

Sales are down. Is it really the summer slump?

How AI search is changing product discovery
and exposing outdated listings and websites.

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**Summer can explain a slowdown.
It should not end the investigation.**

Before blaming the season, I want to know what changed. Are fewer people buying in the category? Are fewer people finding our products? Or are shoppers arriving and choosing something else?

AI-assisted shopping makes that investigation more important. This paper looks beyond Amazon to the full e-tail business: marketplace listings, brand websites, product feeds, search and the content that helps customers choose.

**Your product may still be right.
Your presentation may not be.**

01 / THE DIAGNOSIS

The calendar is not a diagnosis

Every summer, I hear the same explanation: sales are down because it is summer. Then the promotions end, and the explanation changes: everyone already bought what they needed.

Maybe. But that is where the investigation should start, not where it should stop.

In the July-versus-June comparison that prompted my original article, every brand we managed was up. That was our portfolio, not a market-wide study. It did not disprove seasonality. It did challenge the idea that a summer decline was unavoidable.

Start with three different questions

I want to separate demand, discovery and conversion before changing budgets or rewriting pages. They can deteriorate together, but they are not the same problem.

QUESTION	WHAT TO INVESTIGATE
Demand: Are fewer people buying?	Category search interest, prior-year patterns, promotion timing and demand before and after major sales events.
Discovery: Are fewer people finding us?	Search visibility, relevant impressions, qualified visits, advertising reach and whether products appear accurately in shopping results.
Conversion: Are fewer visitors buying?	Traffic mix, product information, price, reviews, stock, delivery promises and friction in the buying experience.

Do not compare a heavily promoted week with an ordinary week and call the difference a problem. Compare like-for-like periods, then examine the full promotion window. Demand pulled forward is different from demand permanently lost.

Also check what the revenue number is hiding. Fewer orders, smaller baskets, heavier discounts and more returns call for different responses. A stockout or a broken checkout should not be diagnosed as an AI-search problem.

Amazon is only one part of the picture

I use “digital shelf” to mean the places where a customer encounters and evaluates a product online. That includes Amazon, Walmart and other retailers, the brand’s own website, and product information distributed through search and shopping feeds.

My concern is not that every page is old. It is that too many brands treat a completed page as a finished job. The question is whether the content still answers the buyer’s questions and supports how the product is discovered now.

**Seasonality should be a conclusion,
not the default explanation.**

02 / THE DISCOVERY SHIFT

The shortlist can form before the click

The old planning assumption was simple: win a search position, get the click, then persuade the shopper on your page. AI-assisted shopping adds another step. An assistant can research, explain and compare options before a customer visits the brand's website.^[1, 2]

This is a real shift, not the whole market

Adobe reported that traffic from generative AI tools to U.S. retail sites rose 693.4% year over year during November and December 2025. Adobe also said the base remained modest. That is rapid growth in AI-referred visits, not evidence that AI already drives most online sales.^[3]

Google's AI Mode brings conversational research together with shopping information. ChatGPT's shopping research compares products across retail sites using details such as specifications, prices, availability and reviews. Amazon's Alexa for Shopping brings together Rufus and Alexa+ for questions, product guidance and comparisons.^[1, 2, 4]

These systems do not all work the same way. The commercial implication I take from them is consistent: explaining why a product fits a particular need matters beyond the page where the order is placed.

A keyword is not the same as an answer

"Travel backpack" identifies a category. "I need a backpack for a two-day work trip, with space for my laptop, that fits under an airline seat" describes a buying decision.

Now the useful information is specific: dimensions, capacity, laptop-compartment size, organization, weight and the limits of any airline-fit claim. Repeating "travel," "business" and "premium" does not supply those answers.

For me, that is the content gap worth fixing. A product can be a good fit and still be poorly explained. If the information needed to establish that fit is missing, we should not assume a shopper or an assistant will fill in the blanks correctly.

Do not turn this into another optimization gimmick

Google explicitly says SEO remains relevant to its generative AI search features. It does not require special AI markup, an AI text file or a particular writing formula. Structured data can support other search features, but there is no special schema that guarantees an AI recommendation.^[5]

I am not suggesting that brands abandon keywords or write for a robot. I am suggesting they stop treating keyword repetition as a substitute for product understanding.

