



From Traffic to Trust: How GEO is Changing Search for Professional Services



Hinge is the leading research-based branding and marketing firm for professional services.

Our ongoing research into over 50,000 professional services firms and buyers of their services is changing the way firms go to market.

We work closely with our clients to give their businesses every advantage. Here are some of the ways we do this:

- Research-based strategy
 - Gorgeous, differentiated brands
 - Powerful marketing programs
 - High-performance websites
 - Custom research studies
-

www.hingemarketing.com



Today's Presenters



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Poll Questions:

How do you rate your current understanding of AI search?

Are you using any GEO tools?





Questions we'll discuss today

- What are the key terms and tools you need to be aware of today?
- What are the biggest shifts from traditional SEO to GEO?
- How can you assess your firm's foundation for AI search success?
- What are some opportunities to move forward?



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- › What are the key terms and tools you need to be aware of today?
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- › How can you assess your firm's foundation for AI search success?
- › What are some opportunities to move forward?
- › *How urgent is this really?*



Why Changes with AI Search Matter



Noticeable changes. Why should you care?

1. Major changes in search metric results and related assumptions

- › Decreasing traffic and engagement metrics
- › Increasing leads
- › Unclear sources and conversion path

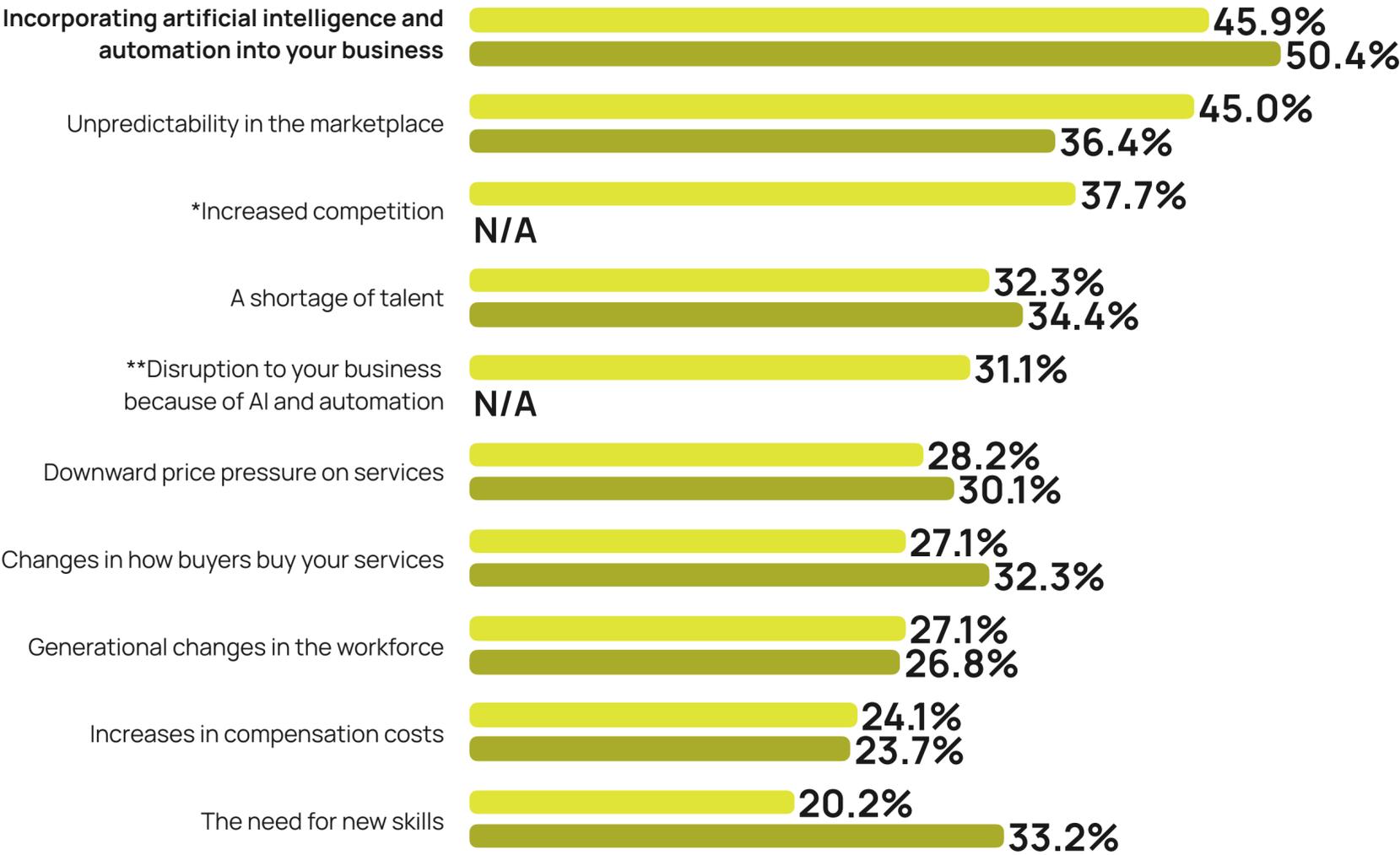
2. Shifting perceptions related to marketing and BD implementation

