

VENDITAN

AI's Impact on Search Traffic: Adapt or Vanish

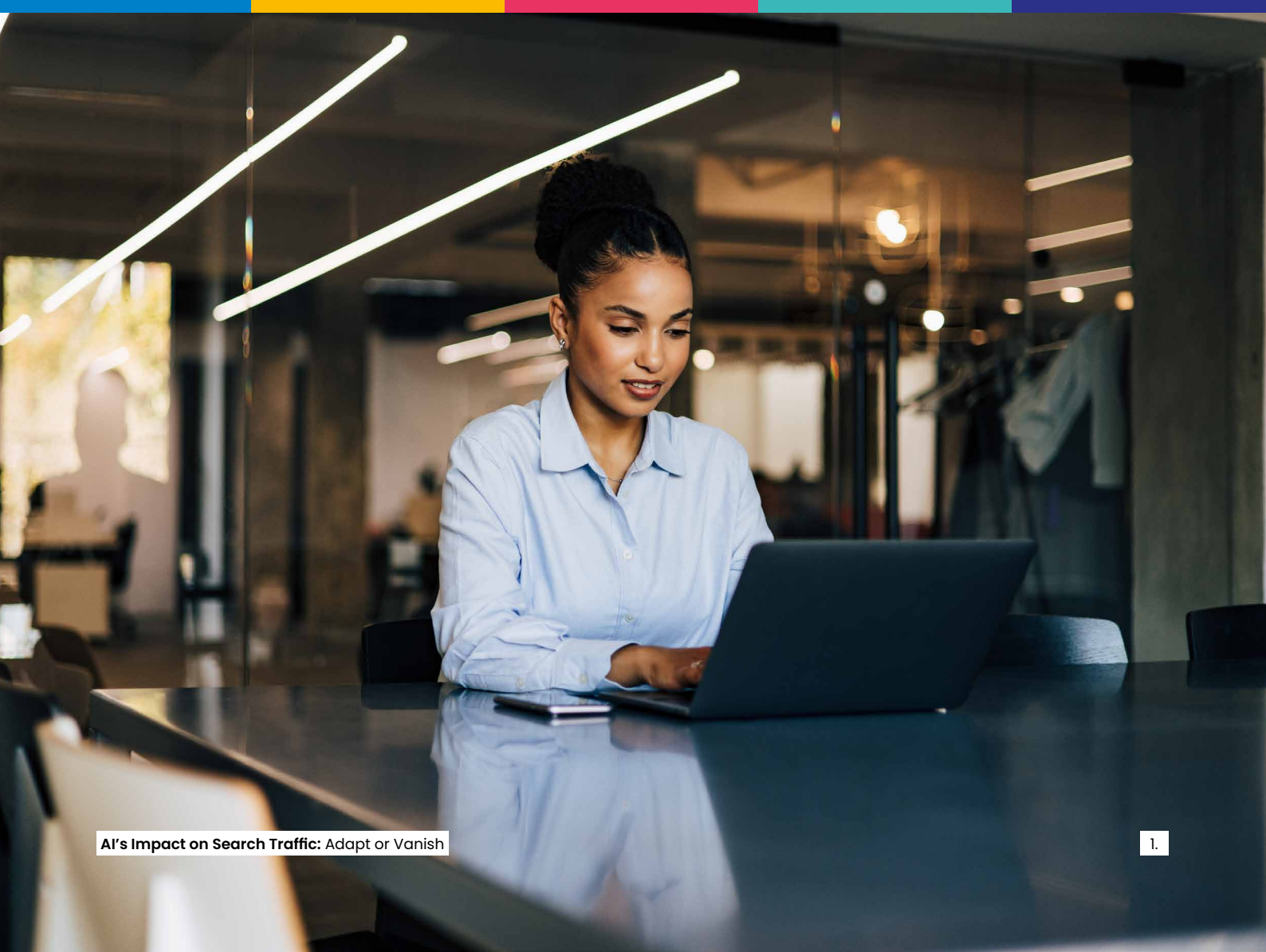
Organic traffic, as we've always known it, is collapsing.

Online retailers must now prepare for Generative
Engine Optimisation (GEO) or risk invisibility.

