

White Paper

The State of Search: AI Implications and Actionable Strategies for Healthcare Marketers

Understand how AI is reshaping search behavior and what you can do to stay visible, trusted, and chosen



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A search revolution is underway

How we discover and engage with information is changing in extraordinary ways. Driven by the proliferation of AI, online search is increasingly conversational, contextual, and personalized. Given that most U.S. adults begin their care journey with a search engine, shifts in online search behavior have significant implications for the healthcare industry.

The search for care is increasingly non-linear. The journey spans traditional search engines, AI platforms, and devices. It includes voice and text and sometimes

both at once. Cookie cutter SEO and SEM strategies aren't equipped for today's Google Search Result, let alone a journey that encompasses ChatGPT and other Large Language Models (LLMs).

Successful strategies are tailored to the signals of intent audiences reveal as they seek information, blending organic and paid methodologies to secure visibility across platforms. In this report, we'll explore how AI is influencing online search behavior and the steps you can take to differentiate your brand from the competition.

By the numbers



The patient journey begins with search

- 75% of U.S. adults turn to the internet first for health information; 85% of them start with a search engine
- There are approximately 70,000 healthcare-related searches per minute on Google which amounts to more than 1 billion per day



AI results are increasingly present across search

- As of May 2025, nearly 90% of healthcare searches on Google return AI-generated summaries



The emergence of AI has diversified where and how we find answers

- 35% of users switch between multiple search platforms (like Google, ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity) during a single journey
- 27% of U.S. adults report using AI instead of traditional search engines

WHY IT MATTERS:



- Online patient research is becoming more conversational
- Authority, accuracy, and structure are the new differentiators
- The future of visibility is not if you appear, it's how you appear

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN:



- How AI is reshaping patient search behavior
- Why healthcare is seeing the biggest impact
- How to future-proof your search strategy across paid and organic tactics
- How to assess your own AI Brand Presence

Visibility, trust, and the rise of AI brand presence

AI doesn't just summarize. Instead, it decides who to summarize. Organically, AIOs, ChatGPT, and others reference and cite specific brands in generated responses.

Monetization is inevitable, and early indications point towards contextual advertising practices that prioritize a seamless, user-first experience. In any case, your hospital's reputation is being shaped — and

surfaced — by algorithms long before a patient ever visits your website.

Analyzing AI citations reveals which types of content LLMs like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity trust and reference most often. Understanding where these citations occur helps prioritize content that earns visibility, builds authority, and drives patient engagement.

Earning citations requires



Strong schema and structure

AI prioritizes well-organized, technically sound content it can interpret and cite



Authoritative, plain language

Content that is human-readable, trustworthy, and medically accurate wins citations

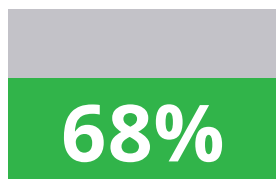


Consistency

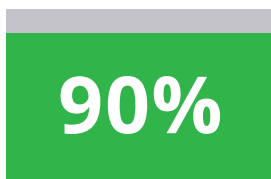
Aligning brand, service line, and local content to present a unified digital identity helps secure generated real estate

A new benchmark for modern search

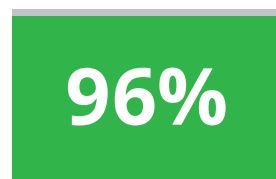
In a recent benchmarking exercise conducted by our team using BrightEdge AI Catalyst, one leading health system demonstrated:



Share of AI mentions across tracked prompts



Citation rate, reflecting strong content authority



Positive sentiment across ChatGPT, Gemini, and AIOs



We can measure and optimize for AI Brand Presence, a new measure of visibility to match modern search behaviors. The systems that invest in content structure, authority, and consistency are the ones AI will trust and surface. Define where you stand now, so you can measure the success of your strategies tomorrow.

What healthcare marketers should do now

The playbook for visibility has changed. Winning in an AI-enabled search landscape requires thinking beyond rankings and clicks. It's about earning trust through structure, intent, and clarity. We recommend a three-pronged strategy to position your brand for success as online behaviors evolve:

1 Secure your spot in AI overviews

- Create authoritative, medically sourced content supported by schema and structured data
- Use modular templates with concise summaries and visual clarity for AI readability
- Audit your content for accuracy, recency, and helpfulness, traits AI will reward

2 Shift from platform-first to intent-first

- Develop a cohesive search strategy inclusive of organic and paid tactics mapped to problem-aware, solution-aware, and brand-aware stages
- Tailor content to each phase: early education (AI), consideration (organic), and conversion (organic and paid)
- Optimize content for conversational queries ("what," "why," "how") where AI results dominate

3 Expand beyond search

- Reinforce brand trust across a diverse set of channels like CTV, video, and programmatic as traditional search results shrink to accommodate AIOs
- Maintain messaging consistency across earned, paid, and owned channels to reinforce signals of trust
- Develop a measurement ecosystem to understand impact from impression to appointment and beyond to overcome potential downturns in traditional leading indicators like clickthrough

Looking ahead



- AI Brand Presence will be a common KPI
- LLM ad networks and AIO inventory are on the horizon, offering new opportunities for visibility
- Local listings, reviews, and thirdparty citations will increasingly shape AI perception



"Search is no longer just SEO and SEM. Success requires understanding and optimizing for an AI-enabled patient journey that's more patchwork than pathway."

— Joe Loar, Associate Director, Digital Marketing

Search + AI = The new patient journey

AI is redefining how people find and trust information online. Generative search experiences like Google's AI Overviews (AIOs) and Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity are rewriting the rules of discovery. Welcome to the era of truly conversational search full of context, symptoms, and emotions.

The rise of conversational and zero-click search

AI isn't replacing search, it's expanding it. Early in their care journeys, patients are asking long-form, contextual questions and expect instant, trustworthy answers. And they're navigating a mosaic of platforms to find what they seek:

- AIOs surface authoritative summaries earlier in the journey, increasing the likelihood of zero-click searches during research
- LLMs offer conversational exploration, context, and comparison as users understand implications and form plans
- Traditional search experiences, like Google, remain dominant for lower funnel transactional and navigational intent

"How often should I see my Primary Care Doctor?"

CHATGPT



"Primary Care Doctor accepting new patients"

GOOGLE



"Schedule appointment at [location]"

GOOGLE ADS



Assess your AI brand presence

You can't lead in AI search if you don't know how you're represented there.

Where does your health system stand in AI search?

Our AI Brand Presence Report benchmarks your visibility across:

GOOGLE AI

CHATGPT

Across brand and service lines, you'll see:

- How often your brand appears in AI-generated results
- How you're described compared to competitors
- Where you can strengthen authority, visibility, and trust

Each report is built on real patient-intent prompts and delivered in a clear, executive-ready format.

Take action:

See how your health system appears in AI search and identify your biggest opportunities to gain visibility across engines and platforms. **[Request your complimentary AI Brand Presence Report.](#)**



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