

The AI Search Revolution

Applications and New Implications of EEAT, SEO, CRAAP for Web Content and Public Relations

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Executive Summary

Online search is undergoing its most significant transformation since its inception, driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI). This shift moves beyond traditional keyword matching to a profound understanding of user intent, delivering direct, synthesized answers and engaging in conversational interactions. AI search algorithms prioritize content based on **E-E-A-T** (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness), fundamentally changing how information is valued. This poses challenges for traditional news media attribution but elevates the importance of credible sources.

The impact on Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and website design is substantial, shifting focus from mere keyword density to comprehensive content quality, structured data for AI readability, and an enhanced user experience that anticipates direct answers. **Earned media** is becoming a critical currency for digital relevance, as AI models are trained on and prioritize prestigious, authoritative publications, creating a "credibility cascade" for brands. To thrive, companies must adapt their content strategies, optimize technical foundations for AI, proactively build brand authority, and strategically leverage public relations for enhanced AI visibility. This requires continuous monitoring and agile adaptation.

1. The Fundamental Shift in Online Search

The landscape of online information retrieval is experiencing a profound transformation, moving beyond the familiar keyword-based systems to a more sophisticated, AI-driven paradigm. This shift is not merely an incremental improvement but a fundamental change in how users interact with information and what they expect from search engines.

From Keyword Matching to Contextual Understanding

Traditional search engines operate primarily by matching keywords present in a user's query with keywords found on indexed web pages. Their ranking mechanisms heavily depend on the frequency and placement of these keywords, often failing to grasp the deeper meaning or intent behind a search.¹ This reliance on exact keyword matches can lead to limitations, particularly when dealing with ambiguous, complex, or multi-layered queries. For example, a search for "best white label

website builder" might yield a list of articles, but not a direct, synthesized comparison or recommendation.¹

In stark contrast, AI search engines leverage advanced techniques such as Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Machine Learning (ML) to understand the context, intent, and semantic meaning of a user's query.¹ These systems analyze the relationships between words and phrases, learn from user interactions, and continuously improve their ability to provide more accurate and relevant results.¹ By synthesizing information from various sources, AI search engines can offer comprehensive answers, enhancing the overall search experience. This capability allows them to handle complex and nuanced requests with significantly higher accuracy than their traditional counterparts.² For instance, a complex query such as "waterproof camera under \$500 with good low light performance" can now be met with a comprehensive answer that instantly synthesizes product data, user experiences, and expert reviews, a task that would typically require multiple, iterative searches in a traditional environment.⁵

This evolution from keyword matching to contextual understanding implies a fundamental change in user behavior. Users are transitioning from "searching for links" to "seeking immediate knowledge." When AI search engines provide immediate, synthesized answers directly on the search results page, the need for users to click through to external websites significantly diminishes.¹ This phenomenon, often referred to as "zero-click searches," fundamentally alters the traditional value proposition of organic search traffic, which historically relied on clicks as a primary measure of success. Consequently, this necessitates a re-evaluation of SEO strategies, shifting the focus from merely attracting clicks to ensuring content is recognized and utilized by AI for direct answers.

The Rise of Direct Answers and Conversational Search

A defining characteristic of AI search engines is their emphasis on delivering direct answers and concise summaries. These systems analyze content from diverse sources and present the most relevant information prominently, often at the very top of the search results page.¹ This approach significantly reduces the effort required from users, allowing them to obtain the information they need quickly without the necessity of navigating through multiple links.¹

Prominent examples of this include Google's AI Overviews and Microsoft Copilot. Google's AI Overviews generate rapid summaries of topics and organize search results under unique headings, facilitating easier brainstorming or exploration of ideas.⁶ Similarly, Microsoft Copilot offers "intelligently curated answers with cited sources and suggestions for further exploration" and possesses the ability to summarize online articles efficiently.¹¹

A pivotal feature of AI search is its conversational mode, which enables users to ask follow-up questions where the context from previous queries is seamlessly carried over.² This fosters a more interactive and fluid search experience, empowering users to delve deeper into topics. For instance, Copilot allows users to continue a dialogue, refine their requests, and even customize the style (e.g., creative, precise, balanced) and format (e.g., list, poem, table) of the

response.¹¹ Furthermore, AI search supports multimodal input, meaning users can initiate searches using text, images, or voice commands, with the AI combining these inputs to yield more accurate results. This contrasts sharply with traditional search engines, which are predominantly limited to text-based queries.¹