Autumn/Winter 2025

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Executive Summary

Ranking first in Google for target search terms has long been the north star for online retailers—a near guarantee of consistent organic traffic and sales. But this value is eroding before our eyes.

Google has progressively redesigned its search results over the past decade, from 'Rich Results' and 'People Also Ask' snippets to the sponsored Google Shopping carousel and, now, its latest addition: AI Overviews.

These features prioritise in-platform experiences, keeping users within Google and pushing traditional rankings further down the page. **One Ahrefs study suggests AI Overviews may have reduced website visits from Google by around a third^[1].**

At the same time, consumers are increasingly using conversational AI tools like ChatGPT and Gemini for product suggestions, bypassing traditional search entirely. **Shopping-related prompts in ChatGPT rose by 25% in the first half of this year^[2].**

We are entering a period of significant disruption, and the rules of online product discovery are being rewritten.

This shift towards AI-integrated search is quietly siphoning 'traditional' organic traffic away from websites. It's creating the illusion that SEO strategies are underperforming, and British retailers are experiencing it firsthand.

It's not that consumer demand has disappeared—it's that discovery behaviours are changing.

As ever, disruption also creates opportunity. Early adopters who optimise their products and content to be cited in AI-generated responses, structure product and informational data for maximum visibility, and adapt to Google's evolving interface can gain competitive advantages that late movers may never recover.

Crucially, there is no fixed playbook. Optimisation for AI responses—Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO)—will be a moving target, grounded by strong fundamentals, but influenced at pace by emerging technologies. At the time of writing, OpenAI has launched an 'Instant Checkout' feature in the US^[3]. Selected American Shopify and Etsy merchants will soon be able to enable their products for single-item purchases from within ChatGPT.

Long-term success will come to retailers that treat this shift as a board-level agenda item, recognise their threats and opportunities, and act now to prepare for the next generation of search discovery.



The Traditional SEO Model

The formula for search discovery hardly changed for the best part of two decades. Type a query into Google, scan a clean results page of ten blue links, click the top few options, and that was usually where the buying journey began.

For retailers, this predictability made SEO a cornerstone of customer acquisition. Ranking first was a badge of honour and a near guarantee of traffic, conversions, and growth.

Google's algorithm was the gatekeeper of that visibility. It rewarded sites that demonstrated relevance, authority, and a smooth user experience. Updates like Panda, Penguin, and Hummingbird periodically shook the industry, but the underlying rules remained consistent: serve the user better than your competitors, and you would be rewarded with visibility.

At the heart of this model were four recognised pillars:

- **Technical SEO kept sites crawlable, fast, and structured.**
- **Content filled the funnel with keyword-optimised product pages, guides, and blogs.**
- **On-page optimisation fine-tuned metadata and layouts for algorithms and humans alike.**
- **Authority, earned through backlinks and trust signals, cemented credibility in Google's eyes.**

Together, these elements created a repeatable playbook retailers could execute with confidence.

The brilliance of this strategy was not just in its clarity, but its longevity, securing SEO as a stable acquisition channel. Budgets were justified, roadmaps were written, and whole departments were built on the assumption that fundamentals guaranteed results.

To be clear, these fundamentals remain relevant. They are the entry ticket to online visibility, and without them, retailers cannot be considered in any search model—AI-driven or otherwise.

What has changed is the reward system.

The same inputs no longer guarantee the same outputs, because the context in which they operate has shifted.

Google has redesigned its interface, consumers are discovering differently, and product journeys are bypassing traditional search.

The four pillars remain essential, but retailers must recalibrate expectations of what they deliver in an increasingly AI-driven search environment.



Search Shift: Google's Reshaping of Visibility

Google is a constantly evolving platform, introducing new features it believes improve its user experience.

Traditional organic listings, once the primary conduit of traffic, are increasingly displaced by features that dominate screen real estate, capture attention, and redirect user intent.

The latest, launched in 2024, are Google's AI Overviews.

They summarise content from across the internet directly on the results page, providing concise, AI-generated answers to informational queries. They are most prevalent for research-heavy searches like "how to choose the right running shoes."

Previously, using Google for these queries was like visiting a library to find a book—browsing through options until you found the right information. Today, AI Overviews read the books on your behalf and deliver the answer on a plate.

Crucially, this means users get the answer they require without engaging with the source content: your website.

