synapse

Search in the Age of AI:
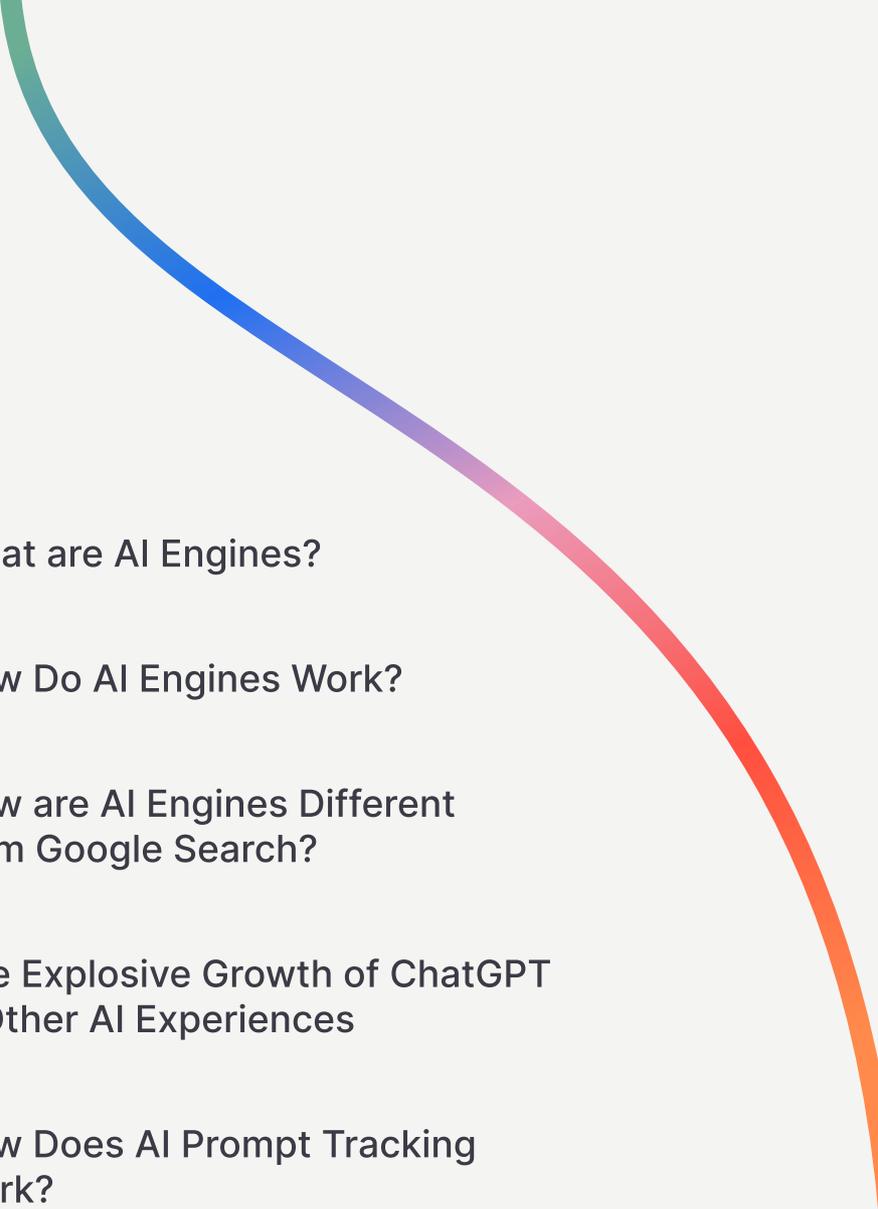
How AI Engines are Changing the Web

Contents

Executive Summary

01   **AI search is already producing more qualified users than traditional search.**

Brands are seeing 3–5x higher conversion rates from AI referral traffic compared to traditional organic search, making AI visibility one of the highest-value growth levers available.

02   **Optimization now extends beyond SEO into AI-specific tactics.**

Success requires technical steps (faster load times, avoiding JavaScript-only content, schema markup), ultra-specific and data-rich content, and expanded off-page signals (reviews, social presence) to increase the likelihood of citations and mentions.

03   **Measurement requires new frameworks.**

With no first-party prompt data available, marketers need prompt clusters, AI citation/mention tracking, and competitor benchmarking to model visibility and identify content gaps. Synapse's AI Engine Dashboard provides this visibility.

04   **AI visibility is more than an impression, it's an endorsement.**

Tracking mentions and citations in AI responses is the new battleground. If competitors are recommended more often, they'll own consideration before you're even in the conversation.

In just 3 years, ChatGPT has upended the world perhaps more than any other technology in such a short time. With mass adoption well underway it's clear that this tech will change how humans interact with the digital world.

ChatGPT has reached over 700 million weekly users

Many marketing leaders are trying to determine how this shift will impact their brand strategy, marketing plans, and bottom line.

In a world where searches are becoming conversations and users expect a more seamless search experience, what is the role of content marketing, organic search, and marketing teams in general?