The conversational nature of AI search and its multimodal capabilities point towards a profound shift towards more natural, human-like interaction with information retrieval. This development blurs the lines between traditional search engines and personal assistants. As search becomes more deeply integrated into daily workflows and decision-making processes, it may evolve beyond a discrete "search" activity into a more ambient, integrated experience. This is because the ability of AI search to maintain context, refine understanding, and respond conversationally, coupled with its multimodal support, transforms it from a mere information retrieval tool into a sophisticated, intelligent assistant.¹¹

This deeper integration means users will increasingly rely on AI search for complex, multi-faceted tasks such as planning activities⁶, comparing products⁵, or even drafting content.¹⁴ This implies that information access will become seamlessly embedded within various applications and daily routines, making the act of "searching" less of a distinct action and more of an ambient, integrated experience.

Table 1 provides a concise comparison of the key differences between traditional and AI-powered search.

Table 1: Traditional Search vs. AI Search – Key Differences

Category	Traditional Search	AI Search
Definition	Keyword matching to rank pages	Context and meaning-based results using AI
Search Methodology	Relies on keyword frequency; misses deeper meaning	Uses NLP and ML to understand context and intent
Query Understanding	Struggles with ambiguous or complex queries	Handles complex, multi-layered queries with high accuracy
Results Presentation	Lists of links (SERP); requires user clicks	Direct answers, summaries, synthesized information
Learning Capabilities	No inherent learning; results consistent	Continuously learns and adapts from user behavior and data
Personalization	Generally provides same results for all users	Delivers personalized results based on user preferences

Conversational Search	No support for follow-up questions	Allows conversational interactions and follow-up questions
Multimodal Search	Primarily text-based	Understands text, images, and voice inputs
User Effort	Higher; often requires multiple queries and clicks	Reduced; provides quick, comprehensive answers

2. How AI Search Algorithms Value Information

The emergence of AI search has introduced new paradigms for how information is evaluated and prioritized. Central to this new valuation system is the concept of E-E-A-T, which assesses content quality and source credibility. This framework also influences how AI search handles different types of sources, such as news media and company websites, and addresses the critical challenge of misinformation.

The Primacy of E-E-A-T: Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness

AI search engines place significant emphasis on content that demonstrates high **E-E-A-T** (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness).⁸ This framework, derived from Google's Search Quality Rater Guidelines, is a critical assessment tool for the quality and credibility of both web content and its creators.⁸

Each component of E-E-A-T plays a distinct role:

- **Experience** refers to whether the content reflects genuine, first-hand, real-world experience with the subject matter.⁸ Demonstrating this can involve including original photos, videos, detailed case studies, or incorporating user-generated content like testimonials and reviews.²⁰
- **Expertise** evaluates if the content is produced by individuals with deep knowledge, professional credentials, or specialized training in the topic.⁸ While AI can compile information, human expert input or validation, often through quotes or direct insights, is crucial for establishing this component.¹⁸
- **Authoritativeness** assesses if the content and its source are recognized as a leading authority in their respective fields.⁸ This is typically built through earning high-quality backlinks, mentions, and recognition from other reputable sources within the industry.⁸
- **Trustworthiness** is foundational and evaluates whether users can have confidence in the information, the source, and the overall website.⁸ This includes factual accuracy, transparent sourcing, secure browsing (HTTPS), clear contact information, and positive user signals such as reviews or testimonials.⁸

The importance of E-E-A-T is particularly heightened for "Your Money or Your Life" (YMYL) content—topics that can significantly impact a person's health, financial stability, or safety.²⁰ For such sensitive subjects, AI search engines, following Google's guidelines, impose a higher standard, requiring content to originate from demonstrably trustworthy and expert sources.²¹

The strong emphasis on E-E-A-T and "trust" is a direct algorithmic response to the challenge of "AI hallucination" and the potential spread of misinformation inherent in generative AI models. Generative AI models, despite their advanced capabilities, are known to sometimes produce inaccurate, biased, or fabricated information.¹ This inherent risk poses a significant challenge to the reliability of AI-generated answers. To counter this, AI search engines are designed to prioritize and heavily weight information from sources that demonstrate verifiable credibility. The E-E-A-T framework provides a structured and comprehensive set of criteria for algorithms to assess this credibility, ensuring that the synthesized answers are grounded in reliable and trustworthy data.²⁸ Therefore, achieving a high E-E-A-T score is not merely a factor for higher search rankings but a fundamental prerequisite for content to be considered trustworthy enough for AI to utilize, cite, and present directly to users.

