THE NEW SEARCH LANDSCAPE

AI in search

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The new search landscape

The digital marketing world is moving at a truly incredible pace; it's a lot to keep up with.

The search engine results page – the one we've all known and loved, with its neat list of ten blue links – is getting a massive makeover thanks to Artificial Intelligence.

An AI search results page is more than just a list; it's a tool that uses things like natural language processing and machine learning to understand the real intent behind a query. It's a bit like someone finally understands what you're asking, not just the keywords you're using.

We've seen the explosive growth of large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, which gets around 2.5 billion daily prompts according to OpenAI. This shift is so significant that even Google has integrated AI into its core search functionality with "AI Overviews" and the newly launched "AI Mode."

For many, this has become a source of anxiety, with some even fearing the end of the "link-based web" entirely. But this transformation isn't something to fear.

It is a new opportunity.

Mastering Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) is about changing your approach to digital marketing so you're found by AI, not just by traditional search engines.

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The rise of zero-click searches

The biggest change brought on by AI is what we call "zero-click" search.

This is where a user gets their answer right on the results page without needing to click through to a website. Think of it like getting a great answer without having to open a book. While this has been happening for a while with weather reports, people also ask and featured snippets

Google Search Features
These are the simple, direct answers for things like a business's phone number or flight times.

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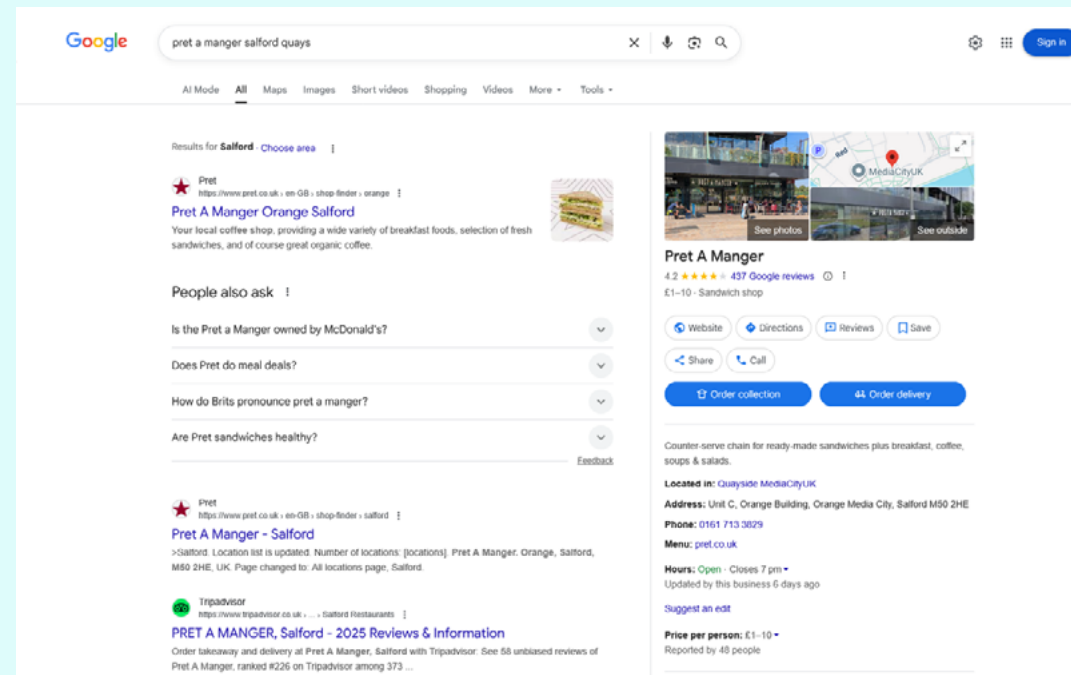
The rise of zero-click searches

