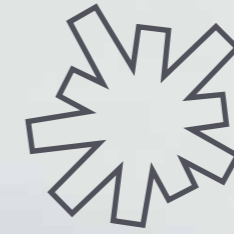


2026 AI SEARCH ERA



**fireworx**

IF THE MACHINE  
CAN'T FIND **YOU**

NEITHER  
CAN **THEY**

How disruptive brands win the new battle for AI visibility and why the window to act is right now.

# THE RULES OF DISCOVERY JUST CHANGED.

For over twenty years, if you wanted to be found online, you played Google's game. You optimised your keywords, built your backlinks, chased your rankings. And for a long time, that worked.

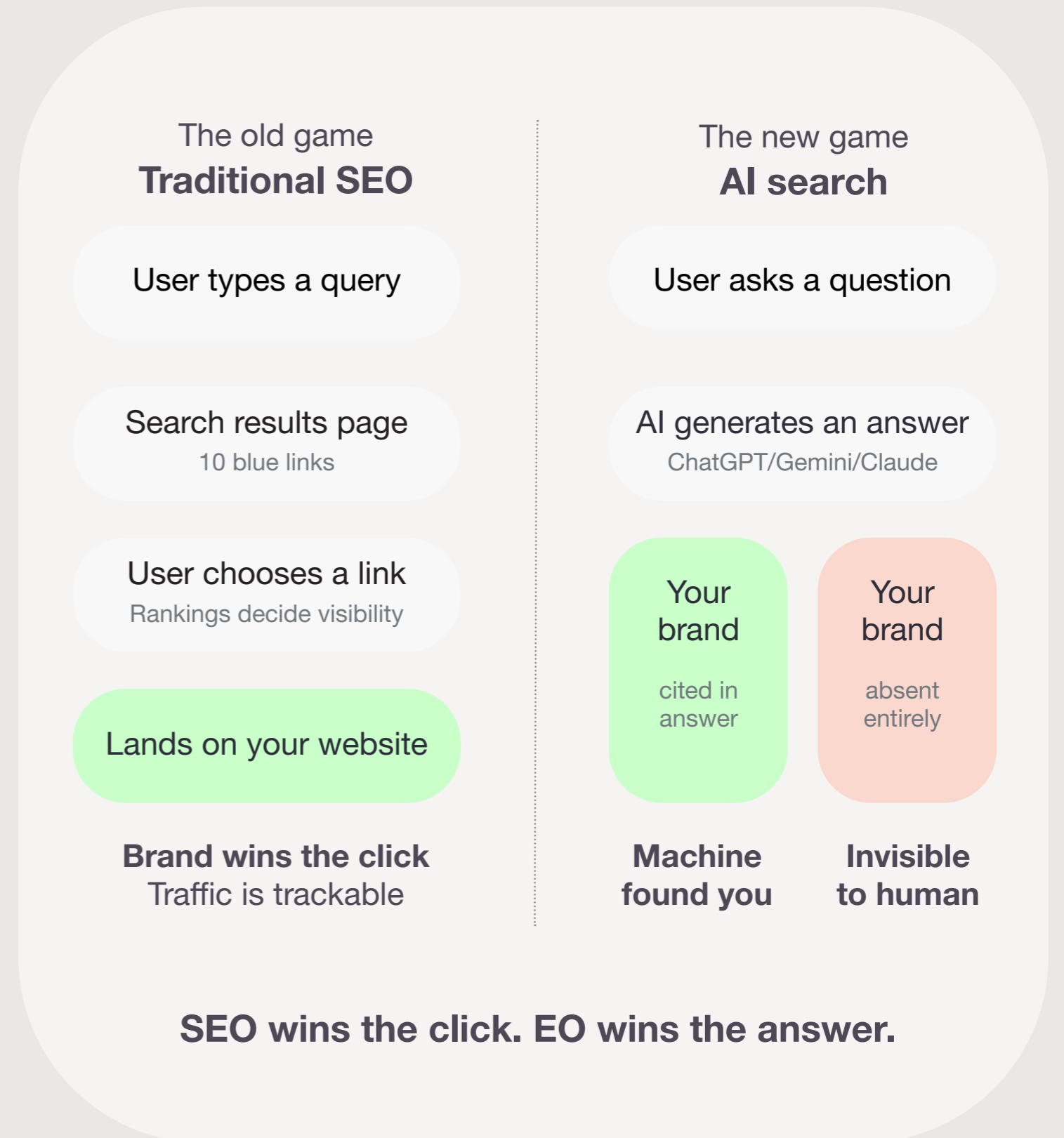
It doesn't work the way it used to.

