

THE GRAYSON COMPANY

EXECUTIVE BRIEFING · JULY 2026

The New Brand Battleground

Winning Visibility in AI Recommendation Engines

Why the next competitive advantage isn't search rankings — it's becoming the brand AI chooses to recommend.



EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

The Question That Defines the Next Decade

THE PAST 25 YEARS • 2000–2025

“How do we rank first in search?”

A generation of digital strategy answered exactly one question.

THE NEXT DECADE • 2025+

“When AI recommends a solution, does it recommend our company?”

Winning this question becomes the defining strategic priority.

A structural shift comparable to the arrival of search engines — or social media.

THE STRUCTURAL SHIFT

Buyers Now Start With AI, Not a Search Box

Today's buyers increasingly open their purchasing journey by asking conversational AI to recommend products, vendors, and service providers.

ChatGPT

Perplexity

Google AI Overviews

Claude

Gemini

Microsoft Copilot

Only a handful

Unlike search engines that return pages of links, these systems synthesize information, compare alternatives, and recommend only a few organizations.

EXHIBIT 1

The Evolution of Digital Discoverability

Era	Winning Strategy	Primary Metric
Search Era 2000–2020	Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	Google Rankings
Social Era 2010–2025	Engagement & Content Distribution	Reach & Engagement
AI Era 2025 +	Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) + Generative Engine Optimization (GEO)	Share of AI Recommendations

Each era rewrote the winning strategy — and the metric that mattered. The AI era rewards share of recommendation.

THE NEW ECONOMICS OF BRAND VISIBILITY

From Matching Pages to Choosing Companies

SEARCH ENGINES ANSWERED

*“Which webpages
match this query?”*

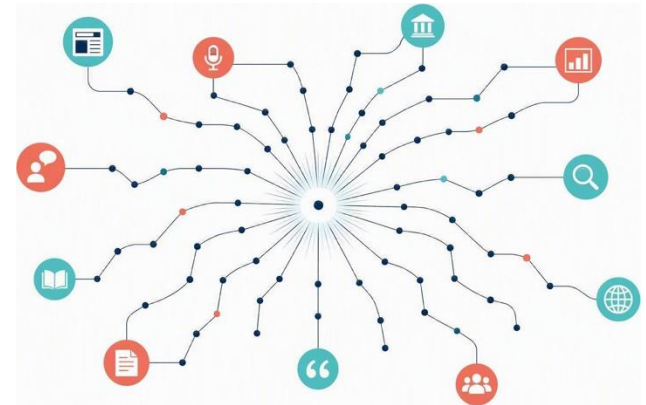
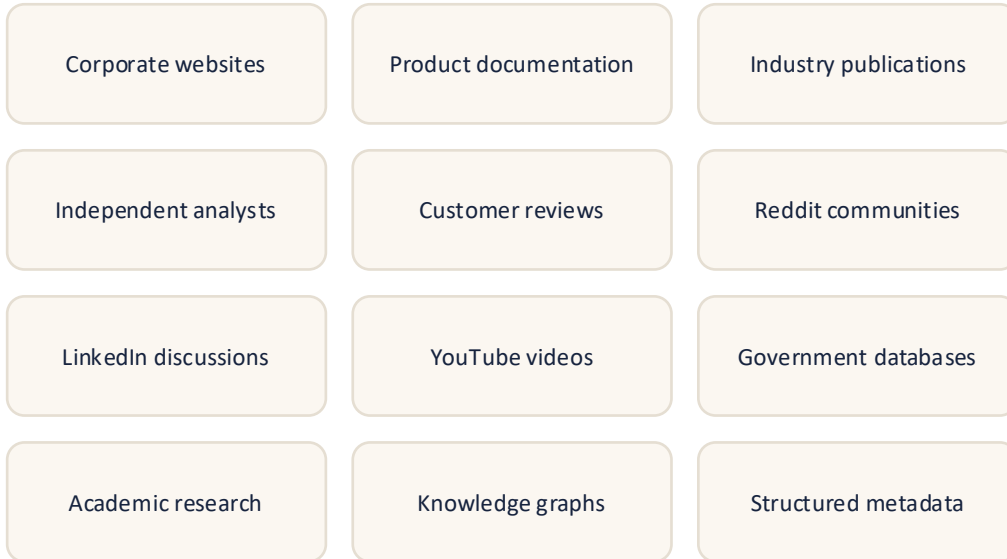


GENERATIVE AI ANSWERS

*“Which companies
deserve to be
recommended?”*

That distinction changes everything. AI rewards brands that demonstrate broad digital consensus — not simply those producing the largest quantity of content.