AI Overviews

This is the most recent, recognisable part of the SERPs, where an AI synthesises information from various sources to give a full summary or answer.
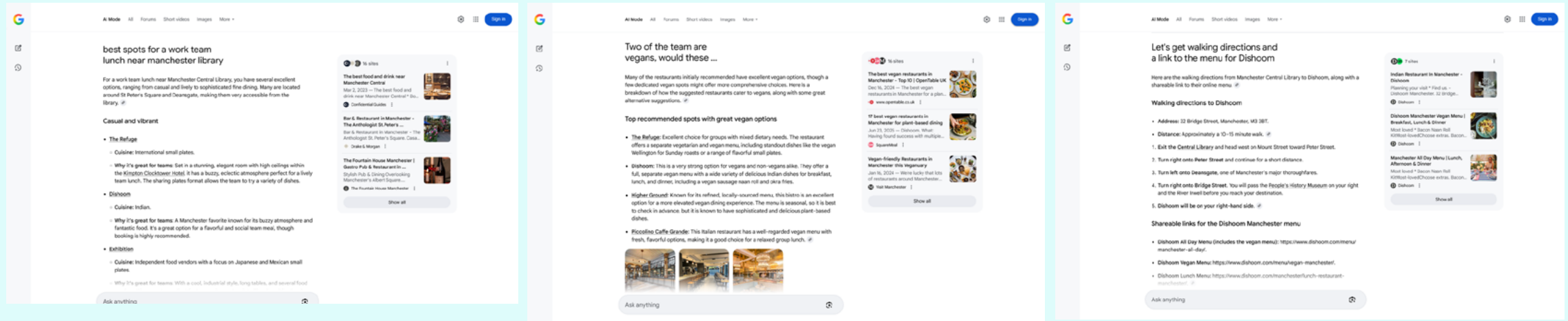
The rise of zero-click searches

AI Mode

This new mode of search is available in 180 countries in English, including the UK, there's also recently launched support for five new languages including Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, and Brazilian Portuguese, all of which provide direct, AI-generated answers within the browser.

While some content sites might be at risk from this, businesses that sell products and services can win. The trick is to get your brand, product, or service recommended in these zero-click results, thereby bypassing your competition and going straight to the consumer.

This isn't about traffic; it's about being seen as the definitive source.

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The first hurdle

Foundational SEO and website structure are still important
Before you can start implementing these AI search techniques, you need a strong foundation. AI models still depend on the web for information, so traditional SEO remains very important. If your website isn't technically sound or user-friendly, an AI agent will simply move on to the next one.

Technical foundations
Your website must be easy for search engines and AI to crawl and index. Using structured data, or schema, helps AI understand the context on your pages. Make sure you don't have broken links or slow loading times; these not only affect users but can also hinder AI from understanding the purpose of your content, links, and navigation.

Website structure
Your site should be designed with both AI and people in mind.

Navigation should be straightforward, and each page's purpose must be clear. A good way to establish trust with AI is by making credibility signals such as customer reviews, case studies, and testimonials prominent on your website. Also, remember to include clear calls to action (CTAs). They help AI easily understand what you want a user to do next, whether that's purchasing a product or signing up for a newsletter.

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A deeper dive

The Query Fan-out Technique
The Query Fan-out Technique represents a major change in how AI-powered search functions. It is so different, in fact, that it amounts to a new way of thinking. Instead of simply matching keywords, AI systems split a complex query into multiple related sub-queries. It then "fans out," searching across different sub-topics and data sources simultaneously to produce a comprehensive, nuanced response.

How it works
The AI breaks down a conversational question into several distinct intents. It then generates a wide range of related searches simultaneously, enabling it to retrieve information for all these fan-out queries at once, providing a much broader pool of information to draw from.

