

Back-to-school (BTS) season in the US

Insights and instructions for 2024

June 2024

 Microsoft Advertising



Lesson plan

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Summary

Opportunity Size

Figures on spending, online shopping proclivity, and breadth of items on lists

The salutatorian of all the Retail shopping seasons

This year BTS spending is expected to continue its upward trajectory and hit a record high.

\$135B

Total BTS spending across K-12 and college shoppers for 2023 in the US.

+22%

Year-over-year (YoY) growth recorded in 2023 for total BTS spending of K-12 and college shoppers in the US.

+310K

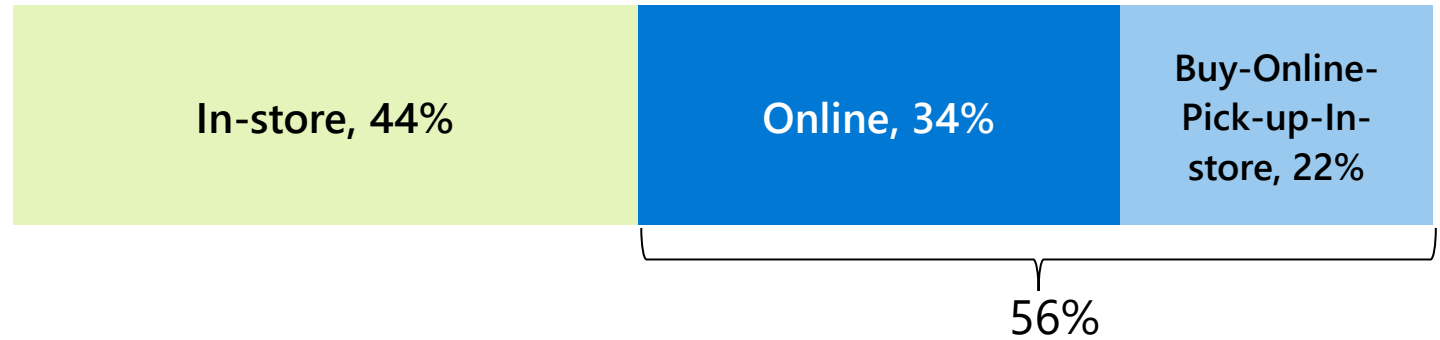
Number of additional college students projected to enroll in the US for 2024 (up 2% from 2023) and the highest total enrollment figure since 2019.

SHOPPING PREFERENCE

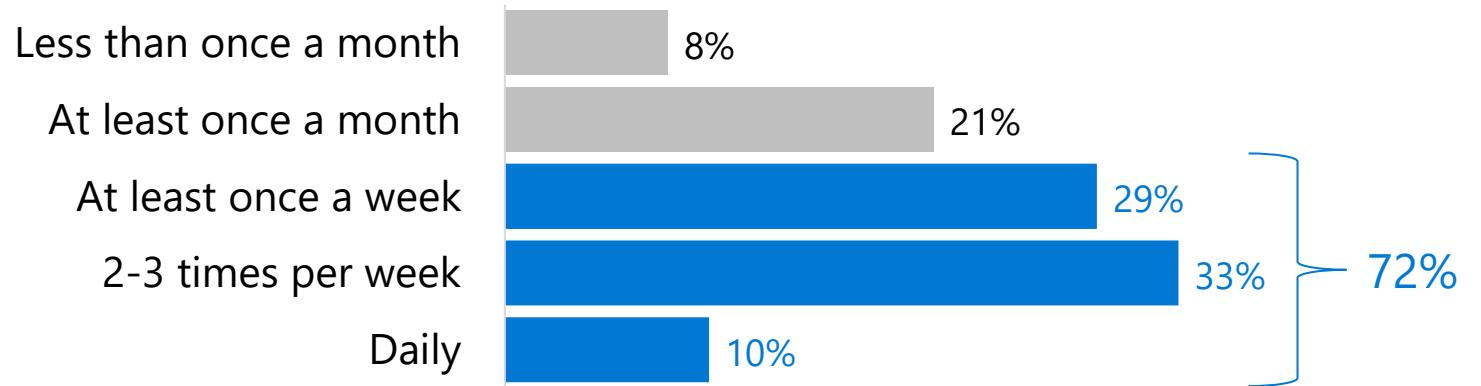
BTS customers are frequent online shoppers

BTS shoppers enjoy a mix of in-store and online shopping. Of the 56% of BTS shoppers who prefer to buy online, 72% of them shop online at least weekly.

% of BTS Survey Respondents When Asked, "In general, how do you prefer to shop?"



% of BTS Survey Respondents When Asked, "In general, how often do you online shop?"



BTS shopping lists are expansive

Carrying products in any of the 8 categories below means you must anticipate and plan for BTS shoppers.



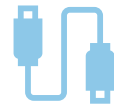
Apparel & Accessories

- Bags/packs, wallets/ belts
- Clothing
- Eyewear
- Footwear
- Gloves
- Headwear
- Jewelry
- Rain gear



Beauty & Personal Care

- Cosmetics
- Hair care & grooming
- Hygiene & toiletries
- Nail care
- Oral care
- Perfumes
- Skin care



Computers & Electronics

- Computer hardware & accessories
- Productivity & educational software
- Audio, visual, media, and wireless devices



Dorm Essentials

- Appliances (cleaning, kitchen, & laundry)
- Bedding & linens
- Décor
- Furniture
- Kitchen supplies
- Lighting
- Storage & organization



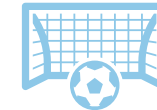
Household Supplies

- Cleaning products (detergents, disinfectant, fresheners)
- Food wraps & storage
- Lunch boxes
- Paper towels
- Trash bags



Office Supplies

- Adhesives & clips
- Binders
- Calculators
- Calendars
- Office furniture
- Paper
- Printers
- Projectors
- scanners, copiers
- Recorders
- Shredders
- Writing instruments



Sports Gear

- Equipment
- Sports & fitness apparel
- Team apparel & accessories



Learning Resources

- Lesson plans
- Textbooks

Timing

BTS season length, ad performance trends, and activation roadmap

2024 BTS calendar

Plan to debut BTS promotions in May and extend their run through September to account for varying school start dates and to capture early and late BTS shoppers.