The shopper's question is specific.
"Premium quality" is not an answer.

03 / THE CONTENT GAP

An outdated page can still look good

I have seen A+ pages that could win design awards but barely say anything. The same problem can appear on a beautiful brand website: impressive photography, polished graphics and very little help making a decision.

A page does not become outdated on its first birthday. It becomes outdated when its information, positioning or buying experience no longer does the job. A new design can still carry an old content strategy.

The wall of images is not the whole experience

Good imagery matters. So do demonstrations, product-in-use video and a clear visual identity. But I do not want an important specification trapped in small text inside a graphic, with no useful explanation anywhere else on the page.

This is not a claim that AI cannot use images. Google explicitly recommends high-quality images and video alongside textual content. The objective is a complete experience, not a choice between design and copy.^[6]

My test is straightforward: can a shopper find the answer quickly, and have we stated the underlying product facts clearly in the fields and text available to us?

CUSTOMER QUESTION	WHAT THE CONTENT SHOULD PROVIDE
Is this for someone like me?	The intended customer, use case and any relevant limitations.
Will it work for my situation?	Actual dimensions, compatibility, sizing or other fit information.
What am I buying?	Materials or ingredients, quantity, included items and variant details.
Why this one?	Meaningful differences explained in specific, supportable terms.
Can I believe the claim?	Relevant testing, demonstrations, qualifications or other real evidence.
What happens after I buy?	Setup or usage guidance, care, delivery, returns and customer support.

Use the questions customers already give you

Read reviews, customer-service messages, return reasons and search-query reports. Look for questions the brand considers obvious but the buyer does not. Those are useful starting points for product copy, FAQs, demonstrations and comparison content.

Do not manufacture details to fill a field or make a product sound more relevant. Unsupported compatibility, exaggerated performance and vague “better than” claims are not optimization. They are bad information.

Great imagery creates emotion.

Clear information creates understanding.

04 / THE CROSS-CHANNEL AUDIT

Fix the whole digital shelf

Rewriting the Amazon title while leaving the website, retailer content and product feeds untouched is not a complete answer. I want one reliable set of product facts, presented appropriately wherever the brand sells.

Marketplace listings: inspect what is actually live

Review titles, benefit-driven bullets, descriptions, images, video, enhanced content, brand pages, relevant attributes and variant details. Check the published customer experience, not just the information your team submitted.

On Amazon, that includes A+ text fields, Brand Story and the Brand Store. On Walmart and other retailers, use the available content and attribute fields properly. The formats differ. The obligation to explain the product does not.

Brand websites: useful, accessible and ready to buy

Build product pages around the information a buyer needs: specifications, benefits, use cases, limitations, FAQs and meaningful proof. Connect supporting guides to the relevant products. Check the experience on a phone, including variant selection, shipping costs and checkout.

Have the technical team verify crawl access, indexing eligibility and whether important content renders correctly. Google's guidance makes access and page experience relevant to both conventional and AI search. Content that looks right to your team still needs a technical check.^[6]

Product data: keep the feeds and the page in agreement

Use supported product markup on your own site to describe the product and offer, including applicable price, availability, shipping and return information. Validate it, and make sure it agrees with the visible page. Google documents these details for merchant listings.^[7]

My operational rule is to maintain a master product record with an owner: identifiers, names, dimensions, specifications, variants, images and approved claims. Then reconcile each channel against it. Current prices and availability also need a reliable update process.

Supporting content: add substance, not noise

Use your website, educational video, creator demonstrations and genuine customer feedback to explain things a product card cannot. Show the product working. Address realistic comparisons. Give buyers evidence worth considering, rather than publishing the same thin paragraph in more places.

Do not turn this into fake reviews, manufactured mentions or a flood of near-identical AI-generated pages. Google cautions against inauthentic mentions and scaled content created primarily to manipulate its results.^[5]

Keep the facts consistent.

Adapt the presentation to the channel.

Find the leak before buying more traffic

Do not replace “it is summer” with “it is AI.” Both are guesses until you look at the business.