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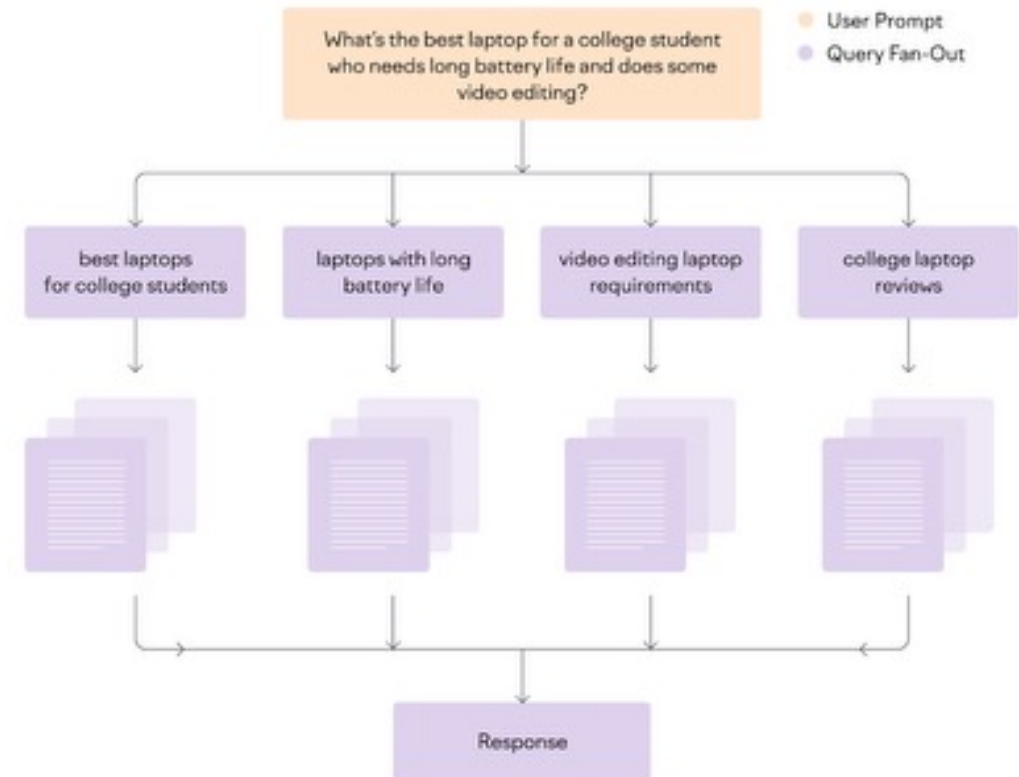
How to optimize for it

The days of targeting single keywords are fading.

Your goal is to become the definitive resource for entire subjects. You can do this by creating comprehensive content clusters - a strong "pillar page" that covers a broad topic, with numerous "cluster content" pieces that dive into specific aspects.

AI models process information in "chunks" or passages. Use clear, descriptive headings (H2/H3), and get straight to the point with concise, direct answers.

This helps the AI easily extract and synthesise your information. You should also think about all the possible questions a user might have, even the unasked ones, as they move through their journey. While links are still valuable, GEO puts a bigger emphasis on brand mentions and citations from influential publications. AI models often pull information from high-authority, third-party sites.

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The power of third-party reviews

In the age of AI, what others say about your business is more important than ever. AI models often draw from third-party review sites as a key trust signal. This is why actively managing your reputation on review platforms should be a vital part of your digital strategy.

AI systems are designed to deliver trustworthy and reliable information. So, they recognise that a brand's own website will show a biased perspective. That's why they prioritise independent, third-party validation.

Reviews on sites like Trustpilot and Google Reviews act as powerful credibility signals. AI models can synthesise the sentiment from these reviews to form an opinion about your brand.

Encourage and manage
You should proactively encourage reviews from satisfied customers and actively monitor and respond to both positive and negative feedback.

Link and showcase
While the AI is likely to pull from these third-party sites directly, linking to your review pages from your own website can help reinforce the signal and show the AI that you are transparent and trustworthy.

In this new AI era, reviews are more than just a reputation management task; they serve as a direct lever for increasing your brand's visibility and influence in AI-generated answers.

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The shift from links to mentions

In traditional SEO, the value of a link was paramount.

