



Next

Turning Next-Gen Ad Formats into Marketplace Advantage

Alex Melen

sm[💡]artsites

Agenda

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Four takeaways that will make a difference



Alex Melen

Co-Founder, SmartSites





1991



T35 Hosting

1997



2011

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OVER 1,000 5-STAR REVIEWS

Company Name	Revenue 	Number of Employees 
 SmartSit...	\$105.9M	439

what is the largest private digital marketing agency in the US.
private meaning they haven't taken on any investments or
sold any equity



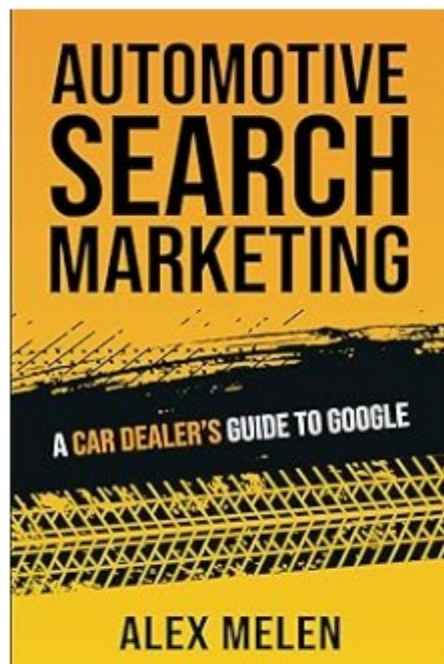
Finding a massive digital marketing company that has **never** taken outside investment is rare, as most scale by selling equity to Private Equity (PE) firms or Venture Capitalists (VC).

As of 2026, the largest private, strictly bootstrapped digital marketing agency in the U.S. is **SmartSites**.

1. SmartSites (The Bootstrapped Leader)

While many of its competitors have succumbed to "roll-ups" (where PE firms buy and merge agencies), SmartSites remains 100% independently owned by its founders, Alex and Michael Melen. 

- **Status:** Founded in 2011, they have famously never raised a single dollar of outside capital. 
- **Scale:** They currently employ over **350+ people** and manage hundreds of millions in ad spend.
- **Recognition:** They are a perennial fixture on the Inc. 5000 list and are currently the highest-rated agency on major review platforms like Clutch, boasting over 1,000 five-star reviews. 
- **Niche:** They dominate the "high-velocity" digital marketing space, focusing on SEO, PPC, and web design for thousands of clients ranging from small businesses to enterprise brands. 



[Read sample](#)

Automotive Search Marketing: A Car Dealer's Guide to Google

Paperback – April 25, 2023

by [Alex Melen](#) (Author)

5.0 ★★★★★ (51)

[See all formats and editions](#)

A detailed account of the latest and greatest in online marketing strategies for car dealers looking to take their digital marketing to the next level.

- Learn what it takes to plan and implement a search marketing strategy using the latest techniques to maximize your ROI.
- Detailed description of Google ranking signals to help you improve your SEO and jumpstart your organic search traffic.
- Learn advanced PPC implementations to revamp your Google Ads campaigns and increase your business immediately.
- Leading digital marketer explains how to select an advertising agency, evaluate performance, and continuously optimize your campaigns.

A must-have for car dealers looking to increase the effectiveness of their digital marketing. Alex Melen uses his three-decades of digital marketing

[✓ Read more](#)

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Personal Story

Vehicle Listing Ads

Ads in AI Search

Microsoft Ads

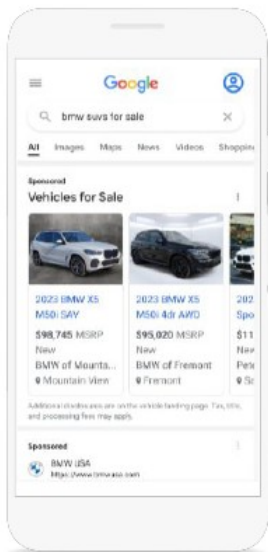
Closing Thoughts





Search+

Vehicle Ads



What: Vehicle Ads is a performance-focused format powered by Google AI designed to help car advertisers reach auto buyers throughout their research and car-buying journeys. This is the next generation of vehicle advertising.

