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From Search Bars to Chatbots
What Users Really Want From AI

November 12, 2026 with Alma Meshes and Joanna Jackson

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Fun facts about Sandstorm®





Accessibility-certified, creative technology agency for 25+ years for **purpose-driven brands**

Deep expertise with **Associations, Global Non-Profits, Higher Ed & Healthcare**



Certifications:
CPACC (accessibility), AWS Cloud, Pantheon, Acquia, Drupal, DEIB, and WBENC (women-owned)

Build enterprise websites in **Drupal, WordPress & Sitefinity**

Interdisciplinary team: UX, UI, AI, strategy, technology and analytics

UX practice started by **Ph.D in human factors** in 2006

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Agenda

- What We Studied and How
- 5 Universal Behaviors
- 5 Surprising Findings
- 5 Tips for Overcoming Chat Skepticism + Bonus Tip



What We Studied and How

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Questions:

1. Where people actually go when they need help
2. What makes them trust an answer
3. Where they expect AI to appear
4. What makes AI feel useful vs. annoying

Methodology:

- Completed real tasks
- Talked through their thinking out loud
- Used real websites and AI tools
- Then reflected on their experience in a short survey

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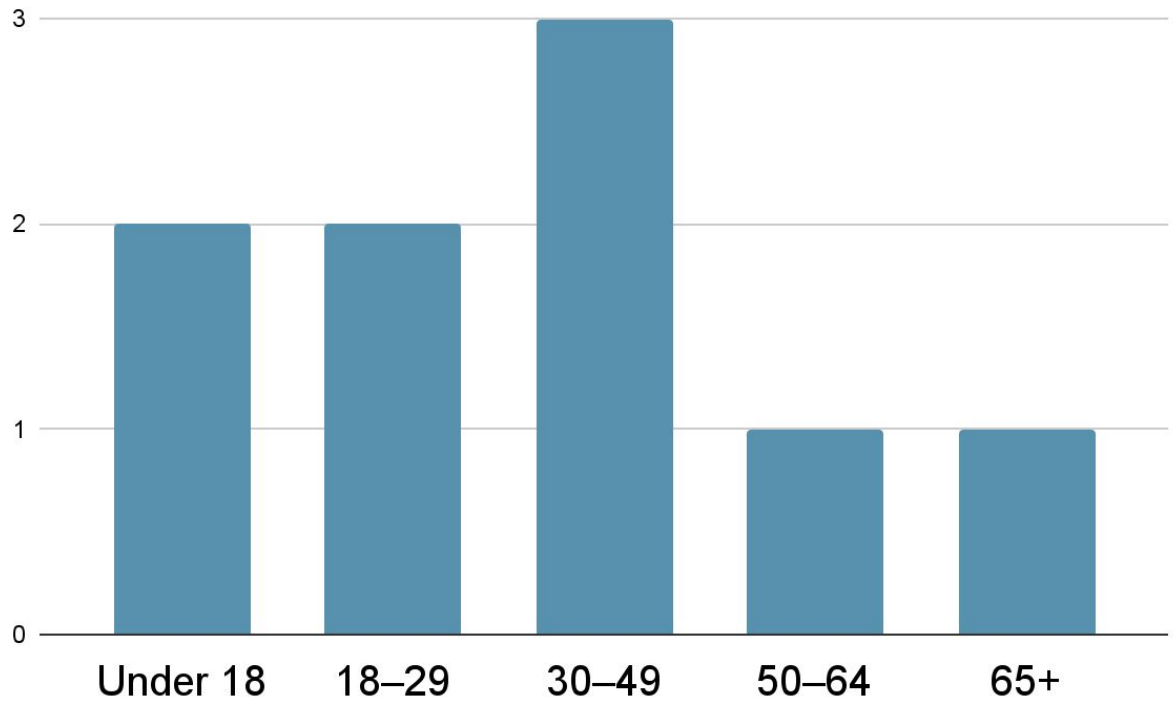
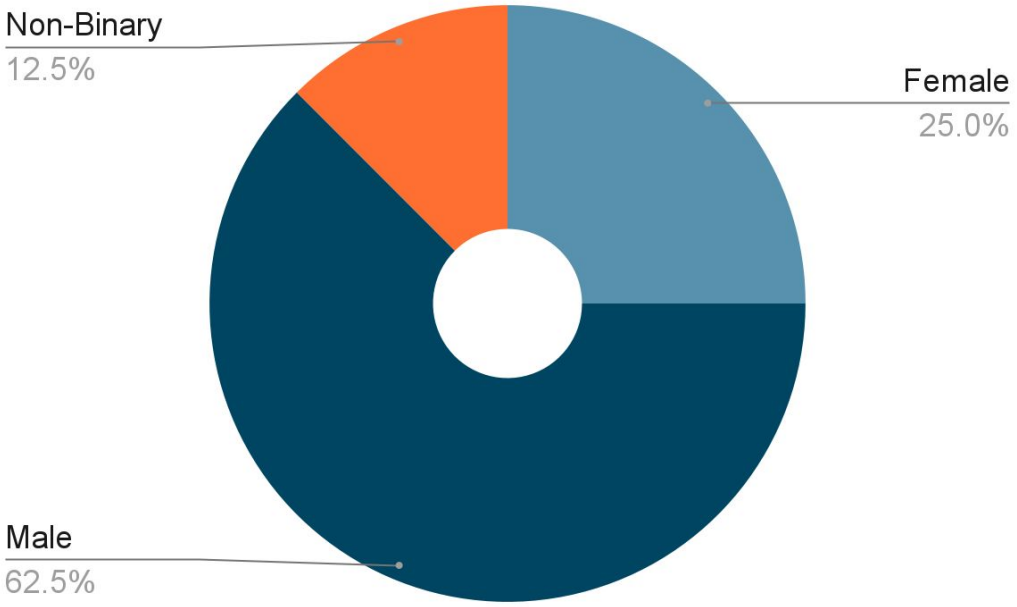
Study Sample: 9 Participants