AI Weighs Hundreds of Sources at Once



AI rewards broad digital consensus — not the largest volume of content.



Visibility has shifted from being an outcome of optimization to becoming an outcome of credibility.

— The New Economics of Brand Visibility

THE LEADERSHIP AGENDA

Four Questions Every Leadership Team Should Ask

1

Does AI know we exist?

Discoverability is the first objective — many firms are simply invisible.

2

Does AI understand us correctly?

Being mentioned is not enough; positioning must be accurate.

3

Where are competitors winning?

Track high-intent prompts to see who AI recommends instead.

4

Which sources does AI trust?

Citations reveal where to invest in PR and thought leadership.

EXECUTIVE QUESTION 1

Does AI Know We Exist?

Many organizations are surprised to find AI either fails to recognize them, or holds only fragmented knowledge. The first objective is simple: become discoverable.

LEADING ORGANIZATIONS NOW MONITOR

- AI Mention Rate
- Share of AI Recommendations
- Citation Frequency
- Citation Quality
- Cross-platform visibility

Share of Model

SoM

The percentage of relevant AI responses that recommend your brand.

EXECUTIVE QUESTION 2

Does AI Understand Our Business Correctly?

Being mentioned is not enough. Executives should regularly audit whether AI accurately describes the business:

Products

Services

Target customers

Industry expertise

Geographic footprint

Pricing model

Competitive differentiation

Hidden brand risk: incorrect positioning misleads prospects who increasingly trust AI summaries before ever visiting your website.

EXECUTIVE QUESTION 3

Where Are Competitors Winning?

Maintain a library of 20–50 high-intent buying prompts:

“Best luxury mattress for back pain”

“Best retail consulting firms”

“Best AI inventory software”

“Best CRM for manufacturers”

The AI equivalent of competitive intelligence.

EVERY MONTH, ASK

- Were we recommended?
- Were competitors recommended instead?
- Were we cited?
- How were we described?

EXECUTIVE QUESTION 4

Which Sources Does AI Trust?

Recommendation engines reveal their thinking through citations. Executives should ask:

Publications

Which appear repeatedly?

Review sites

Which ones dominate?

Analysts

Which influence recommendations?

Organizations

Which industry bodies are cited?

Understanding citation networks reveals the most efficient investments in PR and thought leadership.