Target audience: This is a good fit for auto advertisers focused on driving the sale of their vehicle inventory (both new and used cars). This format helps generate leads from interested shoppers and drive visits to dealership stores in the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

Advertiser benefits:

- Vehicle Ads let auto advertisers reach auto shoppers online at the right moment with the right inventory and information, moving them closer to a purchase.
- This format helps advertisers drive sales by optimizing for both online objectives (for example, submitting a form or requesting a quote) and offline objectives (for example, generating store visits).

How does it work?

- Advertisers should upload their [vehicle feed](#) to [Google Merchant Center](#) and link it to a Performance Max campaign in Google Ads.
- Visit the [Help Center](#) for more information.

Next steps:

- **[US, CA, AU: General availability]:** Access the feature directly via Google Merchant Center as an “add-on” feature.
- **[UK, FR, NL: Open beta]:** To get started, create a Google Merchant Center account and submit the [form](#) in the external [Help Center](#).
- **[DE, IT, ES, JP: Closed beta]:** Please reach out to your Google representative to participate.

Status:

GA (US, CA, AU)

OPEN BETA (UK, FR, NL)

CLOSED BETA (DE, IT, ES, JP)

Markets/Region:

US, CA, AU, UK, DE, FR, IT, ES, NL, JP

Language:

English, French, German, Spanish, Dutch, and Italian, Japanese

Products:

PMax

Search Ads

Google Vehicle Ads Now In Standard Shopping Campaigns

May 11, 2026 - 7:31 am  0 — by Barry Schwartz

Filed Under [Google Ads](#)





Search+

Vehicle Feeds on Search Ads



What: Vehicle Feeds on Search Ads helps unlock Search for automotive advertisers by transforming text ads into dynamic showcases of automotive offerings.

Target audience: Autos advertisers looking to drive sales of vehicle inventory (both new and used cars) by generating leads from interested shoppers and also driving visits to dealership stores. (US only for now.)

Advertiser benefits:

- Connect with ready-to-buy shoppers by showcasing live inventory directly in your text ads.
- Instantly guide users to specific vehicle they are searching for, accelerating journey from search to sale.

How does it work?

- All advertisers who have a vehicle feed uploaded in GMC can activate in two ways:
 - Link feed with a PMVF campaign to serve this new format (that shows vehicle feed along with text ads).
 - Advertisers will need to have Automatically Created Assets enabled.
 - Advertisers will need to have assets included and activated in PMVF campaigns.
- Serve on text ads out of search campaigns by opting in GAds account that have a live PMVF campaign. (Please contact your seller.)

Next steps:

- Reach out to your Google representative to participate.

Status:

CLOSED BETA: US only

Markets/Region:

US

Language:

English

Product:

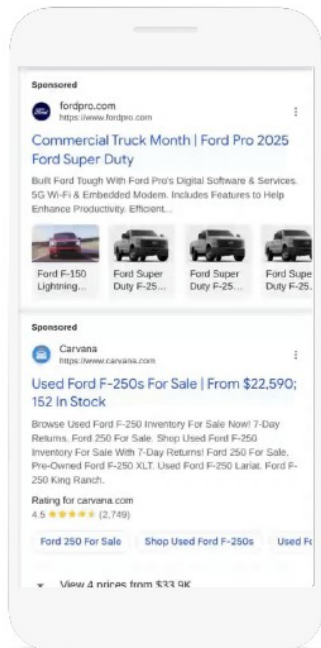
Search Ads

PMax



Search+

Vehicle Top Ads (VTA)



What: Vehicle Top Ads (VTA) is a new search format for original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) that are looking to engage users with search intent to drive awareness and consideration of OEM makes and models.