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Experiences We Tested

- Search (with AI elements)
- Generative AI
- Transactional
- Hybrid (AI with human escalation)
- Domain Specific

Search (with AI elements)

Google

Type 2 diabetes symptoms and treatment

AI Mode | All | Images | Short videos | Videos | Forums | Shopping | More | Tools

AI Overview

Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body resists insulin, causing high blood sugar. Key symptoms include **increased thirst, frequent urination, extreme fatigue, blurred vision, and slow-healing wounds**. Treatment focuses on lifestyle changes (diet, exercise, weight loss), blood sugar monitoring, and medications such as metformin or insulin to manage blood glucose. Cleveland Clinic +2



Common Symptoms

Symptoms often develop slowly and can be hard to spot. Centers for Disease Control and Preventi...

- **Increased Thirst and Urination:** High sugar levels pull fluid from tissues.

Show more

Understanding Type 2 Diabetes | ADA

This information does not constitute medical advice or diagnosis. Type 2 diabetes occurs...

Diabetes.org

Type 2 Diabetes | Johns Hopkins Medicine

Being more active. Get at least 150 minutes a week of exercise or physical activity. Don't let...



Johns Hopkins Medicine

Sponsored results

Search (with AI elements)

AI Mode | All | Images | Short videos | Videos | More

Type 2 diabetes symptoms and treatment

Type 2 diabetes is **a chronic condition where the body either resists the effects of insulin or doesn't produce enough to maintain normal glucose levels**. While often manageable through lifestyle changes, it requires consistent monitoring to prevent long-term complications. Cleveland Clinic +3

Common Symptoms

Symptoms often develop slowly and can be so mild they go unnoticed for years. World Health Organization (WHO) +1

- **Increased thirst and urination:** Frequent trips to the bathroom, especially at night.
- **Persistent fatigue:** Feeling worn out or weak because cells aren't getting enough energy from glucose.
- **Blurred vision:** High blood sugar can cause the lenses in your eyes to swell.

Ask anything

19 sites

Type 2 Diabetes| Adult-Onset Diabetes - MedlinePlus



Jan 21, 2026 — What are the symptoms of type 2 diabetes? Many...

MedlinePlus (.gov)

Type 2 Diabetes: Symptoms and Treatments - Yale Medicine



Type 2 Diabetes: Symptoms and Treatments * •A condition in which...

Yale Medicine

Type 2 diabetes - Symptoms and causes - Mayo Clinic

Feb 27, 2025 — Both type 1 and type 2 diabetes can begin during childhood and adulthood. Type 2 is...

Mayo Clinic

Show all

Generative AI

ChatGPT 5.2

What are the symptoms and treatment options for Type 2 Diabetes?

Here's a clear overview of **Type 2 Diabetes (T2D)** — including common symptoms and treatment options.

🔎 What Is Type 2 Diabetes?

Type 2 diabetes is a chronic condition in which:

- The body becomes **resistant to insulin**, and/or
- The pancreas does not produce **enough insulin**

This leads to **elevated blood sugar (glucose)** levels.

