How AI Is Changing Lead Generation: 3 Key Things SEO & PPC Teams Need To Do Now via @sejournal, @CallRail

1. Identify Which AI Platforms Are Driving Your Visitors

Each LLM and answer engine has different logic, leading to different outputs for the same prompts. It's important to understand which AI chatbots are aligned with your brand before making decisions that inform a larger AI search or SEO strategy.

Different LLMs Are Driving Leads In Different Industries

Not all AI platforms send leads the same way.

- **ChatGPT = Speed.** ChatGPT dominates overall lead volume at 90.1% of AI-referred leads, with especially strong numbers in healthcare and automotive industries, where people want instant options.
- **Perplexity = Research.** Perplexity accounts for 6.3%, but it punches well above its weight in high-consideration sectors. In Travel & Hospitality and Manufacturing, nearly one in ten AI leads comes from Perplexity, roughly ten times the rate seen in other industries.
- **Google's Gemini** holds 2.4% of AI-referred leads and is gaining traction in Business Service and Manufacturing,

likely because users lean on its Google Workspace integration.

- **Claude**, with 1.2% of lead generation, is carving out a niche in both Real Estate verticals and also with Marketing Agencies. Especially in areas where consumers tend to do more specific and detailed research before reaching out.

How To Accurately Track AI Prompt Visibility

AI search isn't one channel. It's a set of distinct platforms, each with different behaviors and industry strengths. So, repeat this AI prompt research phase for each LLM.

1. **Identify the LLMs that matter most for your vertical.** Use the data above as a starting point. If you're in healthcare or automotive, prioritize ChatGPT visibility. High-consideration service? Pay attention to Perplexity. B2B or manufacturing? Gemini should be on your radar.
2. **Test how each platform describes your business.** Go to ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, and Claude and ask them questions your customers would ask. "Who's the best [your service] in [your market]?" See if you're being recommended. If not, note who is and what content those competitors have that you don't.
3. **Create content that answers the questions AI platforms are fielding.** LLMs favor well-structured, authoritative, fact-rich content. Publish service pages, FAQs, comparison guides, and local content that directly answer the kinds of questions consumers ask these platforms.

2. Connect AI Traffic To Actual

Conversions

Connecting AI-driven leads to actual revenue in your reporting is key to understanding how to prioritize your marketing activities. Without visibility into AI lead attribution, you're making decisions in the dark, which is an expensive place to be.

However, if you can identify AI as the source of your best leads, you instantly know how to pivot your SEO strategy.

How To Track AI Traffic & Attribute Conversions Across ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity

As more money flows through AI search, the ability to attribute leads from specific LLMs isn't a nice-to-have. It's the difference between knowing what's working and throwing budget at a black box.

What you need is the ability to trace a lead from the AI platform where it originated, through the call, form, or chat where it converted, all the way to the revenue it generated. That full-funnel visibility is what separates data-driven teams from everyone else.

1. **Implement LLM-specific attribution.** Use a platform that can identify which AI model referred each lead. CallRail's AI search engine attribution, for example, automatically tags whether an inbound call came from ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, or Claude, not just "AI." That level of granularity is what makes it possible to actually optimize by channel.
2. **Create custom GA4 channel groups for AI traffic.** In Google Analytics, go to Admin > Data Display > Channel Groups and create a custom channel group that isolates AI referral traffic by source. This lets you compare AI-

driven sessions and conversions against your other channels.

3. **Add “How did you hear about us?” to your intake process.** Self-reported attribution (SRA) is a simple but powerful complement to digital tracking. Add it to your intake forms and train front-desk or sales staff to ask on calls. CallRail’s SRA feature lets you capture this data at the conversation level, so you can compare what callers say against what your analytics show. The gaps will reveal exactly where your tracking is falling short.

See what’s changing: The 2026 Outlook for Marketing Agencies

Connect AI Traffic to Calls, Forms & Sales Pipelines

Call tracking lives in one platform. Form submissions in another. Text conversations somewhere else entirely. Sound familiar?

When your lead data is fragmented like that, it’s surprisingly hard to answer basic questions. Which campaigns drive your best leads? Is AI search actually improving results? Where are leads falling off between first contact and conversion?

Make sure you are monitoring every lead interaction for complete funnel visibility. Teams need clear insight into every conversation-whether it comes through calls, forms, texts, or chats. And by channel- Paid Search, Video, SEO, Paid Social, and Content, for example.

Unifying those touchpoints isn’t just a reporting upgrade. It’s the foundation for any AI-ready lead strategy. Without it, every optimization decision you make is based on an incomplete picture. And in a landscape moving this fast, incomplete data leads to costly missteps.

How To Attribute Calls & Form Fills To AI Search

Take a good look at what is happening with your Voice Assistants. Are forms going to a shared inbox and being missed? Are calls not being answered while another line is in use or after business hours? How long is it taking to follow up with leads? Are those leads going to the competition after you miss the first call?