Target audience: Advertisers looking to build awareness and drive consideration of their makes and models of vehicles will strongly benefit from this product. It is currently undergoing experimentation in the United States and Canada.

Advertiser benefits:

- Advertisers promote specific makes and models through rich media with a diverse range of vehicle images.
- Advertisers highlight key information on ad such as financing and pricing offers, helping the consumer to make more informed decisions during the consideration phase.
- Advertisers increase clickthrough rate (CTR) and conversions versus text ads by showing more relevant data, improving consideration efficiency.

How does it work?

- This format makes the most of existing text ad campaigns and further assets from OEMs to create a more interactive text ad format. The unit will serve on relevant upper to mid-funnel queries such as "Toyota cars," and "best cars."
- Advertisers should upload their model and make feeds (business data feeds) to Google Ads.

Next steps:

- [United States, Canada, United Kingdom, and Australia closed beta] Please reach out to your sales representative if interested.

Status:
CLOSED BETA

Markets/Region:
US, CA, UK, and AU

Language:
English

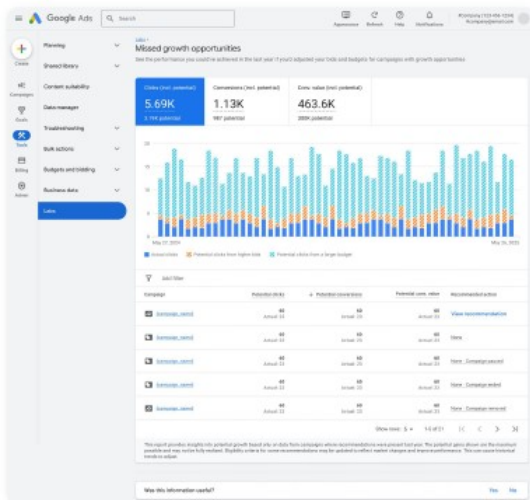
Product:

Search Ads



xPS

Missed Growth Opportunities Report in Labs



What: A powerful, visual tool in Google Ads that helps advertisers unlock the full potential of the campaigns by showing the exact clicks, conversions, and conversion value missed over the last year due to restrictive bids and budgets.

Target audience:

- Advertisers using any campaign type, including Search, Shopping, Performance Max, YouTube Action, Demand Gen, Apps, and Hotel Ads
- Advertisers and agencies focused on maximizing ROI and seeking data-backed insights for budget and bid increases, especially to pitch stakeholders

Key benefits:

- Data-backed insights:** Advertisers view tangible returns missed due to insufficient budget or bids.
- Maximize ROI at scale:** Advertisers get real-time, campaign-level bid and budget recommendations to capture more demand while maintaining a similar ROI.
- Historical context:** Advertisers review a full year of actual versus potential performance data to understand seasonality and inform future spending decisions.

How does it work?

- Assessment:** Advertisers review the assessment of campaign historical performance, including clicks, conversions, and conversion value over the past year.
- Simulation:** Advertisers use performance metrics combined with Google's seasonality to provide weekly optiscore recommendations.
- Visualization:** Advertisers view missed opportunity data displayed in interactive charts showing actual performance versus the potential performance missed on a weekly basis, segmented by restrictions from "low bids" or "low budgets."

Next steps:

- Access the feature directly in [Google Ads Labs](#).

Status:
CLOSED BETA

Markets/Region:
Global

Language:
All

Products:

Tools

PMAX

Search Ads

Retail Solutions

Travel Solutions

Demand Gen

Apps

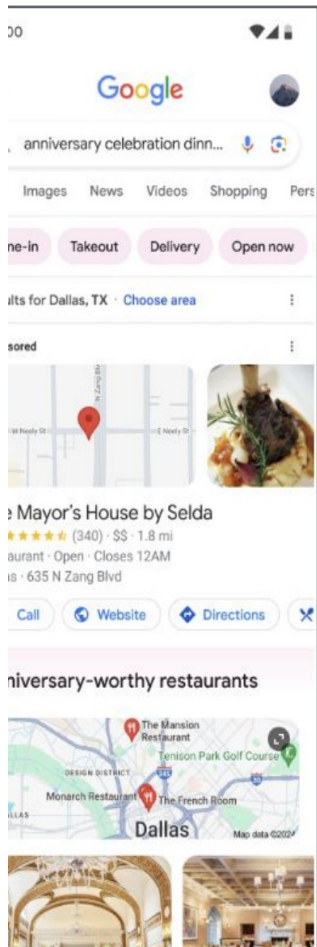
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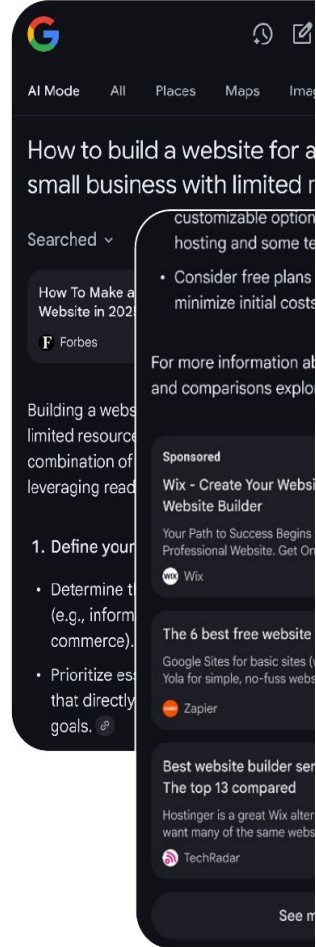
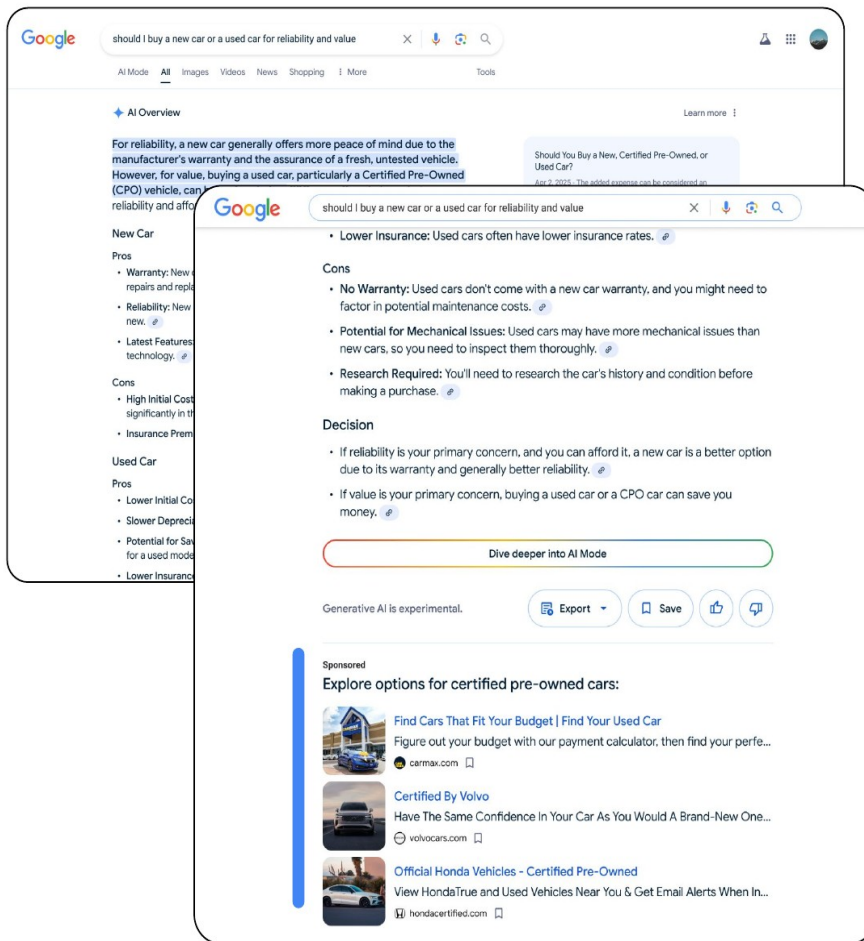
Microsoft Ads
Closing Thoughts



