



How Great Search PMs Build for Impact

A presentation by Women of Search



Join us @ women-of-search.org

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AGENDA



- 01** About Women of Search
- 02** Why Search is Different
- 03** How Great Search PMs Build for Impact
- 04** Learnings
- 05** Q&A



01. Women of Search

Women of Search

Founded in 2021, Women of Search is a community of women and allies dedicated to the empowerment and celebration of women working in Search.



Mission

To provide a network and platform for technical growth, mentorship, and knowledge sharing.



Global Reach

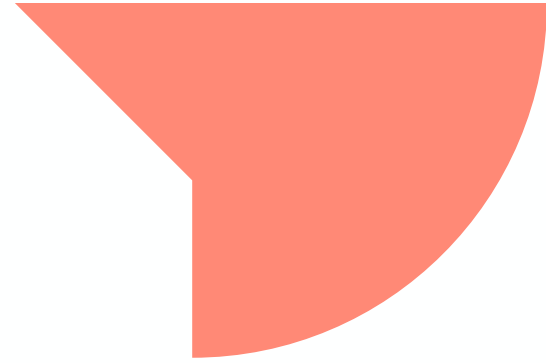
285+ members across 10+ countries working at companies of all sizes.



Knowledge Sharing

Haystacks US/EU talks, monthly meetups, study groups, job recs.

Join us: women-of-search.org or [#women-of-search](https://relevancy.slack.com) on relevancy.slack.com



