

WEBINAR SERIES 2026

# Owning AI Shopping Journeys

How to Take Control of Which  
Products Gets Surfaced, Seen & Sold

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If you would like to optimise your product data, reach out to us at [info@productcaster.com](mailto:info@productcaster.com)!

# 01 Introduction: Owning AI Shopping Journeys

For over two decades, the formula for e-commerce growth remained relatively unchanged: capture consumer intent via targeted keywords, optimise the on-site bidding auction, and drive traffic directly to a web page. Today, that linear funnel is fracturing.

As machine learning advances, users are moving away from traditional digital channels and toward conversational, autonomous AI environments. We have officially entered the era of Agentic Commerce.

You are no longer simply marketing your products to human shoppers; you are marketing to the sophisticated AI agents acting on their behalf. If an AI agent cannot seamlessly discover, read, or trust your product data, your inventory effectively ceases to exist online.

This whitepaper is based on our webinar series,  
**Owning AI Shopping Journeys**

You can find each webinar recording here:

[1. The future of shopping, taking control of AI powered product feeds](#)

[2. AI Max one year on, what have we learned?](#)

[3. The Microsoft opportunity](#)

# 02 The Future of Shopping

Based on our webinar with Connor McGann, Principal CSS Partner Manager at Google, Jill Anderson, Director at Productcaster, and Carl Hutchinson, Strategy and Performance Director at Summit

## Executive Summary

Consumers are rapidly shifting away from traditional keyword-based digital channels and toward advanced AI platforms. To survive this shift, brands must understand a fundamental truth: You are no longer just marketing to human shoppers; you are marketing to the AI agents acting on their behalf.

## The Shift into Agentic AI

Search has evolved past simple text matching. Today's AI shopping journey is deeply conversational, highly personalised, and increasingly agentic.

While first-generation generative AI could summarise text and predictive AI could forecast trends, Agentic AI goes a step further: it possesses reasoning capabilities and the power to execute actions on behalf of the user.