These questions have guided our team's AI research and innovation. This eBook explores recent AI engine advances, the future of search marketing, and the role of content marketing teams in a world where audiences are increasingly utilizing AI as their primary search tool.

What are AI Engines?

AI engines are algorithmic models trained on enormous datasets that use reasoning and statistics to provide users with natural-language responses to textual prompts.

Despite their rapidly rising popularity, AI engines currently account for less than 1% of the digital search landscape. Google, with around 89% of search market share, remains the dominant player.

Rather than searching for an answer yourself on several webpages, you can ask an AI engine to do the research for you. Additionally, the format of AI engines enables users to ask follow up questions, ask for clarification, or ask the engine to consider other factors in its reasoning.

All together, the experience becomes ultra-personalized, from how you ask your initial question to the answer and information you receive.

ChatGPT is the dominant engine today, with approximately

79% of the AI engine market share.

How Do AI Engines Work?

Also known as Large Language Models (LLMs), AI engines analyze and index huge amounts of web content (webpages, images, videos, research papers, news articles, etc.) in a process known as training.

STEP 1
Pre-Training

STEP 2
Supervised Learning

STEP 3
Public Use and Reinforcement

Pre-Training

In training, AI models crawl existing web indexes and the live internet. Similarly to how Google's crawler bots visit, crawl, and index webpages, AI engines like ChatGPT use bots to do the same.

These bots arrive at a website, and in the blink of an eye, attempt to crawl, analyze, and index every bit of content and information it can find. These models are built to run quickly and efficiently. If a bot encounters a page or element that takes too long to load, it will skip it and move on.

This process, known as unsupervised learning, or pre-training, is done in large batches. AI experts talk about how these models are "trained on the entire internet". While this is hyperbolic, it isn't too far from the truth.

These engines are tasked with consuming the internet so users don't have to.

Supervised Learning

Once the AI engine has consumed and indexed the information, it needs to better understand how to score and synthesize what it found. These models must be able to discern the difference between a high-quality, trustworthy source and a spam site with false information.

Supervised learning involves teaching the model how to use what it found to provide helpful answers. If pre-training gives the model knowledge of words and a vocabulary, supervised learning teaches the model how to form sentences and reasoned answers.

This process might include showing the model pairs of prompts with human-written responses that properly address the question. These examples help the model discern a good answer from a poor one.

This instruction enables the AI engine to judge its own answers in the future, improving the quality of its responses and making the tool more helpful to users.

Public Use and Reinforcement

At this point, the model is ready for business. Upon launch, users can submit questions and prompts to the AI engine and receive high-quality synthesized answers.

During this period, the model may ask users for feedback on its responses. If you've used ChatGPT, you may have seen one of these requests.

Sometimes, the engine provides two distinct responses and asks you to choose the version you prefer. Your selection is taken into account by the model, and it will form responses more like your choice in the future.

Not only does this impact your experience with the model, it also influences how the model develops responses globally. If enough users choose one format over another, the model will prioritize that format for all users in the future.

Why It's Important to Understand How AI Engines Work

The above explanation is a simplification of the workings of AI engines, but we believe it's crucially important that marketers have at least a basic understanding of how these algorithms work.

If we're going to develop content and strategies to optimize for AI experiences, we need to know how information is collected and synthesized.

When the first search engines were introduced over 30 years ago, an entire industry of search engine optimization was born to unearth best practices and techniques that enabled their sites to earn top-ranked positions.

Now, we're at the beginning of a brand new evolution in search, one where marketers and content teams need to do the same exploration for AI engines.

How are AI Engines Different from Google Search?

In many ways, AI engines operate similarly to Google's traditional search engine algorithms. The search engine crawls the web, catalogs information, and uses machine learning to surface the most helpful sources for any query a user provides.

The main difference between how these two tools work is in their final product. Where Google delivers credible, trusted sources as its final product, AI engines like ChatGPT take this one step further. They use these sources and their LLM training to then summarize these sources into a concise, robust answer. No longer a search engine, AI models are answer engines.

01 AI Engines Prioritize Speed

For over 20 years, Google has built a reputation of credibility, authority, and accuracy as the internet's premier search engine. It has done this by prioritizing user experience, accuracy of information, and neutrality in its organic search experience.

Crawl budgets are high, meaning that Google will attempt to crawl thousands of pages on larger sites. This means that websites and content marketers are incentivized to develop large quantities of content demonstrating a depth of understanding of a topic.

These models were programmed to run fast and efficiently. If your website can't keep up, it's left behind.

Additionally, we know that Google's crawler bots will render JavaScript elements it encounters, a process that requires more compute power and time to see everything on the page.

Google's commitment to a full understanding of large quantities of data helps to drive continued trust in the results it delivers in the search engine results page.

AI engines work differently. Companies like OpenAI have been clear about their preference for speed when crawling the internet, using slimmer crawl bots that visit a huge volume of pages by skipping over any session it determines is taking too long.

This means that ChatGPT will not render JavaScript, skipping over these dynamic elements in favor of visiting another page. Similarly, if a webpage is taking too long to load, the crawler will skip it altogether.

