

Knowledge hub Series

March 24, 2026

AI-DRIVEN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION:

Mastering Algorithmic Disruption
& Digital Volatility

Sub-topic:

Re-writing the PR Playbook: AI-Driven Storytelling,
Media Intelligence and Reputation Management



Karl Haechler

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Sponsors & Partners



A person in a dark suit is walking away from the camera on a polished floor. The background features a large, curved architectural structure with a grid of blue and white panels, possibly a modern office or public space. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights.

Communications in the Age of AI

PRCAN Knowledge Hub

24 MARCH 2026

Burson

Hello



Karl Haechler
CEO Burson Africa



An African communications powerhouse

Truly African footprint

3 Owned offices
30+ Branded partners
50+ Markets

Burson is the #1 PR network in Africa with 30+ years of experience on the continent

Local connectivity, knowledge and insight enabling market appropriate implementation

Unrivalled regional expertise

300+ people in Africa

Stellar bench of communications expertise

6,000+ people globally

Integrated teams with Reputation Management, Crisis/Issues, Influencer Engagement, Digital and Media Relations experts

Award-winning teams

Top 10 **PRovoke**
Best Agencies in Africa 2025

20+ Industry accolades from 2022-2025 (SABRE, IPRA, PRISM, etc)

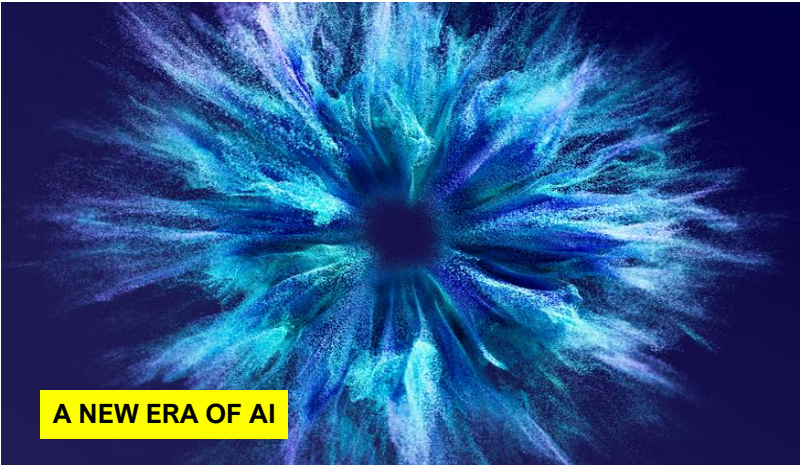
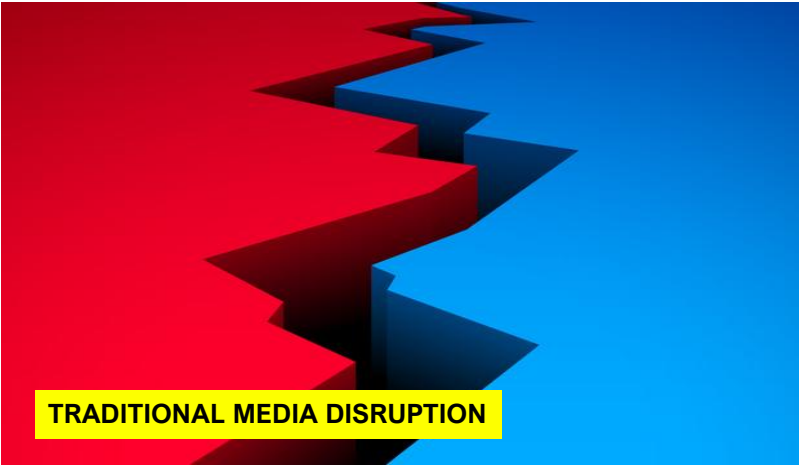
At the forefront of industry innovation



Combined Capabilities

- Corporate communications
- Crisis + issues management
- Executive visibility
- Thought leadership
- Public affairs
- Content creation
- Influencer management
- Media relations
- Media training
- Employee engagement
- Consumer PR
- Event management
- Media partnerships
- Advocacy

Our world is complicated



Our perspective

Strategy

Positioning your organization and business to shape ideas and stories that move minds and markets

Culture

How you earn
relevance

Reputation

How you are
perceived

Policy

How you sustain your
license to operate

Impact

Predicting, measuring and valuing business outcomes

Reputation is earned

Seizes the
moment

by leveraging timeliness
and cultural tension.

Ignites the
unexpected

through surprise or change
(channel/ format agnostic).

Relevant to the
individual/audience

because it's personal,
prominent, and resonates
with a special community.

THE NEW MEDIA REALITY

Burson



Have you heard?

PRWeek

Top 150 News Campaigns Opinion Jobs Events Careers

Earned media success will look different

Beyond podcasts and influencers: Here's how communicators must pivot next year to find earned media success in this rapidly changing landscape.

by Adam Sechrist, Burson

Beyond the Buzz:

Examining the effectiveness of Earned Media

WARC | Advisory

ALL OF THESE PEOPLE ARE JOURNALISTS.

Being Democracy Partners

This Palestinian journalist is trying to survive Israeli airstrikes in Gaza. He's documenting all of it.

Your new front page: How newsrooms and publishers will win audiences on social

News consumption is changing, and so is how news outlets approach its distribution on social. Recent studies by both [Pew](#) and [Ofcom](#) have shown that more people than ever get their news straight from social media, and it's a trend that's only growing.

It's no longer about just driving traffic to the website through posting links on Facebook and Twitter. There's a whole evolving eco-system that publishers are adapting to, building their brands with new audiences and users who might not ever make it to the homepage.

Tech

How Video Streamers Conquered the Media

The written word and the news media are less influential than ever before. Web video, meanwhile, is thriving—even as many of its creators operate like traditional journalists and critics. Well, kind of.

The News Game Has Changed. Are You Ready?

Inside the social news revolution

Social platforms have reshaped news—here's what that means for brands

James Herring · Following

We make brands famous. Founder & CEO at Taylor He...
4h · Edited ·

These days most people don't go looking for news, it finds them.

That's why traditional news publishers are doubling down on social news platforms to meet audiences in their everyday social feeds.

☆ So, we're excited to launch the **Taylor Herring Newsroom** a new editorial division focused on news content and connections with brands across TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and Snap.

We're living in a **new media reality.**

**NEW
USAGE**



**NEW
VOICES**



**NEW
CHANNELS**



**NEW
FORMATS**

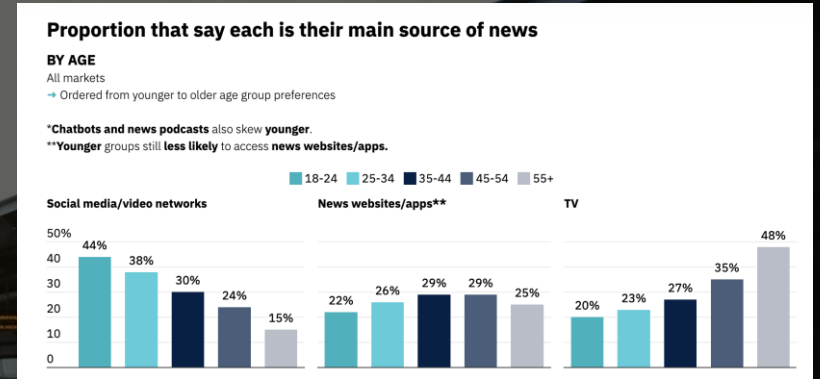
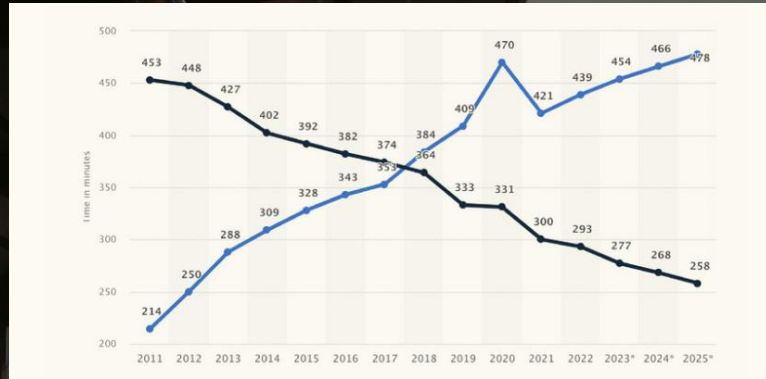


