

Q1 2026 REPORT

# Affiliate Opportunities in AI Search

How to gain brand visibility on highly-cited publishers

**5**

AI ENGINES ANALYZED

**100k+**

AI RESPONSES EVALUATED

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Buyers Ask AI First. Is Your Brand in the Answer?

The way buyers discover brands has fundamentally changed. Rather than visit multiple websites to research solutions, they ask AI first. Engines like ChatGPT, Google AI Overviews, Claude, Perplexity, and Gemini are answering their questions, shaping their opinions, and creating shortlists before anyone clicks on anything.

This shift creates a critical challenge: **If your brand isn't cited in AI-generated answers, you may never enter consideration.**

But it also creates an unprecedented opportunity. Through analysis of hundreds of thousands of AI search responses in our LQ Vision™ platform, we highlight a critical insight: approximately **18% of all publishers cited by AI search engines are "influenceable"** — meaning brands can gain placement through affiliate partnerships or organic social content creation. That means you can **quickly gain a competitive edge** by gaining placement on publishers that are highly cited in AI search.

## THE CORE INSIGHT

Our analysis of **hundreds of thousands of AI search responses** across five major platforms reveals that nearly **1 in 5 citations** come from publishers that brands can directly influence through affiliate placements or organic social content. That is a significant, **largely untapped opportunity** for most brands.

## INFLUENCEABLE RATE

# 18.7%

of all AI search citations come from influenceable publishers

## KEY FINDINGS FROM THIS REPORT

## FINDING 01

Google AI Overviews are **24% influenceable** — the highest of all AI search engines

## FINDING 02

Affiliate publishers represent **the largest opportunity category**

## FINDING 03

NerdWallet, Forbes, Money.com, G2 & Tom's Guide are examples of **consistently cited and addressable publishers**

## FINDING 04

YouTube dominates social citations at **1.5%**, far exceeding Reddit (0.3%) and LinkedIn (0.2%)

## — BACKGROUND

# What Are Influenceable Publishers?

**Influenceable publishers** are domains cited in AI search responses where brands can strategically place content through affiliate placements or by creating organic social content. When AI engines generate a response, the vast majority of citations are outside any brand's control. But a meaningful subset are influenceable.



## Affiliate Publishers

Authoritative third-party sites — review platforms, comparison sites, financial guides, and tech publications — where brands can pay for sponsored content or product listings. AI systems recognize these publishers' editorial authority, so a mention drives both referral traffic and authority simultaneously.



## Social Media Publishers

Platform such as YouTube, Reddit, and LinkedIn, where AI engines surface user-generated and brand-created content as trusted sources. A well-optimized YouTube video or LinkedIn article can become an AI-cited source that shapes how your brand is perceived across millions of searches.

## Why Gaining Placement on Influenceable Publishers Matters

### Speed to Impact

Gain placement on an established AI-cited publisher in **weeks**, as opposed to months or years to build domain authority on your own site.

### Guaranteed Authority

These publishers **already have** the trust signals AI engines value. By gaining placement, you leverage the authority to build brand reputation.

### Competitive Edge

While competitors focus on optimizing their own sites, you can capture mindshare across the **entire ecosystem** shaping buyer decisions.

## Q1 2026 KEY FINDINGS

# The Data: Where the Opportunity Lives

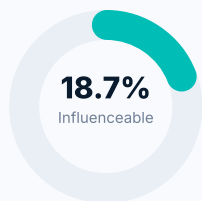
Our analysis spans hundreds of thousands of AI-generated responses across five major AI search engines, revealing the opportunity for brands to gain visibility on key influenceable publishers.

## FINDING 01

## Nearly 1 in 5 AI Citations Are Influenceable

### Overall Influenceable Citation Share

What is the share of influenceable vs. non-influenceable citations in AI search?



**18.7%**  
Influenceable Content (Affiliate + Social)

**81.3%**  
Other Sources (Competitor, news, reference)

**Takeaway:** Nearly 1 in 5 citations across AI search comes from a source a brand can influence, representing a notable opportunity for brands to gain visibility on publishers that AI has deemed relevant.

## FINDING 02

## Affiliate Publishers Drive ~6× More AI Citation Opportunity Than Social Media

### Publisher Type Breakdown

What type of publishers are influenceable?

**16.1%**



**Affiliate**

Sponsored content, reviews

**2.7%**



**Social Media**

YouTube, Reddit, LinkedIn

**Takeaway:** Affiliate publishers represent ~6× more citation opportunity than social media. Securing placements on authoritative affiliate sites is the primary lever for brands to gain visibility on influenceable publishers.

FINDING 03

### Google AI Overviews Offer the Largest Influenceable Opportunity of Any Engine

#### Influenceability by AI Engine

What percentage of citations are influenceable publishers?



**Takeaway:** Google AI Overviews is both the highest-volume AI search engine and the most influenceable — making it the top priority platform.

FINDING 04

### Google Cites Social Media More Than Any Other Engine

#### Influenceable Content Breakout by Engine

What type of publishers are influenceable?