With the rise of AI, the focus is shifting from simply getting links to gaining brand mentions and citations. AI models don't necessarily need a hyperlink to connect information to your brand; a mention in a reputable source is a powerful enough signal of authority. This also makes the consistency of your brand's message across all platforms more important than ever.

The shift to mentions
The AI doesn't differentiate between "follow" and "no-follow" links; it only looks for the brand mention and the context around it. A mention in a positive article on a well-known industry publication is a powerful signal of authority, regardless of the link type.

Consistent brand messaging
A uniform brand message across all marketing channels is necessary to avoid confusion. If the AI sees conflicting information about your business from various sources, it can affect how it represents you. Your brand's message should be clear about what you stand for, whether it's exceptional customer service or a commitment to sustainability.

By actively pursuing mentions in authoritative publications and ensuring your brand message is consistent, you can build a robust digital footprint that signals authority and trustworthiness.

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A new approach to content and strategy

With AI, it's no longer just about creating content. It's a fundamental shift in how you approach your entire digital strategy.

Targeting the middle and bottom of the funnel
Instead of just creating broad, top-of-funnel content, focus on searches indicating a user is close to making a purchase. Develop content for queries like "best product" or "pricing comparisons." This provides a more direct route to conversion in a world of zero-click search.

At the same time, existing top-of-funnel content can still be useful as a strong "pillar page", as long as it provides access to middle and bottom-of-funnel content pages. Your broad, high-volume search term pages don't need to be scrapped. They just need to be utilised differently.

Leveraging lived experiences
This is your secret weapon.

AI can generate generic definitions, but it cannot replicate genuine experience. This is your key differentiator. Show, don't just tell, by using case studies, personal anecdotes from real team members or customers. This makes your content unique and invaluable.

The power of personal branding
Building a personal brand for business leaders and employees helps create a human connection that AI cannot imitate. A strong personal brand enhances your overall authority and trust, which are key signals for AI. Consider how to showcase your team's expertise or experience on your website. This isn't just about adding quotes; it could involve sharing your thought process, an interview, explanation, or history related to your business.

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E-E-A-T is more important than ever

In the old days of SEO, you could sometimes get away with thin, keyword-stuffed content. But in an online world overflowing with information, Google's algorithms are increasingly focused on identifying high-quality, reliable content.

This is where E-E-A-T comes in, which stands for:

Experience: Highlighting real-world engagement and practical application.

Expertise: Demonstrating deep, specialised knowledge and skill.

Authoritativeness: Building recognition from reputable sources.

Trustworthiness: Ensuring your content is accurate, honest, and reliable.

E-E-A-T is key to earning the trust of both users and sophisticated search algorithms.

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Understanding the generative engines

Not all AI models are created equal.
They are trained on different data sets and have different search capabilities. Understanding these distinctions is vital for an effective GEO strategy.

Google's Gemini and AI Mode
The foundation of this is still Google Search.