New: Mentorship Program

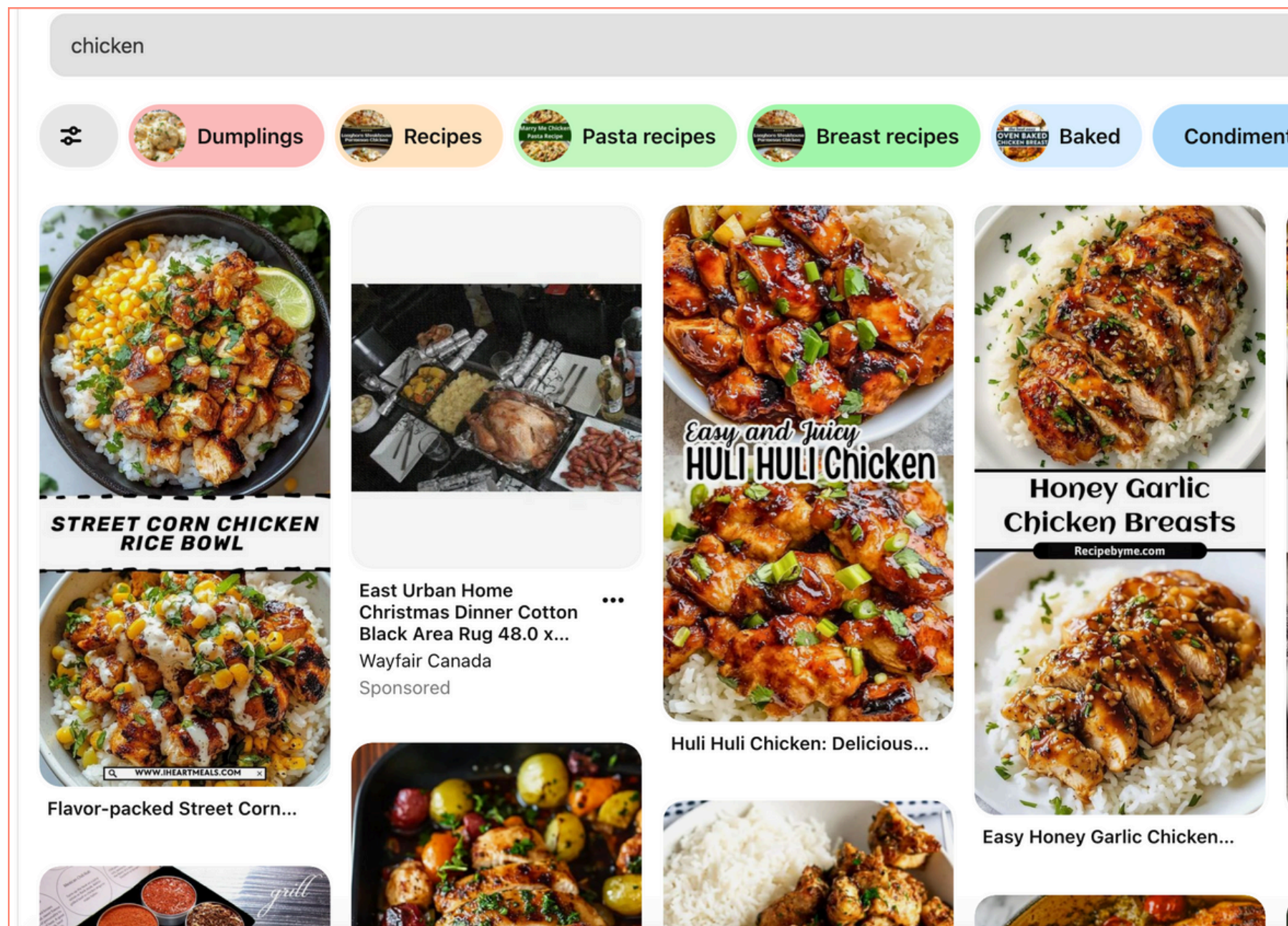


- Women of Search x OpenSource Connections
- Foster meaningful connections between professionals in our field
- 1+ year commitment, 1x/month meetings
- Go beyond work!
- To join: women-of-search.org/mentorship