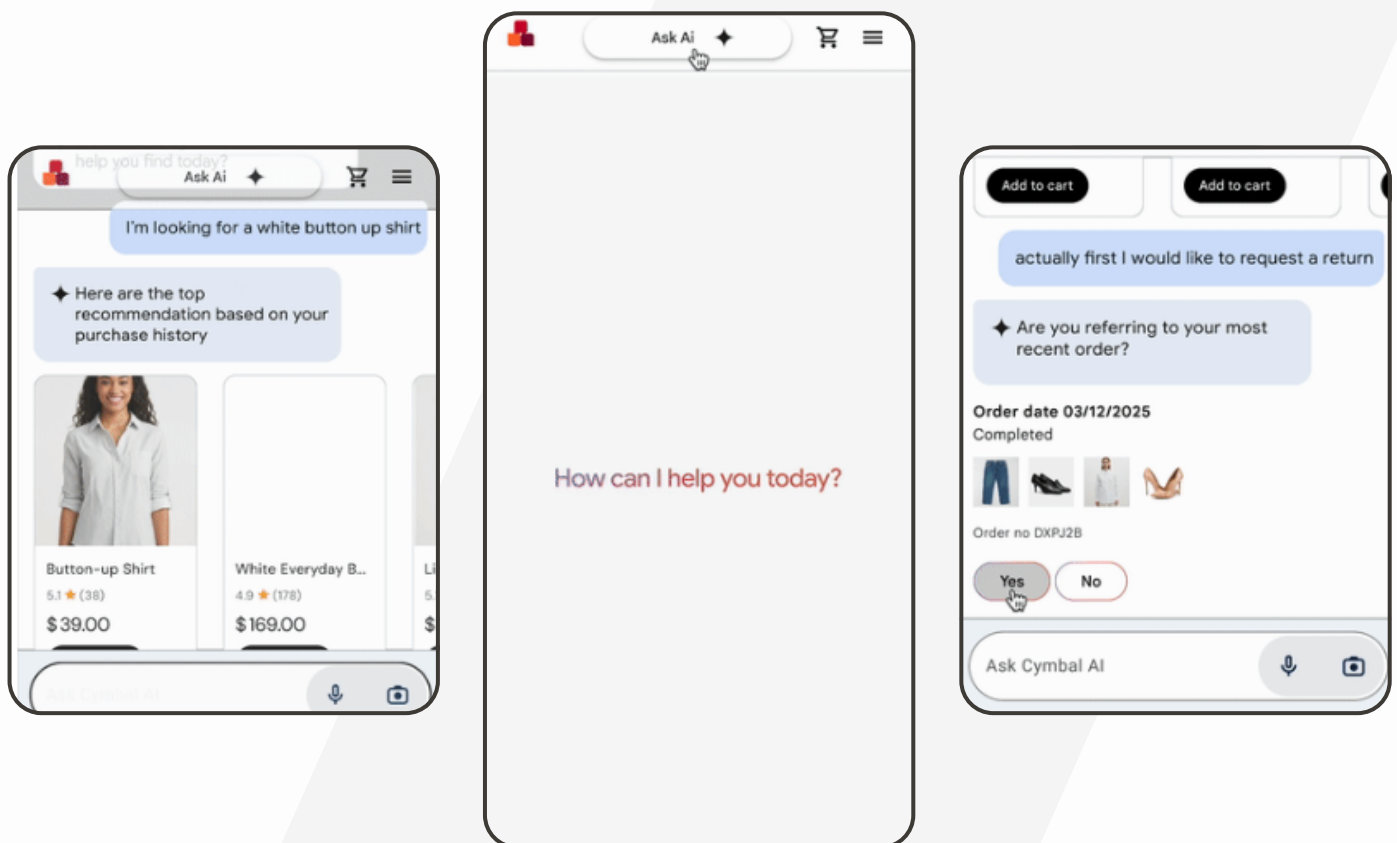
Through platforms like Google's AI Mode and ChatGPT Shopping, we are seeing the entire funnel compress. Product discovery, deep research, feature comparison, and the final purchase decision now happen entirely within a single AI interface. Moving forward, these platforms will feature native checkouts and hyper-personalised embedded offers, making product visibility inside AI ecosystems the ultimate priority for modern brands.

# Searching with AI

Consumers are expecting more and more a level of personalisation and precision that requires retailers to embrace agentic AI to deliver excellent shopping experiences.

This isn't just a minor shift, it's a fundamental change in how consumers discover, research and purchase products.

Here are examples of how customers are using conversational search:



Top options for women's red running shoes in a UK size 6 include [highly-rated, cushioned models available online](#). Whether you need lightweight daily trainers or serious marathon racers, you can find excellent choices from top brands. Nike +2

### Top Red Running Shoes (Size UK 6)

- **Nike Vomero 18 SE:** Known for ultimate daily comfort with ZoomX and ReactX foam cushioning. Available for **£144.99** at [Nike UK](#).
- **Nike Zoom Fly 6 SE:** A propulsive shoe featuring a carbon fiber plate. Priced at **£154.99** from Nike UK.
- **New Balance FuelCell Propel v5:** Highly responsive with a TPU plate. Found starting around **£64.81** on [Alltricks](#).
- **ASICS Gel-Cumulus 24:** Versatile and soft distance trainer. Typically priced around **£106.99**.
- **Adidas Women's Running Trainers:** Explore bold performance options on [Adidas UK](#).

If you want, let me know:

Ask anything

8 sites

**Women's Red Running Shoes. Nike UK**

Women's Road Racing Shoes. £239.99. Nike Zoom Fly 6 SE - Nike Zoom Fly 6 SE Women...

Nike

**Women's Trail Running Shoes red Size 6 | Trainers | ZALANDO**

More Inspiration \* adidas Campus. \* adidas Pant. \* adidas SL. \* adidas SI72 Og. \* adida...