This means that if you want to appear in an AI Overview, you still need to be ranking well in a traditional Google search. Both AI Overviews and AI Mode are more likely to recommend and link to a brand's own content, making it a critical focus for businesses.
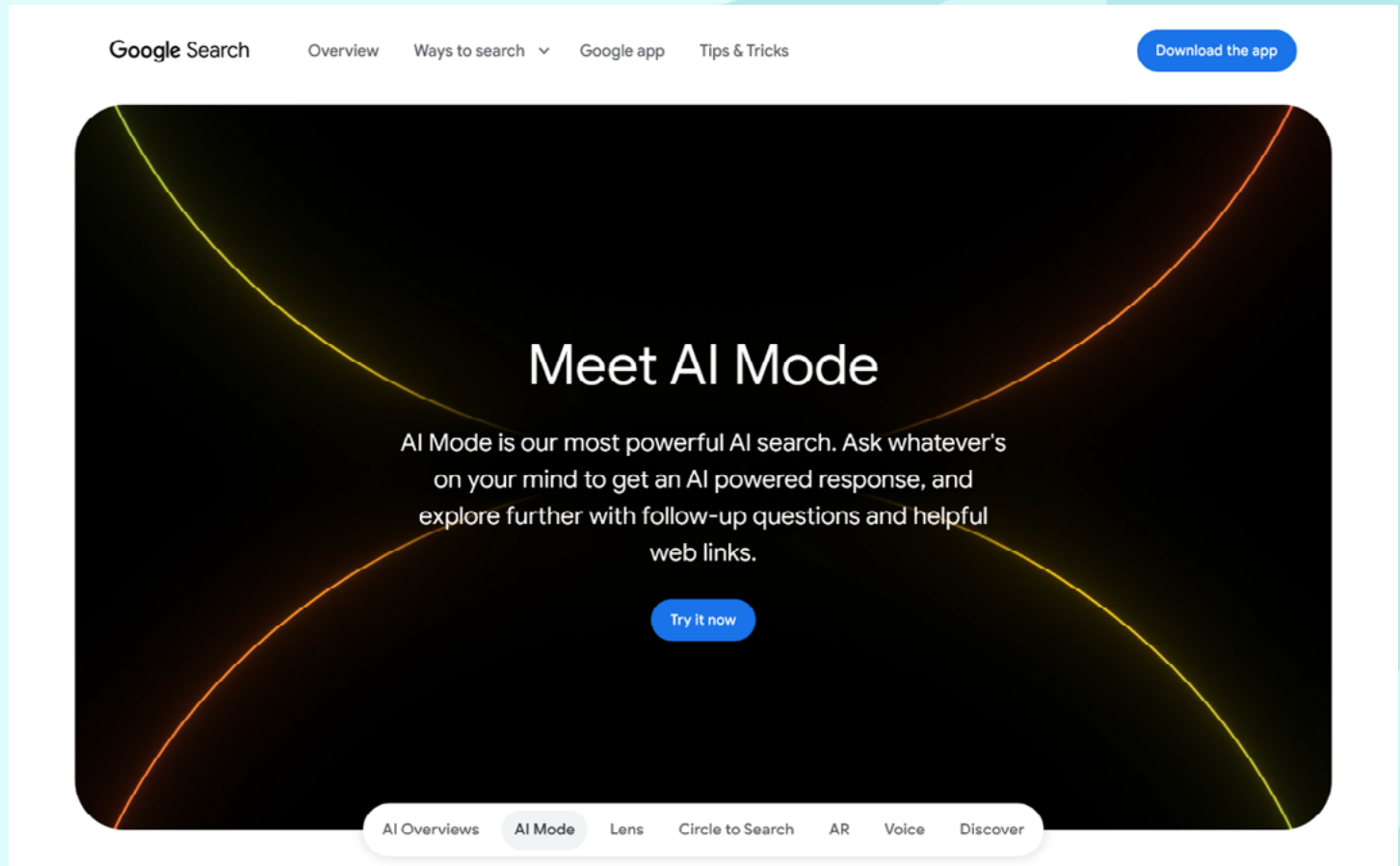
Other AI Search Engines

Bing Search and ChatGPT
When used for web search, ChatGPT relies on Microsoft Bing for its data.