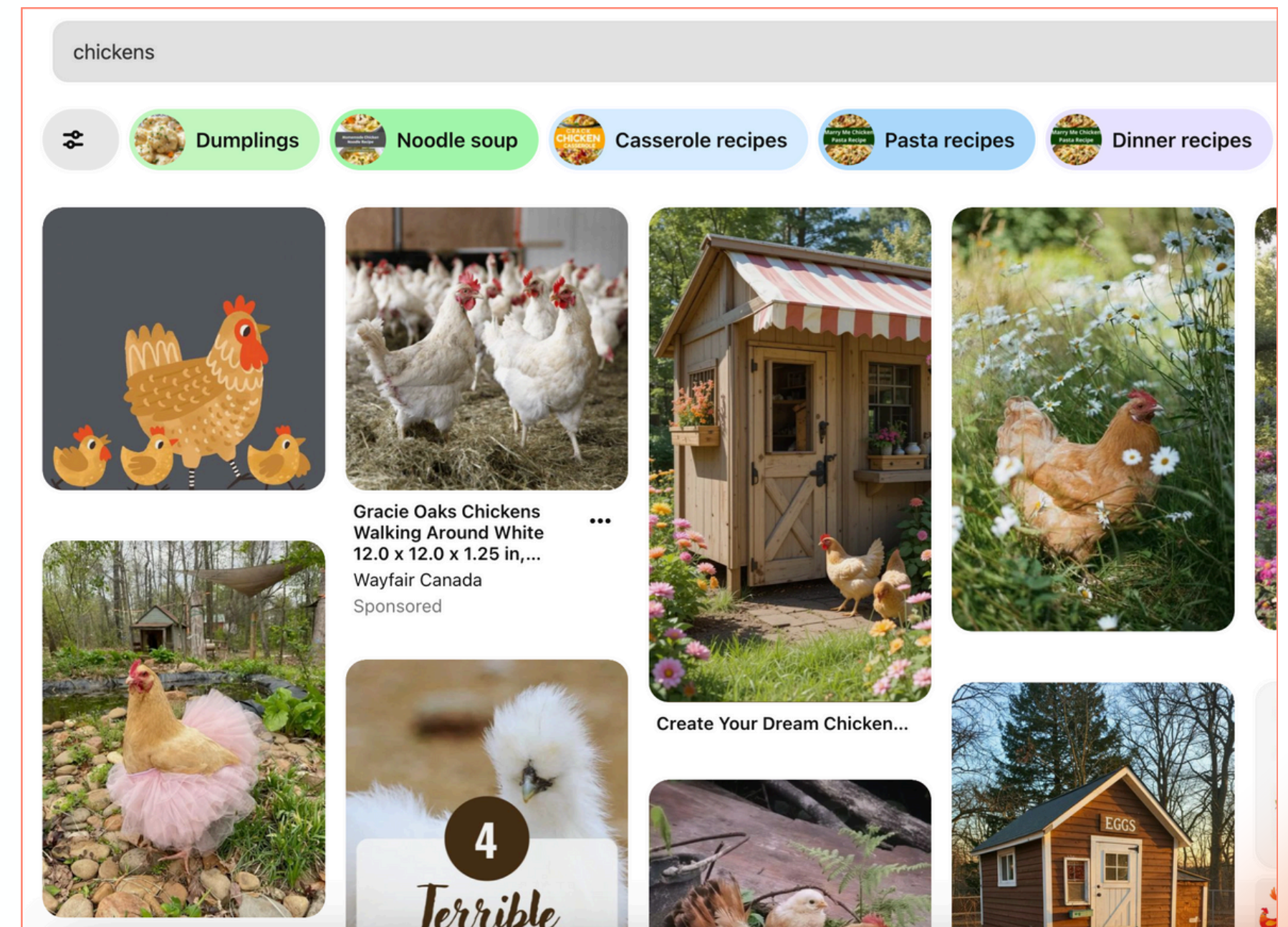
02. Why Search is different

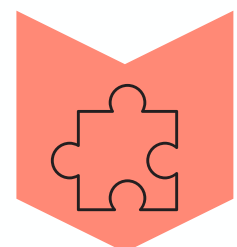
What is the correct result for the query...

Chicken



Chickens





Our Role: Close the Gap

PM's role is connecting ambiguous signals to satisfaction.



Input Is Just a Hint

Users rarely express their full intent in what they type.



Intelligent Inference

Great search experience doesn't just parse text. It understands context and infers what matters most.



Expectation of Understanding

Users assume the system will fill in the blanks and interpret nuance.

Search Begins with a Clue, Not Clarity

Search is the rare product where users initiate with intent. Our challenge is decoding the gap between clue and clarity.

Search Works as a Whole, Not in Parts

Users don't experience algorithms, UX, or infra separately, **they experience one moment.**

Holistic thinking drives more progress than isolated improvements.

It demands orchestration – Ranking, infra, UX, signals—all must work in sync.

“You don't build search. You orchestrate it.”

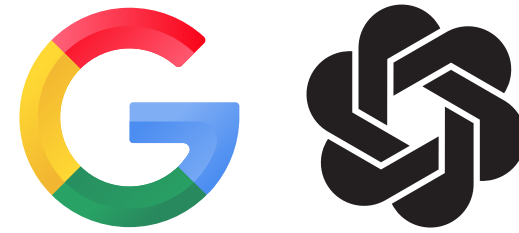
Search Success is Probabilistic and Invisible

You can't be right 100% of the time: aim to be right more often than wrong.

- **Relevance is subjective:** what works for one user may not work for another.
- **Search success is driven by user perception,** not just technical accuracy.
- **Communicating probabilistic success to stakeholders** requires transparency and context.

Search Has Different Forms

Where search lives in the product and in your org defines what success looks like, what metrics matter, and how you justify investments.



Search is the product

Search is a hugely impactful part of the product, but it's not THE product.



Search shapes behaviour

Your goal is to guide users to engage more.



Search is a fallback

Search is a hugely impactful part of the product, but it's not THE product.

03. How Great Search PMs Build for Impact

Define Success Before You Build

Success in Search is fuzzy, but alignment shouldn't be.

Search PMs define success by aligning on:

Business Alignment

- How does search success drive the broader product goals?
- Does your change reflect the product's model and intent

E.g., in a marketplace, success might mean messaging a seller—not clicking a result

Behavioural Changes

- What specific user actions will demonstrate improvement?
- What specific behaviors are you trying to shift?