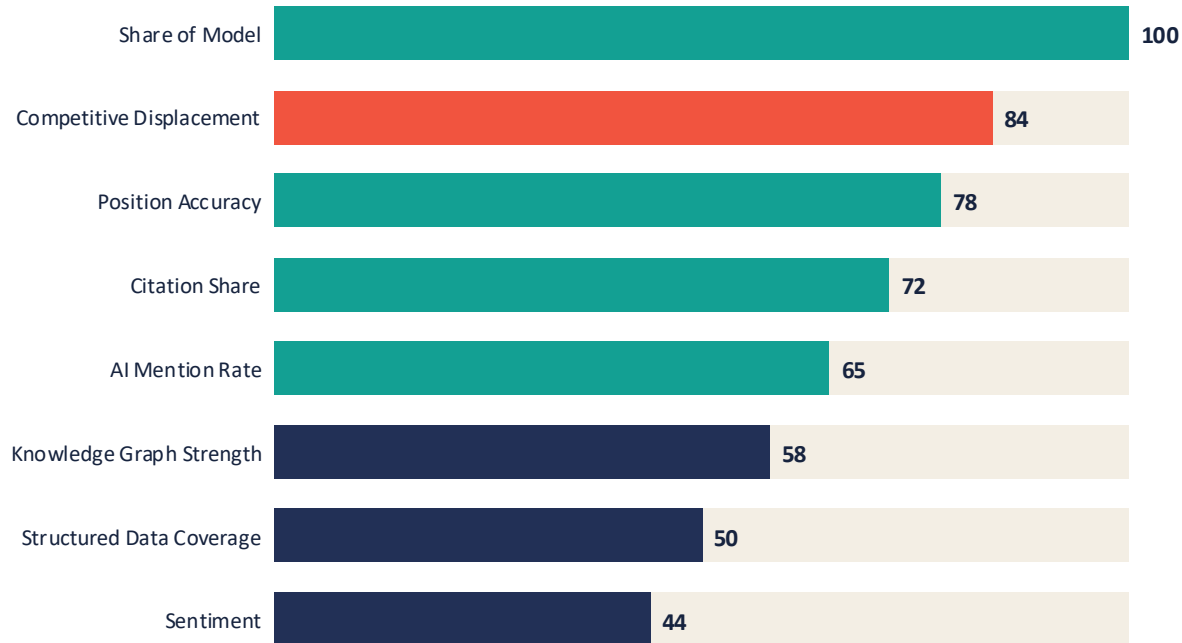
EXHIBIT 2

Executive AI Visibility Scorecard

Dimension	Executive Question	Strategic Importance
AI Mention Rate	Does AI know us?	Awareness
Share of Model	How often are we recommended?	Competitive Position
Citation Share	Which sources validate us?	Authority
Position Accuracy	Does AI understand us?	Brand Integrity
Competitive Displacement	Where do competitors replace us?	Opportunity
Sentiment	Are recommendations favorable?	Brand Equity
Structured Data Coverage	Can AI easily interpret us?	Discoverability
Knowledge Graph Strength	Does AI possess complete knowledge?	Long-term Visibility

EXHIBIT 3

AI Visibility Metrics by Strategic Importance



84

Competitive displacement ranks among the highest-value signals to watch.

Illustrative executive prioritization — relative, not measured, values.

Five Moves That Increase AI Visibility

1 Design an “Answer-First” Digital Experience

Structure content AI can summarize instantly.

2 Become the Most Structured Company in Your Industry

Deploy schema as your machine-readable identity.

3 Publish Research Worth Citing

Trade blog volume for authoritative evidence.

4 Build Digital Consensus

Earn consistent third-party validation.

5 Turn Customer Reviews into Knowledge Assets

Rich, specific narratives become training data.

Structure for Machines, Not Just Readers

1

Answer-First Experience

Built for clarity, not just prose.

- Executive summaries & FAQs
- Comparison tables
- Specifications & use cases
- Structured product information

Easier to summarize → easier to recommend.

2

Most Structured Company

Structured data = machine identity.

- Organization & Product schema
- FAQ & Review schema
- Event & Person schema

Deploy schema aggressively.

THE PLAYBOOK · MOVE 3

Publish Research Worth Citing

The era of publishing hundreds of blog posts is ending. The era of publishing authoritative evidence has begun.

- Original research
- Benchmark studies
- Proprietary datasets
- Industry surveys
- White papers
- Technical documentation

The objective is no longer producing content — it is producing content AI trusts enough to quote.

SIDEBAR

From Content Marketing to Evidence Marketing

Traditional content asked:

“Can we publish something?”

AI optimization asks:

“Would another expert cite this?”

Earn Outside Validation

4

Build Digital Consensus

- Executive thought leadership
- Industry publications & guest articles
- Podcasts & conference talks
- Analyst relationships & digital PR
- Independent product reviews

More independent agreement → stronger AI confidence.

5

Reviews as Knowledge Assets

Most programs optimize for ratings. AI optimizes for context.