Source Weighting: News Media vs. Company Websites (Challenges and Opportunities)

The way AI search tools interact with different types of information sources presents both challenges and opportunities, particularly for news media and company websites.

For **news media**, AI search tools, while rapidly gaining popularity and relying on up-to-date, relevant information often produced by news publishers, present a troubling imbalance.²⁹ Unlike traditional search engines that typically act as intermediaries, guiding users to news websites, generative search tools often parse and repackage information themselves, effectively cutting off direct traffic flow to original sources.²⁹ These tools frequently fail to link back to the original source, cite syndicated or copied versions of articles (e.g., on Yahoo News or AOL) instead of the original publishers, and sometimes even disregard publisher controls like robots.txt.²⁹ Even news organizations with formal partnerships with AI companies have reported misattribution or content surfacing in ways that do not drive traffic back to their platforms.³⁰ This practice diminishes the visibility of primary news organizations and deprives them of direct traffic, posing a serious threat to their revenue and audience engagement.³⁰

The struggle of AI search tools to properly cite original news sources, despite often relying on their content and even ignoring publisher controls, highlights a significant ethical and economic tension. News publishers invest heavily in producing high-quality, timely, and often verified information, which is invaluable for AI models seeking current content.²⁹

However, AI's current operational model, which synthesizes direct answers, effectively bypasses the traditional referral traffic that sustains news organizations' business models.²⁹ The observed failures in proper attribution, the citation of syndicated versions, and the disregard for robots.txt reveal a fundamental misalignment of economic incentives and ethical considerations.²⁹ If AI companies continue to derive significant value from news content without adequate compensation

or proper recognition, it poses an existential threat to quality journalism.³⁰ This unsustainable dynamic will likely force a reckoning, prompting either industry-wide standards, new content licensing agreements, or governmental regulations to ensure content creators are appropriately recognized and compensated for their intellectual property that forms the backbone of AI's knowledge.

For **company websites**, AI search values authority and trustworthiness based on several factors:

- **High-quality backlinks:** Acquiring backlinks from reputable, high-quality industry-related sites is crucial, as AI models often leverage existing search engine data where link strength serves as a proxy for authority.¹⁵
- **Consistent brand data:** Ensuring that factual information about a company (such as Name, Address, Phone, and product details) is accurate and consistent across all online platforms (e.g., social media, directories, affiliate sites) is vital. Inconsistencies can lead to AI models encountering conflicting information, which may lower a brand's perceived authority.²⁵
- **Positive sentiment:** Monitoring how a brand is discussed on social media and forums (e.g., Reddit, X) is important, as AI models consider not just the frequency of mentions but also their sentiment. Positive reviews and endorsements enhance authority signals.²³
- **Comprehensive, authoritative content:** Creating in-depth, well-researched blog posts, guides, whitepapers, and original research that thoroughly covers a topic demonstrates expertise and authority.¹⁵
- **Structured data (Schema Markup):** Implementing schema markup provides clear signals to search engines and datasets about a brand's identity and content. This helps AI understand the context and purpose of the information.¹⁵
- **Technical SEO:** A strong technical foundation, including mobile-friendliness, fast page speed (measured by Core Web Vitals), and proper indexing by search engines, is essential for AI crawlers to efficiently access and process content.¹⁵

Addressing Misinformation and Bias in AI Search

Generative AI tools, built upon large language models (LLMs), gather information from vast online sources. However, they are susceptible to errors, including the incorporation of misinformation, biased data, or outdated sources, which can lead to inaccurate AI-generated content.²⁷ A well-documented phenomenon known as "AI hallucination" occurs when these models perceive patterns in prompts that do not exist, resulting in fabricated or incorrect responses.²⁷

Developers are actively engaged in enhancing the accuracy and reliability of AI search. AI chatbots are regularly updated to improve their capacity to identify and correct misinformation.²⁸ Over the past year, AI models have been trained on larger and more diverse datasets, which has improved their ability to cross-reference information from multiple reliable sources to verify claims and detect inconsistencies.²⁸

