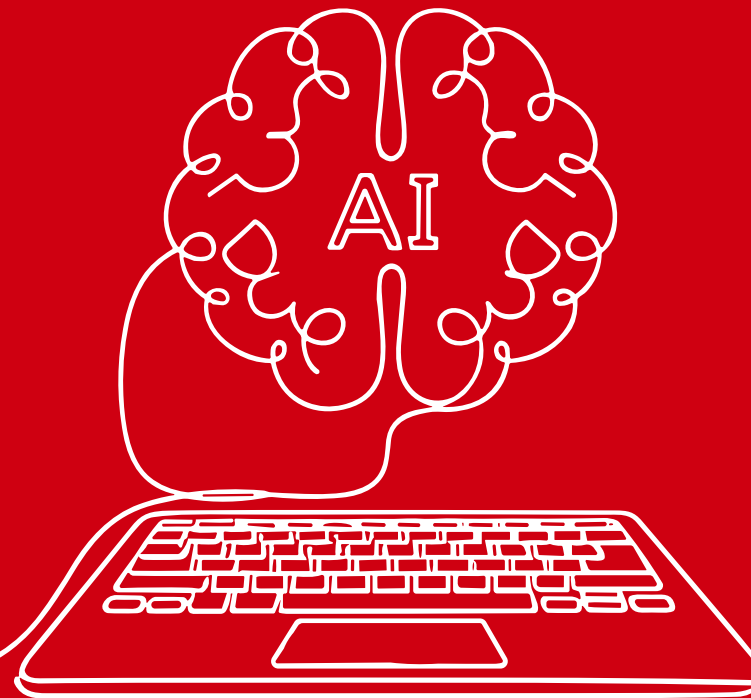


STRATTON CRAIG'S

Don't get lost guide

WHAT THE NEW ERA OF AI
SEARCH MEANS FOR CONTENT



How to create great content that's engaging for humans, citable for AI, and crawlable for search

The new age of search

The way people find and engage with information online has changed. Users no longer need to click through to websites to gather information. Instead, their search query is answered directly by AI tools, whether they're using an AI application directly, or simply via Google's AI overview.

This means brands are often judged before anyone visits their website, based on how their expertise is interpreted, selected and presented by AI.

In this guide, you'll learn:

- How AI-driven search is reshaping visibility and brand perception
- Why clarity, consistency and originality matter more than technical optimisation
- How content strategy helps organisations stay credible, citable and in control of their story



What does this mean for content?

The purpose of content hasn't changed. It still needs to inform, persuade and build trust with human audiences. But today, it also needs to be understood, trusted and surfaced by AI systems, even when users may never see the original source. As a result, visibility is no longer just about rankings and clicks. It's about presence, credibility and influence at the point where decisions are shaped.

While traditional SEO remains important, we are now operating in a more complex environment where content must serve two audiences at the same time:

- Humans, who reward relevance, credibility, insight and clarity
- AI systems, that prioritise consistency, structure and verifiability

User behaviour is shifting:

37%

of consumers now start searches with AI instead of Google (Foundation, 2026)

60%

of searches are now clickless – meaning that most users find their answer on the search engine results page and don't click through to a website (Semrush, 2025)

47%

of consumers say AI influences which brands they trust (Search Engine Land, 2026)

The presence of an AI overview in Google's results reduces the clickthrough rate of the top-ranking page by

34.5%

(Ahrefs, 2026)

AI is your newest stakeholder

AI systems don't just retrieve information. They interpret it, compare it, and present it in ways that shape understanding and perception. In that sense, AI functions like another stakeholder, influencing how your organisation is framed alongside competitors, peers or category leaders.

Brands already adapt their messaging for customers, investors, regulators and employees. Now they must also make sure their content communicates clearly and credibly within the logic AI systems use to assess trust and relevance. And all of that, without losing the clarity and nuance that builds confidence with people.

Now more than ever, organisations need to crystallise their story through clear messaging and narrative frameworks, original ideas and perspectives, and solid proof points. Informed by these foundations, content will be more focused and consistent (however it is generated), which makes it easier to control their story when it surfaces in AI search.