Zalando UK

**Red Running Shoes & Trainers. Nike UK**

\* Nike Alphafly 3 SE. Women's Road Racing Shoes. £284.99. \* Nike Vaporfly 4 SE...

Nike

Show all

# Product Feeds

In an agentic ecosystem, your product feed is no longer just a static spreadsheet used to power PPC ads; it is the primary database that AI agents query to understand your inventory.

## The Universal Commerce Protocol (UCP)

Highlighting the critical importance of standardised data, Google has introduced the Universal Commerce Protocol (UCP). This open standard defines exactly how AI agents access, read, and interpret product data. UCP demands structured, accurate, and incredibly dense product data to power its AI recommendations.

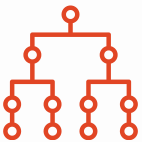


### UCP Deployment Status (As of May 2026):

\* **Active:** Currently being trialled in the US and Canada.  
**UK & Europe:** No confirmed rollout dates yet. However, brands that prepare now will capture an immediate competitive advantage the moment it launches.

## Checklist: Getting UCP-Ready

To ensure your brand isn't left behind, your technical and marketing teams should begin collaborating on these four pillars:



- **Feed & Attribute Readiness:** Structure your data to the highest standard and begin integrating advanced fields, such as the `native_commerce` attribute.



- **Payment Integration:** Partner with payment processors that support Google Pay tokenisation to enable seamless, agent-led native checkouts.



- **Platform Migration:** Ensure your brand has migrated from legacy Google Merchant Centre to Merchant Centre Next, as UCP integration is exclusive to the Next interface.
- **Backend Architecture:** Task your development team with implementing core REST endpoints to make your site architecture inherently AI-friendly.

# Foundational (GMC) Feed Attributes

- Title
- Description
- GTIN

**Inform**

- High Quality Image
- Additional Image
- Lifestyle Image

**Engage**

- Free Shipping
- Shipping Speed
- Return Policy

**Highlight**

- Sale Price
- Product Type
- Product Review
- Product Highlight

**Show**



# 4-Step Framework for Agentic Feed Optimisation

Retailers relying on unoptimised feeds will inevitably lose market share to competitors who treat their data as a strategic asset. To ensure your products stand out during AI-guided comparisons, implement this four-part optimisation framework:

## Inform (Rich Assets)

- Titles: Must be detail rich and exceed 30+ characters.
- Descriptions: Write comprehensive descriptions exceeding 500+ characters.

## Creatives (Engage)

- Provide ultra high quality primary imagery (minimum 1500px).
- Include at least 3+ additional images, heavily leaning on lifestyle imagery to show the product in context.

## Highlight (Trust Signals)

- Real time, accurate pricing.
- Guaranteed shipping speeds and delivery windows.
- Clear, flexible return policies.

## Show (Differentiation)

- Active sale prices and markdown data.
- Aggregated product ratings and reviews.
- Unique product highlights or badges.

# The Danger of Inconsistency

AI agents prioritise speed, efficiency, and predictability. If your data is messy, the agent will view your brand as a risk and recommend a competitor.

Avoid these three critical pitfalls to keep your feed agent friendly:

Pitfalls	Impact	Examples
<b>Inconsistent Data</b>	The agent cannot reliably compare values, causing your product to be dropped from comparison tables.	Mixing spelling / phrasing (colour vs. color) or leaving out specific sizing attributes.
<b>Unreliable/ Unavailable Data</b>	The agent flags your brand as untrustworthy and hides it from the user to avoid a poor experience.	Outdated pricing formats, vague delivery timelines, or laggy stock visibility.
<b>Lack of Standard Actions</b>	Manual or non-standard workflows slow down the agent. AI prioritises automated, instant transactions	Relying on custom, merchant specific APIs instead of open, automated integrations.

# 03 AI Max One Year On

Based on our webinar with Abbie Law, Senior Paid Media Strategist at Summit, Silvia Cocciolillo, Senior Strategic Agency Manager at Google, and Carl Hutchinson, Strategy and Performance Director at Summit

## Executive Summary

In May 2025, Google shook up the paid media landscape by launching AI Max for Search campaigns. It promised marketers the ultimate luxury: automated search enhancements, incremental reach, and AI-generated creative optimisation at the touch of a button.

