Optimizing Search Experiences

to Drive Direct Vacation Rental Bookings

Presented by, Jill McGee , ICND

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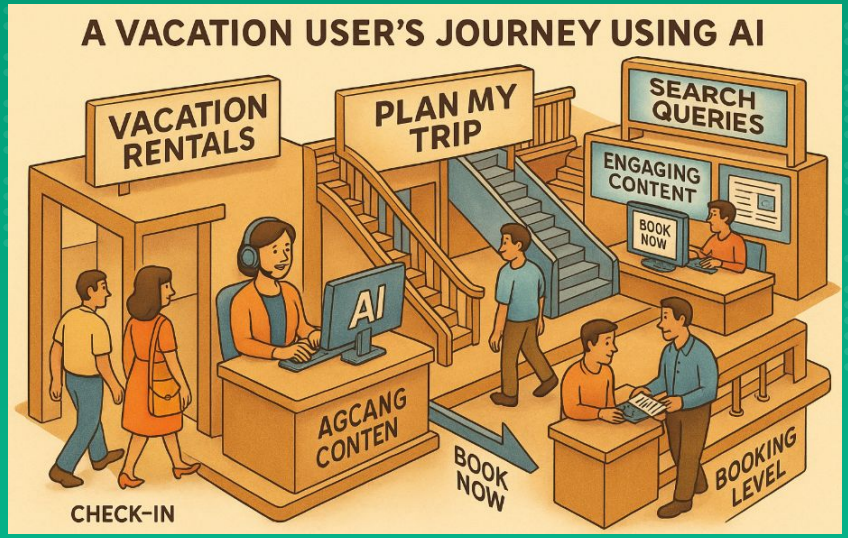
Direct Booking Websites | Digital Marketing

VRNATION

A Vacation Rental User Journey Today

VS



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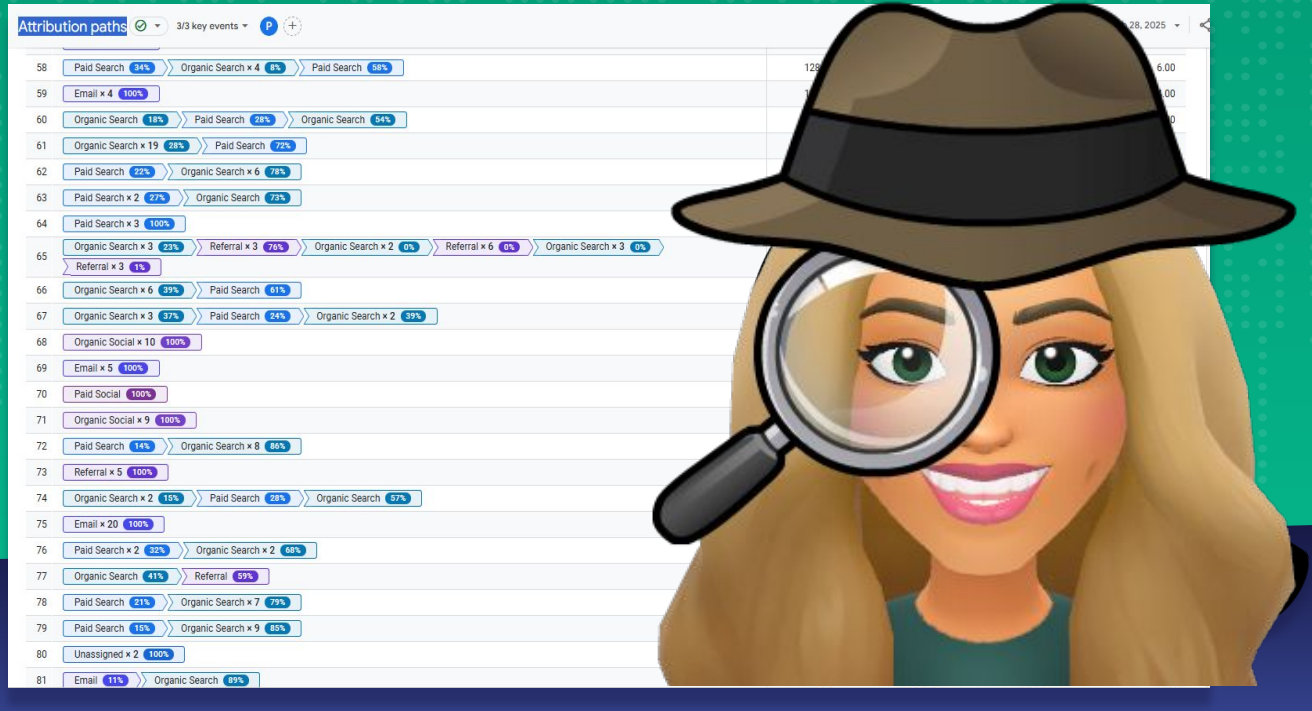
How Do We Know The Journey Has “Evolved”