Users are also advised to proactively fact-check AI-generated content. This involves cross-referencing responses with established, trusted sources such as government websites, respected publications, or academic papers.²⁷ The CRAAP test (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, Purpose) is a widely recognized method for determining source validity and trustworthiness.³⁶ Furthermore, lateral reading—the practice of seeking information from multiple sources to gain a comprehensive understanding—is a crucial skill in this environment.³⁶

The ongoing efforts by AI developers to combat misinformation and bias through improved data training and cross-referencing mechanisms indicate a maturing of AI search technology. This suggests a future where AI search becomes increasingly reliable. However, this development also underscores the enduring importance of human critical thinking and source verification, particularly for complex or sensitive topics. The explicit recognition of "AI hallucination" and the potential for AI to spread misinformation signifies a critical self-awareness within the AI development community.²⁷ The proactive measures being taken, such as training models on larger, more diverse datasets and enhancing their ability to cross-reference multiple reliable sources²⁸, demonstrate a commitment to improving the accuracy and trustworthiness of AI search.

This continuous refinement suggests that AI search will become progressively more reliable over time. However, this evolution does not negate the need for human oversight. Given the potential for serious consequences, especially for YMYL content²⁰, human users will still need to apply critical thinking and verify AI-generated information against established, authoritative sources.²⁷ This implies a future where AI serves as a powerful initial information aggregator, but human discernment remains the final arbiter of truth, especially for high-stakes decisions.

3. Impact on SEO and Website Design

The advent of AI search has fundamentally reshaped the strategic imperatives for Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and significantly influenced best practices in website design. The focus has moved from simple keyword mechanics to a more holistic approach centered on user intent, content quality, and technical readiness for AI processing.

Evolving SEO Strategies: Beyond Keywords to Intent and Authority

AI has fundamentally changed the rules of SEO. Traditional keyword-based approaches must evolve to align with AI's prioritization of context, content quality, and user intent.³¹ AI-powered search engines no longer focus solely on short, generic keywords; instead, they emphasize semantic search and long-tail keywords that precisely match user intent.²²

The objective of SEO is undergoing a significant transformation. Rather than exclusively targeting individual keyword rankings, the strategic aim is now to occupy the most prominent digital real estate within the search results for a given topic, a concept sometimes referred to as "visibility dominance".⁹ The goal is for content to be "sourced" or "featured" within AI-generated responses.⁹

This new approach necessitates "AI-Specific SEO" (also known as AISO, GEO, or LLMO), where marketers must optimize content for how AI summarizes and ranks information across evolving search results pages and conversational experiences.¹⁵ This involves creating content that directly answers user questions, is concise, and utilizes natural, conversational language.¹⁵ For example, structuring content with questions as headings and targeting "People Also Ask" sections can effectively optimize for AI-driven queries.²²

The emergence of AI Overviews, which provide quick summaries at the top of the search results page, is leading to an increase in "zero-click searches" where users find answers directly without visiting a website.⁵ This trend has resulted in lower click-through rates (CTR) for both organic and paid results when AI Overviews are present.⁵ Furthermore, AI-generated responses can significantly push down traditional organic results. An average Google SGE response can displace organic results by a substantial margin, often covering more than a full screen, which means traditional organic listings have less visible "real estate" on the search results page.⁹

The decrease in click-through rates due to direct answers means that traditional SEO metrics focused solely on organic traffic are becoming less indicative of overall success. Historically, the primary objective of SEO was to achieve high rankings, which directly translated to increased website traffic through user clicks. However, with the advent of AI Overviews and direct answers⁵, users can obtain information directly on the search results page without needing to visit a website. This leads to a noticeable decline in click-through rates for both organic and paid listings.¹⁰ Consequently, simply ranking high for a keyword no longer guarantees website visits. The new measure of success in the AI era becomes whether a brand's content is the authoritative source that the AI chooses to synthesize information from or cite within its direct answers. This shift from "click dominance" to "visibility dominance" fundamentally alters how SEO performance should be measured and how strategies should be developed, prioritizing AI recognition over direct traffic.

Technical SEO and Content Structure for AI Readability

Optimizing for AI search requires a strong technical foundation and a deliberate approach to content structuring to ensure AI algorithms can efficiently process and understand information.

