

FROM SEARCH TO GENAI: NEW RESEARCH ON CONSUMER TRUST, BRAND STRATEGY, AND DISCOVERY

Presented by: Kelsey Libert, Cofounder, Fractl

RESEARCH BY:



Search Engine Land



WHY TRUST ME?

- ★ **#1** on Clutch "**Content Marketing: Leaders Matrix**" 34k listed firms
- ★ **"Top 5% Most Effective Accounts"** for **Digital PR** by BuzzStream
- ★ Launched **5,000+ earned media campaigns** for Fortune 500s & SMBs

Industry Research Featured In:



FAST COMPANY

MOZ

TIME

Inc.

Entrepreneur

HubSpot

PR Daily



MarketingProfs

Search Engine Land

Fractl's Client Testimonials:

- "Fractl transformed our shadow brand into a leading voice."
- "Fractl's content outperforms ours in engagement and conversions."
- "Fractl hit all their KPIs, we've even been featured on TV as a result of their work!"
- "Fractl is the Michael Jordan of link building."

PART 1

The AI Search Reckoning

How consumer trust broke in one year—and why
credibility is the new currency of search.

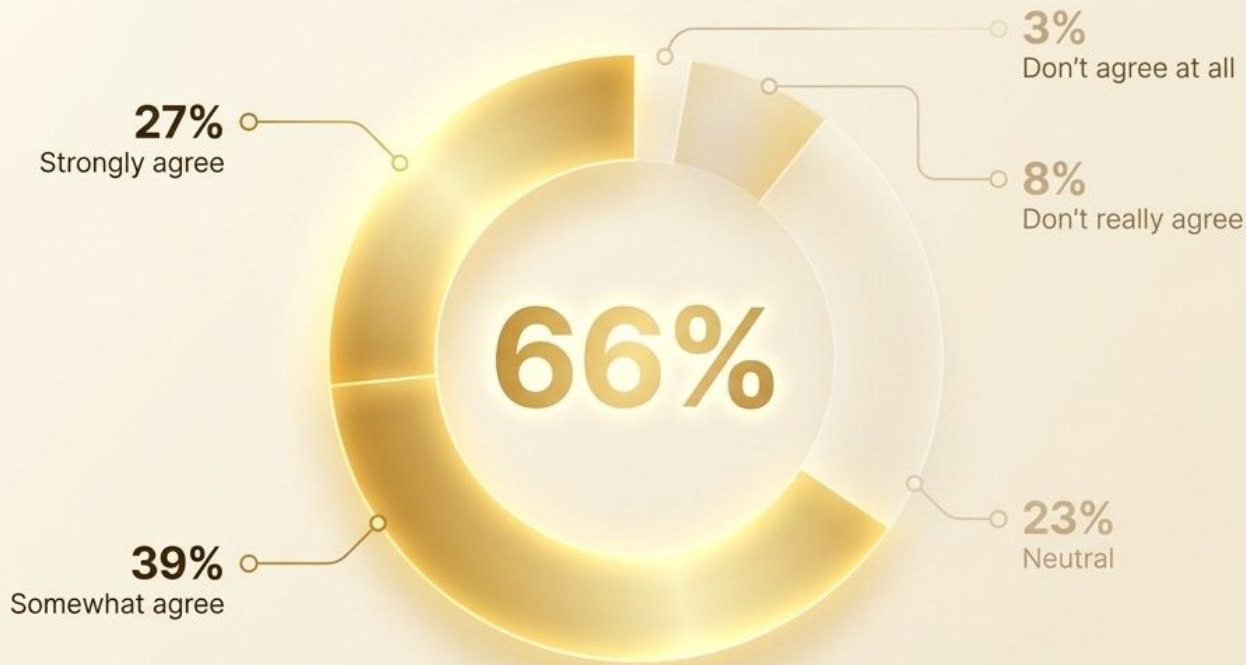
2025: BLIND TRUST DROVE FRICTIONLESS ADOPTION



82% Found AI Search More Helpful



2025: CONSUMERS PREDICT “THE END OF THE SERPS”



At the height of the honeymoon, two-thirds of consumers expected AI to completely replace traditional search within five years.

