Raptive

RAPTIVE RESEARCH BRIEF

Winning on Google Discover: A data-driven guide for gaming media

Early data and actionable insights from 6,000+ sites across the Raptive network

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Executive summary

On February 5, 2026, Google released its first standalone Discover core update, the first time in Discover's eight-year history that Google has issued an algorithm change targeting Discover specifically. At the same time, AI Overviews are reducing click-through rates on informational queries in Search. As traditional search visibility compresses, Discover is becoming one of the most important surfaces for article distribution.

For gaming media, this is a significant opportunity. Across our network, tech and gaming sites receive approximately 50% of their Google traffic from Discover. This report shares early post-update data across 197 active gaming sites, and outlines what correlates most strongly with Discover visibility and revenue performance.

~50%
of gaming Google traffic comes from Discover

197
active gaming sites on Raptive

~20%
more sites receiving Discover traffic post-update

> **KEY TAKEAWAY**
>
> Early signals suggest Google is broadening Discover distribution. Gaming media sites that optimize their Discover presence now have a meaningful first opportunity, particularly for editorial, guide, and reference sites where Discover is already the dominant traffic channel.

What happened on February 5

Google announced a "Discover core update" with the goals of surfacing more locally relevant content, reducing clickbait, and prioritizing quality content from trusted websites.

Previous core updates (August 2025, December 2025) affected Discover as a byproduct of changes to Google's broader ranking systems.

Why Discover matters disproportionately for gaming

Google Discover is a personalized content feed that appears in Chrome on mobile, the Google Search app on iOS, and natively on Android devices when users swipe left from the home screen. It

recommends articles based on browsing history, location, and topical interest, without requiring a search query.

Globally, Discover sends roughly twice as many clicks to publisher sites as Google Search. In the U.S., where iPhone usage is higher, the two channels are approximately equal. But the distribution varies dramatically by vertical.

Vertical	Discover share of Google traffic	Discover relevance
Tech & gaming	~50%	Very high
News & current events	76%	Critical
Sports	~50%	Very high
Travel & lifestyle	~45%	High
Entertainment	~40%	High
Arts & creativity	~35%	Moderate
Home & garden	~15%	Moderate
Food & recipe	~2%	Low

Source: Raptive network data, 6,000+ sites, 2025. Figures are approximate medians by vertical segment.

> **THE GAMING-SPECIFIC INSIGHT**
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> Within gaming, Discover relevance splits sharply by content type. Gaming media sites, those publishing news, reviews, guides, walkthroughs, and reference content, are Discover-heavy, often getting more traffic from Discover than from Search. Gameplay sites (browser-based games, HTML5 portals) get zero Discover traffic because they don't publish the article-format content that Discover surfaces. If you're reading this guide, you're almost certainly in the first category, and Discover should be a top strategic priority.

The landscape heading into 2026

The second half of 2025 brought several compounding changes to the Discover ecosystem:

Search traffic is declining. Discover was supposed to be the answer.

Third-party data from Chartbeat tracking 800 U.S. media sites showed Google Search traffic declining approximately 35% year-over-year by the end of 2025, driven by AI Overviews suppressing click-through rates. For gaming sites, AIO impact is particularly acute: many gaming queries "best builds," "release dates," and "patch notes," are answer-type queries that AI Overviews can resolve without a click.

For the first half of 2025, Discover traffic remained stable or grew even as Search declined. That changed in Q3-Q4 2025 when Discover also began declining in aggregate. However, across the Raptive network, Discover traffic was up 5% in the second half of 2025. This suggests the aggregate decline was concentrated among larger media properties, with smaller independent publishers and creator sites potentially gaining share—a trend the February update may be accelerating.

X and AI Summaries changed the feed

Two shifts in Q4 2025 altered what appears in the Discover feed. First, X posts saw a surge in visibility, becoming the fourth-most-popular domain on Google Discover. Second, Google began testing AI summaries in the Discover feed, with reports indicating they appeared in roughly half of feed impressions by late 2025.

For gaming media, the X integration is a double-edged sword. Gaming is one of X's most active verticals where game announcements, esports results, and developer commentary all trend heavily. Google is showing these posts because it believes users want a first-person perspective and opinion over polished editorial. The lesson: gaming publishers who bring a genuine voice and point of view to their content are better positioned than those producing generic coverage.

The August spam update reshuffled the deck

Google's August 2025 spam update had an outsized impact on Discover. Some sites experienced dramatic swings, from millions of monthly Discover clicks to near zero overnight. In our analysis, the sites most negatively affected were those relying heavily on high-volume, low-differentiation content. Sites with strong brand identity, original reporting, and genuine editorial voice were more likely to maintain or improve their position.