E.g., reduce abandoned sessions on long-tail queries

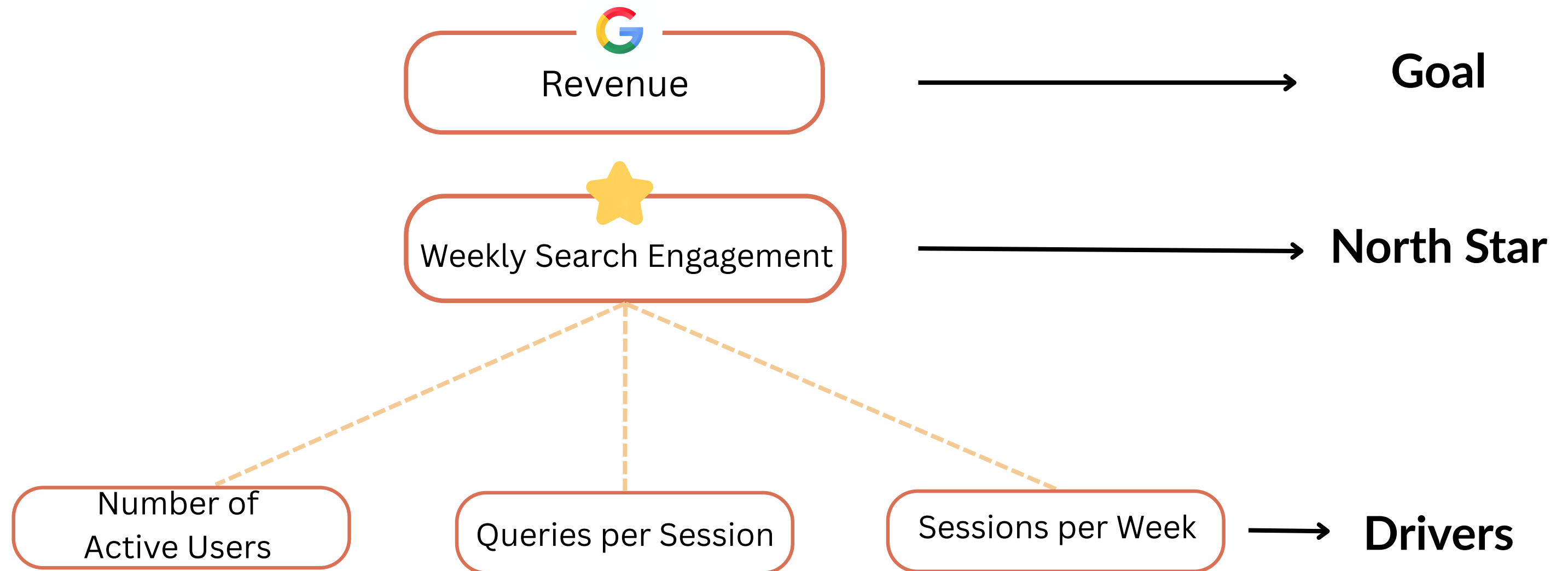
Signals Validity

- Does your chosen metric reflect user satisfaction?
- What metric shows users found what they needed?

E.g., increase search-to-save rate or task completion

Define Success Before You Build

Success in Search is fuzzy, but alignment shouldn't be.



Learn from Customer Behaviour

What Pinterest taught us about behavioural signals that shape relevance and help create impact

Ideal number of clicks

Too few = no engagement, too many = analysis paralysis. The goal is to guide users to act without overwhelming them.

Average query length

Increasing from 1.7 to 2.9 words improved filtering and result accuracy.

Passed-over results

Clicking item 5 implies items 1–4 weren't relevant—this trains the ranking model.

Query length as a proxy

Short = exploratory → prioritize diversity. Long = focused → prioritize precision.

Such leading signals help us infer what users meant, not just what they type.

Live in the logs

Search log analysis not only uncovers unexpected patterns—it also gives you real-world test data for evaluations and model tuning.

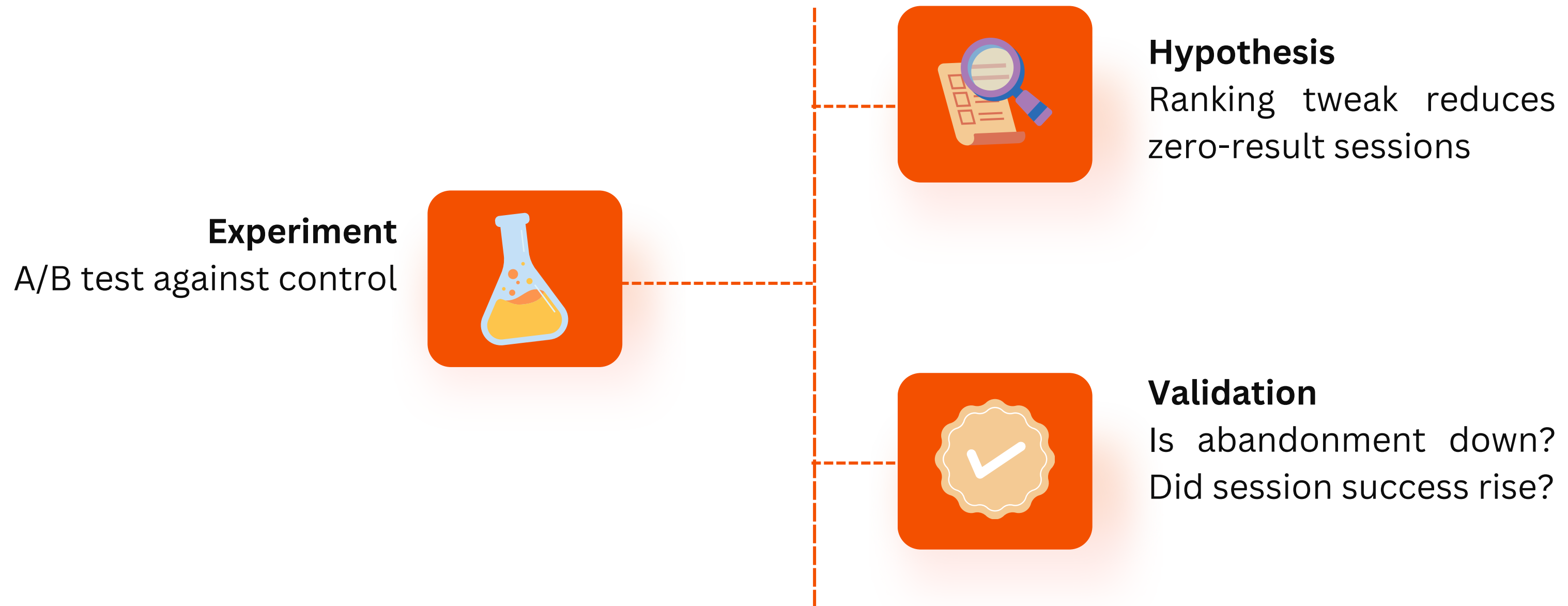
Search logs can reveal:

- What users are searching for and how
- Where they get stuck, abandon, or rephrase
- Which queries return poor or no results

Stakeholder Says	Logs Show
“Users want more filter options.”	6% abandon search after applying a second filter.
“The search bar needs to be bigger.”	9 in 10 users find it instantly.
“People don’t know what to search for.”	83% of queries are product names or features.
“Adding more results helps users find things.”	Users rarely scroll past the 3rd result.

Ship with Purpose, Not Pressure

Impact doesn't come from shipping faster. It comes from learning faster.



Velocity without direction is just motion.

Build Systems, Not Features

Search is judged as one experience. Your job is to make all its parts work as one system.

Search isn't one thing—it's a system of interconnected parts. Users don't see ranking, query parsing, fallback logic, and UX separately—they experience it as one moment: "Did I get what I wanted?"

- **Orchestrate, don't isolate** – Search is a system, not a feature set
- **Success is systemic** – Failures in one part degrade the whole
- **Not everything is an algorithmic problem** – Sometimes UX, defaults, or metadata matter more
- **You're not optimizing one piece** – You're designing for harmony

Search success is systemic. So is failure.

04. Learnings

Prioritize

Great PMs leverage strategies that quantify subjective processes

RICE Scoring Model

Helps prioritize product ideas by evaluating **Reach**, **Impact**, **Confidence**, and **Effort**.

Impact x Effort Matrix

Evaluate the **impact** (how much a feature will improve the product) versus the **effort** (how much time and resources it will take).

Cost of Delay (CoD)

Calculate the **cost of delaying** a feature's development; helps prioritize features that provide the **highest return on investment** when **time is in short supply**.

Prioritize...with Purpose

*“Frameworks don’t replace thinking;
they help focus it.”*

- **Adapt** frameworks to fit your team’s:
 -  Size,  Execution Speed,  Structure
- Size opportunities in accordance with **real query data**:
 - What % of total revenue does this change represent?
- Find the **patterns**
 - Loud examples are not always the most impactful to fix
- **Document** the reasoning behind your decisions:
 - Record the reasoning and *data* that drive your prioritization decisions
- Orient your success around how your team changes user behavior, not around the number of features you deliver

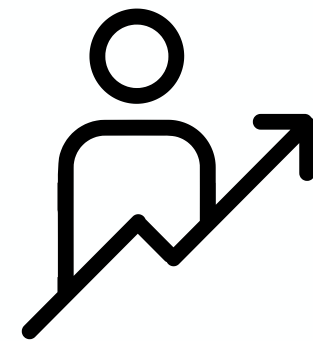
Set Impactful Goals

OKRs are your compass. Good OKRs map to behavioural changes, not delivery checkboxes.