1. **Consolidate your lead tracking into one platform.** If calls, forms, texts, and chats are living in separate tools, you're creating blind spots. CallRail's unified lead intelligence platform captures every touchpoint in a single dashboard, so you can see the full customer journey from first AI search to closed deal, and finally answer the question: which channels are actually driving revenue?
2. **Map every conversion point to a marketing source.** For each way a lead can reach you -phone call, web form, text, live chat- make sure you can trace it back to the campaign, channel, or keyword that drove it. Use dynamic number insertion for calls and hidden fields on forms to capture source data automatically.
3. **Build a weekly reporting cadence around lead quality, not just volume.** Don't just count leads, score them. Review which sources produce leads that actually convert to appointments and revenue. This is the reporting your clients care about, and it's how you prove the value of your work

Build the foundation: The Agency Roadmap for 2026 and Beyond

3. Respond Faster To High-Intent AI

Traffic

28% of business calls go unanswered. Many of those leads never call back.

Take a good look at your Voice Assistants here. Are your forms going to a shared inbox where they sit unread? Are calls going unanswered because another line is busy or it’s after hours? How long does it take your team to follow up with a new lead? And if you miss that first call from an AI-referred prospect who already has high intent and is ready to buy. Are they going straight to your competitor?

Right now, AI search can understand your customers in real time and answer any question they need, making them perfectly ready to convert into a lead.

Now, it’s you who has to be ready.

Dig into the full data: What 20M Leads Reveal About AI Search and High-Intent Calls

AI Leads Convert Faster. Respond Immediately.

Think about how the traditional funnel used to work. Someone searches, browses a few sites, reads some reviews, maybe sleeps on it, then reaches out. There were days, sometimes weeks, of consideration built into the process.

AI has collapsed that timeline dramatically, and AI-directed callers skip the browsing phase entirely.

They’ve already done their research inside the LLM. By the time they call, they’re ready to make a decision. And they expect you to be ready, too. When a prospect has been pre-qualified by an AI recommendation, every minute of delay costs you revenue.

And the stakes go beyond individual calls.

On platforms like Google, answer speed directly impacts your ad rankings. Faster response times earn better placements on Local Service Ads and PPC -meaning slow follow-up doesn’t just lose you a lead, it quietly erodes your visibility and drives up your cost per lead over time. The agencies winning in an AI-search world aren’t just the ones showing up in LLM recommendations. They’re the ones ready to convert the moment the phone rings -day or night.

Get the playbook: 6 Ways To Prepare Your Business for AI in 2026

Apply AI Where Your Team Is Stretched Thinnest: Use AI to Capture & Qualify Leads Automatically

You can’t automate everything. But knowing where to apply AI, specifically, where your agency or internal team is most stretched, is the difference between using it effectively and adding technology for its own sake.

For most agencies and SMBs, the highest-impact bottleneck is follow-up.

If your clients are missing calls, responding slowly, or losing leads somewhere between the first touch and a booked appointment, that’s exactly where AI can deliver immediate, measurable value.

The key to success here is utilizing AI-powered platforms that can answer inbound calls around the clock, qualify leads in real time, capture intake details, and even book appointments automatically. Early adopters have seen answered calls increase by 44%. That’s not a marginal improvement. It’s the kind of shift that directly impacts revenue and client retention.

How To Set Up AI-Assisted Lead Handling

When you can connect your AI-assisted lead handling back to attribution data and revenue outcomes, you're no longer just reporting on activities. You're proving ROI. And that's what earns long-term client trust- and moves agencies from being seen as just a lead source to being a true growth partner.

1. **Deploy an AI voice agent for after-hours and overflow calls.** Start with the windows where your team is least available -evenings, weekends, and lunch hours. CallRail's Voice Assist answers, qualifies, and captures lead details automatically, so no high-intent caller falls through the cracks. Early adopters have seen answered calls increase by 44%.
2. **Automate follow-up texts immediately after missed calls.** If a call does go unanswered, trigger an automatic text within seconds: "Hi, we just missed your call -how can we help?" This simple automation recovers a meaningful percentage of leads that would otherwise be lost.
3. **Connect your AI lead handling back to attribution.** Make sure the leads captured by AI tools feed into the same reporting dashboard as your other channels. If your AI agent books an appointment at 9 pm on a Saturday, you should be able to trace that back to the Google Ad or AI search referral that started the journey.

Go deeper: Why The Top Marketers Pair Data With Story

Start Tracking & Optimizing AI-Driven Leads Now

The shift isn't on the horizon. It's already here.

It's time to build AI-aware attribution so you can see what's actually driving leads, unify your data so you can act on it, and respond fast enough to capture the high-intent leads AI

search is already sending your way.

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