May

Marks the end of prior school year for most K-12 and colleges

July

Merchants kick off their summer sales

September

All schools back in session yet

PEAK PERIOD

June

Typically, when summer school sessions start

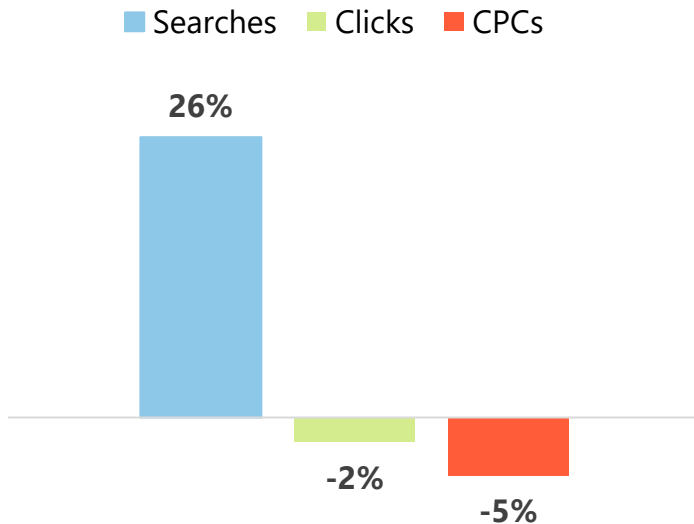
August

Majority of US schools set to have their 1st day of school occur late August

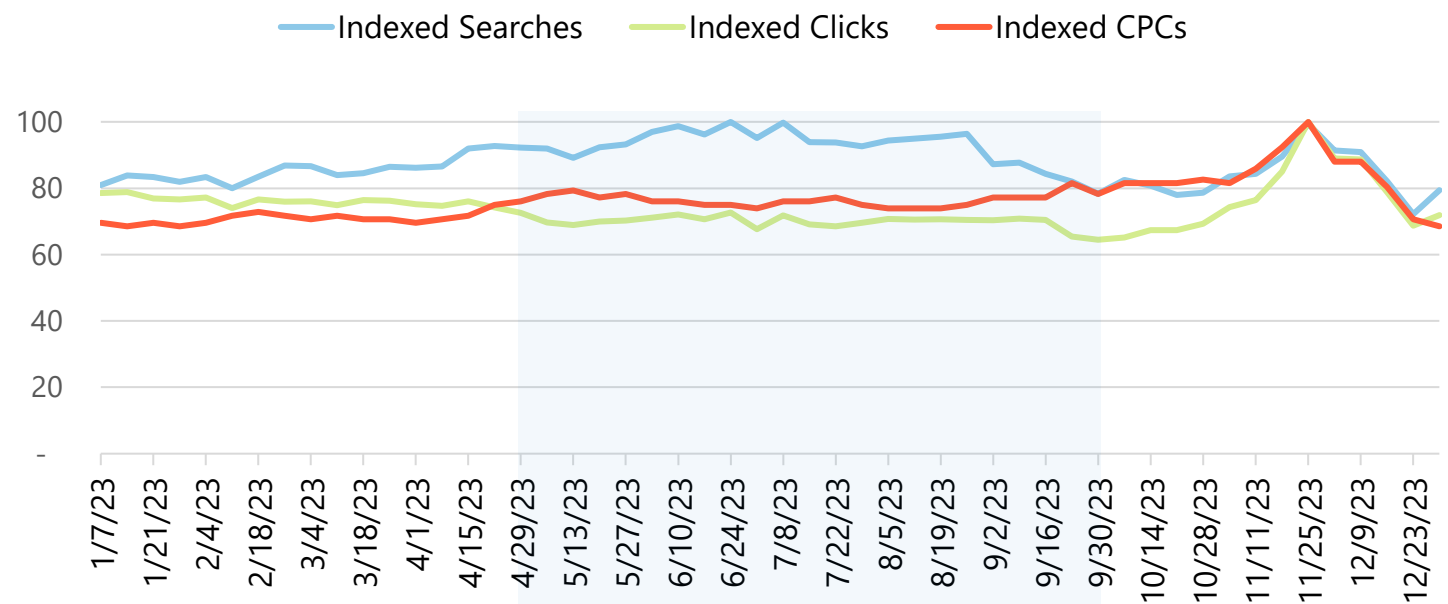
Last BTS season saw search demand climb 26%

Looking exclusively at the 21 weeks of the year that fall within BTS Season, 2023 saw searches grow (peaking in June and July) with slight declines in clicks and CPCs.

YoY change for BTS Season, Search Ads



Indexed Metrics by Week for 2023 BTS Season, Search Ads

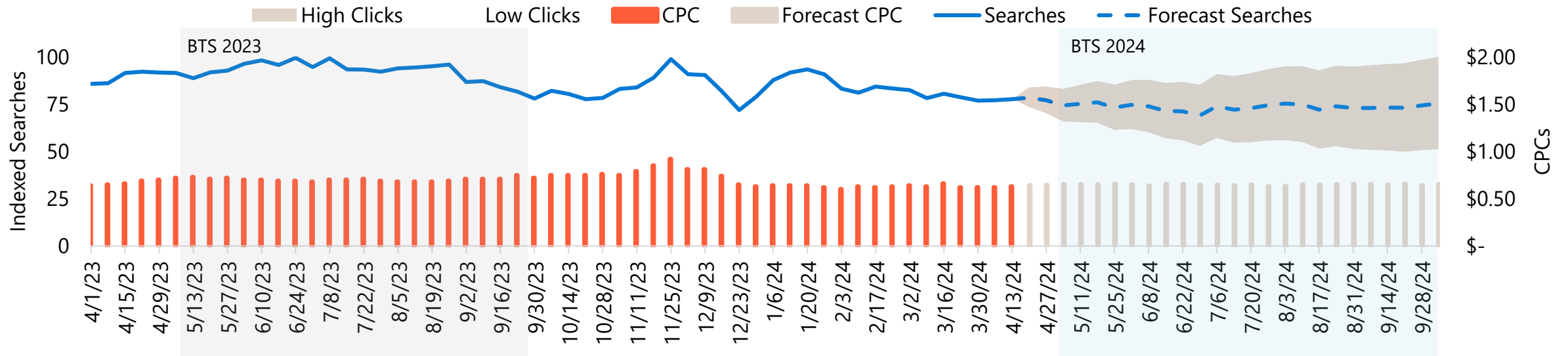


Source: Microsoft Internal, BTS only ICE Supply categories for 4.30.2022-9.30.2022 vs. 4.29.2023-9.29.2023

This season expect some softness in search volume

- 01 Conservative estimates project searches to be down 17% this year, while more aggressive projections could reach up to +2% YoY.
- 02 CPCs are likely to continue trending downward and are estimated to be 8% cheaper this season compared to last BTS.

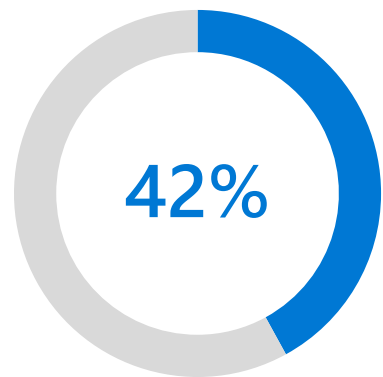
Actuals and Forecasts for Searches and CPCs, Search Ads



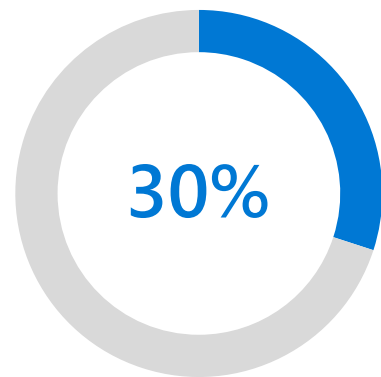
Source: Microsoft Internal, BTS only ICE Supply categories for 4.1.2023-4.19.2024