Now, exactly one year down the road, we explore what a year of rigorous testing has taught us about AI Max, how to deploy a bulletproof testing framework, and how to fuel the algorithm to drive maximum conversion value without losing strategic control.

## Unpacking AI Max

AI Max is an integrated automation suite within Google Search campaigns designed to optimise targeting and creative assets in real time dynamically. Google introduced the feature to solve four key modern marketing challenges:

- **Conversion Growth:** Maximising conversion volume and overall value.
- **Creative Agility:** Improving click-through rates (CTR) via dynamically generated AI copy.
- **Audience Discovery:** Finding new, incremental customer segments that manual keyword research misses.
- **Deep Analytics:** Surface predictive insights natively from Google's machine learning models.

# The "Proceed with Caution" Playbook

When AI Max rolled out, the industry reacted with a mix of excitement and anxiety. Many advertisers feared a complete loss of campaign control. Our approach at Productcaster has remained consistent from day one: proceed with caution, but test aggressively.

Rather than blindly accepting automated defaults, we spent the last year mapping exactly where human expertise intersects with machine learning to add distinct performance lift:

- **Search Term Management:** Setting hard boundaries so the AI doesn't waste budget on low-intent queries.
- **Asset Optimisation:** Auditing AI-generated ad copy to ensure it aligns perfectly with brand voice.
- **Cross-Channel Synergy:** Linking AI Max insights with organic search (SEO) strategies to dominate the SERP.

## 6-Week AI Max Testing Blueprint

Drawing from data across a wide range of industries, brands, and budgets, we developed a standardised 6-week framework to rigorously trial AI Max and safely stabilise the algorithm.

### Weeks 1-2: The Learning Phase

- Bedding-in allowance
- Intense negative matching
- Strict URL exclusions

### Week 3-6: The Testing Phase

- Active ROAS/CPA measurement
- Data-driven URL tracking
- Volume & targeting

## 1. The Learning Phase (1-2 Weeks)

- **Action:** Actively monitor query reports. Aggressively apply negative keywords and URL exclusions to prevent the AI from drifting into irrelevant traffic.

## 2. The Testing Phase (3-4 Weeks)

- **Action:** Evaluate core metrics like ROAS and CPA against your control campaigns. Make data-driven optimisations to your landing pages and keyword lists based on actual performance rather than perceived relevance.

# Fueling the Algorithm - Tips for Success

The rapid expansion of AI across marketing channels can be daunting. However, the most successful brands in 2026 aren't fighting the algorithms; they are fueling them.

As consumer search behaviour becomes more complex, long-tail, and intent-driven, AI Max acts as a net to capture high-value leads you might otherwise miss. To succeed, shift your mindset from "retaining manual control" to "maximising high-quality data inputs."

Do's	Don'ts
Do test across a diverse range of campaigns before drawing final performance conclusions.	Don't test AI Max on restricted budgets; the algorithm needs financial room to breathe and learn.
Do apply strict brand exclusions immediately based on your specific campaign goals.	Don't allow poor quality search terms to linger in your data pool.
Do thoroughly audit your keywords, ad relevance, and landing pages <i>before</i> running a retest.	Don't "set and forget" AI Max. Continuous human oversight is required to steer the asset generation.

# Expanding AI Search Landscape

Google's commitment to automation extends far beyond campaign settings. With the maturity of AI Overviews on standard SERPs and the conversational AI Mode, user behaviour has fundamentally evolved. Today, 61% of shoppers are more deliberate, using these conversational tools to dig deeper, challenge results, and ask complex, long-tail follow-up questions.



**The Opportunity:** By pairing AI Max with high quality data feeds, merchants can align their keywords with these conversational queries, unlocking new ad locations and billions of new searches.