02 AI Engines Love Context and Specificity

The real power of AI search experiences comes in their ability to ingest and understand context. Where Google takes a few words as an input, ChatGPT can ingest entire sentences or even paragraphs, using the context provided by the user to formulate an ever-more-specific response.

Think of a time where you wanted to find a restaurant to visit for dinner. On Google, you might search "best restaurants near me". You then view different local listings, trying to find one that has vegetarian options, allows dogs, and is well-regarded for its service.

You visit websites, read reviews, look at menus. You find a restaurant that works, but the process is clunky.

Today, you can draft a prompt in an AI engine that defines exactly what you're looking for:

"Find me a high-rated restaurant near me with good vegetarian options, good service, and a dog-friendly policy. Consider restaurant websites, reviews, and menus."

The AI engine has crawled and indexed restaurant listings and websites in your area, has analyzed reviews from across the web, and can provide you with a shortlist of restaurants that fit your specific criteria.

The AI experience is much more personalized and much more seamless. You've saved time, and likely feel like you've arrived at a better-informed answer.

03

Google Surfaces Content.
AI Engines Summarize.

Google's search algorithm has refined the process of finding relevant sources for the user's input keyword. And it's really good at doing so.

However, the ability of AI engines to summarize these sources into concise responses that answer the original query, and related questions, set these new experiences apart. What companies like OpenAI have learned is that users aren't actually in search of sources, they're in search of information, answers, and context.

In a way, we've become so trusting of Google and, more recently, AI engines, that we're comfortable turning over the process of source analysis and information synthesis to these models.

What does this mean for marketers?

Your content might not be what your audience sees from your brand. Instead, there's an intermediary interpreter between your brand and your audience.

Not only do you need to satisfy your audience, you also need to satisfy the AI engines consuming your site's content and presenting it to your audience.

AI Engines Offer Huge Opportunities to Brands That Prepare

If all of this sounds scary, we understand. There's a lot of change going on in the search industry these days, and no one's really certain how it'll play out. Things are changing fast, and there's no way to predict what this will all look like a year from now.

However, there's one fascinating thing we've seen from our client data that suggests that there's a golden opportunity for AI-focused marketing teams.

This means that a site visitor from ChatGPT is 3x more likely to convert than one who clicked on an organic Google listing. Further, this doesn't account for the fact that most organic search traffic is branded, meaning that the increased CVR for AI referral traffic is likely understated.

It's likely that the AI experience is warming audiences, bringing them to the site better prepared to convert. This could be due to the fact that they've been given more context on your brand from the AI engine.

Plus, users may treat a brand's visibility in an AI-generated response as a recommendation "from the internet as whole". This brand endorsement can be a powerful force, and may drive these higher conversion rates.

Ultimately, AI engines shrink the research phase, pushing a top-of-funnel user closer to conversion in their first searches.

This expedited user journey underscores the importance of AI engine visibility. For most brands, it isn't optional. Optimizing for and appearing in AI engine responses is a new, critical factor in your brand's organic performance.

On average, our clients are earning a

3x higher conversion rate (CVR)

from AI referral traffic than from traditional organic search.

For one B2B client, this difference is

closer to 5x.

The Explosive Growth of ChatGPT & Other AI Experiences

ChatGPT made headlines in 2023 when it was announced that it was the fastest growing consumer platform ever.

Less than seven years after its founding, OpenAI released its 4th model to great fanfare. Screenshots of the engine's poetry, human-like language, coding abilities, and more were quick to go viral.

The novelty of the technology among audiences not familiar with LLMs helped to boost ChatGPT's popularity among the general public.