**NEW
TECH**



New usage

Traditional media consumption continues to fall



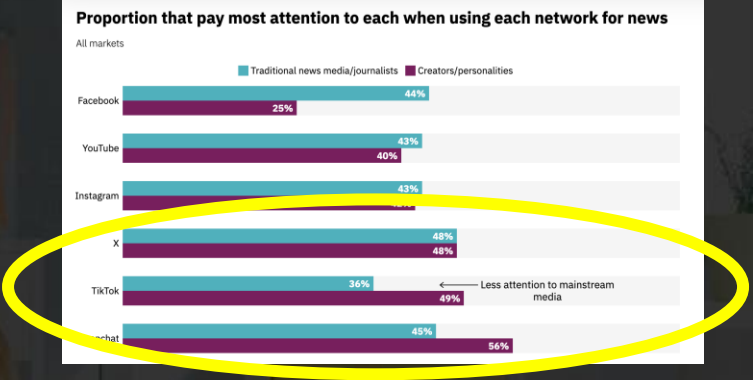
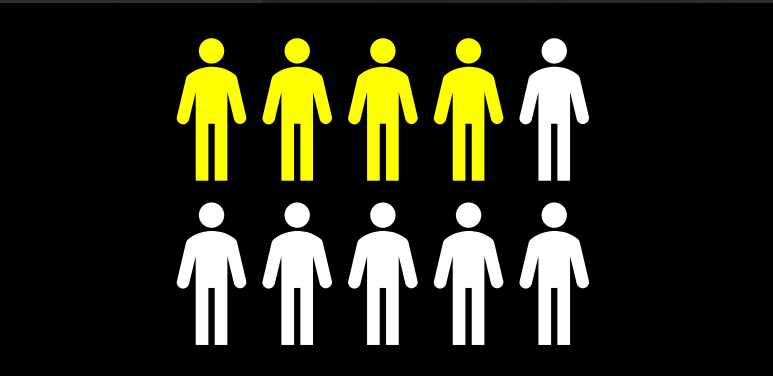
Time spent on traditional media has fallen by **43%** since 2011, from **453 minutes** to an expected **258 minutes** in 2025

72%

of people worldwide are more likely to access news videos via social or video networks rather than directly via news websites

New voices

News distribution is **democratised**



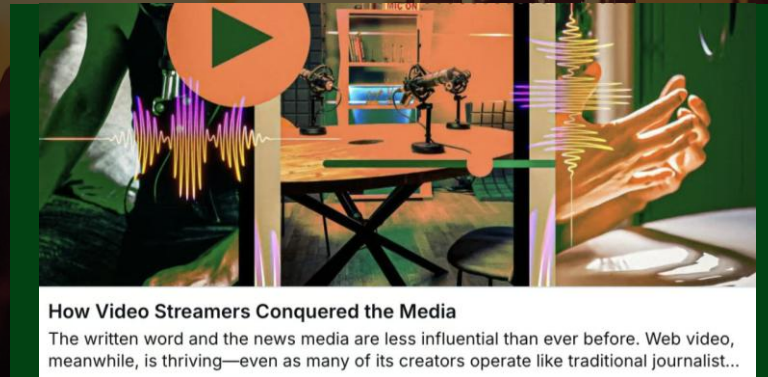
4 in 10

adults get their news from influencers

New channels

Traditional use of channels is over, **information is everywhere**

Short-form video reporting has gained success



How Video Streamers Conquered the Media

The written word and the news media are less influential than ever before. Web video, meanwhile, is thriving—even as many of its creators operate like traditional journalist...

40+%

of total media title engagements come from their **Instagram** and **TikTok** profiles

New formats

For information to travel, it needs a **new approach to content**

92%

of people trust organic UGC more than advertising



Short-form video is the top marketing investment, outpacing all other formats

47s

how long a person can **pay attention** in one screen

New tech

AI has invented a **new kind of news** and gen search is changing how we find it

NEWS
GPT
THE UNHUMAN TRUTH

34%

of adults use AI engines to get news or political information

61%

of content that AI engines rely on for brand reputation is derived from editorial media sites.

“Ties between journalism and its audiences are completely severed”

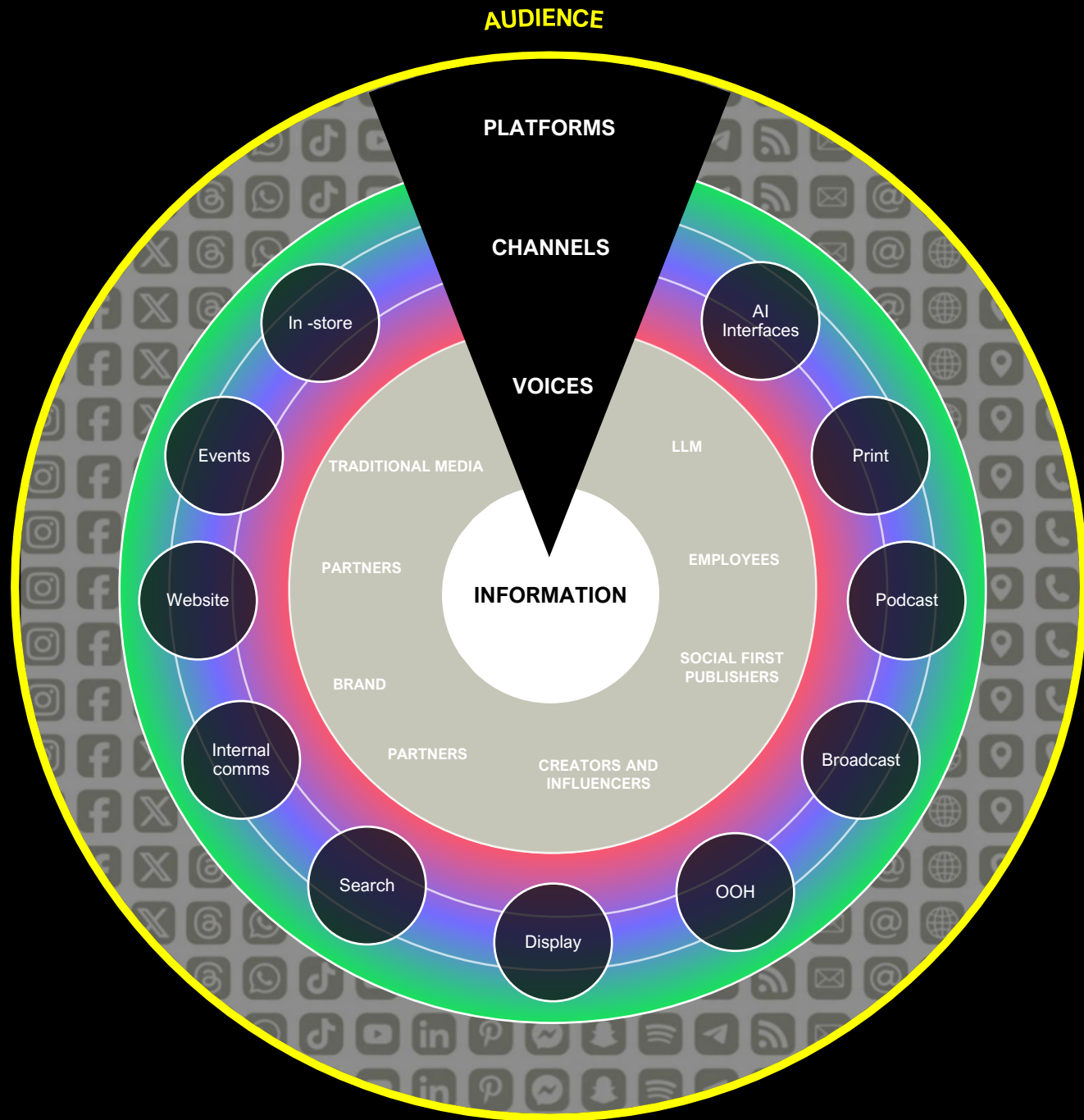
CJR

A group of diverse people, likely at a conference or event, are shown in a crowd. Many individuals are holding smartphones, some taking photos or videos. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source coming from the screens of the phones. The text "Everyone is media now" is overlaid in a bright yellow font across the center of the image.

