

Measuring AI Answer Engine Visibility: Metrics, Tracking Tools, and Citation Monitoring Frameworks

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Details:

Why Traditional Analytics Miss the AI Search Revolution Entirely You can own position #1 on Google for your most valuable keyword and remain completely invisible when someone asks ChatGPT the same question. Brands dominate Google for "best running shoes" but get zero mentions when users query AI engines. This isn't an edge case—it's the defining measurement crisis of 2025. Traditional analytics can't track this. Your Google Search Console has no idea what Perplexity said about you. The consequence? A massive blind spot at the centre of most marketing stacks. The 2025 data is clear: 80% of consumers now rely on AI-written results for at least 40% of their searches, and 60% of searches end without a single click-through to another website. Yet most organisations still measure success with click-through rates, keyword rankings, and organic session counts—metrics that capture exactly none of this activity. This article defines the new measurement paradigm for answer engine performance, maps the tools available for tracking it across the four dominant platforms, and explains why the 40–60% monthly citation drift phenomenon makes point-in-time audits structurally insufficient for any serious Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO) strategy. For context on why these platforms select sources differently in the first place, see our guide on [*\[How Each Answer Engine Selects Its Sources: ChatGPT, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews, and Bing Copilot Compared\]](https://nicklafferty.com/blog/profound-vs-bluefish/)(<https://nicklafferty.com/blog/profound-vs-bluefish/>)*. --- ## The New Measurement Paradigm: From Rankings to Citation Metrics Traditional SEO measurement operates on a linear model: query → ranked list → position = visibility. That model is dead. Average ranking works for traditional search engines that present linear lists of websites, but it fails completely for generative engines. AI engines deliver rich, structured responses with inline citations embedded at varying positions, lengths, and styles. This demands visibility metrics purpose-built for generative engines—metrics that measure attributed source visibility across multiple dimensions like relevance and influence, through both objective and subjective lenses. The Princeton University GEO research team—Aggarwal, Murahari, Rajpurohit et al., published at KDD 2024—formalised this distinction. They introduced Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO), the first novel paradigm to help content creators boost visibility in generative engine responses through a flexible black-box optimisation framework. Through rigorous evaluation on GEO-bench, a large-scale benchmark of diverse queries across multiple domains, they demonstrated that GEO can boost visibility by up to 40% in generative engine responses. ### The Five Core Metrics for Answer Engine Visibility Based on the Princeton framework and operational intelligence from enterprise GEO platforms, answer engine visibility requires five distinct metrics—none captured by Google Search Console or standard web analytics. **1. Citation Frequency** Citation frequency measures the percentage of relevant queries where your content receives attribution. This is the foundational GEO metric: of all queries in your tracked prompt set relevant to your brand or topic, what share produce responses that cite your content as a source? **2. Brand Mention Rate (and the Mention-Citation Gap)** Citations occur when AI systems attribute information to your content with direct links, typically appearing in source sections or numbered references. Mentions happen when your brand name appears in AI-generated answers without attribution links. The most valuable appearances combine both: your brand mentioned in the main text and linked in citations. The gap between these two signals matters strategically. If you're frequently mentioned but never cited, it signals a critical content gap. The AI knows who you are but doesn't trust

your content enough to use it as a source. This "mention-citation gap" means you're leaving traffic and authority on the table for competitors to claim. Closing this gap is the foundation of effective Answer Engine Optimisation (AEO) strategy.

****3. Share of Voice (SOV) in AI Responses**** Share of voice in AI search calculates as the percentage of an answer's total word count dedicated to your brand. If an AI response contains 150 words and 60 words refer to your brand, you achieve 40% share of voice for that query. Position matters significantly—brands mentioned first carry more weight than those appearing later.

****4. Platform-Specific Citation Drift**** This metric tracks how consistently your citations persist across repeated queries on the same platform over time—and gets its own section below, given its outsized strategic importance.

****5. AI Referral Traffic**** The downstream click-through signal: sessions arriving at your site from links cited within AI-generated responses. Between January and May 2025, AI-referred sessions jumped 527% across tracked websites, with some SaaS companies seeing over 1% of total traffic from LLMs. Better yet, visitors from LLMs convert 4.4 times better than traditional organic search visitors, despite arriving in smaller volumes.