Since then, we've seen a new model, GPT 5 released in August 2025, and continued adoption growth. What was first a niche tool for early-adopters and developers has become an integral addition to the tech stack of professionals, students, corporations, and everyday consumers.
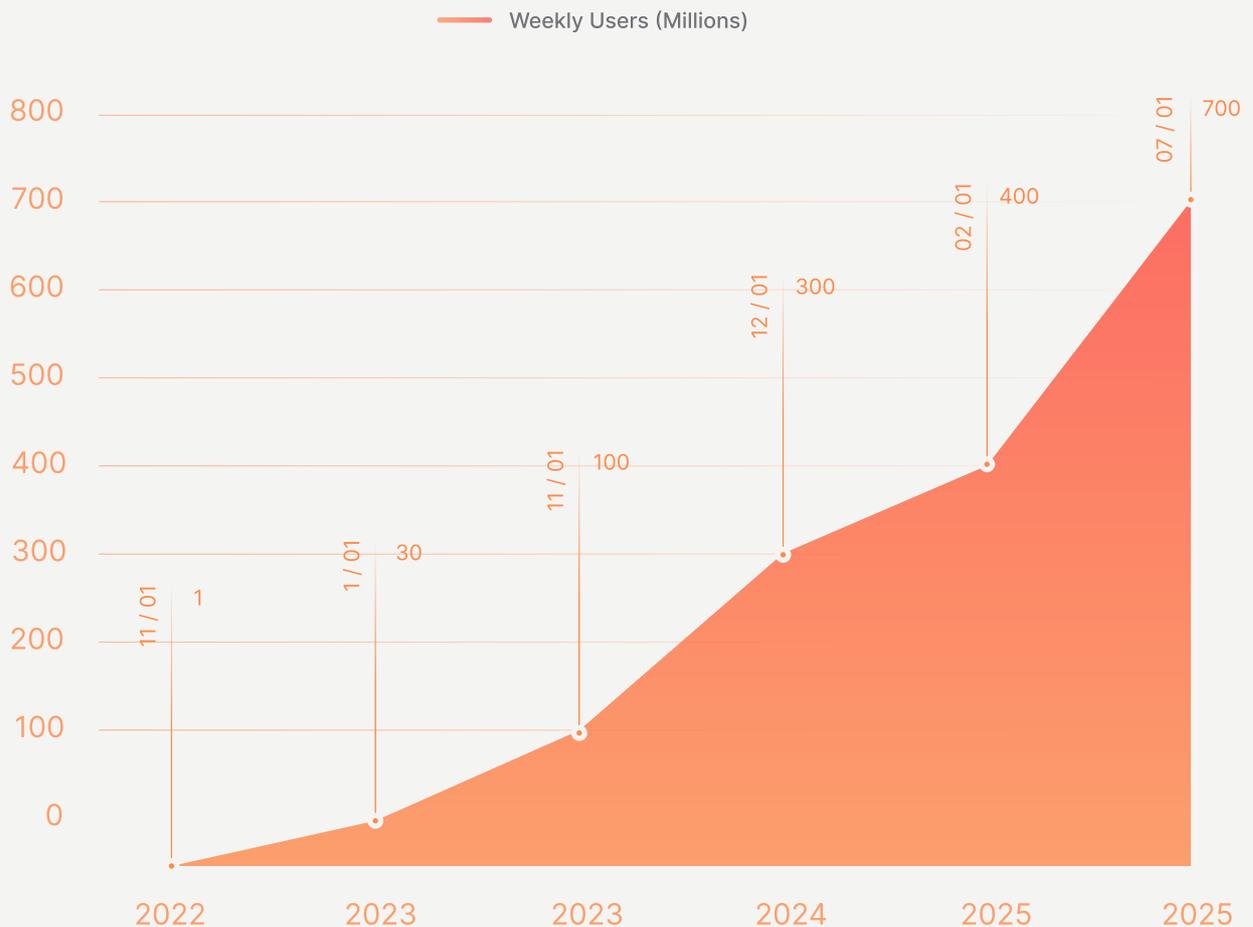
In June 2025, ChatGPT was reported to have reached 700 million active weekly users, double the same number from just two months prior.

ChatGPT grew to

100 million active users within just two months,

4 times faster than TikTok and 26 times faster than Facebook.

ChatGPT Weekly Users (Millions)

— Weekly Users (Millions)

Date	Value
11 / 01	1
1 / 01	30
11 / 01	100
12 / 01	300
02 / 01	400
07 / 01	700

X-axis: 2022, 2023, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2025
Y-axis: 0, 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, 800

Other AI Engines in the Race

While ChatGPT has become synonymous with AI engines, it's important to remember that there are a number of other players in the space. Engines like Perplexity, Gemini, and Anthropic's Claude round out the list of major AI engines that are powering this revolution.

While each model claims to have different features and benefits than the other, they all essentially train and interact with websites and humans the same way.

However, for the purposes of marketing, and particularly understanding how to align content to appear in AI responses, we recommend targeting ChatGPT for your optimization efforts given its sizable market share.

For reference, reports from Q2 2025 suggest that ChatGPT accounts for around

80% of all AI engine traffic.

Gemini earns around 6%, Perplexity 2%, and xAI's Grok earns around 3%.

05

How Does AI Prompt Tracking Work?

With AI adoption increasing rapidly and fears of Google's imminent demise emanating from board rooms, everyone wants to know how they're impacted.

Our client data shows that organic traffic is being impacted by AI Overviews in Google, and the future will likely bring growing impact from AI engines as searchers move to these new platforms.

Therefore, it's important to have a clear understanding of how your site is earning traffic from AI engines, how and when the brand is cited and mentioned in AI engine responses, and what your audience sees about you when they ask AI engines for information about your brand.

Why Prompt Tracking is Critical to AI Strategy

Prompt tracking in AI engines is the equivalent of keyword tracking in the traditional SERP. The goal is to understand whether you're getting visibility in the generated results.

However, there is one major difference between prompt tracking and keyword tracking; **AI engines don't provide 1st party prompt data,** so we don't have any direct insight into how often specific prompts are being conducted within the AI engines.

This obstacle is amplified by the nature in which users are conducting prompts; they tend to be much longer-tailed and more detailed than a traditional keyword-based search. This makes it even more difficult to determine "search volume" for specific prompts.

But not all hope is lost. Using AI, keyword data and other data sources, marketers can build prompt "clusters" that are highly likely to represent the types of prompts their prospects are conducting within the AI engines.