This platform often cites high-authority third-party websites like Forbes, NerdWallet, and Wikipedia. This highlights the importance of a strong digital PR strategy and a focus on gaining mentions from authoritative sites.
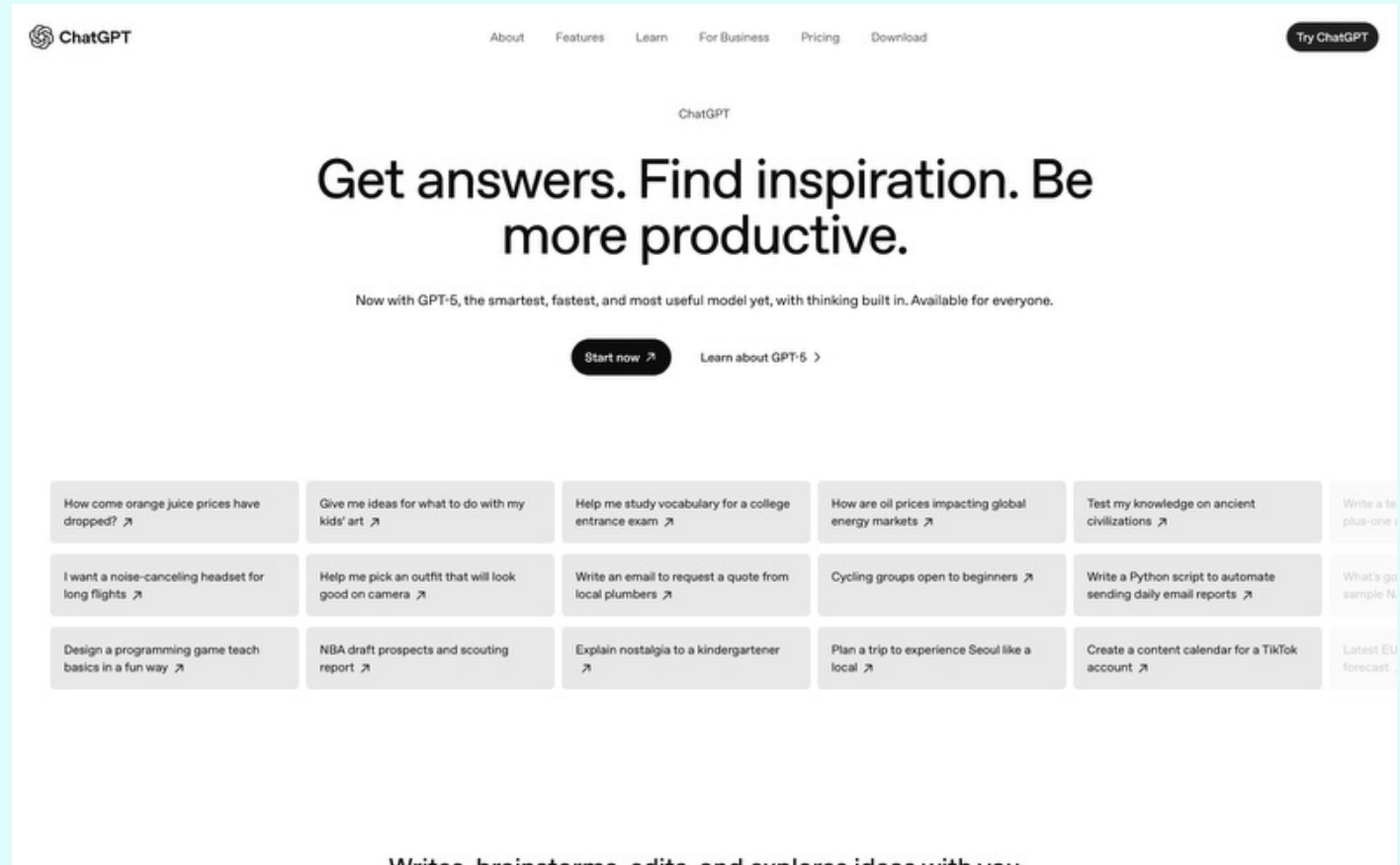

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Other AI Search Engines

The AI search landscape is rapidly evolving.
Perplexity, for example, utilises its own proprietary technology and web search across various platforms. It excels at aggregating information from multiple sources to provide a synthesised answer, again emphasising the need for a comprehensive online presence.