Implementing **structured data (schema markup)** is crucial for helping AI understand your content's context, purpose, and the relationships between various entities.¹⁵ This includes using specific schema types like Organization schema for brand details, Product schema for product descriptions, and FAQ schema to enable AI to extract relevant answers, particularly for voice search queries.²²

Content structure is equally vital. Organizing information logically with clear headings (H1, H2, H3) and subheadings is essential for AI to segment and comprehend your content effectively.⁵ Breaking down text into bullet points and lists makes content easily scannable and referenceable for AI models.⁵ Providing direct answers to specific questions in structured formats, such as Q&A blocks, is also highly beneficial for AI processing.⁵

A robust **technical foundation** is paramount. This includes conducting comprehensive audits of your site's accessibility to AI crawlers.⁵ Ensuring clean, search engine-friendly URL structures, mobile-friendliness, and fast page loading speeds—measured by Core Web Vitals like Largest Contentful Paint (LCP), First Input Delay (FID), and Cumulative Layout Shift (CLS)—are critical for AI to efficiently crawl and index your site.¹⁵ Proper indexing by Bing is particularly important for visibility within Microsoft Copilot.³²

The emphasis on structured data, clear headings, and scannable content is not merely about human readability, but primarily about optimizing content for AI's Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Machine Learning (ML) models to efficiently extract and synthesize information. AI search engines operate by processing vast amounts of data using sophisticated NLP and ML algorithms to understand context, identify intent, and synthesize coherent answers.¹ For these algorithms to perform optimally, content needs to be presented in a highly organized and machine-interpretable format. Structured data, such as schema markup, acts as a direct, explicit signal to AI about the content's meaning, relationships, and categorization.¹⁵ Similarly, clear hierarchical headings, bullet points, and well-defined sections⁵ serve as internal signposts, enabling AI to quickly identify key takeaways, extract specific answers, and efficiently summarize information. This fundamental shift implies that website content creation and design must move beyond merely catering to human readers to actively designing for AI's computational understanding, effectively transforming websites into structured data repositories optimized for AI consumption.

Website Design for Enhanced User Experience in an AI-First World

AI is revolutionizing web design by enabling enhanced user experiences (UX) and streamlining design workflows.³⁴ AI-powered tools can analyze user behavior patterns and optimize website elements in real-time, leading to improved navigation, more intuitive interfaces, and personalized content delivery.³⁴

Automated design systems, such as Wix ADI, can generate websites rapidly, tailoring layouts based on user preferences and industry standards.³⁴ AI also improves accessibility by generating alternative text for images and optimizing font sizes³⁵, and enhances customer support through AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants.³⁴

Despite these benefits, integrating AI into web design presents challenges. There is a potential for a loss of creative control, as AI may lack the nuanced creativity required for unique branding.³⁴ Ethical concerns also arise with AI-generated content, which might lack precision, nuance, or even contain misinformation.³⁴ Over-reliance on AI tools without adequate human oversight can lead to design inconsistencies or limit customization for complex needs.³⁴

While AI can automate and personalize web design, the "automation paradox" suggests that human creativity and empathy become even more critical for unique branding and addressing complex user needs. This implies that successful web design in the AI era will be a hybrid approach, leveraging AI for efficiency while retaining human oversight for nuanced, emotionally resonant experiences that AI cannot yet replicate. AI's capabilities in web design are significant, offering

automation, real-time personalization, and efficiency gains.³⁴ However, AI-generated designs and content can sometimes feel generic, lack emotional depth, or fail to capture the unique essence of a brand.⁸ The "automation paradox"³⁴ highlights that as AI takes over routine and repetitive tasks, the value of uniquely human attributes—such as creativity, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and nuanced problem-solving—increases. For a brand to truly differentiate itself and connect with users on a deeper level, especially in complex or sensitive industries, human designers are indispensable for injecting the necessary creativity, empathy, and bespoke solutions that AI currently cannot replicate.³⁴ Therefore, the future of web design is not AI replacing human designers, but rather AI serving as a powerful tool that empowers human designers to focus on higher-level strategic, creative, and empathetic aspects, leading to a more sophisticated and impactful hybrid design process.

Table 2 outlines key factors that AI search engines prioritize for ranking content.

