NEWS

Engineering buyers use AI to find suppliers. Can it find you?

By Alex Merchan

More engineering and manufacturing buyers are using AI to find new suppliers. Norfolk-based sales & business development agency Hayward Miller is urging engineering firms to make sure they take full advantage.

AI is changing how buyers search

Google's AI-written summary at the top of many searches, known as an AI Overview, is heavily shaping the SEO landscape. Gardner Business Media's **2025 Industrial Buying Influence Survey** found that 69% of manufacturing buyers use AI for work research.

> *"Buyers aren't typing two words into Google and clicking through ten websites anymore. They're asking AI to find them a supplier, even big players in the space. A few of our clients were pleasantly surprised when some good enquiries mentioned they'd found them through AI,"* says **Leyla Hussein**, *Operations Manager at Hayward Miller.*

Buyers are asking more specific questions

Buyers are also asking AI more detailed questions. **Google says** people using its AI Mode and AI in general ask questions two to three times longer than a normal search.

> *"That's good news for engineering firms, if they're ready for it. A buyer might ask for a CNC machining supplier in East Anglia with aerospace experience and quick turnaround. AI will pull together an answer from the businesses that explain this clearly and what they do. Vague websites won't make the cut,"* says **Jonny Grimes**, *Marketing Manager at Hayward Miller.*

Getting on the shortlist

It's a similar picture across B2B buying in general. A **2026 Semrush survey** of US business professionals (with manufacturing the second-largest industry in the sample) found that 92% of those using AI at work said it had influenced which suppliers made their shortlist.

Making sure AI can find you is known as generative engine optimisation, or GEO. For an engineering firm, it starts with a website that clearly says what you make, what machines you run and which sectors you serve.

What AI looks for

AI tools build answers from what they can read. Name your processes and the machines you run. List the sectors you serve and the accreditations you hold. Say where you're based and the area you cover. Show real work through case studies. Keep your details the same across your website, Google Business Profile and directory listings. If AI can't find it written down, it can't recommend you for it.

People still win the work

Buyers still check what AI tells them. Gardner found just 6% of manufacturing buyers trust AI answers without checking them elsewhere.

> *"AI gets you on the list. People still win the work. Engineering has always been built on relationships, and that hasn't changed. Buyers still want to pick up the phone, visit the shop floor and know who they're dealing with. AI just decides who gets that call. The firms that do well will be the ones AI can describe accurately, and whose people back it up when the buyer gets in touch,"* concludes **Alex Merchan**, *Business Development Manager at Hayward Miller.*

Hayward Miller is a business development and sales agency specialising in the engineering and industrial sectors, based in Norfolk. It provides web development, SEO and GEO, email marketing, outreach and content.

Sources: Gardner Business Media, 2025 Industrial Buying Influence survey · Semrush, How AI tools shape the B2B buying process (2026) · Google AI Mode UK launch

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