AI has rewritten how people find things. ChatGPT. Perplexity. Google's AI Overviews. Voice assistants. These platforms don't give people a list of links to click through, they give them an answer. One answer. And if your brand isn't in that answer, you don't exist.

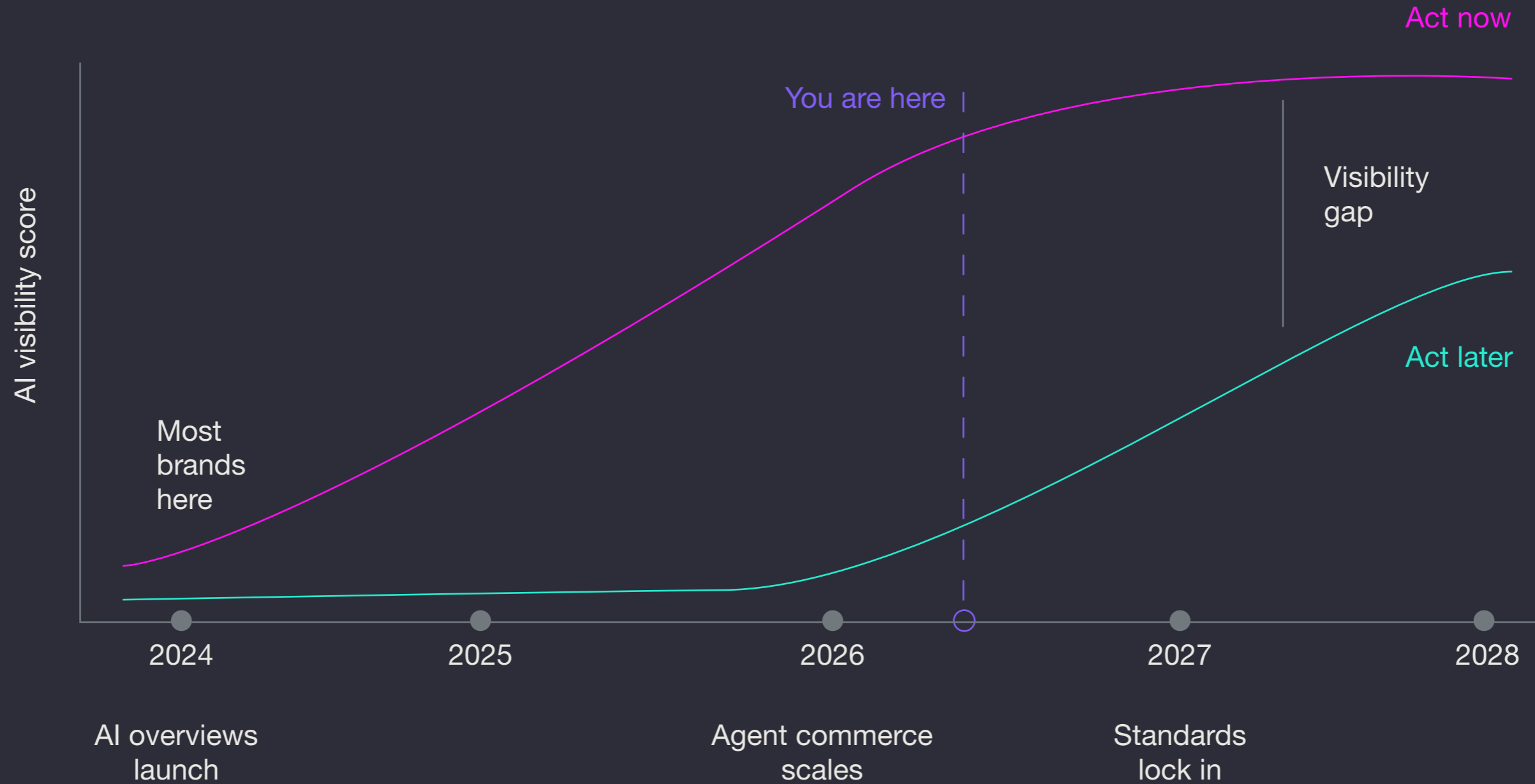
The brands winning right now aren't necessarily the biggest budgets or the oldest domains. They're the ones that understood this shift early and moved. Machine availability, whether AI can find, read, trust and cite your brand, is the new competitive battleground.

This guide gives you that playbook. It's built on the same disruptive thinking we apply to everything at Fireworx, cut through the noise, build a genuine competitive advantage, and grow faster than the brands playing it safe.

Let's get into it.



