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The commercial power of brands in the digital world

Evaluating the effect of the brand in online sales, and the efficiency of brand- and non-brand SEM-investments.

MEDIEBEDRIFTENE

ANFO

Behind this study

Kapero are management consultants with an engineering background specializing in marketing, communication and media.

We help marketing and communications departments, publishers, and broadcasting companies optimize their strategies, processes, and organization to increase efficiency and maximize business impact.

We carry out our projects in close cooperation with our clients, their employees, and stakeholders.

We simplify and clarify prioritization, collaboration, roles, responsibilities, key performance indicators, and decision-making processes. Our goal is to increase value creation, streamline processes, integrate into commercial operations, and ensure alignment with business goals. Our method is based on solid data analysis and interviews, which form the basis for our solutions.

We are grounded in applied knowledge, and, as specialists in the field, we support our customers with implementation.

Founded in 2002, Kapero has completed more than 300 projects for over 100 clients. Our customers are found in most industries, in B2B, B2C and the media sectors. Many of them are active globally.

Our clients include Ikea, H&M, Scania, Atlas Copco, Electrolux, Marshall, Volvo, Oatly, Arla, Oriflame, Bonnier News, Aller Media, Neue Zürcher Zeitung and Bauer Media and Gjensidige.

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ANFO is the major organization for advertisers and marketing-driven companies in Norway. It represents businesses across sectors and sizes, working to secure the best possible commercial, regulatory and professional conditions for those who invest in marketing. ANFO is the unified voice of Norwegian advertisers, always working to improve conditions in the industry on behalf of our members.

It engages with policymakers, regulators and industry stakeholders to safeguard fair competition, transparency and responsible market practices. In a landscape increasingly shaped by global platforms and technology giants, this role has become more critical. A growing share of advertising spend flows to international ecosystems with limited transparency, shifting power away from local markets. ANFO works to address these structural imbalances and strengthen advertisers' position.

ANFO also provides its members with practical tools, training, insight and surveys. AI for marketers is a priority. ANFO supports members in understanding, implementing and governing AI in marketing, from strategy and productivity to ethics, compliance and brand risk.

The objective is clear: To ensure that Norwegian advertisers remain competitive, data-driven and responsible in a rapidly evolving technological environment.

In short, ANFO combines advocacy, knowledge/education and market insight to strengthen advertisers' influence and long-term value creation in Norway.

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Norwegian Media Businesses' Association is the media trade- and tariff organization in Norway. The organization counts approx. 324 member businesses, consisting newspapers, TV companies, media groups, magazines, multimedia companies, press agencies, radio stations, printing offices, distribution companies, advertising groups and advertising companies. The Norwegian Media Businesses' Association is a member of the Confederation of Norwegian Business and is the main negotiator vis-à-vis the labour unions in the media industry.

Association objectives

- Attend to members common interests, thereby contributing to a diverse, independent and economically healthy industry.
- Secure editorial independence, and work towards securing an overall framework beneficial to the industry's competitiveness and profitability, thereby securing jobs within the industry
- Promote contact and cooperation between members, and between members and employees.
- Initiate common initiatives in cases where the members deem it necessary and useful.

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The brand is the main driver of online traffic, conversions and revenue

Key insights: Brand effect

- Most companies allocate a significant portion of their marketing budget to search engine marketing (SEM) and search engine optimization (SEO). However, many struggle to understand the effects of these investments.
- Measuring traffic and conversions from brand-related searches reveals the brand's contribution to sales and its effect.
- In our study, brand-related searches accounted for most of the traffic, conversions, and revenue.
- However, this is not reflected in traditional web traffic analysis, which makes it appear as if Google generates most of the traffic and revenue.
- Our study shows that AI search is a factor, but currently has no significant influence on traffic, conversions, or revenue.

Key insights: SEM efficiency

- Separating brand and non-brand traffic, conversions, and revenue allows you to evaluate the efficiency of brand and non-brand SEM investments.
- Brand SEM investments have a lower cost of sales than non-brand investments.
- For some companies in competitive categories, brand traffic is the only type that delivers an average positive margin. Therefore, sustainable growth is directly tied to growth in brand traffic.
- In short, a strong brand is crucial for a profitable online business.

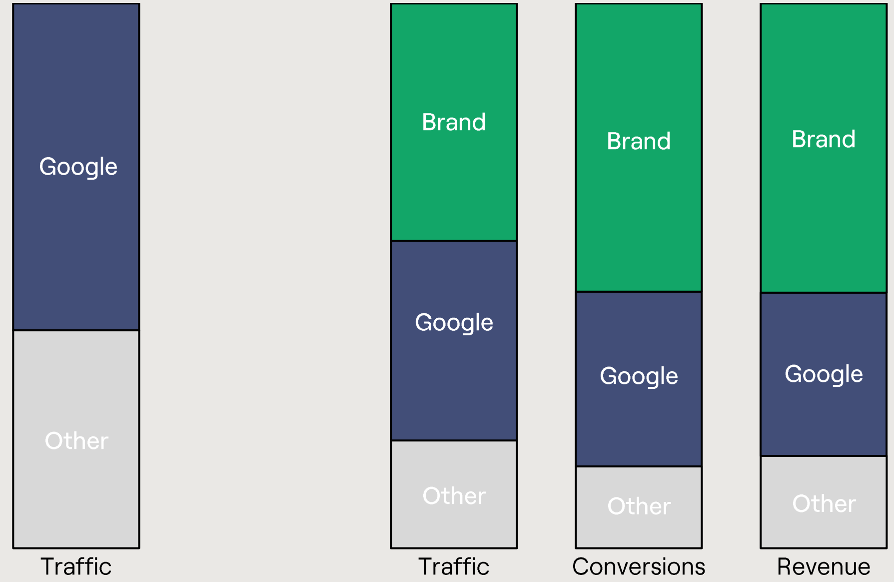
Key actions

- Increasing brand traffic over time will increase a company's sales, making brand traffic an excellent business KPI.
- If your analysis of online advertising indicates that you can safely invest more in search engine marketing (SEM), you should conduct a more thorough analysis at the word level to avoid eroding profitability.
- Although we have detected a clear pattern showing that the brand is crucial, every company should conduct its own analysis to better understand its situation.

There is both money to be made and to be saved.

Study conducted on 13 well known Norwegian companies in different business categories

From Google's perspective | **From a brand perspective**



When analyzing website traffic in Google Analytics, the average traffic distribution can give the impression that search engines and search advertising generate the majority of business.

Analyzing traffic, conversions, and revenue from a behavioral perspective reveals that most visits — and resulting business — come from people who already have the brand in mind. This connection is formed before the search phase and can be seen in the high volume of brand searches and their high conversion rate.

Important to note: the "From Google's perspective" analysis and the "From a brand perspective" analysis are two different perspectives on the same data, both of which are valid. Google's perspective is correct. However, the brand/non-brand division offers complementary perspectives and insights crucial to businesses.

Average ratios from the study in Norway. In reality, the ratio varies between clusters and businesses.

Content

Project Context

In this section, we will describe the background of the project and the development of media investments in Norway. We will also cover how AI affects the traffic mix and the study. Lastly, we will provide an overview of the participating companies, the prerequisites, their aggregated SEM investments and their perceived dependency on Google regarding web traffic and online sales.

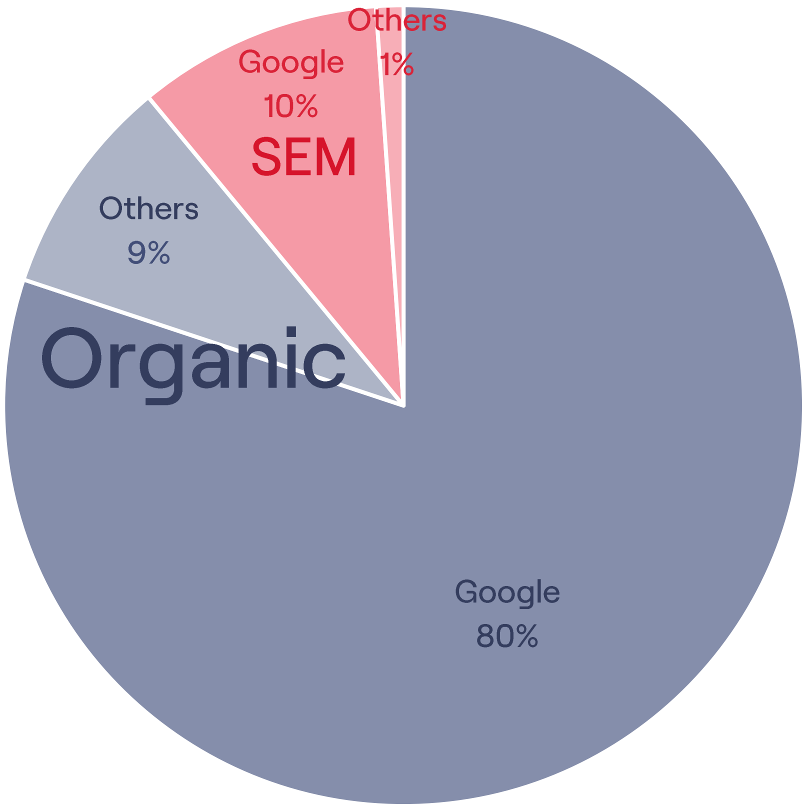
Project Context

Background and purpose

- Marketers have increasingly invested in Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and organic search engine optimization (SEO) content in recent years. However, follow-ups do not show what really drives results.
- This causes a risk that businesses allocate their marketing investments where it doesn’t generate the best effect.
- This study is a neutral initiative that aims to evaluate **the effect of the brand** on online sales and **the efficiency of brand and non-brand SEM investments** on a broader base of companies.
- The purpose is to help organizations understand the true costs and potential limitations of SEM-centric advertising strategies and identify more sustainable growth opportunities.
- To achieve this, we evaluated what is driving traffic, conversions, and revenue by analyzing web statistics. This allows us to understand where the brand has been a key driver and where other factors have generated traffic, conversions, and revenue.
- In the study, **we separate brand-driven traffic** from **non-brand-driven traffic** based on the search terms used. We apply this separation to both paid and organic searches to connect search words to traffic, conversions, and, where available, online revenue.
- This allows us to measure how much of the traffic, conversions, and online revenue comes from people who have already chosen the brand, and where search engines merely act as a switchboard.
- It also allows us to **evaluate the efficiency** of **brand** and **non-brand SEM investments.**

- Our aim is not to claim “non-brand or “brand”-traffic as good or bad. Both play distinct roles in the journey. The point is to understand what truly drives volume and value, and when search captures category demand versus when the brand does the heavy lifting to convert.

Google dominates search in Norway*



* Source: statcounter.com & searchengineland.com

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Project Context

Media investments Norway

International digital platforms are capturing a larger share of Norwegian advertisers' media budgets, approaching 50% now. This trend is not unique to the Norwegian market. The same trend is occurring in similar markets around the world.

The appeal of investing in those platforms is easy to understand. As they offer real-time analysis based on their perspective of ongoing activities, providing answers about the "profitability" of marketing activities. However, there is a natural risk of bias — the better the results, the greater the investment.