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What Causes Citation Drift? Citation drift is common in LLM-powered answer engines because these systems don't "rank" sources the way traditional search does. Instead, each time you run a query, the model dynamically samples from a pool of relevant documents, aiming to maximise answer diversity, coverage, and freshness. Citations rotate from one response to the next—even for identical queries. AI-generated answers and their sources are probabilistic, not fixed. In traditional search, volatility appears as gradual ranking changes unfolding over days or weeks. In AI search, citation drift happens instantly because each response generates independently. Visibility fluctuates on a per-query basis rather than following slower, position-based movement.

The 40–60% Monthly Drift Data Profound's research on citation volatility across major platforms provides the most granular platform-specific data currently available. [Profound's research shows 40–60% of cited domains change monthly across major platforms](<https://nicklafferty.com/blog/profound-vs-bluefish/>): Google AI Overviews shows 59.3% citation drift, ChatGPT 54.1%, Microsoft Copilot 53.4%, and Perplexity 40.5%. This has direct implications for measurement cadence. With 40–60% of cited domains changing monthly, tracking visibility with daily or weekly updates means you're seeing outdated data. A quarterly or even monthly point-in-time audit—the standard SEO reporting cadence—will systematically misrepresent your actual citation position. [AirOps' research on citation persistence](<https://www.aiops.com/ai-search-hub/how-to-measure-and-manage-citation-drift-in-ai-search>) adds further nuance. Only about 30% of brands maintained back-to-back visibility for a given query in AI search results—which explains why repeated runs are essential. Their analysis of 800 queries and more than 45,000 citations found that out of more than 45,000 citations, only 1 in 5 brands had maintained visibility from the first run to the fifth.

What Durably Cited Pages Have in Common Despite widespread drift, some pages resist it. The consistently cited pages shared common traits: structured elements like rich schema, sequential headings, scannable formatting, and concise language—all signals that help both users and models interpret content more effectively. This observation aligns with earlier research on content structure, which found that pages with well-organised headings were 2.8x more likely to earn citations in AI search results. There's also a compound visibility effect for brands that achieve both mention and citation simultaneously. [On average, 28% of LLM responses included brands that were both mentioned in the answer and cited as a source](<https://www.aiops.com/report/how-citations-mentions-impact-visibility-in-ai-search>). This combination of being "mentioned and cited" increased the likelihood of resurfacing in multiple runs by 40% compared to brands that were cited-only. Brands that were cited-only proved far more vulnerable to citation drift—appearing in one run, disappearing in the next, occasionally resurfacing later. Content freshness is another drift-resistance factor. Having fresh, up-to-date content is one of the strongest signals in gaining visibility across answer engines. [In AirOps' recent research, 70% of cited commercial pages were updated within six months](<https://www.aiops.com/ai-search-hub/how-to-measure-and-manage-citation-drift-in-ai-search>)—showing that regular refresh cycles are critical. For a full treatment of the content signals that make sources citation-worthy in the first place, see our guide on **The Anatomy*