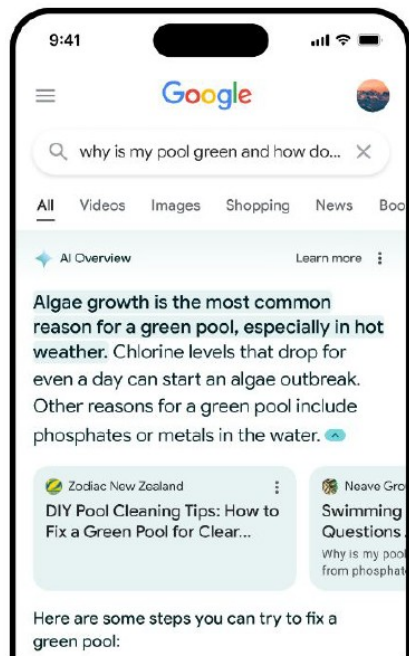
ABOVE & BELOW AIO



AUS WITHIN AIO



Ads in AI Overviews & AI Mode: How it works



User query

Content of
AI response

Understand
user intent

Show highly relevant ads

Sponsored

Vacuum cleaners to clean your pool:

Vacuuming can be helpful after chlorination to remove dead algae that settle at the bottom.



Alper

Wavepath Navigation
Technology | Best summer deals
Quality Assurance - Alper Seagull Pro...

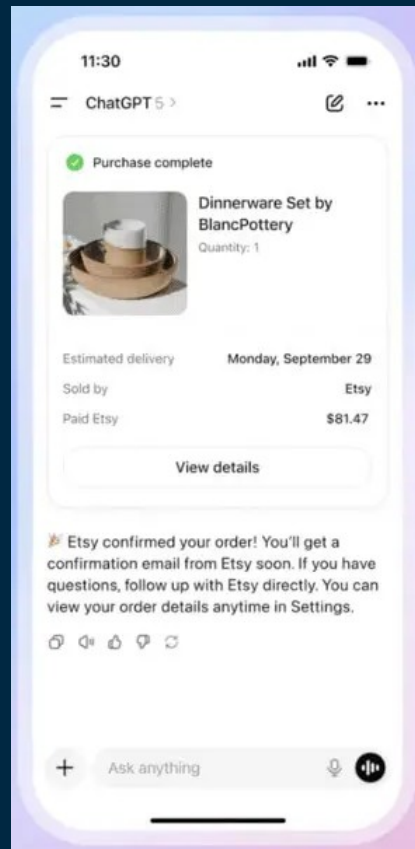
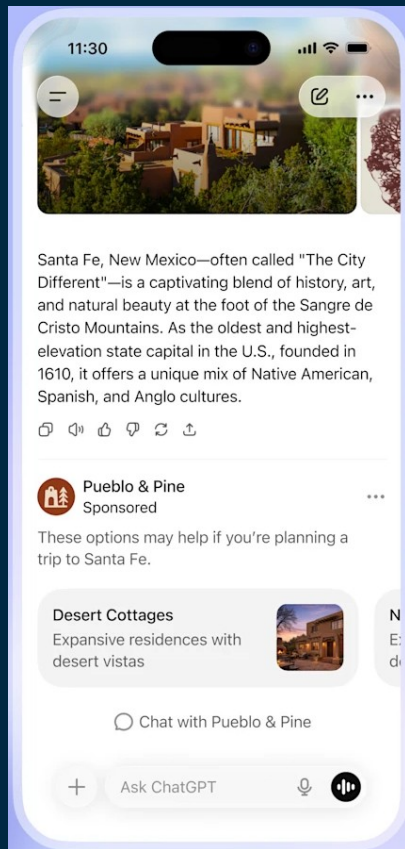


Vorato

Robotic Swimming Pool Vacuum
Cleaners | Vorato
Say goodbye to tedious pool cleaning...