🚩 Common Symptoms

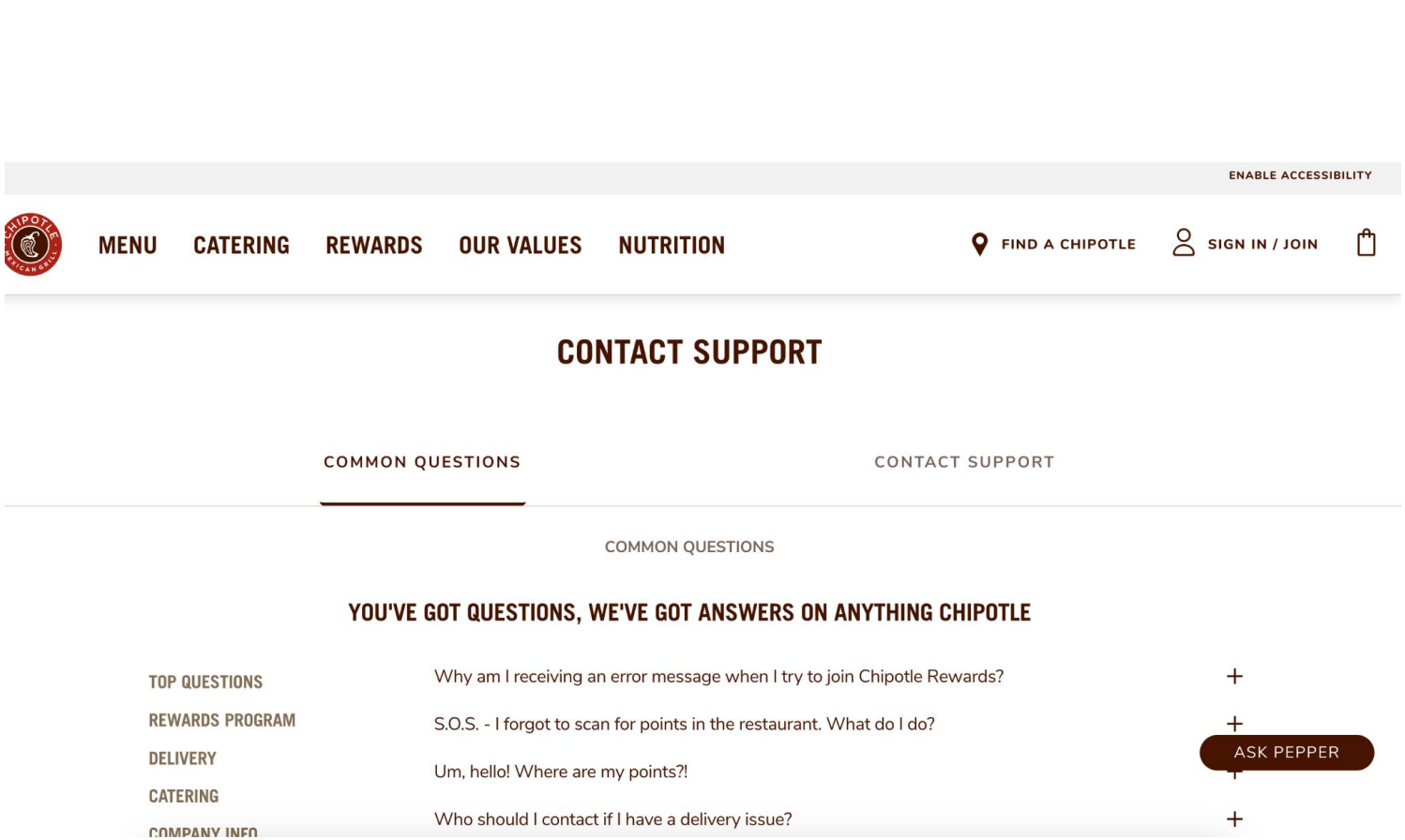
Type 2 diabetes often develops gradually. Some people have no noticeable symptoms at first.

