



The Growing Power of PR Content in an AI Search World.

How to build visibility, credibility and
trust in the age of AI.

The Growing Power of PR Content in an AI Search World

B2B buyers are changing how they discover, evaluate and shortlist suppliers. Traditional search still matters, but it is no longer the only gateway to businesses. Buyers rely on review platforms, trade coverage, LinkedIn, peer proof and website content to build a view before they speak to a potential supplier's sales team. Increasingly, they will use AI tools to aggregate these sources.

It is this shift that is giving PR content a renewed strategic role, as earned media, expert commentary, thought leadership, case studies and quality website content are no longer just driven by the need to increase company awareness. They are now online credibility signals that influence how people, search engines and AI-generated answers understand a business and identify a potential supplier.

PR content is now part of the evidence infrastructure in an AI search world, one that helps a B2B company become visible, understood, trusted and chosen. And sustaining this really matters, with coverage older than three months seeing fewer AI citations, so not only is quality content key, sustaining it is too.



84%

of AI citations came from earned media in Muck Rack's May 2026 analysis.

Muck Rack



25.7%

of content cited is newer than traditional search results. Coverage older than three months sees fewer AI citations

Ahrefs B2B SEO Statistics



90%

of B2B marketers classify PR as important or critical to GTM strategies.

Convey / Demand Metric



95%

of hidden buyers say strong thought leadership makes them more receptive to outreach.

Edelman / LinkedIn

What is changing

- Buyers ask longer, more specific questions before speaking to suppliers.
- AI tools compress discovery into shortlists and summarised answers.
- Third-party authority carries more weight than brand-owned claims alone.
- Fresh, structured, useful content supports both people and machines.

What leaders should do

- Treat PR, SEO, GEO, website content and sales enablement as one system.
- Invest in earned media and thought leadership that demonstrate expertise.
- Build owned content around real buyer questions and evidence.
- Sustain activity AI platforms cite newer content over older.
- Measure visibility, authority, AI mentions, enquiries and sales usefulness.

The shift from search rankings to trusted answers

For years digital visibility was largely framed as a web search ranking challenge. Can a buyer find my website and does it have relevant content to keep them moving towards a sales enquiry and potential conversation? Clearly this process is still important, but the online discovery journey is becoming much less linear as AI search reduces a buyer's initial challenges in finding and then quickly researching potential suppliers. Instead of scrolling through pages of results, users can ask for comparisons, recommendations, supplier criteria or practical explanations all at the click of a mouse and get this presented in a nicely formatted report with recommendations.

What is clear is that the answer or report they receive is now shaped by the sources the search engine finds, interprets and trusts. Recent G2 research into B2B software buying found that 82% of buyers sourced software recommendations from an AI chatbot in the last two years, while evaluation has overtaken research as the longest stage of the buying journey. The same principle applies beyond software, in that discovery of potential suppliers may now be faster; however proof, trust and validation of these companies takes time and now matters more.

For companies' websites, being found online is therefore only the start. Being independently validated through multiple credible sources, is what keeps a business above others and where content plays a key role.

- AI-generated shortlists mean suppliers can be excluded before a human conversation begins.
- Owned content must be clear, structured and genuinely useful, but it cannot carry the whole trust burden alone.
- Earned media, expert commentary, reviews, case studies and thought leadership create wider evidence that supports both human and AI-led discovery.

Earned media is now an AI trust layer

Emerging research is now consistently showing that AI systems appear to favour credible third-party sources. Muck Rack's May 2026 analysis of more than 25 million cited links across ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini found earned media accounted for 84% of AI citations, while paid and advertorial content accounted for 0.3%. Journalism alone made up 27% of cited sources.

Ahrefs' analysis of 75,000 brands also found that brand web mentions showed the strongest correlation with AI Overview brand visibility. Web mentions correlated more strongly than backlinks, and brands with the most web mentions earned up to 10 times more AI Overview mentions than the next quartile.



Earned media

Independent validation from relevant trade and business titles.



Brand mentions

Repeated third-party references that help define category relevance.



Freshness

Recent proof points that reflect current capability, not historic visibility.



KEY TAKEAWAY

PR content is now part of the evidence infrastructure in an AI search world, one that helps a B2B company become visible, understood, trusted and chosen.

Thought leadership reaches buyers you may never meet

B2B purchase decisions involve visible decision-makers that are known to suppliers. However it is not just procurement or marketing or production who are involved. Hidden internal influencers from finance, operations, procurement, legal, compliance and other functions will also play a key role and many will never engage with a sales contact, yet they can accelerate, shape or block a purchasing decision.

