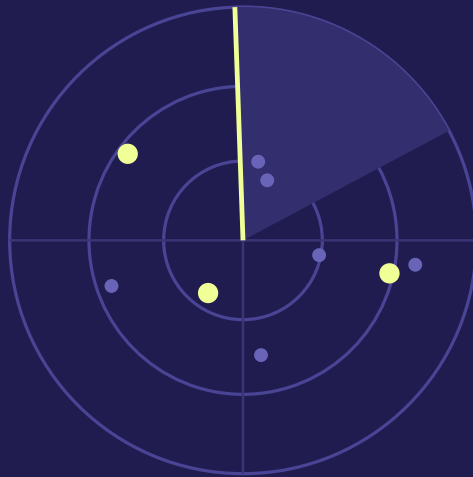


AI, Search and the New Reputation Infrastructure

What changes when institutions are summarized before they are visited



ARTEFACT91

Campaign Intelligence + Strategic Communications

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ARTEFACT91 BRIEFING 03

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HOW TO READ IT

A briefing, not a report: the executive brief carries the argument, the numbered sections carry the evidence and the method, and every external figure is attributed to its source.

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Executive Brief

For two decades, digital reputation strategy assumed that people would search, scan results, click and evaluate. That sequence is changing. Search engines now generate summaries; AI assistants answer questions directly; platforms synthesize information from owned, earned and community sources.

Pew Research Center's analysis of U.S. browsing behaviour found that users encountering a Google AI summary clicked a traditional search result in 8% of visits, compared with 15% when no AI summary appeared. Links inside the AI summary itself were clicked in only 1% of visits. Reuters Institute's 2026 report finds growing experimentation with AI chatbots for news, even while trust in chatbot news answers remains low globally.

The strategic implication is not that websites or SEO are obsolete. It is that an institution's reputation increasingly exists in an information layer it does not directly control.

SECTION 01

From Search Rank to Answer Environment

Traditional search optimization asks whether an organization appears. AI-mediated discovery adds harder questions: How is the organization described? Which sources are used? Which controversies are foregrounded? Are outdated facts repeated? Are competitors or critics treated as more authoritative? Does the answer distinguish allegation from verified fact? Does it know what the institution actually does?

This creates a new reputation surface: the answer environment.

An answer environment includes search summaries, chatbot responses, knowledge panels, news results, high-authority third-party pages, forums, reviews, social video and the structured information machines can retrieve. It is dynamic, query-dependent and different across platforms.

SECTION 02

Why Owned Content Is Not Enough

Organizations have historically treated their website as the canonical version of themselves. AI systems synthesize across sources. Pew found Wikipedia, YouTube and Reddit among the most frequently cited sources in the AI summaries it studied, while government sites appeared proportionally more often in AI summaries than in traditional results.

That means authority is distributed. A precise corporate webpage may coexist with an outdated directory, critical news story, regulator filing, employee review, Reddit thread or Wikipedia entry.

The communications task becomes information coherence: ensuring that accurate, specific, corroborated information exists across the ecosystem rather than merely on the organization's own domain.

SECTION 03

Build an AI Reputation Audit

Artefact91 recommends auditing the questions that matter, not simply the brand name.

Start with five query families: identity (“What is X?”); evaluation (“Is X trustworthy?”); comparison (“X versus Y”); controversy (“What happened with X?”); and decision (“Should I partner with/work for/buy from/invest in X?”).

Run those questions across major search and AI environments. Record the answer, sources, omissions, outdated claims, inconsistencies and uncertainty. Repeat over time rather than treating a single output as definitive.

Then map each issue to an intervention: improve the authoritative source, publish missing evidence, correct structured data, strengthen third-party validation, clarify ambiguous language, create an FAQ, provide machine-readable facts, or accept that a credible negative source cannot simply be optimized away.

SECTION 04

The New Content Standard: Retrievable Proof

Generic brand language performs poorly in an environment built to synthesize facts. “Leading,” “innovative” and “trusted” are claims. Machines and skeptical audiences need evidence.

Useful content contains specific entities, dates, methods, leadership, services, jurisdictions, evidence, outcomes, definitions and sourceable explanations. Important claims should be consistent across biographies, media materials, reports, profiles and public databases.

This is not about writing for robots at the expense of humans. Clear factual architecture improves both human comprehension and machine retrieval.

SECTION 05

AI Visibility Is Also a Crisis Issue

During a controversy, the information ecosystem can update faster than an organization’s own website. A high-volume falsehood, old article or misleading clip may become part of the source environment from which automated answers are produced.

Crisis protocols should therefore include an answer-environment check. What does search show? What do major assistants say? Which sources are being surfaced? Are corrections indexed? Is the organization’s latest factual statement retrievable? Is the same misinformation appearing across platforms?

The goal is not to manipulate an AI answer. It is to improve the availability, consistency and authority of accurate information.

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Artefact91 Point of View

Reputation is no longer only what people remember about an institution. Increasingly, it is also what an information system retrieves when someone asks a consequential question.

Organizations should manage three layers together: what they say, what credible others say, and what machines can reliably find.

The emerging discipline is not merely generative-engine optimization. It is reputation infrastructure: the deliberate creation, verification and distribution of facts capable of surviving synthesis.

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Sources & Research Base

[Pew Research Center — Google users are less likely to click on links when an AI summary appears](#)

[Reuters Institute — Digital News Report 2026](#)

[Gartner — Consumer distrust of AI-powered search results](#)

RESEARCH NOTE

This briefing synthesizes current public research and Artefact91 analysis. External statistics are attributed to their source. Strategic frameworks and recommendations are Artefact91's analytical interpretation and should be adapted to the facts, jurisdiction and risk profile of each engagement.