Table 2: Key AI Search Ranking Factors

Factor	Description
E-E-A-T (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness)	Content from experts with verified credentials, showcasing first-hand experience, and recognized as a go-to authority. Trustworthiness is foundational. ⁸
Content Relevance & Intent Matching	Directly answers user questions, incorporates related terms for semantic depth, and aligns with various user intents (informational, commercial, etc.). ¹⁵
Structured Data & AI-Readable Formatting	Use of schema markup, clear headings, bullet points, and tables for easy machine understanding and scannable data. ¹⁵
Content Freshness & Updates	Regularly refreshed content with the latest trends, data, and updates to evergreen material, signaling active maintenance. ¹⁵
Multimodal Content	Incorporation of diverse media formats (text, images, infographics, videos, audio) with proper tagging for AI interpretation. ¹
Mobile Optimization & Page Speed	Fully mobile-friendly sites with fast load times and optimized Core Web Vitals (LCP, FID, CLS). ¹⁵

Backlinks & Industry Citations	High-quality backlinks from reputable industry sites and mentions in authoritative publications, signaling credibility. ¹⁵
User Engagement & Interaction	Content that aligns with search intent to reduce bounce rates, encourages shares, and fosters community engagement. ¹⁵
AI-Specific SEO (Generative AI Optimization - GAIO)	Concise summaries, clear headings, structured formats for AI-generated overviews, and natural, question-based writing for voice search. ¹⁵

4. The Growing Value of Earned Media

In the evolving AI search landscape, the role and value of earned media are undergoing a significant re-evaluation. It is no longer just a component of public relations or brand building; it is becoming a critical determinant of a brand's visibility and authority within AI-driven information ecosystems.

Why Earned Media is More Critical Than Ever for AI Visibility

The AI search revolution fundamentally changes how brands appear online. Unlike traditional SEO, which heavily relies on keywords and backlinks, AI search models prioritize credibility and authoritative sources.³⁷ AI search tools primarily draw from knowledge already embedded in their training data, which focuses on prominent, reliable sources.¹⁵ If a brand is not already part of the AI's knowledge foundation or is not considered worthy by its retrieval process, it simply will not appear in answers.¹⁶

Generative AI systems function as sophisticated curators, distilling information from content they were trained on or sources they deem reliable.¹⁶ OpenAI, for example, explicitly states that its models draw on publicly available internet information while filtering out low-quality or sensitive content, preferring material that is freely accessible and frequently cited.¹⁶ Furthermore, OpenAI has formalized strategic partnerships with major news organizations such as News Corp (including The Wall Street Journal, MarketWatch, and Barron's), The Associated Press, The Atlantic, Vox Media, and Reddit, directly incorporating their content into ChatGPT's training data.¹⁶ This clearly indicates that these are the sources AI values most. Additionally, large language models often use traditional search engine results to "ground their answers," and those search engines continue to prioritize authoritative sources.¹⁶

Earned media is no longer just for brand reputation or direct traffic; it is becoming a foundational element for a brand's very "knowledge base" within AI systems. Without mentions in authoritative publications, a brand risks not being recognized or included by AI search engines at all, effectively being invisible in the AI-driven information ecosystem. Unlike traditional search, which primarily crawls the web in real-time for each query, AI search systems often rely heavily on the knowledge

embedded within their pre-trained models.¹⁶ This training data is meticulously curated and prioritizes content from prominent, reliable, and authoritative sources.¹⁵ If a brand or its relevant information is not present within these highly trusted sources that constitute the AI's core knowledge foundation, it will simply not be available for the AI to synthesize or cite in its responses.¹⁶ This means that earned media, particularly coverage in prestigious publications and authoritative platforms, transitions from being a valuable marketing asset to a critical prerequisite for a brand's very digital existence and visibility within the AI-driven search landscape. It is about establishing a brand's "notability" in the eyes of AI.