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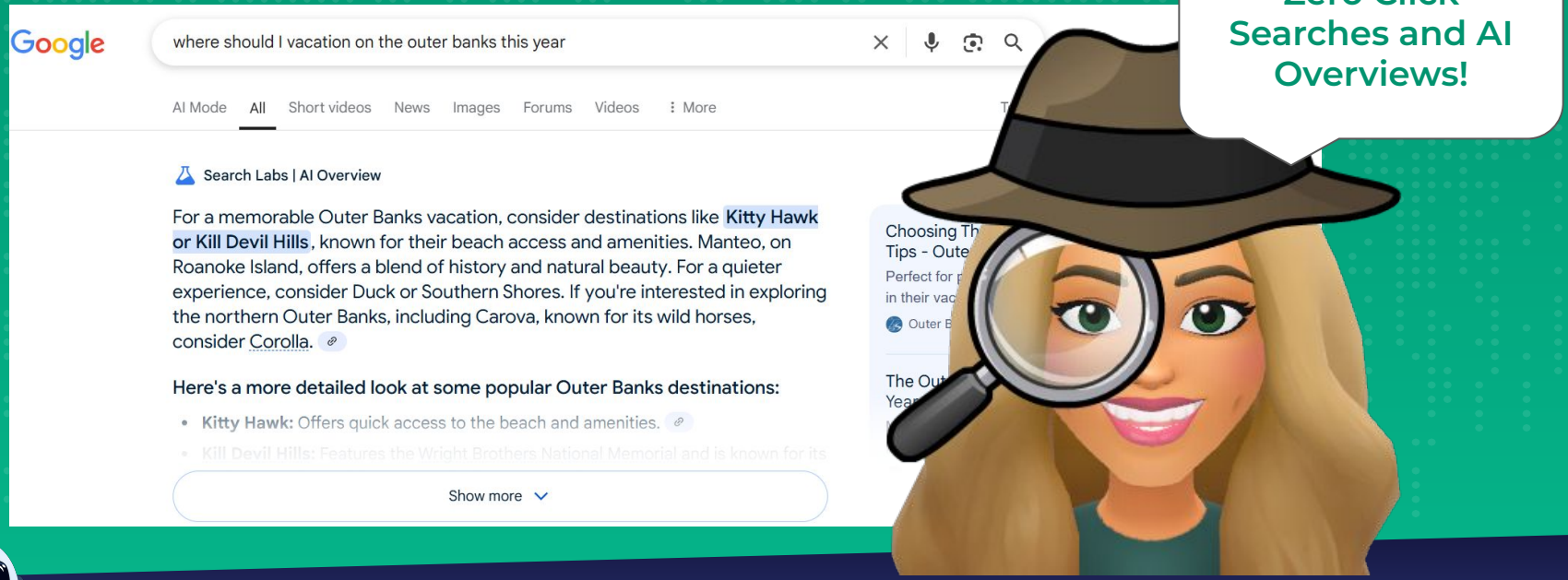
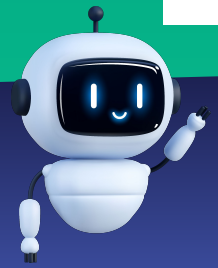
How Do We Know Search Has “Evolved”?





Indicators: Google Search Console Traffic Drops Without Ranking Loss

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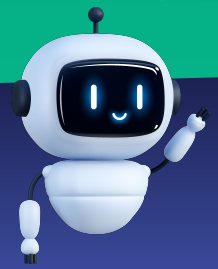
So Let's Discuss...

- ✔ How To Adapt Traditional SEO Practices
- ✔ The 3 Tiers Of Ranking A Website
- ✔ The Different AI Channels
- ✔ How To Use AI To Forecast Trends



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Traditional SEO Practices

SEO Framework: WHY → HOW → WHAT

WHY (The Purpose of SEO)

✔ Drive *qualified* traffic

✔ Build trust & authority

✔ Serve users & search engines

HOW (Strategy)

✔ Identify audience & analyze behavior

✔ Match content to user intent

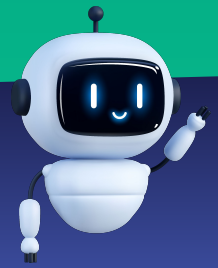
✔ Iterate & improve based on real data

WHAT (Tactics)

✔ Keyword targeting, content creation, trust factors

✔ Link building, on-page optimization

✔ Technical fixes, local SEO, continuous updates



TIP: Take a picture of this page!

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What Ranks Websites?

Technical SEO

Make sure it works & Google likes it

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Proper Content

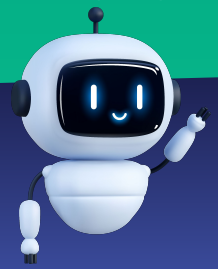
Satisfy the User with your offerings

2

Trust Signals

Links to your website from authoritative sources

3



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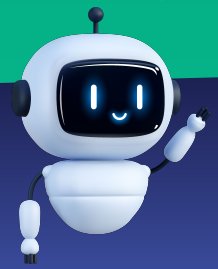
Let’s Break It Down



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Tier 1: Technical SEO

SITE 'AUDITS'

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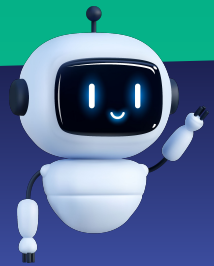
Site Audits

X Duplicate Content
X Orphaned Pages (Aren't Linked Anywhere)
X Not Indexed & No Follow Tags

✔ Similar Layouts for Property Pages is normal
✔ Not all pages need traffic
✔ You're controlling what should and shouldn't be indexed... just like Google wants



Understanding and interpreting errors on a site audit is the key to success!

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Technical SEO

- ✔ Mobile-friendly site
- ✔ Fast loading speed (Core Web Vitals)
- ✔ Clean URL structure (e.g., /rentals/area-beachfront not /?id=34x56)
- ✔ Understanding crawl errors
- ✔ Run a crawl with Screaming Frog or Semrush
- ✔ Fix any redirect chains, broken links, and duplicate title tags
- ✔ Use Google Search Console to monitor indexing issues & understand them

This is your “data hygiene.” No good insights come from a messy setup. Clean structure = better ranking and crawlability.

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Tier 2: Proper Content

PAGE DEPTH & KEYWORDS

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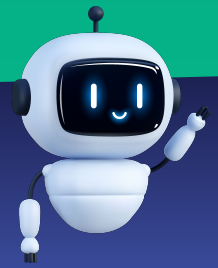
Quality Traffic *vs* Quantity



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Quality Traffic

Conversion Focused

High-Intent Keywords – Searches like “oceanfront [area] rentals”, “pet-friendly vacation rentals in [area]”, or “one-bedroom rentals in [area]” indicate strong booking intent.

Direct Booking Potential

Lower Bounce Rate – Users landing on the site are more likely to stay, engage, and take action.

Stronger ROI on Paid Ads – PPC campaigns targeting these keywords have a higher return on ad spend (ROAS).

More Valuable SEO Rankings – Ranking well for high-intent vacation rental terms leads to consistent bookings and long-term revenue growth.

VS

Quantity Traffic

Higher Bounce Rate

Broad Interest Keywords – Topics like “best restaurants in [area]”, “weather in [area]”, or “things to do in [area]” attract a wider audience.

Builds EEAT (Experience, Expertise, Authority, Trustworthiness) Google rewards sites that provide helpful, informative content, improving overall rankings.

Increases Brand Awareness – Visitors may not book immediately but remember the brand for future stays.

Can Contribute to Indirect Conversions – A user researching restaurants or events might later book a stay after discovering the website.