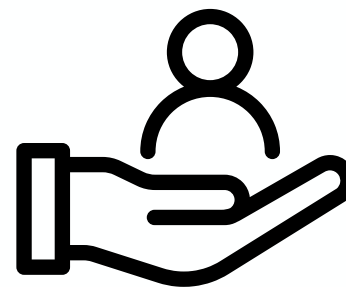
- OKRs must be:
 - Anchored to business goals
 - Linked to user actions
 - Measurable
- Align with cross-functional partners on OKRs *before* execution
- OKRs are *adjustable*: as the solution evolves, so too can your OKRs!



“Increase purchase rate from search on high-intent queries from 12% to 15%.”



“Raise first-time search engagement from new users by 20%”



“Grow repeat weekly searches per returning user from 1.3 to 1.6.”

Community best practices

The following habits will keep your team aligned and moving.

- Review logs quarterly with your team to uncover patterns
- Set recurring check-ins with your cross-functional partners
- Bring engineers into user calls—they build better with context
- Don't fix for one query—solve for the pattern and root cause

“The most aligned teams don’t just talk often—they look at the same problems together.”

Communicate With Intention

Search PMs operate across layers. Tailor comms to match the context and protect your team's focus.

- Say no early, with rationale; it protects focus and builds trust
- Manage across and upwards: set expectations cross-functionally.
- Anticipate team needs before they escalate

Clear communication is execution. Your job is to make the invisible visible, before it becomes a fire.”

Frameworks as Guideposts

Great PMs use frameworks to guide their thinking, not to prescribe their abilities.



OKRs

Objectives & Key results

Best for: Execution & measurable outcomes

Strengths: Strategic alignment, measurable



NSM

North Star Metric

Best for: Guiding long-term product direction and team alignment

Strengths: Focused, unifying metric



KPIs

Key Performance Indicators

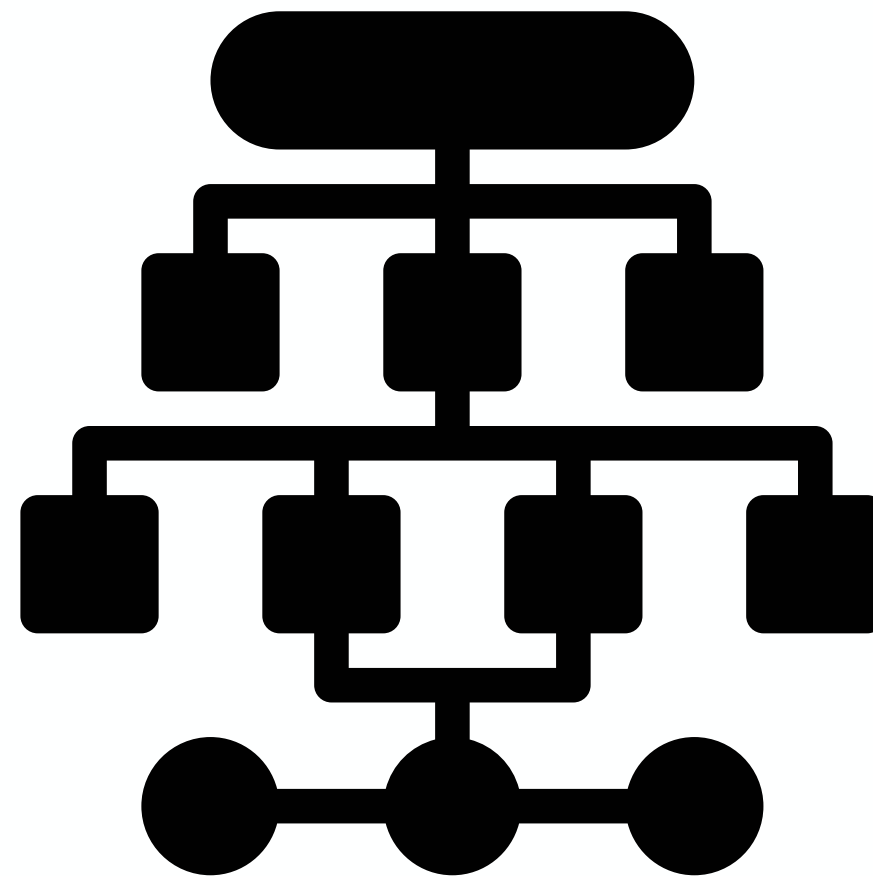
Best for: Monitoring & optimising product performance

Strengths: Actionable, easy to track

Systematic Decision Making

Great PMs use systems and logic to guide decisions, so their chain of reasoning is unbiased and documented.

