

# AI Search Visits Surging in 2025—But Organic Search Remains the Cornerstone of Digital Growth

While AI may be the fastest-growing channel, the smartest marketers are winning by combining AI readiness with proven SEO strategies

## About This Report

As AI search platforms experience explosive growth, marketers face a critical question: How should they balance investment between this emerging channel and proven organic search strategies?

BrightEdge analyzed thousands of queries and top-performing websites, including many Fortune 100 brands, from January through August 2025. The data reveals AI search is experiencing double-digit growth rates month over month, demonstrating how rapidly AI is reshaping discovery. Yet while AI search is growing fast, it accounts for less than 1% of referral traffic while organic search remains the primary driver and delivers the majority of conversions.

### Key Content in This Report:

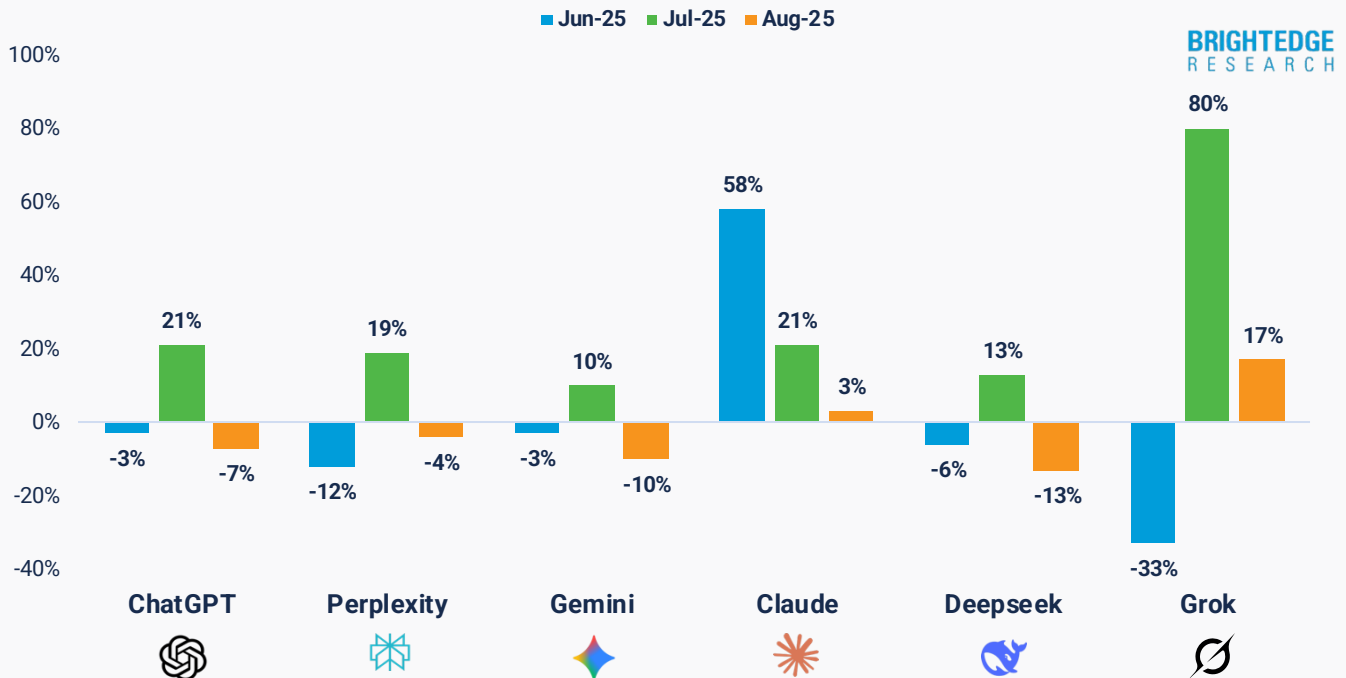
1. AI Search Referral Traffic Shows Big Month-Over-Month Gains
2. Why Organic Search Continues to Outperform AI Search on Conversions
3. Content sources used by AI that brands can influence
4. Two BrightEdge Innovations that Help Marketers Win in the Age of AI

## AI Search Referral Traffic Shows Big Month-Over-Month Gains

Google Commands 90%+ Search Market Share , But Key AI Players Are Growing Fast Of Search? "AI Players"?