2026: “THE HONEYMOON PHASE” ENDS

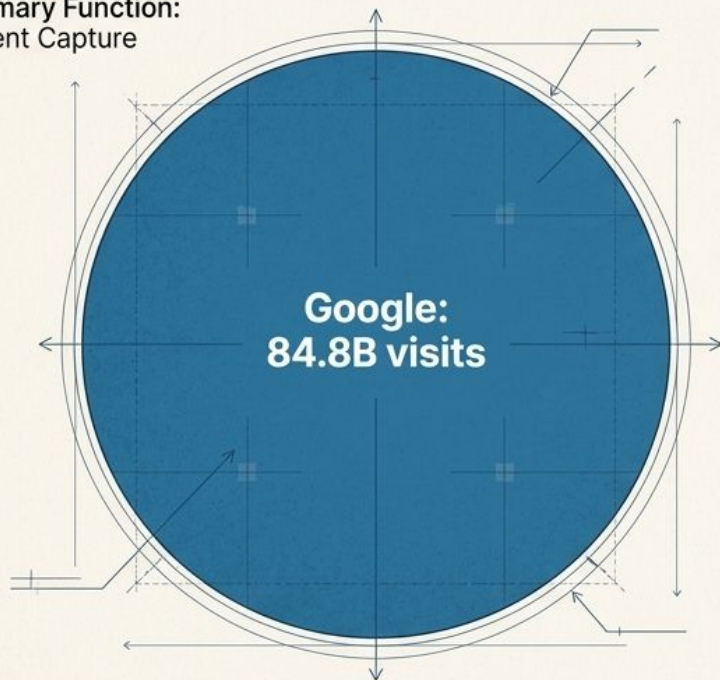


THE SKEPTIC CAMP GREW 6X

SEARCH IS NO LONGER A PLATFORM IT'S A CROSS-CHANNEL BEHAVIOR

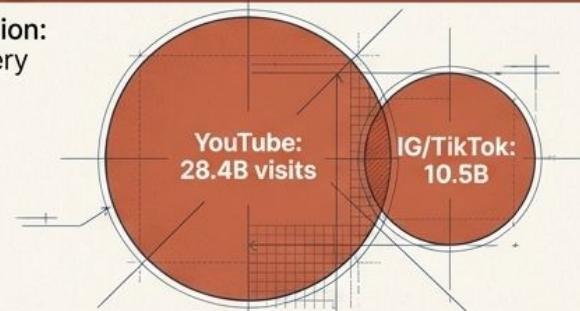
Search & Core

Primary Function:
Intent Capture



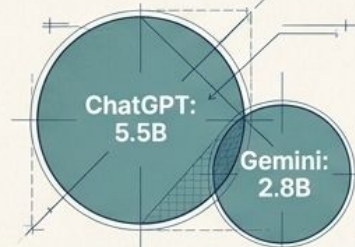
Video & Visual

Primary Function:
Brand Discovery



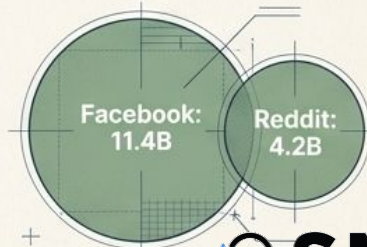
AI & Chat

Primary Function:
Research & Learning



Community & Dark Social

Primary Function:
Human Validation



ORGANIC VISIBILITY ISN'T DISAPPEARING IT'S DIVERSIFYING

50%

OF MARKETERS
REPORT TRAFFIC
DECLINES SINCE
AI OVERVIEWS
LAUNCHED

**61% DIRECTLY
BLAME AI TOOLS**

Significantly contributed **19%**,
Somewhat contributed **42%**

57%

see growth in
Social
(TikTok, Reddit,
YouTube).

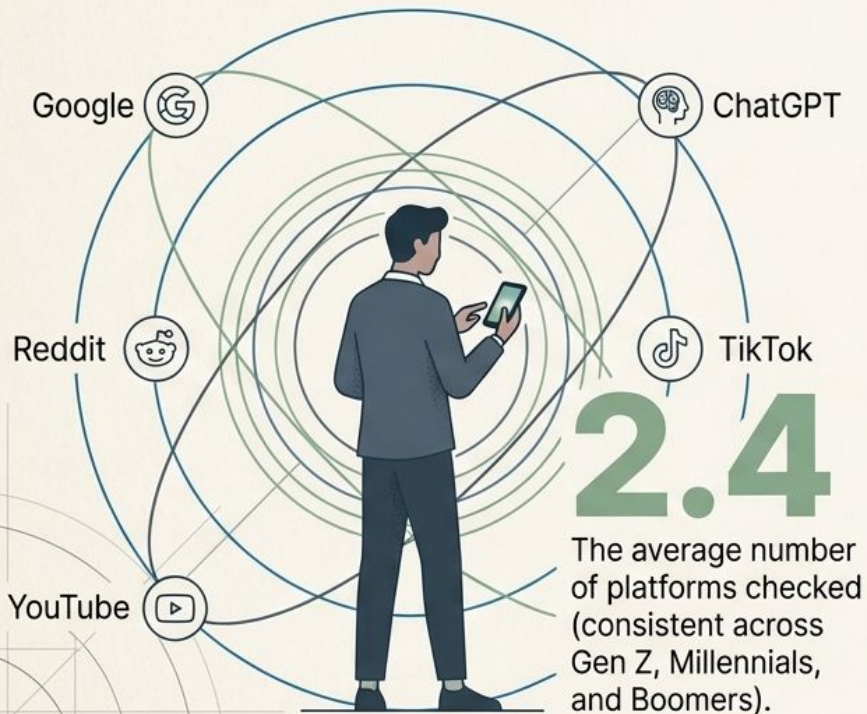


40%

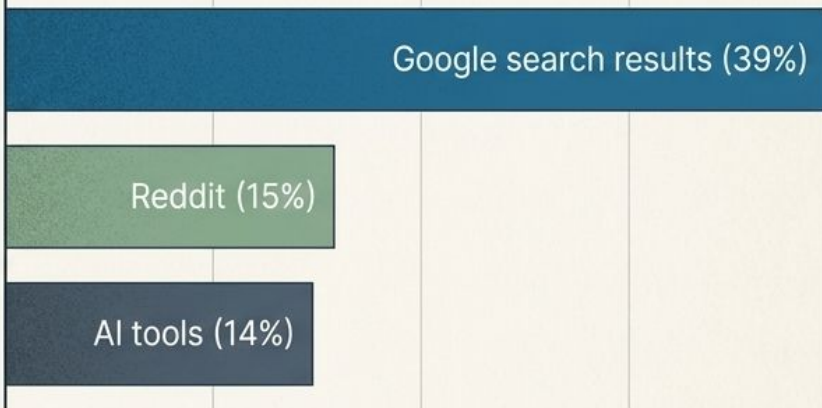
see growth in
AI Assistants
(ChatGPT,
Perplexity).



CONSUMERS USE 2.4 TOUCHPOINTS TO VALIDATE A PURCHASE



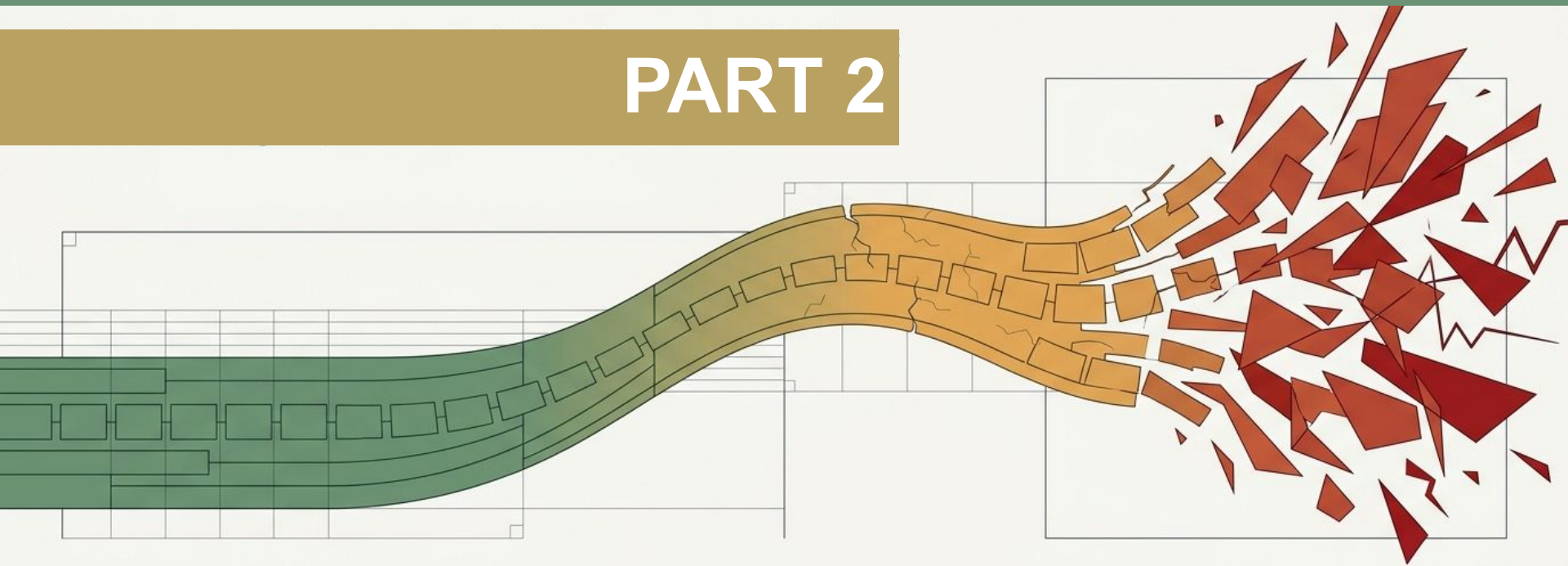
The Trust Hierarchy: When money is on the line