Additionally, most marketing departments today are organized by channel. Each channel organization analyses its own impact through its own tool and perspectives, often concluding that investments in its channel should be increased.

With this comes increasing fragmentation, and the actual effect is becoming increasingly difficult to understand. Often, there is a lack of total overview and cross-channel optimization – what is actually delivering what.

When talking to CFOs we often hear similar thoughts:

"If I add together all results reported from the different channels follow-up, our sales should be much higher"

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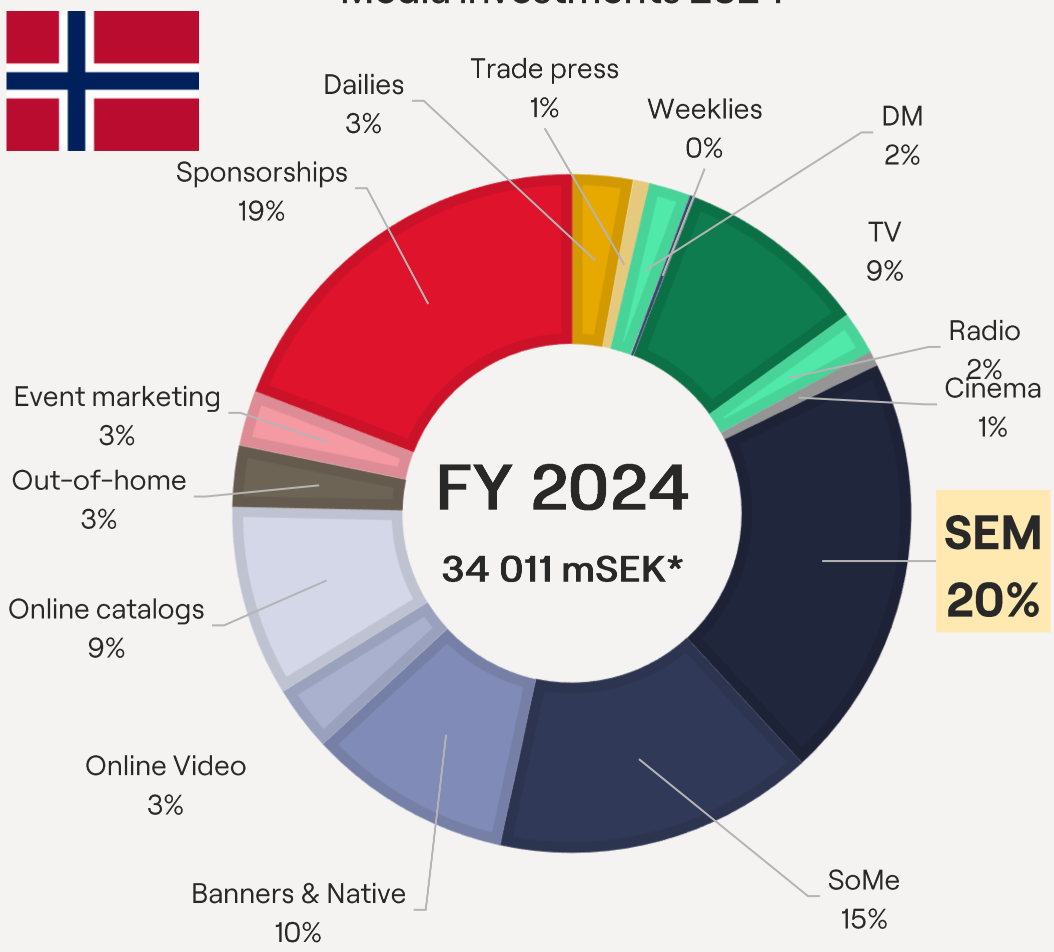
Media investments 2024



* Source: irm-media.no

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Project Context

Participating companies

This report covers a broad mix of Norwegian strong, well-known brands across multiple categories and business models – both B2B and B2C - reflecting different maturity levels and funnel shapes.

The analysis focuses on full-year 2024 with selected intra-year cuts where relevant (e.g., seasonality, campaign- or billing effects). We use data from 2024 as it lowers the thresholds for participating companies to share real business data, which the study depends on.

We include only companies with defined measurable on-site conversion (purchase, booking, sign-up, or lead generation) so traffic can be tied to outcomes.

All participating companies have a mix of sales channels, where online is one of them, but not necessarily the main one.

Across the 13 participating companies, Google Ads investment totaled NOK 123 million in 2024, of which NOK 98.5 million (80%) was non-brand. Spend levels varied widely across brands.

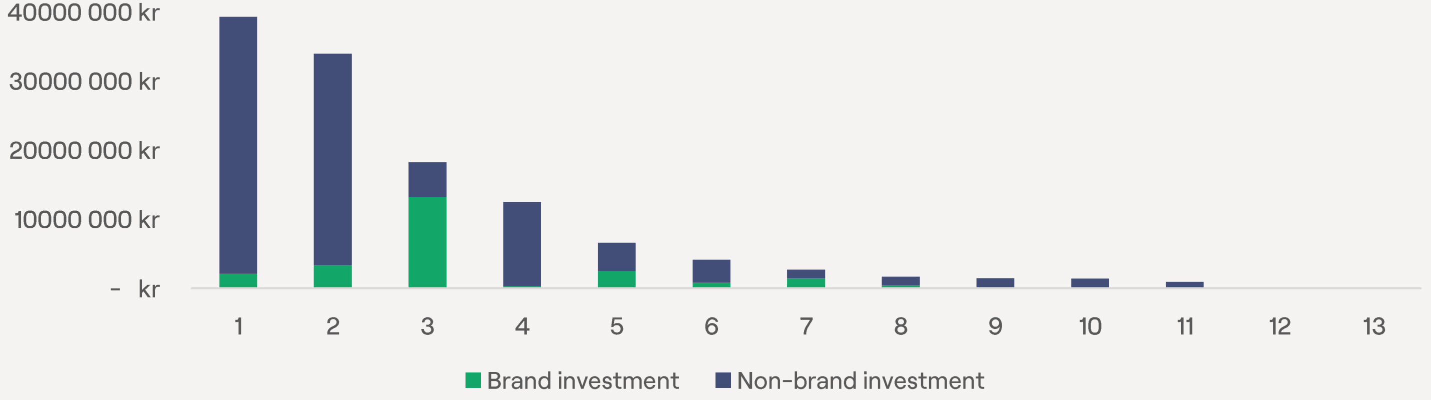
In aggregate, Google accounts for 60% of site traffic, 61% of on-site conversions, and 60% of online revenue for the companies in this study

Since business models and customer journeys differ, direct company-to-company comparisons are not useful. For this reason, we have grouped companies into logical clusters to evaluate findings and patterns at that level rather than analyzing individual companies.

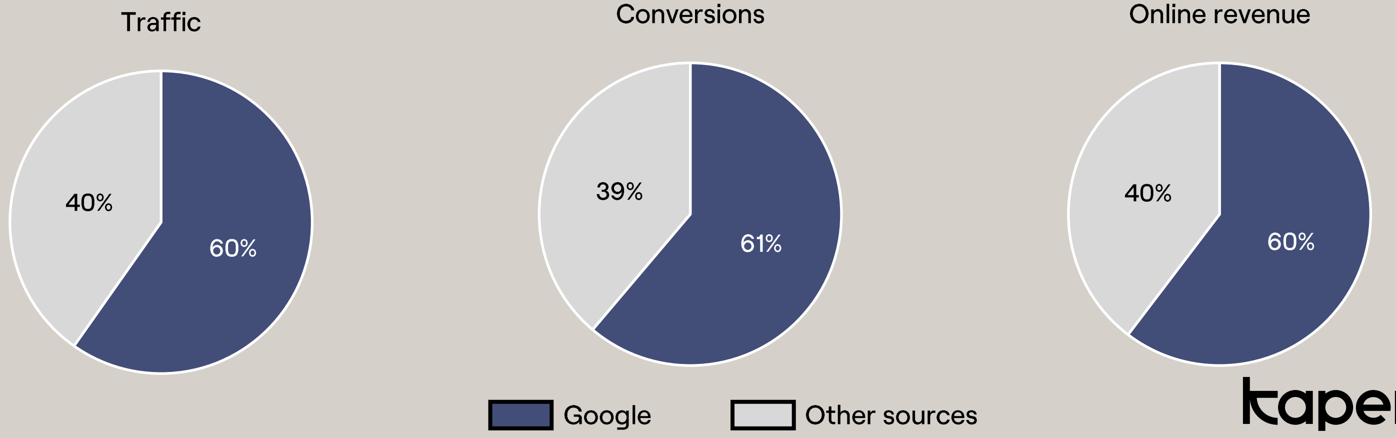
The clusters are described in detail using comparable metrics to show how traffic mix, conversion rates, and online revenue vary depending on the clusters, and where there is the greatest scope for optimization or brand building.

Participating companies	Total Google Ads investment	Google Ads non-brand investment
13	123 MNOK	80%

Google Ads investment for participating companies



How much impact does Google have on companies' websites, from a Google perspective?



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Project Context

Traffic from AI assistants

AI assistants and Google's AI Overviews are gradually becoming an additional surface for discovering brands before clicking on anything.

Traffic referred by AI assistants still represents a very small share of total visits. Among the seven companies for which we had GA4 access, AI-referred traffic increased from an average of 0,01% of total traffic in 2024 to 0,09% in 2025.

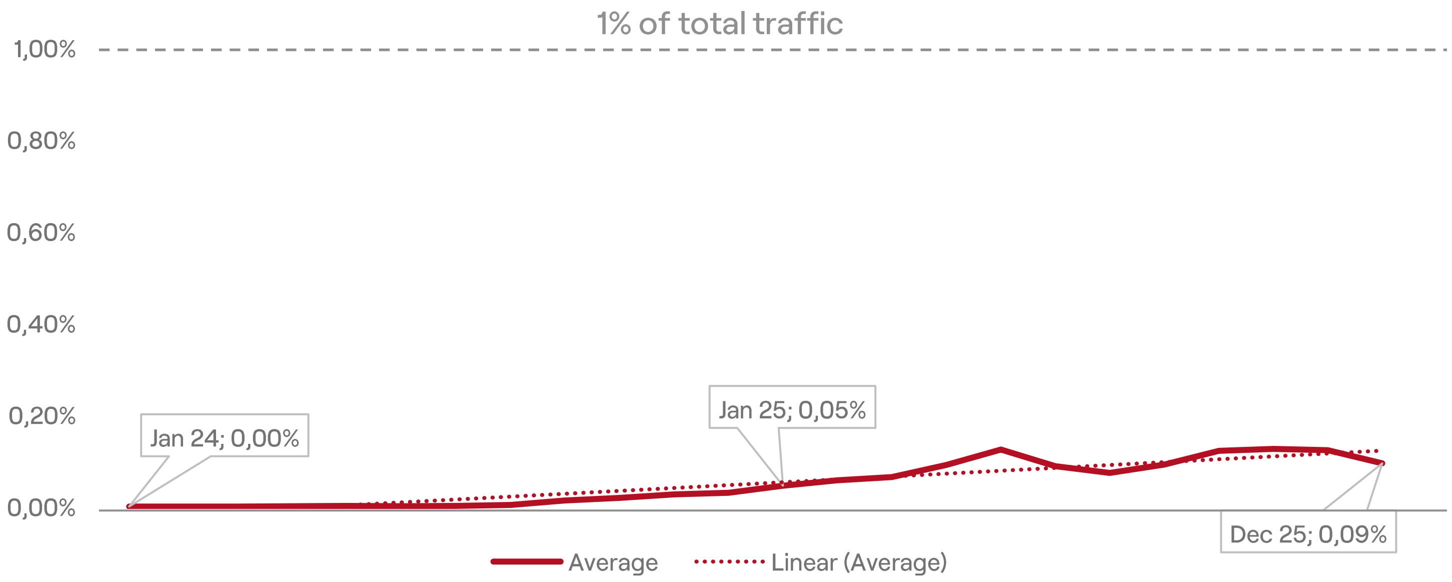
Although only a small fraction of users click through from AI assistants, their role as an entry point for discovery is growing. As ad formats are piloted in several markets, assistants are poised to become a paid extension of search. This is not yet available in Norway, but we continue to monitor AI as a small yet growing source of traffic and brand exposure.