The data suggests that AI search has had dramatic periods where some months double traffic. This isn't just another incremental change—it represents a period of experimentation- both in how users are connecting to websites and how AI engines are managing how they send referrals.

## AI Platforms LLM Referral 3 Month Traffic Patterns June to August 2025



### Key Trends in AI Search Referral Traffic:

- Claude's Growth:** Claude achieved 58% growth in July followed by 21% growth in August, demonstrating sustained momentum.
- Grok's Explosive Trajectory:** While starting from a small base, Grok achieved remarkable 1279% growth in July. If this trajectory continues, it could emerge as a serious contender in the AI search space.
- ChatGPT's Position:** When analyzing website referral traffic over the past three months, ChatGPT significantly outpaces all competitors, solidifying its position as the market leader for emerging AI engines.
- DeepSeek's Decline:** The Chinese LLM that emerged early this year has steadily lost ground, with particularly sharp declines throughout July.

### Why This Matters for Marketers

SEO fundamentals are critical for achieving visibility in AI search. Here's why: First, all major AI engines rely on traditional search indexes as their foundation—ChatGPT often uses Bing, Google AI Overviews and AI Mode are built on Google's index, and Claude leverages Brave's search infrastructure. Second, AI platforms deploy their own crawlers to feed their LLMs and build their search indexes, meaning they need to access and understand your website's content just like traditional search engines do.

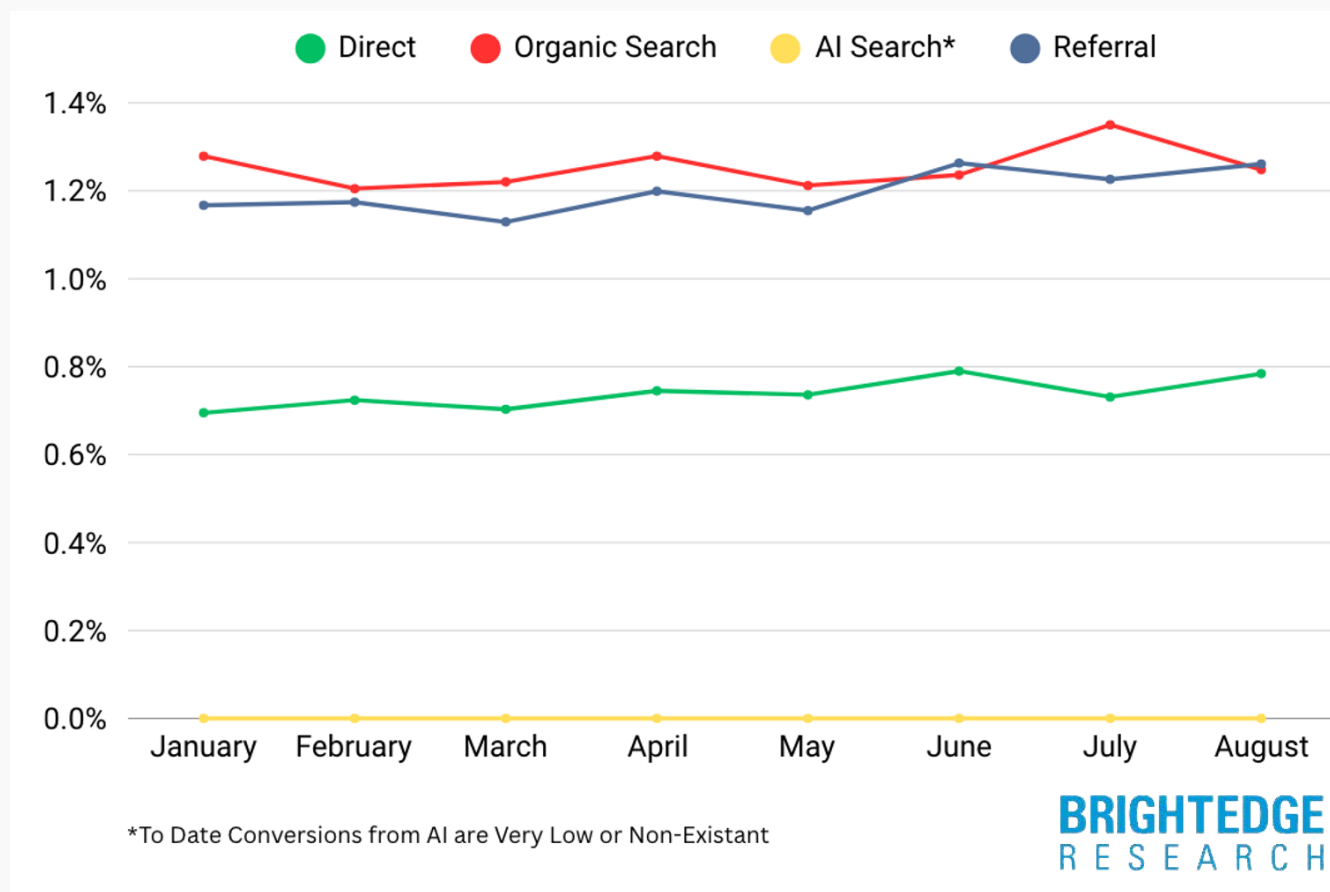
This technical reality means robust SEO optimization now delivers compound returns: optimize once, and your content becomes discoverable across traditional search, AI overviews, ChatGPT, Perplexity, and emerging platforms alike.

