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# When AI Stops Searching and Starts Deciding

*Teneo Insights | July 2026*

## *For the past 25 years, corporate reputation has been built around the assumption that your key stakeholders search, compare, click and decide. But that assumption is now breaking.*

Generative AI is no longer just another interface for finding information; it is increasingly becoming the starting point for information discovery. It is an intermediary that can monitor, recommend and, increasingly, act. The implication for business is profound: your most important stakeholders may never visit your website, read your full statement or consume your content in the context you intended. Instead, AI systems, whether they are AI summaries served by Google's AI Overviews or responses generated by conversational AI assistants, are increasingly influencing what audiences are exposed to. The scale of this shift is already evident: Google reports that AI Overviews now reaches more than 2.5 billion monthly active users, while AI Mode has surpassed one billion monthly users.[1]

This shift is likely to accelerate further. At Google I/O 2026, held in Mountain View, California, Google previewed Agentic Search, signalling a significant shift in how information is discovered and delivered. Emerging AI agents may increasingly surface news, information and product recommendations directly to stakeholders, potentially reducing reliance on traditional information distribution models.

This is the next frontier of corporate influence. The issue is not limited to reputation. It affects product discovery, direct purchasing, agentic commerce, investment decisions, regulatory confidence and licence to operate. For companies, the challenge is no longer simply being visible online. It is making sure they are accurately understood by the machines that increasingly mediate stakeholder decisions.

While the shift is global, its impact is already taking different forms across regions. In North America and Europe, much of the focus is on platforms such as Google AI Overviews, ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude. In Asia Pacific, the landscape is more fragmented, with local AI ecosystems and environments shaping how companies are interpreted and recommended. The common challenge remains the same: organisations must ensure they are understood not only by human stakeholders, but by the AI systems increasingly influencing decisions on their behalf.

At Teneo, we regularly speak to clients about how AI is reshaping communications strategy. The point is becoming clearer: AI is not just a tool stakeholders use. It is becoming a stakeholder in its own right, one that observes continuously, synthesises quickly and influences what others believe.

[1] Google, New Opportunities, Control and Insights for Website Owners, June 2026

## From Search Visibility to Machine Understanding

Historically, information-seeking has been a largely pull-based activity. An investor, journalist, customer, policymaker or employee identified a question, selected which sources to consult and formed a view based on the information they gathered.

The emerging model is increasingly push-based. AI agents can crawl the web continuously, identify changes, synthesise updates and alert users when something appears relevant to their interests or decisions. As this technology evolves, companies may increasingly be classified, ranked and recommended by systems that do not wait for the next investor day, campaign launch or media cycle.

That changes the nature of exposure. We are moving beyond the era of worrying only about AI hallucinations and into an era where AI can select the wrong witnesses. In a 2026 study of major AI chatbots, more than 70% of factual errors were caused by retrieval failures, meaning the system selected the wrong sources rather than reasoning incorrectly from the right ones.[2]

If a company's owned information is incomplete, gated, difficult to parse, outdated or too generic, answer engines will look elsewhere. They may rely on media summaries, NGO reports, analyst commentary, review platforms, Reddit threads, comparison sites, proxy advisers, customer forums, procurement databases, influencer posts or competitor content. Many of these sources are legitimate. But they may also be partial, stale, adversarial or commercially conflicted.

This creates a new category of reputational exposure: third-party proxies defining the company by default. Not necessarily because they are malicious, but because they are more available, structured or machine-readable than the company's own evidence base.

Google's recent patent, described by Forbes as 'The End of Your Website,' points in the same direction of travel: AI-generated pages and summaries may increasingly become the interface through which users understand an organisation.[3] That places pressure on companies to strengthen high-intent landing pages, clarify product and service data, remove dead ends and make public pages satisfy user intent even when deeper journeys require sign-in.

But this is not simply a web or SEO issue. It has implications across the enterprise, affecting the CEO and functions including corporate affairs, investor relations, legal, digital, brand, risk, product, sales and government affairs. The operating model needs to shift from "publish and hope" to "benchmark, feed and monitor."

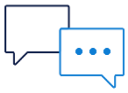
[2] Tech Radar, AI chatbots got election information wrong 90% of the time in a new study – including ChatGPT rivals, May 2026
[3] Forbes, Google Just Patented The End Of Your Website, March 2026

## What Companies Need to Do

Companies need to begin with a clear view of what major models and answer engines are already saying about them, their leaders, products, controversies, competitors and category. That audit should look beyond whether the company appears in AI outputs. It should assess share of model, sentiment, citation quality, message ownership, competitive prominence and the sources AI systems rely on.