When machines do the searching,
clarity and consistency are your
greatest assets.

How AI search
makes content

**matter
more**

than mechanics

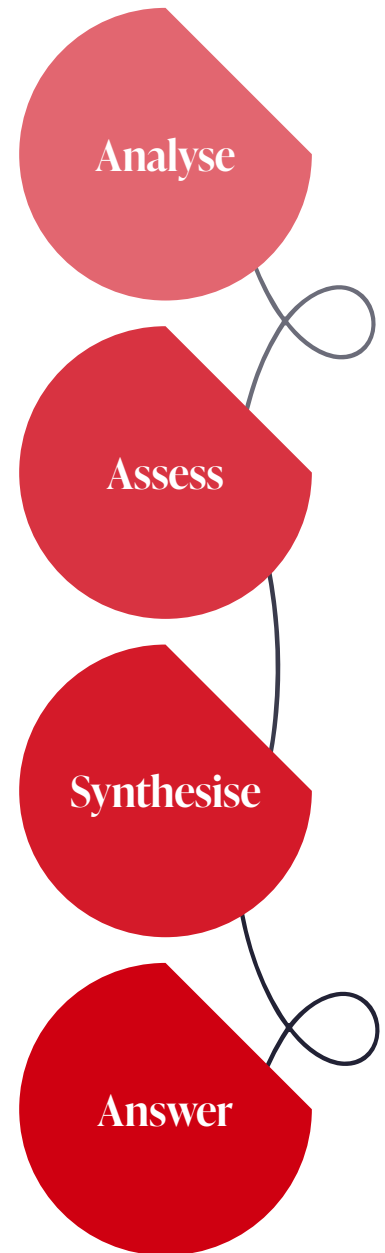
Unlike traditional search, AI tools generate a single answer rather than a list of links. To do that, models analyse the user's question, assess information from multiple sources, compare patterns and viewpoints, and then synthesise a response designed to be helpful, concise and trustworthy.

Understanding how AI search assembles answers is useful context, but unlike traditional SEO, you can't rely on technical shortcuts to get ahead. Instead, you have to get the fundamentals right: clear thinking, engaging storytelling, original insight and consistent communication.

The brands that perform best in AI-driven search won't be the ones producing more content. They'll be the ones producing content that earns trust from people and credibility from the systems increasingly speaking on their behalf.

The key to performing well in AI-driven search isn't just an inside knowledge of algorithms or technical optimisation tactics. It's whether your content:

- Clearly explains ideas without ambiguity
- Shares unique information, data and insights
- Provides enough context to stand alone when quoted or summarised
- Builds a consistent, credible narrative around your organisation and expertise across multiple channels



“Good content has always been built on clarity, relevance and purpose. While the environment is changing rapidly, those fundamentals haven’t become less important. If anything, they’ve become essential for ensuring content is understood, trusted and surfaced in an AI-driven world.”



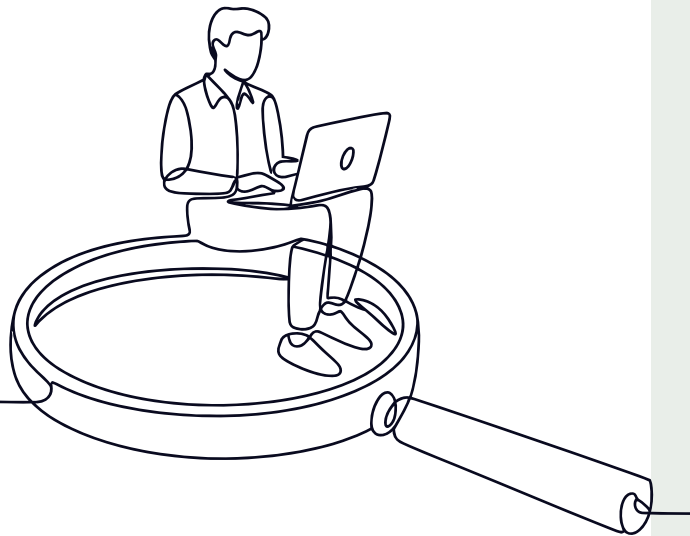
COLM HEBBLETHWAITE,
WRITING AND AI LEAD
AT STRATTON CRAIG

The visibility framework

Understanding how visibility works in an AI-driven world is only the starting point. The real challenge is applying that understanding in a way that strengthens your content’s effectiveness, not just its discoverability.