There is a general concern that when an AI Overview appears on Google's search results page, click-through rates for organic and paid results - and the resulting traffic - will decline. While this may be true of online searches in general, with media outlets and publishers reportedly experiencing significant drops in organic and paid traffic, the effect on the companies in this study has been limited to the research phase thus far. We have not observed an overall decline in traffic for these seven companies.

Even if AI assistants were to grow faster and capture a much larger share of total traffic, the importance of brand would remain high (or even increase). Strong brands have a significantly better chance of appearing in AI-generated answers and AI Overviews because these systems tend to prioritize well-established, trusted, and frequently referenced entities.

In other words, if AI becomes a more dominant discovery layer, companies with strong brand equity will be in a comparatively stronger position in terms of visibility within AI responses and likelihood of being included among the few clickable sources.

Average share of AI referral traffic in this study - 2024 to 2025



The average share of AI referral traffic is steadily increasing, but it is still very small compared to the total traffic websites receive (under 0,1% of traffic). The impact is growing but remains modest for now.

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Methodology

In this section, we will describe the methodology behind the two areas of analysis in the study. The first analysis, "Effect of Brand on Online Sales," serves as a stepping stone for the second analysis, "Efficiencies of SEM Investments."

Methodology

What is brand and non-brand traffic?

There are a few ways people reach your website. They can use a search engine or AI-assistants, type your web address directly into a browser, or click links from other sources, such as social media, email, and referrals. This is shown in the figure to the right.

“Brand traffic” occurs when people visit a website to quickly access a known brand.

They may do this by searching on any search engine for a specific company or its product lines (including misspellings) to reach the site.

Direct visits, from visitors who type the brand’s web address, are also classified as brand traffic as the intention is the same.

This study will not examine the origins of brand traffic or how it is generated.

“Non-brand traffic” occurs when people search without naming a company, e.g., by searching for product- or category-related words, or when asking exploration-led questions.

In this study, we will use the abbreviation "SEM" to refer to "search engine marketing” and common variations (i.e. , “paid search”, ”search ads”, “Google Ads”, “Google Search”, “ppc”, “cpc”, etc.)

Because the approach is based on search terms and intent, it is independent of channel and attribution settings.

How do visitors reach your website?

	Via search (Google, Bing, AI assistants, etc.)		Via other sources
	Organic (non-paid)	**SEM** (paid)	
Brand	Searched on a **brand word** and clicked on a link (SEO).	Searched **on brand word** and clicked on an ad link (SEM).	Typed in the **brand’s website directly** in browser.
Non-brand	Searched on a **non-brand word** and clicked on a link (SEO).	Searched on a **non-brand word** and clicked on an ad link (SEM)	Clicked on **links in other channels** (e-mail, social media, other sites, etc.).

What specific data sources are used for this methodology?

- **Web analytics data** (GA4, Adobe Analytics, etc.) for total traffic, conversions, online revenue and time periods.
- **Paid keyword data** (Google Ads, Bing Ads, etc.) to split paid performance by Brand/Non-brand.
- **Organic keyword data** (e.g., Search Console) to determine the share of brand search performance.

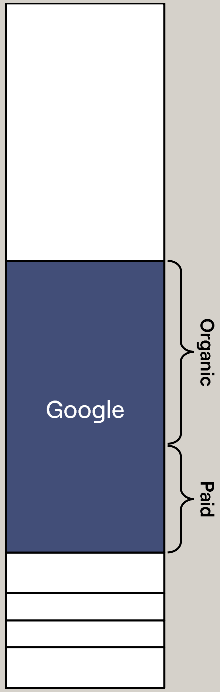
Methodology

How to analyze online brand effect

1
Traffic according to Google

This is how sources of online traffic are presented by Google and other web analytic tools. Google is often the primary driver of traffic, conversions, and online revenue.

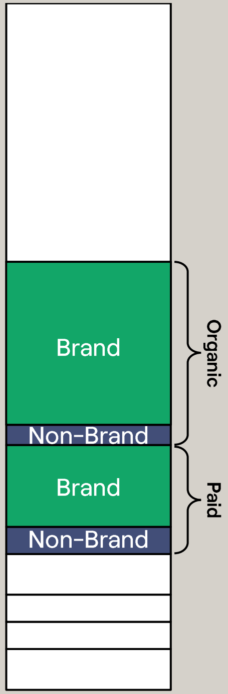
2
Organic and Paid



In order to understand what drives traffic, it is important to recognize that Google traffic is driven by two types of activities:

- Clicks on organic search results (optimized through SEO activities).
- Clicks on ads connected to paid keywords.

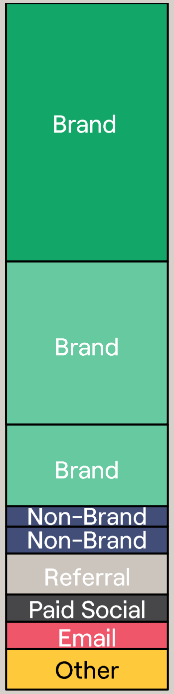
3
Two intents



These two types of traffic are both generated from two different starting points for the existing and potential customers:

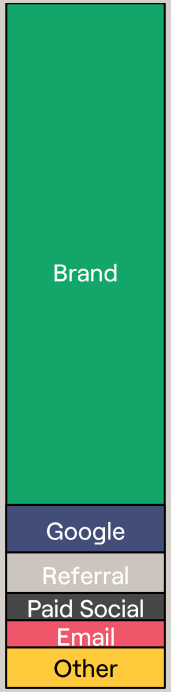
- Non-brand words and general concepts searches.
- Brand word searches by people who have decided they want to visit the brand.

4
Direct traffic is also brand



A significant portion of traffic to a typical website often comes from visitors who type the brand's web address directly. This is also brand-driven traffic, as visitors clearly intend to visit the brand.

5
Brand Traffic

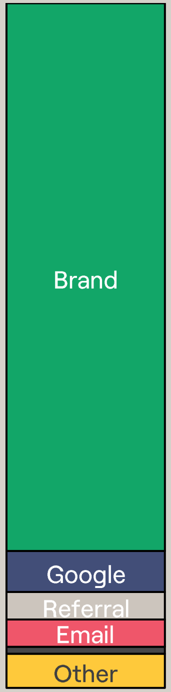


We define Brand traffic as the combined traffic from Google organic and paid searches connected to brand words, as well as direct traffic.

6
Brand Conversions

In this context, we define brand conversions as conversions from brand traffic.

7
Brand Revenue



In this context, we define brand revenue as revenue from brand traffic.

It's important to note that the "Traffic according to Google" analysis (step 1) and the "Brand" analysis (step 5 to 7) are two different perspectives on the same data, both of which are valid. Google's perspective is correct. However, the brand/non-brand division provides complementary perspectives and insights that are crucial to businesses.

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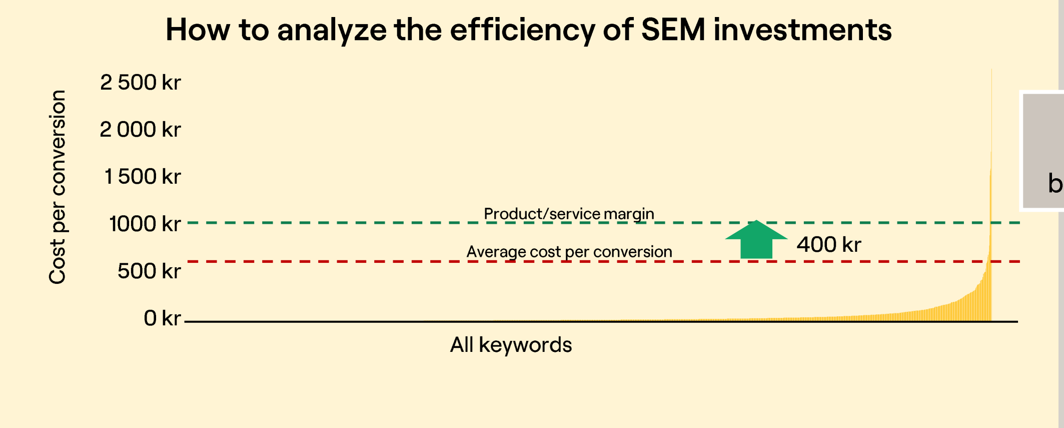
Methodology

How to analyze SEM efficiency

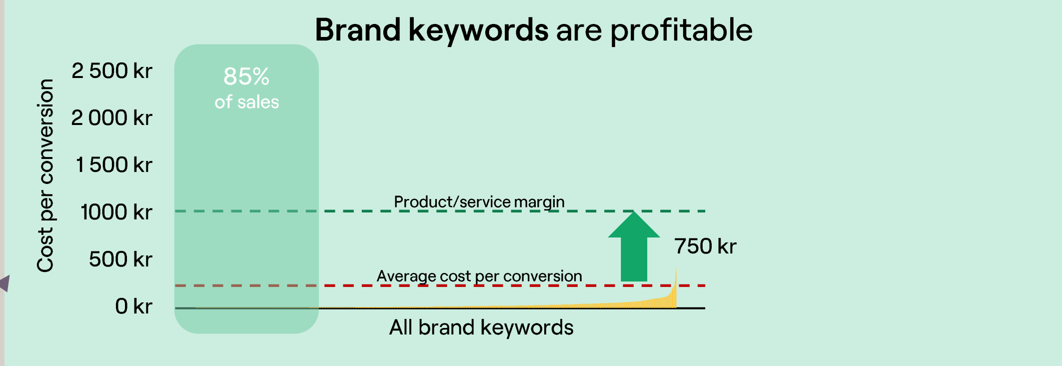
Why divide into brand and non-brand?

The SEM cost per conversion is typically shown as an average and does not separate brand from non-brand keywords. This makes the overall cost per conversion appear safely below the product margin. This creates the impression that both spending and cost per conversion can be increased without putting profitability at risk.