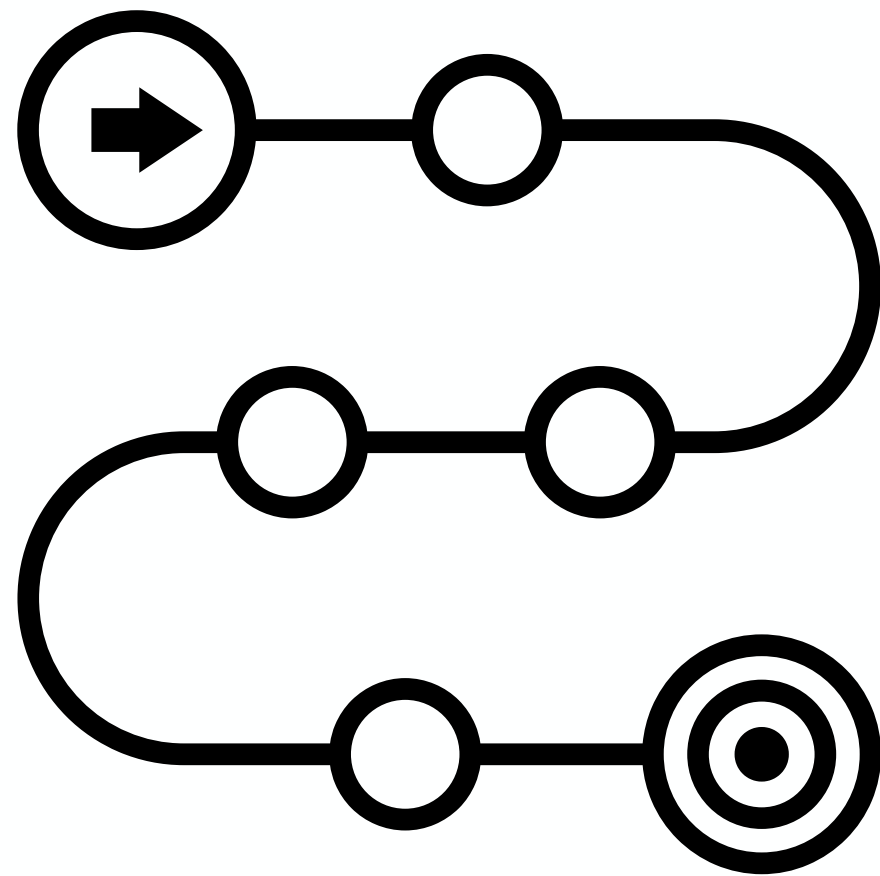
Opportunity Solution Trees



OSTs map opportunities to outcomes and link those outcomes to solutions.

The End Result: Roadmaps

All of these methods help great Search PMs create Roadmaps: the crystalization of what you will deliver, when.



Roadmaps are a PM's main deliverable to stakeholders.

Roadmaps explicitly link features to expectations, along a strategic timeline.

Learnings



Define success *before* you begin

Great Search PMs don't copy industry standards blindly. They tie metrics to their specific business model. Without proper metrics, teams just push changes and hope they worked.



Obsess over the data

Great Search PMs *live* in the logs. They always validate assumptions and lean on the data to back their decisions.



Ship with *purpose*

Great Search PMs set clear, actionable, data-driven, and *documented* goals. Direction matters just as much as speed; roadmaps need to contain measurable outcomes, not a list of fancy features.



Work *beyond* the Search team

Great Search PMs are *visible*. They proactively seek out feedback from other teams and *evangelize* their teams' work across the organization.

placeholder for TLDR for search PMs

- Start adopting a new vocabulary. Say concepts, experiments, outcomes, instead of deliverables, features, etc.
- Define success from the start
- Chase outcomes
- Experiment

Audrey Lorberfeld

TLDR for search teams

- product-led thinking even if you don't have a search PM:
- user behavior
- logs
- analysis
- experimentation
- systemtic impact