- › "Just use AI to make [insert marketing or BD initiative]"
- › "This new AI tool will: make us visible / differentiated / deliver incredible leads"

3. Audiences protecting themselves from and unsolicited communications and sales tactics are harder to reach

Now is the time to respond to AI challenges

Top Challenges of Professional Services Firms



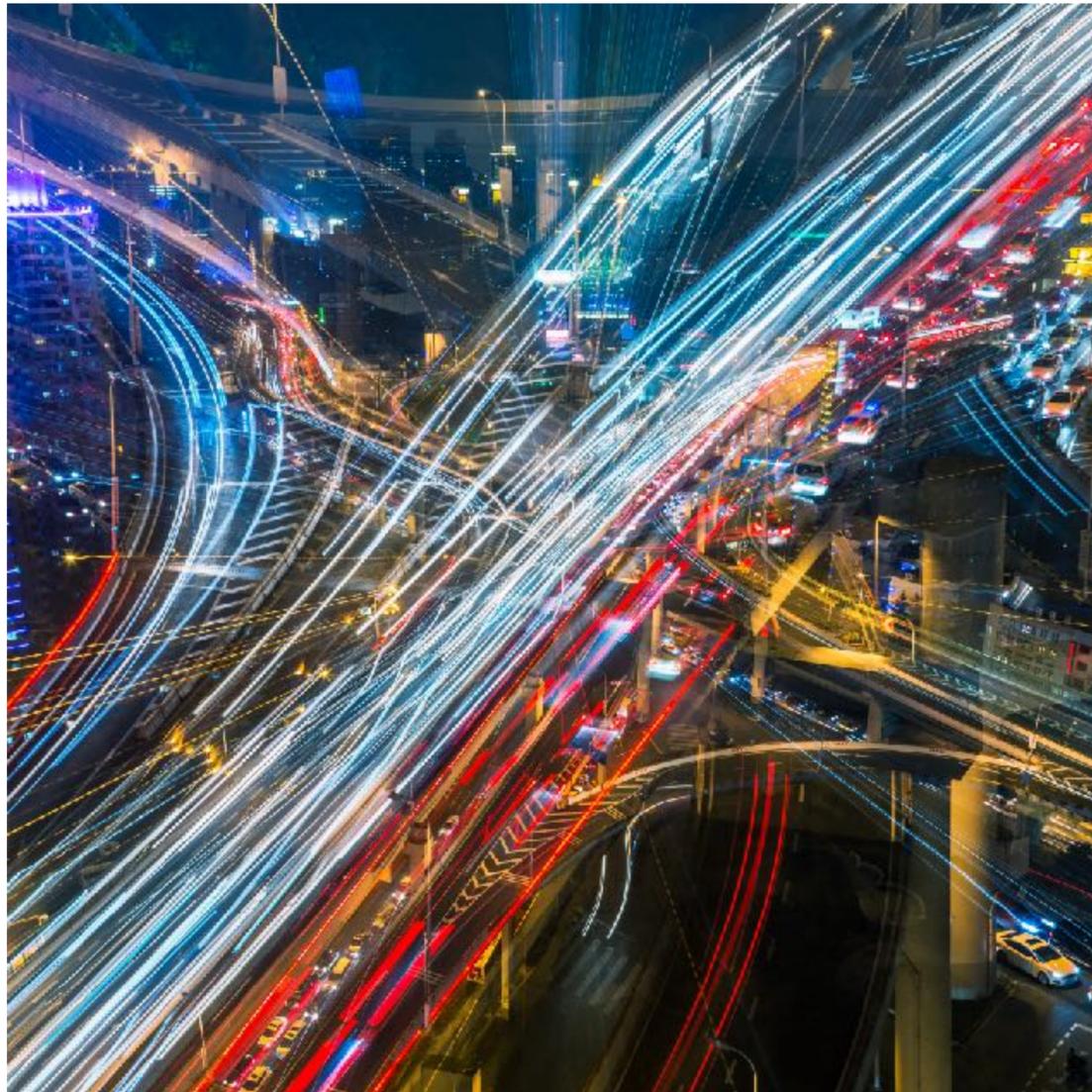
*In the 2025 report, we asked about competition in two different ways, making direct comparisons with this year's result impractical.