# THE FIRST-MOVER WINDOW



The old game was winning the click.  
The new game is winning the **answer**.  
And you need a completely different  
playbook to do it.



# THE LANDSCAPE HAS SHIFTED. HAVE YOU?

**Understanding the scale of the disruption, and why traditional SEO alone is no longer enough.**

When someone asks ChatGPT to recommend the best project management tool for a small team, they get one answer, not ten blue links. That answer was shaped by training data, citations, structured content and brand authority signals. Your ranking position in Google has almost nothing to do with it.

AI-powered discovery is up over 500% in the last two years. Google's own organic traffic share fell for the first time in a decade, down 1.75% year-on-year. Publishers are reporting between 1–25% traffic losses from search. Click-throughs have dropped nearly 30% since AI Overviews launched.

This isn't a trend. This is a structural shift. And most brands are still playing the old game.

**500%**

Growth in AI-driven discovery over the past two years

**30%**

Drop in click-throughs since Google AI Overviews launched

**4.4x**

More valuable: AI-referred visitors vs. traditional organic

# FROM SEO TO EO.

You may have heard the acronyms: GEO (Generative Engine Optimisation), AEO (Answer Engine Optimisation), AIO (AI Optimisation). They're all pointing at the same thing, optimising your brand so AI systems can find it, trust it, and cite it.

At Fireworx, we call it Engine Optimisation (EO): the discipline of making your brand legible, credible and retrievable to AI models. It sits alongside SEO, it doesn't replace it, but right now, most brands are spending 100% of their energy on a game that's rapidly sharing the stage.

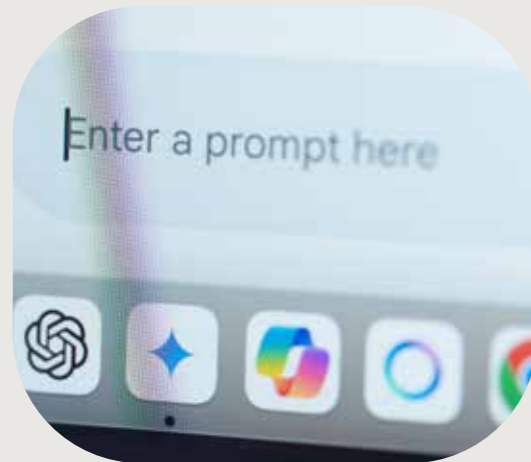


Traditional SEO focused on winning the click. Machine availability focuses on winning the answer. Moving from isolated content updates to a centralised authority model ensures that AI agents find and recommend your brand as the **primary** source of truth.



# FIVE THREATS TO YOUR VISIBILITY RIGHT NOW

The specific ways AI search is eroding your brand presence, and what to do about each one.



## ZERO-CLICK JOURNEYS

AI gives the answer directly. Users never visit your site. Traditional analytics can't see it happening, so most brands don't even know they're losing.

**Structure content with schema, FAQs and trusted citations. Measure Share of Model, not just clicks. still playing the old game.**



## BRANDLESS ATTRIBUTION

LLMs use your content to build their answer, then don't mention you. You're doing the work; someone else is getting the credit.

**Mirror real-world question phrasing. Build content that naturally triggers branded responses.**



## MODEL HALLUCINATIONS

When AI can't find authoritative structured data, it makes things up. Wrong prices, outdated claims, incorrect positioning, in sectors like healthcare or finance, this is serious.

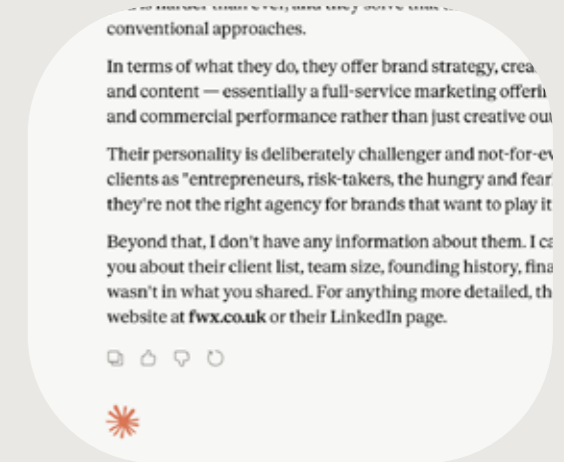
**Build machine-readable content hubs. Audit AI outputs for accuracy regularly.**



## FLATTENED BRAND IDENTITY

Generative summaries strip out personality. Without structured inputs, even strong brands sound generic, interchangeable with every competitor in the space.