What's Next? The Dawn of AI Max Shopping

Currently in a closed beta and slated for a wider rollout later this year, AI Max Shopping will introduce:



**Automated Shopping Text Customisation:** Dynamically generating ad copy tailored directly to conversational product searches.



**Smart Final URL Expansion:** Directing high-intent shoppers to the exact product or category page most likely to convert.



**Optimal Format Selection:** Automatically choosing whether to display a text ad or a Shopping ad based on the user's real-time intent.

Strategic Note: While AI Max Shopping prepares for launch, Performance Max (PMAX) remains the undisputed gold standard for optimising your shopping campaigns.

# 04 The Microsoft Opportunity

Based on our webinar with Julia Andreevich, Senior Partner Account Manager at Microsoft, Lucas Gordon, Senior Account Executive at Microsoft, Samantha Bluckert, Senior Client Success Manager at Productcaster and Carl Hutchinson, Strategy and Performance Director at Summit

## Executive Summary

While Google remains a dominant force in digital advertising, a profound market shift is taking place right under the surface. Search has always existed beyond a single ecosystem, but the injection of advanced AI has turned Microsoft networks, specifically Bing and Copilot, into indispensable goldmines for e-commerce growth.

Consumers are looking for shorter, more intuitive paths to purchase. We explore how Microsoft is using agentic commerce to slash consumer journey times by a third, how to extend your Universal Commerce Protocol (UCP) readiness to Microsoft Merchant Centre, and how a strategic partnership between Productcaster and Diginus allows you to capture this low-competition, high-ROAS traffic at no extra cost.

## The Evolution of Microsoft Search

Microsoft has aggressively overhauled its search infrastructure, moving rapidly from a traditional web index into a hybrid ecosystem that blends the classic search results page of Bing with the highly conversational, transactional power of Microsoft Copilot.

By leveraging AI to handle the "heavy lifting" of the consumer journey, Microsoft actively compresses the marketing funnel.

## Core Agentic Features Powering Microsoft Retail:

- **Hyper-Personalised Product Feeds:** Dynamically tailoring product arrays based on deep user context rather than single keywords.
- **In-Conversation Commerce:** Allowing deep product comparisons, automated feature analysis, and technical evaluations right inside the chat window.
- **Copilot Checkout & Brand Agents:** Deploying intelligent brand-specific agents capable of guiding users straight through a native checkout.