How to Create and Measure Prompt Clusters

Building out prompt clusters enables marketers to measure visibility in AI engines across a particular theme. Where traditional search visibility can be measured granularly, at the keyword level, **AI visibility is best understood as the cluster level.**

This cluster of topically-similar prompts provides a representative sample of questions users might be asking about your product or service. As we analyze responses to these sample questions, we're able to infer how AI engines would frame your brand to other, similar prompts.

To understand the impact of this visibility, we can compare changes to prompt cluster citation rates to changes in AI referral traffic volume. As citation rates increase, AI referral traffic should also rise. A secondary benefit of increased citation and mention rates may be an increase in branded organic or direct traffic, as users perform a Google search to learn more about the brand they saw in their AI engine response.

Prompt tracking enables marketing teams to measure two very important visibility metrics:

Brand mentions and Citations.

01

02

01

Brand mentions are rare, and really only appear when a prompt pushes the AI engine to recommend a brand.

You might ask ChatGPT to tell you "what are the best gyms in Boston for beginners". When ChatGPT provides you with a list of four or five options, those are brand mentions.

These mentions are incredibly important due to the brand endorsement effect we discussed earlier.

The user has been presented with what appears to be a personalized, curated shortlist of options to consider.

If your brand is there, you've made it into consideration, and the user is likely to perform more research into your brand as they continue their journey. If your brand was left out, you may have lost that prospect.

02
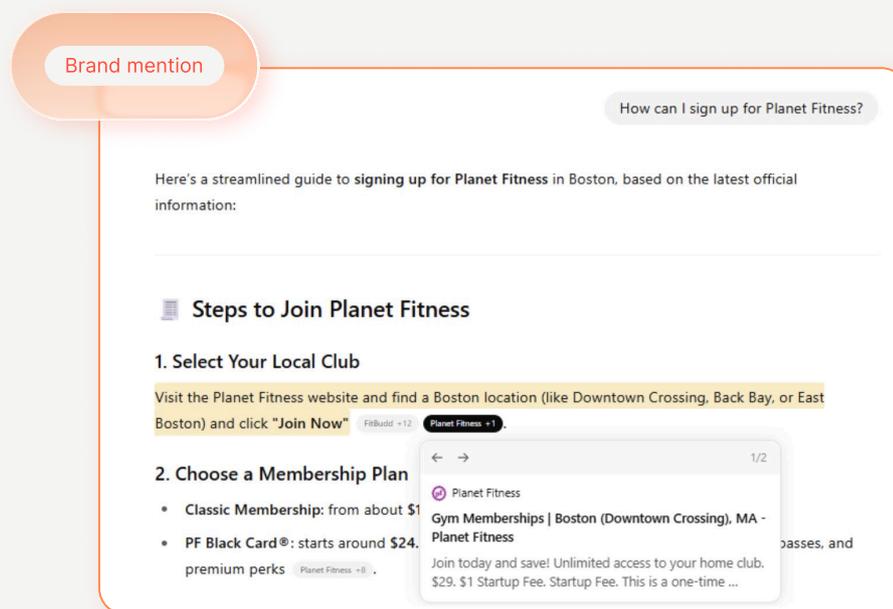
Citations are another valuable data point found in AI engine responses. Often, but notably not all the time, AI engines include citations of their source material in their responses. These links are clickable and drive the AI referral traffic mentioned earlier.

Citations can also take the form of in-line links. Instead of a citation signaling that the linked webpage was a source used in developing the answer, in-line links are found where the AI engine has determined that a user may want to visit a site. These appear in the AI-generated response.

Monitoring AI responses that mention or cite your brand provides additional datapoints marketers can use in developing an AI search strategy. Additionally, it enables teams to identify prompts that trigger the engine to provide a negative review of your brand and work to prevent that from happening in the future.

Using Competitor Visibility as a Benchmark

How often should your brand be mentioned in AI engines? Should every tracked prompt include your brand name in its response?

These questions open a larger conversation around what a good AI presence looks like. As discussed earlier, not every AI response will include brand names.

Therefore, AI visibility metrics like mention and citation rates are best served alongside those of your competitors.

When it comes to AI engine visibility, it isn't so much about appearing in every response, but appearing more often and more positively than your competitors. When AI recommends brands, you want to be recommended more frequently and more aggressively than your competitors.

This additional context is important. Not only are you able to tell how you fare against other brands, but you can also use a prompt-theme gap analysis to identify specific topics where you fall behind competitors.

For example, maybe you're mentioned and cited in more AI engine responses than your main competitor. However, they may still appear as the recommended brand for a specific feature or product offering.

Identifying this gap enables you to tune your content strategy to prioritize growing visibility in this theme.

The Synapse AI Engine Dashboard: A Custom Tool for AI Engine Analysis

Despite some of the data challenges associated with AI engines (no 1st party data, etc.), we have been determined to find ways to measure and model AI engine visibility and engagement for our clients.

Over the last several months, our Synapse Labs task force has built out custom solutions to be able to track AI engine visibility, including citations and mentions. This effort has culminated in our AI Engine Reporting Dashboard.