The 2025 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report found that hidden buyers consume thought leadership at almost the same rate as target buyers. 63% of hidden decision-makers spend more than an hour a week with thought leadership content, compared with 64% of target decision-makers. It also found that 95% of hidden decision-makers say strong thought leadership makes them more receptive to sales and marketing outreach.

Relevant content and it being found by these hidden decision makers is key and will often impact a decision without any form of direct sales contact.



Strong thought leadership should be

- Specific to the audience and the decision context.
- Useful enough to help buyers understand a problem or trade-off.
- Bold enough to challenge assumptions rather than repeat category language.
- Human, clear and easy to share internally.



Weak thought leadership tends to be

- A disguised sales pitch with no independent value.
- Too generic to help a buyer make a better decision.
- Too dense, abstract or jargon-heavy for internal sharing.
- Disconnected from PR, website content and sales enablement.

For B2B companies, the practical lesson is not simply “get more coverage”, it is the need to build sustained, credible and searchable content that acts as a wider body of evidence around the topics the business wants to be known for. Coverage should therefore be planned around buyer questions, market trends, value proof points, sector authority and the language AI tools are likely to associate with the business and its brands.

PR content and GTM need to work as one system

The business case for PR is strongest when it is connected to a business's wider go-to-market strategy. Convey Communications and Demand Metric's 2025 State of B2B Public Relations report found that 90% of B2B marketers classify PR as either important or critical to GTM strategy. The report also found that brand and reputation management, media relations and thought leadership were the most effective PR tactics across the board.

CMI's 2026 B2B content research adds another important point: effective teams are not simply producing more content. They are improving strategy, relevance, quality, measurement and the skills needed to use AI well. In other words, AI can accelerate production, but it does not replace judgement.



KEY TAKEAWAY

For complex B2B companies, thought leadership content should therefore translate expertise into authority. It needs to explain not only what a business does, but why that expertise matters to customers, markets and wider industry change.

What B2B companies should build next

Generative Engine Optimisation, or GEO, should not be treated as a quick fix, once only, technical activity. Making sure the right claims, proof points and explanations exist across credible online sources and that they are clear enough for people and AI search to interpret, requires continued effort and through this approach build online reputation



As the discipline of GEO is still developing no one can honestly guarantee AI search visibility; however it would appear that those companies who are visible in trusted sources, answer buyer questions clearly and keep content current are clearly better placed than those relying only on their homepage, an occasional press release or paid media. The practical question is 'Are we visible, credible and useful enough to be found, cited, trusted and chosen by a potential customer?' If the answer is yes, carry on!

Proving value

The strongest approach to measurement combines visibility, authority, engagement and commercial signals, then interprets them against the business objective. Convey/Demand Metric found that 68% of marketers can successfully attribute PR efforts directly to revenue outcomes, but almost half still face difficulties defining and communicating PR ROI.



Visibility

Coverage, share of voice, search presence, AI answer visibility.



Authority

Quality of outlets, backlinks, expert mentions, message pull-through.



Engagement

Website traffic, content engagement, LinkedIn response, downloads.



Commercial signals

Enquiries, lead quality, sales feedback, influenced conversations.

PR and quality content are still king

At Nielsen McAllister we have always backed a simple but important view – quality content matters. It mattered before AI and it matters even more now. What has changed is the number of places where that content matters and can now influence a potential customer's view of a business.

The strongest companies not only need to be good at what they do, they must be visible, independently validated and clearly understood by online users. This requires earned media, thought leadership, quality website content, social amplification, sales focus and measurement to now work together as one system. Areas that content creators excel and where the growing role of PR content plays an ever-increasing role in an AI world.

For complex B2B organisations, Nielsen McAllister turns technical expertise into clear stories, credible proof and content programmes that build visibility, authority and business results.

Content that builds results
www.nielsenmcallister.com



KEY TAKEAWAY

GEO is a long-term investment, not a one-off task. The more credible signals you create and the more consistently you show up, the higher your chance of being selected by AI and trusted by buyers.

References and Further Reading

Convey Communications & Demand Metric **The State of B2B Public Relations Report (2025)**

A comprehensive study of more than 300 B2B marketing leaders and PR professionals examining the role of PR in go-to-market strategy, revenue attribution and business performance.

www.conveypr.com/state-of-b2b-pr-report

Edelman & LinkedIn **2025 B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report**

Research examining how thought leadership influences buyer behaviour, hidden decision-makers and commercial outcomes in complex B2B purchasing environments.