Building Brand Authority Through Prestigious Mentions

Prestigious media coverage initiates a powerful "credibility cascade": when respected publications feature a brand, platforms like Wikipedia can cite them, and subsequently, AI systems incorporate both, significantly increasing the brand's chances of appearing in AI responses.¹⁶ Wikipedia, notably, serves as a primary source for many AI systems and requires substantial coverage in reputable publications to establish notability.¹⁶

Public relations (PR) is becoming increasingly vital in this new landscape. It actively drives AI rankings, boosts domain authority, and plays a crucial role in shaping a brand's online reputation.³⁷ PR strategies that effectively drive user engagement—such as website traffic, social shares, and comments—can also improve search rankings and visibility, as AI evaluates these as indicators of valuable content.³⁸

AI algorithms favor brands that exhibit a strong mix of quality earned content (e.g., media coverage, podcasts, backlinks) and owned content (e.g., blogs, authoritative articles, white papers, websites).³⁷ The more diverse and credible a brand's media presence, the stronger its authority will be in AI-driven search results.³⁷ Beyond direct backlinks, unlinked mentions on reputable sites and positive sentiment expressed on social media and forums (e.g., Reddit, X) contribute significantly to a brand's perceived authority for AI models.²⁵ AI does not merely count stars in reviews; it "reads" the context and sentiment, placing higher value on robust descriptions of use cases or product performance.²⁵

The "credibility cascade," where media mentions lead to Wikipedia entries, which then feed AI systems, illustrates a powerful multiplier effect for earned media. This suggests that public relations (PR) is not just about direct media placements, but about building a holistic, interconnected web of authoritative signals that AI can interpret and trust, making PR a strategic imperative for long-term AI visibility. AI systems frequently draw information from highly authoritative and widely referenced sources like Wikipedia.¹⁶ For a subject or entity to have a Wikipedia entry, it must meet "notability" criteria, which are typically established through significant, independent coverage in reputable news and media outlets.¹⁶ Therefore, when a brand secures prestigious media coverage through PR efforts, it not only gains direct exposure but also lays the groundwork for a potential Wikipedia entry. Once a brand is featured on Wikipedia, it becomes a highly trusted and frequently accessed source for various AI models. This creates a powerful, cascading effect: PR efforts generate media mentions, these mentions validate the

brand's notability for Wikipedia, and Wikipedia then serves as a direct feed for AI systems, thereby amplifying the brand's authority and presence within the AI's knowledge foundation. This multi-layered influence makes PR a strategic imperative for establishing and maintaining long-term AI visibility, extending its impact far beyond traditional media relations.

5. Recommendations for Companies

Navigating the evolving AI search landscape requires a proactive and adaptive approach. Companies must integrate AI-centric strategies into their existing digital marketing and public relations efforts to maintain and enhance their online visibility.

Content Strategy: Prioritize E-E-A-T and Direct Answers

- **Focus on high-quality, authoritative content:** Develop comprehensive, well-researched content that clearly demonstrates Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness (E-E-A-T).⁸ This is especially critical for Your Money or Your Life (YMYL) topics.²⁰
- **Incorporate human expertise and original contributions:** Include detailed author bios highlighting credentials and first-hand experience.⁸ Publish original research, case studies, and unique data to showcase thought leadership.¹⁵
- **Provide direct answers and summaries:** Structure content with clear headings, bullet points, tables, and Q&A blocks to facilitate AI summarization and direct answers.⁵ Ensure information is complete without needing additional context.²³
- **Optimize for conversational and natural language:** Write content that sounds like a human answering a question, using natural phrasing and targeting long-tail, conversational keywords.¹⁵
- **Diversify content formats:** Go beyond text to include images, infographics, videos, and audio (multimodal content) to expand discovery surface area.¹

Technical Optimization: Ensure AI-Friendly Site Structure

- **Implement comprehensive schema markup:** Use structured data (e.g., Organization, Product, FAQ schema) to provide clear signals to AI about your content's context and purpose.¹⁵
- **Ensure crawlability and indexing:** Conduct regular audits to confirm your site's accessibility to AI crawlers. Verify that robots.txt and meta directives do not inadvertently block AI models from accessing your pages.⁵
- **Optimize for mobile and speed:** Ensure your website is fully mobile-friendly and has fast loading times. Pay close attention to Core Web Vitals (Largest Contentful Paint, First Input Delay, Cumulative Layout Shift) as these impact AI's evaluation of user experience.¹⁵

- **Strengthen internal linking and content clusters:** Implement clear navigation menus and robust internal linking to build topical authority and improve discoverability for AI crawlers. Organize content into thematic "content hubs" or "topic clusters".²²