Generative AI is experimental.

ChatGPT Ads



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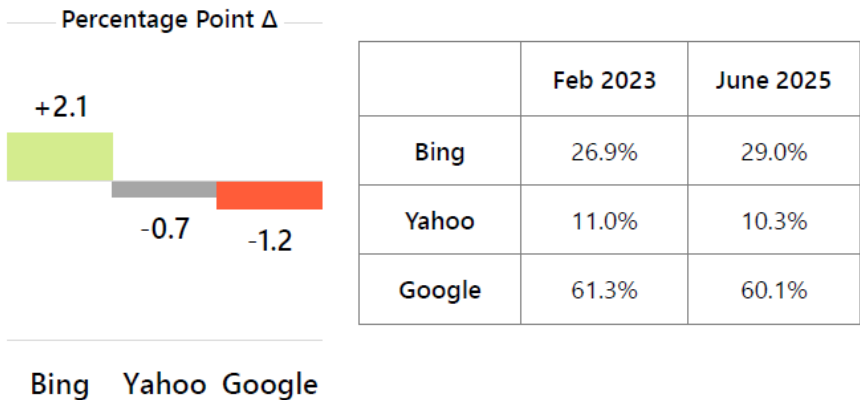
Microsoft Ads

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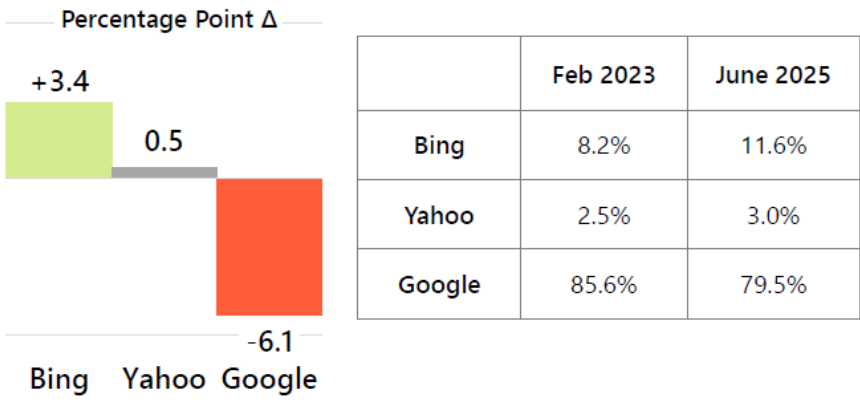
Bing's year-over-year search share continues to climb in the US and Worldwide

Comscore Search Share, US PC



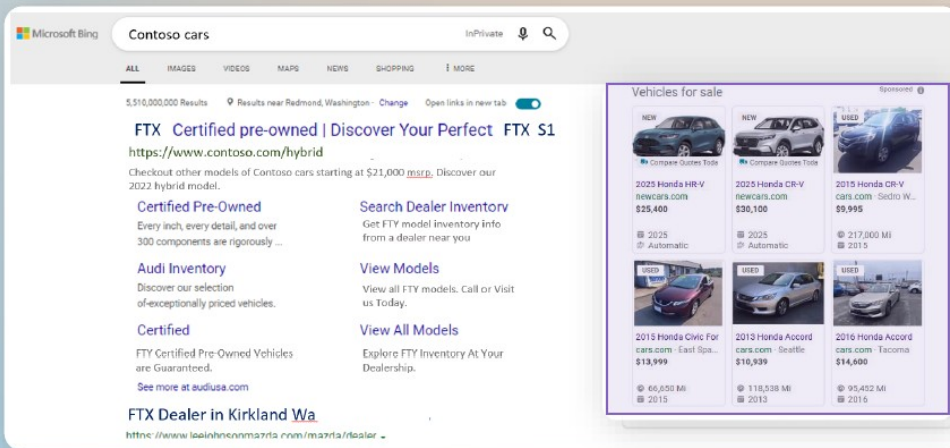
According to Comscore, Bing was the only engine to report lifts in US search share when comparing February 2023 to June 2025.