Everyone is media now

The media ecosystem

~~Social First~~
Social Always



Owned
Paid
Earned

New ways of creating content



Packages

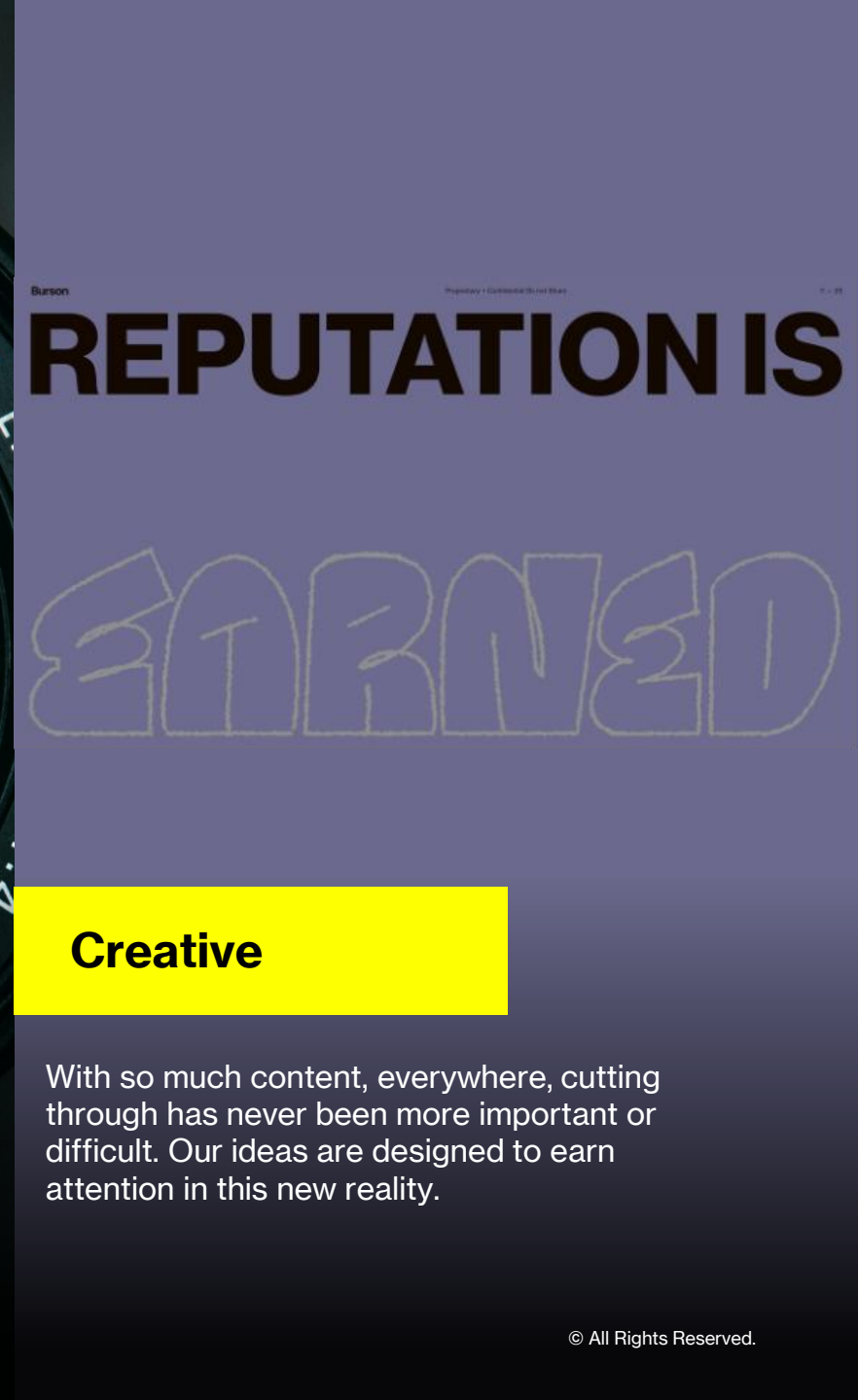
This new media reality needs more and different content (not just press releases). Every story we distribute will have a content package. Burson will create a content menu aligned to each story's connection map.

Burson



Content Capture

Every outlet or influencer will be given access to create their own content, or assets delivered directly to them to match their channel. Client socials will always be part of the channel mix.



Creative

With so much content, everywhere, cutting through has never been more important or difficult. Our ideas are designed to earn attention in this new reality.

THE REALITY OF INFORMATION

Burson





/prompt:

Overhead drone captures the collision of a large tanker spilling chemicals and oil crude into an estuary with news helicopters flying through the frame.

/prompt:

Security camera style video with the date and time in the upper left corner of the frame shot from overhead showing a fast-food worker in a red uniform holding up a rat, showing to the camera and then putting it into fryer with boiling steaming hot oil.

/prompt:

First-person body cam video in an angry crowd banging on a security gate at the global headquarters of large multinational pharmaceutical company.

/prompt:

Dashcam video catches rideshare driver screaming at passenger from inside the car.

truth is **subjective.**

“proof” can be **created.**

crises can be **manufactured.**

information can be **weaponized.**

We're living in a post-factual era rife with disinformation.

Global risks ranked by severity



Please estimate the likely impact (severity) of the following risks over a 2-year and 10-year period.

Short term (2 years)

1 st	Geoeconomic confrontation
2 nd	Misinformation and disinformation
3 rd	Societal polarization
4 th	Extreme weather events
5 th	State-based armed conflict
6 th	Cyber insecurity
7 th	Inequality
8 th	Erosion of human rights and/or of civic freedoms
9 th	Pollution
10 th	Involuntary migration or displacement

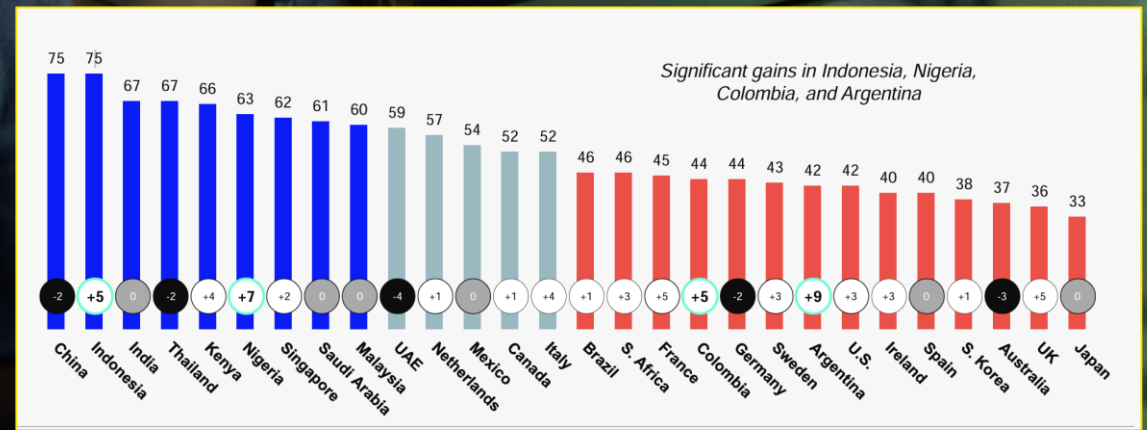
Long term (10 years)

1 st	Extreme weather events
2 nd	Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse
3 rd	Critical change to Earth systems
4 th	Misinformation and disinformation
5 th	Adverse outcomes of AI technologies
6 th	Natural resource shortages
7 th	Inequality
8 th	Cyber insecurity
9 th	Societal polarization
10 th	Pollution

Risk categories ● Environmental ● Geopolitical ● Societal ● Technological

Source: World Economic Forum Global Risks Perception Survey 2025-2026.

Global trust in media is at all time low. AI is a threat.

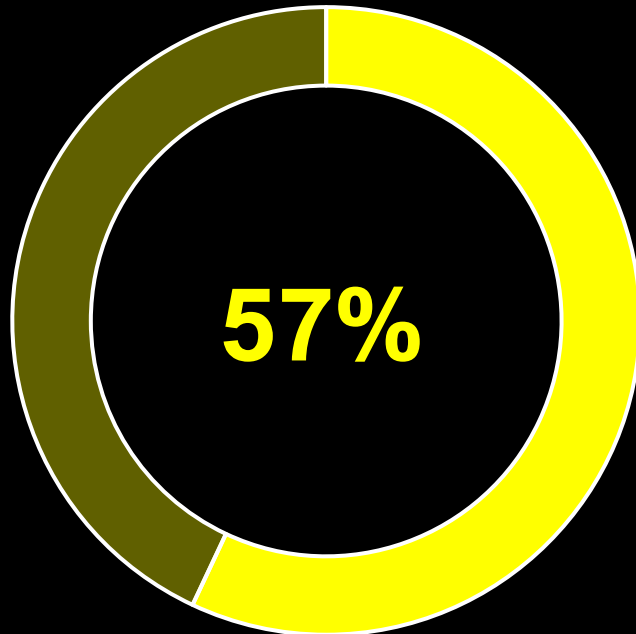


+1,000%

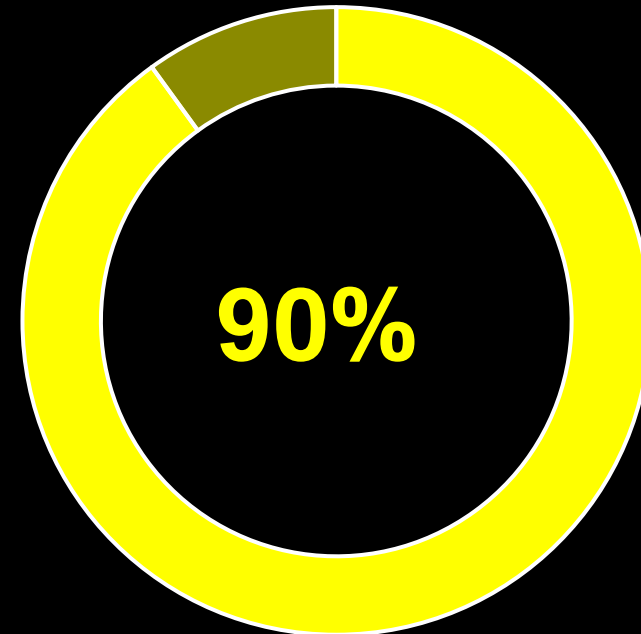
Growth in AI generated false news websites.