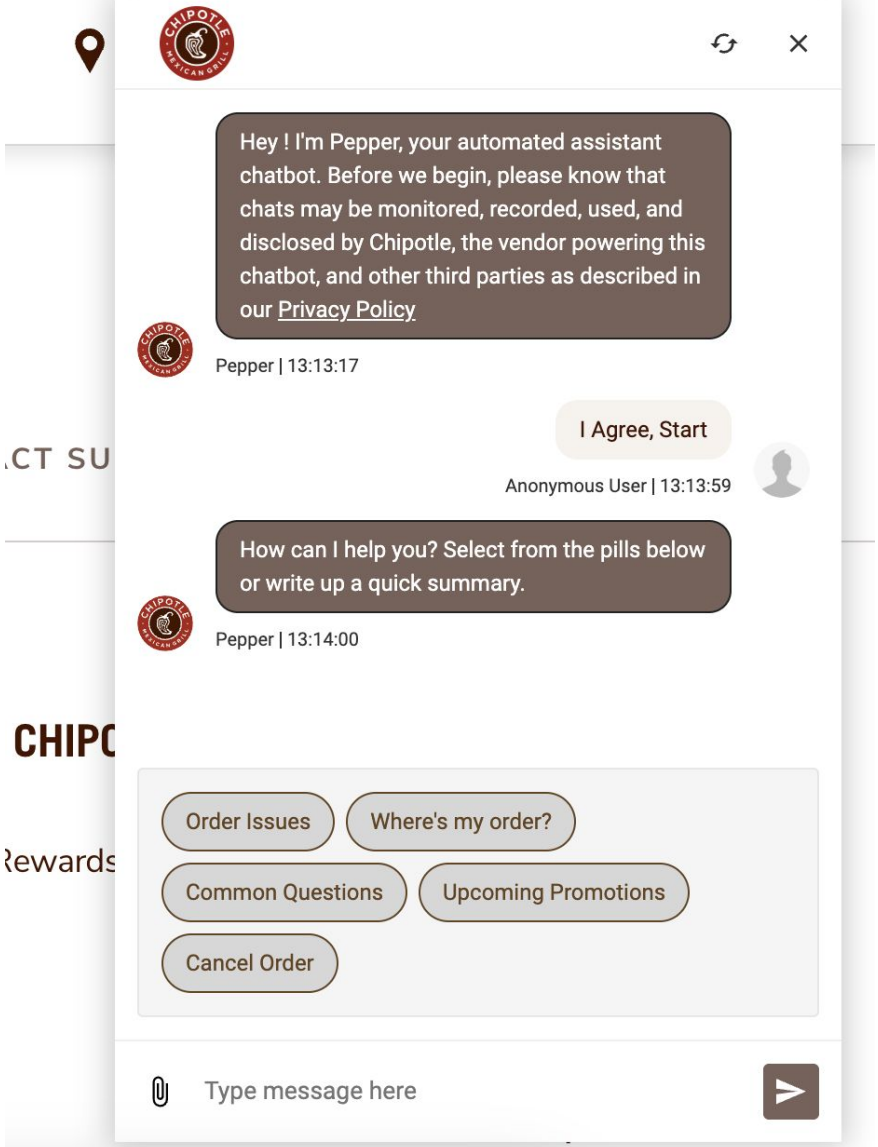
Most Common Symptoms

- Increased thirst
- Frequent urination

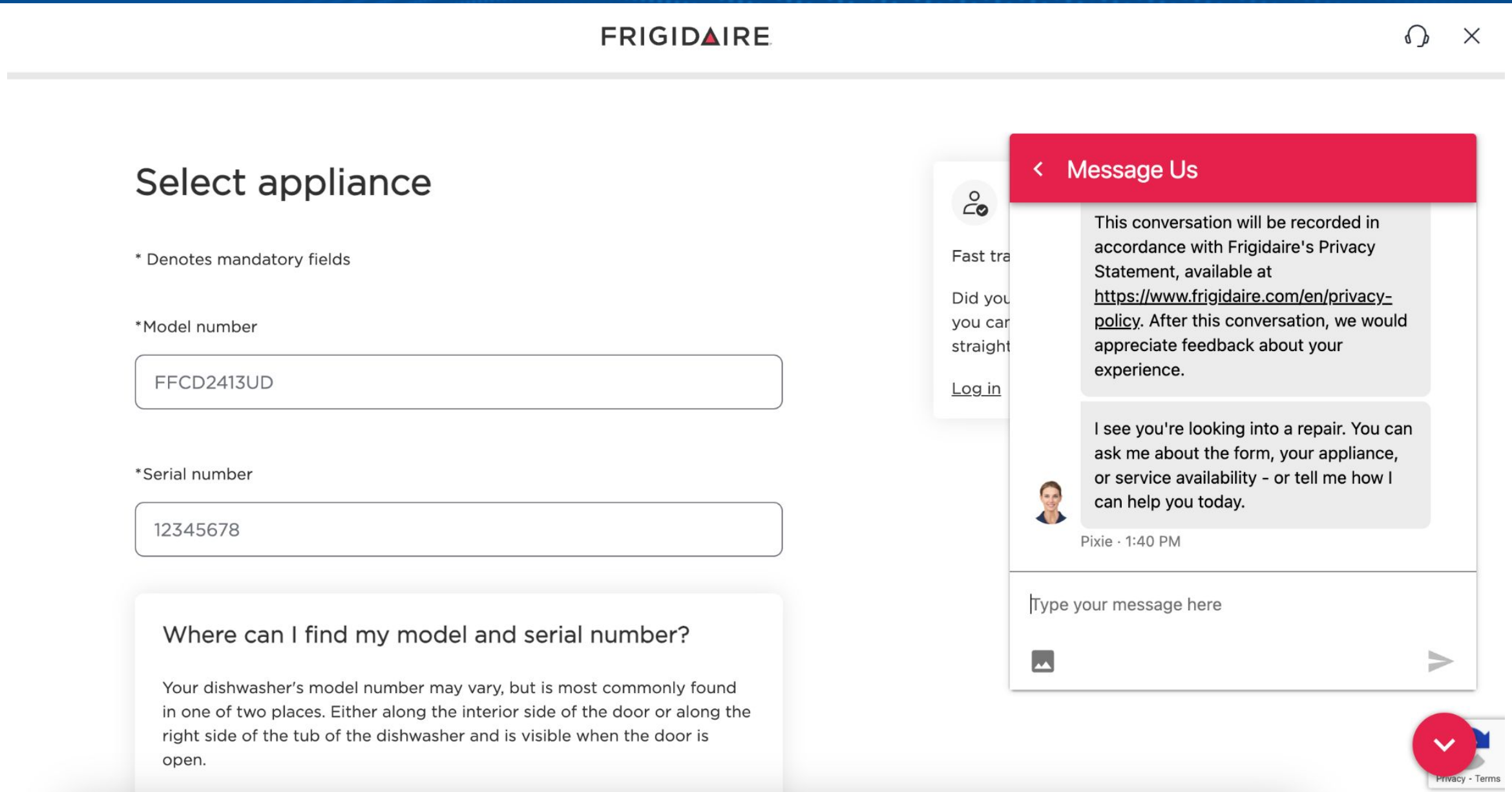
Ask anything

Transactional

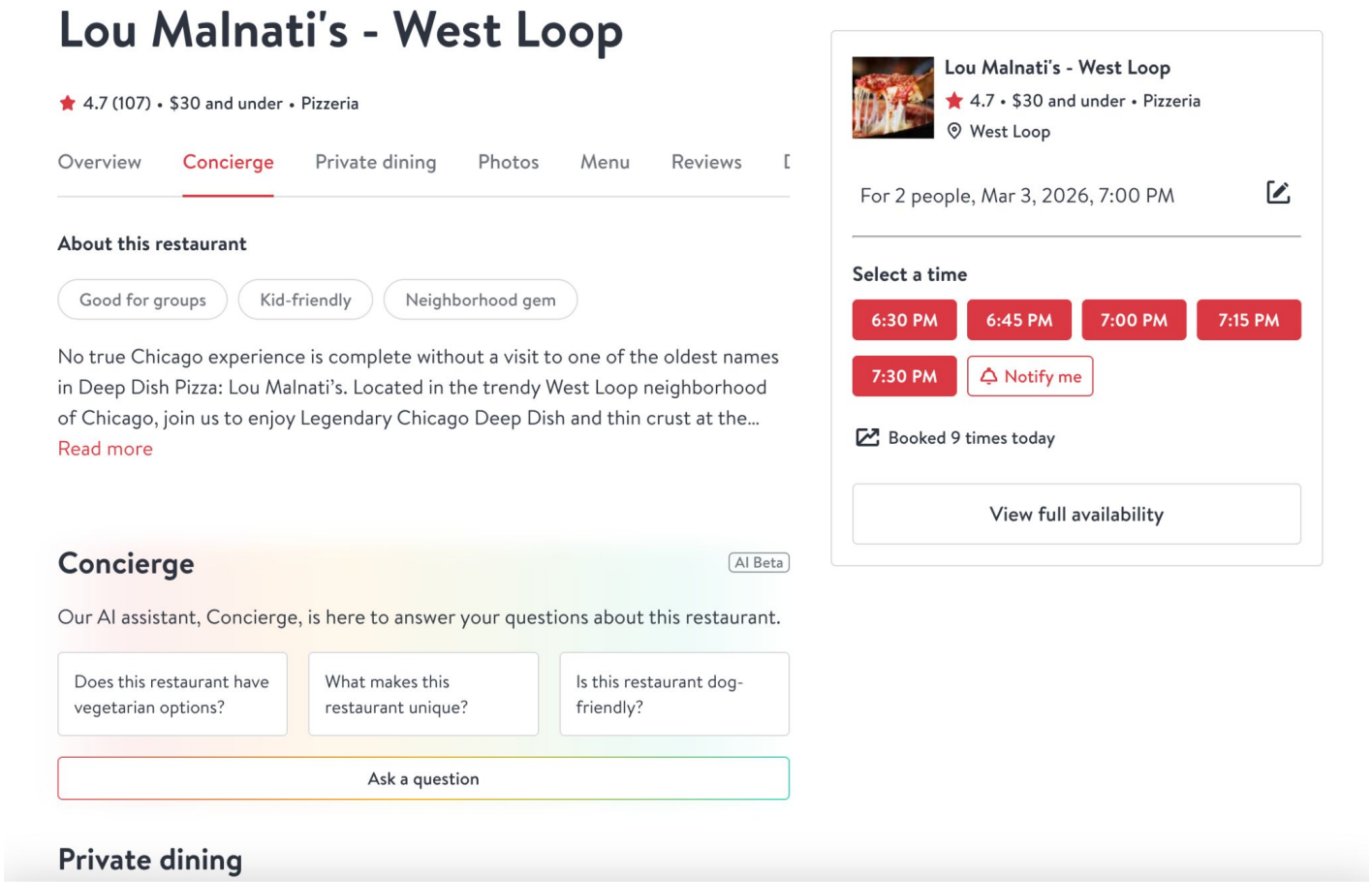


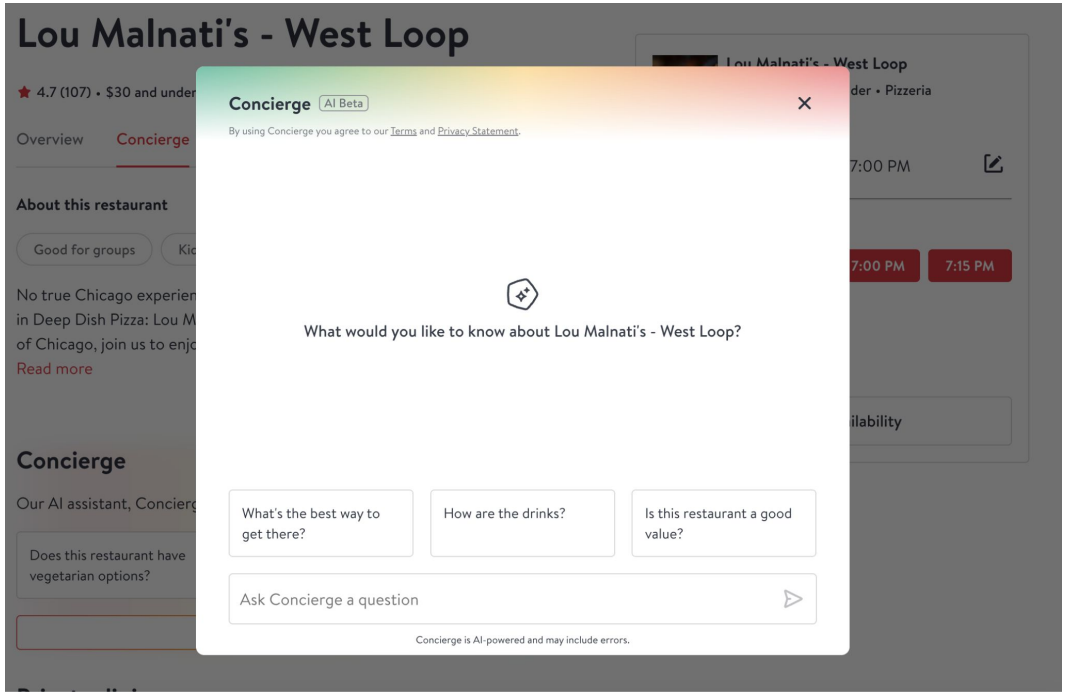


Hybrid (AI with human escalation)



Domain Specific





Domain Specific

IRS File Pay Refunds Credits & Deductions Forms Report Fraud Search

Interactive Tax Assistant (ITA)

English | Español

- Interactive Tax Assistant
- Tools
- Report fraud
- Tax scams
- Identity theft
- Notices and letters
- Appeals
- Frequently asked questions
- Accessibility

You can use this tool to get answers to your tax questions. Choose a topic, then enter basic information to find your answer.

Your information is anonymous and only used to answer your question. We don't share, store or use it in any other way.

Search for a topic or find it in the list.

Interactive Tax Assistant Search

Do I need to file a tax return?



Filing requirement, forms, due date

Amended return - Should I file one?

IRS File Pay Refunds Credits & Deductions Forms Report Fraud Do I need to file a tax return?

ITA Search Results

Do I need to file a tax return?

Search Reset

All Forms Guides News Notices FAQs Statistics

Found 3 Matching Items; Displaying 1 - 3.

Do I need to file a tax return?

Do you need to file a tax return? Find out with the IRS Interactive Tax Assistant.

General Information

Am I required to file a nonresident alien U.S. individual tax return?

Determine if you're required to file a nonresident alien tax return or if you should file to receive a refund.

General Information

As a resident or nonresident alien, am I required to obtain a departure permit to leave the United States?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5 Universal Behaviors