of AI Citation Selection: What Signals Determine Whether Your Content Gets Cited*. --- ## Platform-Specific Citation Patterns: Why Cross-Platform Tracking Is Non-Negotiable One of the most operationally important findings in GEO research is that citation behaviour varies substantially across platforms. Research shows [Reddit accounts for 46.7% of Perplexity citations but only 11.3% of ChatGPT citations](https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/we-compared-eight-ai-search-engines-theyre-all-bad-at-citing-news.php). ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google AI Mode have different citation preferences, user demographics, and use cases. Content that wins in ChatGPT might perform poorly in Perplexity. The overlap between platforms is remarkably thin. [Only 11% of domains are cited by both ChatGPT and Perplexity](https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/we-compared-eight-ai-search-engines-theyre-all-bad-at-citing-news.php)—platform-specific optimisation is mandatory. A brand could have strong citation presence on one platform and be effectively invisible on another, and a single-platform audit would produce a dangerously incomplete picture. [BrightEdge's ongoing citation analysis](<https://www.brightedge.com/resources/weekly-ai-search-insights/ai-search-citations-week-to-week-changes>) across five major AI engines offers additional texture on how drift varies by industry vertical. Government and institutional sites were the most stable at under 4%—when AI engines trust a .gov.au source, that trust holds. By contrast, health/medical sites are notable: while "only" 34% changed, 100% of those changes were declines. One of the most striking patterns was the divergence between mentions and citations. Multiple website categories saw their citations drop significantly whilst their mentions actually increased. AI engines are still talking about these sources by name—referencing them in the body of their answers—but increasingly choosing not to link to them. --- ## Tracking Tools: A Comparative Framework The GEO tool market is exploding. [More than 35 AI search monitoring tools launched in 2024–2025](<https://siftly.ai/blog/tools-measure-citation-rates-ai-generated-content-brands-2026>). These tools fall into three broad categories, each suited to different organisational contexts and measurement needs. ### Tier 1: Dedicated AEO/GEO Platforms These tools are purpose-built for answer engine visibility measurement and offer the deepest citation intelligence. | Platform | Platforms Covered | Key Differentiator | Best For | |---|---|---|---| | **Profound** | ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Copilot, 6+ others | 400M+ real user conversations; continuous monitoring vs. snapshots | Enterprise teams needing citation telemetry + crawler analytics | | **Otterly.AI** | ChatGPT, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews, Gemini, Copilot | Automated prompt-to-answer tracking; SOV dashboards | Marketing teams needing cross-platform brand coverage | | **Peec AI** | ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Perplexity, DeepSeek | Streamlined dashboards; API access | Teams wanting simplicity without feature bloat | These metrics are crucial as monthly citation drift ranges 40–60% across major platforms, making continuous tracking essential for identifying risks and opportunities. [Answer Engine Insights tracks citations and visibility across ten answer engines](<https://gracker.ai/data-and-research-reports/geo-technical-playbook-citation-economy>), processing 5M+ daily citations to manage citation drift and protect share-of-voice. An AI visibility tracker works by automatically sending queries (search prompts) to AI search engines like ChatGPT, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews, and AI Mode, and analysing the responses for brand mentions, citations, and source links. The tool captures how each AI platform answers questions relevant to your industry, then identifies whether your brand appears, how it's positioned, and what sentiment surrounds the mention. An AI Visibility Tracker compiles this data into dashboards showing key metrics: brand coverage rate, share of voice compared to competitors, platform-by-platform visibility, and trends over time. ### Tier 2: Integrated SEO + GEO Platforms [Semrush's AI Toolkit](<https://www.semrush.com/blog/ai-referral-traffic/>) is the most integrated solution for teams already using Semrush. It extends traditional SEO tooling into generative search, making it easy to monitor AI citations without learning a new platform. [Conductor](<https://www.conductor.com/platform/features/ai-search-performance/ai-mention-citation-tracking/>) occupies a similar position at the enterprise level: Conductor is the only end-to-end, enterprise AEO platform built on the industry's most complete data engine. Combining AEO/GEO and traditional SEO in one solution, the platform connects AI visibility tracking with content creation and real-time site monitoring—all powered by 10+ years of unified website data. ### Tier 3: GA4 + Manual Audit (Free Baseline) Before investing in dedicated tooling, practitioners can establish a baseline using GA4 and manual prompt testing. ChatGPT sent 243.8 million visits to news and media websites in April 2025 alone. Whilst still small compared to