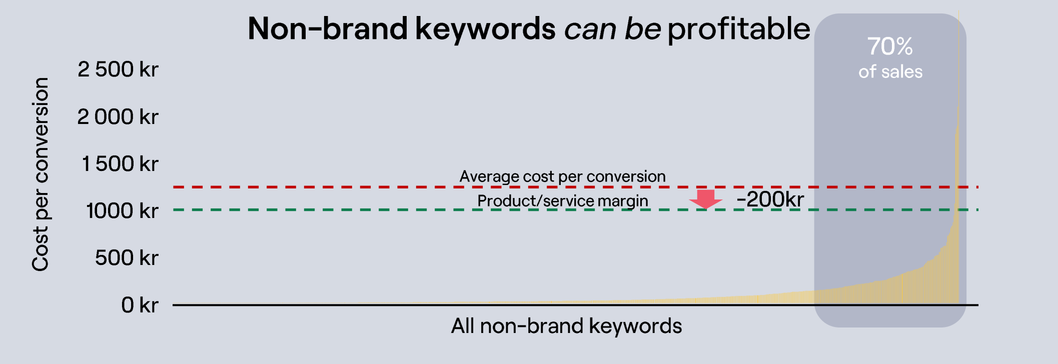


By separating brand and non-brand traffic, conversion and revenue, we can evaluate the efficiency of brand and non-brand SEM investments (illustrated in this example). This is based on an analysis of the cost per conversion for each keyword, which depends on the number of clicks required for a conversion and the cost of each click.

Separate SEM investments into brand or non-brand



When **only looking at brand** words in isolation, volumes are high and the cost per conversion is even further below the product/service margin - this pulls the combined average of brand keywords safely below the margin. Profitability on brand keywords is therefore almost guaranteed, but brand search volume and number of keywords are naturally capped – you can only buy the brand-words that exist - so you cannot simply buy more to scale these results.



Non-brand performance varies considerably. Some keywords convert below the product margin and are worth investing in, while others convert above it and should be limited. Unfortunately, you can't simply cut the most expensive keywords, as they are often connected to the majority of sales. Since brand-related investments cannot be scaled, any "headroom" for additional investment implied by SEM platforms (in the left diagram) will be allocated to non-brand investments, risking raising the cost per conversion and eroding profitability. This can be avoided by carefully and selectively allocating investments to keywords with positive margins.

Comments on the methodology

- In this report, when we refer to 'traffic', the underlying data type is 'sessions'.
- We use current GA4 key events as the basis for conversions without auditing completeness. This method determines whether the brand drives the measured events, not whether the set of events is exhaustive.
- Where revenue tracking exists, we report online revenue; otherwise, we use conversions (e.g. leads or form submissions) – this is the case for four out of the participating companies. Offline revenue is out of scope.
- Non-SEM channels remain separate. Identical time frames and filters are used for traffic, conversions, and revenue to enable comparison.
- Results are reported under a single GA4 attribution setting, regardless of which one is used. Brand/non-brand splits are derived from SEM platforms and Google Search Console (organic) term-level ratios and are then applied to GA4 totals. This alignment mitigates differences between SEM platforms and GA4 attribution models, though small variances may persist when calculating averages over multiple GA4 accounts. The companies where we have had GA4 access, have all had the same attribution model implemented.
- Classification is based on query tokens only and does not estimate the effect of brand mentions in ad creative for non-brand queries.
- Direct traffic is treated as brand traffic (i.e., navigational intent). In GA4, (direct)/(none) includes visits where the website is typed in or bookmarked, as well as sessions where no referrer or campaign data is passed (e.g., some apps, emails, and offline documents). Therefore, a subset may not be purely navigational. 'Unassigned' is a separate channel. GA4 automatically excludes known bots and spiders (IAB list), though unknown bots may remain. We acknowledge these cases and do not reclassify such sessions in this study, as these do not impact online sales.
- Please note that some visits originating from AI may appear as (direct)/(none) in GA4 when no referrer is passed, while others will appear as referrals. We acknowledge this and do not reclassify such sessions in this study.
- SEM share (which includes Brand/Non-brand) is influenced by expenditure and auction conditions and should not be interpreted as an indication of brand strength in isolation. Investing more in SEM brand search will increase the share of traffic, conversions, and online revenue.

Company Clusters

Due to the broad differences in business models and customer journeys between the companies in the study, it is impossible to make direct company-to-company comparisons. In this section, we will define different logical clusters into which the companies will be grouped.

All companies: need to compare like with like

When looking at all companies' outcomes (below), some overarching similarities emerge. However, the results give a rather scattered impression. To make sense of the results, we sought similarities and patterns to cluster. The clustering that created the most similarities and made the most sense was connected to business models. On the following page, you can see how we defined them.

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Company Clusters

Defined business clusters

Subscription Services

This cluster groups businesses whose customer relationships are built on continuity (subscription) rather than single transactions. These services are driven by basic customer needs rather than high interest.

Their websites function partly as service centers where people return to manage an ongoing plan, reviewing invoices, checking what's included, adjusting options, seeking support, etc., and partly as sales platforms.

The defining feature is the recurring nature of the relationship: value is delivered over time, commitments renew, and clarity around usage, cost and entitlements matters.

Although these companies work hard to attract new customers, which is difficult in a mature market, they must focus on retaining existing customers. They achieve this by emphasizing trust, transparency, and ease of self-service. They design experiences that make routine tasks simple and reassure users.

Retail (B2C & B2B)

This cluster covers product-led businesses that use their websites to help customers discover, evaluate and purchase.

For individual consumers, the site plays the role of a well-organized storefront where browsing, comparison and checkout flow together.

For professional buyers, it supports predictable replenishment and larger orders, often under agreed terms.

While audiences and purchase patterns vary, the unifying thread is a direct path from product discovery to completed order.

These companies focus on clarity around selection and availability, confidence in the choice being made, and a buying journey that reduces effort from first search to delivery.

Via Resellers

Here we find businesses that create demand and provide assurance on their own sites, while the actual transaction typically happens elsewhere.

The website's role is to help people understand the range, confirm details, and feel confident in what they're choosing - then point them to an appropriate sales channel to complete the purchase.

This model balances two responsibilities: telling the product and brand story clearly, and routing interest fairly and transparently to partners.

Even after a sale, these sites often remain the home for guides, warranties and other resources that support ownership, keeping the brand relationship active without running a full direct-to-consumer checkout.

Corporate communications

This cluster consists of businesses whose websites serve primarily as a public window into the company, not as a sales engine.

The audience is broad but united by a need for trustworthy information about who the organization is, what it does, and how it behaves. It typically includes prospective employees, journalists, investors, partners, and community stakeholders.

These sites focus on identity, performance, and accountability. They present the company's story and leadership, share news and updates, report on commitments and progress, and highlight opportunities to join.

The shared purpose is to build credibility and attract interest by being clear, consistent and open -without facilitating product sales on the site itself.

Company Clusters

Brand analysis of traffic – clustered

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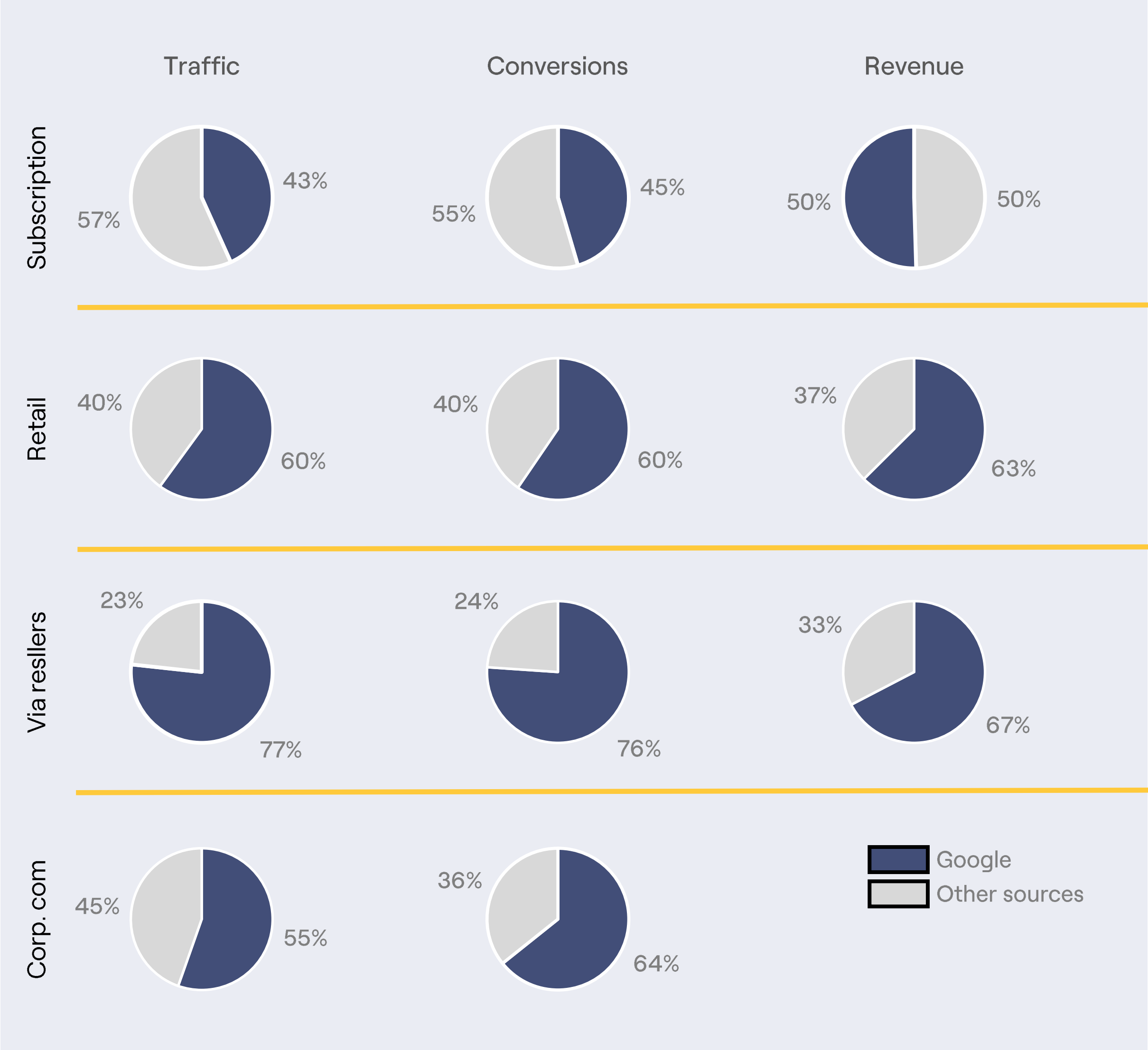
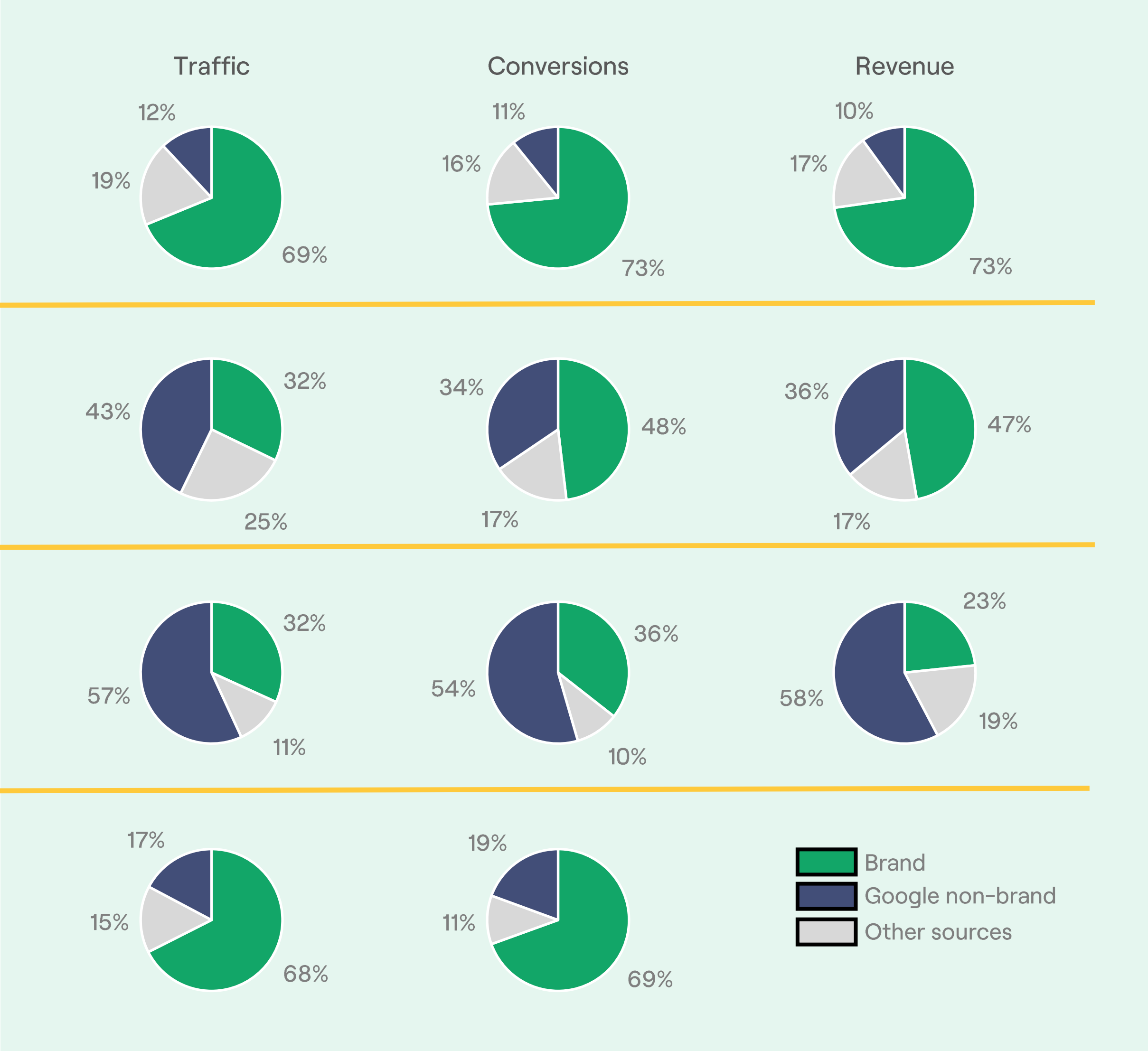
Impact of Google, from Google's perspective