Google still leads AI 3:1 for trusted product recommendations

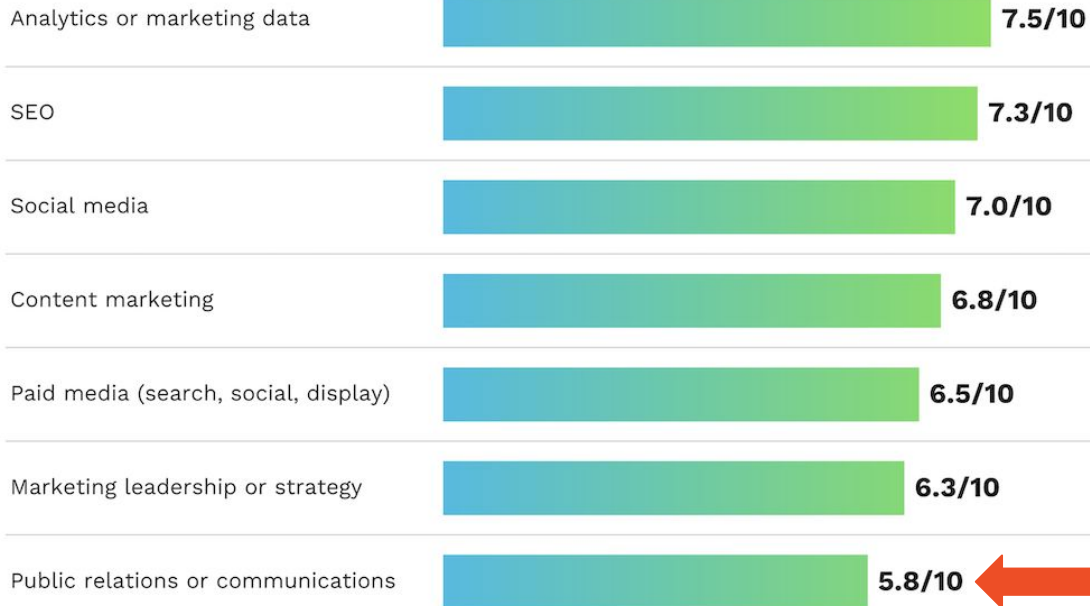
PROTECTING BRAND EQUITY IN *THE ERA OF INFINITE CONTENT*

PART 2



MARKETERS ARE TRAPPED IN AN OPERATIONAL PRESSURE COOKER

PRESSURE TO ADOPT AI BY MARKETING FUNCTION (0-10)