The dashboard monitors AI referral traffic, analyzes which webpages are earning that traffic and visibility in citations, and measures the sentiment of our brand's mentions.

Altogether, the AI dashboard is an integral part of any AI search program. Without this tracking, there's no way of measuring current visibility or understanding how marketing efforts impact change.

How to Use AI Data and AI Engine Responses to Audit Your Content

With an understanding of the data available from AI engines, the question becomes how to use this data to identify content gaps and audit your site's performance.

→ **For traditional SEO,** we use keyword rankings to measure visibility: which webpages rank for which keywords, and where are users seeing our content when they search. Similarly, we used organic search traffic or clicks to measure traffic and engagement: which webpages were able to convince a user to click into our site.

→ **For AI search,** citations and mentions replace keyword rankings (where is our content getting seen in AI responses) and AI referral traffic replaces clicks (where have we been able to earn a session).

Additionally, we can use citation data to understand what types of information AI engines want to include in their responses that we could publish to our site. AI engines are notorious for adding in supplemental information to their answers. You might've asked for the best gyms for beginners in Boston, but the engine might provide you with guidance on how to choose the right gym, different types of gyms to consider, or some beginner gym tips.

By reverse engineering these responses, you can guide your brand's content strategy to fill gaps that your competitors aren't considering.

How to Optimize for AI Engines

The question that every content marketer should be asking right now is this:

how to optimize your site's content for AI engines to give it the best chance at earning citations and mentions.

Like traditional SEO, optimizations fall into three categories: technical, content, and off-page. We've compiled a list of proven and experimental tactics marketers should consider implementing.

Technical Optimizations

Robots.txt Audit

Your site's robots.txt file helps bot crawlers, like ChatGPT's web crawler or Google's Googlebot, navigate your website. It can also prevent defined bots from crawling certain parts of your site.

ACTION | **Check your site's robots.txt file to ensure it isn't prohibiting AI engine bots from crawling your site.**

LLMS.txt Files

One of the earliest strategies put forth was the development of an LLMS.txt file. Similar in function to a robots.txt or XML sitemap, this file helps AI engines easily understand your site and locate its most valuable information.

ACTION | **Build an LLMS.txt file for your site. There are tools online that can help, and implementing this one change can improve your visibility to AI engines.**

Site Speed & Load Time

We discussed earlier how AI engines differ from Google in that they prioritize fast-loading content, and are known to skip pages that take too long to load. Knowing this, it's important to optimize your site's load times to check that they aren't prohibitively long.

ACTION | **Review your site's page load times, and optimize the loading process to prioritize speed. Start with your site's most valuable pages.**

JavaScript Audit

In the same vein, AI engine crawlers do not render JavaScript elements when they crawl your site. That means that any text or content that only appears when JavaScript renders is invisible to AI engines.

ACTION | **Review your site's core page templates to ensure that critical content elements aren't nested in JavaScript. And if they are, consider adding an HTML element to the page to house the content.**

Schema Markup

Schema Markup is a form of structured data that organizes important information in a standardized, bot-friendly format. Uses are near limitless: blog articles, FAQ elements, people/authors, organization information, and more can all be represented by Schema Markup.

> **ACTION** | Audit your site for opportunities to implement Schema Markup, and add to pages wherever possible, especially for information you'd like AI crawlers to cite. FAQ elements are top-priority, as this content format is prioritized by AI engines.

Content Optimizations

Develop Ultra-Specific Content

As we've discussed, AI engines love context. Users are able to ask very specific questions, and expect very specific answers. By writing ultra-specific content, you can increase your chances of being cited in AI responses for these hyper-specific prompts.

> **ACTION** | Build out content for all keyword variants and combinations.

Employ Formatting Tricks to Gain an Edge

AI engines like ChatGPT prefer content that's formatted in a structured, digestible way.

> **ACTION** | Write your headings as questions, and use a short paragraph of body copy to clearly answer them. Implement tables of contents where appropriate, particularly across your blog.

Emphasize E-E-A-T

Google has always advised publishers to consider writing with signals that enforce the author's experience, expertise, authority, and trustworthiness. AI engines weigh these same signals.

> **ACTION** | When developing content, focus on emphasizing the author's credibility and expertise, and cite first-party statistics and data when possible.

Write Review Content

You can improve your brand's chances of being mentioned by writing a review article of your product, and those of your competitors, where you rank your own product first with a robust review of the product and its features.

> **ACTION** | **Write review content on your site that emphasizes your product's key features and clearly positions your brand above your competitors.**

Include Your Brand Name in Content

AI engines are susceptible to something like subliminal messaging. Make sure engines keep your brand top of mind by using your brand name often across your site. Instead of writing "We offer the best…", write "[Brand name] offers the best…"

> **ACTION** | **Use your brand name in content as often as is appropriate.**

Off-Page Tactics

Third-Party Review Sites

Since AI engines are summarizing content from sources across the web, increasing your brand's presence on other websites can help improve your visibility. By analyzing cited sources for AIOs where your brand isn't mentioned, you can identify third-party sites that impact relevant mention lists and develop an outreach plan for your PR team.