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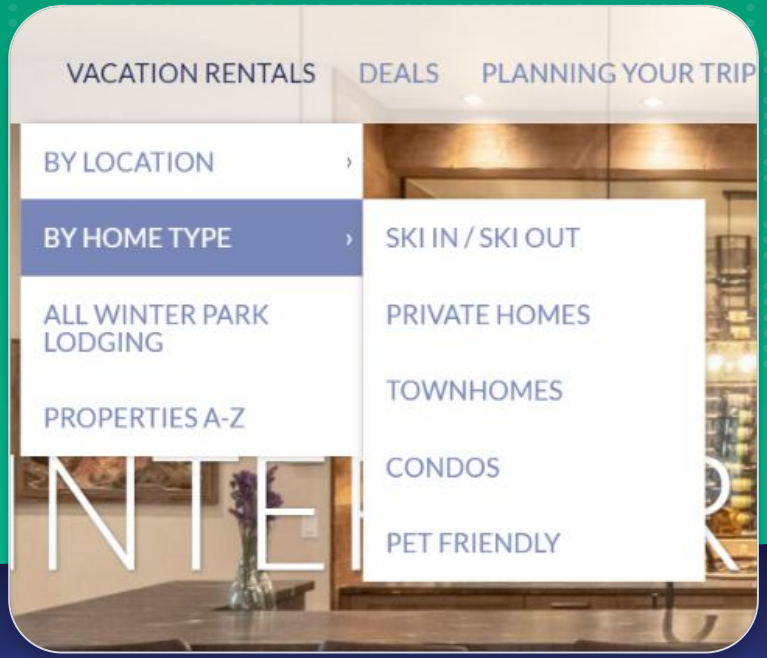
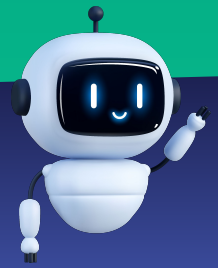
If You Build It...

- ✔ Google Ranks PAGES, not WEBSITES
- ✔ Create dedicated search results pages for major things people are looking for
- ✔ Optimize these pages with internal links and rich content





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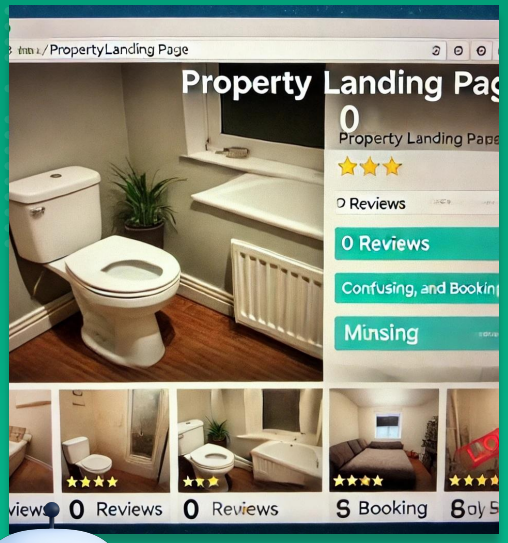
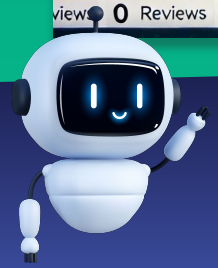
Is Your Property Detail Page Confusing?



- ✔ High quality photos (w/ captions) & nice cover photo
- ✔ Property FAQs
- ✔ Current Reviews - Trust Factors!
- ✔ PRICING - Make sure your pricing is clear & competitive
- ✔ Clear & Easy-To-Find CTAs (Book Now & Contact)



Tip: Invest in photos but keep your editing style simple!

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What's E-E-A-T

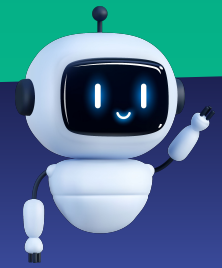
Search Quality Evaluator Guideline on Building Content & Trust

✔ **Experience:** About Us Page

✔ **Expertise:** FAQ pages, Area Guides

✔**Authority:** Reviews, Backlinks, Media page

✔**Trust:** User experience, Reviews, Easy to find contact information, fast page loads



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Tier 3: Trust Signals

CLEAR UX & CONVERSION PATHS

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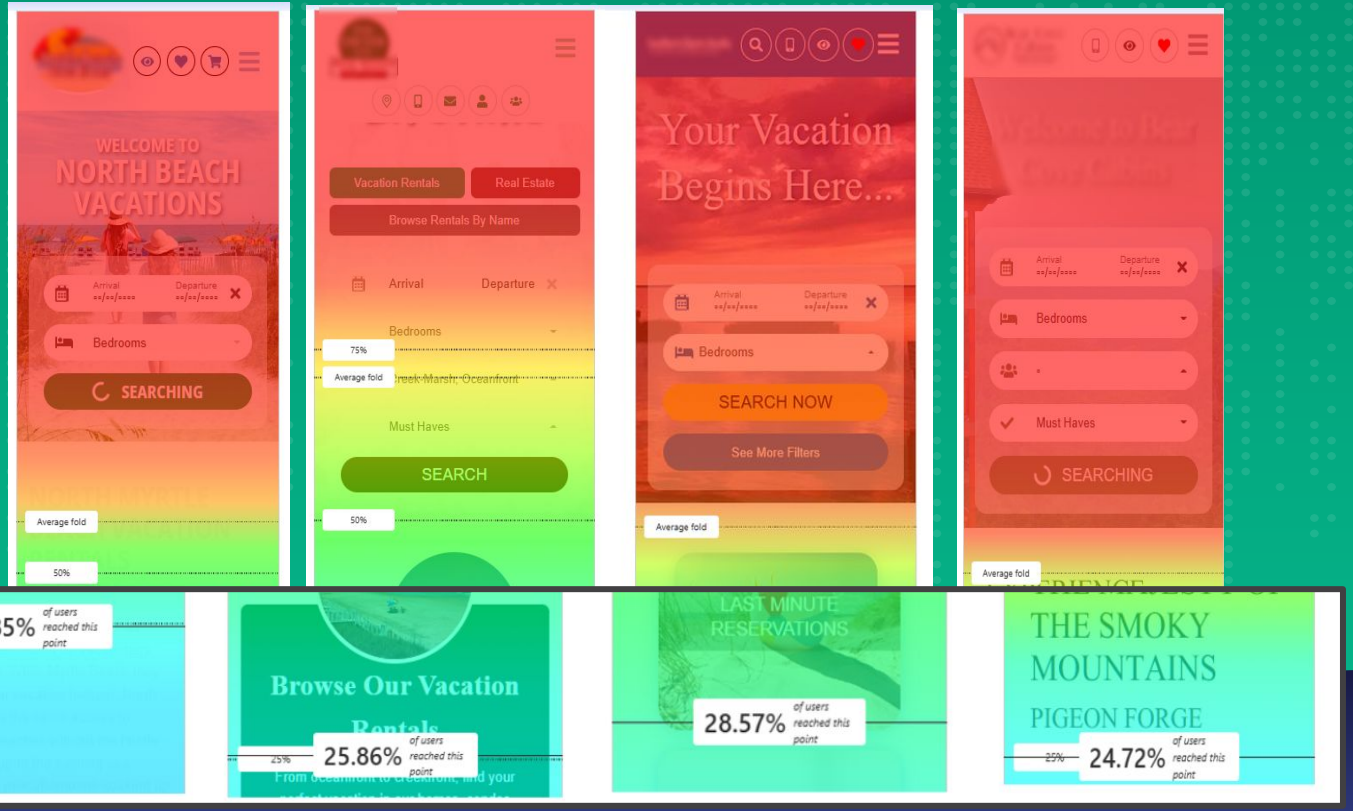
User Experience (UX)



