

# AI Invisibility: The New Strategic Risk

## 84% of Companies Haven't Measured Yet

*When your prospects consult ChatGPT, Gemini or Perplexity before contacting you — what do those systems tell them?*

**900 M**

weekly ChatGPT users

**\$750 Bn**

in revenue through AI search by  
2028

**16 %**

of brands systematically track AI  
visibility

## 01 — THE SHIFT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

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Since 2023, a silent but irreversible change has transformed the way decision-makers — and their customers — gather information, compare options and make choices. It is no longer Google that answers first. It is conversational artificial intelligence.

*Half of American consumers now use AI-powered search tools as their primary and preferred source of information — ahead of Google (31%), brand websites (9%) and review platforms (6%).*

— McKinsey, AI Discovery Survey, August 2025, n = 1,927

**Adoption figures confirm an unprecedented dynamic:**

**900 M**

**Weekly active users on ChatGPT in early 2026, with 2.5 billion queries processed daily. In Europe, adoption is accelerating across all age groups and industries.**

*Source: Incremys, LLM Statistics 2026*

**+800  
%**

**Increase in traffic generated by LLMs in one year. This exponential growth is accelerating quarter after quarter, outpacing all initial projections.**

*Source: Backlinko / Leigh McKenzie, February 2026*

**65 %**

**Of global organisations use generative AI tools in 2026 according to McKinsey. AI assistants are now embedded in office suites, smartphones, search engines and messaging platforms.**

*Source: McKinsey Global Survey 2026*

This shift cuts across all age groups and sectors. It is no longer a generational or tech-savvy phenomenon — it is a mass behavioural change, accelerated by the integration of AI into everyday tools. The question is no longer whether AI will change how your organisation is discovered. It already has.

## 02 — WHAT AI SAYS ABOUT YOU — AND WHAT IT COSTS

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Imagine a potential investor, a key account or a future partner types your organisation's name into ChatGPT before picking up the phone. What exactly happens?

The AI does not redirect to your website. It synthesises a direct answer, built from thousands of sources it has analysed. That answer can be:

- Accurate and favourable — you are cited first, your positioning is precise, your differentiation visible.
- Partial or generic — you are mentioned but without differentiation, buried in a list of competitors.
- Absent — you simply do not exist in the response. A competitor takes your place.
- Inaccurate or unfavourable — the AI associates your name with incorrect, outdated or negative information.

*In some retail categories, McKinsey found that market-leading brands had 60% less share of voice in AI responses relative to their actual market share.*

— McKinsey, New front door to the internet, October 2025

### The concept of AI Perception

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AI Perception refers to the way an AI system perceives, represents and positions an organisation in its responses. It is measured across five dimensions:

<b>Presence</b>	Is the organisation mentioned when a user asks about its sector, competitors or services?
<b>Accuracy</b>	Do the details provided — services, positioning, geography, teams — match current reality?
<b>Positioning</b>	Is the organisation cited before or after its direct competitors? What rank does it occupy in spontaneous recommendations?
<b>Intl. Visibility</b>	Is perception consistent in English, German, Spanish? Do international audiences receive the same signals?
<b>Sentiment</b>	Is the tone associated with the organisation positive, neutral, or carrying negative signals that influence the decision to make contact?

## 03 — FIVE FINDINGS THAT SHOULD CONCERN YOU

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01

### **Only 30% of brands maintain stable visibility from one AI response to the next**

LLM responses are probabilistic and dynamic. Even if your brand appears in a response today, nothing guarantees it will appear tomorrow for the same question. This volatility is structural, not circumstantial. Source: Incremys / Semrush, 2026

02

### **60% of AI citations come from URLs absent from Google's organic top 20**

Being number one on Google no longer means being visible in AI. LLMs build their responses from sources that classic SEO has never optimised: forums, third-party platforms, specialist media, structured data. Source: Incremys / Semrush, 2026

03

### **35% of brands are victims of factual misinformation in AI responses**

Outdated information, incorrect services, executives who have since left: AI perpetuates inaccurate data with the same confidence as facts. This reputational risk is invisible without systematic auditing. Source: Profound, 2025

04

### **Less than 1% chance ChatGPT will provide the same brand list twice**

SparkToro demonstrated there is less than 1% probability that ChatGPT or Google AI will generate exactly the same list of recommendations for two identical queries. Every user receives a potentially different answer. Source: SparkToro, January 2026

05

### **Brand-owned sources represent only 5 to 10% of AI citations**

Your website, blog and press releases are not enough. LLMs build their representation of your brand from an ecosystem of external sources you do not directly control. Source: McKinsey, October 2025

## 04 — THE ACTION WINDOW IS SHORT

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We are in 2026 in a situation comparable to 2004 with organic search. Organisations that invested early built an advantage that proved almost impossible to close. Those that waited spent years catching up at great cost.

*By 2028, \$750 billion in US revenues will flow through AI-powered search channels. Unprepared brands risk losing between 20% and 50% of their traditional search traffic. Even market leaders are not guaranteed AI visibility.*

— McKinsey, New front door to the internet, October 2025

### Three dynamics make the urgency real:

#### **The monopoly effect**

AI tends to concentrate recommendations on a small number of players per category. First place is exponentially more valuable than second.

#### **Accelerating adoption**

LLM traffic is growing 800% per year. Every month of inaction means thousands of prospects receiving an incomplete or absent picture of your organisation.

#### **Competition is shifting**

Your most agile competitors are already investing in AI visibility. Every position they gain is a position lost for you in synthesised responses.

Gartner predicts a 25% drop in traditional search volume by end 2026 due to AI assistants. The question is no longer whether this shift will impact your organisation — it is to measure precisely how, and how much.

## 05 — THE ASHFORD & STERLING APPROACH

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Ashford & Sterling AI & Cognitive Systems is an independent strategic analysis firm specialising in how AI systems perceive, represent and position organisations. We do not optimise your content. We do not manage your campaigns. We produce an objective external diagnostic — with no conflict of interest with your existing service providers.

### The AI Perception Audit™

Our audit process analyses your perception across 6 major AI platforms — ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Copilot, Grok and Meta AI — through 15 structured research scenarios covering 4 strategic angles.

### VisibilityScan™

Our proprietary analysis framework VisibilityScan™ scores each dimension of your AI Perception on a normalised scale and benchmarks it against your sector standards and direct competitors.

### Our deliverables

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1	Express 8-10 page analysis: platform scores, alert signals, 3 priority risks, actionable recommendations.
2	In-depth 25-30 page analysis with complete dimensional scoring, competitive benchmarking, and a prioritised strategic action plan.
3	Working session with the Board or Marketing leadership to translate the diagnostic into operational decisions.

## Start by measuring.

You cannot manage what you do not measure. The first step is a diagnostic — fast, independent, actionable.

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