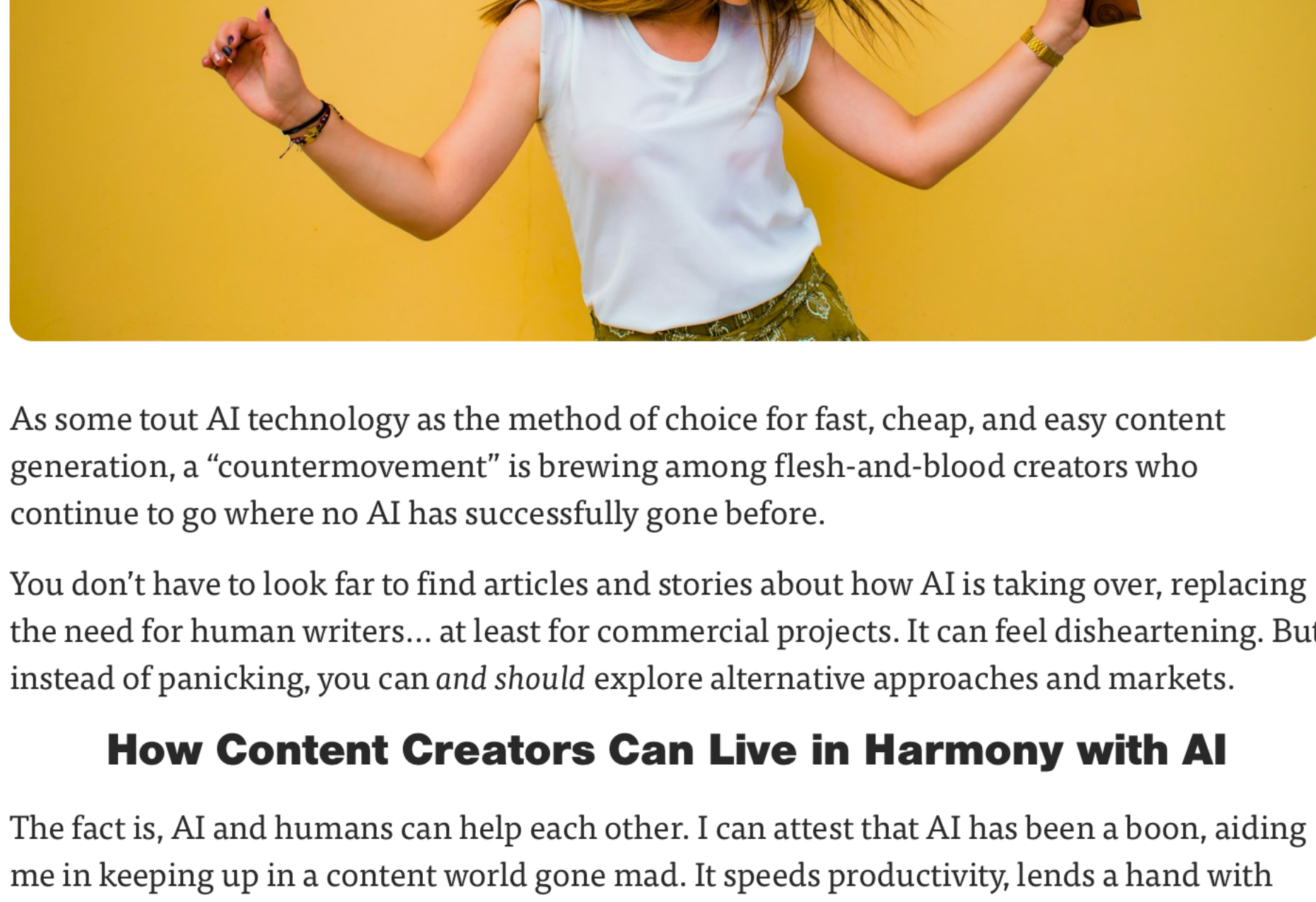


Is Your Relationship Status with AI Complicated?

By [Jonna Jerome](#) May 13, 2024

10 minute read



As some tout AI technology as the method of choice for fast, cheap, and easy content generation, a “countermovement” is brewing among flesh-and-blood creators who continue to go where no AI has successfully gone before.

You don't have to look far to find articles and stories about how AI is taking over, replacing the need for human writers... at least for commercial projects. It can feel disheartening. But instead of panicking, you can and should explore alternative approaches and markets.

How Content Creators Can Live in Harmony with AI

The fact is, AI and humans can help each other. I can attest that AI has been a boon, aiding me in keeping up in a content world gone mad. It speeds productivity, lends a hand with research, and is great at organization. Yet, there are still areas where AI does a spectacularly bad job.