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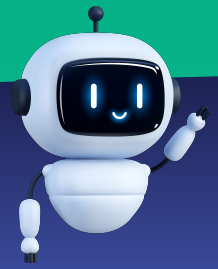
Prevent Friction

On average, how many times does a main results page return 0 results....

59%

Arrival Date	Departure Date	Number of Nights	Properties Returned	Event count
01/30/2025	02/02/2025	3	0	21
02/22/2025	03/02/2025	8	0	21
02/19/2025	02/22/2025	3	0	20
12/21/2024	12/24/2024	3	0	19
01/10/2025	01/13/2025	3	0	18
01/17/2025	01/20/2025	3	0	18
03/04/2025	03/08/2025	4	39	14
03/24/2025	03/26/2025	2	0	14
12/26/2024	12/29/2024	3	0	13
02/13/2025	02/17/2025	4	1	12
02/18/2025	02/22/2025	4	1	12
12/04/2024	12/11/2024	7	1	12
12/30/2024	01/02/2025	3	0	12



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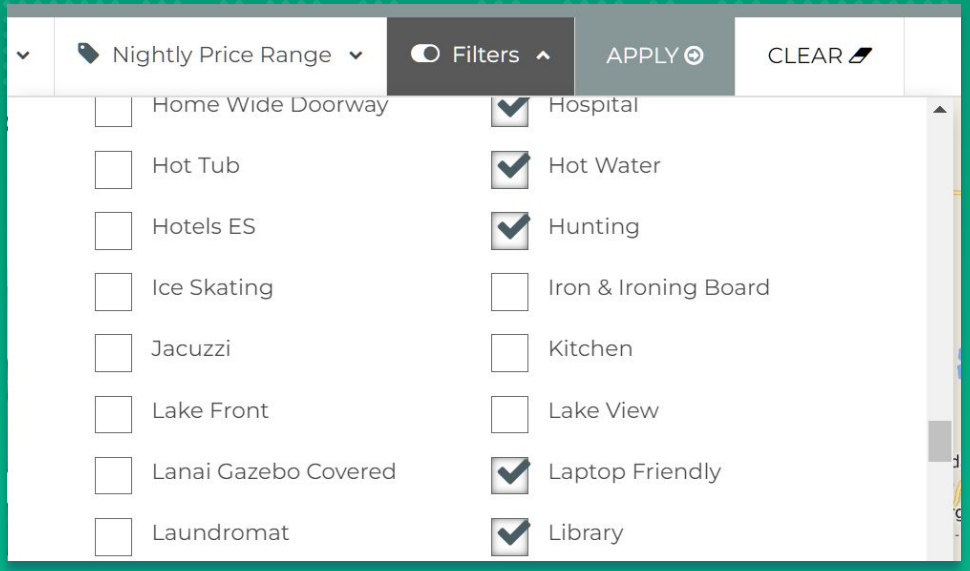
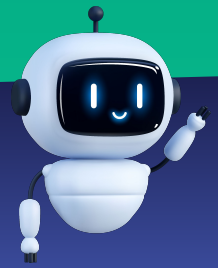
Streamline The Process





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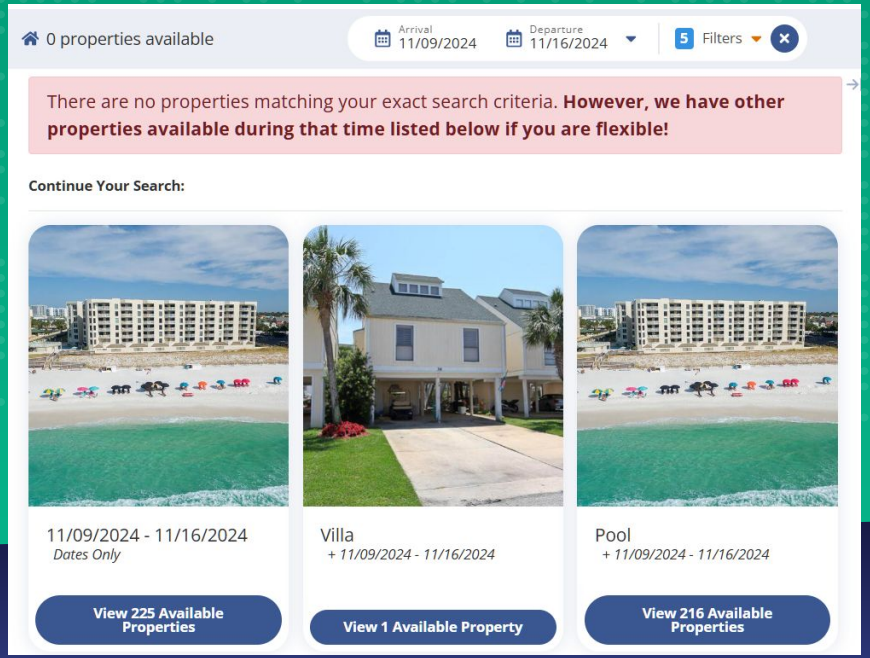
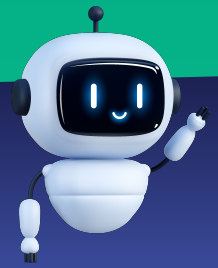
Give Them The Answers