Audience Ads improve your grade

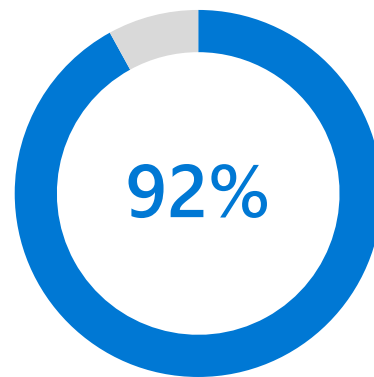
The BTS user journey: multi-touch attribution analysis



42%
of BTS
journeys start
with Audience Ad exposure



30%
of BTS
conversions are attributed
to Audience Ad exposure



92%
of BTS shoppers exposed to
Audience Ads'
next action was Search

BTS shoppers who view Audience Ads are:

3.7x

more likely to visit the BTS advertiser website²

3.6x

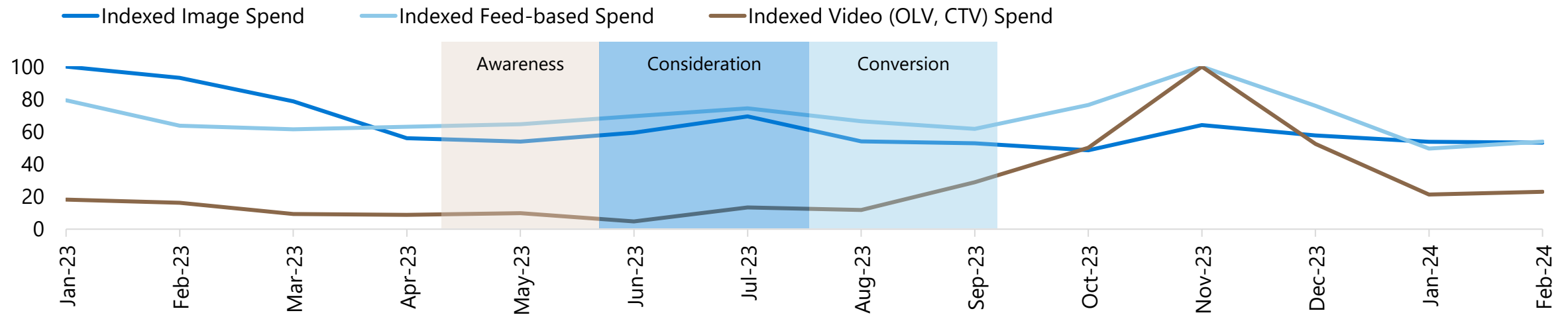
more likely to engage in conversion behavior²

Sources: ¹ Microsoft Internal, Query path + Multi-touch attribution BTS advertisers for Sept 2023 US; ² Microsoft Internal, BTS Retail advertisers with completed lift studies through Feb 2024; Lift measured between exposed users and a control group of eligible unexposed users, with lift represented on a per-user basis. Compared to users who did not see an Audience Ad from BTS advertisers

Strategic flighting of Audience Ad types maximizes conversions

- 01 Video and Feed-based investment peaks in November.
- 02 Feed-based investment sustains throughout the year and is a key lower-funnel ad type.
- 03 Image ads connect with early nonbrand searchers, and nurture feed-based peaks.
- 04 Video is still an emerging ad type to drive awareness, a valuable test and learn opportunity.

Indexed Spend by Audience Ad Type, Audience Network



BTS activation guide:

	May	Early June	June – end of September
	Cast Audience nets	BTS promotions roll out	Searches and conversions peak
Actions	Activate Audience Ads to drive awareness and nurture early shoppers during their research phase.	Roll out BTS-related ad copy that draws attention to BTS specific products, promotions, and site content across all your programs.	Bid up during key moments, refine targeting, and budget mix to maximize conversions. Maintain a balanced Search and Audience Ad strategy with funding across major formats.
Importance	Audience Ads amplify powerful Search programs, and are proven to drive key behaviors with shoppers, like searching and site visits. Additionally, are a great way to strategically reach new and existing customers throughout the funnel via our vast targeting options.	Just like BTS lists, the BTS journey is long. Continued engagement throughout the entire BTS season is key to win shoppers as they shop for each item on their list.	Peak BTS search volume occurs mid June through the beginning of September.
Suggested Audience Targets: Custom Audiences, Customer Match, In-market Audiences, LinkedIn Profile Audiences, Remarketing Lists, Dynamic Remarketing Lists, Similar Audiences, Predictive Targeting, Placement Targeting			

Shopper Profiles

Nuances between the 3 BTS shopper profiles and how to reach each through your keyword, creative, and audience strategies

BTS shoppers fit 1 of 3 profiles

Maximize your BTS reach with tailored plans for each shopper profile's distinctive needs.

1. Parents/
Guardians

2. Students

3. Educators

Parents/Guardians: Do the majority, if not all, of the BTS shopping for child(ren) under the age of 18 years old and wield final say on BTS purchases.

Profile information based on Parents/Guardians' 2024 survey responses.

School levels:
Daycare to graduate

BTS budget this year compared to last year:
49% responded higher



of children purchasing for:
**1 (44%); 2 (34%);
3 (11%); 4+ (10%)**

% that typically save money for BTS shopping:
72%

% child(ren) homeschooled or schooled virtually:
17%

Influences on supplies purchased:
School lists, student requests, & recommendations from other teachers and parents

Aim to make BTS shopping *easier and less overwhelming* for *Parents/Guardians* as it's an added responsibility to their already full plates

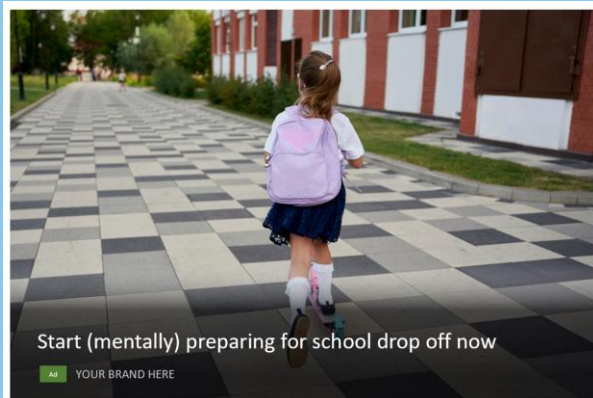
Keywords to bid on:

1. Nursery school to college level BTS items
2. Question style, information seeking, and general guidance related queries
3. Brand and nonbrand
4. Broad match types

Ad strategy incorporating:

1. Full Microsoft Advertising Network visibility:
 - Search Ads (Product, Multimedia, RSA, DSA, App Install, Vertical),
 - Audience Ads (Display, Native, Video). and
 - Microsoft Retail Media* Ads
2. Cross-device and device specific ad assets
3. Ad copy that includes:
 - **Discounts and/or loyalty programs** if offered
 - BTS-related content like **preconfigured school kits, bundled deals, buying guides (ex. by grade level), top product lists, and any personalized products/services**
 - Ad extensions that shorten journey, provide pertinent information upfront, and encourage faster action
 - Visually relevant image and video ads **displaying kids of all ages**

Reach Parents/Guardians directly through a *combination of our Audience Ads and targeted Audience Segments*