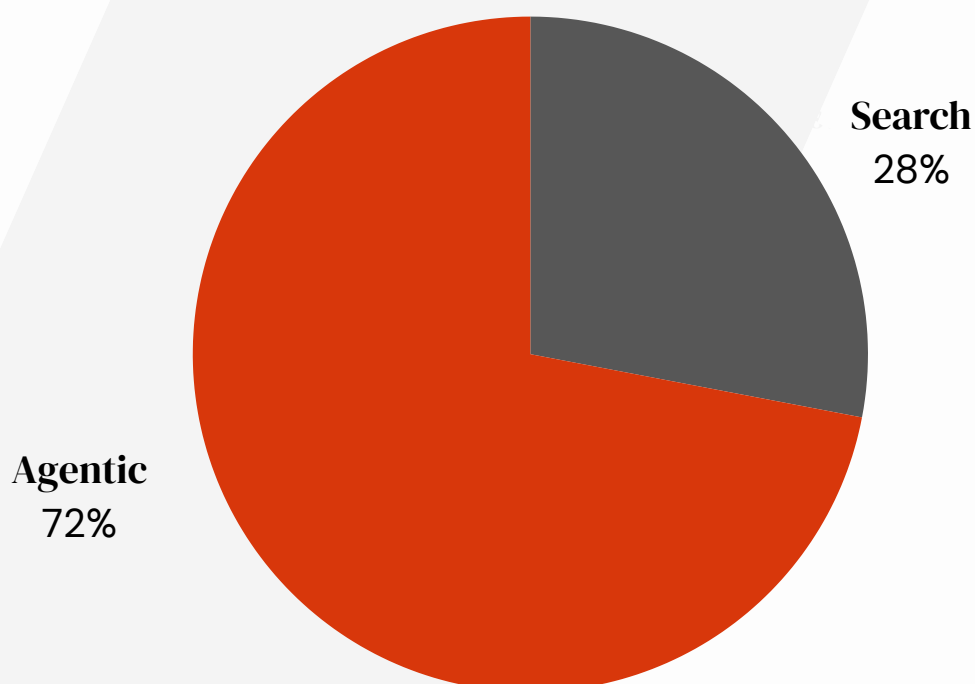
## Keeping Shopping Personal

Because Copilot acts as a collaborative shopping assistant rather than a rigid search bar, users feel a stronger personal connection to the recommendations. Crucially, conversion and purchase behaviours see a massive spike after a user interacts with Copilot compared to shoppers who rely on unassisted digital channels.

### The Agentic Growth Surge

The demand for these experiences is skyrocketing:

- AI-driven traffic surged by 800% during peak seasonal moments like Black Friday.
- 72% of shoppers now explicitly expect agentic shopping experiences from retailers over the next 12 months.



## Extending UCP and Brand Agents

The Universal Commerce Protocol (UCP)—the open standard designed to give AI agents frictionless access to structured product data—is just as vital for Microsoft as it is for Google.

By pushing UCP-ready feeds into Microsoft Merchant Centre, your products gain the deep, dense attribute structures required to be natively surfaced inside Copilot's visual carousels and comparison blocks.

### The Power of Microsoft Brand Agents

To win in a conversational landscape, your brand needs a voice that can speak the AI's language while protecting your brand identity. Microsoft Brand Agents step into this role by engaging in natural conversations, serving up contextual cross-sells or upsells, and handling native checkouts.

**x2 Performance Benchmark:** Conversational sessions assisted by a Microsoft Brand Agent yield nearly twice the conversion rate of unassisted, standard search sessions.

## 3 Fundamentals for Winning with Microsoft AI

Paid advertisements are now fully integrated into Copilot conversational streams, offering a powerful way to put tailored options from trusted retailers in front of high-intent buyers. To win these placements, brands must master three core components:

### 1. AI Max for Search

A unified campaign type that mirrors automated efficiency by delivering personalised ad units across both Bing and Copilot using predictive query matching.

### 2. Offer Highlights

A conversational ad format that dynamically pulls out your primary selling points (e.g., "Free shipping," "2-year warranty") and highlights them directly within Copilot's written responses.

### 3. Copilot Checkout

An ultra-low-friction checkout solution that allows users to complete their purchase directly inside the AI chat interface without bouncing to external landing pages.

## Google vs Microsoft

For years, digital marketers have automatically prioritised Google due to sheer volume. However, that high volume brings challenges that Microsoft's ecosystem uniquely solves.

Strategic Metric	Google Ecosystem	Microsoft Ecosystem
Advertiser Focus	Consumes the vast majority of media team management time.	Frequently overlooked, offering a clean playground for agile brands.
Competition Level	Extremely high; saturated bidding environments.	Significantly lower competition across major retail verticals.
Cost Per Click (CPC)	Premium pricing driven by heavy auction density.	Lower CPCs, allowing budgets to stretch further.
Efficiency Metrics	Highly optimized but subject to diminishing returns.	Higher ROAS rates due to lower overhead and high-intent demographics.

# 05 Final Summary

The transition into an AI-driven retail landscape is no longer a forward-looking prediction. As consumers increasingly delegate their product discovery, rigorous feature comparison, and checkout actions to advanced AI agents, the old paradigms of digital marketing are rapidly losing their efficacy. To win in this new era of agentic commerce, brands must treat their data not as a passive administrative tool, but as a dynamic, high-velocity performance asset.

Success across this evolving digital ecosystem comes down to three operational imperatives highlighted throughout this series:



- **Radical Feed Optimisation:** You must systematically transform your product data from static lists into rich, context-dense databases optimised for the strict readability standards of the Universal Commerce Protocol.