An ongoing proliferation of AI generated content dominates the landscape

Current Percentage of Online Content Generated by AI



Estimated Percentage of AI Content by 2027



The impact of AI is broad-sweeping within organizations

We are facing massive disruption and transformation that requires we retool ways of working to **maximize opportunity and minimize risk.**

Forbes

Which Jobs Will AI Replace? These 4 Industries Will Be Heavily Impacted

Arianna Johnson Forbes Staff

I cover the latest trends in science, tech and healthcare.

Follow

87% of global organizations believe that AI technologies will give them a competitive edge.

Studies show both speed and quality improve when consultants leverage AI

+12.2%
volume

+25.1%
speed

+40%
quality



As you are on the journey
consider...

Key observations:

No broad-sweeping replacement of human tasks...yet

Manage the engineering of humans into the loop with new processes and approaches for familiar work tasks

Some efficiencies, but look for other value in implementation

Organizational training and transformation initiatives with prioritized use cases

Integrated intelligence approach will deliver greatest impact

NEW WAYS OF WORKING

Burson





We're beyond
experimentation.



AI already
makes us
**faster and
better.**

Bringing Intelligent Performance to life

Gather Complete Intel to Anticipate and manage risk and reputation

The **Sonar** Suite

Forecast impact, influence and behaviors

The **Decipher** Suite

Create personalized content at scale

The **Creators'** Suite

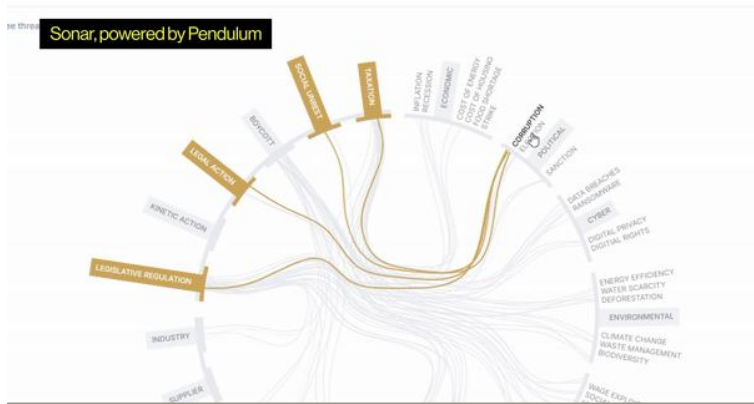
Navigate sector or category specific challenges

The **Specialists'** Suite

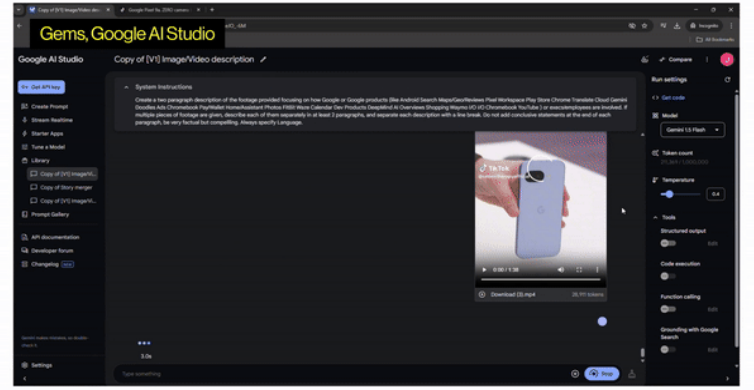
Measure performance, demonstrate value and see around corners

The **Fount** Suite

WPP Open // PR Studio



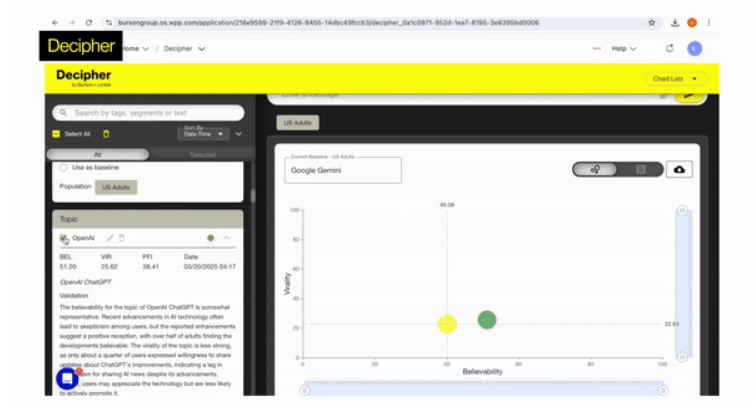
See the Unseen



AI Automation for Speed

Brand	Sentiment
Workspace	Negative
Search Images	Negative
Pixel	Negative
Brand	Negative
Employees	Negative
Maps/Geo	Negative
Gemini/Bard	Negative
Pixel	Negative