Audience Targets to use:

1. In-market Audiences segments (IMAs) – **target a mixture of the directly (17) and indirectly (166) relevant IMAs.** See appendix for full details on the 183 relevant IMAs.
 - Direct
 - /Baby & Children’s Products
 - Indirect (overlap with direct IMA)
 - /Apparel & Accessories (56%)
 - /Financial Services (54%)
 - /Sports & Fitness (52%)
 - /Pets & Animals (48%)
 - /Home Décor (46%)
 - /Real Estate (41%)
2. Customer Match Lists and Custom Audiences – **import users you’ve already identified as Parents/Guardians.**
3. Remarketing Lists, Dynamic Remarketing, and Similar Audiences – create Remarketing Lists based on page visitation and/or custom events and use them to continuously **remind busy Parents** facing never-ending to do lists with a steady flow of ads, such as **promotions for complimentary BTS products** based on past purchase history. **Combine Similar Audiences to ad groups and campaigns already associated with your Remarketing Lists** to expand reach further to like customers.
4. Predictive Targeting– **turn on Predictive Targeting and have it run alongside all the above audience targets** to expand reach to users who are likely to convert.

Audience Ad types to create and serve:

1. Native Ads
2. Display Ads
3. Online Video Ads and Connected TV (CTV) Ads

Students:

Adult aged, high school to graduate degree level students shopping for themselves and who are the end user of products.

Profile information based largely on Students' 2023 survey responses.

School levels:

High school – graduate

Back-to-college spending in the US for 2023¹:

\$95B (up \$20B YoY); earning title of most costly US shopping event

% of shoppers who spent more time comparative shopping for BTS in 2023¹:

40% (up 10% YoY)

Financial backing provided by:

Parents/Guardians or self

Planned back-to-college expenditures per US households in 2023¹:

\$1,367

Popular store types¹:

Mass merchants, discount stores, & department stores

Popular product categories:

**Apparel & Accessories,
Dorm Essentials, Electronics**

% of US back-to-college shopping done online in 2023¹:

50%

Planned back-to-college spend on Computer & Electronics in 2023¹:

\$23.2B

Appeal to Students by *providing inspiration and ample guidance* to influence their BTS purchases

Keywords to bid on:

1. Young adult (high school to graduate level) items
2. Style inspiration, list generation assistance, trending products, user reviews, recommendation, and budget related queries
3. Brand and nonbrand
4. Broad match types

Ad strategy incorporating:

1. Full Microsoft Advertising Network visibility:
 - Search Ads (Product, Multimedia, RSA, DSA, App Install, Vertical),
 - Audience Ads (Display, Native, Video). and
 - Microsoft Retail Media* Ads
2. Cross-device and device specific ad assets
3. Ad copy that includes:
 - **Student discounts and/or any customer loyalty programs** if offered
 - BTS-related content like **dorm bundles, persona/style-related recommended products, college-based buying guides, collegiate gear, trending product lists, and any personalized products/services**
 - Ad extensions that shorten journey, provide pertinent information upfront, and encourage faster action
 - Visually relevant image and video ads that include **young adults and ways they express themselves** through their outfits or décor

Reach Students directly with *targeted Audience Ads and select Audience Segments*



Audience Targets to use:

1. In-market Audiences segments (IMAs) – **target a mixture of the directly (7) and indirectly (161) relevant IMAs.** See appendix for full details on the 168 IMAs relevant.
 - Direct
 - /Education/Post-Secondary Education
 - Indirect (overlap with direct IMA above)
 - /Apparel & Accessories (56%)
 - /Financial Services (54%)
 - /Sports & Fitness (52%)
 - /Pets & Animals (48%)
 - /Home Décor (46%)
 - /Real Estate (41%)
2. Customer Match Lists and Custom Audiences – **import users you’ve identified as Students (i.e., those enrolled in Student programs).**
3. Remarketing Lists, Dynamic Remarketing, and Similar Audiences – **continually re-engage with Students who have visited your site through Remarketing Lists limited to Student activities.** Combine Similar Audiences to ad groups and campaigns already associated with your Remarketing List to expand reach further to like customers.
4. LinkedIn Profile Audiences – **target the 3 industries found on Student LinkedIn profiles.**
 - Industry: Primary/Secondary Education; E-learning; Higher Education
5. Predictive Targeting– turn on Predictive Targeting and have it run alongside all audience targets to expand reach to users who are likely to convert.

Audience Ad types to create and serve:

- Native Ads
- Display Ads
- Online Video Ads and Connected TV (CTV) Ads

Educators: Adult aged educational professionals (teachers, administrators, counselors) purchasing supplies for classroom, themselves, and their students.

Profile information based largely on Teachers' 2023 data survey responses.

School levels:

Daycare to graduate

Average of teacher out of pocket expenses 2023-24 school year¹:

\$800

% of teachers cited inflation as having noticeable impact on supplies²:

69%

Financial backing provided by:

School, self, donations, crowdfunding and/or wish lists

% of teachers who increased their BTS personal spend over last 3 years²:

38%

Top items on K-12 teachers' BTS lists²
Stationery, art supplies, books, technology, and classroom décor & furniture

% of teachers that pay out of their own pocket for classroom supplies¹:

90%

% of teachers who struggle to afford their necessary BTS classroom supplies²:

51%

Most accessed education technology in K-12 schools for 2023²:
Supplemental platforms (online activities, games, research)

Connect with Educators with *keyword and ad creative strategies centered on making their job easier*

Keywords to bid on:

1. Wide range of supplies needed to create a classroom environment and related products/services that enable them and their students to do their work
2. Product specifications/accreditations, educational incentives, reusable supplies, classroom essentials, budget friendly, sale, educ related queries
3. Brand and nonbrand
4. Broad match types

Ad strategy incorporating:

1. Full Microsoft Advertising Network visibility:
 - Search Ads (Product, Multimedia, RSA, DSA, App Install, Vertical),
 - Audience Ads (Display, Native, Video). and
 - Microsoft Retail Media* Ads
2. Cross-device and device specific ad assets
3. Ad copy that includes:
 - **Teacher discounts and/or any customer loyalty programs** if offered
 - **BTS-related content like bundles on school supplies, educational product lists, teacher endorsed products, and classroom staples guides**
 - Ad extensions that shorten journey, provide pertinent information upfront, and encourage faster action
 - Visually relevant image and video ads **depicting classroom settings, educational instruction, and/or Educational Professionals interacting with their students**

Reach our unique audience of Educators through Audience Ads and Audience targets



Audience Targets to use:

1. In-market Audiences segments (IMAs) – **target a mixture of directly (3) and indirectly (167) relevant IMAs.** See appendix for full details of the 170 IMAs relevant to them.
 - Direct
 - /Employment/Education Jobs
 - Indirect (overlap with above direct IMA above)
 - /Apparel & Accessories (56%)
 - /Financial Services (54%)
 - /Sports & Fitness (52%)
 - /Pets & Animals (48%)
 - /Home Décor (46%)
 - /Real Estate (41%)
2. Customer Match Lists and Custom Audiences – **import users you’ve identified as Educational Professionals** (i.e., those enrolled in teacher programs or associated with schools).
3. Remarketing Lists, Dynamic Remarketing, and Similar Audiences – **continually remind and re-engage with Educational Professionals who have visited your site.** Combine Similar Audiences to ad groups and campaigns already associated with this Remarketing List to expand reach further to like customers.
4. LinkedIn Profile Audiences – **select the 4 Industry and 1 Job Function targets where Educators’ profiles fall.**
 - Industry: Education Management; E-learning; Higher Education; Research
 - Job Function: Education
5. Predictive Targeting– turn on Predictive Targeting and have it run alongside all audience targets to expand reach to users who are likely to convert.