When you emphasize your emotional intelligence and human touch, which remain beyond AI's capabilities, you give yourself an edge in the job market. And it's that notion that the countermovement I mentioned is built on. It entails a heightened emphasis on the unique qualities and skills humans bring to content creation, including emotion, personal experiences, and relationships.

AI cannot conduct interviews, attend events, express original opinions, show empathy, write memoirs, or craft stories based on firsthand experience. And it certainly cannot bond with clients over a cup of coffee. If you're comfortable in front of a camera or recording your voice, leveraging video or podcasts so your audience can get to know your authentic self (or your client) is an ideal way to bring your individuality into any messaging content... setting it apart from the sea of sameness that comes out of AI.

AI, Changing Algorithms, and Their Impact on SEO

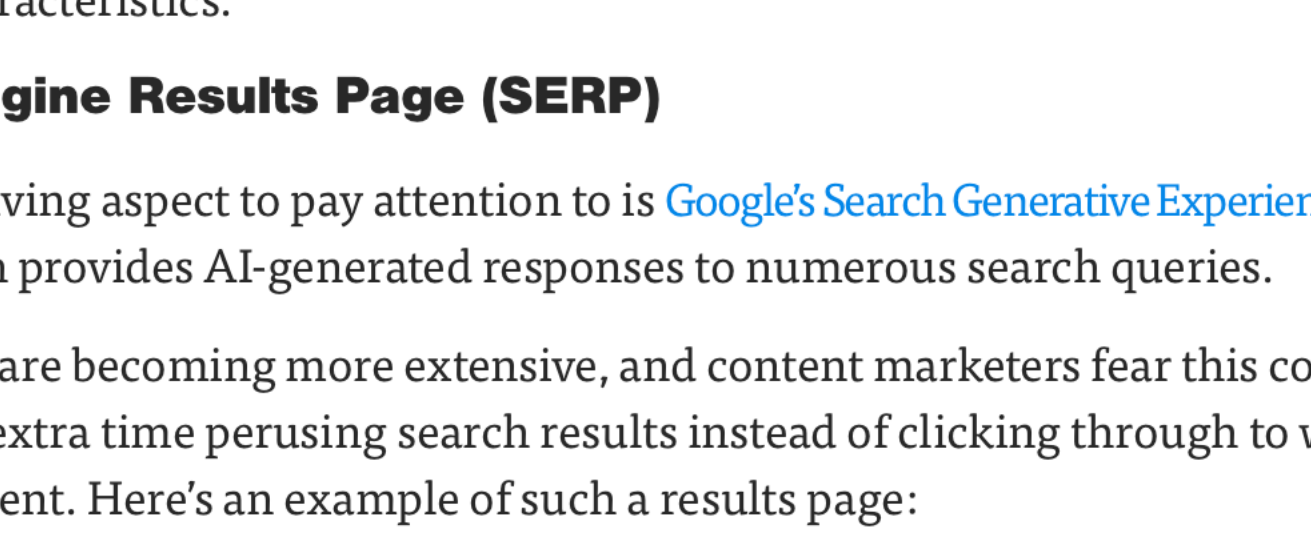
By embracing AI's impact on search engine algorithms, you can establish yourself as an important voice and valuable asset in your communities and for your clients. Take a look at how:

1. Be human. Use [emotional intelligence](#) in your content.
2. Apply [original research](#) for content creation.
3. Go deep into [niche marketing](#).

Refinements to AI make it possible for companies to use it to improve SEO user experiences and streamline the content creation process. Yet, marketing experts anticipate a surge of low-quality content flooding the online space this year, because of inexperienced AI users employing it ineffectively.

Proof of this occurring can be seen in Google's recently announced [core algorithm update and new spam policies/improvements](#) to cut down on low-quality search results.

Google expects these changes to reduce the amount of low-quality, unoriginal content appearing in search results by approximately 40%. That includes a lot of AI-generated content... which is what most marketers are putting out these days.



Numerous brands see AI as a fast and easy solution for content generation — often bypassing the expertise of professional writers or editors, and failing to personalize their output.

The upshot is when you show evidence of human emotional intelligence (that relates to a specific target audience), your work will stand out from the crowd.

