You Can’t See How AI Ranks You, So Build What It Can Read via @sejournal, @slobodanmanic

Web strategy in the AI era has a strange shape. You spend your days optimizing for systems nobody will let you look inside. You publish, you watch the traffic move, and when an AI answer surfaces a competitor instead of you, there is no panel that explains why. So when a regulator forces one of these systems to show its work, the question gets concrete: What actually changes for the people who build websites? After reading the order, the honest answer is two things at once. The recourse is real and worth taking seriously. The work it points to is not new.

A Regulator Is Forcing Google To Explain How It Ranks

On June 17, the UK Competition and Markets Authority used Google’s Strategic Market Status designation, granted last October on the basis that Google handles more than 90% of UK search, to impose two binding rules. The first matters to anyone with a website. Google has to rank organic results by “objective and non-discriminatory criteria,” and the regulator wrote that this applies inside AI Overviews, not only the 10 blue links. Google also has to give businesses real transparency into how ranking works, advance notice before major changes to its ranking systems, and a documented process to raise complaints. It has six months. “Step by step, we’re

ensuring that Google's search services work better for businesses and consumers across the UK," said Will Hayter, the CMA's executive director for digital markets.

For 25 years, the ranking system was something you inferred from the outside, never something you could question from the inside. Advance notice of changes and a real complaints process is recourse web professionals have never had, and "objective criteria" is a promise that the unexplained demotion has to end. It is UK-only for now, Google will contest it, and nothing is live for six months. But rules like this rarely stay in one country, and the direction is not ambiguous. The layer that decides whether your website is seen might end up being exposed.

Opening The Box Would Change Less Than You Hope

Now run the thought experiment all the way. Say the order goes further than anyone expects, and you could read the exact criteria that decide what gets surfaced and cited, across every engine, not only Google. What would you actually do differently?

You would probably change less than the excitement suggests. Transparency would settle many arguments, sure. It would end the seasonal debate over whether llms.txt does anything (the latest large-scale data says it does not), whether schema markup is a citation cheat code (a controlled study says it is not), whether stuffing a page with "best in class" claims earns the recommendation (it earns the citation and loses the recommendation to the competitors you named). Seeing the rubric would kill the folklore. It would not change the work. A system reading your website still has to find the answer, parse it cleanly, and have some reason to trust it. Whether you can see the criteria or not, the page either presents its substance in a form a machine can extract, or it hides it

behind something the machine never runs.

That through-line sits under every one of these stories. A court in Munich ruled in May that Google's AI Overview is Google's own speech, which Google can be held liable for. The AI answer is being treated as a product with an owner and rules. None of that touches the one input you fully control, which is whether your content is legible to the thing doing the answering.

Audit What A Machine Can Read On Your Website Today

Waiting for the box to open is the wrong instinct. That is someone else's six-month timeline, in one country. The right move now is to audit what a machine can already read on your website, and fix what it cannot.

Run three checks, in order.

1. **Rendering First:** Does your meaningful content exist in the HTML a system receives, or does it depend on client-side JavaScript that most AI fetchers never run? Load your most important page with JavaScript disabled and see what is left.
2. **Structure Next:** Can the answer to an obvious question be lifted off the page as a clean, self-contained passage, or is it buried in narrative that only resolves for a human reading top to bottom?
3. **Verifiability Last:** Are the facts that define you, who you are, what you sell, what is true about it, stated plainly and consistently across your website, or does the machine have to take your word for claims it cannot confirm anywhere else?

That is machine-first work, and it is the same work whether Google is forced to publish its criteria or not. It's upstream

of every ruling, which is why it will survive all of them. A website a machine can read, parse, and verify wins in the opaque version of this world and in the transparent one. The only thing transparency would add is proof you were right.

So, when that black box opens is not on your roadmap. A regulator or a court could force that, in their country, on their clock. What should be on your roadmap is whether the answer to a real question about your business sits in your HTML right now, in a form a machine can lift out and trust. You don’t need anyone’s permission to do that.

More Resources:

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