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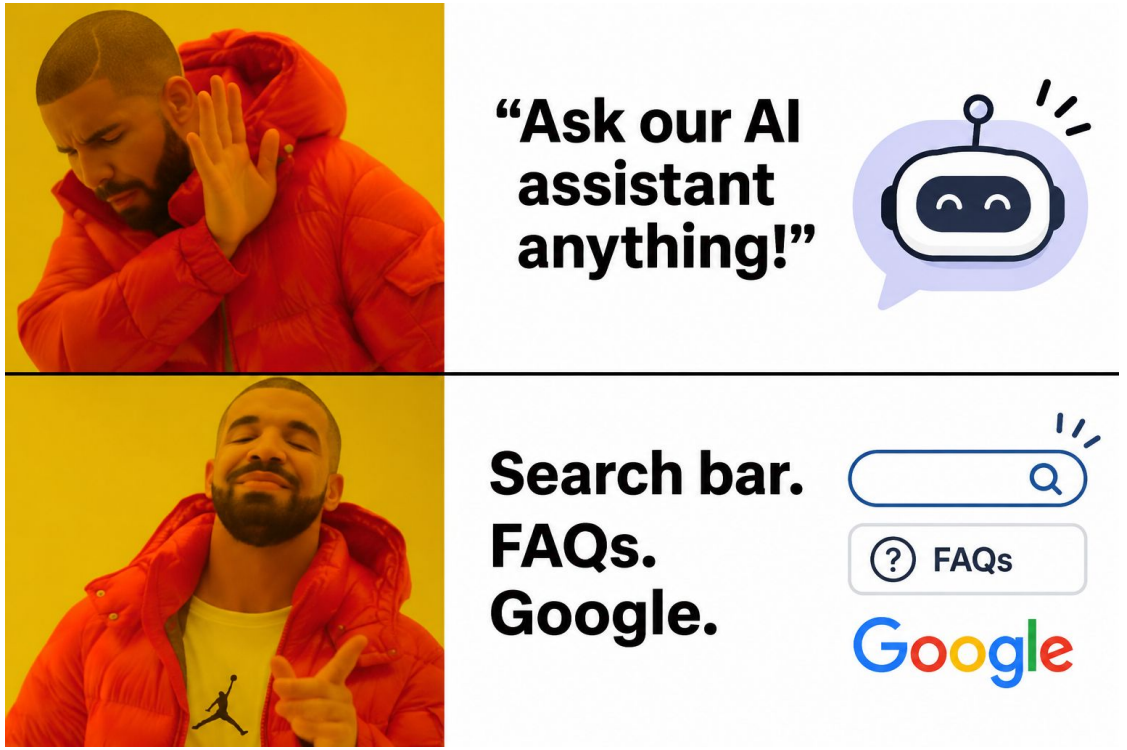
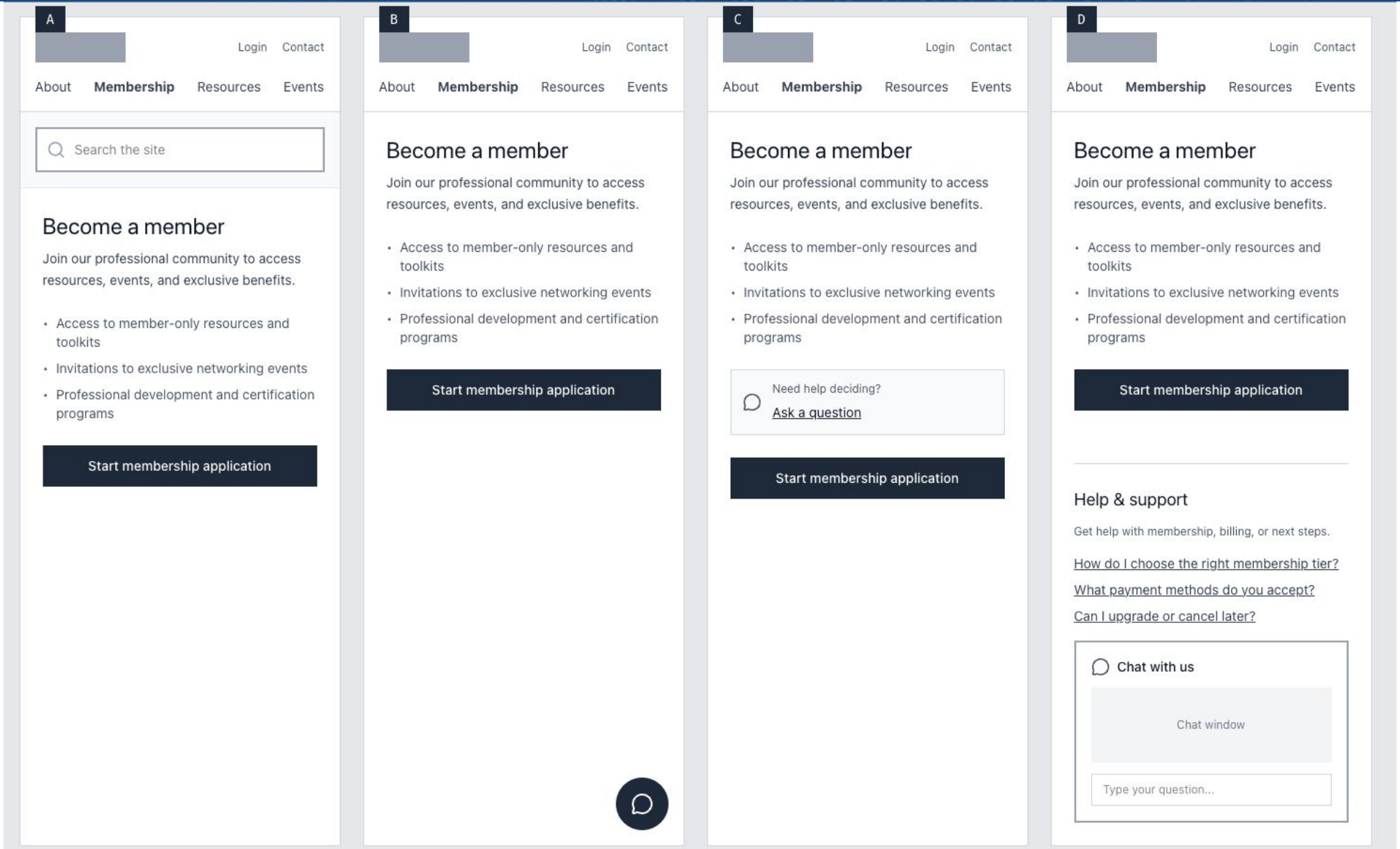
What We Learned

1. **Users Look for Search First**
2. **Google Still Wins the Trust Game**
3. **Nobody Takes AI at Face Value**
4. FAQs and Search Preferred
5. People Have Chat Baggage