In addition to the major players, other platforms are gaining traction, including IBM Watson Discovery, Andi, Bagoodex, Komo AI, and You.com. Each of these has a unique approach to data and content, requiring a tailored GEO strategy."
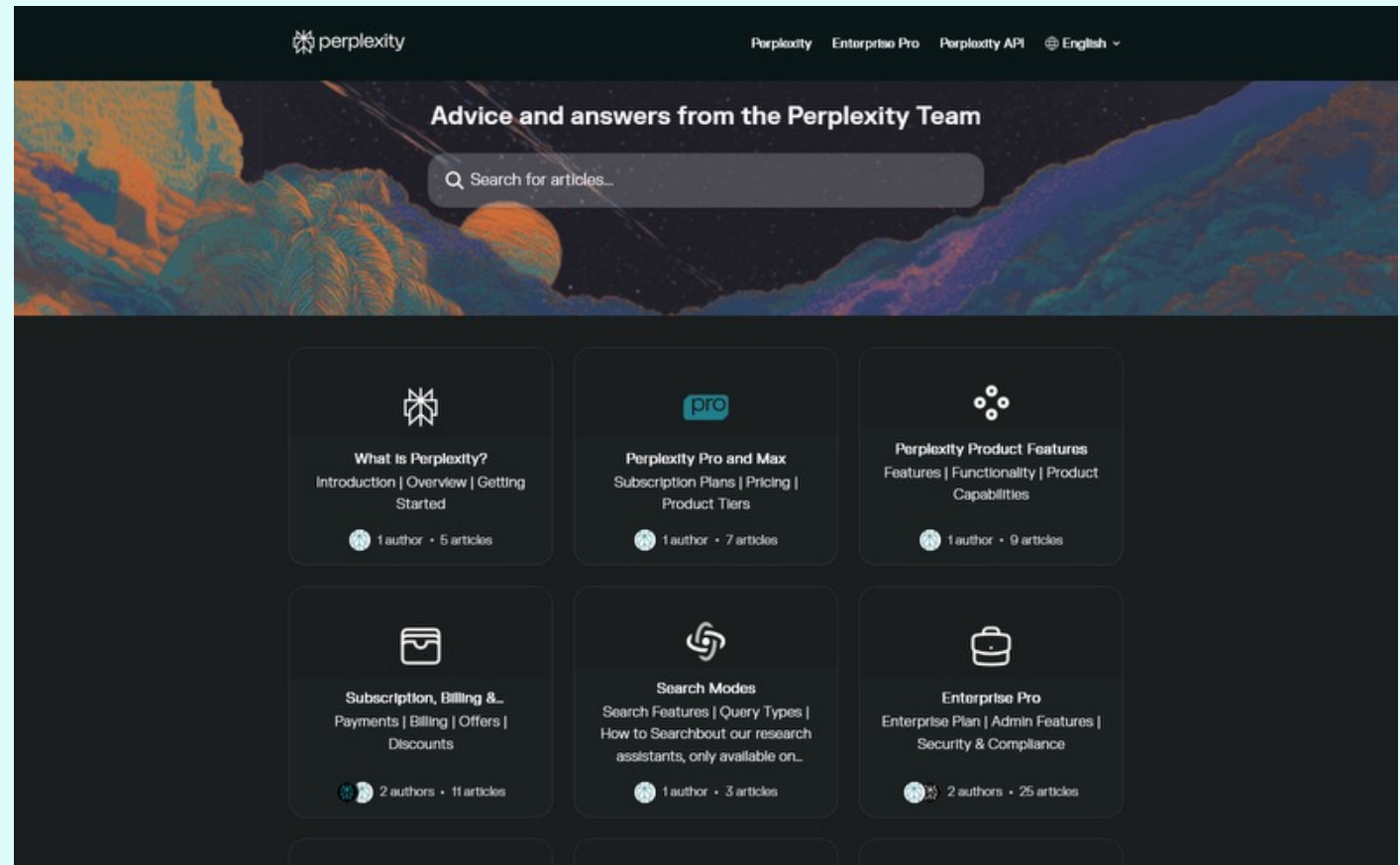
Where's Apple Intelligence?

After launching the iPhone 16 range being built for Apple Intelligence last year, nothing much has come out from Apple on their AI integration or advanced version of Siri.

Sure, you can pass questions to ChatGPT that Siri can't answer, but there's been little else.

The iPhone 17 launch in September 2025 skirted the AI elephant in the room.