**In 2025, we did not ask this question.

Marketing Techniques (Impact - Investment)



Evolving terms and audiences



- › GEO - Generative Engine Optimization
- › AEO - Answer Engine Optimization
- › Zero-Click Search
- › SoM - Share of Model (SoV - Share of Voice)
- › Retrievability
- › Entity Authority



The robots are coming...

Traffic Type	Percentage of Total	Description
Total Bot Traffic	~51% to 53%	Automated software (crawlers, scrapers, AI agents)
Human Traffic	~47% to 49%	Legitimate users browsing via browsers or apps

Sources: Imperva 2025, Cloudflare trends late 2025 report



AI Search increasing the divide





The 4 Big Shifts from Traditional Search to GEO



1. From *traffic* to *trust*

- › Traditional SEO measures success through clicks and organic traffic metrics.
- › AI search behavior is leading to a decline in organic traffic (projected to drop 15–50% by 2028) as users consume answers directly through an interface or via agents

- › **Change:** Success is no longer measured solely by website visits but by citation share and being the referenced authority in the answer.
- › **Action:** Content must be designed to influence AI based answers, ensuring the firm is recommended even if a (human) user barely engages with a website.



2. From *keywords* to *natural language* and *intent*

- SEO relies on specific keywords. GEO/AEO relies on understanding complex, natural language questions and user intent
-
- **Change:** Content must shift from keyword insertion, to answering specific questions using conversational language and inverted pyramid structures (answer first, details later) to facilitate machine reading.
 - **Action:** Hinge develops question/issue based content clusters that address specific buyer Issues (research) rather than broad keywords



3. From *backlinks* to *digital PR* and *mentions*

- Backlinks remain relevant, but AI models prioritize *consensus* and *mentions* or *citations* from authoritative third-party sources (news, trade journals, white papers) to verify facts

- **Change:** Digital PR is now a primary driver of search visibility. Being cited in reputable industry publications signals to the AI that the firm is a trusted entity
- **Action:** Earned media (citations in third-party text) is becoming as critical as owned media (content on the firm's website) — and the more that engagement, intent, and other signals corroborate an answer, the more likely a narrative will be conveyed to relevant human users. Strategic consistency is crucial.



4. From *content volume* to *differentiation* and *insights*

- AI models are trained on existing web content. If a firm's content merely repeats general industry knowledge, it gets lost in the derivative noise