While the tools and technologies behind search will continue to evolve, the principles that underpin effective visibility are far more stable. They centre on how clearly ideas are expressed, how consistently expertise is demonstrated, and how confidently content can stand on its own when reused or summarised.

This framework is designed to help organisations focus on the fundamentals that matter most.



The core principles

1

Be consistent

Consistency helps both humans and AI recognise, verify and trust your content. However they interact with your organisation, they should recognise the same core messages and narrative.

It's also important that facts, terminology and core messages should align across all channels, from thought leadership and owned content to social posts and sales materials. Inconsistencies create confusion and dilute authority.

2

Make your originality stand out

In a world saturated with content, repetition is easily ignored. AI systems, like human audiences, gravitate towards original insight and clearly articulated perspectives. Content that simply echoes widely available information is less likely to be selected, cited or remembered.

Visibility increasingly depends on whether you offer a point of view worth paying attention to.

3

Make structure explicit

Clear structure benefits everyone. Headings, summaries, lists and tables help human readers scan and understand information quickly. They also help AI systems identify key themes, relationships and priorities.

4

Provide context

AI systems often extract and reuse content in isolation. If meaning relies too heavily on surrounding material, important nuance can be lost.

Strong content provides enough context at regular intervals so that individual sections can stand alone without misrepresenting the original message. This helps ensure your expertise remains accurate, even when only fragments of your content are surfaced.

5

Prioritise clarity

Content needs to be immediately understandable. Clear, direct language helps human audiences grasp ideas quickly and enables AI systems to interpret meaning without distortion. Avoid unnecessary jargon and complexity.

6

Don't overlook governance

Visibility is built over time, not through one-off wins. Clear ownership, regular reviews and defined quality standards help ensure content remains accurate, relevant and aligned as organisations grow and evolve. Good governance reduces risk and increases the likelihood that your content continues to be surfaced and trusted.



These principles shape how visibility works in theory, but content strategy is where they are applied in practice.

“Success will depend on establishing a structured approach to turning expertise into consistent, high-quality content in a way that can be repeated and scaled.”

“Great content starts with great thinking. The brands that stand out in AI search won’t be the ones producing more content, they’ll be the ones producing smarter, more effective content. And that’s where content strategy comes in.”



CLAIRE WILSON,
HEAD OF COPY & STRATEGY
AT STRATTON CRAIG

How content strategy brings it **all together**

Standing out is getting harder. As AI systems generate answers from vast amounts of content, anything unclear, generic or inconsistent is less likely to be selected or surfaced. At the same time, human audiences are overwhelmed with information and quick to disengage from content that isn't useful or interesting.

The risks of generic content have never been higher. In a traditional SEO model, even average content could still perform if it ranked well. In an AI-driven world, that safety net is disappearing. Content that lacks clarity, structure or originality risks being overlooked by AI systems and dismissed by real audiences.

This is where content strategy becomes critical.

Effective content strategies connect what you say, how you say it and where it appears. The shift now is away from producing more content and towards producing the right content – focused, purposeful and aligned to where it will have the greatest impact. A strong strategy prioritises areas where you can demonstrate genuine expertise, while defining the insights that set you apart and support clear business goals.

Start by building your foundations

You need to set your strategy up for success by putting the right building blocks in place. Developing key strategic documents such as brand narratives, tone of voice guidelines before you start producing content ensures every asset contributes to a coherent, consistent narrative.

Then focus on what to say

Content needs to be grounded in original thinking, real-world insight and clear explanations. That starts with a well-defined point of view about what your organisation believes, why it matters, and how it helps audiences make sense of complex topics.