Audrey Lorberfeld

Q&A

We'd love to hear from you 🔍

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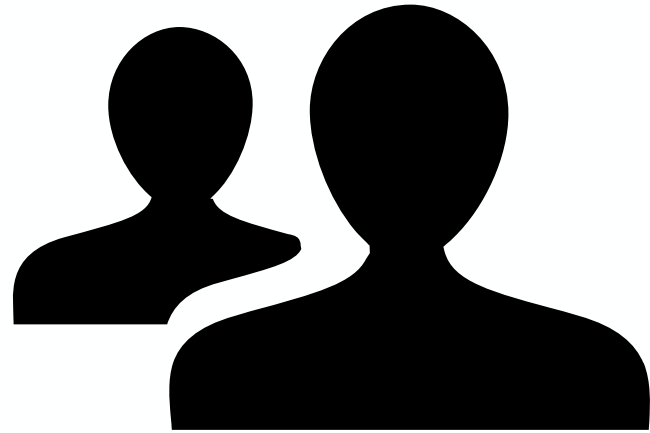
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[#women-of-search](#), relevancy.slack.com

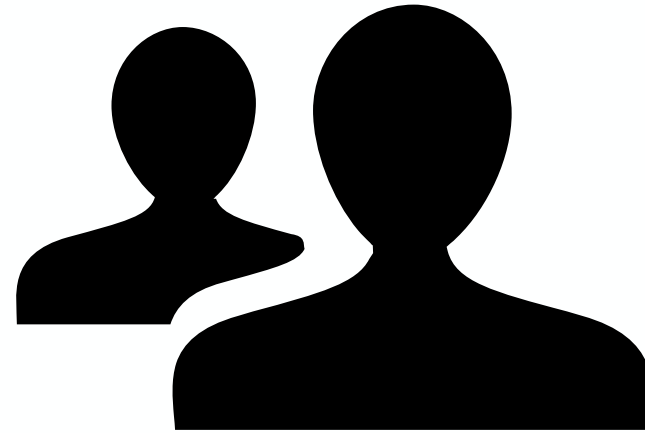
Appendix

Who Will Be Most Successful as a Search PM



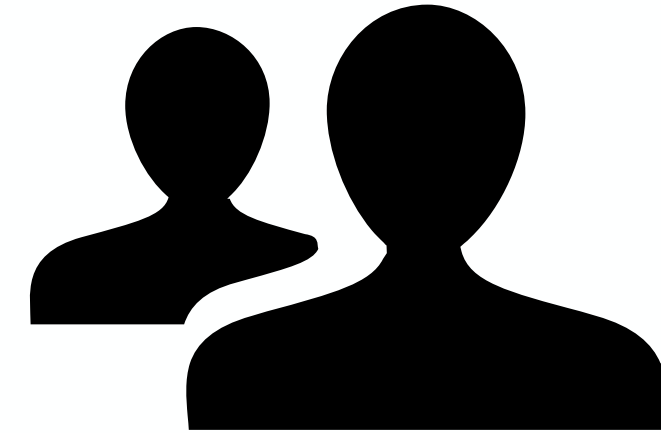
Experimentation Obsessed

The best Search PMs always make room for experimentation, knowing that impact comes from trialing different ideas and *measuring outcomes*.



Expert Communicator

Communicates concisely and precisely to ensure clear alignment of expectations across all stakeholders.

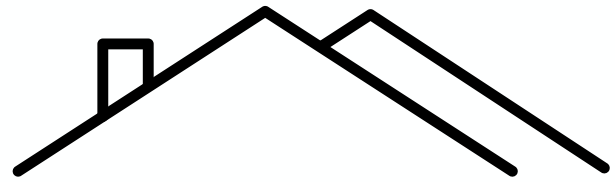


Fullstack

Unlike traditional PMs, Search PMs own a *horizontal* piece of the business: search often shows up in multiple products in a single company.

To succeed, these PMs need to take a bird's eye view of the user journey, knowing that neglecting to update the UI can be as detrimental as launching a poor reranking function, and be proactively cross-functional.

Do you even need a Search PM?



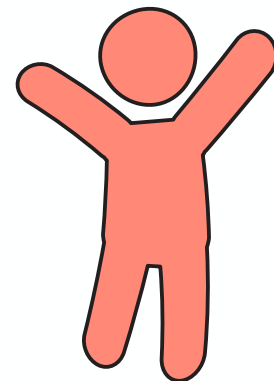
Small shop

- No search team
- Engineers are generalists
- Everyone does everything



Medium shop

- Small search team
- Engineers are interested in search but not career specialists
- *Maybe* 1 Search PM



Large shop

- Healthy search team
- Some engineers specialize in Search
- Definitely 1 Search PM, maybe 1 Search Director



You are Google

- Large, established search team
- Many engineers specialize in Search, hold PhDs, etc.
- Directors, Senior Directors, many Search PMs

