# The future of search: why trust matters in the AI era

**By Cameron Nakashima, Media Engagement Manager, Better Business Bureau Great West + Pacific**

The topic of AI can be a polarizing one. While some people get stars in their eyes at the idea of limitless AI-driven possibilities, others get “the ick” at the thought of the related societal and moral challenges it raises. Whichever way you feel about the topic, one thing is certain: AI is changing the way people find information and brands online. Put into [BBB](https://www.bbb.org/)-terms, AI-powered search is changing **who** shows up at the top of search results, impacting your brand’s perceived relevance and trustworthiness.

For some businesses, this is a blessing; for others, not so much. To win in the era of AI search, businesses must understand how these changes impact their brand’s website and make changes accordingly.

## From search engines to answer engines

Looking back just a couple of years ago, traditional **search engines** such as Google, Microsoft Edge, or Bing used to present a list of blue links that customers could skim through to find what they believed they needed. It used to be that you would tell the browser **what you were searching** for, and it would help you sift through the internet to find it.

Now, AI plays a greater role. Today’s search tools, including ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Microsoft Copilot, behave more as an **answer engine**. Instead of just serving up links, it compiles and summarizes (what it believes to be) the best sources on the topic. When using today’s browsers, you simply **ask a question**, and it researches and crafts an answer.

In this new landscape, businesses can’t rely solely on SEO (search engine optimization) shortcuts and keyword stuffing; now, they must plan for AEO ([answer engine optimization](https://blog.brandrank.ai/prompted-perspectives-news/what-is-answer-engine-optimization-aeo)). This shift creates both opportunity and risk for business owners who have optimized their online presence for the traditional search system. On one hand, brands with trusted, authoritative content stand to win new visibility. On the other hand, if your website lacks clarity, credibility, or evidence of trust, AI models may skip over you entirely (or perhaps even worse), summarize your business inaccurately.

## Trusted content matters more than ever

AI tools are trained to detect trustworthy information with authentic content, not fluff. While it doesn’t work perfectly every time, the companies behind these search engines are investing manically to make their AI as accurate and trusted as possible.

According to [AI search experts](https://www.bbb.org/all/business/business-tips/why-bbb-accreditation-may-help-you-be-more-visible-in-ai-search), this means that if you want AI to find your business and present it accurately, the content on your company website and business profiles must be:

* Credible: Fact-based and aligned with industry standards.
* Helpful: Written for the customer, not just the algorithm.
* Consistent: Reflecting the same message across your website, social media, and business listings.

When businesses share transparent, educational, and consumer-friendly content, they are significantly more likely to [be found in AI searches](https://www.bbb.org/all/your-artificial-intelligence-hq/the-power-of-ai-powered-search?utm_source=chatgpt.com). Think FAQs that genuinely answer customer questions, product or service explanations that demystify choices, and blog posts that address real-world problems.

## Trust signals: the deciding factor

When it comes to building trust online today, content alone is not enough. AI models and consumers look for third-party validation as proof that a business is reputable. This is where industry-standard trust leaders, such as Better Business Bureau, come into play.

For example, when it comes to building trust, BBB Accreditation shows that a business has met rigorous standards of honesty, transparency, and accountability, serving as a powerful third-party proof point. [In some tests](https://www.bbb.org/all/business/business-tips/why-bbb-accreditation-may-help-you-be-more-visible-in-ai-search), AI search engines were more likely to highlight Accredited Businesses because they have the proof points (verified identity, transparent practices, responsive customer service) that algorithms are designed to favor.

**Other trust signals include:**

* Verified customer reviews (not purchased or manipulated).
* Proof of website security and clear data privacy tool usage.
* Consistent business details (including transparent contact information, ownership details, and policies) across social media profiles and online business directories.

## What your business can do

To make sure your brand doesn’t get lost in the AI shuffle, here are action steps business owners or brand managers can take now that can help prioritize your brand among AI engine results.

**Make Your Business “Machine-Readable.”**

AI models don’t just scan your homepage; they pull from structured data sources across the web. A [BBB Business Profile](https://www.bbb.org/all/local-business/for-businesses/optimize-your-bbb-business-profile), for instance, provides verified business information (including contact details, categories, reviews, and complaint resolution history) that AI can digest and confidently share. For this reason, you should make sure that your business details are accurate and consistent across the various online profiles and trusted websites AI checks.

**Demonstrate Trust via third-party signals**

Proof of third-party validation, membership, or [awards](https://www.bbb.org/local/1296/bbb-awards) that demonstrate your business’s excellence can help you stand out in AI searches. Becoming [BBB Accredited](https://www.bbb.org/apply) can send a strong signal to both customers and AI that your business has been vetted and is committed to integrity and accountability.

**Highlight Reviews and Responsiveness.**

Consumer reviews are one of the top factors AI looks at when pulling brand mentions. But it’s not just the star rating, it’s how you respond. A history of timely, professional responses shows both customers and AI that you’re engaged and trustworthy. If you have not done so recently, take time to respond to reviews and complaints across platforms.

**Publish Consumer-Focused Content.**

AI looks for content that solves problems, not sales pitches or keyword-stuffed slop. FAQs, “how-to” articles, and clear explanations of your products or services give AI the material it needs to recommend your business in context-rich answers. Combine that with Accreditation, and you’re providing both the substance and the credibility signals that search engines want.

## Bringing it back to trust

AI-powered search has rewritten the rules of online visibility. Now, the businesses that get seen are those that pair true, consumer-focused content with credible trust signals that are weighted by AI and people alike. BBB Accreditation is one of the most recognized ways to demonstrate that credibility. In a world where the first impression of your brand might not be made by a person, but by an algorithm, trust matters more than ever.

Optimizing your searchability in the AI era means, in part, optimizing for trust.