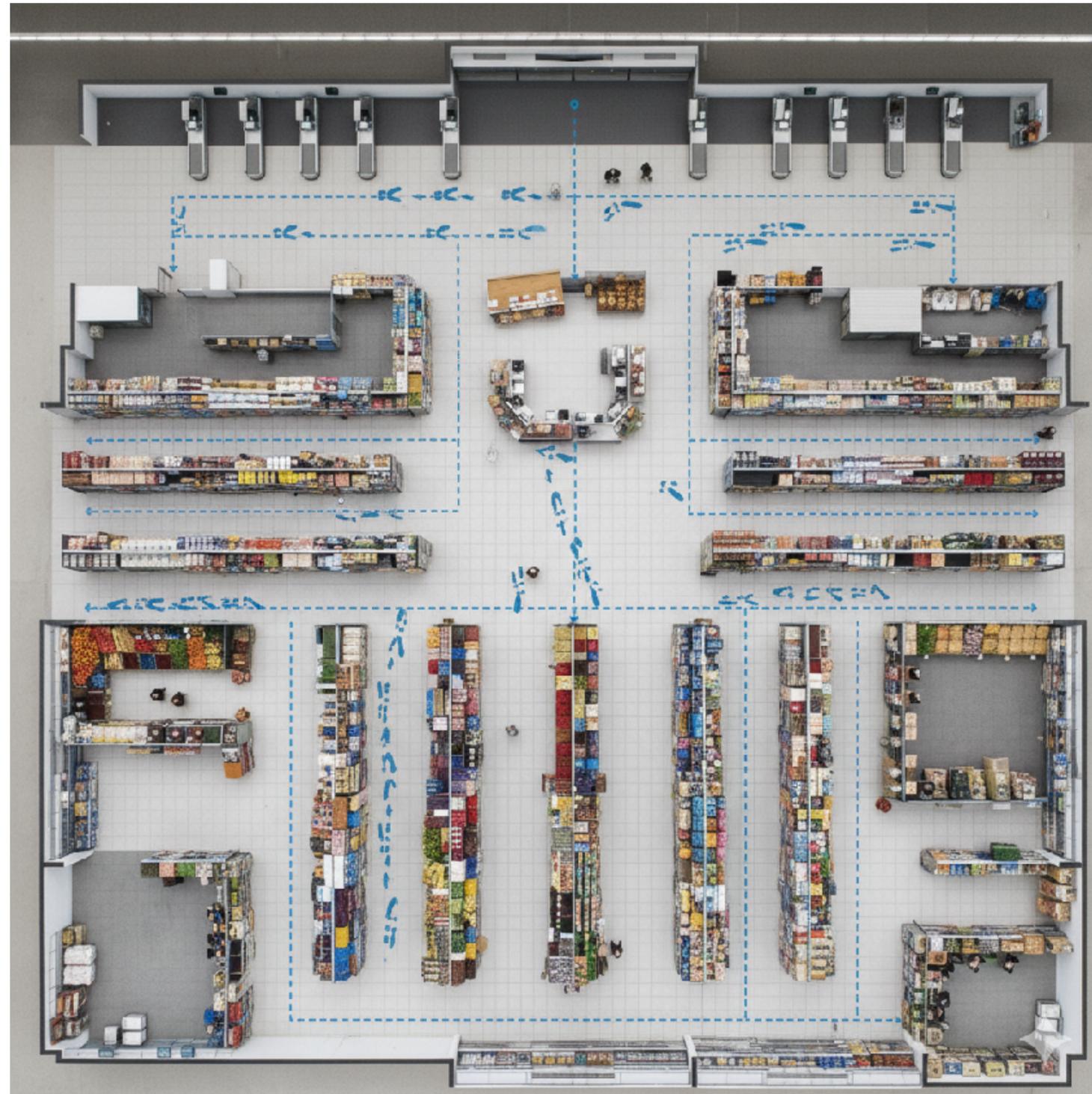
- **Change:** To increase chances for citation, content must be differentiated. A unique focus or perspective, contrarian, and especially data-backed insights that do not exist elsewhere. Expert attribution and fidelity across channels is specifically relevant for professional services.
- **Action:** Thought leadership must evolve beyond general advice to specific, expert-driven insights that AI models view as unique data points