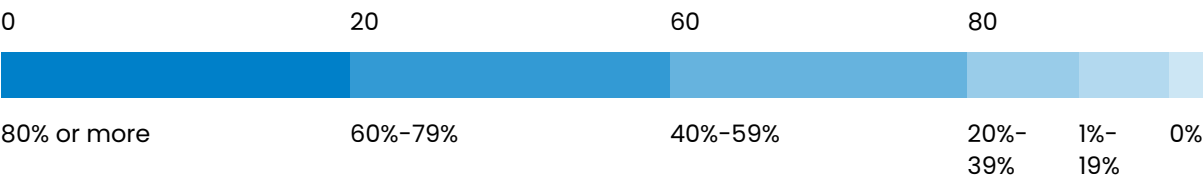
The impact is measurable. A month-long survey of nearly 69,000 Google searches by Pew Research Center found that **users clicked a link under an AI Overview only once in every 100 searches**^[4].

It's an alarming statistic, and one that is reinforced by Bain's research on the subject.

They found that **80% of Google users now rely on AI summaries at least 40% of the time**^[2].

Frequency at which searches result in zero clicks

Percentage of survey respondents



Source: Bain-Dynata AI Consumer Survey, December 2024 (n=1,117)

The Impact of AI Overviews on Retailers

AI Overviews mark a clear shift in Google's priorities: keeping users within its ecosystem. For retailers, this represents a major threat to organic visibility. AccuRanker reports steep declines in **eCommerce mobile Google click-through rates since 2023, in some cases approaching 50%**^[5].

The impact is particularly acute for retailers that relied on content marketing—like 'how-to guides' and 'listicles'—to drive traffic through informational searches.

The most immediate risk is obvious: fewer website visits mean fewer opportunities to convert interest into revenue. Optimising websites to be cited in AI Overviews offers limited upside, as Bain's research shows that these queries rarely generate clicks.

Achieving citations also appears highly challenging. A Semrush study of 150,000 AI citations, including through Google's AI Overviews, found results are dominated by authoritative domains such as Reddit, Wikipedia, YouTube, Google itself—and Amazon for product queries—likely due to their domain strength.

In practice, this signals a transition to a search environment where answers are generated and consumed within Google's ecosystem, driven almost exclusively by a selection of highly authoritative websites.

AI Overviews primarily threaten informational search, while transactional searches for individual products have long faced a separate challenge: organic product listings displaced by Google's sponsored Google Shopping Carousel, a highly competitive pay-to-play ad environment that has become an essential requirement for retailers that require product visibility through Google search.

Takeaway: Treat AI Overviews as a significant threat to organic reach. Reduced reliance on Google for informational traffic is essential, and while being cited in an Overview may have some upside, it is fragile and largely outside your control. The time and expertise you are investing into informational content risks becoming a footnote in Google's native experience.

Where AI gets its answers

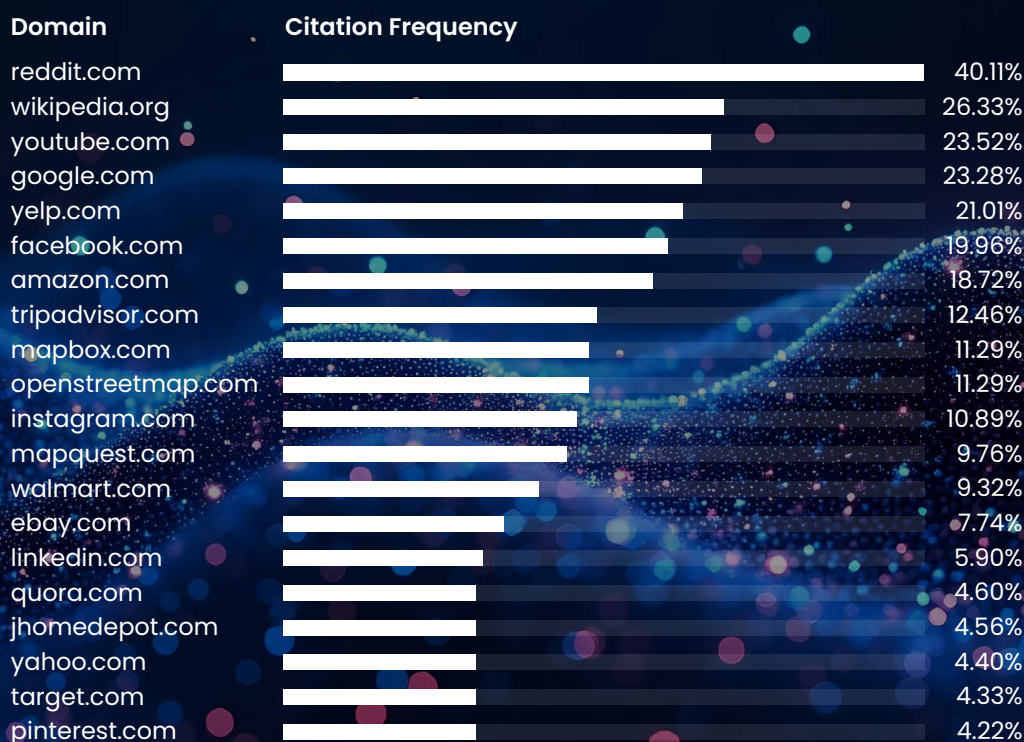
Source: Semrush study of 150,000 AI citations conducted in June 2025^[5]

