

Why AI Search Will Soon Decide If Customers Ever Find Your Brand

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Key Takeaways

- AI assistants now deliver product recommendations, collapsing the traditional marketing funnel into answers.
- Optimizing content with schema, clear product attributes and FAQs increases AI recommendation chances.
- Third-party validation through reviews and media mentions builds digital trust that AI relies on.

If the last few years were about business efficiency and retention, 2025 is shaping up differently. Consumer spending is coming back. Customers are finally opening their wallets again, and that means competition for attention is heating up. For founders and brand leaders, the challenge is not just how to keep existing customers engaged but how to make sure new ones can easily find you in the first place.

Here is the shift that too many entrepreneurs still underestimate: most customers are not discovering brands through Google the way they used to. They are now asking Large Language Models (LLMs) and other AI tools. ChatGPT, Perplexity, Claude and Gemini are quickly becoming the front door to commerce, which has completely changed the growth playbook.

Across categories, brands that align with this shift are seeing sharp gains in AI-referred traffic, including triple-digit increases in some segments and more than 400% growth in parts of the luxury sector.

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Why search is turning conversational

The core concept of product discovery has gone through an extensive change, from simply searching keywords to typing dynamic conversation. Five years ago, most users typed in “best running shoes in Google.”

Now, with LLMs and AI tools, those queries have turned to more descriptive searches, such as “What are the best lightweight running shoes for flat feet under \$150?” In just seconds, these tools operate like seasoned researchers that expertly synthesize product specifications, reviews and media mentions to provide definitive, curated recommendations.

For consumers, this instant, hyper-personalized recommendation is a massive win. For brands, however, this raises the stakes to an entirely new level. As the traditional marketing funnel is starting to collapse, if your product isn’t in that AI-generated answer, you’re essentially being eliminated from the consideration set. In this new landscape, you are either the answer or you are invisible.

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How AI decides which products to

recommend

Think of AI discovery today as the Wild West of early Search Engine Optimization (SEO). The regulations are still being developed, but the fundamental ideas are already forming. Unlike typical search engines, which rank a list of sites, LLMs and other AI tools come up with a single, confident response from sources that are easy to comprehend and trust. And every business's goal is no longer simply to rank but to make every product's information the most reliable, easy-to-use element for the AI's final recommendation.

This starts with the technical basics. Clean HTML structure, clear headers and descriptive alt text make the content legible to these machines. Highly specific product attributes, such as materials, fit, sizing and use case, will further enable the model to map a user's needs without guesswork. Finally, concise answers to consumers' FAQs can provide perfect, prepackaged building blocks that an AI assistant can confidently copy and cite in its answer, which in turn can make your product an easy choice.

Optimizing your website for AI search

Seventy to eighty percent of AI discovery overlaps with traditional SEO, and most teams already have the resources. The most critical next step is to apply them with an answer-first lens. Development teams can utilize schema markup to enable AI and LLMs to parse content more efficiently. Marketing teams can tailor product descriptions to mirror what customers actually search for online.

For example, if people are looking for "the best moisturizer for sensitive skin that will not clog pores," your product page should answer that question in the first two sentences of

the product description. When your content is structured this way, you are essentially writing the AI's answer for it. Additionally, you make your product the most logical and defensible choice.

Getting your brand into the sources AI trusts

While fully optimizing your website is a huge plus, LLMs and AI tools often pull results from third-party sources. Communities like Reddit, category-specific publications and mainstream media all contribute to shaping this knowledge base. In PR, this strategy is referred to as "media mentions."

Each credible mention is a signal that your product fits a use case, budget or buyer profile. Pitch the outlets your customer already trusts with clear, attribute-led positioning. An AI builds confidence through third-party validation; it looks for a consensus across the web to verify your claims. Your goal is to create this consensus.

To do that, encourage customer reviews that are rich with detail to describe the specific use cases that other buyers care about. Simultaneously, earn placement in authentic comparison articles where conversations about your product category are already happening.

When an AI sees the same specific benefit supported across your site, customer reviews and a trusted third-party article, its confidence in recommending you skyrockets.

Ultimately, the shift from search engine to answer engine is rewriting the playbook for brand discovery. The new strategy is to build a foundation of digital trust so clear and consistent that an AI or an LLM has no choice but to see your brand as the most credible solution.

This doesn't just encompass the next evolution of SEO; it's a

fundamental return to clarity, authority and value.

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