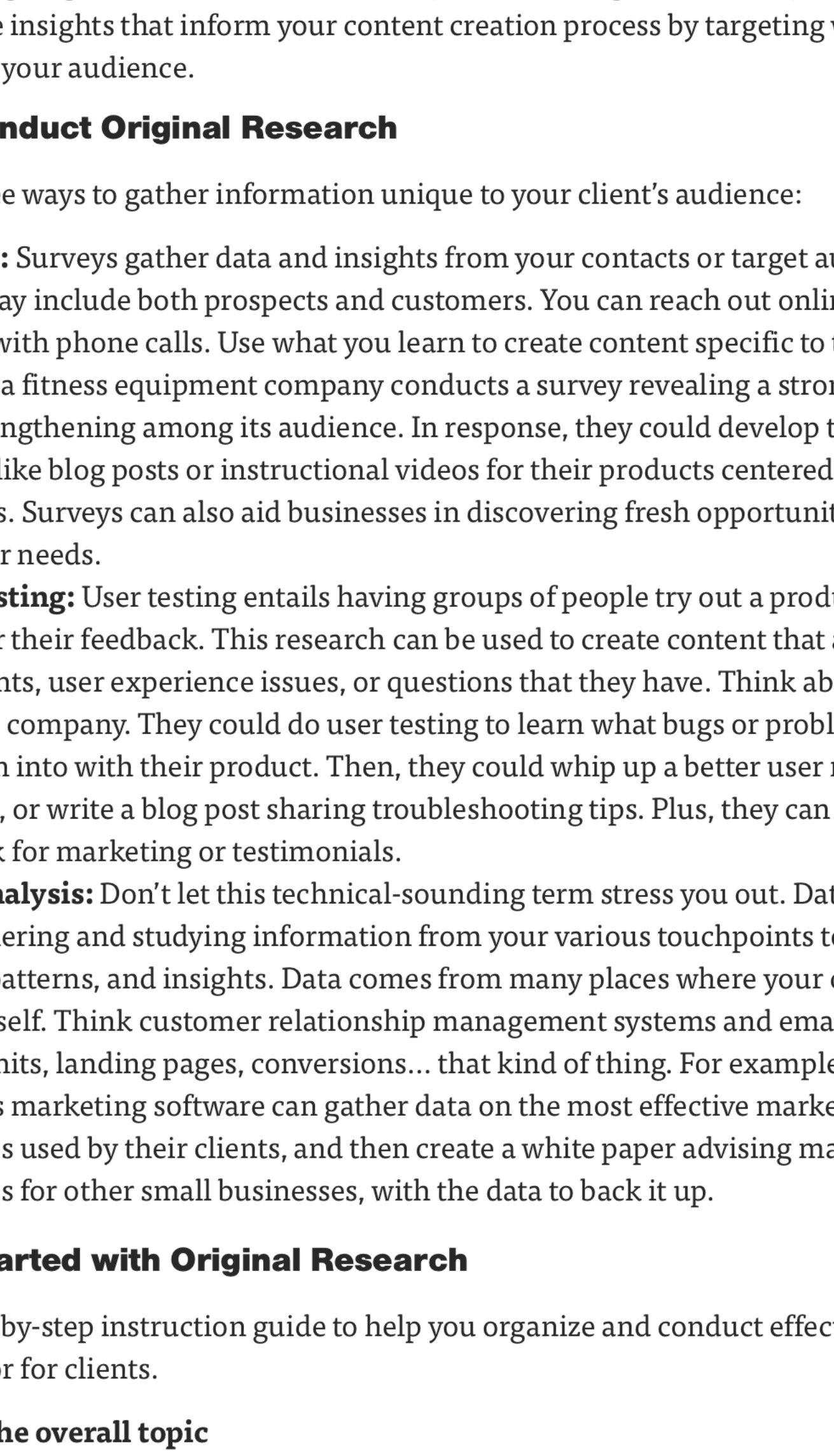
Search engines are continuously adapting to understand more complex human user queries. Google's algorithm [Multitask Unified Model](#) (MUM for short) can predict the order in which users navigate a search. Rather than relying solely on individual keywords, they consider the context and intent behind every search. These advances are why human writers can be more effective than AI in many aspects of SEO... precisely because we think like humans, not algorithms.

The components of Google's [E-E-A-T algorithm](#) (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness) are inherently human qualities that align with what users are searching for. They want content that is accurate and genuine, and that helps them solve their problems. The best way to naturally meet these criteria is by highlighting a brand's relatable characteristics.

Search Engine Results Page (SERP)

Another evolving aspect to pay attention to is [Google's Search Generative Experience](#) in the SERPs, which provides AI-generated responses to numerous search queries.