55%

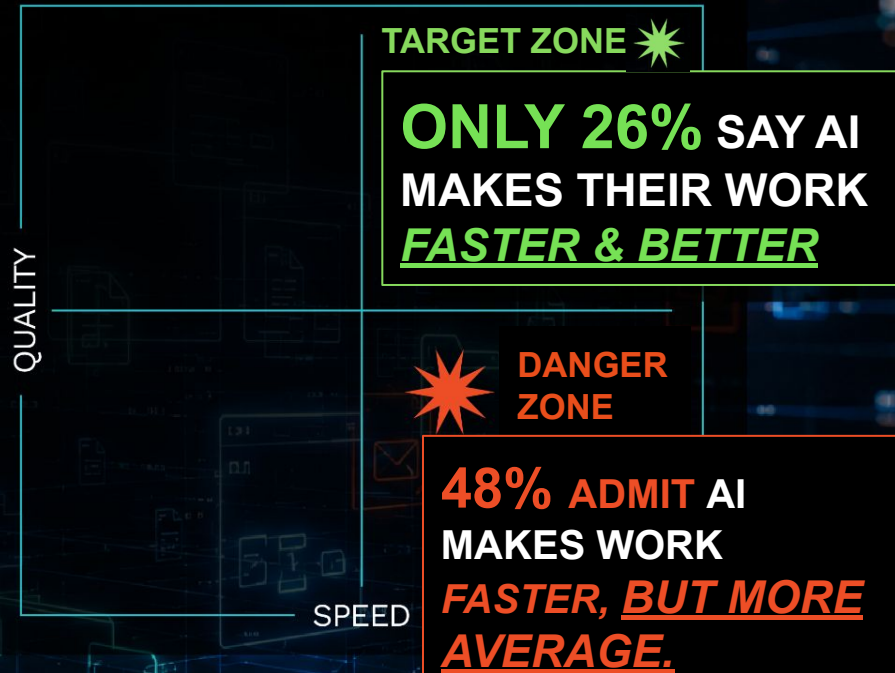
report 7 or higher

Pressure to adopt AI **remains high.**

WE'RE BUYING PRODUCTION SPEED AT THE COST OF DISTINCTION

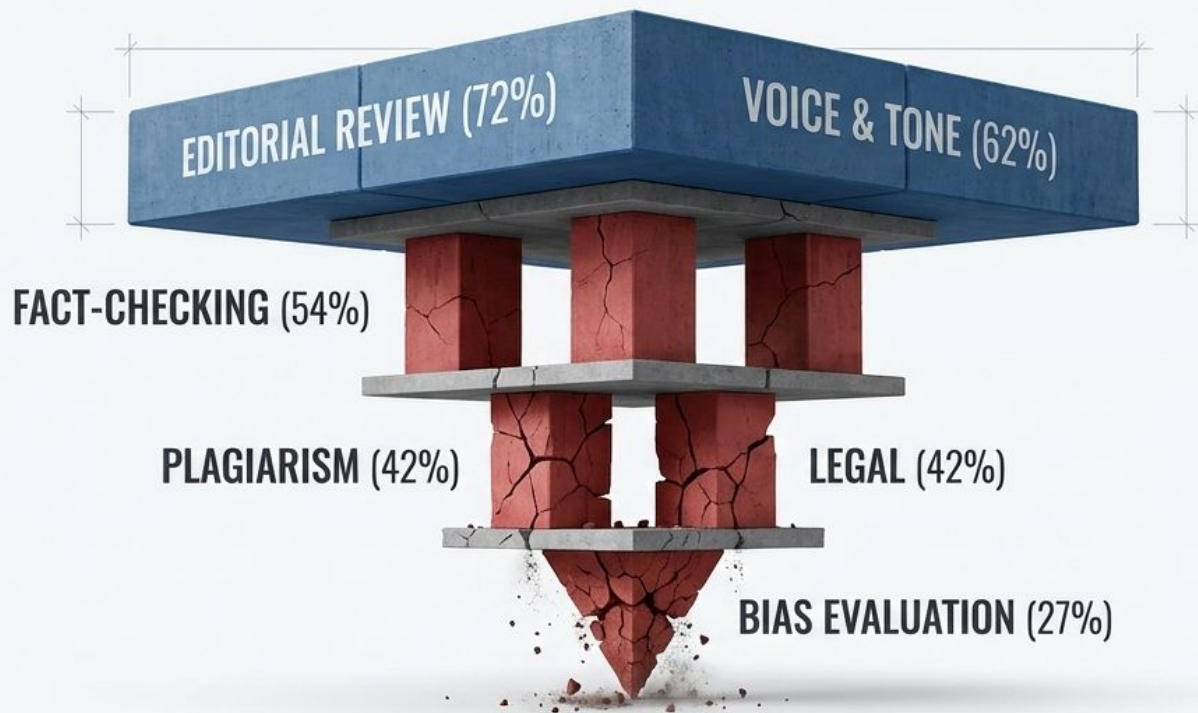
53%

OF ALL MARKETING WORK
NOW INVOLVES AI TOOLS
(UP FROM 38% IN 2025)



WE ARE BALANCING OUR AI STRATEGY UPSIDE DOWN

Marketers are spending the majority of their human capital polishing aesthetics while neglecting structural and ethical integrity.



THE DEFAULT POSTURE IS WARINESS



40%
OF CONSUMERS SAY
THEIR *TRUST*
WOULD
DECREASE
IF A FAVORITE
BRAND *USED AI*
FOR *MOST OF ITS*
MARKETING

TRANSPARENCY IS NOW A TRUST SIGNAL

THE CORPORATE SIDE

20%

Only 20% of organizations
always disclose their AI use.

33% never disclose at all

THE CONSUMER SIDE

84% - 91%

Yet 84% to 91% of consumers
demand AI labeling across all formats
(Text, Video, Audio, Images)

← **THE TRUST GAP** →

THE AI BOTTLENECK IS HUMAN ENABLEMENT

Human Capital

The Skills Gap

Team training and skill gaps (26%)

Operational Friction

The Chaos of Choice

Tool fragmentation (20%)

Administrative Noise

The Distractions

Budget constraints (19%)

Unclear ROI (12%)

Legal or compliance (12%)

Leadership buy-in (2%)

YOUR NEXT PR CRISIS MAY START WITH AN AI ANSWER

27%

The Exposure Level:

27% of brands have already been inaccurately described or misrepresented in AI-generated responses.

The Business Cost:

14% confirm an AI inaccuracy has impacted a real customer relationship, sale, or triggered a PR situation.

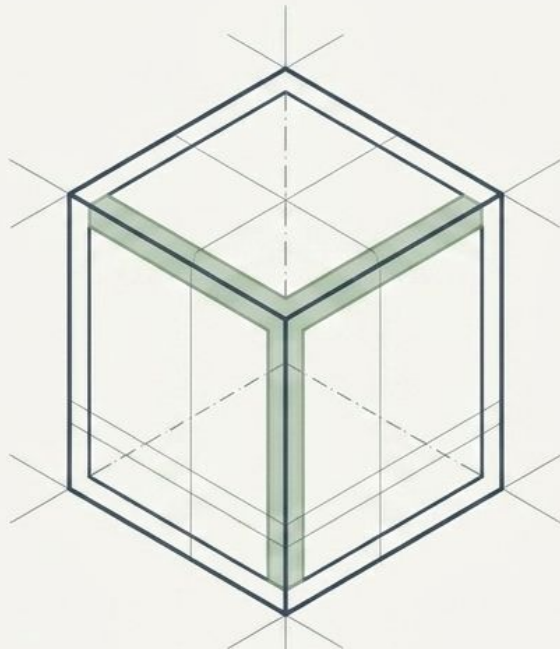
24%

The Blind Spot:

Only 24% of organizations have a formal, documented monitoring process for AI brand mentions.

The Readiness Gap:

The space between the 27% already misrepresented and the 24% actively monitoring is where the next major brand PR crisis lives.



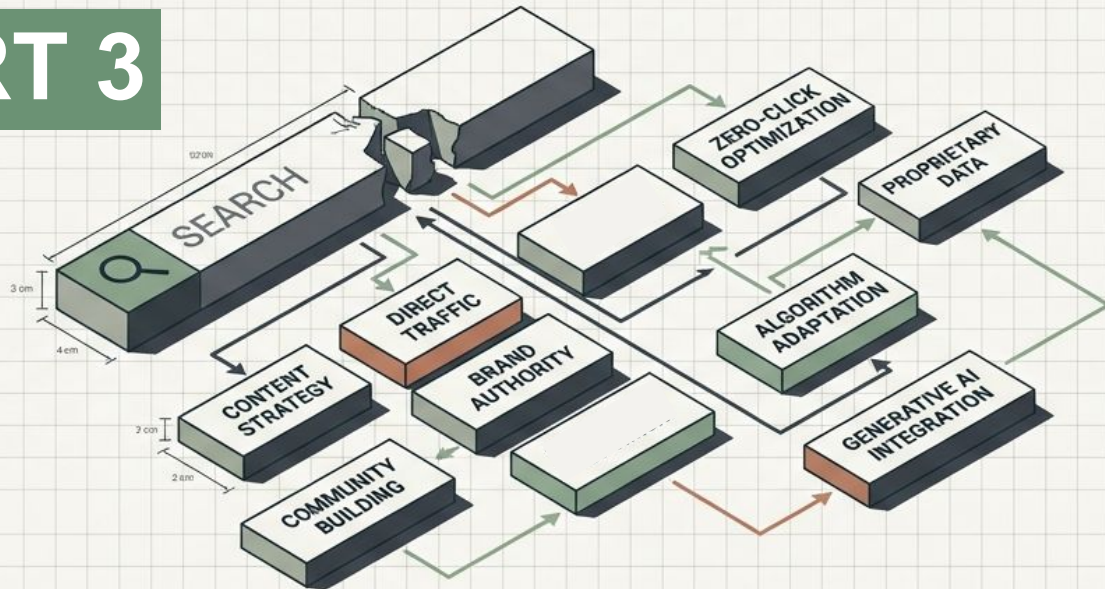
FIX THE INFRASTRUCTURE BEFORE YOU SCALE THE OUTPUT.

