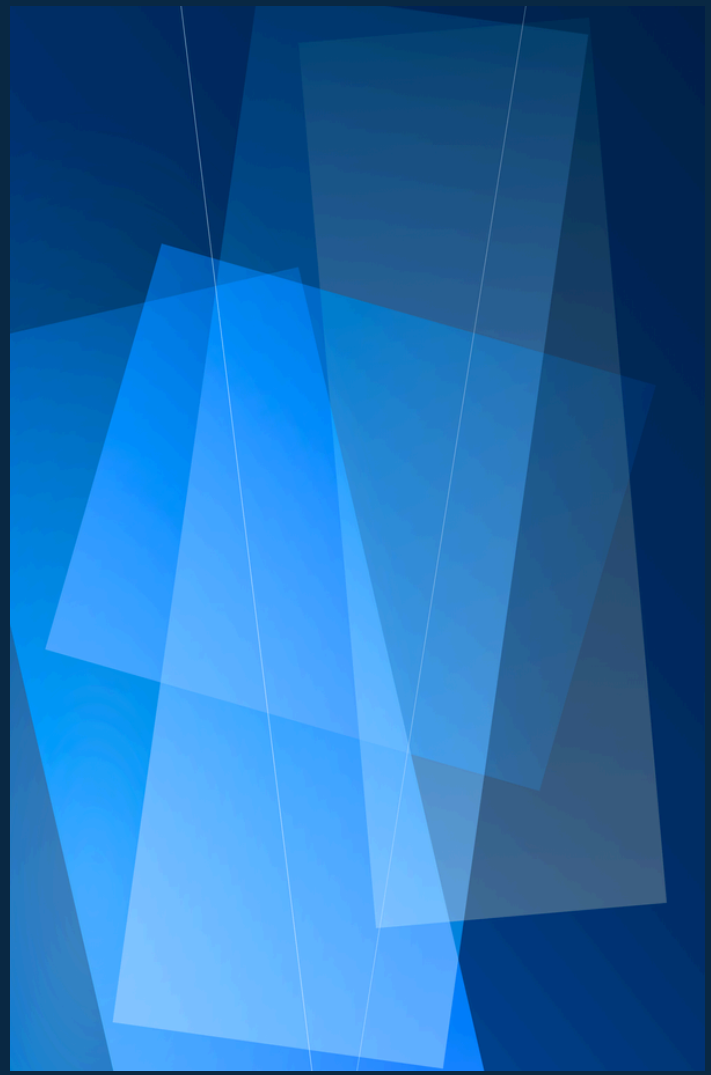
PR COUNCIL

2026

Understanding AI Discoverability: Why Communications Matters



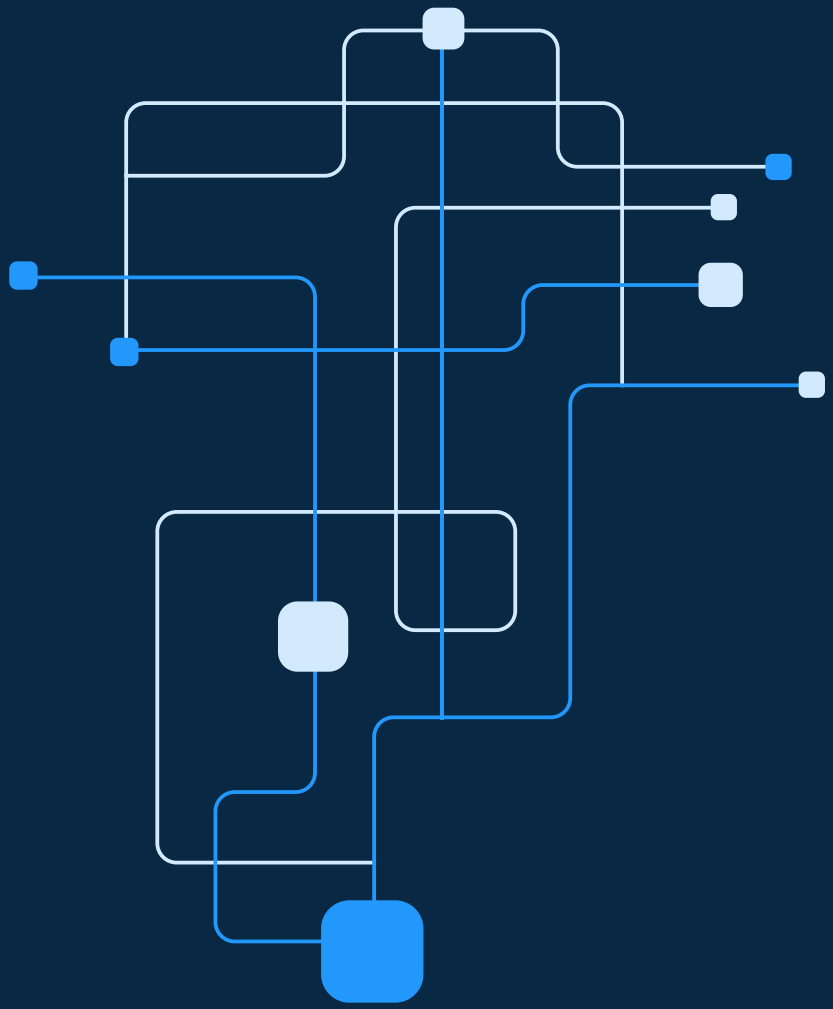
AI is Changing How People Discover and Evaluate Organizations