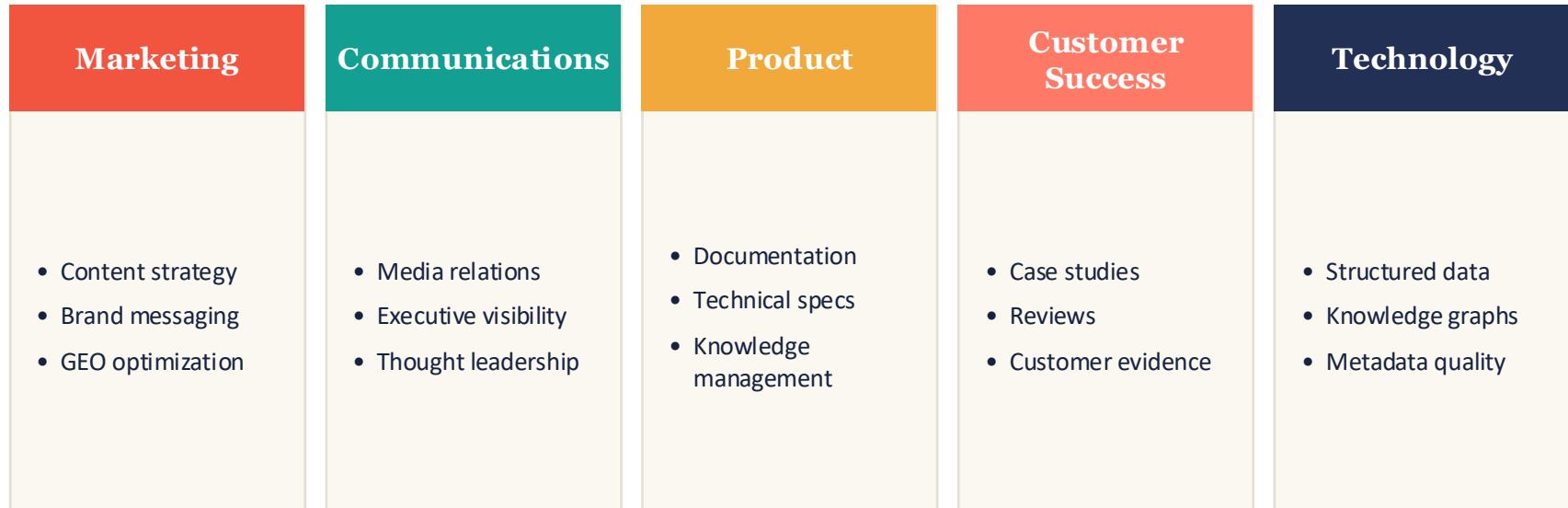
Instead of “Excellent service.”

encourage **“Reduced inventory shortages by 18% in six months.”**

Rich narratives become training data for recommendation engines.

GOVERNANCE

Building an AI Visibility Operating System



Together, these functions create a unified, AI-ready digital presence.

ENABLING TECHNOLOGY

The Emerging AI Visibility Tech Stack

Capability	Strategic Value
Prompt Tracking	Measures recommendation frequency
Citation Monitoring	Identifies trusted information sources
Competitive Benchmarking	Compares AI visibility vs. competitors
Sentiment Analysis	Evaluates how AI frames the brand
Knowledge Graph Audits	Identifies missing company information
Structured Data Validation	Improves machine readability

FIRST-WAVE PLATFORMS

Profound

Semrush AI Visibility Toolkit

Ahrefs Brand Radar

Yoast AI

EXECUTIVE TAKEAWAYS

Five Priorities for the C-Suite

The next era won't be won by the largest ad budget or the highest search ranking — but by the most trusted, authoritative, consistently cited source of knowledge in AI ecosystems.

1

Measure AI visibility as rigorously as web traffic.

2

Optimize content for answers, not keywords.

3

Invest in authoritative research that earns citations.

4

Strengthen digital consensus through third-party credibility.

5

Treat AI discoverability as an enterprise capability — not a marketing initiative.



Tomorrow's brand equity will be measured not only by what customers think — but also by what artificial intelligence knows.

In the AI economy, discoverability is determined not by who publishes the most — but by who earns the greatest trust.