AI WON'T KILL CREDIBILITY. UNTRAINED OVERSIGHT WILL.

THE POST-SEARCH PLAYBOOK

How marketing leaders are reallocating resources to build moats, adapt to algorithms, and offset the impact of Generative AI

PART 3



The AI Pivot: How Marketers Are Hedging




59% Prioritize Social Brand Presence

Building a footprint on social platforms is now the top strategy.





As AI changes search, marketers diversify budgets to maintain visibility.




54% Optimize for AI Answers

Over half are investing in Generative Engine Optimization (GEO).



44% Double Down on Authority

High-quality, expert-led content remains a critical pillar.

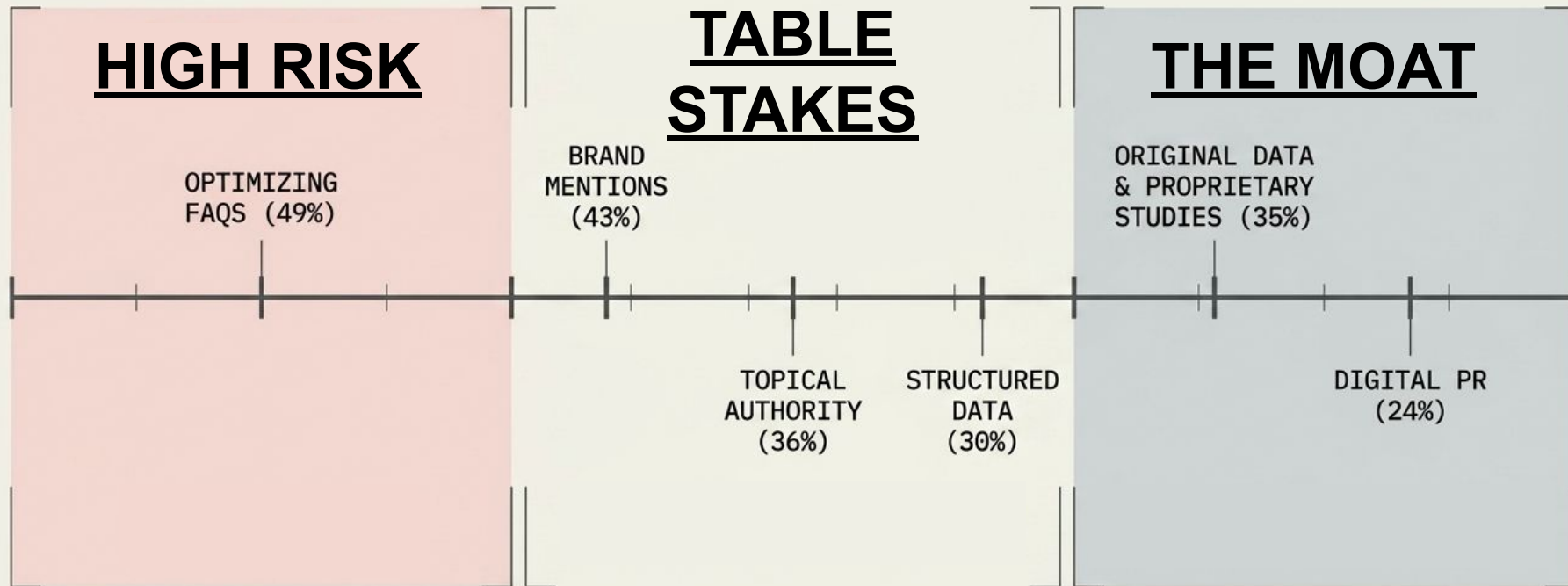


37% Focus on Owned Audiences

Strengthening email lists and diversifying traffic sources away from Google.



WHICH GEO TACTICS ARE MARKETERS USING?



THE GEO PLAYBOOK IS AHEAD OF THE GEO DASHBOARD

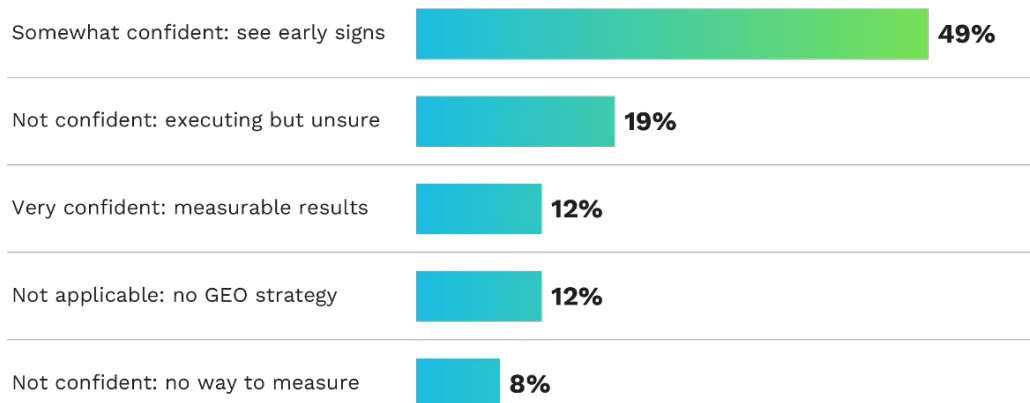
How confident are marketers their GEO strategy is working?



61%

are confident in their GEO strategy. The other 39% are running tactics without measurable confidence or have no strategy at all.

Full distribution of responses



YOUR FUTURE BRAND VISIBILITY DEPENDS ON

THE DEPTH AND UNIQUENESS OF YOUR SME AND THE BREADTH OF YOUR BRAND MENTIONS



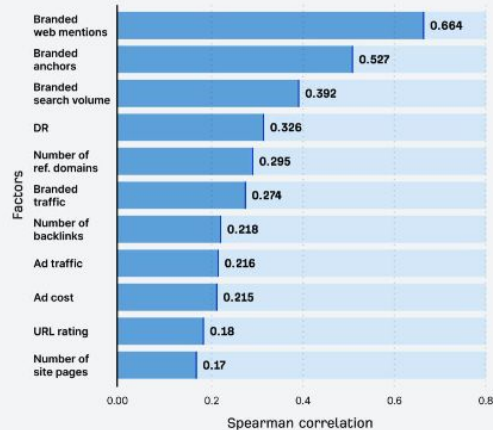
Louise Linehan · 1st
Content Marketer at Ahrefs
1w · Edited · 🌐

Want AI overviews to cite your brand? Here's what you need to know 📌

Branded web mentions show the strongest correlation (0.664) ...more

Factors that correlate with brand appearance in AI overviews

Based on a study of ~75K brands.
Source: Ahrefs Brand Radar and Ahrefs Site Explorer.