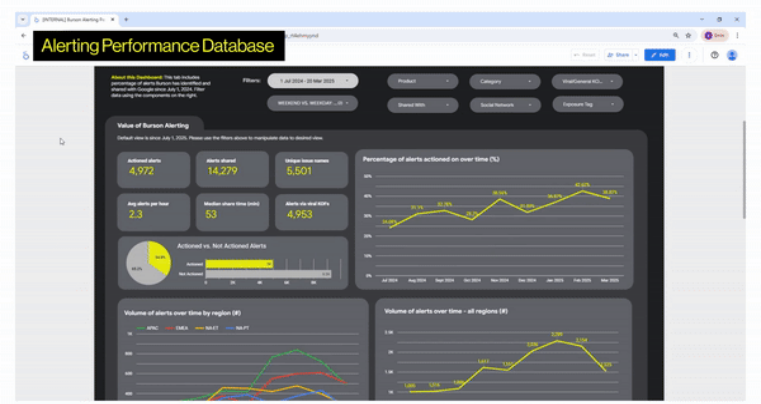
Alerting for Action



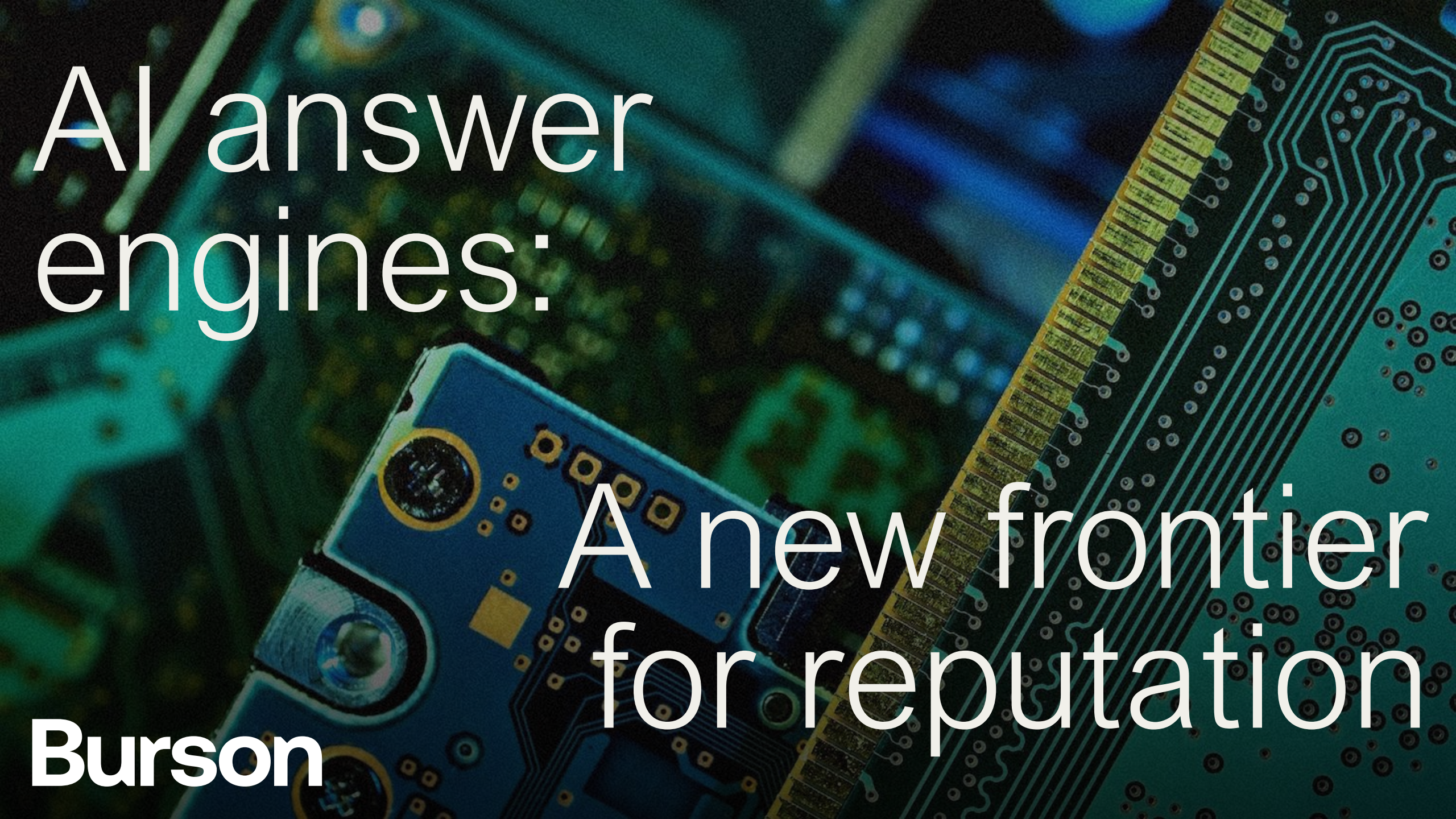
Predicting Behavior and Impact



Visualizing Insights



Optimizing for Performance



AI answer
engines:

A new frontier
for reputation

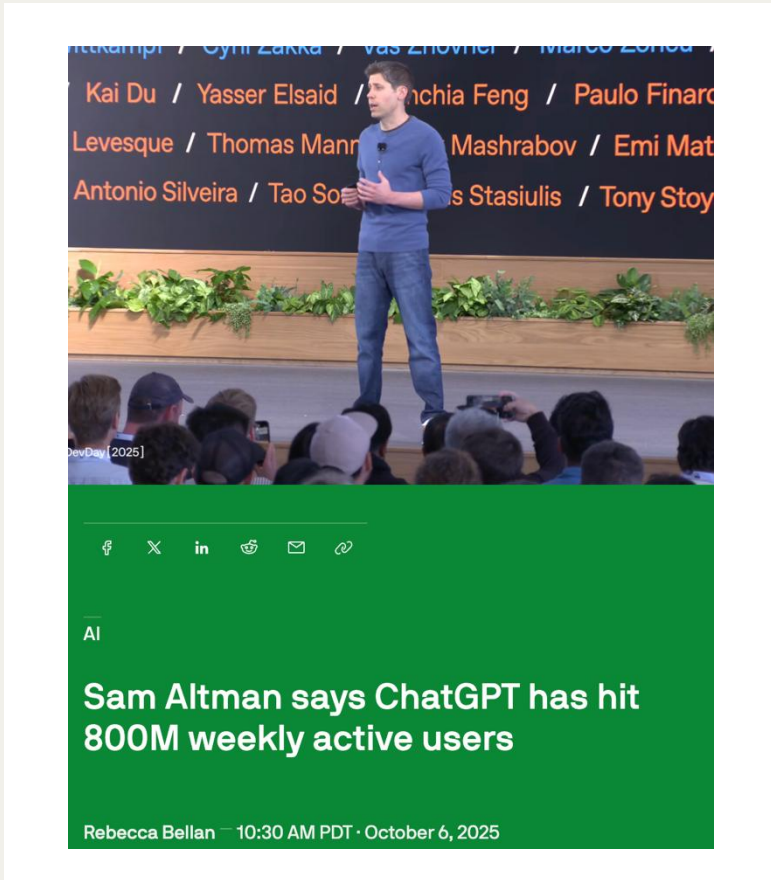
Burson



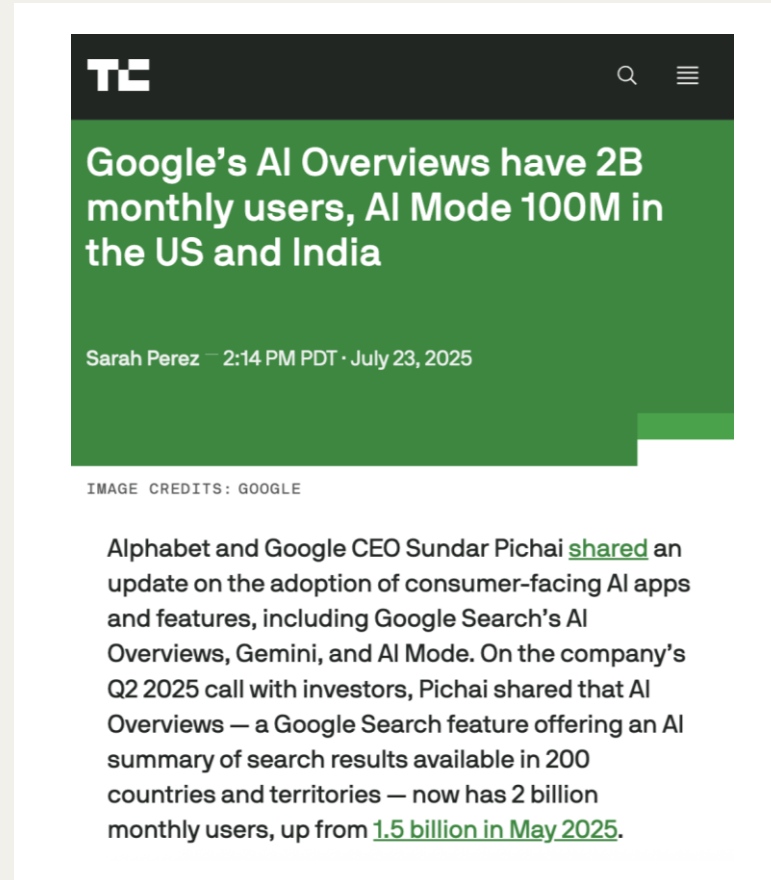
The Challenge

AI Answer Engines Are Fast Becoming a Gatekeeper for Reputation

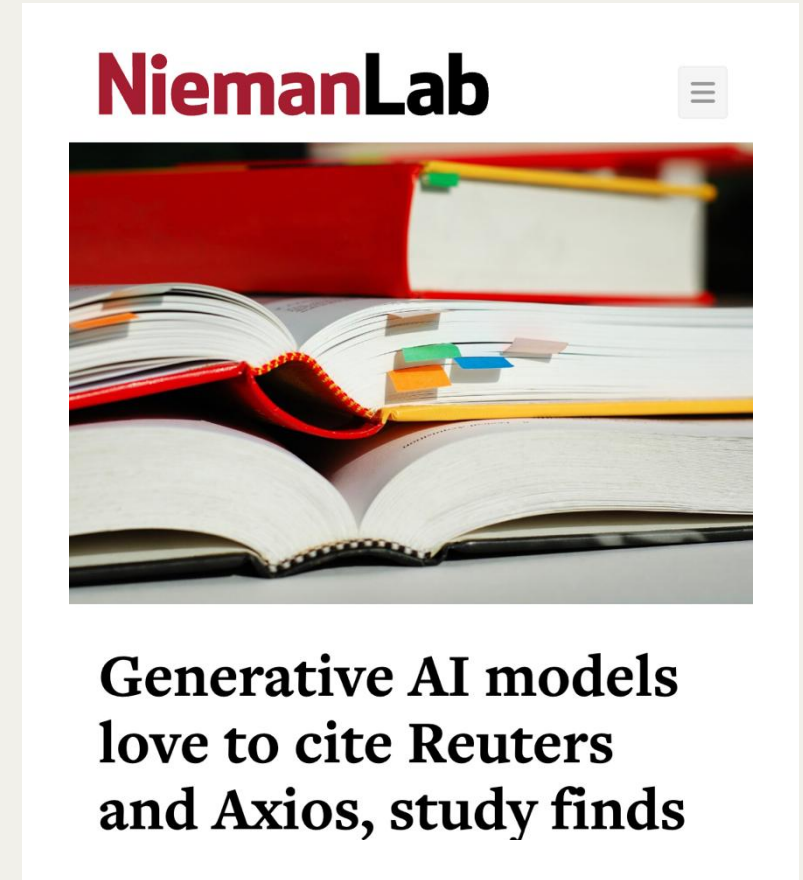
ChatGPT is rising



Google is changing

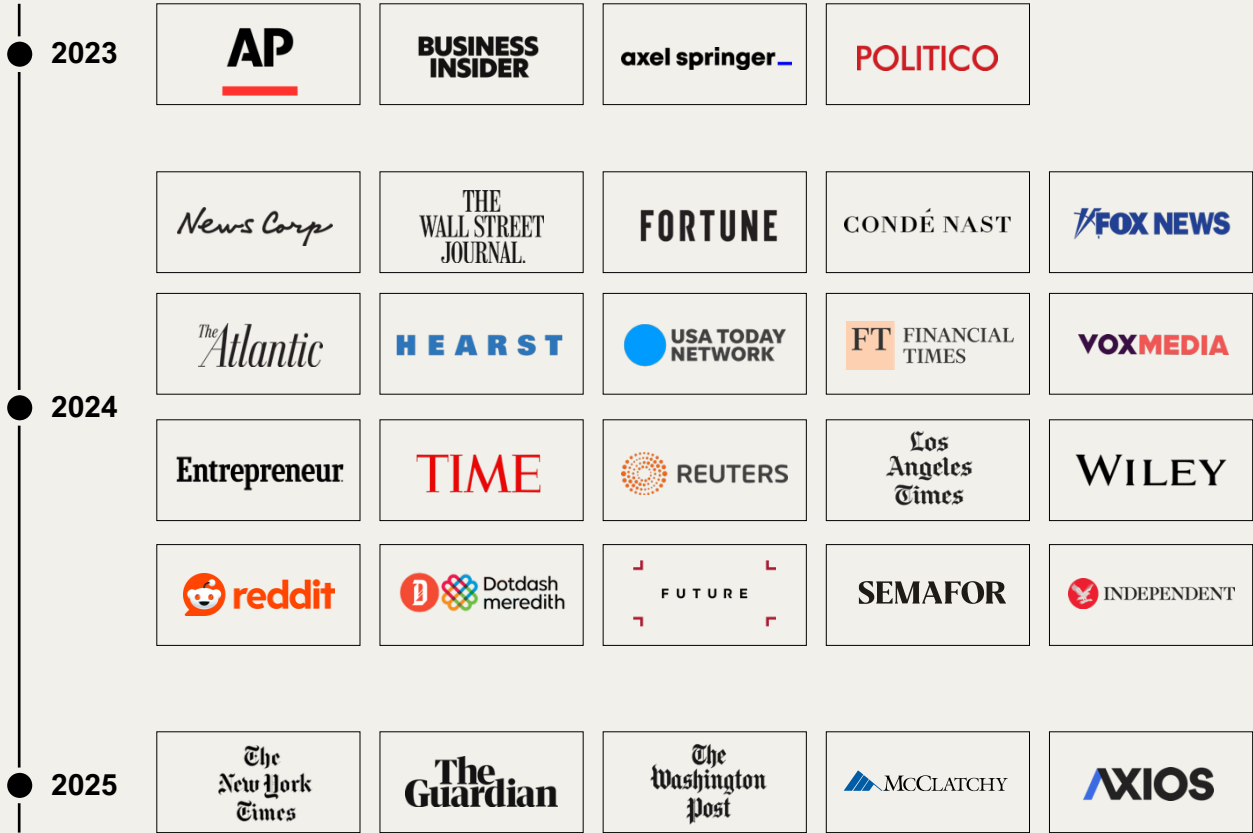


Earned media feeds both



Publisher-Platform Partnerships Power AI's Growing Influence

Timeline of media companies licensing to AI answer engines



AI Platforms Licensing Content

- OpenAI / ChatGPT
- Google/Gemini
- Anthropic/Claude
- Microsoft
- Meta
- Amazon
- Perplexity

What Platforms Get

- Material to train their models
- Full historic archives
- 2+ years of forthcoming news to keep training the models

What Publishers Get

- Cash
- Open line to the AI platforms
- Access to the technology
- Potential influence, for now

Jan 15, 2025 - Business

OpenAI to fund four new Axios Local newsrooms

OpenAI will underwrite the expansion of Axios to four cities of its choice as part of a broader content-sharing and technology deal, the firms said Wednesday.

Why it matters: It's the first time OpenAI is funding newsrooms as a part of a publisher deal, although the idea isn't novel.

Google struck a deal with McClatchy to fund the creation of three digital-only local newsrooms in 2019.

Zoom in: As part of the three-year deal, OpenAI will fund Axios' expansion into Pittsburgh; Kansas City, Missouri; Boulder, Colorado; and Huntsville, Alabama, the companies said.

ChatGPT will use Axios journalism to answer user queries with attributed summaries, quotes and links to Axios stories. Axios can access OpenAI's technology to build its own AI products, processes, and systems.

Reality check: OpenAI says it wants to support a healthy news ecosystem while providing its users with quality information — but after feeling burned by tech companies, some outlets are being cautious about making agreements.

What to watch: OpenAI has taken the lead on making deals with media publishers, but its generative AI competitors are beginning to catch up.

How AI Answer Engines Respond to Questions

They find patterns



All the major platforms rely on frequency and co-occurrence patterns from reputable sources – particularly media, Wikipedia, Reddit, academic and gov't sites.

They blend old and new



They rapidly fuse older, widely cited facts with fresh, recent news.

They solve the puzzle



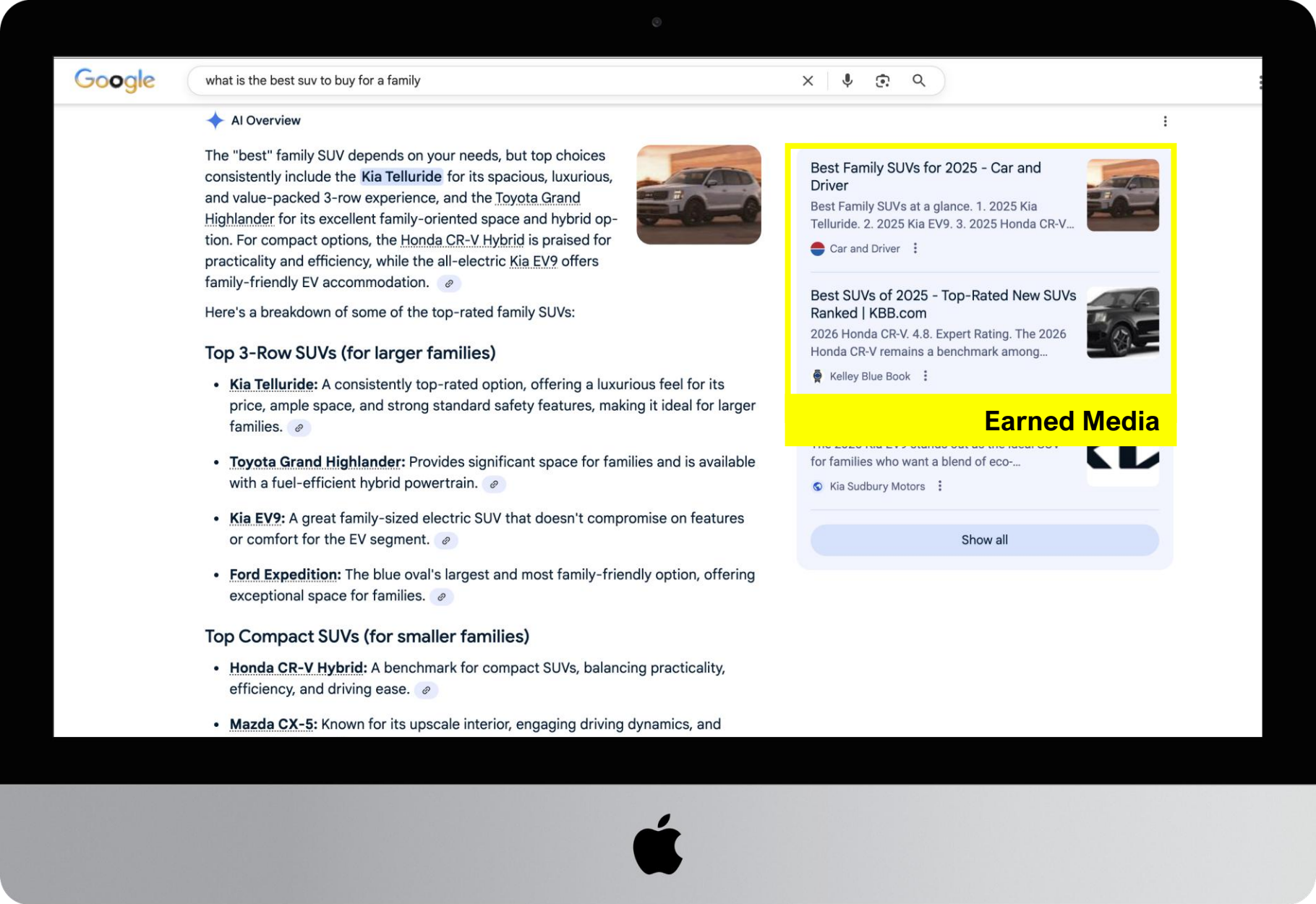
Earned assets that routinely associate a brand with certain qualities are more likely to appear in AI assistant responses when it puts all the pieces together.