Audience Ad types to create and serve:

- Native Ads
- Display Ads
- Online Video Ads and Connected TV (CTV) Ads

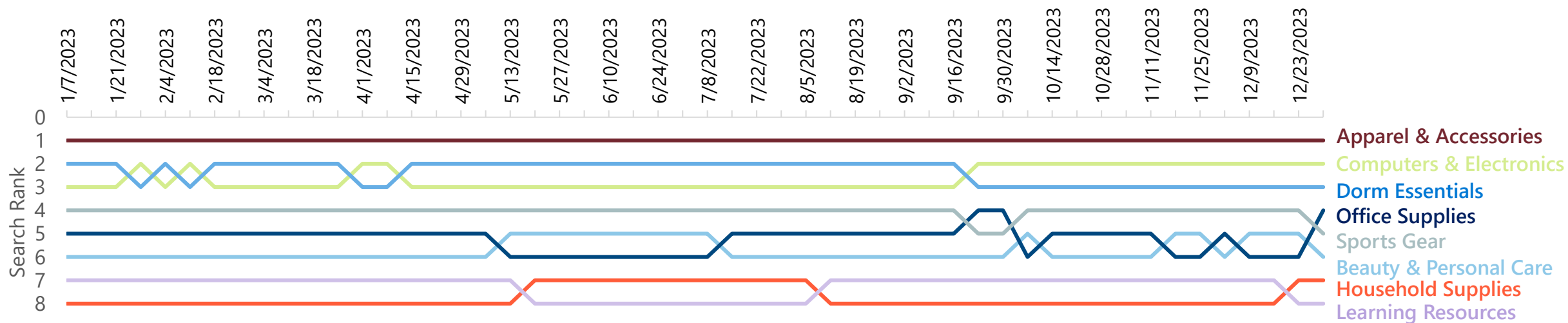
Categories

Trends seen last BTS season on Search
paired with forecasts for this year
broken down by category

Searches were up for all 8 BTS categories last year

Metrics for entire BTS season	Apparel & Accessories	Beauty & Personal Care	Computers & Electronics	Dorm Essentials	Household Supplies	Office Supplies	Sports Gear	Learning Resources
Searches YoY	34%	37%	28%	17%	56%	28%	8%	11%
CPCs YoY	-3%	-7%	-17%	0%	-2%	-3%	-5%	-3%
% total searches	36%	7%	19%	21%	1%	7%	8%	1%

2023 Search Rank (1 being the best/highest) by BTS Category by Week



Source: Microsoft Internal, BTS only ICE Supply categories for 4.30.2022-9.30.2022 and 4.29.2023-9.29.2023



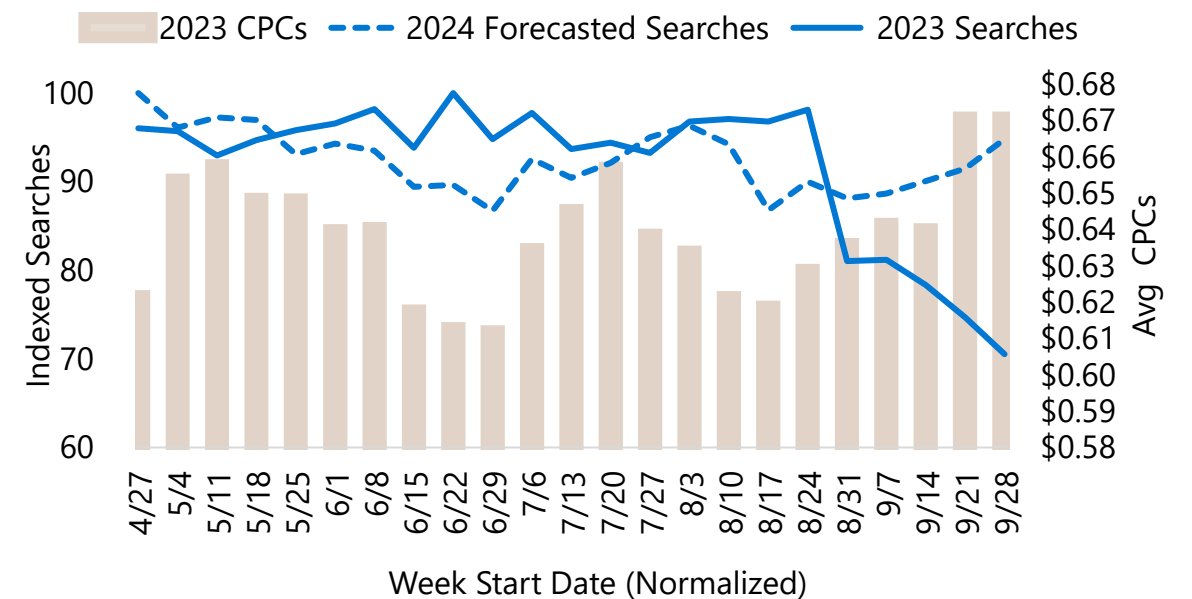
Apparel & Accessories searches are forecasted to be more last-minute this year

Apparel & Accessories searches increased 34% during BTS season YoY, while CPCs decreased 3%. Backpacks, Eyewear, and Gloves saw the highest YoY search growth last BTS season.

YoY change for BTS season by sub-category

A&A Sub-Category	Searches	Clicks	CPCs
Bags/Packs/Belts	45%	-3%	1%
Clothing	31%	-6%	-3%
Eyewear	48%	3%	-1%
Footwear	33%	-13%	-6%
Gloves	57%	38%	6%
Headwear	24%	-1%	4%
Jewelry	20%	0%	-5%
Rain Gear	37%	-7%	2%

A&A Category: 2023 Actuals & 2024 Forecasts by Week



Source: Microsoft Internal, BTS only ICE Supply categories for 4.30.2022-4.12.2024