Suggested Searches

- ✔ 47% of visitors USED Suggested Searches
- ✔ Resulting in 373 additional bookings
- ✔ Equating to about $1.03 MILLION dollars





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The Guest's Point Of View

Locations	Event count
Oceanfront	343
Walk to Beach	36
Oceanfront,Oceanside	35
Second Row	24
Creek-Marsh	18
Oceanfront,Oceanside,Second Row	12
Lakefront at Litchfield by the Sea	10
Oceanfront,Oceanside,Walk to Beach	10
Oceanside	10
Oceanfront,Second Row	9
Litchfield by the Sea,Oceanfront,Oceanside,Second Rc	8

ONE MONTH BEFORE

Lakefront at Litchfield by the Sea,Oceanfront,Oceanside,Second Row	2
Lakefront at Litchfield by the Sea,Second Row	2
Creek-Marsh,Lakefront at Litchfield by the Sea,Oceanfront,Oceanside,Off Ocean,Se	1
Lakefront at Litchfield by the Sea,Oceanfront,Second Row	1
Oceanfront,Off Ocean	1
Oceanside,Off Ocean	1
Oceanside,Off Ocean,Second Row	1

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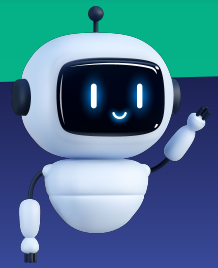
Clear Booking Path

Free form 1

	Href Click Text	Event count	Event count per user
	Totals	267	2.5
1	BOOK NOW	8	2.29
2	View Property Details	251	2.37

CS3L Brown Pelican ★ 5 (1)
Oceanside - Nags Head
$4,212.50 +Taxes and Fees
4 bedrooms 3 baths
View Property Details
BOOK NOW

LSC209 La Dolce Vita II ★ 5 (5)
Soundfront - Nags Head
$1,797.25 +Taxes and Fees
2 bedrooms 2 baths
1 half bath
View Property Details
BOOK NOW



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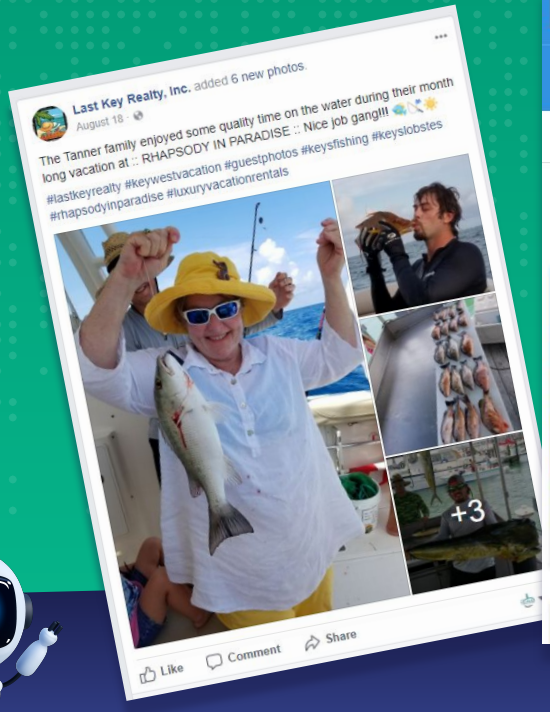
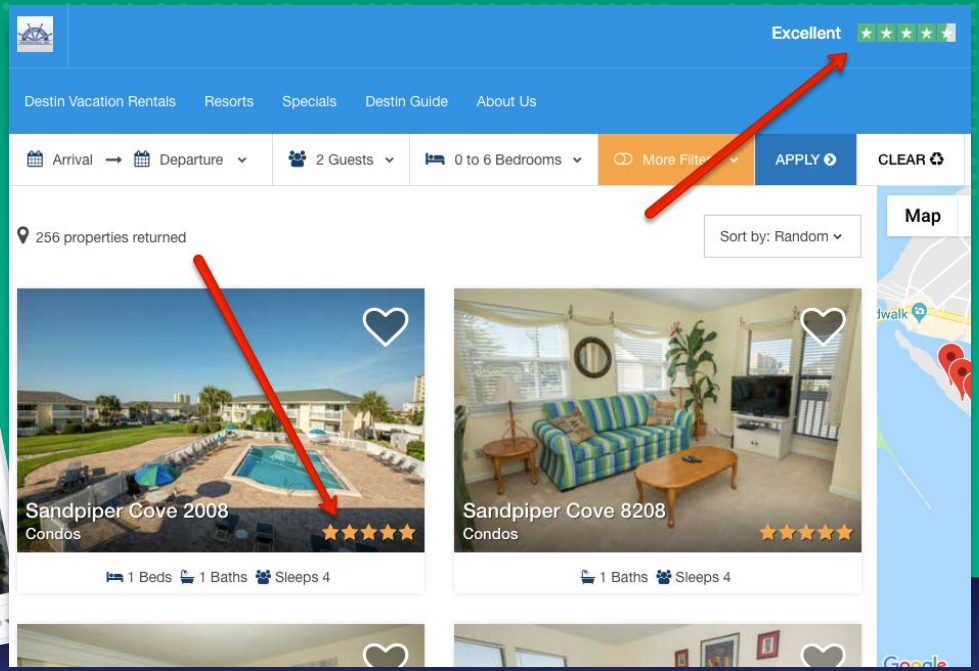
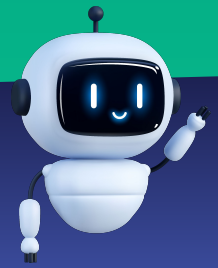
Trust Signals







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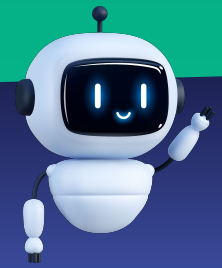
AI can assist, but humans connect.