This pattern aligns with what we see across our gaming portfolio. Among Raptive's 197 active gaming sites, structured editorial content, guides, reference databases, and editorial coverage

consistently outperform forums and community-generated content on both monetization and traffic quality metrics. Google's quality signals and revenue potential are directionally aligned: high-quality content wins on both fronts.

What we're seeing: Early network data

More sites are entering the Discover feed

In the days following the update, we've seen approximately a 20% increase in the number of sites across the Raptive network receiving Discover traffic. This suggests Google is broadening the set of quality sites it surfaces in the feed, a potentially significant shift from the consolidation trend we observed in late 2025.

Click volatility remains high

While more sites are appearing in the feed, day-to-day click volumes remain volatile. This is normal for Discover and shouldn't be interpreted as instability in the update itself. Discover's recommendation engine is inherently tied to real-time user interest and trending topics, which creates natural fluctuations. For gaming publishers, this volatility is especially pronounced around game launches, patch cycles, and esports events.

What we're watching for over the coming weeks is whether the expanded site inclusion translates into aggregate click growth across the network, or whether the same total click volume is simply being distributed across more sites.

What Raptive's gaming data tells us about Discover readiness

While we track Discover trends at the network level, our deep analysis of 197 active gaming sites reveals which site characteristics correlate with both traffic acquisition and Discover readiness. The same attributes that make a gaming site a strong Discover candidate also predict stronger overall performance.

Performance driver	What the data shows	Discover implication
US traffic concentration	Sites with higher US traffic outperform on every key metric. Below 30%, performance drops into a different tier.	Discover feed is heavily US-weighted on both Android and iOS. Higher US traffic concentration = more Discover exposure and better overall outcomes.

Performance driver	What the data shows	Discover implication
Session depth	Longer sessions and higher pages-per-visit are the second strongest predictors of site performance, independent of traffic source or content type.	Discover rewards content that keeps users engaged. Deeper sessions signal quality to Google's algorithms and indicate the kind of content Discover preferentially surfaces.
Content structure	Structured editorial content—guides, reference databases, and editorial coverage—dramatically outperforms forums and community-generated content across all performance metrics.	Discover surfaces articles, not threads. Guides, databases, and editorial content are the formats Discover indexes and recommends.

Source: Raptive internal analysis, 197 active gaming sites, Q4 2025–Q1 2026.

> THE CONVERGENCE
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> The same three factors that make a gaming media business strong overall—US traffic concentration, session depth, and structured editorial content—are the same that drive Discover success. Gaming media sites that invest in Discover optimization raise revenue potential.

Does your site fit the profile? If your site publishes structured editorial or reference content, draws 40% or more of its traffic from the US, and shows evidence of meaningful session depth, you are in the profile that performs best on both Discover and monetization. If you're below 30% US traffic or rely primarily on forum-style user-generated content, the path to Discover success is steeper—but not impossible with the right optimizations.

Five actions gaming publishers should take now

These optimizations represent the highest-leverage moves we've identified across hundreds of Discover optimization projects.

1 Audit your Core Web Vitals today

Core Web Vitals have become one of the strongest predictors of Discover inclusion and

performance. In 2025, we worked with a site that fixed its CWV issues and went from negligible Discover traffic to over 1.5 million clicks per month. That's not an outlier—we've seen consistent CWV-to-Discover correlations across dozens of sites.

For gaming media, CWV is both a challenge and an opportunity. Gaming sites tend to run heavier JavaScript payloads, embed interactive elements, and use complex layouts that can degrade Largest Contentful Paint and Interaction to Next Paint scores. Discover is essentially 100% mobile traffic, and Google's mobile-first evaluation applies with particular force here.

Action: Check your CWV scores in Google Search Console or PageSpeed Insights. If you're not passing all three metrics on mobile, this should be your top priority.

2 Write Discover-specific headlines

The title tag length in Google Discover is significantly longer than in Search. Discover rewards with more descriptive, engaging, narrative-driven headlines that give users a reason to click.

We worked with a publisher that shifted from Search-style titles to longer, more evocative Discover titles. They went from under 5,000 Discover clicks per month to over 150,000. The content didn't change; only the headline did.

EXAMPLE

Instead of "Elden Ring DLC Best Builds 2026," try "The 5 Elden Ring DLC Builds Carrying Players Through the Shadow of the Erdtree." The second headline tells a story and creates engagement without crossing into clickbait. It also brings the first-person perspective that Google's algorithm increasingly favors.