Your target audiences are increasingly asking AI systems questions they once brought to Google, a company website, a review site, or an industry expert:

- Who are the leaders in this category?
- What is this organization known for?
- Which company should I consider?
- Can I trust it?

40–55%

A 2025 McKinsey study found that half of consumers were already intentionally using AI-powered search, with roughly 40% to 55% relying on it across major categories – a share estimated to have grown sharply in the year since.



AI Discoverability

AI discoverability is about how well an organization can be found, understood, and represented when people turn to these tools. Unlike traditional search, there is no single ranking to win or algorithm to optimize. AI systems pull together information from many sources, and results vary by platform, prompt, and over time.

> Organizations need to think beyond their website. They also need the right information about themselves across the broader information environment AI systems draw from.

Why Communications Should Play a Leading Role

AI systems rely heavily on information organizations do not directly control: journalism, industry publications, expert commentary, reviews, research, third-party websites, and other sources that help establish authority and trust.

84%

Earned media

0.3%

Paid and advertorial content

Muck Rack's May 2026 analysis of citations across ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini found that earned media accounted for 84% of AI citations, while paid and advertorial content accounted for just 0.3%. The mix varies by platform and question, but the pattern holds: AI answers are built on credible third-party information.

Communications teams and agencies have spent decades building exactly this kind of information ecosystem. They help organizations:

- Earn reputable and accurate media coverage and third-party validation.
- Establish executives and subject-matter experts as authoritative voices.
- Create research, analysis, and other useful evidence.
- Build relationships with journalists, analysts, creators, and industry organizations.
- Identify and address outdated information, misinformation, and reputational risk.

Many of the practices that strengthen reputation also strengthen the evidence AI can use to understand an organization. Communications agencies are particularly well positioned to help organizations build this credible information environment, while partnering with SEO, digital, analytics, web, IT and other disciplines where needed.

Where SEO and GEO Fit

Communications builds the evidence.
Earned media, thought leadership, executive visibility, original research, customer stories, and well-resourced content help establish the narrative (what an organization is known for and why it should be trusted).

SEO and technical teams make that evidence accessible.
Information needs to be structured, crawlable, indexed, and understandable by search engines and other systems.

GEO (Generative Engine Optimization) helps organizations understand what AI does with it.
GEO focuses on how AI systems retrieve, cite, synthesize, and represent information and how those patterns change over time.

AI discoverability is the result:
Whether an organization is accurately found, understood, trusted, and surfaced in relevant AI-generated answers.

Start with an Audit

Before investing in tactics or technology, establish a baseline.

- Develop a consistent set of questions that reflect what customers, employees, journalists, investors, or other important audiences might ask and how they might ask it.
- Test across multiple major AI systems and repeat prompts over time rather than drawing conclusions from one or two answers.

FOCUS ON THREE QUESTIONS:

- **Can people find you?** Does your organization appear in relevant questions about your company, category, products, services, or expertise? Look beyond searches for your company name: someone researching a problem may not yet know which organizations to consider.
- **How are you represented?** Assess whether AI systems accurately describe what you do, who you serve, what differentiates you, your leadership and expertise, and your current products and services.
- **What evidence is shaping the answer?** Look at the sources AI systems cite or appear to rely upon. Which publications, websites, reviews, research or industry sources are informing the response? Are competitors supported by stronger third-party evidence? Are important parts of your story missing?

The goal isn't a single "AI visibility score;" it is to identify patterns that can inform communications strategy.

Strengthen the Information AI Has to Work with

Use the audit to focus on the gaps that matter most.