Google (which sends 300x more traffic), AI referral traffic is growing 165x faster than organic search. [Google Analytics 4 (GA4) can capture referral traffic from AI tools](<https://www.semrush.com/blog/ai-referral-traffic/>), but only if the AI tool sends a referrer header and you configure the reports correctly. The practical setup involves creating a custom channel group under Admin → Data Display → Channel Groups, with a regex filter covering major AI platforms. A comprehensive pattern covers ChatGPT, Perplexity, Claude, Gemini, Copilot, and other major AI platforms. However, GA4 has a critical structural limitation: [most ChatGPT users copy/paste URLs into their browser, not click them](<https://martech.org/how-ga4-records-traffic-from-perplexity-comet-and-chatgpt-atlas/>). This results in traffic appearing as direct rather than referral. [Comet typically passes referrer information and appears as a clear referral source. Atlas often masks its origin, blending in with direct traffic](<https://martech.org/how-ga4-records-traffic-from-perplexity-comet-and-chatgpt-atlas/>). This means GA4 captures the *minimum* floor of AI referral traffic—the actual figure is likely substantially higher. For manual citation auditing, manual tracking doesn't scale beyond 10–15 queries. Testing 30 queries across 6 platforms requires 180 manual searches weekly, consuming 10+ hours of team time. Automated tools enable sustainable monitoring programmes that drive optimisation decisions rather than overwhelming resources. --- ## A Practical Citation Monitoring Framework The following framework translates the measurement principles above into an operational cadence that accounts for citation drift and cross-platform divergence. ### Phase 1: Establish a Prompt Library and Baseline (Weeks 1–2) 1. **Build a prompt set** of 25–50 queries that represent how your target audience asks about your category, products, and competitors across platforms. Prioritise conversational, 7+ word queries—the format that reflects actual AI search behaviour. 2. **Run each prompt 3x per platform** (ChatGPT, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews, Claude) and record: cited/mentioned/absent for each run. 3. **Document your baseline metrics**: citation frequency %, brand mention rate %, mention-citation gap, and initial SOV estimates. 4. **Configure GA4** with a custom AI channel group and regex filter to begin capturing referral data. ### Phase 2: Continuous Monitoring (Ongoing) Use rolling windows because of 40–60% monthly citation volatility. A single snapshot is not a data point—it's noise. Implement the following cadence: - **Weekly**: Automated platform sweeps via a dedicated tool; alert on sudden SOV drops or lost high-value citations. - **Monthly**: Full 25-prompt manual audit across all four platforms; document drift deltas and update a change log correlating content updates with citation changes. - **Quarterly**: Competitive SOV analysis; identify which competitors are gaining citations you're losing and on which platforms. ### Phase 3: Attribution and Action Last-click attribution will underreport LLM impact because if a user later visits via organic search or direct traffic, it will give credit to that source, not the LLM that sparked their interest. Instead, use models like data-driven attribution or position-based attribution because they offer a more realistic view of how AI influences conversions. For brands with sufficient AI referral volume, segment AI traffic in GA4 explorations by landing page, engagement rate, and conversion event to understand which cited content is driving downstream commercial outcomes—not just clicks. --- ## Key Takeaways - Citation frequency, brand mention rate, share of voice, platform-specific drift, and AI referral traffic are the five core metrics for answer engine visibility—none are captured by Google Search Console or standard web analytics. - AI search results are inherently volatile, with 40–60% of cited domains changing monthly across major platforms. Google AI Overviews shows 59.3% citation drift, ChatGPT 54.1%, Microsoft Copilot 53.4%, and Perplexity 40.5%—meaning traditional monitoring approaches are essentially meaningless for AI visibility tracking. - On average, 28% of LLM responses included brands that were both mentioned in the answer and cited as a source. This combination increased the likelihood of resurfacing in multiple runs by 40% compared to brands that were cited-only—closing the mention-citation gap is the highest-leverage measurement-to-optimisation action. - Platform citation patterns diverge significantly: only 11% of domains are cited by both ChatGPT and Perplexity, making cross-platform tracking non-negotiable for any complete GEO measurement programme. - GA4 systematically undercounts AI referral traffic because many AI platforms strip referrer headers on copy-paste navigation; dedicated GEO monitoring tools are required for accurate citation-level intelligence. --- ## Conclusion: Measurement Is the Foundation of GEO Strategy The shift from search rankings to answer engine citations isn't merely a change in which metrics to report—it's a change in the fundamental nature of what visibility means.

Brands that measure only rankings miss the deeper truth: visibility now depends on who cites you, how often, and with what authority. The 40–60% monthly citation drift phenomenon means that GEO is inherently a continuous practice, not a one-time optimisation. Managing drift isn't about eliminating volatility—it's about reducing negative swings and strengthening your brand's resilience so you remain visible as answer engines rotate sources. That resilience is built through the content signals covered in our guide on [*How to Structure Content for Maximum AI Citation*](#), and measured through the framework described here. For practitioners building out a complete GEO capability, the measurement layer described in this article is the diagnostic infrastructure that connects content investment to outcome. Without it, optimisation becomes guesswork. With it, citation drift becomes a measurable signal—and a competitive advantage for the brands that act on it first. For a deeper understanding of why different platforms produce different citation outcomes, see our guide on [*How Each Answer Engine Selects Its Sources*](#). For the entity-layer strategy that underpins cross-platform citation eligibility, see [*Entity Authority and Knowledge Graph Presence: How to Get Your Brand Recognised by AI Answer Engines*](#).