- **Strategic Algorithmic Control:** Rather than fearing machine-led platforms like AI Max, marketing teams must implement disciplined testing frameworks to fuel automated models with high-quality data while maintaining firm guardrails over brand equity and budget.



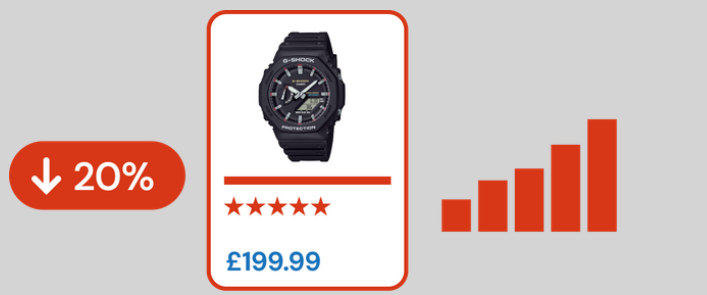
- **Omnichannel Diversification:** Relying solely on a single platform is a vulnerability. Shifting budgets to capture high-intent, low-competition spaces like the Microsoft and Copilot ecosystems opens premium, highly efficient paths to revenue.

The digital storefront has expanded past the destination URL. By aligning your technology backend with the needs of AI platforms, safeguarding your creative assets, and utilising intelligent feed management solutions like FeedManager, your brand will not just survive the shift—you will actively own the AI shopping journey.

# More About Productcaster

As search shifts to AI-driven discovery, high-quality product data is essential for visibility and growth across Google, Microsoft, and emerging AI channels.

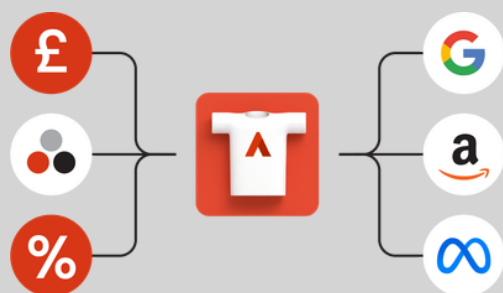
Productcaster helps you optimise, enrich, and syndicate product data at scale—reaching more customers, improving performance, and staying ahead of what's next.



A product card for a black sports watch. To the left is a red pill-shaped button with a white downward arrow and '20%'. The product image shows the watch. Below the image is a red horizontal line, five red stars, and the price '£199.99'. To the right is a red bar chart with five bars of increasing height.

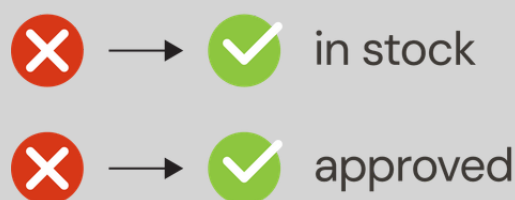
## Productcaster CSS

Increase shopping visibility and improve efficiency by making your Google Shopping budget work harder.



## FeedManager

Create a single source of truth for your product data, powering every search, shopping, marketplace, and AI-driven channel.



Two rows of icons. The first row shows a red circle with a white 'X' followed by an arrow pointing to a green circle with a white checkmark, with the text 'in stock' to the right. The second row shows a red circle with a white 'X' followed by an arrow pointing to a green circle with a white checkmark, with the text 'approved' to the right. To the far right is a blue icon of a price tag on a clipboard.

## ProductMaximiser

Automatically enrich and optimise product attributes to improve discoverability, relevance, and conversion performance.



Two product cards for coffee machines. The left card shows a black machine with a price of £179.99 and five stars. The right card shows a similar machine with a price of £179.99 and five stars. A red circle with 'A/B' is placed between the two cards.

## ProductTester

Validate feed optimisations through controlled testing, helping you make data-driven decisions that maximise results.

If you would like to optimise your product data, reach out to us at [info@productcaster.com](mailto:info@productcaster.com)!