- **Make your position clear:** Consistently communicate what your organization does, who it serves, what problems it solves, what differentiates it, and why people should trust its expertise. Significant inconsistencies across sources can make it harder for AI systems to accurately represent an organization.
- **Keep narratives, facts and positioning current:** Regularly review executive biographies, company descriptions, products and services, statistics, research, and other frequently referenced facts. AI can give outdated information new life by synthesizing and repeating it in new contexts.
- **Build recognizable expertise:** Make executives and subject-matter experts useful voices in the conversations you want the organization associated with. Interviews, contributed articles, speaking engagements, podcasts, industry commentary, research, and thoughtful social content can establish expertise over time.
- **Earn valuable third-party validation:** Continue investing in sources that organizations cannot manufacture themselves: quality journalism, industry coverage, analyst recognition, conferences, awards, and credible external collaborations. AI discoverability gives organizations another reason to value the third-party credibility PR has always worked to build.
- **Create useful, authoritative information:** More content is not automatically better. Prioritize information that fills genuine gaps and demonstrates expertise, such as original research, industry analysis, customer case studies, FAQs, explainers, and substantive executive perspectives.

Measure Patterns, Not Individual Prompts

AI discoverability measurement is still developing, and no single platform captures the entire picture.

LEVEL 1

Available information: Is correct, useful, and trustworthy information available? Are important gaps being filled and outdated information corrected?

LEVEL 2

AI representation: How frequently and accurately does the organization appear? Which messages, attributes, and sources show up consistently? How does that compare with competitors?

LEVEL 3

Business relevance: Is the organization appearing in questions that matter to priority audiences? Is AI becoming a meaningful source of referral traffic, qualified inquiries, or other business outcomes?

Treat individual responses as observations rather than definitive scores. Look for patterns across platforms, prompts, and over time.

What AI Discoverability Is and Isn't

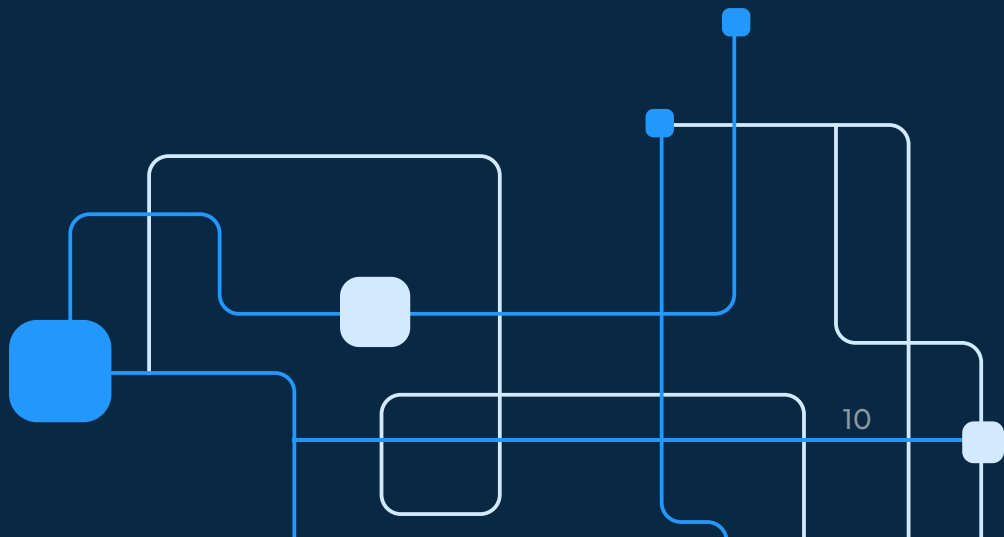
It isn't about "ranking first." AI platforms do not produce one universal ranking. Accurate, credible, and relevant representation is a more meaningful objective.

It isn't simply SEO 2.0. SEO makes information accessible; AI discoverability also depends on reputation, authority, and third-party validation.

It isn't a magic formula. No agency, consultant, or technology provider can guarantee how an AI platform will answer a question. Be cautious of promises of guaranteed visibility or proprietary shortcuts.

It isn't a mandate to publish more. Strengthening the quality and authority of available information matters more than increasing publishing volume for its own sake.

And it isn't a one-time project. AI platforms, search experiences, and user behaviors are changing quickly. Organizations should monitor how they are represented, learn from what they see, and adjust over time.



The Opportunity for Communications

AI is changing how organizations are discovered, but it has not changed the fundamentals of credibility. When an AI system answers a question about an organization, it needs evidence. Communications helps create that evidence: credible coverage, expert perspectives, original research, useful owned content, third-party validation, and a clear and consistent organizational story.

> There is still much the industry does not know about how AI-mediated discovery will evolve. Agencies and clients should approach this as an ongoing learning process, combining communications expertise with SEO, digital, analytics, and technical capabilities while continuing to invest in the durable practices that build reputation and trust.