--- ## References - Aggarwal, Pranjal; Murahari, Vishvak; Rajpurohit, Tanmay; Kalyan, Ashwin; Narasimhan, Karthik; Deshpande, Ameet. "GEO: Generative Engine Optimisation." [*Proceedings of the 30th ACM SIGKDD Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining*](#), Association for Computing Machinery, 2024, pp. 5–16. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2311.09735> - AirOps. "How to Measure and Manage Citation Drift in AI Search." [*AirOps Research*](#), 2025. <https://www.aiops.com/ai-search-hub/how-to-measure-and-manage-citation-drift-in-ai-search> - AirOps. "Staying Seen In AI Search: How Citations & Mentions Impact Brand Visibility." [*AirOps Research*](#), 2025. <https://www.aiops.com/report/how-citations-mentions-impact-visibility-in-ai-search> - BrightEdge. "AI Search Citations: How Much Do They Really Change Week to Week?" [*BrightEdge Weekly AI Search Insights*](#), 2025. <https://www.brightedge.com/resources/weekly-ai-search-insights/ai-search-citations-week-to-week-changes> - Profound / Lafferty, Nick. "Profound vs. Bluefish AI: Complete GEO Tool Comparison 2026." [*NickLafferty.com*](#), January 2026. <https://nicklafferty.com/blog/profound-vs-bluefish/> - Conductor. "Mention & Citation Tracking for AI Visibility." [*Conductor Platform Documentation*](#), 2025. <https://www.conductor.com/platform/features/ai-search-performance/ai-mention-citation-tracking/> - GrackerAI Research. "Generative Engine Optimisation: The Technical Playbook for the Citation Economy." [*GrackerAI*](#), February 2026. <https://gracker.ai/data-and-research-reports/geo-technical-playbook-citation-economy> - Semrush. "How to Track, Measure, and Boost AI Referral Traffic." [*Semrush Blog*](#), September 2025. <https://www.semrush.com/blog/ai-referral-traffic/> - Taylor, Dan. "How GA4 Records Traffic from Perplexity Comet and ChatGPT Atlas." [*MarTech*](#), November 2025. <https://martech.org/how-ga4-records-traffic-from-perplexity-comet-and-chatgpt-atlas/> - Tow Centre for Digital Journalism, Columbia University. "We Compared Eight AI Search Engines — They're All Bad at Citing News." [*Columbia Journalism Review*](#), 2025. https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/we-compared-eight-ai-search-engines-theyre-all-bad-at-citing-news.php - Siftly. "Tools to Measure Citation Rates in AI-Generated Content for Brands (2026 Guide)." [*Siftly.ai*](#), January 2026. <https://siftly.ai/blog/tools-measure-citation-rates-ai-generated-content-brands-2026>