> **ACTION** | **Partner with third-party review sites that are frequently cited in AI engine responses for relevant prompts to grow your web presence.**

Grow Your Social Media Presence

Similarly, increasing your social media presence can provide AI engines with more brand-friendly content to consider when generating its responses.

> **ACTION** | **Consider investing in YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn and other social platforms to improve your AI visibility.**

How Vector Embeddings Can Help Identify Content Gaps

Vector embeddings are the language of AI engines.

They're strings of numbers that, in a very abstract way, represent the "essence" of a thing, as understood by AI. When an AI engine encounters a webpage, a keyword, a prompt, an image, or really any data, it uses algorithms to turn that information into a string of "vectors".

By representing different types of information as embeddings, AI engines are able to measure the similarity of two things, even if they're originally completely different formats. For example, AI engines can compare the vector embedding of an image of a duck and to the embedding of the word "duck" to understand that the two things are similar and represent the same thing.

0.0123, -0.0345, 0.0567, 0.0789, -0.0912, 0.1023, -0.1234, 0.1456, -0.1678, 0.1890, 0.2011, -0.2132, 0.2253, -0.2374, 0.2495, -0.2616, 0.2737, -0.2858, 0.2979, -0.3100,...

A sample embedding, shortened, as most include hundreds or thousands of values.

This also applies to webpages, keywords, and prompts. When an AI engine crawls your webpage, it generates a vector embedding to represent that page. Later, when a user asks a question, the AI engine turns the prompt into a vector embedding, too.

The algorithm then compares the vector embedding of your webpage, and thousands others, to the vector embedding of the prompt and cites and mentions the webpages most similar or relevant to the prompt.

Understanding AI engines this way enables marketers to use vector embeddings to test their content's relevance for certain target keywords or prompts. It also enables us to compare our content to that of our competitors, identifying gaps in the process and empowering teams to develop stronger content.

Using Vector Embeddings to Score Content Relevance & Find Content Gaps

There are two major ways to use a vector embeddings analysis to improve your AI search strategy.

→ **The first is a content scoring exercise.** By generating a vector embedding for your webpage and its target keyword or topic, you're able to calculate a similarity score between the two. This enables you to determine how well optimized your page is for a given term or topic, and helps your team identify pages that may be poorly aligned with their target.

This exercise can also be useful in finding internal linking opportunities. By calculating the similarity scores between a target keyword and a collection of pages on your site, you can identify additional, relevant pages.

→ **The second main use case for a vector embeddings analysis is in competitor research.** In traditional search, you may compare the vector embeddings of a keyword and the top 10 or 20 results in its SERP.

Measuring these pages' similarity scores enables your team to identify top performers to analyze. What about these pages made them so relevant? What can we learn from these pages and apply to our pages to improve?

The same thinking applies to AI engines. Compare embeddings of prompts and top-cited content. Compare both to your page's embedding.

Vector embeddings aren't some secret, all-powerful cheat code to hack AI algorithms. But they do provide a more quantifiable understanding of content and its relevance to a topic.

In the era of AI, vector embeddings are valuable tools that, when used correctly, can power a strong AI search strategy.

Are We At the Start of a New Trail, or the Edge of a Cliff?

If there's one thing that every marketer can agree on, it's that everything is changing, and that it's changing fast.

AI has the chance to fundamentally change how humans interact with the digital world. Soon, the days of short, exact keywords and scrolling through top 10 rankings will be behind us.

Users don't want to search, they want answers.

It seems apparent that AI engines have been widely adopted. We expect this adoption to continue, especially as models continue to improve and become more intuitive and trustworthy, leaving traditional search behind.

Therefore, the question that many marketers are asking, both out loud and internally, is whether this spells the end of search marketing. Certainly, this sounds pretty dire, especially coming from a performance agency who counts search marketing as one of its primary service offerings.

We couldn't be more excited for the future recent trends suggest is coming.

What Does Search Marketing Look Like in the Age of AI?

For the last 20+ years, our job as content and search marketers has been to analyze SERPs to understand what works. We used these insights to inform our strategy, implementing changes based on winning strategies. By doing so, we earned real growth in visibility, traffic, and conversions.

These strategies prioritized people. Ultimately, that's who was reading our content. In the future, people aren't the only consumers of our content. In fact, they might not even be the primary consumers.

Implementing a strategic AI search program means writing for people and AI engines. AI engines are crawling your content and sharing it with people, indirectly, on your behalf. Whether we like it or not, we're now at the mercy of these engines.

But that's not new, and it isn't necessarily a bad thing.

Our content has always been filtered by Google's ranking algorithm. We wrote content that impressed Google and our human audience. If we only wrote for one or the other, we wouldn't be seen by either.

So what's new? There are two main things we're watching out for and considering moving forward.

01

Data-First Content Development, Formatted for Machines

- What does it mean to write content for AI engines?
- What do they like?
- What does this mean for the real people still consuming our content?