SERP results are becoming more extensive, and content marketers fear this could make users spend extra time perusing search results instead of clicking through to website pages or other content. Here's an example of such a results page:



To continue earning website traffic, provide very detailed, compelling content that shorter AI summaries can't easily replace. Here are some ways you can compete with Google's new search experience and make your content stand out:

- Embed multimedia content in your articles.
- Add other interactive elements.
- Use quality links for credibility.
- Provide detailed guidelines and examples.
- Showcase your brand's unique voice.
- Collaborate with subject matter experts and guest contributors.
- Be as comprehensive as possible.

Original Research Is Vital for Unique Content Creation

While not a new concept, original research is more crucial than ever to help clients stand out from AI-generated content. AI cannot produce or replicate it, because the information is unique to your client and their audience.

By conducting original research, such as surveys, user testing, or data analysis, you can gain valuable insights that inform your content creation process by targeting what is important to your audience.

How to Conduct Original Research

Here are three ways to gather information unique to your client's audience:

1. **Surveys:** Surveys gather data and insights from your contacts or target audience. These may include both prospects and customers. You can reach out online, via email, or even with phone calls. Use what you learn to create content specific to their needs. Let's say a fitness equipment company conducts a survey revealing a strong interest in core strengthening among its audience. In response, they could develop targeted content like blog posts or instructional videos for their products centered on core exercises. Surveys can also aid businesses in discovering fresh opportunities to fulfill customer needs.
2. **User Testing:** User testing entails having groups of people try out a product or service to gather their feedback. This research can be used to create content that addresses complaints, user experience issues, or questions that they have. Think about a software company. They could do user testing to learn what bugs or problems people often run into with their product. Then, they could whip up a better user manual, fix the bugs, or write a blog post sharing troubleshooting tips. Plus, they can use good feedback for marketing or testimonials.
3. **Data Analysis:** Don't let this technical-sounding term stress you out. Data analysis is just gathering and studying information from your various touchpoints to identify trends, patterns, and insights. Data comes from many places where your client's brand shows itself. Think customer relationship management systems and email results, website hits, landing pages, conversions... that kind of thing. For example, a company that sells marketing software can gather data on the most effective marketing strategies used by their clients, and then create a white paper advising marketing strategies for other small businesses, with the data to back it up.

Getting Started with Original Research

Here's a step-by-step instruction guide to help you organize and conduct effective research for yourself or for clients.

1. Identify the overall topic

- **Get curious:** Look for topics that genuinely interest you, your client, or their customers. Curiosity fuels the research process and motivates you to see it through.
- **Gather information:** Do a deep dive reviewing any existing literature to identify gaps, controversies, or unanswered questions within your field of interest.

2. Come up with a hypothesis

- **Focus:** Narrow your list down to a few specific questions that are feasible to address; these will be the foundation of your research.
- **Testability:** Ensure these question(s) are restable through observation or experimentation.
- **Originality:** Select question(s) that represent a novel contribution to existing knowledge of your subject.

3. Design your research methods

- **Research design:** Choose a suitable method — qualitative, quantitative, or mixed — depending on the nature of your research question.
- **Data Collection:** Plan how to collect this data, such as surveys, interviews, experiments, or archival research.
- **Ethical considerations:** Address participant consent, confidentiality, and other issues that may present themselves during the research process.

4. Data analysis and interpretation

- **Data management:** Organize your data logically to make analysis easier.
- **Statistical analysis:** Use statistical analysis for numbers and thematic analysis for themes to understand your data. Hire someone to do this if needed.
- **Interpretation:** Interpret your results by comparing them with the research and theories you used. What do these findings mean for your current or future goals?

5. Review and revision

- **Feedback:** Solicit feedback from participants and colleagues to identify strengths, weaknesses, accuracy, and areas for improvement in your research.
- **Revision:** Revise based on this feedback.

6. Contributing to knowledge creation

- **Citation and attribution:** Acknowledge and build upon existing research by citing relevant sources if used.
- **Long-term impact:** Consider the potential impact of your research on practical applications within your field, and share what you come up with.



Examples of Successful Campaigns Built on Original Research

- **Dove's campaign for real beauty:** Dove's iconic campaign challenged conventional beauty standards by celebrating diverse body types and appearances. The campaign was built around original research by Dove, which revealed that only 2% of women surveyed would describe themselves as beautiful. This extensive research formed the foundation for Dove's messaging, emphasizing authenticity, inclusivity, and self-acceptance. The campaign resonated with audiences and sparked conversations about beauty and self-esteem.
- **Google's "Year in Search" campaign:** Google's annual "Year in Search" campaign reflects on top search trends and events of the past year. The campaign analyzes billions of searches to identify the most significant cultural moments, news events, and trends. Google's "Year in Search" videos and interactive websites resonate with audiences by offering a retrospective look at the events that shaped our world, reflecting the collective curiosity and concerns of people around the globe.