 Google AI Mode

 Google AI Overviews

 ChatGPT

 Perplexity



Consumer Behaviour Shift: The Emergence of Conversational AI

As Google reshapes its results pages, consumers are also changing how they discover products. Conversational AI tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Bard are emerging as alternative sources for product research, recommendations, and purchase guidance.

ChatGPT launched its own shopping experience^[7] in April 2025, displaying integrated product information such as images, prices, and star ratings directly in-chat.

They've since added an 'Instant Checkout' option in the US, enabling purchases from select Etsy and Shopify merchants directly within ChatGPT. The rollout remains limited—single-item checkout only, US-only, and restricted to approved partners at launch—but it signals a rapid shift from AI chat as a search tool to a genuine commerce driver, and that transition could happen sooner than expected.

Trust becomes the next critical factor. AI outputs often feel authoritative, but if product recommendations are inaccurate or incomplete, confidence in the platform will erode quickly. That's why OpenAI is beginning to source data directly from retailers.

It means maintaining clean, accurate product data isn't just housekeeping anymore—it will decide whether their products are discoverable in this new era of conversational commerce.

While ChatGPT has dominated the headlines, it won't be the only environment embedding shopping into AI experiences. Google is well placed to fold commerce into Gemini, given its direct access to retailer product data through Google Merchant Centre. TikTok and Instagram continue to deepen their social commerce offerings, and Amazon is already experimenting with AI-driven recommendation engines. The competitive landscape will remain fragmented, so retailers cannot afford to pin their strategy on ChatGPT because they moved first.

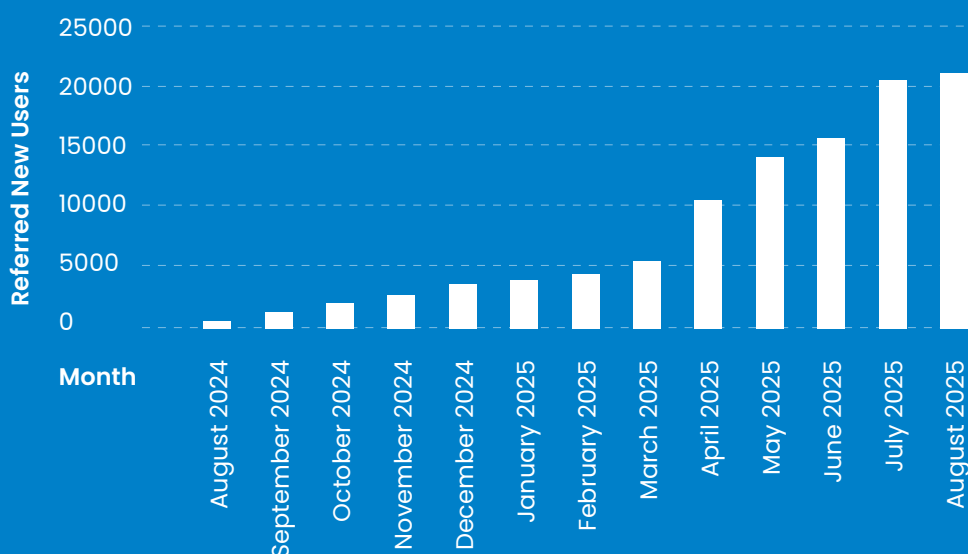
The tech is there, but are consumers using it?