Build A Connection With Your Audience By:

- ✔ Team Photo
- ✔ Business Achievements
- ✔ Positive Reviews**
- ✔ Local Recommendations
- ✔ Local Support
- ✔ Current Pictures, video, floor plans
- ✔ Talking to a real person
- ✔ Active online presence



TIP: Brag about yourself! Highlight your team and share local insider knowledge

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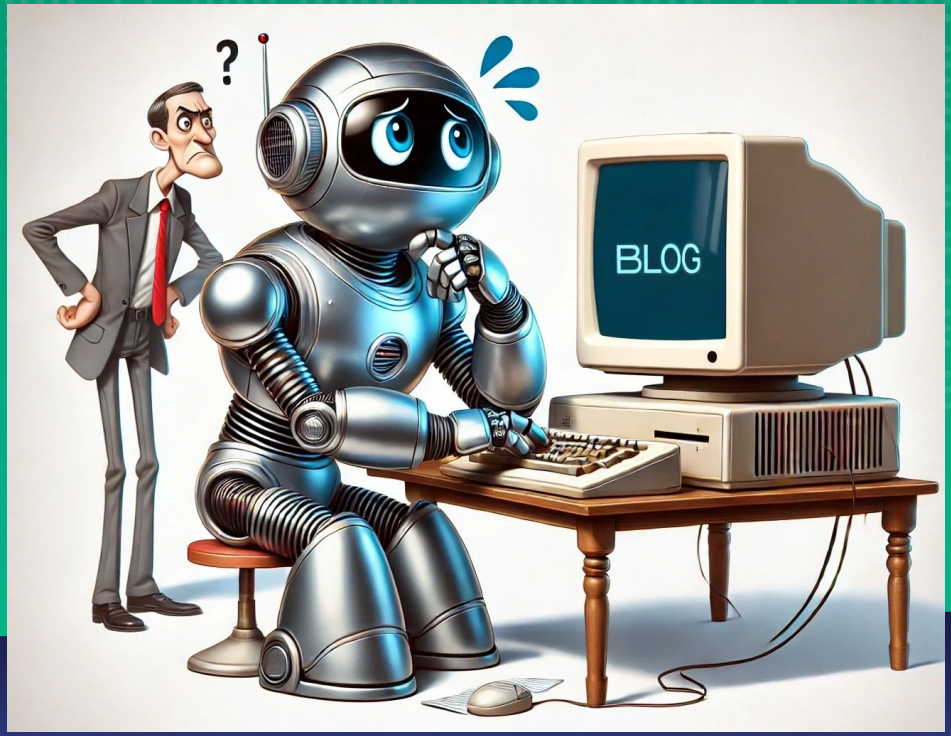
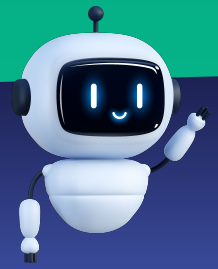
How Do We Optimize For AI?





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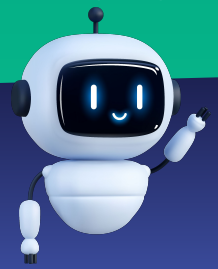

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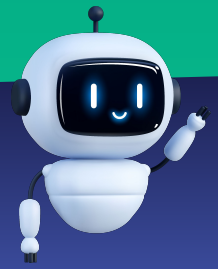

Wait... That looks familiar...

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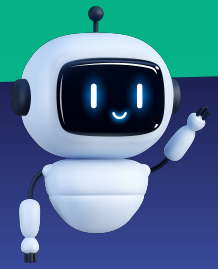
AI is just another channel!



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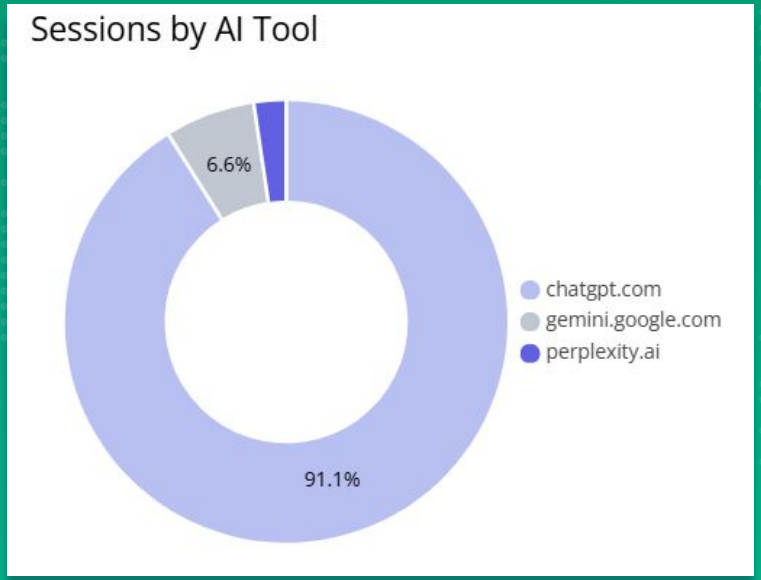
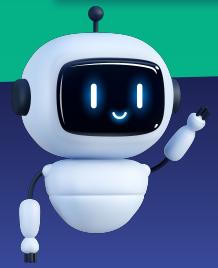
What We Know



Search behavior is evolving many travelers now use AI tools like ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google Gemini to plan vacations, not just traditional search engines.

These tools are becoming gateways to discovery, making them a new kind of audience we need to consider in our digital strategy.



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AI Referral Traffic

Pageviews by AI Tool

Page path	chatgpt.com
/rentals/the-lazy-dolphinn	24
/	22
/rentals/results	14
/pet-friendly-properties	10
/4-bedroom-rentals	6
/beach-front	6
/rentals/results.cfm	6
/private-pools	5
/rentals/a-b-sea	4

	Total		48 0.04% of total
1	chatgpt.com / referral	/blog/[redacted]	6 (12.5%)
2	chatgpt.com / referral	(not set)	5 (10.42%)
3	chatgpt.com / referral	/	4 (8.33%)
4	chatgpt.com / (not set) ⚠	/blog/winter-activities-that-dont-involve-skiing/	3 (6.25%)
5	chatgpt.com / referral	/all-rentals/ski-in-ski-out/	2 (4.17%)
6	chatgpt.com / referral	/all-rentals/[redacted]ental-homes-by-bedroom/2-bedrooms/	2 (4.17%)
7	chatgpt.com / referral	/events-and-festivals/list/	2 (4.17%)
8	chatgpt.com / referral	/events-and-festivals/list/page/10/?tribe-bar-date=2023-11-29	2 (4.17%)
9	chatgpt.com / (not set) ⚠	/all-rentals/downtown-telluride-vacation-rentals/?sort_by=name&location_area_id=6573	1 (2.08%)
10	chatgpt.com / (not set) ⚠	/blog/romantic-activities-for-couples-in-[redacted]/	1 (2.08%)

Hmmm. I think I'm seeing a pattern here...