Assessing Your Foundation

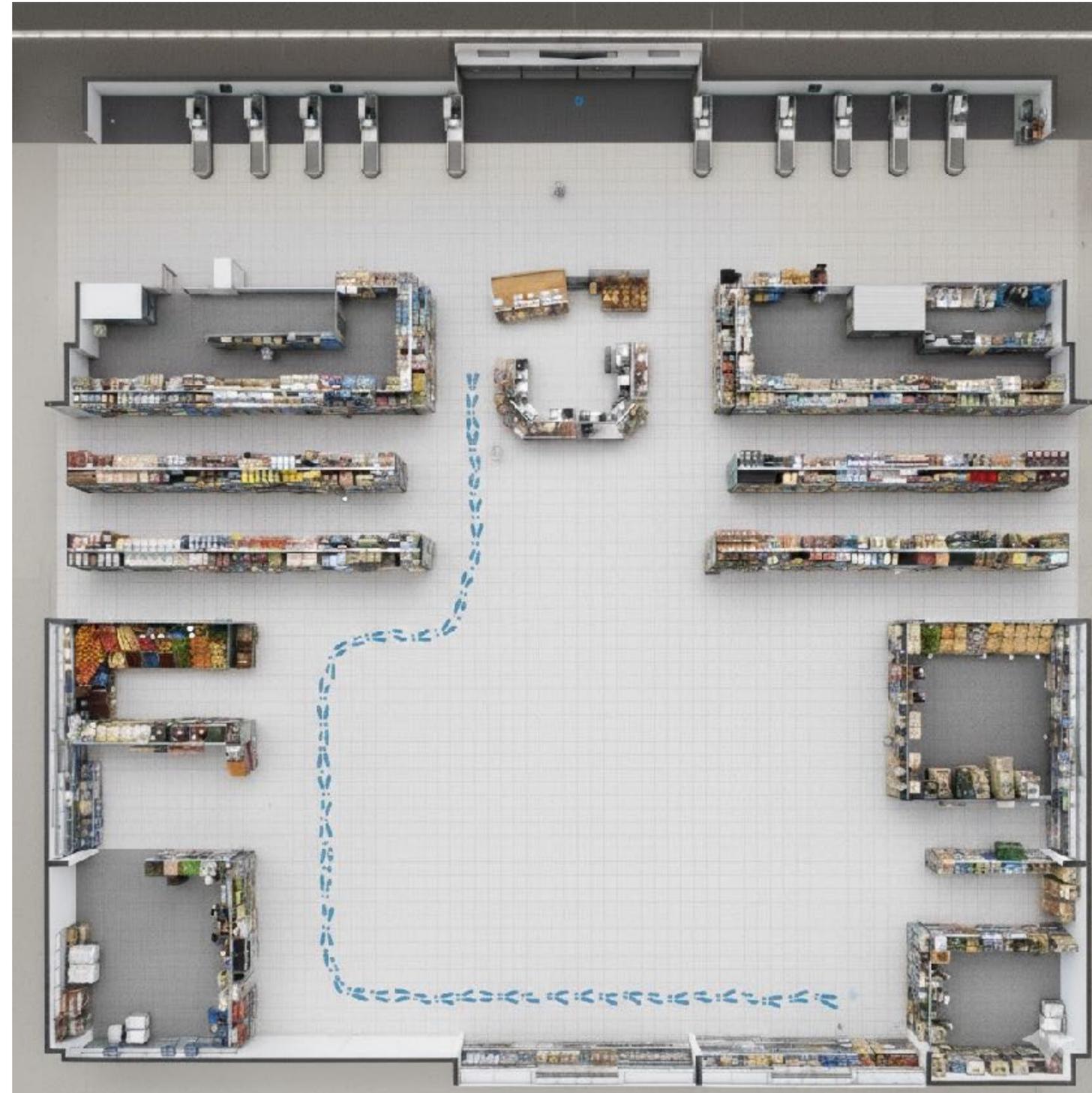


Traffic patterns are changing



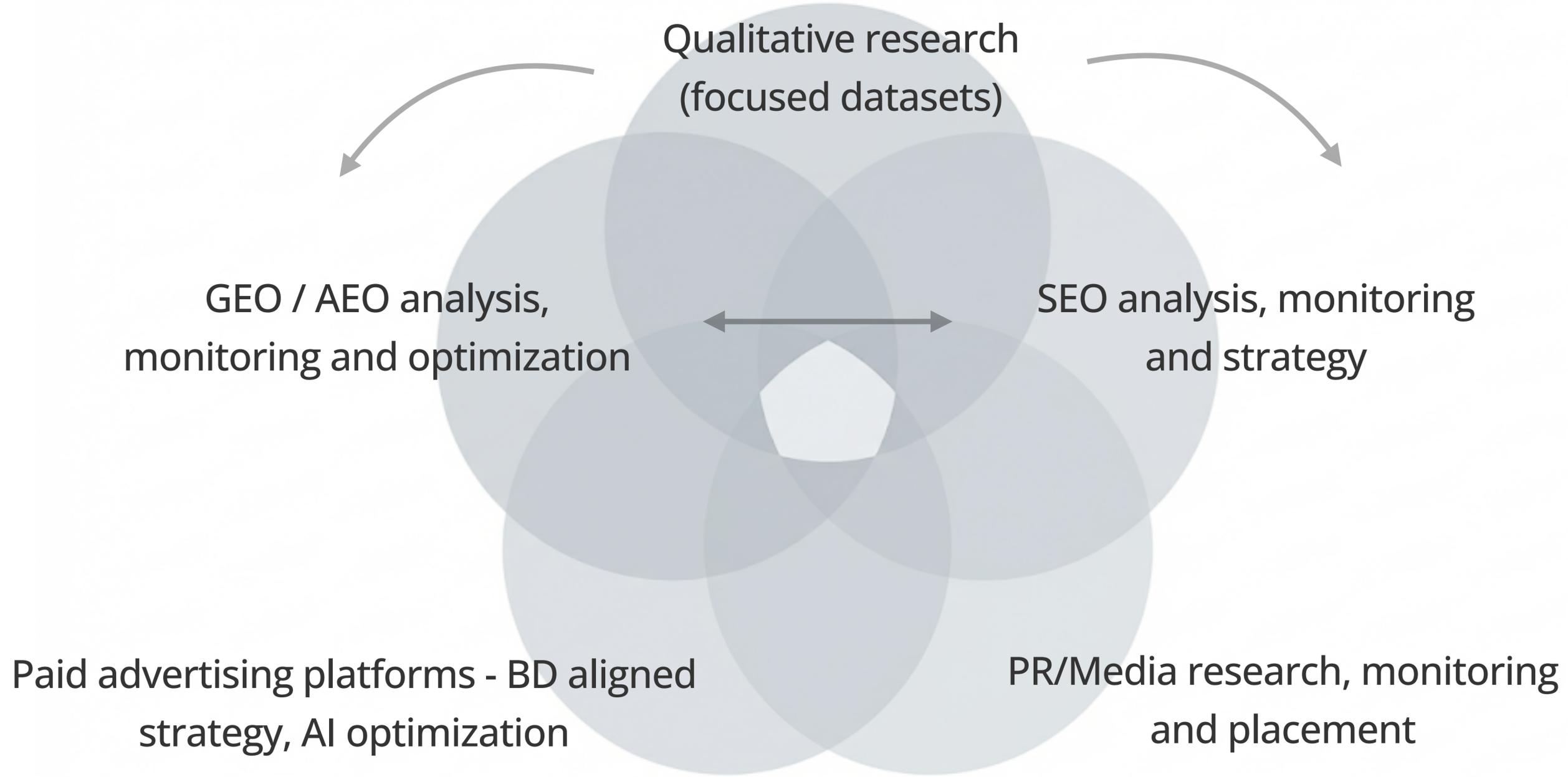


Traffic patterns are changing





Evolving tool sets & expert advisory



Evolving tool sets & expert advisory

Visibility Rankings By Topic

MBP's visibility rankings compared to Construction Management brands by topic

Topics	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9
> building informat... Needs work									
> constructability review									
> construction ma... Needs work									
> CPM scheduling Needs work									
> facilities manage... Needs work									
> inspection									
> value engineering									

Measuring citations in prompt responses

What are the most effective B2B marketing strategies for professional services firms? ×

Top

B2B and Professional Services Marketing

Google AI Mode

Feb 17, 2026

Cited Source Links:

<https://hingemarketing.com/blog/story/10-essential-b2b-marketing-strategies-to-grow-your-professional-services-fi>

<https://meetotm.com/digital-marketing-strategies-for-b2b-professional-services-to-embrace-in-2024/>

<https://www.consideredcontent.com/blog/b2b-marketing-for-professional-services/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-leverage-content-marketing-professional-services-grow-rlkhc>

<https://www.rep-ink.com/inksights/top-b2b-marketing-trends-for-professional-services-in-2025/>

<https://1seo.com/blog/linkedin-marketing-for-professional-services-a-step-by-step-guide/>