Now however, it seems Apple's search is about to enter a new era. Apple is reportedly working on a new system, internally dubbed "World Knowledge Answers," which is designed to be a more sophisticated "answer engine" for Siri, Safari, and Spotlight. The new "World Knowledge Answers" engine, built in part with Google Gemini, is currently estimated for release in early 2026.

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Measuring AI Performance with the Right Tools

AI search is trickier to measure than traditional search.

This is because we are moving away from simple keyword rankings and towards a more complex system of citations and brand mentions.

The need for new metrics

- Track referral traffic and conversions coming directly from AI platforms.

- Monitor how often your brand appears in AI-generated answers.

- Use tools to understand whether the AI is speaking positively or negatively about your business.

- Compare your brand's presence in AI answers to that of your competitors to assess share of voice.

Tools of the trade to consider

- HubSpot's AI Engine Optimization Grader (AEO Grader): This tool can be used to analyse a brand's visibility and sentiment across different AI platforms.

- SEMRush's AI Toolkit: This tool can track brand recommendations and sentiment, providing actionable insights into your strengths and weaknesses.

- User Feedback and Learning: Acknowledge that some AI systems learn from user feedback, such as "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" ratings.

This highlights the ever-changing nature of the AI search landscape and the need for constant monitoring.

The future of the website and shopping in LLMs

With AI agents capable of facilitating direct purchases, it's natural to question the future of the traditional website.

Is it becoming obsolete?

No, the website's role is simply evolving.

The new role of the website

Your website remains the central hub of your digital presence. It's where your brand story lives, where you can highlight your unique experience and expertise, and where you control the user journey. The website is the primary location for demonstrating E-E-A-T.

It's where you host your case studies, your team's bios, and your firsthand accounts, all of which are essential signals for AI. While AI platforms can help with customer acquisition, they will always need a reliable source of information.

Your website is that source.

Shopping in LLMs

AI is not just a tool for research; it's a new sales channel. Partnerships, such as the one between ChatGPT and Shopify, are allowing for in-platform purchases, meaning a user can buy a product without ever visiting a brand's website.

This shift towards a more integrated, platform-agnostic approach means businesses must ensure their products and services are accurately represented and recommended in these AI environments.

The focus is no longer just on driving traffic to a site, but on driving direct conversions through the AI itself.

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Ready to optimise for the new AI Search Landscape?

The future of digital marketing isn't about ignoring AI; it's about embracing it.

By building a solid foundation, understanding the new rules of influence, and measuring what matters, you can ensure your brand is not just a part of the conversation but a key recommendation in the new era of search.

Are you ready to adapt your strategy? Get in touch with our team for a free, no-obligation audit of your current digital presence.

Email us at: **geo@redcmarketing.com**

Visit our website: **www.redcmarketing.com**

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Frequently Asked Questions on AI Search

Q: What is an AI search engine?

A: An AI search engine is a tool that uses AI technologies like natural language processing and machine learning to understand the context and intent of a user's query, providing more personalised and relevant results than traditional keyword-based search.

Q: What is a "zero-click" search?

A: Zero-click search is when a user's query is answered directly on the search results page without them needing to click through to a website.

AI Overviews have accelerated this trend dramatically, and AI Mode is expanding this further.

Q: How do I get my content into an AI Overview and AI Mode?

A: To get cited in Google's AI Overviews or AI Mode, your content needs to rank well in a traditional Google search first. You should also optimise for clear, concise answers using headings and schema markup, and ensure your content has high E-E-A-T signals.

Then you need to be looking at brand mentions for content or products on your site; reviews are important, and consistency across other sources will also help.

Q: Will AI replace traditional SEO?

A: AI will not replace SEO, but it will transform it.

Traditional SEO is still the foundation of your digital presence, as AI models rely on the web for their information. SEO is simply expanding beyond traditional search engines.

Q: Do I still need to build links?

A: While links are still valuable, AI places a greater emphasis on brand mentions and citations from influential third-party sources. The AI is more concerned with brand authority signals than whether a link is "follow" or "no-follow."

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