From there, the work has to become a joined-up effort. Communications alone cannot solve this. Digital alone cannot solve it. Social, paid media, investor relations, product marketing and legal each control different levers. The companies that make progress will be those that treat AI readiness as a cross-functional discipline, not a channel-specific campaign.

We see six levers increasingly determining whether a company is understood, trusted and surfaced by AI systems: format, structure, discoverability, relevance, timeliness and prevalence.



### 01

**Format: Write for Answers, Not Just Audiences**

AI systems favour content that answers clear questions directly. Companies should move away from dense, generic or overly promotional language and adopt an answer-first architecture: plain explanations, clear claims, concise summaries, labelled proof points and content that directly addresses the questions stakeholders are likely to ask.

The goal is not to strip out nuance. The goal is to make the company's position, evidence and context easy for both humans and machines to understand.

### 02

**Structure: Make the Source of Truth Machine-Readable**

AI systems ingest fragments: pages, snippets, databases, citations and structured data. If critical information is trapped in PDFs, images, gated environments, inconsistent microsites or pages with weak metadata, models may turn to less controlled sources. That risk is growing: research shows nearly 60% of reputable news websites block at least one AI crawler, compared with just 9% of misinformation sites, creating significant asymmetries in what AI systems can access and learn from.[4] Companies should ensure priority content is clearly hosted, technically accessible, consistently labelled and supported by structured data where appropriate. Product pages, leadership biographies, investor materials, ESG disclosures, issue statements and FAQs all need to be built as part of a coherent evidence base.

[4] Cornell University, Is Misinformation More Open? A Study of robots.txt Gatekeeping on the Web, October 2025

## 03

**Discoverability: Traditional Search Still Matters**

AI optimisation does not replace search discipline. Old-school search visibility still shapes what models can find, index and cite. Companies should continue strengthening the fundamentals: clear page hierarchy, authoritative backlinks, schema, crawlability, accessible language, topic clusters and pages that satisfy high-intent queries.

If the company's own content is hard to find, competitors, commentators and third-party platforms will fill the gap.

## 04

**Relevance: Show Up in the Right Decision Moments**

AI does not reward generic visibility. It rewards contextual usefulness. Companies need to identify the business-critical questions being asked in their category and ensure they appear naturally in those problem-solving contexts, including comparisons, risks, trade-offs, "should I" questions and "what if" scenarios.

This requires an integrated mix of owned content, earned media, paid amplification, social engagement and credible third-party validation. Presence matters, but placement matters more.

## 05

**Timeliness: Keep the Evidence Current**

The very nature of large language models is to ingest new data points continuously, which means a company's AI reputation can shift continuously. Your reputation is no longer reviewed quarterly; it is recalculated constantly.

Monitoring must therefore move from periodic search checks to always-on model and source tracking. Companies need to know which sources models rely on, how that weighting shifts over time and where competitors are gaining or losing ground. They also need a process for updating evidence quickly when facts change.