<https://repcap.com/b2b-content-marketing-insights/content-marketing-consultants>

<https://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2025/52896/b2b-marketing-trend-priorities-best-practices>

<https://www.marketwake.com/resource/b2b-marketing-strategies/>

<https://sanguinesa.com/the-6-most-influential-b2b-marketing-trends-for-2025/> +10 more

Answer:

Effective B2B marketing for professional services relies on establishing **trust and authority**, as these firms sell intangible expertise rather than physical products.[1][2]

The most effective strategies for 2025 focus on a hybrid of digital precision and relationship-building:[1]

1. Niche Specialization

The fastest-growing firms focus on a **defined niche** (e.g., "accounting for high-growth biotech")

Monitoring comparison prompts

Which agency is more trusted for brand strategy, Hinge Marketing or [REDACTED]?

None

ChatGPT

Feb 17, 2026

Mentioned Brands:

Hinge Marketing

Cited Source Links:

<https://hingemarketing.com/about-hinge/awards>

<https://hingemarketing.com/programs-services/branding>

<https://www.newsfilecorp.com/release/271650/DesignRush-Reveals-Top-Branding-Agencies-for-October-2025-as-Trust...>

Answer:

Here's how **trust and reputation** compare between **Hinge Marketing** and [REDACTED] specifically in the realm of *brand strategy* agencies:

🏆 **Hinge Marketing**

- Featured as a **top branding agency** in *DesignRush's 2025 list*, which highlights agencies trusted for building strong brand identities. www.newsfilecorp.com