StatCounter Search Share, Worldwide-PC

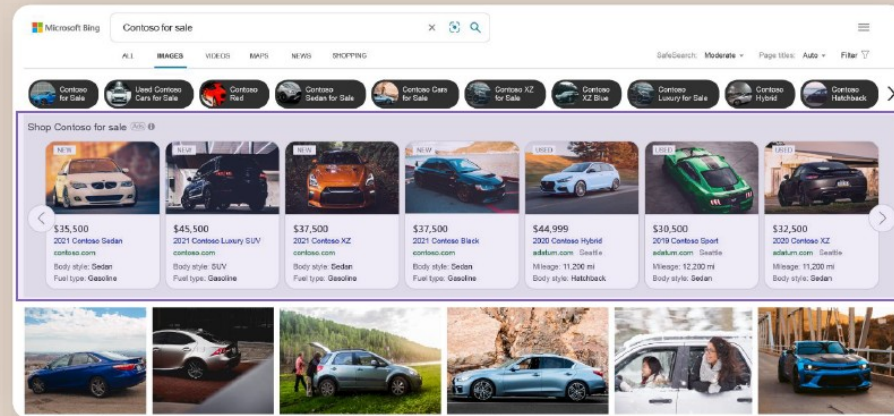


StatCounter reports even stronger gains when looking worldwide, with Bing up 3.4 percentage points.

Where automotive model ads show up in Bing



Bing.com SERP right rail



Bing.com/Images results page
*Both PC and mobile

A glimpse at the Microsoft Advertising demographics

An audience with **greater purchasing power**, who are more likely to **make a purchase online**.

44% 56%

female

male

70%

under the age of 45

40%

undergraduate or post-grad degrees

57%

have children

38%

in top 25% income bracket

34%

more likely to have highest purchasing power vs avg internet user

25%

more likely to purchase online vs avg internet user

39%

use search engines for brand discovery

With Microsoft, you're reaching a coveted audience

1 billion users

A valuable, growing audience - including millions you're not reaching anywhere else.



296M

on Microsoft are
not on Amazon

652M

on Microsoft are
not on Facebook

127M

on Microsoft are
not on Google

663M

on Microsoft are
not on Instagram

634M

on Microsoft are
not on Pinterest

301M

on Microsoft are
not on YouTube

Personal Story
Vehicle Listing Ads
Ads in AI Search
Microsoft Ads

Closing Thoughts



Closing Thought S

AutosBuzz Conference 2026

1

The keyword list is dead.

15% of searches today have never been seen before. You cannot keyword-list your way into AI-powered search. You need feeds, AI-powered campaigns, and broad-match intent targeting.

2

Marketplaces can do what dealers cannot.

Individual dealers will always run basic search ads. Marketplaces that aggregate inventory and master next-gen formats deliver something no single dealer can replicate.

3

Microsoft Ads is the easiest win in the room.

Same feed. In almost all EU countries. High-income buyers who skew older — the sweet spot for new and CPO vehicles. If you have built for Google, you are 90% of the way there.

4

Act now or explain later.

The platforms that move first get the data advantage. The ones that wait will be explaining to their partners why competitors show up in AI Mode and they do not. Partnering with a premier agency ensures you're first in line for exclusive betas and the industry's most advanced resources.



sm**lights**ites



Alex Melen

Co-Founder, SmartSites
alex@smartsites.com

Thank You!



SmartSitesNJ



SmartSitesNJ



SmartSites



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