They fill voids

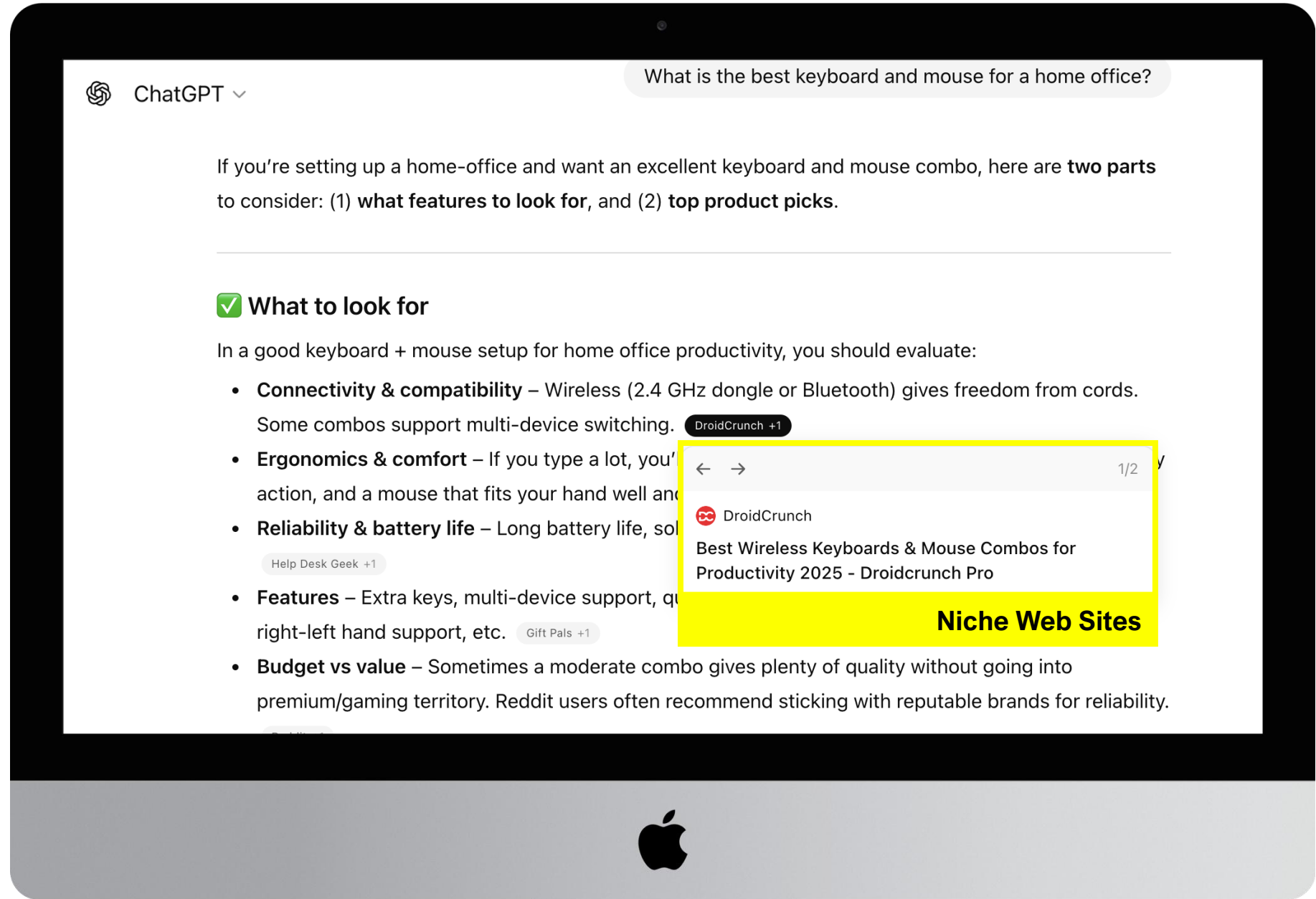


However, if coverage is sparse or absent, AI will default to outdated or generic information — leaving others to define your narrative.

Google AI Overviews



ChatGPT



The Opportunity

This is a Watershed Moment for Communications and PR

- **AI answer engines are another surface for comms to navigate**, one that subsumes traditional and social media.
- **This is a big opportunity.** Earned and owned are the primary disciplines that move the needle.
- **However, it's a long game.** Here, the goal is no longer just to be found, but to be understood.



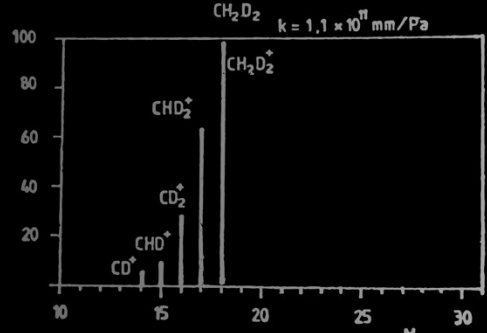
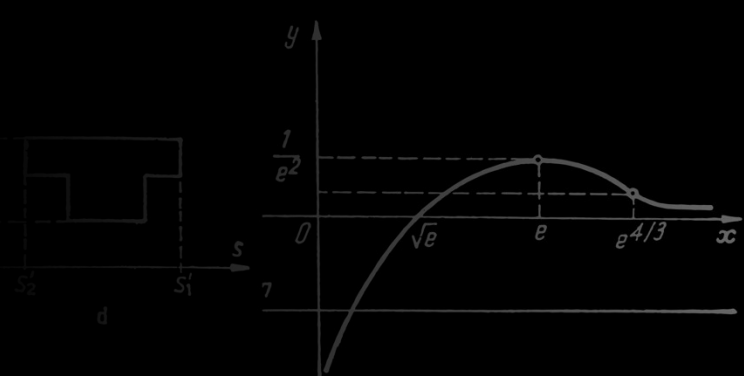


The Threat

AI is a Clear and Present Danger to Reputation

- **AI answer engines are disrupting user behaviors**, creating a “zero-click” environment that eliminates the need to search further by visiting web sites.
- **They can surface repeated misinformation**, and this can cascade into further damage.
- **And there's no easy fix.** Quick remedies and hacks only create further risks for brands.

The "Three C" Formula for Success



$$E_p = E_{p_{max}} \Rightarrow \sin^2\left(3t_p + \frac{\pi}{3}\right) = 1$$

$$= \sin^2\left(\frac{\pi}{2} + n\pi\right); n = 0, 1, 2, \dots$$

$$t_p = \frac{\pi}{3}\left(n + \frac{1}{6}\right); n = 0, 1, 2, \dots$$

$$E_c = E_{c_{max}} \Rightarrow \cos^2\left(3t_c + \frac{\pi}{3}\right) = 1 \Rightarrow \cos\left(3t_c + \frac{\pi}{3}\right) = \pm 1 = \cos(n\pi) \Rightarrow t_c = \frac{\pi}{3}\left(n - \frac{1}{3}\right)$$

$$\omega = \sqrt{\frac{k}{m}} = \sqrt{\frac{4\pi m_1 K \rho}{3m_1}} = \sqrt{\frac{4\pi K \rho}{3}}$$

$$\omega = \sqrt{\frac{g_0}{R_0}}$$

$$T = \frac{2\pi}{\omega} = 2\pi \sqrt{\frac{R_0}{g}} = 5,03 \cdot 10^3 \text{ s.}$$