Capturing internal expertise is essential. Interviews, workshops and simple Q&A sessions with subject matter experts can uncover perspectives that are hard to replicate. These insights can then be translated into multiple formats, from thought leadership and reports to FAQs and short-form content.

Proprietary data is another powerful differentiator. Sources such as customer feedback, sales conversations, CRM data or internal reports, when combined with expertise, can form the backbone of original, credible content.



Pick the best way to say it

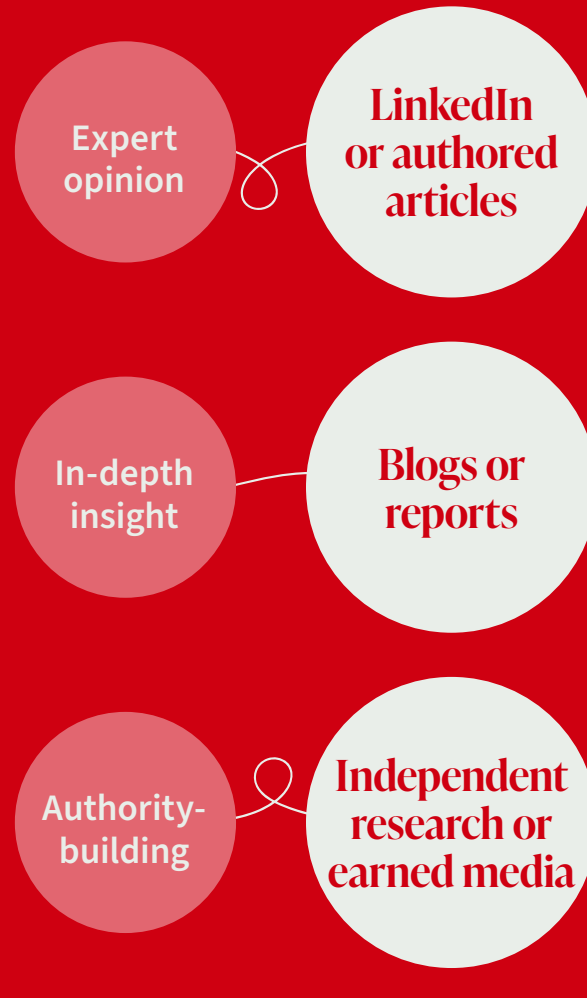
How content is communicated is just as important as what it says. Consistency in tone, language and messaging helps humans and AI recognise, interpret and trust your content.

In practice, this means using your strategic building blocks to set clear guidance and help you apply it consistently across teams. This ability to have every part of your organisation speaking in the same voice is really important. This consistency ensures your brand is instantly recognisable and it is far less likely that either a human reader or an AI algorithm will misinterpret your key messages.

Decide where to say it

Visibility no longer depends on a single channel. AI systems draw on a wide range of sources and weigh them differently depending on the query.

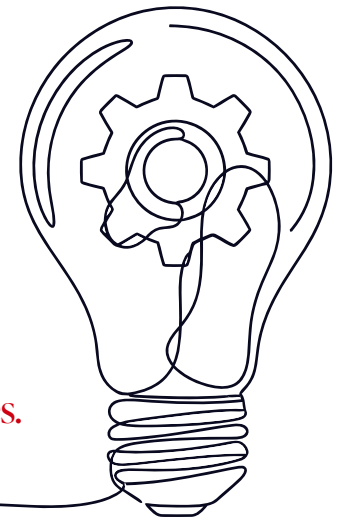
Content strategy should match topics to the most effective formats and channels:



Build on consistency and governance

For content to be trusted and reused, it must be accurate, consistent and up to date. This needs alignment of messaging across all channels, regular updates to maintain relevance and rigorous quality control processes to ensure accuracy. These are not differentiators – they are essential. Without them, even strong content is less likely to be surfaced or trusted.

We help organisations clarify their thinking, surface genuine expertise and build content strategies that perform in AI search without just relying on short-term technical fixes.



Talk to us about your content strategy

If you want your content to be accurately understood, consistently trusted and confidently surfaced, let's talk.

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