Rather than fragmenting your efforts, the proliferation of AI search amplifies the value of comprehensive SEO. Leading marketers are reinforcing SEO best practices in the age of AI discovery, from improving site performance for faster, more user-friendly experiences to adding contextual signals like schema that help AI engines and search platforms better interpret content.

## Growth and Business Impact Are Two Different Things

While AI search captures headlines with its explosive growth rates, BrightEdge data reveals a critical distinction: organic search remains the primary driver and delivers significantly stronger conversions. Over the course of the year, AI's referrals are not translating to conversions yet.

### Visits to Conversions by Channel (average across all industries)



### Understanding User Intent Differences:

The graph above reveals several critical insights about channel performance:

1. **Organic search delivers the best conversion results** - consistently outperforming all other channels
2. **All traditional channels deliver better conversions than AI search** - and this efficiency gap is actually increasing over time
3. **AI search functions as a research channel, not a conversion channel** - with near-zero direct conversions tracked

This performance gap reflects fundamental differences in how users engage with each channel:

1. **AI Search Users:** Enter the funnel at the research and exploration stage, asking questions and gathering information to inform their decisions. They're seeking understanding, not yet ready to transact.
2. **Organic Search Users:** Demonstrate clearer purchase intent, often searching for specific products, services, or solutions. They know what they want and are closer to conversion.

3. **The Journey Dynamic:** Many users begin with AI-powered research but ultimately convert through organic search or direct channels - making AI search valuable for top-of-funnel discovery despite its lack of direct conversions.

## Why This Matters for Marketers

While AI search doesn't drive direct conversions today, it matters for two critical reasons

1. **It's growing at unprecedented rates** - creating new touchpoints with potential customers
2. **It owns the research phase** - influencing decisions that lead to conversions through other channels

The most successful marketers aren't choosing one channel over the other—they're adapting for AI while doubling down on the organic strategies that have always driven results. This dual-channel approach ensures brands capture both the exploratory AI search audience and the high-converting organic search traffic.

## I AI Search Referral Traffic Shows Big Month-Over-Month Gains

### Beyond Your Website: Understanding AI Citation Patterns

The good news for marketers: You don't need to change how you develop content on your website. Instead, focus on influencing content outside your website that in turn shapes what AI platforms say about your brand. This approach is simple and low-risk—you're not disrupting anything that's already working.

BrightEdge's analysis reveals the specific sources AI platforms use:

1. **Continue with SEO fundamentals for your website** All major AI engines rely on traditional search indexes—ChatGPT uses Bing, Google AI Overviews run on Google's index, and Claude leverages Brave. Additionally, AI platforms deploy their own crawlers to feed their LLMs. This means your existing SEO efforts automatically benefit AI discovery.
2. **Shape PR and media coverage (34% of AI citations)** News sites, industry publications, and media coverage represent significant opportunities. Build relationships with publications in your space that AI frequently references. For example, in the golf industry, Golf.com is heavily cited when AI helps consumers shop for golf equipment. In fashion, Vogue and WWD carry similar weight. Identify and cultivate relationships with the authoritative media sources in your industry.
3. **Engage strategically on social platforms (Nearly 10% of citations)** LinkedIn articles and Reddit discussions directly influence AI responses. BrightEdge pinpoints the exact forums—even down to specific subreddits—where your industry conversations happen. This precision allows you to engage where it matters most.
4. **Monitor user-generated content sites** Forums, review sites, and Q&A platforms are also important sources of content for LLMs. BrightEdge identifies which specific communities carry the most authority in your industry, allowing targeted engagement.