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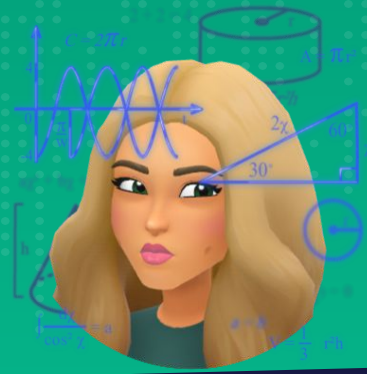
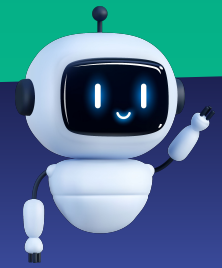
Is there a pattern!?

What We're Seeing

✔ Informational blog posts
✔ Specific vacation rental listings
✔ Filtered search results (e.g., 2-bedroom homes, pet friendly)

What They Have In Common: These pages reflect long-tail SEO strategies and are deep-linked content, not homepage landings.





This means users landing from AI searches with high intent, looking for **specific** answers or rentals.

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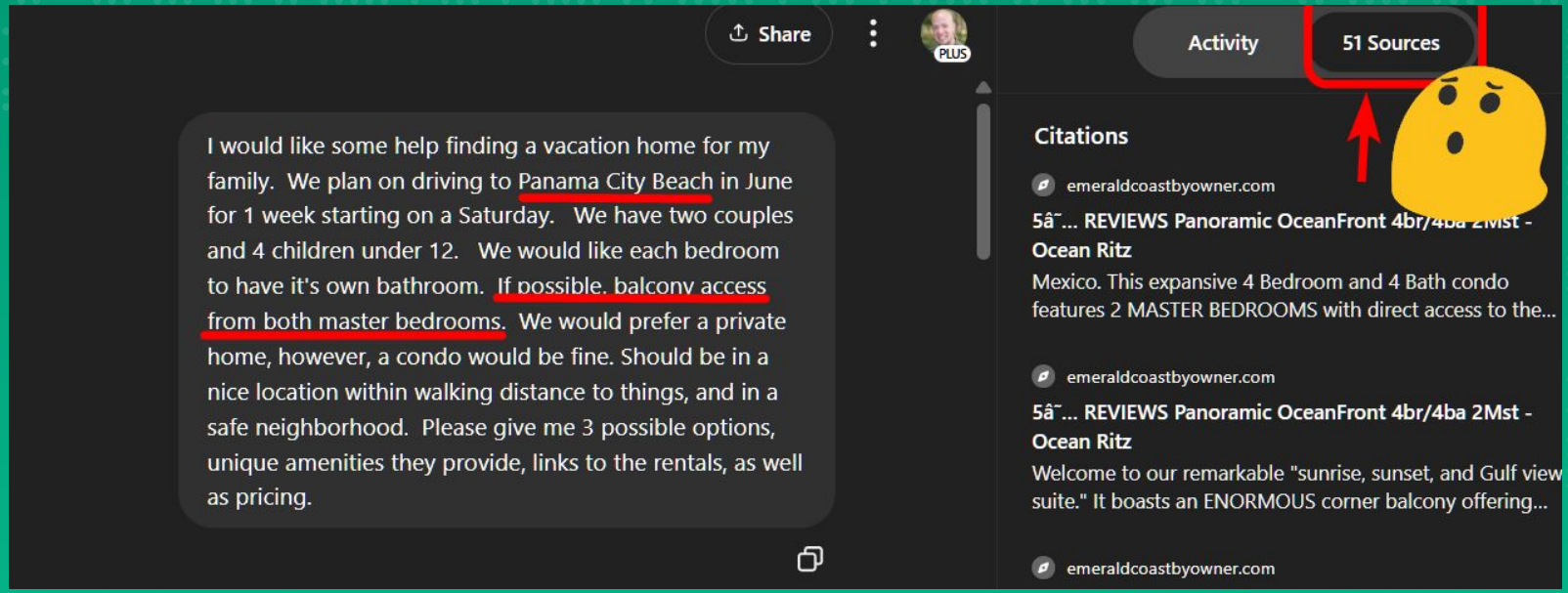
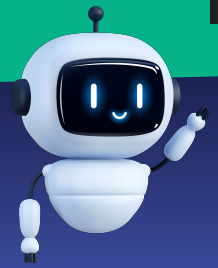
We Did Our Own Experiment





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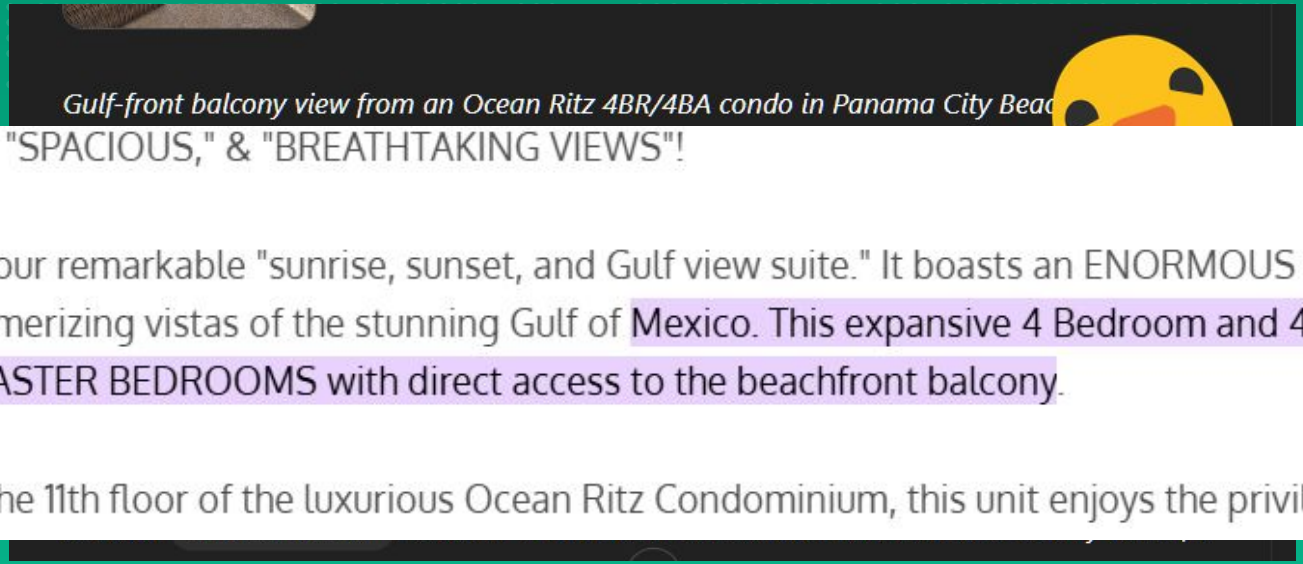
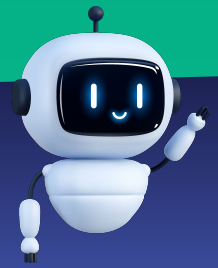
IT FOUND IT!