Britney Muller · 1st
AI Educator | AI Consultant | Entrepreneur
3mo · 🌐

Brand mentions are the new backlinks in the age of AI search. While Google counts links, AI counts conversations. The game has shifted from link-building to voice-building.

Here's what's fascinating: AI doesn't need hyperlinks to understand authority, it reads context more like humans do.

Authentic voices will rise to the top in a world drowning in AI-generated sameness. Your digital footprint is now measured by who's talking about you, not just linking to you.

🗨️ The secret? Being genuinely quotable beats being technically optimized. While everyone is creating AI slop, the winners will be those brave enough to stand out with original insights, unique opinions and bold perspectives.

This isn't just a shift in search; it's a return to what actually matters: saying something worth repeating.



Neil Patel [in](#) · 1st
Co-Founder at Neil Patel Digital
[View my services](#)
3w · 🌐

20 years of SEO obsession over backlinks. Turns out branded mentions on credible sites predict AI visibility better. That's not a small shift. That's the whole strategy flipped.



Amanda J. [🔒](#) · Following
MozCon x3 Speaker, BrightonSEO speaker. SEO process and strategy ...
5mo · 🌐

So... I quadrupled AI visibility for a PI lawyer this month.

They were already getting cases from ChatGPT, but after the first couple of tests, their "best lawyer" and "top-rated" prompt mentions jumped from 50 mentions → 200+

We haven't even done any of the interesting test ideas yet 🤖

The majority of the changes made? Content and increasing brand mentions on third party sites.

👍👎👏 36

6 comments

AI REWARDS BRANDS PEOPLE TALK ABOUT

HIGHEST INFLUENCE

(Strongest AI Visibility Signals)



YouTube mentions, impressions, and branded web mentions

Correlations: **0.50–0.74**

MEDIUM INFLUENCE

(Helpful But Not Dominant)



Branded search volume, Domain Rating (DR), and referring domains

Correlations: **0.25–0.49**

LOWEST INFLUENCE

(Weakest AI Visibility Signals)



Ad spend, total backlink count, and site page volume

Correlations: **< 0.30**

BOTTOM LINE: AI systems reward brand presence and mentions more than traditional SEO scale metrics.

Based on Ahrefs analysis of ~75K brands across ChatGPT, AI Mode, and AI Overviews.

AI VISIBILITY BUILDS ON SEO AUTHORITY

All-industry signal correlations (Spearman ρ vs. LLM recommendation score)

SIGNAL	GROUP	P (SPEARMAN)	R ²	N	TIER
Search Engine Appearances	Search	+0.241	5.8%	10,914	STRONG
Best Search Engine Rank	Search	+0.238	5.7%	10,914	STRONG
SE Outbound Links	Search	+0.230	5.3%	13,828	STRONG
Backlink Count	Backlinks	+0.204	4.2%	20,402	STRONG
BL Authority	Backlinks	+0.200	4%	19,988	STRONG
BL Authority (Exp)	Backlinks	+0.199	3.9%	19,988	CONFIRMED
PageRank	Backlinks	+0.194	3.7%	20,402	CONFIRMED
HC	Backlinks	+0.169	2.8%	20,402	CONFIRMED
Common Crawl	Web	+0.123	1.5%	14,057	CONFIRMED
Wikidata	Reference	+0.120	1.4%	1,619	CONFIRMED
Reddit Comments	Social	+0.111	1.2%	6,171	CONFIRMED

<https://oppalerts.com/LLM-Ranking-Factors/>

BECOME A SOURCE JOURNALISTS TRUST

Bloomberg

"I'm interested in receiving **future studies.**"



"This is interesting! If you have a **media list**, I would love it if you could add me."



"This sounds interesting!"



"Now that's a **f***ing graphic.**"

COMPUTERWORLD

"I'm interested in **what your client has to say** on these issues."

Newsweek

"Thanks for these stats, I think it'll make an **interesting feature!**"



"I would love to **collaborate** on future projects!"

TIME

"The survey and **findings are great.** If you do more of these, please **put me on a list.** Fascinating."

The Washington Post

"Please add me to **your media list** for future research."

Forbes

"I'm always on the **lookout** for these types of studies!"



"I'm absolutely interested in covering this topic! It's right up my alley, and that data is **so interesting.**"



"This video is **fantastic!**"



"**We're excited** to move forward with this story!"



LEVERAGE YOUR LEADERS AS SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

6 Ways to Heat Your Home When the Power Is Out – HVAC Pros Reveal the Life-Saving Methods to Stave Off Cold if Disaster Strikes

Better Homes & Gardens

Brandon Young, CEO at Payless Power says, The most important thing is to insulate your house. Weatherstrip or towel-seal the doors and windows shut off unused rooms, and huddle together in the warmest area.

'It's surprising how much of a difference this may make. Heavy drapes [with some curtain hacks for a warmer home], carpets, and quilts can do the trick.'

7 Energy Bill "Tricks" People Use to Cut Home Costs—We Asked Pros If Any of Them Are Actually Worth Trying

By ASHLEY CHALMERS | Published on 05/16/26

MEET THE EXPERT

Brandon Young is the CEO of Payless Power.

the spruce

Make your best home.

GO BankingRates

Banking Investing Credit Cards Loans Retirement Saving & Spending

Why Your Electric Bill Could Spike

Brandon Young, CEO of Payless Power, explained, "Holiday lights can contribute to increased electricity usage due to factors such as continuous operation, high wattage, especially in traditional incandescent lights, additional decorations like animated displays, inflatables and the use of multiple strings of lights."

Here's a full breakdown of how holiday lights are hiking up your electric bill.

RUN SURVEYS FOR EXCLUSIVE DATA

The New York Times

YOUR MONEY ADVISER

Looking for a College Scholarship on Social Media Sites? Buyer, Beware.

Students say they trust their peers' advice more than financial advisers', a new survey found. But experts say students need to do their own research.