From a brand perspective



Cluster Analysis

In this part, we will describe the insights and findings related to the clusters. Cluster analyses are presented in the following order:

- Subscription Services
- Retail B2C
- Retail B2B
- Via resellers
- Corporate communications

Cluster Analysis

Subscription Services

Who are the companies?

The Subscription Services cluster consists of three companies at different stages of development, operating in three distinct, stable categories in Norway. Two of the companies are well-established brands with high brand awareness and large subscriber bases. The third company is a newer challenger with lower brand awareness, but it has experienced rapid growth in recent years.

What characterizes the Subscription Services cluster?

Subscription services receive the highest share of traffic from direct and brand searches. This is likely because subscribers return for account management and payment tasks, and this traffic is added to the brand traffic of new potential customers. As a result, the two well-established brands have the highest share of brand traffic among all the companies in this study.

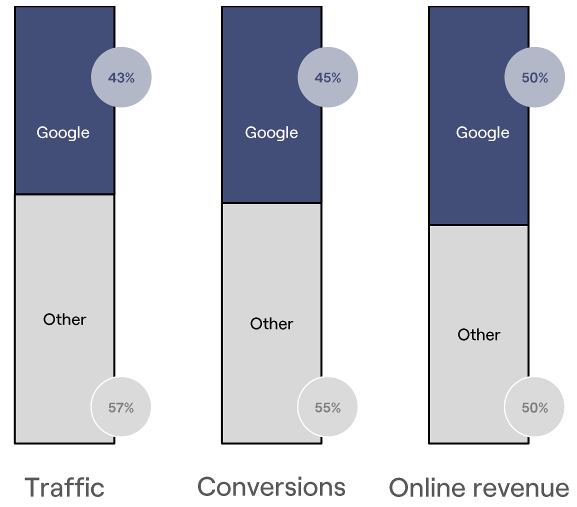
Commercial power of the brand

Brand traffic is the primary performance driver across all three brands, delivering most of on-site conversions and online revenue. The two long-established brands receive 80%+ of online revenue to brand traffic; "the challenger" receives 55% of online revenue from the brand traffic.

The long-established brands have the highest share of brand revenue, lifting the cluster's average. This reflects their brand awareness and sales to existing customers.

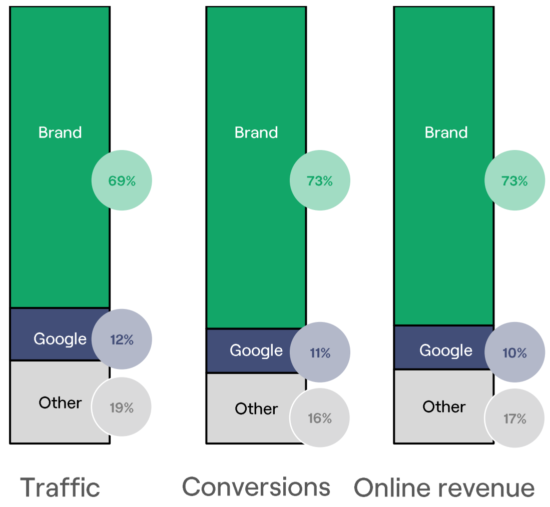
"The challenger" shows a lower brand revenue share and relies more on non-brand search and other acquisition sources, consistent with a weaker brand awareness that requires more short-term activation to drive sales.

From Google's perspective



The single largest source of website traffic, conversions and online revenue is from Google (paid and organic). Traffic from Google converts to a higher extent than others and drives more revenue.

From a brand perspective



The impact of the brand on website traffic is significant, and this applies to the entire cluster. This also shows us Google's actual impact when brand words are not included, which is limited and has a lower conversion rate.

Cluster insights

- Non-brand search becomes costly in a mature, highly competitive market. Cost per conversion for paid non-brand traffic is between 3 and 19 times more costly than paid brand traffic's cost per conversion in this cluster.
- In general, brand search words show strong organic visibility, suggesting that brand word investments could be streamlined to improve cost-efficiency.
- There is potential to reallocate the budget to increase efficiency. A large percentage of non-branded search words appear to underperform in terms of return on ad spend (ROAS), with some businesses showing a negative return on investment for non-branded search. This indicates that further analysis on word level could uncover opportunities.
- Increasing Brand traffic through brand strengthening activities is beneficial in driving online conversions and revenue.

Cluster Analysis

Retail B2C

Who are the companies?

The Retail B2C cluster includes four consumer-facing brands with strong brand recognition in the Norwegian market.

All brands operate via digital and physical channels; three brands have transactions online, and one does not.

Two of these brands in this cluster have by far the highest investment in non-brand words in the study, which generates relatively high non-brand traffic and revenue.

What characterizes the Retail B2C cluster?

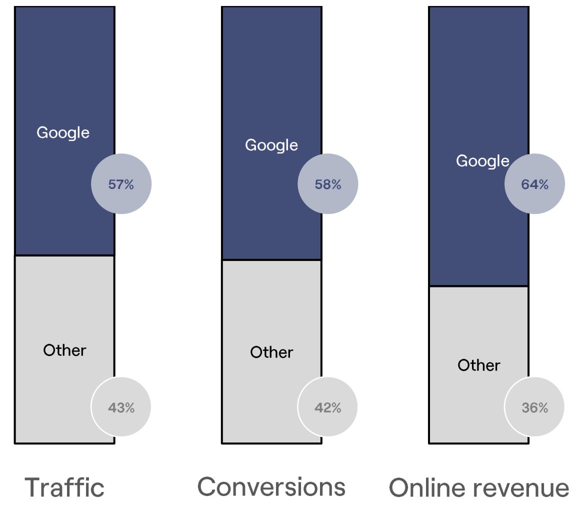
Retail B2C is discovery-driven by nature, where customers often arrive via non-brand searches and compare options across wide assortments. In this cluster, multiple companies sell the same products in the same category.

Commercial power of brand in Retail B2C

Besides and after the discovery phase, there are two main customer behaviors. In the first, customers search for the company's brand and then search for the product on the company's e-commerce site. We define this as brand traffic. In the other behavior, customers search for products rather than the companies that sell them. However, as customers approach the point of conversion, the company's brand becomes more important since they will see the same product (often with the same price tag) sold by different competitors; at this point, the brand is the only differentiator besides free delivery.

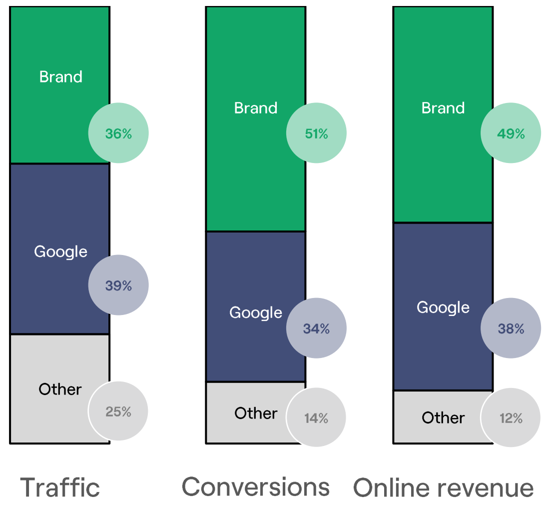
In effect, non-brand words fill the funnel, but brand words harvest purchase, sustain higher conversion efficiency, and deliver stronger value per visit.

From Google's perspective



The majority of website traffic, conversions and online revenue is from Google (paid and organic). Traffic from Google converts to a higher extent than others and drives more revenue.

From a brand perspective



Although the volume of brand and non-brand traffic is similar, brand traffic has higher conversion and revenue shares on average.