Benefits of Original Research in Content Creation

The examples above demonstrate how original research drives a more personalized marketing approach. By understanding consumers, brands can create campaigns that are anything but cookie-cutter, and that have a lasting impact.

1. **Unique insights:** Conducting original research can provide unique insights not available elsewhere — and not generated by AI. Brands can gain insights into their target audience's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that they may not be able to gather through other means.
2. **Data-driven decisions:** Original research can make informed decisions about their content strategy. Rather than relying on assumptions, original research provides hard data that guides campaigns.
3. **Credibility:** Original research helps brands establish themselves as thought leaders and experts in their industry. Coming up with new information always trumps deciphering what has already occurred.
4. **Shareability:** Original content has the potential to capture widespread attention and go viral. Involving your audience creates a sense of ownership and investment, leading to a loyal following eager to share and promote your content.

Niche Marketing Creates Opportunities to Connect

Niche marketing targets a specific audience, united by needs, preferences, and identity. It revolves around providing exclusive, personalized, and more in-depth information than what may appear on the SERPs by other competitors. Original research complements niche marketing.

Niche marketing serves as a strategic defense against the homogenization of content by AI. It's about prioritizing relevance and context over sheer volume. By catering to niche audiences, writers can offer individualized, high-value content that AI cannot easily replicate. When you do, you can reduce your reliance on search engine algorithms for visibility. To entice and engage your website's audience, as well as leverage Google's E-A-T-T framework, it's essential to have a clear understanding of your audience.



Since AI recognizes this approach, it can also assist you in these areas:

- Identifying your niche and gaining deeper insight into their target audience
- Developing a reader persona using your audience's demographic data
- Organizing your writing workflow

For example, you can ask AI whether your blog posts and landing pages are optimized for your reader persona or to create a content outline focusing on their pain points. Niche marketing occurs when a business specializes in or highlights a particular product or service and tailors its marketing efforts to target specific groups or audiences.

Let's say your client sells shoes. They have hundreds of shoes for men, women, and children. They vary from casual wear to formal wear. Each represents a specific market segment with its own needs and preferences.

When defining niches, various factors come into play, such as

- price (luxury, discount);
- quality level (premium, handmade);
- demographics (gender, income level, education level); and
- geography (residents of certain countries, cities).

Look for a specialty, a unique feature, or a price point you can highlight to consumers. Perhaps they buy Greek sandals from a cobbler in Greece who still makes his products by hand, using only horse hides from animals who pass peacefully of old age. These cost more — but animal lovers and people who appreciate handcrafted products over machine-made items would be die-hard fans. We've identified three niche possibilities: sandals as the shoe type, handmade by a fascinating individual, and produced without harming any animals.

Examples of niche marketing campaigns:

Untuckit: This company makes shirts for men who like to wear them untucked. There are countless shirtmakers around the world, and most sell casual shirts. However, designers lean toward more fitted formal shirts, so finding a well-fitting casual shirt is more difficult. Untuckit offers 50+ customized fits to suit guys of all sizes with a shorter hemline.

Untuckit solved a simple problem with more options than anyone else did, successfully fulfilling a need. They're the perfect example of a company mastering a niche and slowly expanding, as they now offer other male products like polo shirts and jackets, and have started catering to women, too.

Lefty's: The Left Hand Store: Lefty's approached an underserved community of left-handed people. Since most of the population are right-handers, Lefty's played it smart and created a store that sells products designed exclusively for the left-hander. The store found its success by reaching a smaller audience and targeting them for its brand.

Niche marketing stands as a beacon of opportunity for content writers to elevate their craft and surpass the limitations of AI-generated content for audiences who crave connection, originality, and trust, or even the chance to rebel against the mainstream.

Distinguish Yourself in a Crowded Environment

For your success, it's nonnegotiable to stay updated on new advancements and leverage the benefits of AI, but don't stop there. Build upon it with your contributions and insights to distinguish yourself in a crowded and increasingly homogenous online environment.

Highlight your humanity, conduct original research, and implement personalized and niche marketing strategies to enhance your content and SEO efforts.

By incorporating these components, you can develop far more satisfying content that truly captivates your target audience while employing AI as your virtual assistant. Your ability to effectively integrate these elements underscores the value you bring to the table as a living, breathing, and thought-provoking human.