Brand Building: Cultivate Authority and Trust

- **Acquire high-quality backlinks:** Focus on earning backlinks from reputable, industry-related websites. A handful of high-value backlinks is more beneficial than many low-quality ones.¹⁵
- **Maintain consistent brand data:** Ensure all facts about your company (e.g., Name, Address, Phone, product details) are accurate and consistent across your website, social media profiles, directories, and other online platforms.²⁵
- **Improve review generation and sentiment:** Actively encourage customers to leave detailed, context-rich reviews, as AI models "read" the context and sentiment of reviews, not just star ratings. Monitor and foster positive discussions about your brand on social media and forums.²³

Public Relations: Leverage Earned Media for AI Visibility

- **Prioritize prestigious media coverage:** Actively pursue mentions and feature articles in top-tier publications and authoritative websites, as these sources are highly prioritized by AI training models and contribute significantly to a brand's AI knowledge base.¹⁵
- **Build a strong owned media presence:** Consistently publish high-quality blogs, whitepapers, and case studies on your own platforms. Original research and industry insights published here can increase the likelihood of being cited by journalists and industry experts, further boosting AI search presence.³⁷
- **Collaborate with industry thought leaders:** Partnering with recognized experts and influencers can enhance content authority, provide authorship expertise, and generate additional organic, high-quality backlinks.⁹

Continuous Monitoring and Adaptation

- **Regularly test AI platforms:** Periodically test branded queries and relevant industry questions in various AI search platforms (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Perplexity) to check for consistency, accurate mentions, and how your content is being synthesized.²³
- **Monitor AI Overviews and SERP features:** Track instances where your content is featured in AI-generated answers or snippets using SEO tools.²³
- **Stay agile with AI updates:** Pay close attention to new AI model releases and algorithm changes. Proactively pushing strong PR or fresh, authoritative content before large language models re-train or update can help "lock in" stronger brand associations for the AI's next iteration.²⁵

The need for "continuous monitoring and adaptation" and testing multiple AI platforms indicates that the AI search landscape is highly dynamic and evolving rapidly. This means strategies cannot be static; they require ongoing experimentation, analysis, and refinement to maintain visibility and relevance. The AI search environment is characterized by constant evolution, driven by continuous learning from user interactions, frequent model updates, and ongoing experimentation by developers.¹ Google's Search Generative Experience (SGE) is explicitly an "experiment" ⁷, and different AI platforms may operate on varying datasets or update schedules.²⁵ This inherent dynamism means that a "set it and forget it" approach to AI search optimization is ineffective.

To maintain visibility and competitive advantage, companies must adopt an agile and iterative strategy, continuously monitoring how their content is perceived and used by AI, testing various queries and platforms, and refining their content and technical strategies based on new data and algorithmic shifts. This proactive engagement is crucial for sustained relevance in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

Table 3 provides a summary of actionable recommendations for companies to improve their position in AI search.

Table 3: Actionable Recommendations for AI Search Positioning

Category	Key Actionable Steps
Content Strategy	Prioritize E-E-A-T; incorporate human expertise & original insights; provide direct answers & summaries; optimize for conversational language; diversify content formats.
Technical Optimization	Implement comprehensive schema markup; ensure crawlability & indexing; optimize for mobile & speed (Core Web Vitals); strengthen internal linking & content clusters.
Brand Building	Acquire high-quality backlinks; maintain consistent brand data; improve review generation & sentiment.
Public Relations	Prioritize prestigious media coverage; build strong owned media presence; collaborate with industry thought leaders.
Monitoring & Adaptation	Regularly test AI platforms; monitor AI Overviews & SERP features; stay agile with AI updates.

(more)

Conclusion

The integration of AI into online search represents a fundamental paradigm shift, transforming information retrieval from simple keyword matching to contextual understanding and direct, conversational answers. This redefines user expectations and fundamentally alters how digital content is consumed and valued. Success in this new environment hinges on prioritizing **E-E-A-T** (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness) and cultivating genuine authority and trustworthiness, which are critical for AI algorithms to value and cite content. While traditional SEO fundamentals remain relevant, strategies must evolve to focus on AI readability, structured data, and "visibility dominance" rather than solely click-through rates.

Earned media has emerged as an indispensable asset, providing the authoritative signals that AI models rely on to build their knowledge bases, creating a powerful "credibility cascade" for brands. Companies that proactively adapt their content, technical infrastructure, brand-building efforts, and public relations strategies will be best positioned to thrive. Continuous monitoring and agile adaptation are paramount in this rapidly evolving AI-driven landscape.

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