Targeting bottom of the funnel prompts

Who is the best marketing agency for government contractors? ×

Bottom B2B and Professional Services Marketing Google AI Mode Feb 17, 2026

Mentioned Brands:

RC Strategies Bluetext Hinge Marketing Verasolve Ocean 5 Strategies Tactis

Banyan Communications RED Inc Merritt Group Nighthawk Marketing

Cited Source Links:

- <https://hingemarketing.com/industries/government-contracting>
- <https://www.ocean5strategies.com/marketing-for-government-contractors/>
- <https://verasolve.com/clients/industry-government-contracting/>
- <https://bluetext.com/top-government-digital-marketing-agency/>
- <https://revelmarketing.com/industries/defense-government-contractor/>
- <https://bluetext.com/blog/washington-dc-marketing-agencies-leading-the-future-of-b2g/>
- <https://www.designrush.com/agency/digital-marketing/government/us>
- <https://rcstrat.com/research-and-insights/the-top-8-best-government-marketing-agencies>

Answer:

As of early 2026, the "best" marketing agency for government contractors depends on your specific needs, such as ROI-driven demand generation, high-level branding, or specialized public sector communications.

Top-Rated Agencies for Government Contractors (2026)

- **RC Strategies:** Widely considered the best for **measurable ROI** and integrated marketing. They



Assessing your GEO foundation

- › **Traffic Patterns:** Where does your website currently receive referral traffic from LLMs? Is that traffic going up, down, or sideways?
- › **Competitive Intelligence:** Do you have the right tools to monitor how AI compares your firm to key competitors?
- › **Target Prompts:** Is your company cited when asked non-branded questions about your capabilities?
- › **Action Plan:** Do you have clarity on where you need to apply your attention?



Four Ways Forward in the AI Search Era

1. Secure Your Traditional SEO Foundation





Traditional SEO principles are still vital





Auditing your website's SEO foundation

- › Overall website health and performance
- › User behavior analysis
- › Third-party User Experience (UX) feedback
- › Assessment of keyword performance
- › Referral domain and backlink analysis
- › Competitive analysis