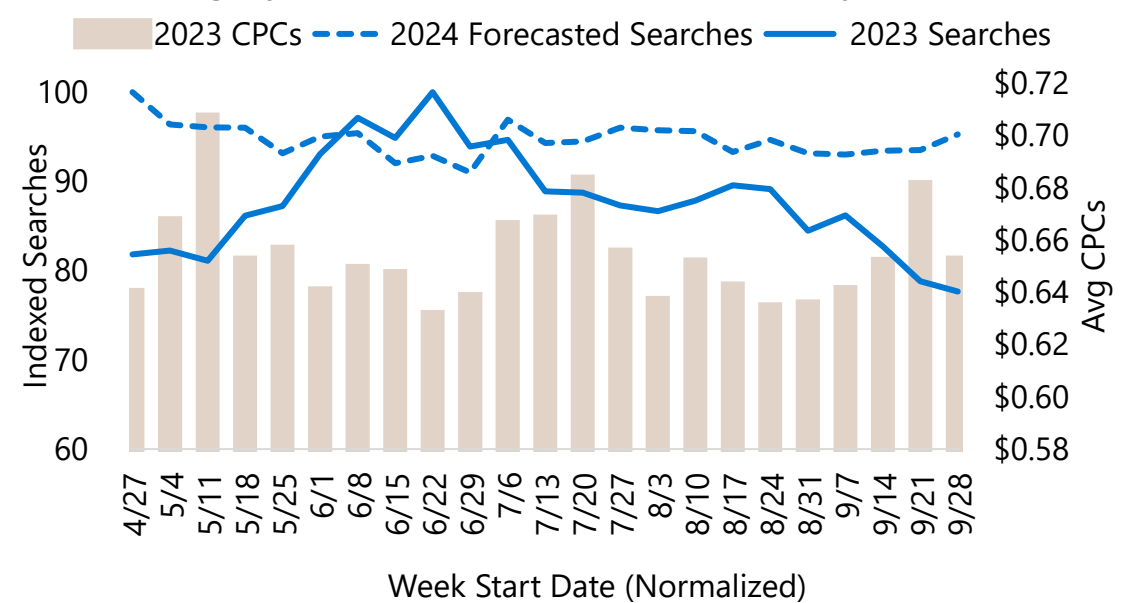
Beauty & Personal Care searches to stay high this BTS season

B&PC searches increased 37% during BTS season YoY, while clicks rose 7% and CPCs decreased 7%.

YoY change for BTS season by sub-category

B&PC Sub-Category	Searches	Clicks	CPCs
Hair Care	30%	9%	4%
Hygiene & Toiletries	43%	-26%	0%
Make-Up & Cosmetics	39%	3%	-12%
Nail Care	18%	6%	6%
Oral Care	42%	8%	-6%
Perfumes & Fragrances	37%	27%	-16%
Shaving & Grooming	33%	1%	-20%
Skin Care	53%	13%	-6%

B&PC Category 2023 Actuals & 2024 Forecasts by Week



Source: Microsoft Internal, BTS only ICE Supply categories for 4.30.2022-4.12.2024



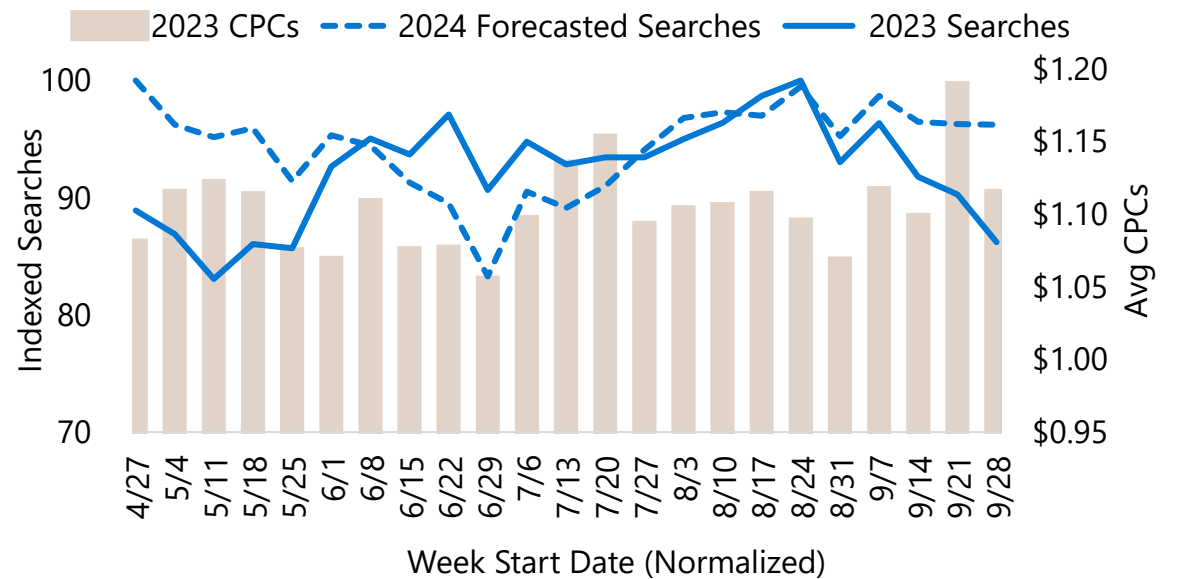
Office Supplies searches are forecasted to rise the end of July

Office Supplies searches increased 28% during BTS season YoY, with Desktop Printers and Printer Accessories driving the highest demand.

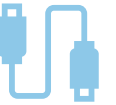
YoY change for BTS season by sub-category

Office Supplies Sub-Category	Searches	Clicks	CPCs
Business Cards, Stationery & Forms	21%	27%	-19%
Calendars & Planners	15%	6%	-15%
Desktop Printers	43%	12%	-16%
Office Appliances	39%	13%	-6%
Office Furniture	17%	0%	4%
Printer Accessories	177%	15%	-17%

Office Supplies Category: 2023 Actuals & 2024 Forecasts by Week



Source: Microsoft Internal, BTS only ICE Supply categories for 4.30.2022-4.12.2024



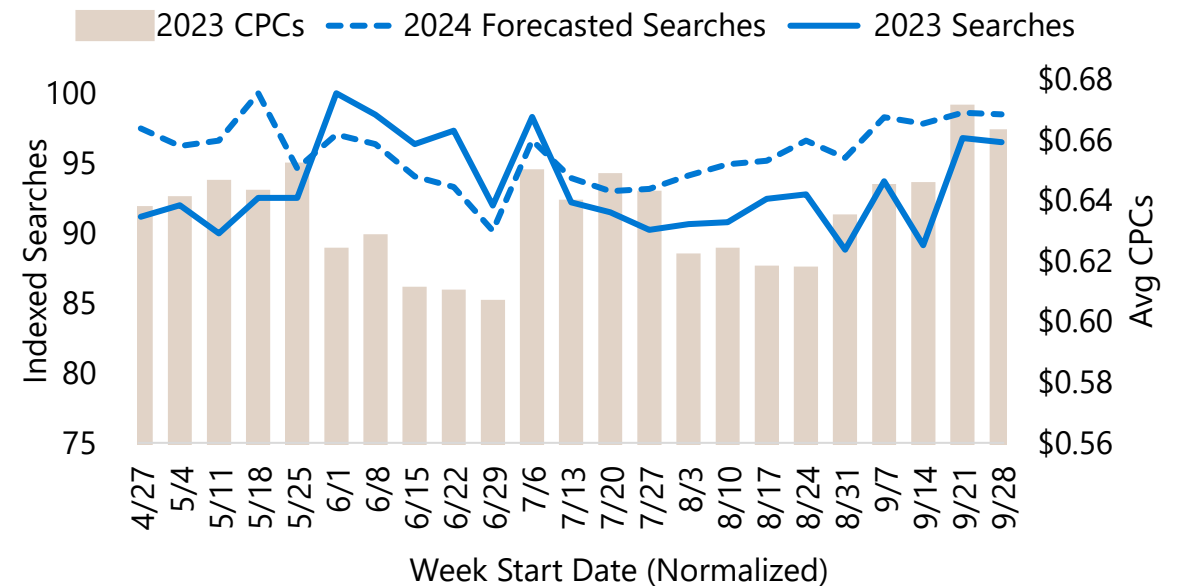
Computers & Electronics searches to behave similarly to last year

Computers & Electronics searches increased 28% during BTS season YoY, while clicks rose 14% and CPCs decreased 17%.