Cluster insights

- A common assumption in retail e-commerce is that performance is primarily driven by non-brand Google traffic, since non-brand search captures discovery face traffic. Our analysis challenges that view. Although non-brand accounts for 92% of Google's investments, traffic volumes are only slightly higher than brand traffic. The brand accounts for 8% of Google investments but delivers 51% of conversions and 49% of online revenue.
- Non-brand search becomes costly in a mature, highly competitive market. Cost per conversion for paid non-brand traffic is between 3 and 14 times more costly than paid brand traffic's cost.
- A large percentage of non-branded search words appear to underperform in terms of return on ad spend (ROAS), with some businesses showing a negative return on investment for non-branded search. This indicates that further analysis on word level could uncover opportunities.
- Increasing Brand traffic through brand-strengthening activities is beneficial in driving online conversions and revenue.

Cluster Analysis

Retail B2B

Who are the companies?

The Retail B2B cluster includes two business-facing brands with strong recognition in the Norwegian market.

Both transact online, enabling online revenue tracking for the entire cluster. One operates primarily online, while the other combines e-commerce with a nationwide chain of stores.

What characterizes the Retail B2B cluster?

Retail B2B is research-led and need-driven, with customers mainly arriving via non-brand searches to compare options across specifications and assortments. This typically decreases the share of brand traffic relative to other clusters.

However, as intent matures, brand traffic gains influence, supporting return visits, account logins, negotiated pricing, basket finalization and checkout. Compared with B2C retail, purchase frequency is lower and baskets are larger, making late-stage brand familiarity more important at the point of decision-making.

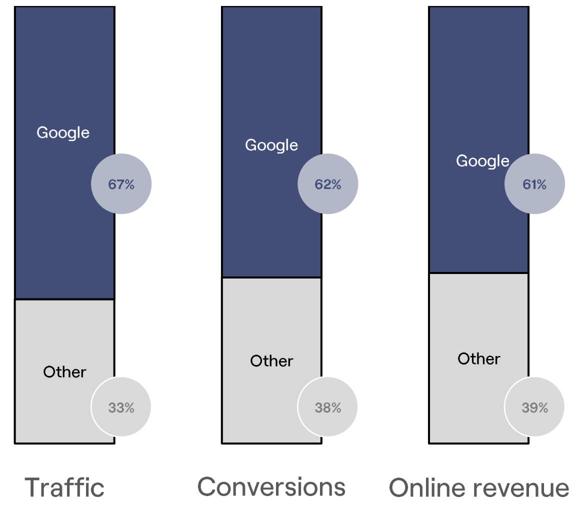
Commercial power of brand in Retail B2B

Although non-brand searches drive the largest volume of traffic, it is the brand that is the decisive driver of conversions and revenue.

Studies of B2B purchasing behavior show that people choose a preferred brand at the beginning of the process, and this initial preference largely determines the outcome. In practice, 95% of purchases are made from the day-one shortlist (before even contacting potential suppliers), and 80% are from no. 1 on that list.

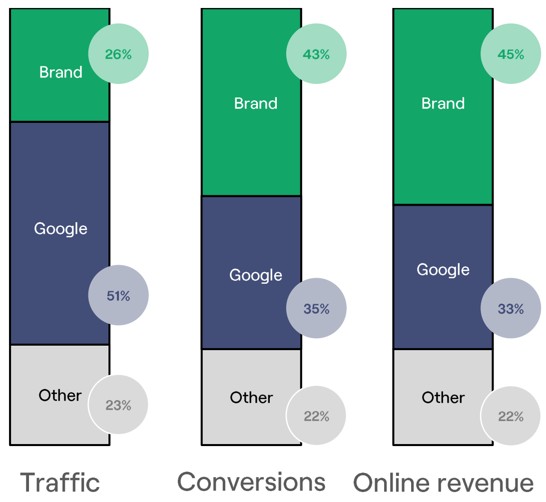
This challenges the conventional idea that B2B retail performance is mainly a function of non-brand search. Brand compresses buying cycles, sustains higher conversion efficiency, and increases value per visit. Meanwhile, non-brand search fills the funnel through discovery and specification queries.

From Google's perspective



The majority of website traffic, conversions and online revenue comes from Google (paid and organic). Although traffic from Google converts to a lesser extent than other sources, it still accounts for the majority of conversions and online revenue on average.

From a brand perspective



Although the volume of brand traffic is substantially lower than non-brand traffic, the conversion and revenue shares are higher on average.

Cluster insights

- The conversion rate for non-brand traffic is lower than average, with 51% of traffic accounting for 35% of conversions and 33% of online revenue. The conversion rate for brand traffic is higher than average, with 26% of traffic accounting for 43% of conversions and 45% of online revenue. Meanwhile, non-brand search investments account for an average of 80% of total SEM investments in this cluster.
- The cost per conversion for paid non-brand traffic is between 3 and 30 times higher than the cost of paid brand traffic.
- The large basket sizes in the cluster makes it relatively insensitive to higher costs per conversion, despite the potential to reallocate investments.
- A large percentage of non-branded search terms appear to underperform in terms of return on ad spend (ROAS). This suggests that analysing words individually could reveal opportunities for optimization.
- In general, brand search words show strong organic visibility, suggesting that brand word investments could be streamlined to improve cost-efficiency.

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Cluster Analysis

Via resellers

Who are the companies?

This cluster comprises three companies that sell primarily through resellers (online/offline).Their own sites are there to create demand and provide reassurance - helping people understand products and services, confirm details, and feel confident in choosing them - then route buyers to appropriate resellers to complete the purchase. Two operate a house-of-brands model where demand concentrates around sub-brands, and one is a branded house with a unified parent brand. Only one company in this cluster has a notable investment in paid search, whilst the remaining have very small investments. Only one of the companies sells products on its site and tracks revenue, while the others do not, which makes it impossible for us to analyze the cluster's average.

What characterizes the via resellers cluster?

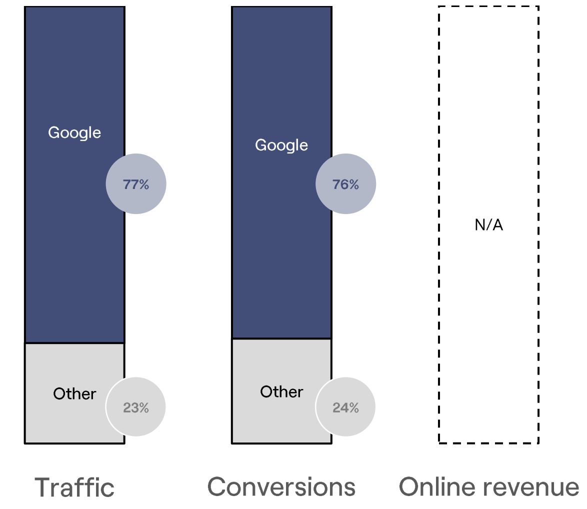
Discovery and search are fragmented across parent brands, sub-brands, product terms, and retailers. Searches for the parent brand are low, while sub-brand and product queries dominate and are often captured by retailers. Consequently, on-site behavior leans toward research and navigation, and the site's main responsibility is to clearly present the range and seamlessly transfer to the appropriate partner.

Commercial power of brand in via reseller cluster

Because purchases mostly occur with resellers, the brand site does not effectively monetize traffic. Its commercial role is to create informed demand and route qualified visitors to partners.

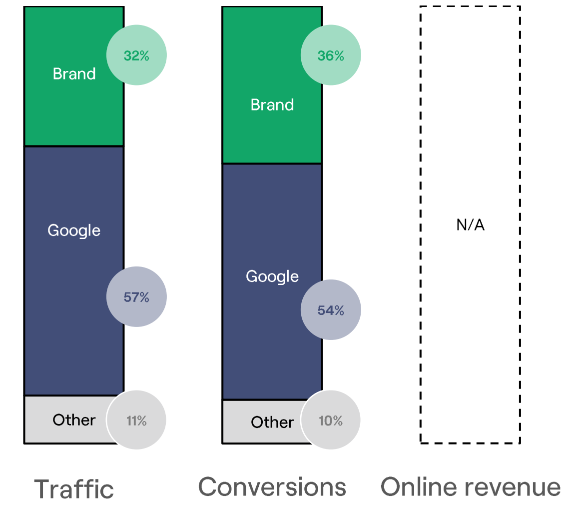
With low search levels on the parent brand and reseller competition on non- and sub-brand, heavy search investments rarely pays off.

From Google's perspective



The majority of website traffic and conversions are from Google (paid and organic). Traffic from Google converts to a lesser extent than others but still accounts for the majority of conversions on average.

From a brand perspective



Although the volume of brand traffic is substantially lower than non-brand traffic, it has higher conversion rates and shares on average. Only one company in this cluster has revenue tracking (and online sales), and therefore, we do not show online revenue averages here.

Cluster insights

- Lower brand traffic due to limited interest and relation to the parent brand.
- The nature of this cluster is constant competition with resellers which increases keyword bids and risks cannibalization of clicks that would otherwise go to resellers.
- For two of the companies, the cost per conversion for paid non-brand traffic is between 1,4 and 5 times higher than for paid brand traffic. For the third company, however, the cost per conversion for brand traffic is higher than for non-brand traffic. This company does not have commercial conversions; it only has engagement conversions. It has invested heavily in non-brand traffic and hardly at all in brand traffic, which distorts this metric.
- In most cases, heavy SEM investment is questionable in this cluster, as it stands in the way of the customer journey. This is supported by the fact that two of the three companies in this cluster have very small SEM investments.

Cluster Analysis

Corporate communications

Who are the companies?

This cluster consists of one organization whose website functions primarily as a public window into the company - designed to inform, not to sell. The site's core role is to present identity, mission, leadership, and accountability, rather than to facilitate product transactions.

What characterizes the cluster?

Audiences are diverse - prospective employees, journalists, investors, partners, and community stakeholders - but they share a common need for reliable, up-to-date information about who the organization is, what it does, and how it behaves.

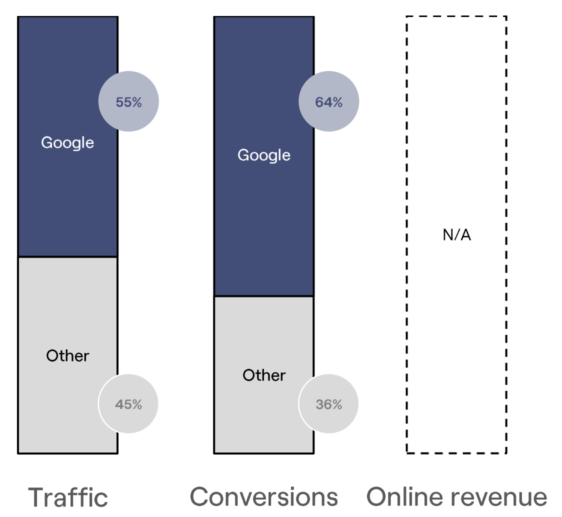
Commercial power of brand in reseller cluster

Where retail is discovery-driven, this cluster is trust-driven and brand-led. Brand search accounts for both discovery and "harvest": it drives the majority of traffic and a higher share of conversions than non-brand.