Locating Help Wireframe



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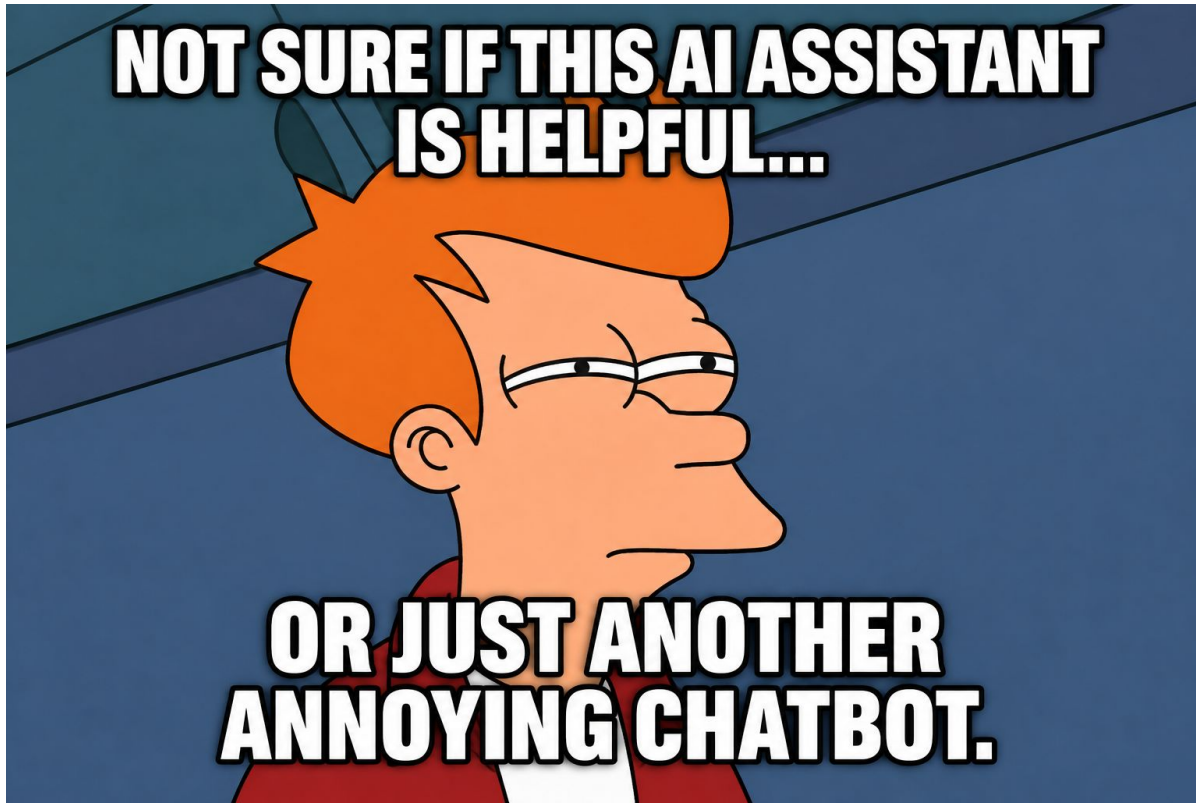



5 Surprising Findings

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1. Nobody Was Looking for Chat

Despite all the hype around AI chat…

Users consistently tried search or the navigation first.

Chat was usually a last resort.

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2. Age Expectations Reversed

Familiarity didn’t equal trust.

In several sessions, the younger users were actually the most critical of AI answers.

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3. The IRS Beat ChatGPT

The IRS Interactive Tax Assistant was rated **more trustworthy** than ChatGPT and Google.

Why?

Because **authority beat interface polish.**

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4. Inputs Change for AI vs. Search

Multiple participants changed their query style when using ChatGPT versus Google — switching from keywords to full conversational questions.

This suggests users **intuitively understand different interaction models**.

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5. Standard Placement Didn't Work

Even though designers expect users to see chat in the bottom corner…

Several participants never noticed it at all.

The question is not "How do we design better chat?"

The question is "When do users actually want chat?"


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5 Tips for Overcoming Chat Skepticism

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1. Position Chat as Backup

Design help in layers

1. Search
2. FAQs
3. Chat

Chat should feel like: “Still stuck? Talk to us.”

Not the first thing users see.

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2. Don’t Hide the AI. Explain It.

Show:

- Sources
- Citations
- Confidence levels

Transparency increased trust every time.

Bonus tip: Don’t use a fake photos or cute name.

Overview Experiences Private dining Concierge Popular dishes

Concierge

Our AI assistant, Concierg

Is this restaurant good for big groups?

Popular dishes



sau

fish
cas

62

15 Photos

Explore Girl & the Goat's



Girl & the Goat

der • Contemporary Am...

7:00 PM

7:30 PM 7:45 PM

4 timeslots left

ilability

Concierge AI Beta

Does this restaurant have vegan food?

Yes, Girl & the Goat offers vegan options! There's a dedicated vegan menu available upon request, and guests consistently praise the creativity and quality of the plant-based dishes. Examples of vegan-friendly items that have received rave reviews include:

- Crispy cauliflower
- Roasted beets with tangy sauce
- Vegetable curry
- Eggplant parmesan
- Vegan coconut flan (for dessert)
- Vegan ice cream

The kitchen is happy to accommodate multiple dietary preferences, so just let your server know if you'd like to see their vegan selections.

Ask Concierge a question

Concierge is AI-powered and may include errors

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3. Design Seamless Human Handoff from Day One

- ✓ Build clear escalation triggers (“Let me connect you with a specialist”)
- ✓ Maintain chat history during transfers
- ✓ Set expectations about wait times
- ✓ Provide clear indication when the handoff occurs and acknowledge the AI conversation context rather than starting over

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4. Give Users a Starting Point

Instead of an empty chat box, provide:

- Common questions
- Quick actions
- Guided prompts

Users felt more confident when the system showed what it could do.

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5. Test With Actual Users

Test different positions with your specific user base and content context.

Chat discoverability matters more than following design patterns that may not work for your audience.



BONUS TIP

Chat shines when you’re the source of truth

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Bonus Tip!
Listen for These Two Thoughts

When they're thinking:

- "I need your answer, not a general one"
- "I can't tell which rule applies to me"

That's when chat becomes the fastest path to a trusted answer.

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Questions?

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Say Hello!



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