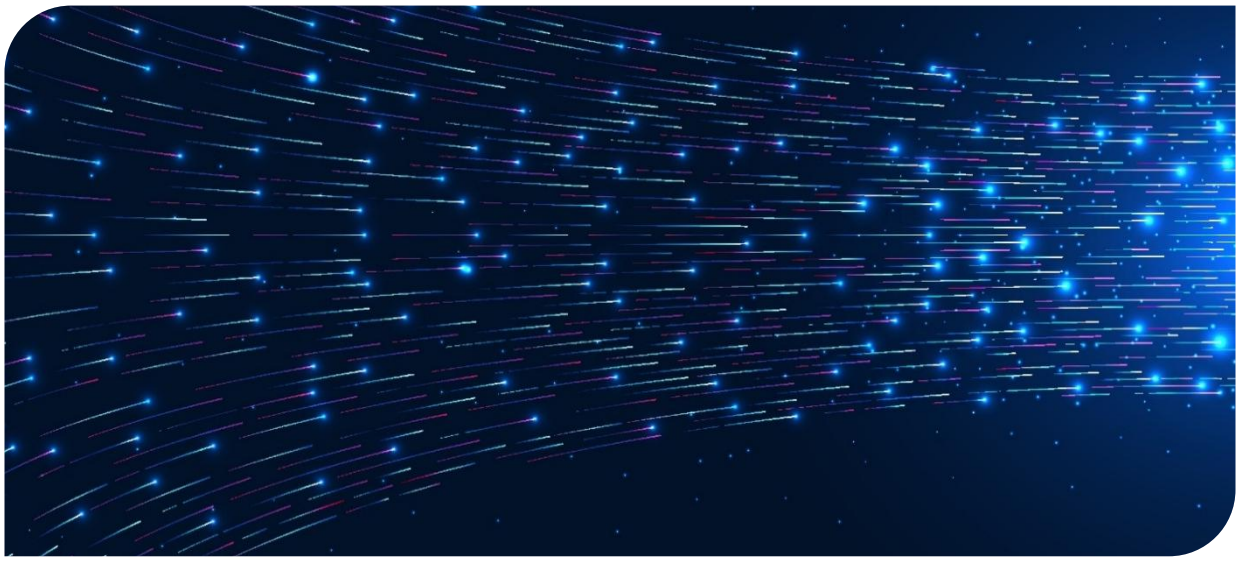
## 06

### Prevalence: Build Consistent Signals Across Platforms

AI systems learn through patterns. One high-profile mention rarely creates durable relevance. Repeated, independent references across credible sources help establish the association between a company and the topics it wants to own. Google's Knowledge Graph, which has grown to more than 5 billion entities and 500 billion facts,[5] was built by connecting information about entities across countless independent sources rather than relying on any single mention.

This is why some competitors appear to dominate AI-generated answers even when they are not objectively stronger businesses. They may simply have more consistent, repeated and easily discoverable signals across the open web. Companies should track how often they appear relative to peers, which topics they are associated with and who is being mentioned instead of them.

Prevalence is not about flooding the internet with content. It is about reinforcing the right message across the right sources often enough that it becomes part of the machine-readable record.



[5] Google, The Knowledge Graph gives instant information on people, places, and things

## Why AI Reputation Is More Complex in Asia Pacific

This is a universal issue, but APAC introduces a distinct set of complexities that materially shape how AI systems form and propagate corporate reputation. China is the clearest example. The relevant model ecosystem is not limited to ChatGPT, Gemini or Claude; it is increasingly shaped by domestic platforms such as Alibaba's Qwen, DeepSeek, ByteDance's Doubao and Tencent's Yuanbao.

All AI platforms prioritise local, Chinese-language and highly structured content, meaning that companies with incomplete, gated or poorly localised disclosures risk being defined by local media, forums or outdated commentary. The result is a more fragmented and less transparent reputation environment, where companies may be continuously assessed and summarised by models they do not actively monitor.

There are also fundamental regional nuances, for example: Singapore often acts as a regional decision hub where English-language AI summaries disproportionately shape investor and partner perceptions; Japan requires high-quality local-language trust signals from institutional and authoritative sources to avoid misclassification or omission; and Australia is closer to Western model usage patterns but with its own regulatory, media and stakeholder dynamics influencing AI outputs. The implication is clear: a global AI reputation audit cannot be centralised or dealt with in broad strokes. It must be executed model by model, market by market and language by language.

## The New Rules of Corporate Reputation

**Your AI reputation is becoming a managed corporate asset.**

This requires a fundamental mindset shift: from search visibility to AI credibility. The objective is no longer just to be discoverable by humans, but to be trusted, cited and relied upon by AI systems as the most authoritative answer.

Companies that move first will not be trying to “game” the machines. They will be focused on making their public truth easier to understand, verify and recommend. They will know which models reference them, which ignore them, which sources define them, where competitors own the narrative and where third-party proxies are filling the gaps.

Crucially, LLM visibility, or your “GEO” (Generative Engine Optimisation), cannot be treated as an executional add-on. It needs to come much earlier as a foundational input into overall communications strategy. This applies equally across corporate communications, capital markets, investor relations, special situations and beyond. If AI systems are becoming intermediaries between companies and stakeholders, then influencing those systems must be designed at the point where narratives, evidence and priorities are set, not bolted on at the end.

Our methods of reputation mitigation and repair have completely changed. There is no longer an editor to call to fix a story. There is no shortcut to deploy for instructing an AI model to “get it right.” This is a fundamental shift at a content level, meaning that reputation starts much earlier in the communications funnel than before.

Companies have spent decades managing relationships with investors, regulators, journalists, employees and customers. Increasingly, they must also consider how they are understood by AI systems that influence all of those audiences. The organisations that adapt earliest will not simply be more visible. They will be more accurately represented when machines become the first point of reference.

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