Non-brand search is used selectively to extend reach in information-intensive moments (notably careers and thematic topics), complementing brand rather than replacing it.

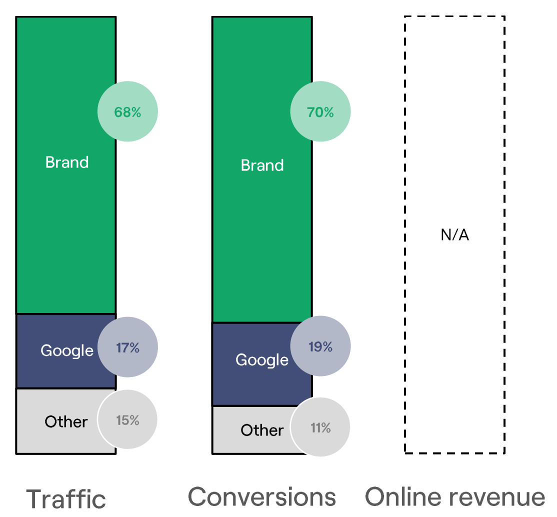
Because on-site "conversions" are engagement signals (not purchases), brand strength translates into greater reading depth and engagement, not immediate commercial value.

From Google's perspective



The majority of website traffic and conversions are from Google (paid and organic). Traffic from Google converts to a higher extent than others and accounts for the majority of conversions on average.

From a brand perspective



The impact of the brand on website traffic is significant. This also shows us Google's actual impact when brand words are not included, which is limited yet maintains an above average conversion rate.

Cluster insights

- Cost per conversion for paid non-brand traffic is 3 times more costly than paid brand traffic's cost.
- The conversion rate for brand traffic is higher than average, with 68% of traffic accounting for 70% of conversions. Meanwhile, non-brand search investments account for an average of 69% of total SEM investments in this cluster.
- The measured conversions don't drive commercial value (scroll depth is the main key event measured). Without commercial conversions on the site, the impact of SEM (or any other marketing efforts) are difficult to measure on-site.

Cross-Company Analysis

In addition to the cluster analysis, insights and findings can be made across all companies, by comparing specific companies in different clusters, and others that are specific to individual companies (outliers).

Cross-company Analysis

Cost per conversion and ROAS

Separating traffic by intent reveals clear performance differences. Brand traffic consists of people who have our brand in mind, while non-brand traffic typically consists of people who haven't yet reached the brand stage of their purchasing journey.

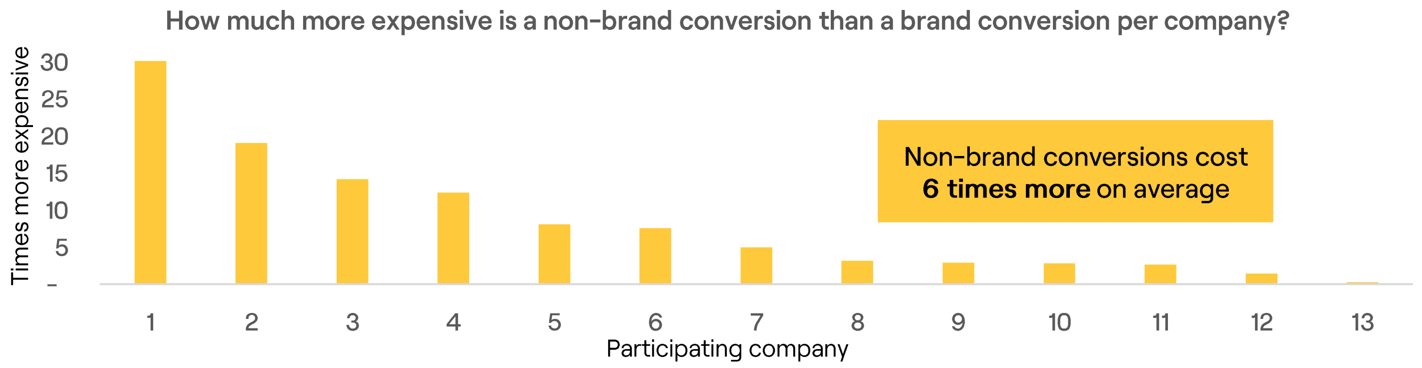
Brand exposure improves non-brand performance as well. Even non-brand searches are influenced by prior brand exposure, which affects which ads users click when seeing multiple ads from different brands side by side. However, these effects are not taken into account in this study as they aren't measured.

The cost per conversion varies significantly between brand and non-brand traffic. Brand keywords tend to convert at a lower cost because of low competition for the words and high click-through rates, as users searching for a brand are likely to choose it. You find a similar pattern in the return on ad spend. On average, brand keywords deliver a ROAS that is around 8 times higher than that of non-brand keywords, based on the average across nine companies with available revenue data.

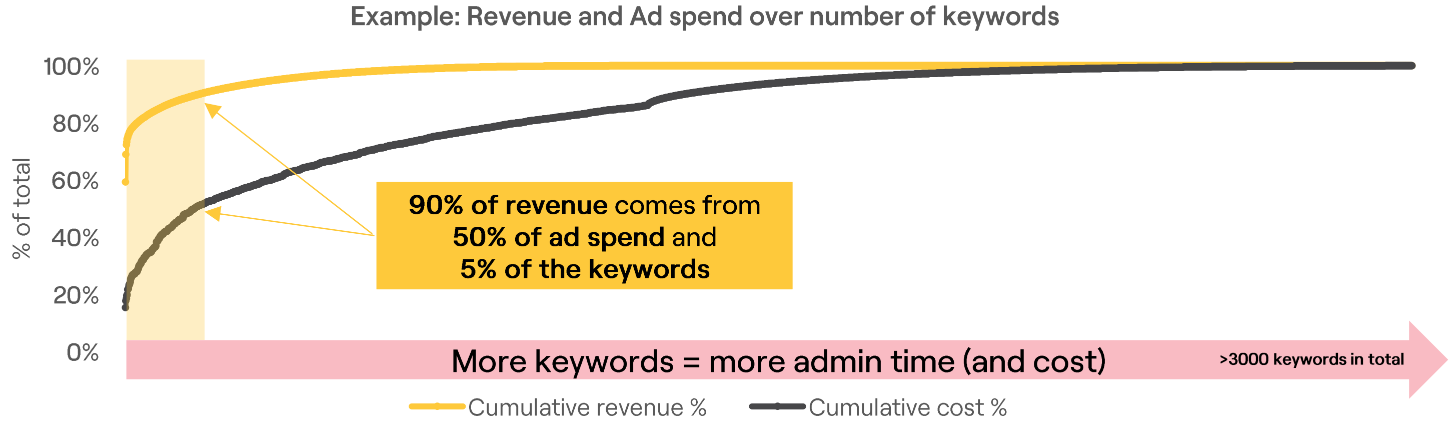
Aggregated ROAS and cost-per-conversion metrics can mask these differences. To understand what truly drives returns, performance must be evaluated at the keyword level, where the impact of brand strength becomes apparent.

Amount of keywords drives cost, but not always results

The number of keywords in an account also matters. Larger non-brand keyword sets often drive higher management and operational costs, whether from internal resources or external agencies. This occurs without necessarily generating proportional business value - while brand volumes remain concentrated and efficient. Splitting the data at the keyword level enables us to identify which terms justify continued investment and pinpoint where marginal returns diminish.



The impact of the brand on average cost per conversion is substantial across all participating companies. By splitting performance into branded and non-branded traffic, we can clearly see how much more expensive a non-brand conversion is. On average, a non-brand conversion costs 6 times more than a branded one, with individual company levels ranging from 1,4× to 30× more expensive. There is one outlier where the cost per conversion for brand traffic is higher than for non-brand traffic, but in this company's case, conversions are engagement-based. More about this in the outlier section of this study.



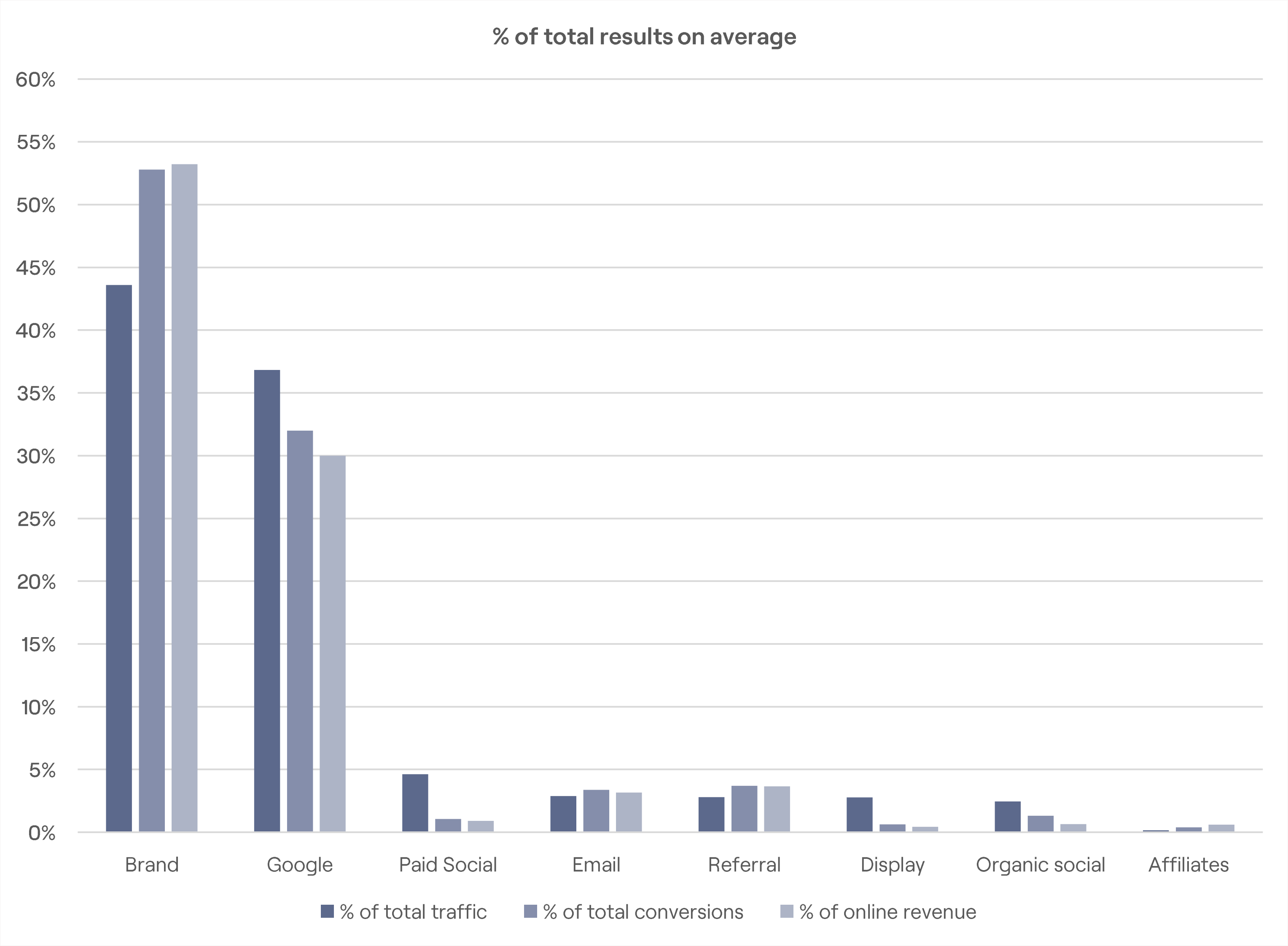
The distribution of keywords usually looks like this: around 90% of a company's revenue is generated by only 5% of its keywords. These keywords account for approximately 50% of the company's Google Ads investment. The remaining 50% of the investment is used to generate the final 10% of conversions from the remaining 95% of keywords. The long tail not only underperforms but also inflates management overhead and incurs additional costs beyond ad spending.