Fewer clicks do not tell the whole story

Pew Research Center studied the browsing behavior of 900 U.S. adults in March 2025. Users clicked a traditional search result on 8% of Google visits with an AI summary, compared with 15% without one. This was observational research across searches, not a retail conversion study or proof of what caused a particular brand’s decline.^[8]

That is a reason to examine the journey, not declare demand dead. A customer may learn more before visiting, purchase elsewhere or choose another product. I want to know what happened to qualified visits, conversion, order value and total sales across our channels.

Measure accuracy as well as presence

Build a small, repeatable set of real buying questions. Test them in the relevant shopping assistants. Record the date, product mentions, factual errors and sources shown. Compare your content with the information being used, then correct what you control.

One answer is not a market-share measure. Pair those checks with marketplace reporting, Google’s Generative AI performance report in Search Console, identifiable AI referrals and conversion data.^[5]

Paid traffic cannot repair the destination

The economics are simple. At the same click price, a page that converts fewer visitors requires more advertising spend to produce an order. Here is an illustration, not a client result:

ILLUSTRATIVE METRIC	BEFORE	AFTER
Cost per paid click	\$1.00	\$1.00
Purchase conversion rate	4%	2%
Paid clicks per order	25	50
Advertising cost per order	\$25.00	\$50.00

Advertising cost per order = cost per click ÷ purchase conversion rate. All other factors are held constant. This example does not attribute the change to content or AI.

Buying more of the same traffic does not solve that deterioration. But stopping all traffic is not a testing strategy either. Keep controlled campaigns running where justified, fix the identified problems and judge improvement against contribution margin, not just reported return on ad spend.

**More traffic is not the first answer
to every sales problem.**

06 / THE AUGUST RESET

Use the slowdown to do the work

I would rather use August to find and fix the weak points than wait for a stronger season to hide them. The following is a working sequence, not a promise that rankings or sales will recover in 30 days.

Week 1: Establish what changed

Choose the products that matter most. Capture a baseline by product and channel: impressions, visits, conversion, orders, revenue, advertising cost, stock and returns. Record promotion dates and compare sensible periods.

Read customer questions and complaints. Inspect competitor offers. Identify gaps in discovery, information, offer or buying experience. Prioritize commercial consequences, not cosmetic preferences.

Week 2: Rebuild the product explanation

Confirm the master product facts and approved claims. Rewrite the high-priority pages around real customer questions. Improve titles, benefits, descriptions, specifications and FAQs. Give each image and video a clear job.

Keep copy, creative and product data aligned. Have someone accountable for checking the facts before publication.

Week 3: Publish and verify

Update the selected marketplace pages, website content and feeds. Check the live mobile experience. Have the technical team validate product markup, crawl and indexing status, and relevant search-visibility settings. Confirm that variants, prices, stock and delivery information are correct.

Do not count a submitted change as a completed change. Inspect the actual destination and record what went live, where and when.

Week 4: Test, measure and decide

Test a specific hypothesis. Keep other variables stable where practical, or use comparable products as a reference. Look for better-qualified visits, improved conversion and healthier economics.

Low-volume products may need longer to produce useful evidence. Publishing is within our control. Crawling, indexing, recommendation changes and customer response do not follow our project calendar.

Give the work an owner

This is not solely a design, SEO or advertising job. Someone needs to connect the product facts, customer experience and commercial result.

That is how we approach it through CaptiScale: Foundation, Experience, Trust, Traffic and Scale. The purpose is to make the parts work together, not to create another disconnected AI-search project.

Fix the foundation. Test the change.

Scale what the evidence supports.

07 / THE BOTTOM LINE

Do not wait for the calendar to fix the business

Seasonality is real. Promotion cycles matter. So do competition, pricing and the economy. None is a reason to stop examining what we control.

The rise of AI-assisted shopping makes clear product information more important to my strategy, not less. I want the brand to make sense before the click, on the product page and wherever the customer checks the story.

My argument is not that every declining brand has an AI problem. It is that an outdated listing or website deserves serious scrutiny before we decide the problem is the season.

Before asking when sales will come back, ask whether your content has kept up.

**A better season may bring more shoppers.
It will not answer their questions for you.**

Sources and notes

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The portfolio observation is the author's own experience, not independent market research. Recommendations and diagnostic frameworks reflect CaptVita's approach; no outcome is guaranteed.