3 Bring opinion and voice to your content

The rise of Reddit in search results and X posts in Discover means Google believes users want first-person opinion. People want an authentic human perspective over generic, committee-written coverage.

For gaming sites,your audience expects strong opinions on game quality, meta shifts, developer decisions, and competitive play. Lean into it. Our data shows that images of faces in Google Discover tiles can significantly improve click-through rates. People want to read content that feels human, especially as AI-generated content floods the web.

Action: Publish under named authors with established online identities. Include author headshots in your article templates. Take positions in your headlines rather than defaulting to neutral, informational framing.

4 Shift your publishing calendar to match demand

Discover content has a half-life of roughly 12–36 hours. If you publish on Monday but your audience's interest peaks during weekend gaming sessions, you're missing the window. Many publishers we've analyzed get 30-50% more Discover clicks per post on weekends despite publishing fewer posts on those days.

Gaming has natural demand spikes: patch days, expansion launches, esports tournament weekends, and seasonal events. Align your publishing velocity with these moments. Analyze your Google Search Console Discover data by day of week, the patterns may surprise you.

Action: Map your next 30 days of publishing against known game release calendars, patch schedules, and community events. Shift at least 20% of your content output to align with peak demand windows.

5 Shift your publishing calendar to match demand

This may be the single highest-ROI fix available. A single meta tag correction on one site in our network drove 400% growth in Discover traffic. The most common issues we find:

- Missing or misconfigured max-image-preview meta tags (Google needs this set to "large" to show images in Discover)
- Improperly formatted RSS feeds
- Missing article structured data
- Thumbnail images that don't meet Discover's minimum size requirements

These are not difficult fixes, but they're invisible to most publishers because there's no obvious error or warning. The only way to identify them is through systematic auditing, which most gaming publishers haven't done specifically for Discover.

What we're watching next

The February 5 update is the beginning of a new chapter for Discover. Here's what we're monitoring:

- **Aggregate click volume vs. site distribution:** Is the total Discover pie growing, or is the same volume being spread across more sites? The answer determines whether this update is net positive or zero-sum for individual gaming publishers.
- **AI summary expansion:** Will AI summaries in Discover grow beyond the current ~50% of feed

impressions? For gaming queries where Google can synthesize patch notes or tier lists directly, this could suppress clicks to publisher sites.

- **AIO impact on gaming search:** AI Overviews are particularly impactful for answer-type gaming queries. As traditional search traffic declines, Discover becomes even more critical as an alternative traffic channel.
- **Threads integration:** With Threads recently surpassing X in traffic, we expect Threads content to begin appearing in Discover, further reshaping the competitive landscape for publisher content in the feed.
- **Personalized intelligence:** Google's January 2026 launch of personalized intelligence in Gemini could fundamentally reshape Discover recommendations, potentially creating more granular audience matching that benefits niche gaming publishers covering specific genres, franchises, or platforms.

We'll publish a full data analysis once the rollout is complete and we have sufficient post-update data. Sign up to receive the complete report when it's available.

How Raptive helps gaming publishers win on Discover

Raptive manages ad monetization for over 6,000 creator and publisher sites.. We are the largest ad management network for gaming content on the open web.

We offer:

- **Google Discover Workbook (coming 2026):** A purpose-built analytics tool inside the Raptive dashboard showing performance data you can't get from Google Search Console alone. No other ad management partner offers this level of Discover intelligence.
- **One-on-one Discover audits:** Our Audience Growth team conducts personalized Discover reviews, identifying technical issues, headline optimization opportunities, and publishing cadence adjustments specific to gaming content patterns.
- **Proven gaming track record:** Gaming media sites that switch to Raptive consistently see on average 89% RPM uplift compared to their prior ad management solution. Our portfolio spans the full spectrum of gaming content, from large-scale editorial operations to niche guide sites, giving us unmatched benchmarking data across the vertical.
- **Dedicated sales team:** Unlike pure programmatic networks, Raptive's 40+ person direct sales team actively sells gaming inventory to advertisers, bringing meaningful incremental

demand beyond what programmatic alone delivers. This is revenue that doesn't exist on competing networks.

- **Network-scale data:** Benchmarking your site's Discover and overall performance against gaming vertical peers, identifying outlier opportunities, and tracking algorithm changes in real time across the largest gaming publisher dataset in the industry.

This research brief was produced by the Raptive Audience Growth team.

For questions or to schedule a Discover consultation, contact us at growth@raptive.com

Want to know where your site stands?

Get a personalized Discover traffic analysis for your site. Our team will review your current Discover performance, identify optimization opportunities, and show you what Raptive can do for your revenue.

Request your free Discover audit

Or sign up to receive the full post-rollout analysis

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