



Commodity vs Non Commodity Content

Strategic Briefing: Navigating the AI Search and Generative Engine Optimization Landscape

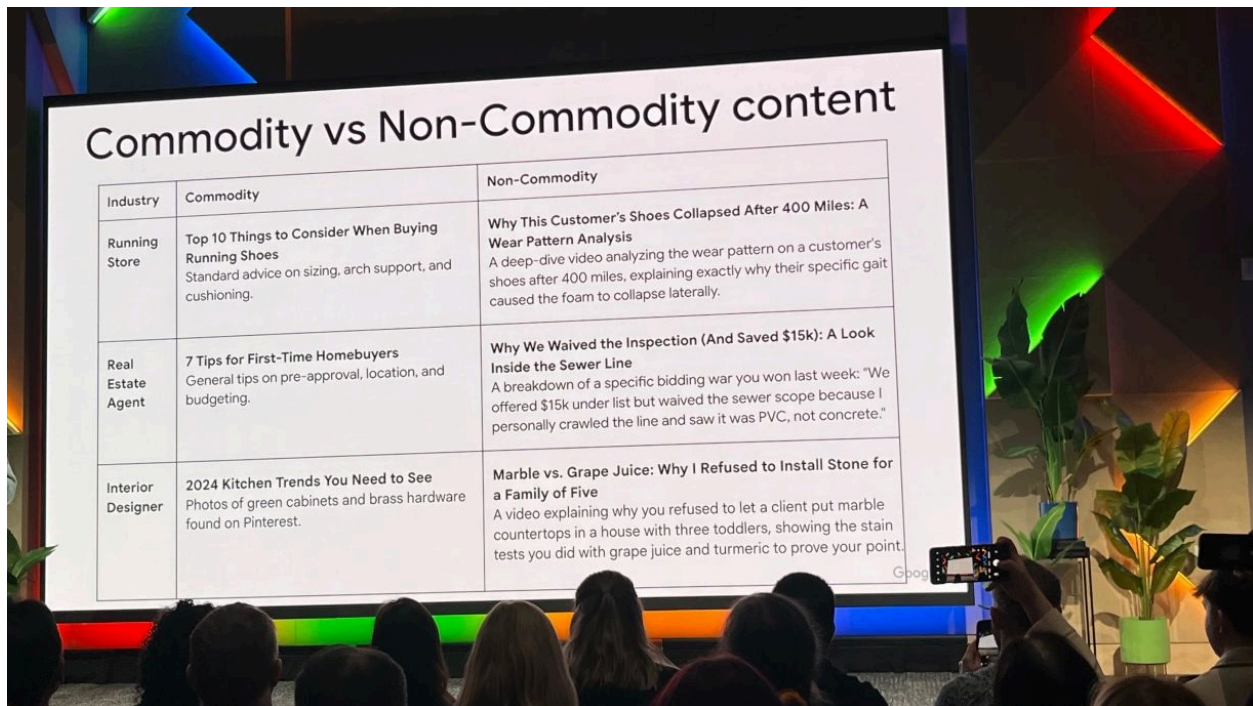
Summary

The search landscape is undergoing a fundamental shift as Google and other platforms integrate Generative AI into their core experiences. Official guidance from Google suggests that Search Engine Optimization (SEO) fundamentals remain the primary driver for visibility in AI features. However, independent analysis and empirical research indicate a more complex reality.

The core of the new strategy is a move away from "commodity content"—generic, easily synthesized information—toward "non-commodity content" rooted in first-hand experience, proprietary data, and unique perspectives. In an era of "Zero-Click" results where AI summaries may satisfy user queries directly on the search

results page, business survival increasingly depends on building "inimitable products" and fostering brand loyalty rather than merely chasing traffic. Furthermore, AI citation patterns reveal that off-site presence on platforms like Reddit and YouTube often outweighs owned assets in driving generative engine visibility.