About two-thirds of college students search for scholarships on TikTok at least occasionally, and about 20 percent search weekly, according to a **February survey** of 274 college students and recent graduates by the private lender Sallie Mae, which also offers the [Scholly scholarship search tool](#). (The company is changing its

SURVEY

AI Mode All Images Video

News Shopping Books More Tools

Federal News Network

Many fired probationary employees have not 'moved on,' survey shows

A survey of hundreds of probationary federal employees who were fired last year reveals lasting impacts for their careers, mental health and former...

3 days ago

Past week

Sorted by relevance

Advanced Search

Clear

About 3,750,000 results (0.46s)

Recent

Past hour

Past 24 hours

Past week ✓

Past month

Past year

VICE Magazine Pulse Life Tech Munchies Music Waypoint Shop Members Subscribe

Life

'Future Faking' Is Ruining Modern Dating, and Almost Everyone Has Experienced It

A new survey found that 32% of singles have dealt with big romantic promises that never actually happened.

By Ashley Fike May 25, 2026, 1:30am

USA TODAY MAKE MORE OF YOUR MONEY 8-week series REAL ESTATE LISTINGS Check home prices USA 250 Most iconic US b

U.S. Politics Sports Entertainment Life Money Travel Opinion Crossword

In a survey of more than 1,000 Americans by DOSS, 60% of shoppers said they have dropped a brand they were previously loyal to because of an uptick in price. USA TODAY was given an exclusive first look at the study.

"Rising prices appear to be changing not just how Americans spend, but who they're willing to spend with," Sebastiaan Debrouwere, DOSS vice president of business development and marketing, told USA TODAY. DOSS' products help businesses automate inventory management.

ANALYZE GOVERNMENT DATASETS

CLIMATE

ENERGY

The 5 Big Reasons Why Electricity Bills Are So High Right Now

A report from [Payless Power](#), a Texas electricity company, found that increasingly hotter summers have contributed to a 400% increase in utility rates since the mid-1970s. The report found that the average American household paid about \$784 for electricity during the summer of 2025—6% higher than 2024.

TIME

Introducing TIME Games: Play Now

The screenshot shows a news article from KDFW-TV (Channel 33). The article is titled "Texas metros rank for electricity grid stress as demand rises" and is categorized under "TEXAS". The author is Abbey Bowling, and the article was posted on May 20, 2026, at 12:05 PM CDT and updated on May 20, 2026, at 10:55 AM CDT. The article content is partially visible in a separate block below.

SHARE

DALLAS (KDFW) — A [new study by Payless Power](#) indicates that several smaller Texas cities are projected to experience greater summer electricity grid stress in 2026 compared to the state's largest metropolitan areas.

The "2026 Texas Summer Power Index" ranked 26 Texas metros based on factors related to peak summer electricity demand.

USE SEARCH VOLUME DATA

Interested in rescuing? These are the dog breeds most searched in US



Story by Liz O'Connell • 2w • ⌚ 3 min read

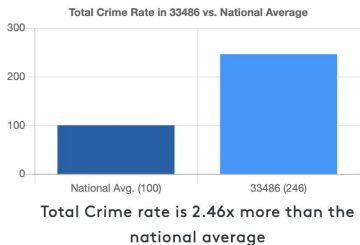
A newly released analysis from MetLife [Pet Insurance](#) examined Google search volume for 222 pet-related keywords across all 50 states over the past year, alongside a nationwide survey on pet adoption and purchasing trends to better understand how people explore pet ownership online.

CREATE INTERACTIVE TOOLS

Boca Raton (33486) Crime Index

[DOWNLOAD](#)

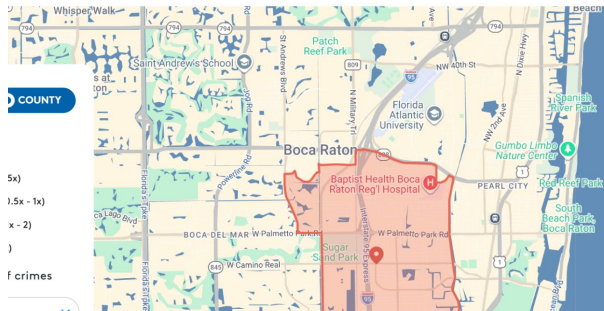
CATEGORY	LOCAL INDEX	VS. NATIONAL INDEX
Assault	300	3x more than average
Burglary	379	3.79x more than average
Larceny	327	3.27x more than average
Murder	110	1.1x more than average
Motor Vehicle Theft	279	2.79x more than average
Personal Crime	181	1.81x more than average
Property Crime	332	3.32x more than average
Rape	96	0.04x less than average



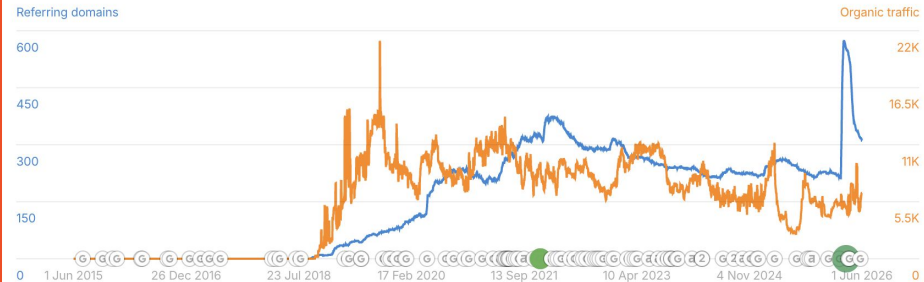
Crime Rate Maps from ADT

Interactive crime map helps you understand as much as possible about potential crime in your city or local neighborhood.

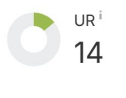
Boca Raton, FL 33486, USA



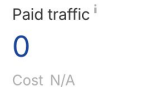
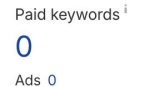
- Referring domains
- Domain Rating
- URL Rating
- Organic traffic
- Organic traffic value
- Organic pages
- Impressions
- Paid traffic
- Paid traffic cost
- Crawled pages



Backlink profile



Search



CREATE HELPFUL GUIDES

Resulting in 20K Monthly Organic Visits and 596 Keywords

Overview: [REDACTED] /tiktok-posting-timing
Best Times to Post on TikTok [REDACTED]

Backlink profile



Search

Organic keywords ⁱ	Organic traffic ⁱ
596 +338	20K +11.1K
Top 3 244 +116	Value \$6.4K -1.1K

Paid keywords ⁱ
0
Ads 0

Paid traffic ⁱ
0
Cost N/A

BECOME THE BRAND AI CONNECTS TO YOUR CATEGORY

BY ESTABLISHING YOUR DISTRIBUTION MOAT

Mainstream/News (AIOs Focus)



Google AIOs use Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) to favor highly vetted, U.S. media-dominant mainstream news for immediate trustworthiness.