**Encode your tone across multimodal formats: text, video, audio, annotated images.**



## ATTRIBUTION IN THE LLM FUNNEL

Users complete entire buying journeys inside AI interfaces without ever hitting your site. Those visitors are 4.4x more valuable than standard organic, and you're losing them invisibly. Marketing loses attribution even when it's your content driving the outcome.

**Design for conversion inside the AI interface. Use lead-gen chat flows, LLM plug-ins and UTM-enabled summaries to capture signals.**

# SIX WAYS TO OPTIMISE CONTENT FOR THE AI ERA

**Six content principles that make your brand retrievable, citable and impossible to ignore.**

More content isn't the answer. Smarter content is. AI models reward brands that are consistent, authoritative, digestible, distributed, multimodal and technically accessible.

Here's what each of those means in practice.



## CONSISTENCY: SAY THE SAME THING, EVERYWHERE

AI models treat repetition as a signal of truth. Define your core messaging, your positioning, key claims, product facts, and make sure they appear consistently across every piece of content you produce. Contradiction confuses the machine. Consistency builds authority.



## AUTHORITY: BE A SOURCE WORTH CITING

AI search engines reward credibility. Use citations, statistics, expert quotes, and factual data. Update existing content regularly, add new data, reshare it, implement Author and Article schema.

Recency matters as much as quality.



## DISTRIBUTION: GET YOUR CONTENT INTO THE ECOSYSTEM

AI synthesises from everywhere: industry publications, Reddit, UGC, expert blogs. Your content strategy needs to seed those channels. Strategic backlink partnerships, forum presence and earned media aren't just for Google anymore, they directly feed the models that shape AI answers.

# SIX WAYS TO OPTIMISE CONTENT FOR THE AI ERA

## Know Your Engine.

Not all AI search engines work the same way. ChatGPT relies on Bing for retrieval. Perplexity uses semantic and vector-based approaches and prioritises user-generated content. Copilot heavily favours Forbes and Gartner. Google AI Overviews are more domain-agnostic. Build a presence strategy that accounts for where your audience is, and what each engine rewards.



## MULTIMODALITY: DON'T JUST WRITE IT, SAY IT AND SHOW IT

AI models are multimodal. They interpret video transcripts, audio content and image alt text, not just web copy. Your key messages need to live across every format. A YouTube explainer, a podcast quote, a properly-annotated infographic, these all feed the machine.



## DIGESTIBILITY: STRUCTURE FOR THE MACHINE FIRST

AI loves tables, schemas, spreadsheet formats, clear headers and FAQ structures. Use natural language aligned with how real people ask questions. Clear, concise, intent-matched copy outperforms dense long-form every time in AI retrieval.



## ACCESSIBILITY: LET THE AI IN

Your site must be structured for AI agents, not just Google crawlers. Implement llms.txt and llms-full.txt files (emerging standards that act as a lightweight guide for AI agents navigating your site). Most brands haven't done this yet. First movers win on discoverability.

# MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

**Share of Model: the north star metric for your AI visibility strategy.**

If you can't measure it, you can't improve it. The challenge with AI visibility is that traditional metrics; clicks, sessions, rankings, don't capture what's happening. You need a new measurement framework.

## THE THREE DIMENSIONS



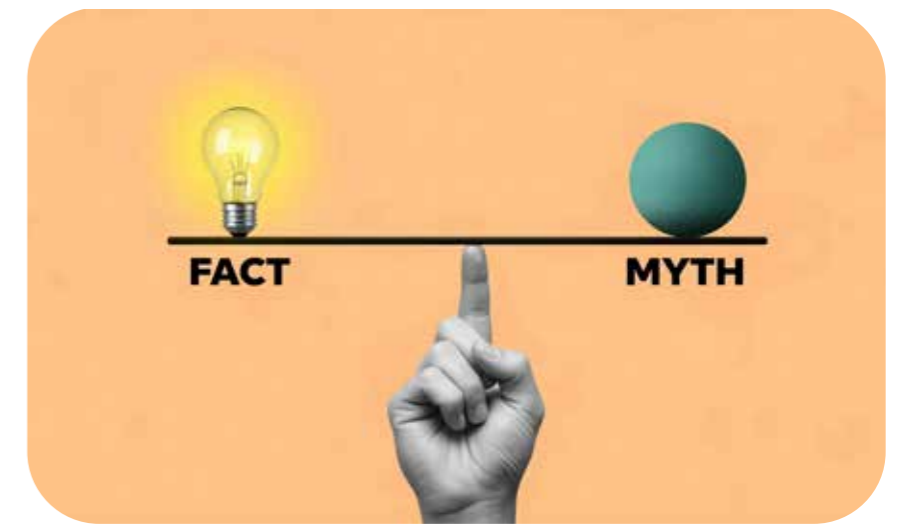
### Citation Frequency

How often, and how recently, is your brand named in relevant AI responses? Across which platforms? Against which prompts?



