of the uncertainty in its competitor, Twitter, users have been hungry for another conversation social app. Like most new platforms, there are still limitations, bugs to fix, and enhancements to roll out. Regardless, the demand and audience are certainly there.

Is this a replacement for Twitter?: It's no surprise that Twitter usage has declined after Elon Musk's acquisition and drastic platform updates. However, in its current state, Threads isn't a replacement for Twitter since it still needs some real-time news feed functionality for breaking news and trending topics. Users will continue to divide their time between social channels since most users are active on multiple platforms.

Should brands be on Threads?: Short answer, absolutely. Brands should want to be where their target audience is, and right now, it's likely their audience has flocked to Threads, the newest social media platform. Though the initial buzz will eventually pass, this is more than just a fad. Sure, Threads has been dubbed Twitter's clone, but this new social channel has the potential for more if done right. Threads are what you would get if the intuitive content discovery feed of the TikTok algorithm feed and conversation piece of Twitter combined. Threads just strips the best things from these platforms—the comments and conversation—and allows a one-stop shop for users to engage in the "town square."



Threads, an Instagram app

Share ideas & trends with t...



Still, there are impacts of what this new platform can have on the culture because, unlike Twitter and TikTok, most users on Threads are those you already know and follow. So, Meta should be mindful of the upcoming election—a platform with an echo chamber opens up a new avenue for misinformation. However, this platform fits perfectly with Web 3.0, where the community will be the major factor in how individuals and brands interact as individuals take more control of their personal data and online identity.

How should brands use Threads?: Create a profile for visibility using your current Instagram handle. Don't stress about producing content until you have the resources to commit to avoid spreading your content strategy too thin. But stay true to your brand when you post, and don't be afraid to test and learn, and take the time to truly engage with your followers and what they like. The platform is still very new, and we're all still figuring out how to work together. So honesty and building consumer trust will be critical as this platform evolves.

Need More Guidance?



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