Time will tell whether consumers are truly receptive to completing purchases within conversational chat systems. What is clear, however, is that they are already using them as part of the shopping journey. Market intelligence from Sensor Tower shows that **shopping-related prompts within ChatGPT rose by 25% in the first half of 2025, contributing to a 70% overall usage increase^[2]**.

This shift is already visible across our Venditan Commerce client base. Across all clients on our platform, we reported a **2543% YoY increase in new user referrals from ChatGPT**, including a marked increase following the rollout of its shopping features in April 2025.



Combined New Users from ChatGPT over time



Source: Google Analytics 4 Properties of Venditan Commerce client websites

There is also a structural change in play as conversational AI collapses the buying journey.

Traditional discovery often involved multiple steps—search, comparison, reviews, and cross-referencing retailers' websites.

In AI environments, those steps can compress into a single conversation at lightning speed, reducing the space for retailers to capture attention and win trust. Single-item purchases are now possible, meaning the window to influence decisions is shrinking.

The buying funnel is being compressed, and if your product doesn't make the shortlist, it may never even enter the customer's awareness set.

The opportunity is clear, but it raises a wider question of agency. With each shift—from Amazon to Google Shopping to social commerce, and now to conversational AI—discovery is moving further out of retailers' direct control. The trade-off is visibility in exchange for dependency on external platforms.

Takeaway: Retailers that prepare clean, structured product data and invest in trust signals that build the authority of their website and brand can capture early advantages, but they must also recognise the long-term risk of building discovery strategies on ground owned by others.

What's the Play?

The first step is recognising that this isn't an SEO side-issue, it's a strategic risk.

If your traffic and revenue relies on traditional organic search, then the way Google and AI platforms are reshaping discovery directly affects your acquisition pipeline.

Understanding the scale of that exposure is essential. Where is your traffic coming from today? How much of it is informational, research-led content versus transactional? Which revenue streams are most at risk if that traffic declines?

These are board-level questions.

Once the risk is mapped, it needs ownership. This is not something to delegate down into the marketing function and forget about. A senior staff member should be tasked with owning AI discovery and strategy, with the mandate to assess risk, monitor impact, and ensure your business adapts.

Without clear accountability, you risk slipping behind competitors who are already building capability in this space.

The fundamentals remain the same, but the stakes are higher. Search engines and AI models are prioritising brands they trust.

That means high-quality, consistent product data; referenceable content that demonstrates expertise and authority; and trust signals such as earned media, quality links, and positive brand associations. This will be the currency AI systems use to decide who gets cited, and who doesn't.

As AI discovery tools grow, retailers should anticipate the emergence of new standards for how product and content data are surfaced. One such example is the proposed `llm.txt` file— a public, machine-readable set of rules that signals to AI systems how your website content should be accessed and attributed.

While still at an experimental stage, implementing a forward-looking approach to structured feeds and governance files like `llm.txt` will strengthen retailer authority signals. Just as `robots.txt` became a baseline for SEO in the early web, retailers should expect similar conventions to become foundational in Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO).

Retailers who underinvest here risk invisibility. At the same time, consumer attention is spreading across multiple platforms. While Google remains important and AI systems are emerging, shoppers are increasingly exploring products through TikTok Shop, Instagram, and social advertising channels.

For retailers, this means considering expanding acquisition strategies to maintain visibility beyond search, while continuing to invest in the data and trust signals that AI systems rely on to surface credible brands.

In short, the play is about taking a measured, leadership-led approach: quantify the risk, assign ownership, invest in data and authority, and broaden your awareness ecosystem. Retailers that treat this as a strategic shift, rather than an SEO challenge, will be better placed to defend revenue and capture opportunity as consumer discovery continues to evolve.

Venditan Commentary

It's easy to assume that AI will instantly dominate product discovery. Our research shows that preparing early is important, but the reality is more complex. While some organic traffic may be shifting, multiple routes to market remain effective. Google Ads continue to be a critical driver, as search engines remain the first port of call for most consumers. Social commerce is also growing, offering alternative ways to capture attention and sales.