### Sentiment & Framing

When AI mentions your brand, is it positive, neutral or negative? Does it align with your positioning, or is it a distorted, diluted version of your identity?



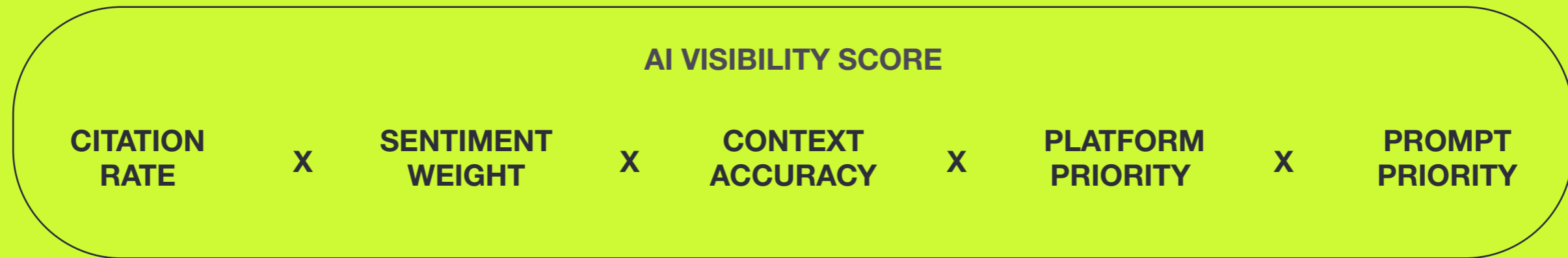
### Context Accuracy

Is AI describing your brand and offering correctly? Especially critical in complex categories, wrong information isn't just a brand risk, it's a commercial one.

# THE FORMULA

This is your Share of Model, the AI equivalent of Share of Search. It tells you not just whether you appear, but how you appear, in the moments that matter most to your audience.

Run this across ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity and Copilot. Weight platforms by where your audience lives. Weight prompts by commercial intent. The result is a genuinely actionable signal, not vanity metrics, but a strategic compass that informs content, media planning, brand governance and platform selection.



The brands that will dominate the next decade won't be the loudest. They'll be the ones the machine trusts most, because they did the work to earn it.



# THREE ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE THIS QUARTER

**Disruptive thinking meets practical execution. Here's where to start.**

## 1: MACHINE READABILITY AUDIT

Audit your technical foundation. Can AI agents navigate your site and cite your content? Check your schema implementation, meta descriptions, llms.txt files, URL structure, and content formatting. Because discovery is no longer text-only, your core messaging must live across text, audio and video to remain ingestible by models. This is the foundation everything else builds on.

**Timeline: 2–4 weeks. Owner: SEO + Engineering.**

## 2: ESTABLISH YOUR MODEL BASELINE

Move away from standard click-tracking and run your first AI visibility audit. Map 20–50 prompts relevant to your category across ChatGPT, Perplexity and Gemini. Measure citation rate, sentiment and context accuracy. This identifies exactly where your brand is being recommended, where it's absent, and where competitors are owning the answer instead of you.

**Timeline: 4–6 weeks. Owner: Digital + Analytics.**

## 3: BUILD YOUR EO ROADMAP

EO isn't a solo discipline. It requires SEO, PR, content, engineering and creative working from the same strategy. Build a long-term roadmap that defines ownership across functions, establishes a centralised authority model, and creates a continuous feedback loop between what AI says about your brand and what content you produce next.

**Timeline: 6–8 weeks. Owner: Marketing Director + cross-functional leads.**

## YOUR EO CHECKLIST

- Define and document your core brand messaging: the 5–10 claims that must appear consistently everywhere
- Audit current content for schema markup, FAQ sections and citation of authoritative sources
- Create or update your llms.txt file to guide AI agents navigating your site
- Map the 10 most common questions your audience asks in your category, does your content answer them directly?
- Run a Share of Model test: ask ChatGPT and Perplexity 5 category-relevant questions, does your brand appear?
- Identify one piece of existing content to update, expand with structured data, and redistribute
- Audit your video and audio content for transcripts, structured metadata and searchable titles
- Assign clear ownership: who in your team is responsible for EO strategy and measurement?

# READY TO OWN THE ANSWER?

We help ambitious brands build the visibility that machines trust and humans choose.

Let's talk about your AI search strategy.

Contact us to get started