Niche/Specialist (Pure LLMs Focus)



Pure LLMs lean heavily on specialist publishers for nuanced, vertical-specific queries.

NICHE SITES OFFER HIGHER BRAND RELEVANCE AND AFFINITY

Why High-Affinity Niche Sites Drive Brand Influence Beyond Traditional SEO Metrics

Analysis of SparkToro's "Hidden Gem" Publishers by Industry

Industry	Average Affinity	Average Domain Rating	Average Monthly Organic Traffic	Average Total Referring Domains
SaaS	91	76	3,533	4,984
Wellness	83	74	19,121	5,178
HealthTech	83	68	4,528	2,207
Education	79	70	12,981	3,311
FinTech	76	74	19,737	6,407
Insurance	72	68	13,428	3,963
Travel	67	67	8,269	2,676
Lifestyle	67	69	42,728	3,519

Source: SparkToro and Ahrefs



Small Sites, Big Influence: Media That Punch Above Their Traffic

Analysis of SparkToro Audience Affinity Data



TURN YOUR BLOG INTO AI'S SOURCE OF TRUTH FOR YOUR INDUSTRY

URL	Status	UR	Traffic	
150 Awesome Riddles for Kids [With Answers] https://www.prodigygame.com/main-en/blog/riddles-for-kids	New	10	237,982	50.8%
31 Back to School Hacks for 2025-2026 https://www.prodigygame.com/main-en/blog/back-to-school-cheat-sheet	New	4.5	34,460	7.4%
36 Classroom Rules for Student Success https://www.prodigygame.com/main-en/blog/classroom-rules	New	4.8	15,274	3.3%
107 Report Card Comments to Use and Adapt https://www.prodigygame.com/main-en/blog/report-card-comments	New	4.9	12,178	2.6%
The 5 Key Elements of a Story Explained Prodigy Game https://www.prodigygame.com/main-en/blog/story-elements	New	4.6	11,810	2.5%

ONLY 38% OF AI OVERVIEW CITATIONS COME FROM TOP 10 SERP RESULTS
(Ahrefs)

YOUR BLOG

Category #1	Category #2	Category #3
Cluster Pillar #1a	Cluster Pillar #2a	Cluster Pillar #3a
Cluster Pillar #1b	Cluster Pillar #2b	Cluster Pillar #3b
Cluster Pillar #1c	Cluster Pillar #2c	Cluster Pillar #3c

PART 4

THE 2026 PLAYBOOK

**HOW MARKETERS MOVE FROM AI
ADOPTION TO AI-ERA ADVANTAGE**

RESEARCH BY:



Search Engine Land



2026 AI SEARCH PLAYBOOK

The brands that win will build cross-channel engagement and trust.

1

MONITOR INFLUENTIAL PLATFORMS

Track accuracy, inclusion, sentiment, and citations across Google, AI Overviews, ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Reddit, YouTube, and review surfaces.

2026 AI SEARCH PLAYBOOK

The brands that win will build cross-channel engagement and trust.

2

BUILD ENTITY AUTHORITY

Invest in original research, subject matter experts, source transparency, and assets AI systems can verify and cite. Prioritize high-trust brand mentions and third-party validation.

2026 AI SEARCH PLAYBOOK

The brands that win will build cross-channel engagement and trust.

3

TRIANGULATE BRAND VISIBILITY

Stop optimizing for one destination. Make your brand the consensus answer across search, social proof, video, reviews, and trusted media.

2026 AI SEARCH PLAYBOOK

The brands that win will build cross-channel engagement and trust.

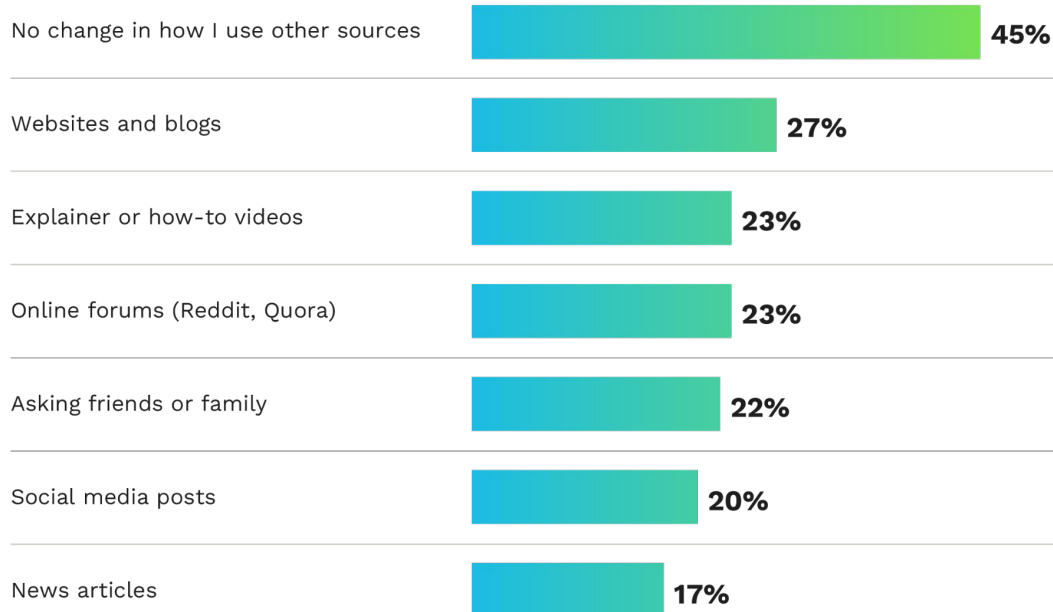
4

**GOVERN
FOR
TRUST**

Formalize AI disclosure, human review, hallucination escalation, and brand safety as operating rules, not one-off tactics.

AI IS REPLACING GENERIC ANSWERS *NOT TRUSTED SOURCES*

What Sources Do Consumers Rely On Less Because Of AI?



45%

REPORT NO CHANGE IN
HOW THEY USE OTHER
SOURCES

“

AI REWARDS BRAND EQUITY.

IT DOESN'T CREATE IT.

”



Obsessed With Search Marketing



GET THE
DECK



KELSEY LIBERT,
COFOUNDER

kelsey@frac.tl

www.frac.tl

[LinkedIn.com/in/KelseyLibert](https://www.linkedin.com/in/KelseyLibert)

kelseylibert.bsky.social