YoY change for BTS season by sub-category

CE Sub-Category	Searches	Clicks	CPCs
Computer Accessories	53%	9%	-9%
Computer Hardware	22%	16%	-27%
Consumer Electronic Accessories	34%	4%	7%
Home Audio & Video	21%	7%	-15%
Portable Media Devices	15%	16%	-5%
Productivity & Educational Software	28%	21%	-17%

CE Category: 2023 Actuals & 2024 Forecasts by Week



Source: Microsoft Internal, BTS only ICE Supply categories for 4.30.2022-4.12.2024



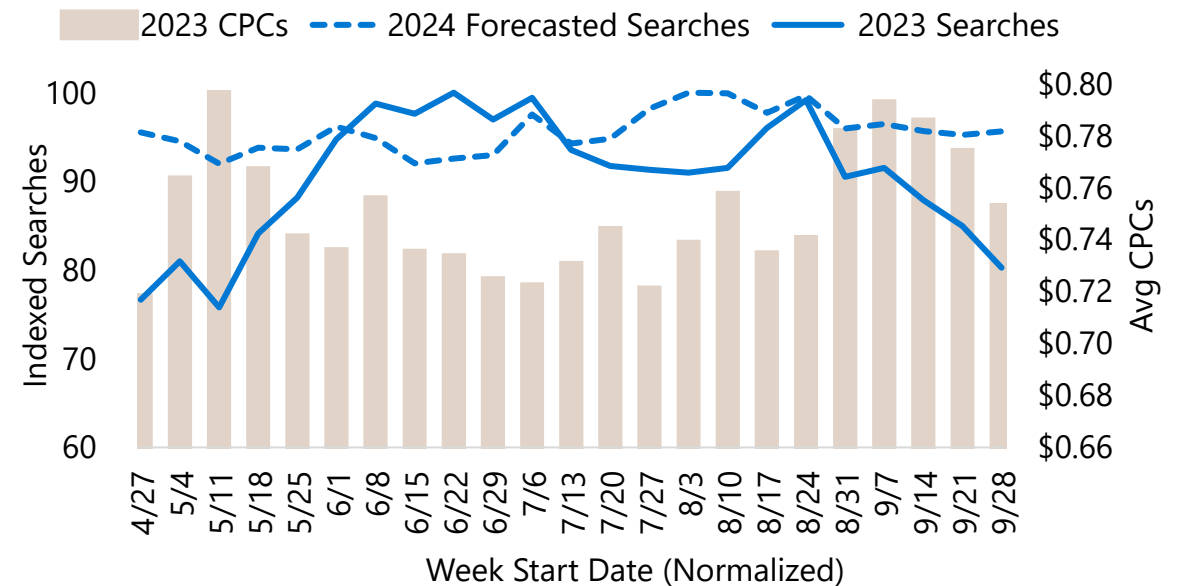
Household Supplies searches forecasted to be highest from the end of July to August

Household Supplies searches increased 56% during BTS season YoY, while clicks rose 14% and CPCs decreased 2%.

YoY change for BTS season by sub-category

HS Sub-Category	Searches	Clicks	CPCs
Food Wraps & Food Storage Containers	46%	-1%	5%
Household Cleaning Products	55%	25%	-3%
Household Paper Products	64%	-41%	-9%

HS Category: 2023 Actuals & 2024 Forecasts by Week



Source: Microsoft Internal, BTS only ICE Supply categories for 4.30.2022-4.12.2024



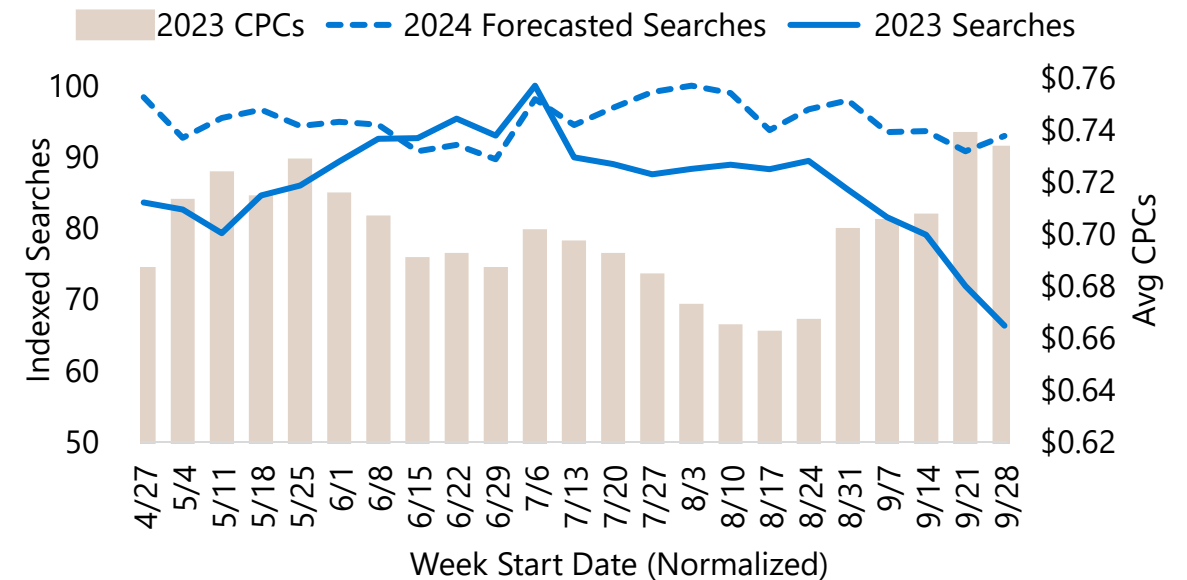
Dorm Essentials searches forecasted to increase early July

Dorm Essentials searches increased 17% during BTS season YoY, with the highest search volume occurring from 11th June – 9th July.