Contribution across all sources

Although certain channels are considered strong drivers of conversion, the data from the participating companies in this study indicates that their actual commercial impact varies significantly. Often, substantial time, platform investments, advertising spending, and operational efforts are invested in channels that generate minimal traffic, conversions, and online revenue.

This does not mean these channels lack value, but it does mean their role must be clearly defined. Some channels may primarily support long-term brand building, while others may play an assistive role in the customer journey. If that is their purpose, then the allocation of resources and the expected outcomes should be evaluated against those of other channels with the same strategic mission.

In practice, this means distinguishing between channels meant to convert and those meant to build preference and ensuring each is assessed using the appropriate metrics. Only then can we optimize effort, budget, and expectations across the full ecosystem.



Company-specific findings

What we see

Very low levels of brand traffic and brand revenue. The total paid search investment is modest, with 53% invested in non-brand keywords. The pattern suggests that the majority of non-brand clicks are related to navigation and exploration, rather than purchase.

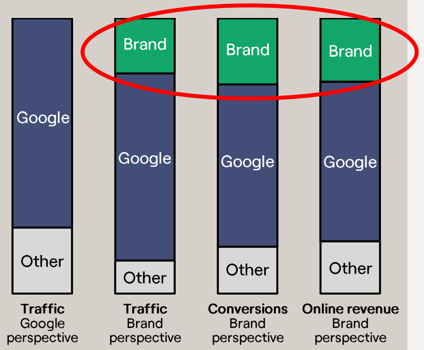
Why it likely happens

This company can be classified as a house-of-brands: recognition and choice are associated with its products rather than the company brand. The company's website is primarily a content destination, even though it acts as an e-commerce site. Purchase primarily goes through resellers or intermediaries rather than directly from the company.

Conclusion

There is a small volume of sales but the majority is captured off-site. Shifting advertising spend from Google Ads to avoid driving up click prices through bidding when competing with resellers could be a more strategic way to capture demand.

Exploration heavy, low purchase



Company A

What we see

Very low levels of brand traffic and brand conversions. As the site doesn't transact, there is no checkout or revenue tracking. Conversions are only engagement actions, and this is the only company in this study with more expensive brand conversions than non-brand conversions. Relatively large investments are made in paid search, 98% of which are in non-brand, driving volume to content rather than sales.

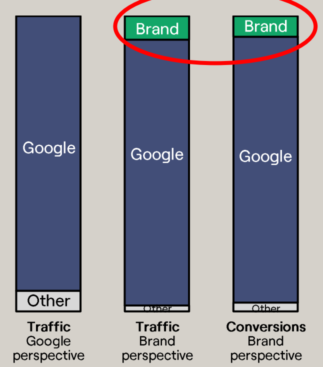
Why it likely happens

This company can be classified as house-of-brands: recognition and choice are associated with its products rather than the company brand. Users might research content on the company website but then purchase primarily through retailers or intermediaries rather than directly from the company. Because the site's conversions reflect interaction instead of business value, conversions don't reflect actual business impact.

Conclusion

The measured conversions don't drive revenue. Without commercial conversions on the site, paid search rarely pays off, and there is a risk of cannibalizing clicks and driving up click prices through bidding when competing with resellers.

Exploration heavy, no purchase



Company B

What we see

3% of traffic in GA4 is unassigned, yet this accounts for 17% of conversions and 19% of online revenue. This means that almost one in five commercial outcomes isn't credited to any channel, so channel comparisons (including splits for brand vs. non-brand) cannot be relied upon. Importantly, this is high-converting, high-value traffic—not noise. This undermines our analysis for this company.

Why it likely happens

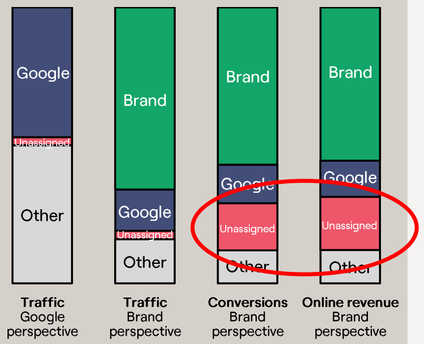
There are several technical explanation that could be the reason for unassigned traffic, below are some examples:

- Missing or faulty tracking (late/misfiring tags)
- Cookie consent issues (GA4 record actions but not sources)
- Missing/incorrect UTM link-tagging
- Cross-domain/payment hops that break attribution
- Referrer-stripping sources

Conclusion

With close to 20% of commercial outcomes unassigned, we cannot draw firm conclusions about which channels perform best or the actual impact of the brand. It is important for this company to solve this problem as it hinders optimization of effects and efficiency.

Measurement issues undermines analysis



Company C

What we see

The traffic mix stands out versus other companies: a larger share comes from display and social media ads, but with low conversion rates. Google Ads investments are relatively large, with a vast majority of that being in non-brand keywords (89%).

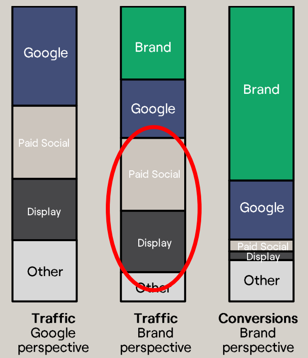
Why it likely happens

This company receives partner marketing contributions that must be spent on specific channels. This allocates a larger budget to awareness channels than we see with other companies. The business is based on high-cost goods. Customers don't make purchasing decisions in a single visit; interest builds over time. This makes display and social media ads useful for continuous visibility and selectability throughout the lengthy decision-making process. However, this also explains the low conversion rates from these channels.

Conclusion

The channel mix reflects the buying cycle and funding rules, and high investments in display and social media ads - not underperformance in Google search. Expect longer journeys and more assists before purchase. Brand traffic still drives most of the conversions.

Different channel mix, similar brand impact



Company D

Applications for the marketing department

The study reveals a clear pattern showing that brand has a significant impact on online sales, and that investing in brand SEM is far more effective than investing in non-brand SEM.

In this section, we will suggest how to use your company's results to increase effectiveness and efficiency by achieving greater alignment and steering.

Applications for the marketing department

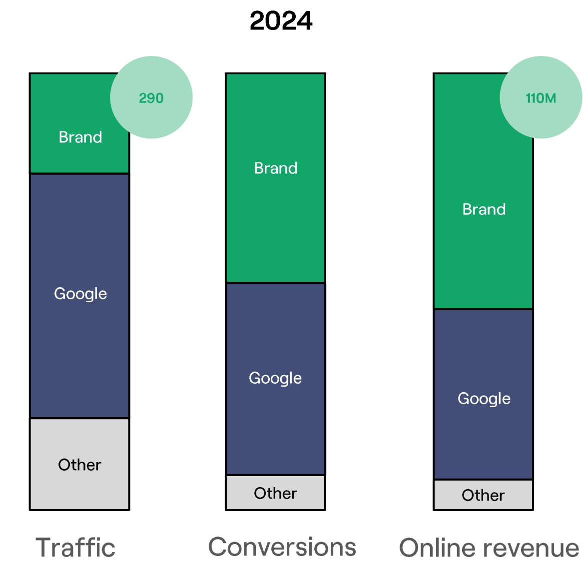
By applying a brand perspective to web traffic, conversions and online revenue – and following up on this over time – there are several benefits for today's marketing departments.

1. **The (monetary) value of brand explained**
   Explaining the value of brand, and brand investments, in financial logical terms to C-level counterparts is notoriously difficult. But by measuring the brand's impact on sales over time, brand investments can be assessed in the same way as other business critical initiatives.

2. **Holistic budget allocations and steering**
   Our study shows that a strong brand is crucial for a profitable online business. How a company can build a strong brand needs to be adapted to the specific market conditions, but by following the impact of brand as shown in this study, marketing investments can be allocated in a way to best meet business objectives.

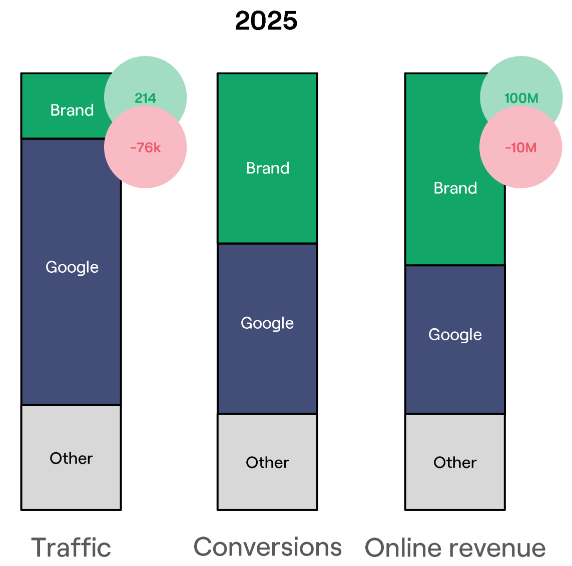
3. **Improved internal cross-discipline collaboration**
   Today's marketing departments are often split between different specialists, with different objectives and ways of working. By having the same internal view of which activities are driving results, internal collaboration can be increased, fragmentation reduced, and overall effect and efficiency improved.

Conclusion
Although we have detected a clear pattern showing that brand has a crucial effect on online sales and that brand SEM investment is far more efficient than non-brand, it is important for every company to conduct its own analysis to gain a better understanding of its situation. For example, when evaluating the efficiency of brand and non-brand SEM investments it needs to be done on word level.
There is money to be both made and saved.



In the example above, a company followed web traffic and conversions from a brand perspective starting in 2024.

In 2024, the company had 290k visits from brand traffic, generating 110M in revenue.



The company followed brand traffic and conversions over time and saw a decrease in brand traffic of -76k visits year on year. Indicating a worsened brand position in the market.

The online revenue from brand traffic was 100 M, a decrease by -10M year on year. .

The financial impact of the worsened brand position was in this case -10M as the company operates an online only transaction model.

Implications in this case were amongst others a review of the marketing budget allocations.

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Most companies allocate a significant portion of their marketing budget to search engine marketing (SEM) and search engine optimization (SEO). However, many struggle to understand the effects of these investments.

This study, a neutral initiative from Kapero, ANFO, and Mediebedrifterne, aims to evaluate the effect of brands on online traffic and sales, as well as the efficiency of brand and non-brand SEM investments, on a broader base of companies.