Slide from Danny Sullivan, pic by Cyrus Shepherd, April 2026



I. The Shift from Commodity to Non-Commodity Content

Google has introduced "non-commodity content" as a critical standard for visibility in AI Overviews and AI Mode. This distinction separates content that is easily replicated from content that provides unique value.

Defining the Content Divide

Feature	Commodity Content	Non-Commodity Content
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Source	Aggregated from existing web sources/general consensus.	First-hand experience, original research, or proprietary data.
Replicability	Easily replicated by AI or competitors following a basic brief.	Nearly impossible to copy overnight; requires "unscalable labor."
AI Treatment	Likely to be summarized by AI, removing the need for a click.	Difficult to summarize without losing core value; earns citations.
Format	Standard listicles, "What is" guides, and generic tips.	Deep-dive case studies, wear-pattern analyses, and specific biddings.

For your podcast, you can frame the conversation around the shift from **being a "page people find" to a "brand people seek out."** Here is a focused, 4-point outline based on the sources to help guide the discussion:

1. The "Commodity Trap" (Why mediocre content is now a liability)

- **The Definition:** Commodity content is anything that has the same value regardless of who produces it (e.g., a "Top 10 Tips" list). If a competitor can replicate your content just by following a basic brief, it's a commodity.
- **The AI Threat:** Large Language Models (LLMs) are trained on the "structural average" of the web. If your content is just a synthesis of what's already out there, AI will summarize it directly in search results, removing any reason for a user to click through to your site.
- **The Rule:** If you are creating content *only* for SEO and have nothing unique to add to the existing body of information, you are throwing money away.

2. Lived Experience: The Only Inimitable Moat

- **Expertise vs. Experience:** AI has vast technical "expertise," but it has zero "experience". Non-commodity content proves the author was "**genuinely present**"—they ran the experiment, personally crawled the sewer line, or tested the product until it broke.
- **Lived Specificity:** Move from general advice to **specific narratives**. Instead of "7 Tips for Homebuyers," the winning angle is "Why We Waived the Inspection

(And Saved \$15k): A Look Inside the Sewer Line".

- **The Source Advantage:** When you are the primary source of a finding, a unique dataset, or a specific trend, your name becomes much harder for an AI engine to erase from its summary.

3. Lean Into "Unscalable" and Laborious Content

- **Quality over Quantity:** In a world where AI can generate 1,000 mediocre posts in minutes, your defense is doing things that are **unscalably laborious**.
- **Effort as a Signal:** Evidence suggests that Google may actually estimate and score the **"effort"** put into a document; things that are difficult for a competitor to copy overnight are rewarded.
- **Proprietary Assets:** Invest in things AI cannot easily scrape or replicate: original research, practitioner interviews where the subject says something new, and proprietary metrics (like a "composite engagement score").

4. The Shift from Traffic to Loyalty (Building a Destination)

- **Chase Loyalty, Not Clicks:** The era of "cheap visits" is ending. The goal now is to build **"destination demand"**—creating a brand like *Mental Floss* where users seek you out by name rather than just stumbling upon you via a generic query.
- **Beyond the Page:** Business defensibility now comes from offering a **product, service, or task completion** that AI cannot do for the user (e.g., selling the skincare products you are reviewing).
- **The "New SEO" Strategy:** To get cited by AI, use **factually specific, self-contained passages**. "Show your work" by explaining your methodology; AI engines are more likely to cite sources they can justify.

Podcast Talking Point Tip: You might want to mention that **"Influence is the new traffic"**. In the age of AI, being a trusted entity in the "Knowledge Graph" is more valuable than just ranking for a high-volume keyword.

VI. Strategic Recommendations

To maintain visibility and business viability in the AI search era, organizations should adopt the following framework:

- **Prioritize Experience (E-E-A-T):** Move away from "commodity" guides. Invest in "unscalable content"—proprietary research, interviews with practitioners, and first-person perspectives that AI cannot synthesize.
- **Optimize for Scanners and Agents:** Structure content with clear hierarchies and front-loaded answers to satisfy both human "scanners" and AI retrieval systems.
- **Focus on Loyalty Over Clicks:** Utilize Google's new loyalty features—such as "Preferred Sources," "Search Profiles," and "Subscription Linking"—to maintain connection with core audiences even as general search traffic declines.
- **Build the Brand, Not Just the Page:** Influence is the new traffic. Focus on being the "source" of an idea so that AI models are forced to credit the brand by name in their summaries.
- **Diversify Distribution:** Ensure presence on Reddit, YouTube, and LinkedIn to feed the AI mention and citation ecosystem.