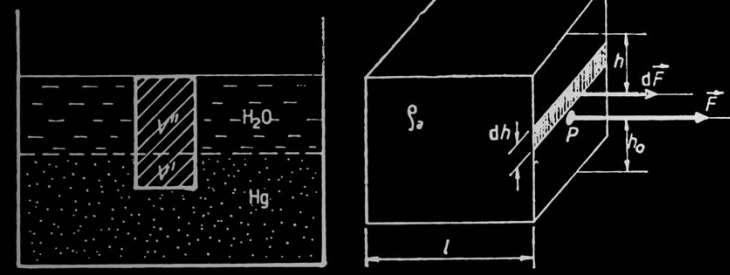
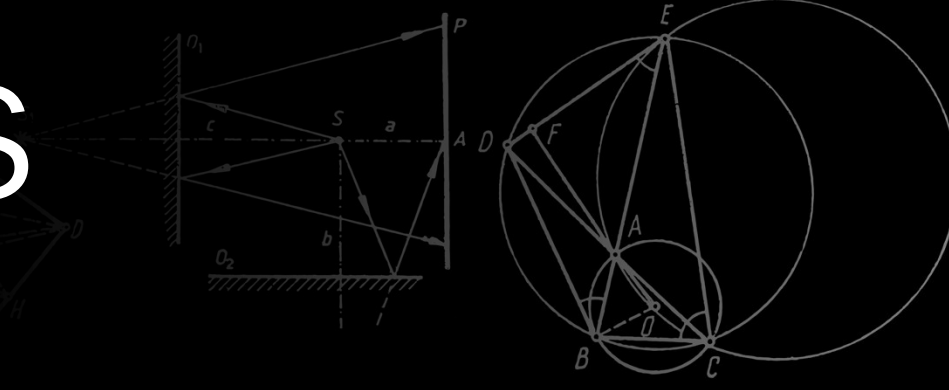
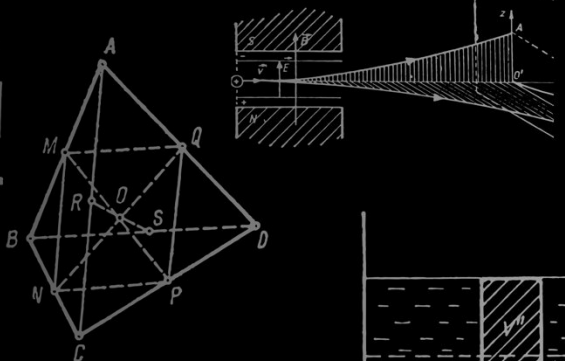
$$\int_{-a}^0 x^2 e^{ax} dx = \frac{1}{a^2} \left[\frac{1}{a} (x^2 e^{ax}) - \frac{2}{a} \int_{-a}^0 x e^{ax} dx \right]$$

$$= \frac{1}{a^2} \left[\frac{1}{a} (x^2 e^{ax}) - \frac{2}{a^2} (x e^{ax} - \int_{-a}^0 e^{ax} dx) \right]$$

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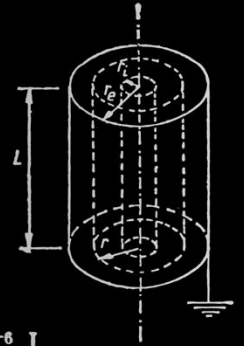
$$Q_{total} = Q_1 + Q_2 = 3\epsilon_0 \frac{S}{d_1} U_0$$

$$C_1 = C_2 = \epsilon_0 \frac{S}{d_1} = 8,85 \text{ pF}$$

$$Q = \frac{Q_1 + Q_2}{2} = 13,275 \cdot 10^{-9} \text{ C}$$

$$U = \frac{Q}{C_1} = \frac{3}{2} U_0 = 1500 \text{ V}$$

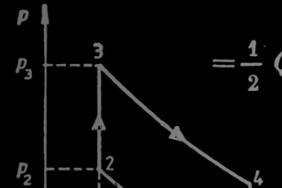
$$= \frac{1}{2} QU = \frac{9}{8} \epsilon_0 \frac{S}{d_1} U_0^2 = 9,956 \cdot 10^{-6} \text{ J}$$



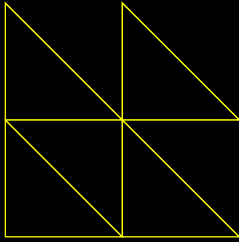
90	104	170
0,9	0,9	1,0
0,9	-4,2	-5,3
	-4	-5
44	115	175
0,9	0,9	1,0

$$-(x+t)I_2 + (xt-yz)I_2 = 0$$

$$\begin{pmatrix} x & y \\ z & t \end{pmatrix} - \begin{pmatrix} x+t & 0 \\ 0 & x+t \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} -t & y \\ z & -x \end{pmatrix}$$

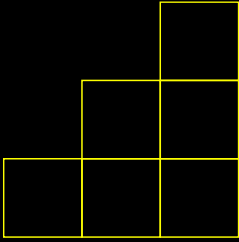


Burson generative engine optimization guiding principles



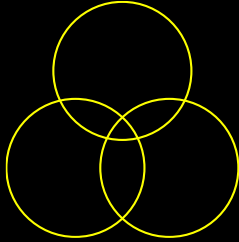
Consistent narrative

Tell your story the same way across all touch points with uniformity to set the foundation.



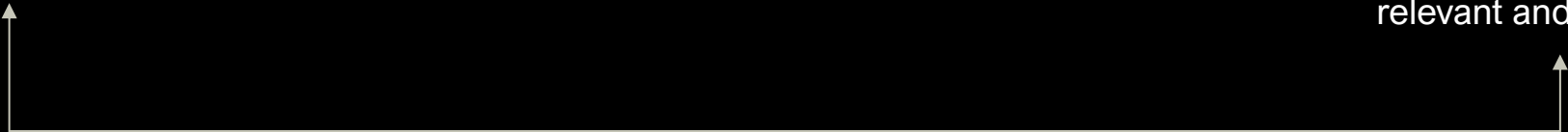
Compounding authority

Leverage authoritative channels to signal to AI answer engines that your voice is credible.



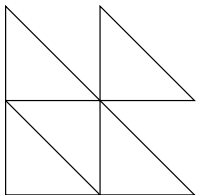
Chorus of content

Ensure your message is repeated in unison from diverse sources so AI engines hear it as one and treat it as relevant and important.



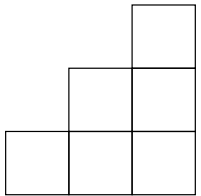
Consistent Narrative

- The same narrative should appear in various channels. If your earned media, website, social presence all use the same descriptors, AI models will be more likely to adopt them.
- Companies should consider a “narrative lexicon” — a set of approved key phrases and proof points to seed. Discipline is key.
- This narrative can't be spin. It needs to be credible and, importantly, verifiable.



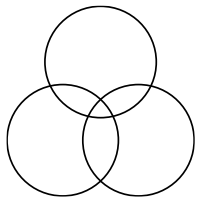
Compounding Authority

- Multiple trusted voices and institutions can position you as a topical authority.
- Certain media outlets may receive more prominence in responses both organically and via strategic publisher-platform partnerships. Coverage here helps, but it's not enough alone.
- AI answer engines love human, first-person accounts. This necessitates talking to podcasters, Substack writers, academics, YouTubers as well as traditional journalists. Work with trusted content creators who have expertise and experience.

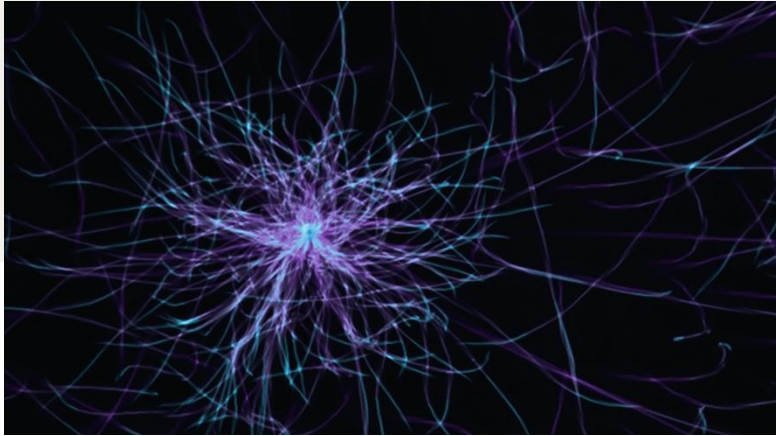


Chorus of Content

- Programs that harmonize owned assets, earned media, first-person executive and subject-matter POVs are more likely to help shape AI citations.
- For corporate and b-to-b, publishing data-driven research assets routinely referenced by others can also help surface your framing.
- In a consumer context, programs that routinely drive / become part of culture can also contribute if aligned with common AI engine queries.
- A ubiquitous approach to product reviews – one that doesn't just focus on traditional outlets – is essential



Getting Started



Audit and map

Baseline how AI answer engines currently describe you, your competitors, and category.



Seed and amplify

Generate consistent, fact-based narratives in channels most likely to be read and cited by AI engines.



Monitor and reinforce

Track shifts in AI-mediated reputation and act quickly to protect it.

THE WAY AHEAD

Burson



5 tips for working within the new comms realities

1. Be 100% clear where AI can('t) help you

outputs must uphold the highest standards

2. Speed = Security

(Mis)information spread globally within minutes – responses can't take days

3. Use AI efficiency and time dividends for strategy

instead of more content output

4. Maintain and train critical thinking

Experts + AI = improved performance | Novice + AI = diminished critical thinking

5. Always stay curious and experiment

within guardrails

THANK YOU!

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