YoY change for BTS season by sub-category

Dorm Essentials Sub-Category	Searches	Clicks	CPCs
Bedding and Linens	47%	-7%	-4%
Home Appliances	41%	4%	-3%
Home Décor & Interior Decorating	23%	-5%	-3%
Home Furniture	53%	2%	-5%
Kitchen & Dining	40%	-2%	0%
Lights & Lighting	34%	-5%	1%
Storage & Organization	0%	-16%	5%

Dorm Essentials Category: 2023 Actuals & 2024 Forecasts by Week



Source: Microsoft Internal, BTS only ICE Supply categories for 4.30.2022-4.12.2024



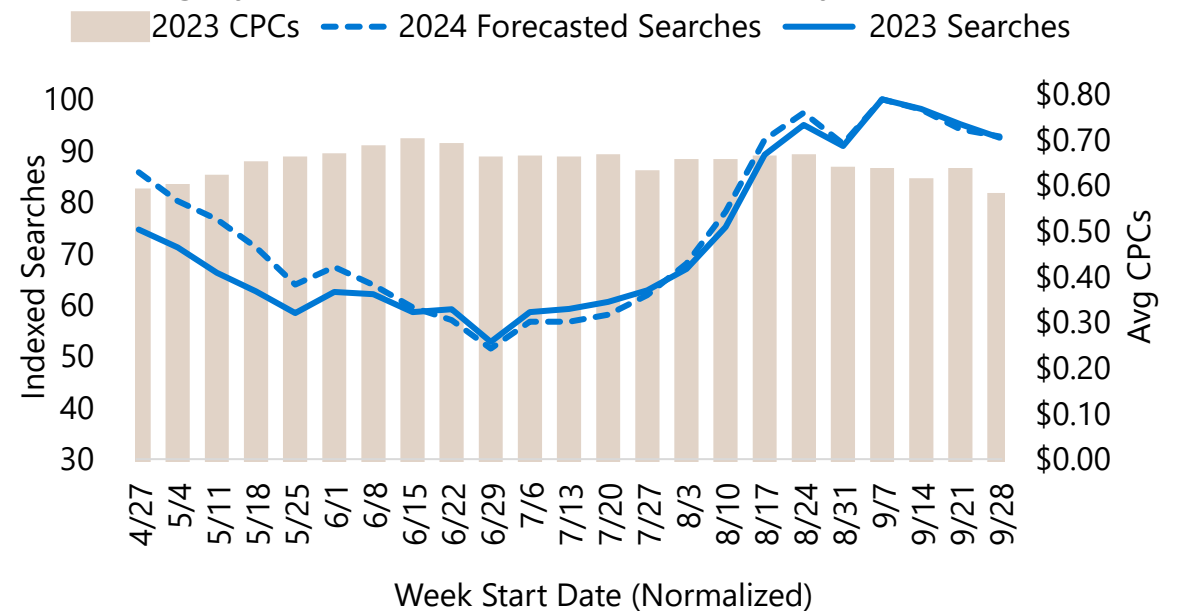
Learning Resources searches are forecasted to see similar trends to last year

Learning Resources searches increased 11% during BTS season YoY, while CPCs decreased 3%. Searches started increased at the end of July, peaking at the start of the school year.

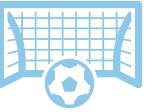
YoY change for BTS season by sub-category

LR Sub-Category	Searches	Clicks	CPCs
Lesson Plans	4%	26%	-13%
School & Classroom Equipment	28%	-15%	12%
Textbooks	19%	19%	1%

LR Category: 2023 Actuals & 2024 Forecasts by Week



Source: Microsoft Internal, BTS only ICE Supply categories for 4.30.2022-4.12.2024



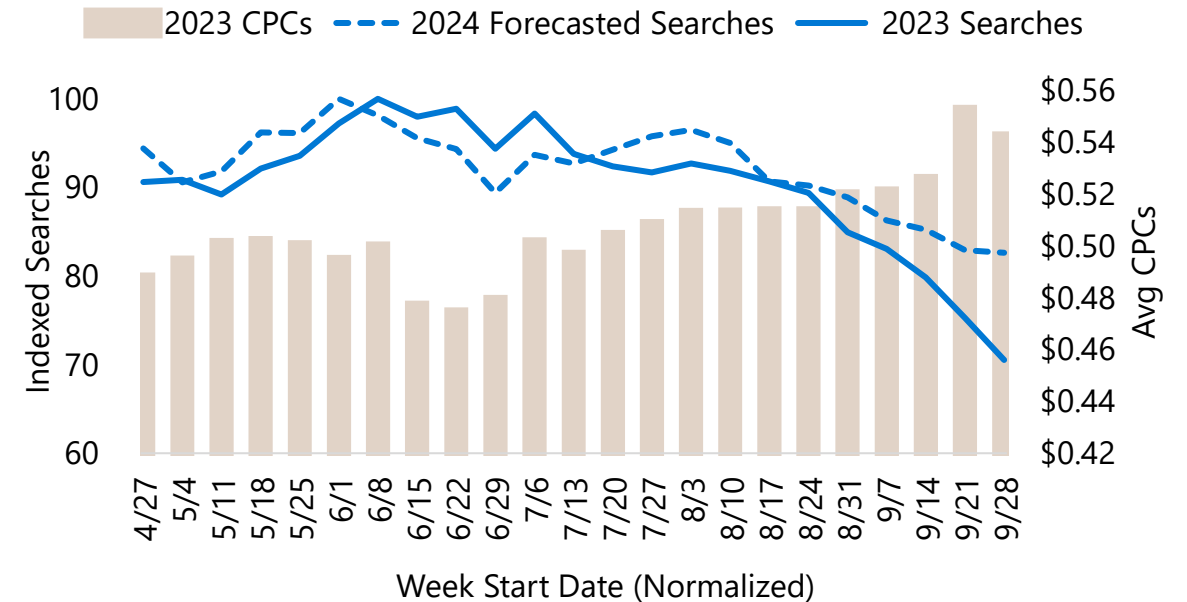
Sports Gear searches are forecasted to be highest from mid-May to mid-June this season

Sports Gear searches increased 8% during BTS season YoY, while CPCs decreased 5%.

YoY change for BTS season by sub-category

Sports Gear Sub-Category	Searches	Clicks	CPCs
Sporting Goods	6%	-11%	-5%
Sports & Fitness Apparel	42%	-8%	-8%
Sports Fan Gear & Apparel	16%	14%	-13%

Sports Gear Category: 2023 Actuals & 2024 Forecasts by Week



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Summary

Key learnings

PARTICIPATION ENCOURAGED

BTS spending, student enrollments, and volume of online BTS shoppers are up. This paired with the expansive list of BTS items, create a huge opportunity for a wide variety of Advertisers.

ATTENDANCE REWARDED

Don't be tardy! Attendance is key throughout the entire BTS season (May-Sept). Full Microsoft Advertising Network visibility is recommended as shopper journeys are numerous and multi-touched.

SCORE HIGHER WITH SEARCH + AUDIENCE

Search and Audience programs work together to maximize conversions; users exposed to both are 3.7x more likely to visit the brand site and 3.6x more likely to convert!

TARGET ALL 3 SHOPPER PROFILES

Maximize reach with customized game plans for each of the 3 types of profiles: Parents/Guardians, Students, and Educators. Leverage our provided keyword, ad, and Audience targeting strategies.

EVALUATE BY CATEGORY

Use BTS category benchmarks from 2023 and 2024 forecasts when making optimizations. Overall, most categories are expected to behave similarly to last year.

DUAL CREDIT TOWARDS HOLIDAY

Use BTS season to cast Audience nets to lay the foundational groundwork for the upcoming 2024 following holiday season.

Thank you

 Microsoft Advertising