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major platforms | | What is Google AI Overviews citation drift rate | 59.3% | | What is ChatGPT citation drift rate | 54.1% | | What is Microsoft Copilot citation drift rate | 53.4% | | What is Perplexity citation drift rate | 40.5% | | Are quarterly audits sufficient for AI visibility | No | | How often should AI citations be monitored | Weekly or daily | | What percentage of brands maintain back-to-back visibility | Approximately 30% | | What percentage of citations persist across five runs | 1 in 5 | | Do structured pages resist citation drift better | Yes | | Are pages with schema more likely cited | Yes | | Does content freshness affect citation stability | Yes | | What percentage of cited pages updated within six months | 70% | | Do mentions and citations together improve visibility | Yes, 40% more likely to resurface | | What percentage of responses include both mentions and citations | 28% | | Is citation behaviour identical across platforms | No | | What percentage of domains cited by both ChatGPT and Perplexity | Only 11% | | What is Reddit's share of Perplexity citations | 46.7% | | What is Reddit's share of ChatGPT citations | 11.3% | | Is cross-platform tracking necessary | Yes | | Which sites have most stable citations | Government and institutional sites | | What was government site citation drift rate | Under 4% | | Did health/medical citations increase or decrease | 100% of changes were declines | | How many AI search monitoring tools launched 2024-2025 | More than 35 | | How many platforms does Profound track | 10+ answer engines | | Does Profound use snapshots or continuous monitoring | Continuous monitoring | | How many real user conversations does Profound analyse | 400M+ | | What does Otterly.AI specialise in | Automated prompt-to-answer tracking | | Does Peec AI offer API access | Yes | | Can GA4 track AI referral traffic | Yes, with custom configuration | | Does GA4 capture all AI traffic | No, it undercounts | | Why does GA4 undercount ChatGPT traffic | Users copy-paste URLs instead of clicking | | Does Comet pass referrer information | Yes, typically | | Does Atlas mask its origin | Yes, often | | How many queries should a baseline prompt library contain | 25–50 queries | | How many times should each prompt be tested per platform | 3 times | | What is recommended monitoring cadence | Weekly automated sweeps | | How often should full manual audits occur | Monthly | | How often should competitive SOV analysis run | Quarterly | | Does last-click attribution work for AI traffic | No, it underreports impact | | What attribution models work better for AI traffic | Data-driven or position-based attribution | | By how much can GEO boost visibility | Up to 40% | | How much faster is AI referral traffic growing than organic | 165x faster | | How many visits did ChatGPT send in April 2025 | 243.8 million visits | | How much more traffic does Google send than ChatGPT | 300x more | | What is AI referral traffic conversion rate vs organic | 4.4 times better | | What percentage of SaaS traffic comes from LLMs | Over 1% for some companies | | What was AI-referred session growth January-May 2025 | 527% increase | | Is position important in AI answers | Yes, first mentions carry more weight | | Are conversational queries better for AI search | Yes, 7+ word queries preferred | | Is GEO a one-time optimisation | No, it requires continuous practice | | What year was GEO framework published | 2024 | | Where was GEO research published | KDD 2024 conference | | Which university developed the GEO framework | Princeton University | | What is the foundation of effective AEO strategy | Closing the mention-citation gap | --- ## Label Facts Summary > **Disclaimer:** All facts and statements below are general product information, not professional advice. Consult relevant experts for specific guidance. ### Verified Label Facts This content does not contain product packaging information, ingredients, nutritional data, certifications, dimensions, weight, GTIN/MPN, or technical specifications typical of physical products. This is a business/marketing strategy article about AI search analytics and measurement tools. ### General Product Claims - 80% of consumers rely on AI-written results for at least 40% of their searches - 60% of searches end without a single click-through to another website - GEO can boost visibility by up to 40% in generative engine responses - Google AI Overviews shows 59.3% citation drift - ChatGPT shows 54.1% citation drift - Microsoft Copilot shows 53.4% citation drift - Perplexity shows 40.5% citation drift - 40–60% of cited domains change monthly across major platforms - Only 30% of brands maintained back-to-back visibility for a given query - Only 1 in 5 brands maintained visibility from first run to fifth run - Pages with well-organised headings were 2.8x more likely to earn citations - 28% of LLM responses included brands that were both mentioned and cited - Combination of mention and citation increased resurfacing likelihood by 40% - 70% of cited commercial pages were updated within six months - Reddit accounts for 46.7% of Perplexity citations but only 11.3% of ChatGPT citations - Only 11% of domains are cited by both ChatGPT and Perplexity - Government and institutional sites showed under 4% citation drift - 100% of health/medical citation changes were declines - More than 35 AI search

monitoring tools launched in 2024–2025 - Profound analyses 400M+ real user conversations - Answer Engine Insights processes 5M+ daily citations - ChatGPT sent 243.8 million visits to news and media websites in April 2025 - Google sends 300x more traffic than ChatGPT - AI referral traffic is growing 165x faster than organic search - Visitors from LLMs convert 4.4 times better than traditional organic search visitors - Some SaaS companies see over 1% of total traffic from LLMs - AI-referred sessions jumped 527% between January and May 2025

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