<https://www.edelman.com/research/b2b-thought-leadership-impact-report>

Institute for Public Relations (IPR) Independent research and academic studies covering communications, trust, reputation, media relations and public affairs.

<https://instituteforpr.org/research/>

Cision **2026 State of the Media Report** Annual global survey of journalists exploring media relations, source credibility, content requirements and evolving communications practices.

<https://www.cision.com/resources/reports/state-of-the-media/>

Muck Rack **What Is AI Reading?**

Analysis of AI-generated citations across ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Perplexity, examining the role of earned media and third-party authority in AI-generated responses.

<https://muckrack.com/blog/what-is-ai-reading>

Muck Rack **State of PR Report**

Annual benchmark study covering AI adoption, Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO), measurement trends and changing communications priorities.

<https://muckrack.com/state-of-pr>

Ahrefs **AI Overview Brand Visibility Factors** Large-scale analysis of brand mentions, backlinks and visibility within Google's AI-generated search experiences.

<https://ahrefs.com/blog/ai-overview-brand-visibility-factors>

Ahrefs **B2B SEO and AI Search Statistics**

Research examining search behaviour, content freshness, AI visibility and changing digital discovery patterns.

<https://ahrefs.com/blog/b2b-seo-statistics>

Princeton University **GEO: Generative Engine Optimisation** Academic research introducing the concept of Generative Engine Optimisation and examining methods for improving visibility in AI-generated search responses.

<https://collaborate.princeton.edu/en/publications/geo-generative-engine-optimization>

Content Marketing Institute & MarketingProfs **B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends** Annual research into B2B content strategy, thought leadership, AI adoption and marketing effectiveness.

<https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/research/b2b-content-marketing-benchmarks-budgets-and-trends>

Demand Generation Benchmark Survey Industry research examining marketing investment priorities, content effectiveness, account-based marketing and pipeline generation.

<https://www.demandgenreport.com/resources/research/>

G2 **Buyer Behavior Report: The Evaluation Maze**

Research into how modern B2B buyers evaluate suppliers, use peer reviews and increasingly leverage AI tools during the buying process.

<https://www.g2.com/resources/reports/buyer-behavior-report>

Gartner **Marketing and Communications Research** Research and analysis covering marketing strategy, communications, brand development and emerging trends in digital discovery.

<https://www.gartner.com/en/marketing>

Forrester **B2B Marketing and Revenue Research** Research focused on B2B buying journeys, demand generation, customer experience and revenue marketing.

<https://www.forrester.com/bold/marketing-and-sales/>

McKinsey & Company **Growth, Marketing and Sales Insights** Thought leadership and research examining business growth, brand building and modern marketing effectiveness.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/growth-marketing-and-sales/our-insights>

WARC **Effectiveness and Brand Building Research** Evidence-based marketing research covering brand growth, communications effectiveness and media performance.

<https://www.warc.com/content/topic/effectiveness>

Ehrenberg-Bass Institute **Brand Growth and Mental Availability Research**

Leading research into brand building, buyer behaviour, mental availability and marketing effectiveness.

<https://www.marketingscience.info/publications/>

AMEC **Integrated Evaluation Framework** Internationally recognised framework for measuring PR, communications and business outcomes.

<https://amecorg.com/amecframework>

Inc. **Gartner Says PR Budgets Will Double by 2027. AI Search Is Why** Industry commentary discussing Gartner's view that AI-driven search is increasing the strategic importance of PR and earned media.

<https://www.inc.com/victoria-watters/gartner-says-pr-budgets-will-double-by-2027-ai-search-is-why/91345318>

Mastering Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO)

Practical guidance on optimising content for AI-powered search and answer engines.

<https://searchengineland.com/mastering-generative-engine-optimization-in-2026-full-guide-469142>

Unhooked **Why PR Is Essential for AI-Driven Search** Commentary on the growing relationship between PR, earned authority and generative search visibility.

<https://weareunhooked.com/generative-engine-optimisation-geo-why-pr-is-essential-for-ai-driven-search/>

Results PR **Earned Media and AI Search** Discussion of how earned media influences AI-generated brand visibility and authority.

<https://www.resultspr.net/insights/earned-media-ai-search>

Schubert B2B **How B2B PR Drives GEO Visibility** Analysis of the role PR plays in Generative Engine Optimisation and AI-powered discovery.

<https://schubertb2b.com/blog/b2b-public-relations-drives-geo-visibility>



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