■ Affiliate ■ Social ■ Other

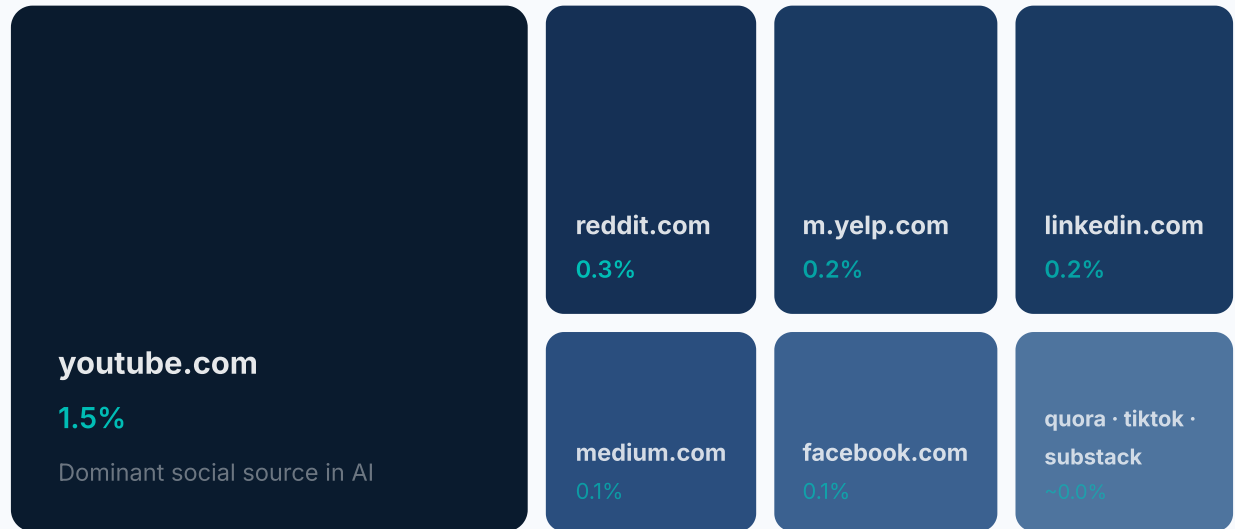


**Takeaway:** AI Overviews is the only engine where social exceeds 10%. For ChatGPT and Claude, affiliate is the dominant lever.

## FINDING 05

**YouTube Dominates Social AI Citations — Making Video Your #1 Social Priority****Social Networks Most Cited in AI Search**

Which influenceable social networks are most frequently cited?



**Takeaway:** YouTube's citation share is 5x that of any other social platform. A YouTube content strategy is the primary social lever for AI visibility.

## — PUBLISHER SPOTLIGHT

# Highly Cited Influenceable Publishers

The following are examples of publishers that consistently appear in AI search citations across multiple engines. LQ Digital maintains relationships with these publishers, enabling us to secure placements that directly improve AI citation presence for our clients.

**Why these publishers matter:** These are sources AI engines have determined to be authoritative for category-level queries. A placement here signals to the AI that your brand belongs in the conversation, and that signal compounds over time.

## TECHNOLOGY & REVIEWS

### TechRadar.com

A high-visibility technology review and buying-guide publisher with an outsized presence in AI search citations and 20M+ monthly visitors, coverage here is particularly valuable for technology-focused brands.

## PERSONAL FINANCE

### NerdWallet.com

The leading personal finance comparison platform in the U.S. Highly favored by AI for financial services queries, makes it an essential channel for fintech, lending, and banking brands.

## BUSINESS & FINANCE MEDIA

### Forbes.com

As an authoritative global business media brand, Forbes' contributor network provides pathways to earn editorial presence that carries significant AI citation weight across virtually every business category.

## WEALTH & PERSONAL FINANCE

### Money.com

An enduring personal finance destination covering banking, investing, and wealth-building. Frequently surfaced in AI responses for financial product queries.

## B2B SOFTWARE REVIEWS

### G2.com

The world's largest software review platform with 3MM+ reviews. Among the most influential sites in AI responses related to software purchasing, a high-ranking presence on G2 is a pivotal part of citation strategy.

## CONSUMER TECHNOLOGY

### Tom's Guide

A premier consumer technology review destination for laptops, software, and security tools. Frequently cited by AI for purchase-intent queries — a valuable channel for brands in competitive technology categories.

## FROM INSIGHT TO ACTION

# The Opportunity is Clear. Here's Your Action Plan.

The gap between AI search winners and losers isn't just knowledge, it's the ability to execute at scale.

01

## Identify the Influenceable Publishers Winning in Your Category

Map exactly which affiliate sites, review platforms, and social channels AI engines are pulling from when responding to queries in your space. Identify which of those you currently have presence on (and which you don't).

Use a search monitoring platform like **LQ Vision™** to automatically surface this publisher intelligence on a daily basis.