## The Strategic Opportunity

By understanding these influence patterns, marketers can:

- Maintain strong SEO for direct website visibility
- Build relationships with key publications and journalists in their space
- Participate authentically in the specific forums and communities AI platforms reference
- Ensure accurate, positive information exists across all sources AI systems consult

## Why This Matters for Marketers

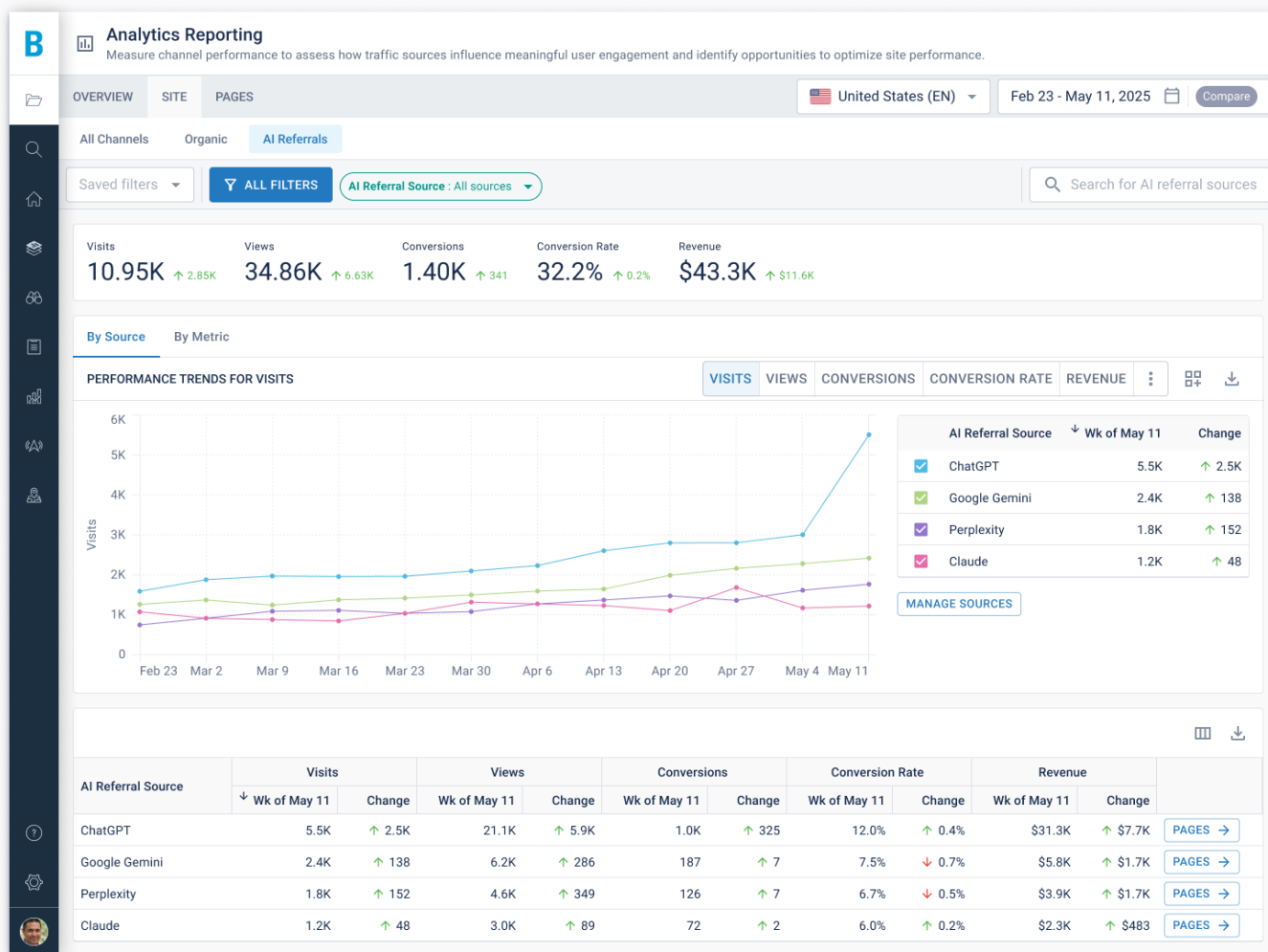
This multi-channel approach doesn't require rebuilding your content strategy. It's about extending your influence to the sources AI already trusts, while maintaining the SEO foundation that drives both traditional and AI search visibility.