Sources:

Here is the list of the 11 sources used to provide the insights for your podcast and content strategy:

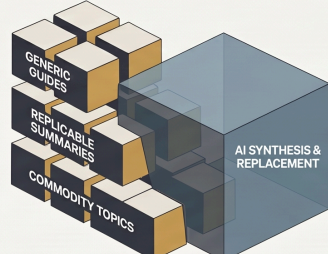
1. **Foundation Inc:** "What Google's AI Optimization Guide Means for Your GEO Strategy" by Ethan Crump.
2. **iPullRank:** "Google's Guidance on AI Search is Naive and Self-Serving" by Mike King.
3. **Ross Simmonds:** "Why Creating Unscalable Content Amidst The Rise Of AI Is The Right Move".
4. **Zyppy Signal:** "AI Citation Ranking Factors Analysis" by Cyrus Shepard.
5. **SparkToro:** "Inimitable Product is the New 'Make Great Content'" by Rand Fishkin.

6. **SparkToro:** "The Death of the Ultimate Guide?" by Amanda Natividad.
7. **Ann Smarty:** "Non-Commodity Content: What SEOs & Content Teams Need to Start Doing Differently".
8. **BrainZ Digital:** "Commodity Content vs Non-Commodity Content: What's the Difference and Why Does It Matter?" by Liraz Postan.
9. **Leadership in SEO:** "Creating 'Non-Commodity' Content That Isn't Shit" by Harry Clarkson-Bennett.
10. **SEO for Google News:** "Google is building an Audience Loyalty ecosystem" by Barry Adams.
11. **Cyrus Shepard (via X/Twitter):** A post highlighting Google's Danny Sullivan explaining the difference between "**Commodity**" vs "**Non-Commodity**" content.

Infographic

Survival of the Unique: Navigating the Shift to Non-Commodity Content

COMMODITY CONTENT (HIGH RISK)
Generic, replicable "Top 10" guides easily synthesized by AI.

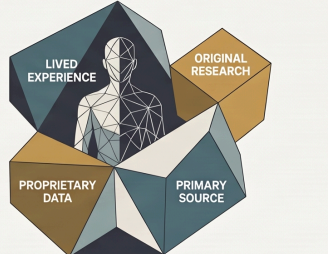


TOPIC	COMMODITY (AI REPLACEMENT)	NON-COMMODITY (AI CITATION)
Real Estate	"7 Tips for First-Time Homebuyers"	"Why We Waived Inspection & Saved \$15k"
Fitness	"Top 10 Running Shoes for 2026"	"Wear Pattern Analysis: Why These Shoes Collapsed"
Design	"2024 Kitchen Design Trends"	"Marble vs. Turmeric: Why I Refuse to Install Stone"

NON-COMMODITY CONTENT (HIGH VALUE)
Content rooted in first-hand experience, original research, and proprietary data.

Serves as Primary Source for AI Citation.

90%
OF AI CITATIONS FOR B2B SAAS COME FROM OFF-SITE SOURCES
Reddit (20.8%), YouTube (13%)



THE GEO SURVIVAL PLAYBOOK

OPTIMIZE FOR "EXTRACTABILITY"
Use clear headings and self-contained passages so RAG systems can accurately retrieve and cite your claims.

CLEAR HEADINGS

SELF-CONTAINED PASSAGES

ACCURATE RETRIEVAL

BUILD "INIMITABLE PRODUCTS"
Defensive Marketing: Offer physical goods, proprietary tools, or services AI cannot replicate with pixels.

NotebookLM