Preparing for AI-integrated search is essential, but there has never, and will never, be a single silver bullet. Retailers that combine AI readiness with strong fundamentals across search, social, and other channels will be best positioned to navigate this evolving landscape.

Andrew Flynn, Head of Digital Marketing, Venditan Commerce

Bold Predictions: What the Next 1–3 Years Will Bring

The shifts we are witnessing today—AI Overviews, chat-based product recommendations and purchases, and evolving consumer behaviour—are just the beginning. Retailers who understand the trajectory and act decisively will gain a competitive edge; those who wait risk being left behind.

1. AI will become a major channel for product discovery

Conversational AI tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Bard are not the default starting point for shopping today, particularly across older demographics. Yet adoption is growing, and OpenAI's Instant Checkout demonstrates that they see eCommerce as a major monetisation opportunity. Consumers are increasingly using AI for product recommendations, comparisons, and purchase guidance, which may eventually reduce reliance on traditional search engines and retailer websites.

eCommerce sites will remain important—especially for repeat customers familiar with the brand—but their role may shift to one of multiple sales channels. Websites focused on storytelling, trust, and brand authority will complement AI-driven commerce, rather than serve as the sole entry point.

2. The AI commerce arms race will drive integrated experiences

As AI adoption grows, platforms are racing to embed more seamless and effective commerce experiences within their environments. Instant Checkout is just the first step, signalling how ChatGPT is experimenting with in-chat purchasing. Gemini, Bard, and other emerging systems are expected to respond by developing their own solutions, creating a competitive cycle that raises standards for user experience, convenience, and integration.

This arms race will shape consumer expectations for AI-driven commerce. Retailers must maintain robust central platforms that manage product, order, and customer information, ensuring they remain the merchant of record while leveraging these evolving tools.

3. AI-native advertising and promotion will emerge

Visibility within AI-generated responses will become a competitive battleground, creating a potential new layer of paid media, similar to Google Ads. Early movers will shape exposure and engagement, while slow adopters risk higher costs to catch up.

For now, ChatGPT listings remain organic and this may evolve as platforms seek monetisation opportunities. Retailers will need to balance investment in AI channels against owned channels and other third-party platforms like search and social.

4. Data quality, authority, and trust will be the critical differentiators

AI doesn't respond to branding or flashy visuals—it relies on structured, authoritative, and accurate product data. Retailers with complete feeds, consistent attributes, and high-quality content will be surfaced more effectively, while those skimping on fundamentals risk invisibility.

Investing in PIM, attributes, mapping, and data quality is especially important for complex products. Strong data and trust signals provide a platform-agnostic advantage, increasing visibility across all AI commerce environments.

5. AI discovery will become an investor focus

Investors will increasingly scrutinise how retailers plan for AI-integrated search and product discovery. Businesses without a clear roadmap for Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO) and AI-driven visibility may face tougher questions about growth projections and risk mitigation.

6. The metrics of success will be redefined

Traditional KPIs like traffic and click-through rates will become less meaningful. Success will be measured by AI citations, inclusion in recommendation sets, and engagement within AI-driven purchase flows. Retailers must redefine visibility, conversion, and ROI to reflect these new pathways, particularly as embedded purchasing in AI chats becomes more common.

Conclusion: Disruption, Opportunity, and the Path Forward

The traditional model of SEO as a predictable, reliable driver of traffic and revenue is diminishing, and the landscape of online product discovery is undergoing a fundamental shift.

Google's AI Overviews and the rise of conversational AI are beginning to disrupt how consumers research and evaluate ahead of a purchase. Visibility will no longer be guaranteed by ranking well in search alone; it must be actively managed across AI-driven discovery platforms and the emerging channels of tomorrow.

Yet disruption brings opportunity. Retailers that act now can secure a decisive advantage by:



Quantifying the risk:

Understand what proportion of traffic and revenue comes from informational search and organic discovery.



Assigning ownership:

Appoint a senior stakeholder to lead AI-first discovery strategy and ensure the business adapts to evolving platforms.



Investing in fundamentals:

Maintain high-quality, structured product data, authoritative content, and trust signals that AI systems recognise and reward.



Diversifying the visibility ecosystem:

While Google remains important, awareness strategies should expand into other AI-driven experiences, paid search, and social commerce.