02

## Prioritize by Factors Including Citation Frequency

Not all publishers are worth equal effort. Prioritization means balancing how often a publisher is cited, how much query volume flows through that engine, and how feasible it is to gain placement.

Through a direct integration with affiliate platforms like **Impact.com**, our platform reveals the gap between what AI is citing and where you're currently active.

03

## Activate Through Social Content and Key Publisher Relationships

Once you know where to invest, activation moves across three channels: securing affiliate placements on authoritative publishers, building a platform-specific content strategy, and leveraging publisher relationships to earn editorial placement at properties AI trusts most.

LQ Digital manages the **full activation cycle**, using our established relationships with many of the highest-cited publishers in AI search to gain visibility for your brand on highly sought-after properties.

## INNOVATION AT LQ DIGITAL

As pioneers in answer engine optimization (AEO), we coined the term "**influenceable publisher**" to bring a name to the strategy. Our industry-leading insight-to-activation workflow means you don't just identify the opportunity, **you own it.**

POWERED BY LQ VISION™

# The Intelligence Behind the Insight

The data behind this report is powered by **LQ Vision™**, our proprietary search intelligence platform that reveals opportunities to gain brand visibility across all major AI and search surfaces.

## THE UNFAIR ADVANTAGE

LQ Vision™ shows you exactly where your brand stands in AI search — and what it takes to **own your space**.



**How often** your brand is cited



**Which competitors** are gaining authority



**Your gaps** in visibility in AI responses

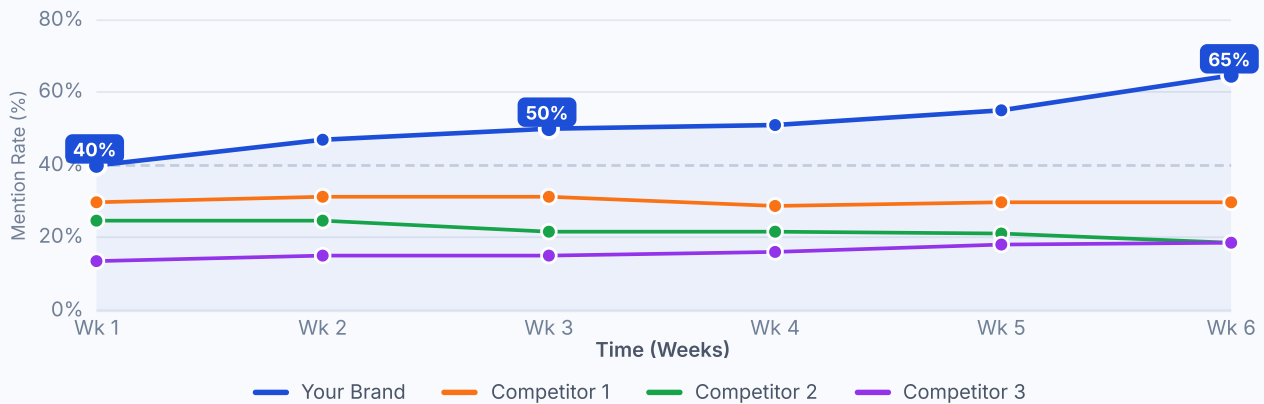


**Opportunities** to be recommended by AI

### Example Insight: Brand Mention Rate

Engine: **ChatGPT** ▾

How often your brand is mentioned in AI responses vs. competitors



## NEW FEATURE

### End-to-End Activation: From Insight to Impact.com

LQ Vision now integrates directly with Impact.com, the leading affiliate platform, creating an end-to-end insight-to-activation workflow for our influenceable publisher strategy.

01

#### Identify Key Publishers

LQ Vision surfaces which affiliate publishers are cited in AI responses for your target prompts.

02

#### See Your Existing Placements

Instantly see which cited publishers you already work with — prioritize gaps, not duplicate relationships.

03

#### Activate the Opportunities

By gaining placement on influenceable publishers, unlock traffic and authority instantly.

YOUR NEXT STEP

# Find Out Where Your Brand Stands in AI Search — Free.

The AI Readiness Scorecard gives you a fast, free snapshot of your brand's current visibility inside ChatGPT, and a clear roadmap for what to do about it.

STEP 1

**LQ Scorecard**

Your AI visibility snapshot.  
Free, fast, and insightful.

STEP 2

**LQ Vision™**

Ongoing intelligence on how AI is reshaping your brand visibility.

STEP 3

**LQ Partnership**

Acquire profitable customers with our proven playbook and talented team.

YOUR SCORECARD REVEALS:

- ✓ Are you present in ChatGPT for key searches?
- ✓ How do you compare to direct competitors?
- ✓ Which sources define your brand to AI?

WHAT IT COSTS:

**\$0**

Free. No commitment.  
No technical setup required.

[Get My Free AI Readiness Scorecard →](https://lqdigital.com/scorecard)

[Book a Strategy Call with LQ](mailto:sales@lqdigital.com)

[lqdigital.com/scorecard](https://lqdigital.com/scorecard)

[sales@lqdigital.com](mailto:sales@lqdigital.com)