A lot of this is still being discovered. These models are still so new, and data still so limited, that there aren't any concrete best practices. The optimization guide we included above is a great place to start, but there will certainly be more optimization opportunities found in the coming months and years.

What we do know is that AI engines love data. Novel, written content is one form of data that AI engines are hungry for, but it isn't the only format.

We believe that the future of content strategy will revolve around data. Brands that publish novel, high-quality reports, studies, surveys, analyses, and databases will earn frequent and consistent visibility in AI engines.

Structured data will become all the more valuable. **An AI engine doesn't need your site's beautifully designed product page,** it just needs some core facts and details. Price, available sizes and colors, reviews, ratings, images, etc.

That elegantly crafted product description you wrote? It's getting summarized. Your brand font, colors, and design? AI engines won't show it.

Raw data and information is the name of the game in the age of AI. Users visiting your site, and to be clear, they will always visit your site, maybe just in smaller volume, will still need to be impressed by your site's design and copywriting.

But AI engines just don't care.

02

More of the Online Experience Happening in AI Chat Experiences, and the Need for APIs

Over the years, Google has made it clear that their business goals include keeping users in the Google environment. Sure they sent users to sites when it made sense, but much of the search journey slowly snuck into the SERP.

Featured Snippets, the precursor to AI Overviews, brought quick answers out of brand content and into the SERP. Local packs collected and organized local businesses into easy-to-navigate SERP experiences.

It seems likely that AI engines will work towards a similar goal. ChatGPT, which operates under a freemium model and charges Plus and Pro users monthly subscription fees, announced in July their intention to develop an AI-powered web browser.
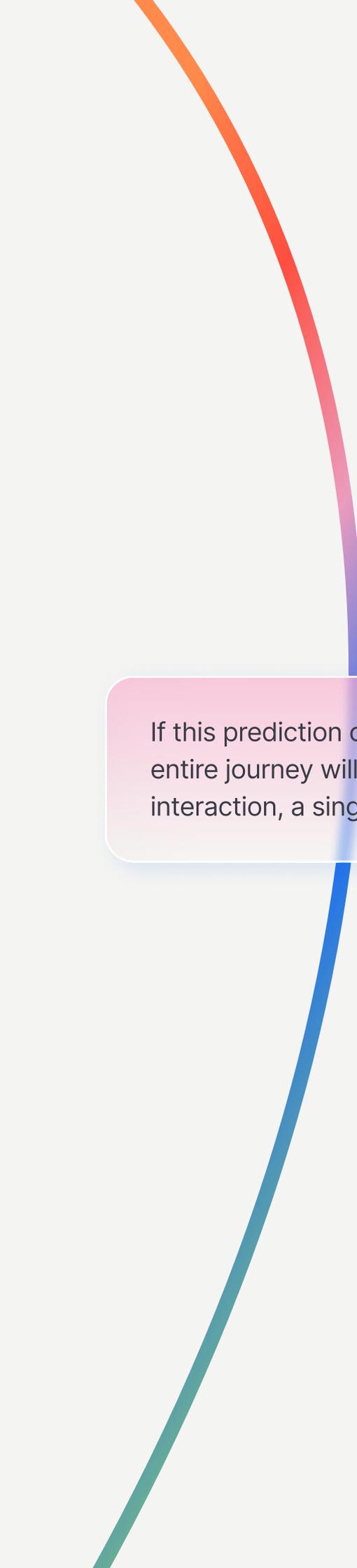
Their value-add over traditional search is a seamless, intuitive search process. If they can keep users on one platform from first search to purchase or conversion, they've reduced friction and provided a superior experience.

Today, users must still visit a website to convert or make their purchase. ChatGPT can offer guidance and provide helpful links for follow up, but the conversion event still happens on your site.

There may soon come a day where ChatGPT instead chooses to integrate the conversion activity directly into their platform. As web experiences are standardized across brands and API development becomes a more central piece of web infrastructure, it seems possible, maybe likely, that this is where we're heading.

If this prediction comes true, **the impact will be enormous.** The entire journey will be compacted onto a single platform, a single interaction, a single search.

Brands with native API access will crush those without. Connecting your site's conversion journey to ChatGPT and other AI engines will be the only way for users of the experience to find you and convert.

There are no signs that this shift to a one-platform experience is imminent, but it's important that brands are considering this possibility as they consider their strategic roadmaps over the coming years.

How to Prepare Your Brand for the Age of AI

Search marketing isn't dying, it's evolving. Unfortunately, brands and agencies that don't evolve with it might be left behind.

That's why it's so important that brands begin prioritizing AI search measurement and strategy now. There's no time to waste. ChatGPT is growing faster than we can measure, and Google is introducing deeper AI integration into its existing experiences every month.

Whether we'll ever see a day where Google goes the way of Yahoo search, we can't say. What we do know is that **there's enormous change on the horizon,** and it's approaching faster every day.

If you're interested in learning more about AI search and the strategies that will propel your brand into an AI-powered future, get in touch.

We'd love to set up a free, no-strings-attached AI consultation and strategy brainstorm.

synapse