"LOCATION," "SPACIOUS," & "BREATHTAKING VIEWS"!

Welcome to our remarkable "sunrise, sunset, and Gulf view suite." It boasts an ENORMOUS corner balcony offering mesmerizing vistas of the stunning Gulf of Mexico. This expansive 4 Bedroom and 4 Bath condo features 2 MASTER BEDROOMS with direct access to the beachfront balcony.

Situated on the 11th floor of the luxurious Ocean Ritz Condominium, this unit enjoys the privilege of only three



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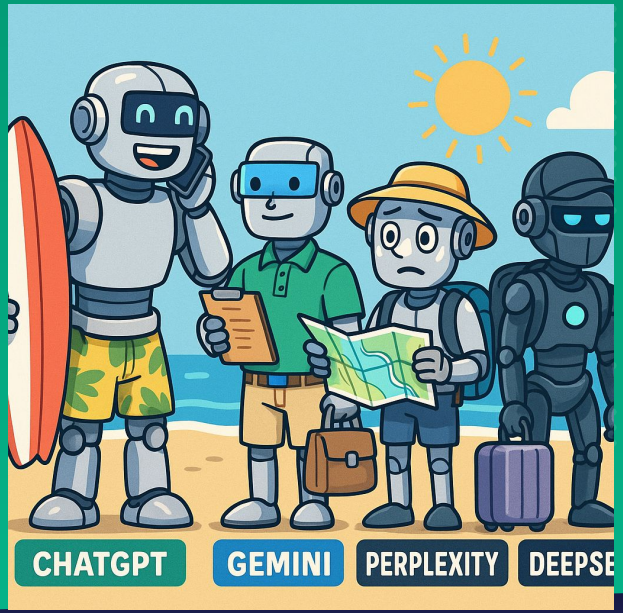
Knowing Your AI Travel Agents

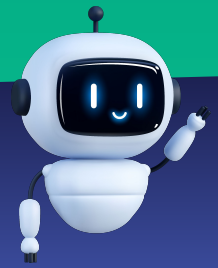
✔ **ChatGPT**: This is your fun robot, so make your pages sound natural, helpful, and conversational, like you're giving local tips to a friend.

✔ **Gemini:** This one's your type-A planner. So serve clear, structured content with fast facts, rich snippets, and schema to help it organize and rank your pages.

✔ **Perplexity:** This overthinker double-checks everything, so back up your vacation rental info with sources, updates, and links that prove you know what's happening now.

✔ **DeepSeek:** This is your quiet, code-loving logic machine, so make your site technically flawless, well-structured, and full of deep, interconnected content it can crawl and understand.





Robots have personalities too! Or at least defining characteristics!

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What Can YOU do with AI?

✔ **Analyze** Google Trends & Market Reports

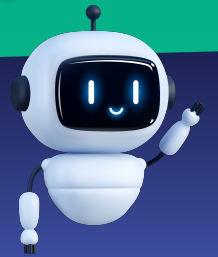
✔ **Create Content calendars** for social media and email blasts

✔ **Help write ads** tailored to your voice

✔ **Help define a marketing strategy for each month**

✔ **Spot trending search terms**

✔ **Crunch numbers fast (export your PM's reservation history)**



Utilize AI to Analyze Booking Patterns with Google Trends & Search Console. Together We're Even Better!

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Real World Scenarios

✔ You use AI to compare this year's spike against previous years.

✔ Use Google Trends to Spot Broad Booking Behavior

✔ Export GSC data and analyze search queries driving traffic Feed the data into ChatGPT and ask it to group the queries by month to see a pattern

Knowing Your Audience Is The Key!

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Beep Bop Boop...

Predictions for 2025 Digital Marketing Strategy

Month	Recommended Action
March-April	Start **early campaign push**; retarget site visitors, test spring-break creatives
May-June	Boost **family trip targeting**, especially "Outer Banks Rentals 2025" in ad copy
July	Focus on **last-minute deals**, extend reach with YouTube and Display retargeting
August	Start pivoting to **fall shoulder season** messaging by late month
Sept–Nov	Use this time for **content creation** and local SEO expansion
Dec–Jan	Capitalize on **holiday planning phase** for early bookings and gift-a-trip promotio

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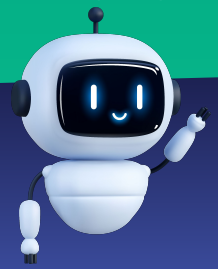
Final Takeaways

1. ***SEO Is Evolving,*** but the Core signals remain the same

2. **Process Matters: Intent-First Thinking Wins :** Identifying patterns and matching user intent = higher-quality traffic and better conversions.

3. **AI Is Not Just a Tool,** It's a Channel and Traffic Source

4. **AI isn't a replacement for SEO,** it's an extension of it.



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Questions?

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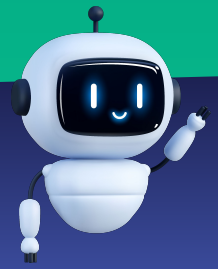
jhighsmith@icnd.email

👉*Read The Article & Connect With Our Team*
icnd.net



Let's Connect! Drop Your Business card up front!