# BrightEdge Launches Two New Innovations to Help Marketers Win

To help brands navigate this ongoing shift, BrightEdge announced two major product innovations at the Fall Spark 2025 Event:

## AI Early Detection System:

The next generation of analytics reporting that shows, in real time, how AI search is contributing to traffic and conversions. Most web analytics treat AI search domains like any other referral, making them hard to analyze. BrightEdge makes this traffic visible, organizes it alongside your other channels, and lets you drill from top-level trends down to individual pages so you can see performance clearly and know exactly where to optimize to drive results.



Instead of guessing whether a spike in AI referrals matters, marketers can see when it drives real downstream engagement and adjust their strategy accordingly.

# AI Catalyst Recommendations:

BrightEdge AI Catalyst identifies where competitors are appearing in AI results, then translates those gaps into actionable steps. It not only shows what's missing, but why others are winning—whether it's page structure that makes content easier for LLMs to interpret, deeper topic coverage, or stronger layout that helps models surface the right answers.

Comparison: <https://www.corp.com/think/topics/ai-supply-chain> vs. <https://www.acme.com/scm/ai-supply-chain/>

Recommendations

Performance

Prompt Citations

Keyword Ranking

Characteristic	<a href="https://www.corp.com/think/topics/ai-sup...">https://www.corp.com/think/topics/ai-sup...</a>	<a href="https://www.acme.com/scm/ai-supply-ch...">https://www.acme.com/scm/ai-supply-ch...</a>	Which is better?	Recommendation
UX/Template	Clean, professional layout with clear navigation and consistent branding. Interactive elements like images and videos enhance engagement. Mobile responsive with fast loading.	Modern, visually appealing design with prominent CTAs. Slightly denser content blocks that may challenge first-time users. Responsive but slower page load than Corp.	<a href="http://www.corp.com">www.corp.com</a>	Acme may want to simplify content blocks and optimize page speed for smoother user experience.
Content	Focuses on AI applications in supply chain with detailed articles, case studies, and thought leadership content. Updated regularly with comprehensive insights.	Offers detailed product-centric AI solutions in supply chain. Emphasizes Acme's technology with customer testimonials and whitepapers. Less editorial depth than Corp.	<a href="http://www.corp.com">www.corp.com</a>	Acme may want to enrich editorial content with more thought leadership and educational articles to match Corp's depth.
Schema	Includes multiple JSON-LD blocks covering Organization, Article, and FAQ schemas. Proper nesting and all required fields are present.	Contains JSON-LD for Product and Organization schemas but lacks FAQ or Article schemas. Minor nesting issues detected.	<a href="http://www.corp.com">www.corp.com</a>	Acme may want to expand schema coverage to include Article and FAQ types and fix nesting for better SEO.

CANCEL

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What makes Catalyst especially powerful is that it shows where AI engines source their answers. It identifies the sources that matter most, analyzes why they influence AI, and generates clear action items—even down to what content resonates and who inside an organization to reach.

The result: a faster, easier way to strengthen presence in AI search and tie activity directly to business outcomes.

# | About BrightEdge

BrightEdge is the global leader in Enterprise SEO and AI-powered content performance. For more than 18 years, BrightEdge has helped thousands of brands and digital marketers, including 57% of the Fortune 500, transform online opportunities into measurable business results.

Its industry-first platform integrates the most comprehensive dataset in search, combining insights from traditional SEO, digital media, social and content with cutting-edge generative AI capabilities, including its deep learning engine DataMind and AI Catalyst platform.

Trusted by enterprises, mid-market companies, and leading digital agencies, BrightEdge continues to set the standard for innovation in search and AI, enabling brands to win by becoming an integral part of the digital experience.

## Learn More:

- **BrightEdge AI Catalyst:** [www.brightedge.com/ai-catalyst](http://www.brightedge.com/ai-catalyst)
- **Contact:** [www.brightedge.com](http://www.brightedge.com)