There is no fixed playbook. GEO is a moving target, and navigating it successfully requires expertise, strategic insight, and ongoing adaptation. Retailers that act now, with strong guidance, will be best placed to capture the opportunities that this new age of discovery presents.

These changes are complex, fast-moving, and potentially disruptive to revenue.

Our team at Venditan can help you assess your exposure, map the opportunities, and build a forward-looking strategy that positions your business for long-term success.

Contact us today to start a consultation and ensure your brand thrives in the AI-driven discovery era.

In 2025, checkout pages face record levels of client-side attacks, from digital skimming to script injections.

Checkout Audit

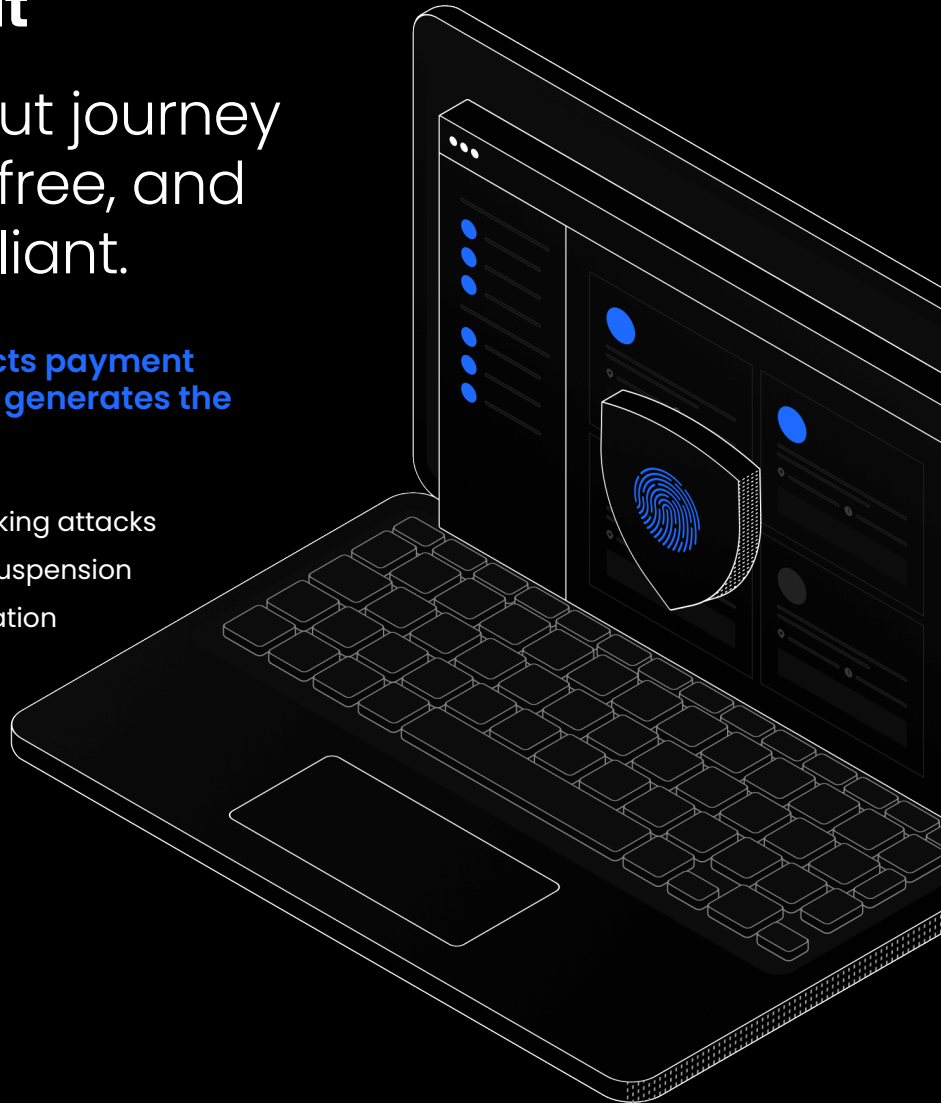
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About Venditan

We are retail and eCommerce experts who help businesses grow faster and operate smarter. Contact us to gain the clarity, expertise and technology your business needs to stay ahead.

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