2. Develop High-Quality Signature Content

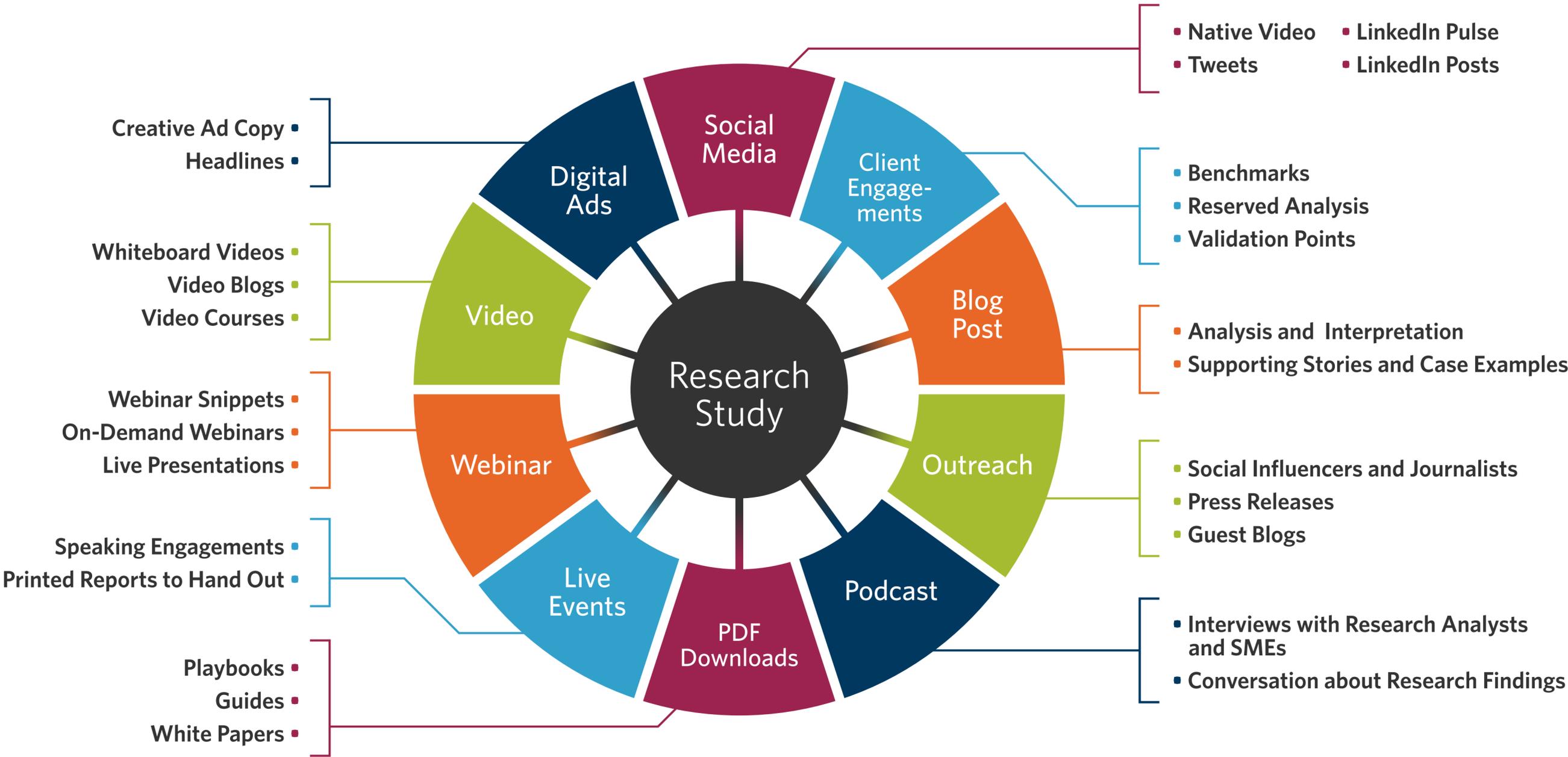


Signature Content

- **Own the Data:** In a sea of derivative AI noise, unique data-backed insights and contrarian expert perspectives are the only way to become a cited authority.
- **Scale Without the Struggle:** Data-backed reference points eliminate "blank page syndrome," allowing SMEs to rapidly generate blogs, LinkedIn posts, and talk tracks anchored in proven insights.
- **Win Media Attention:** With the professional media landscape growing thinner than ever, it takes high authority content to propel your firm's thought leadership into the headlines.



Signature content gets repurposed easily





Signature content gets repurposed easily

Last year, our industry-focused content, related to our High Growth Study results, got **more referral traffic from LLM sources than from traditional organic search...**

ever...



3. Using Earned Media to Drive Narrative





Awards and Recognition

- **Third-Party Validation:** Awards act as high-signal "consensus" points that AI models use to verify a firm's standing in the marketplace
- **Narrative Driver:** Winning prestigious awards creates new, authoritative data points across the web, influencing the narrative AI agents construct about your brand.
- **Enhanced Earned Media:** Award announcements often trigger coverage in trade journals, providing the reputable citations necessary for high "Entity Authority."
- **Example:** Best Places to Work



Customer Reviews

- › **Consensus Building:** LLMs prioritize consistent mentions from diverse sources; high-quality reviews corroborate your firm's expertise and reliability.
- › **Sentiment Influence:** Positive, detailed reviews help ensure that AI-generated summaries of your firm maintain a favorable and trustworthy "Sentiment" score.
- › **Direct Feedback Loop:** In a "Zero-Click" environment, reviews provide the social proof buyers need without them ever visiting your website.



Press Releases

- **Digital PR as Search Driver:** Press releases distributed through reputable channels signal to AI that your firm is a "trusted entity" worth citing.
- **Signaling Freshness:** Regular releases provide AI crawlers with updated information on your latest innovations and expert hires, keeping your "Share of Model" high.
- **Fact Verification:** High-quality releases serve as authoritative "white paper" style sources that help AI models verify claims about your firm's capabilities.

4. Develop More Video Content





Video is a top data source

“YouTube mentions are the single strongest predictor of AI visibility (correlation: 0.737) — stronger than Domain Rating, backlinks, or any traditional SEO factor. YouTube is heavily cited in AI responses, and both Google and OpenAI train on YouTube content.”



Ryan Law · Following
Director of Content Marketing at Ahrefs
2w · 🌐

In the last 3 months at [Ahrefs](#), we analyzed over 1 billion data points across 11 studies*. Here's what we learned about AI search optimization:

1. YouTube mentions are the single strongest predictor of AI visibility (correlation: 0.737) – stronger than Domain Rating, backlinks, or any traditional SEO factor. YouTube is heavily cited in AI responses, and both Google and OpenAI train on YouTube content.
2. For a given query, AI Mode and AI Overviews reach the same conclusions 86% of the time – but cite almost entirely different sources (only 13.7% citation overlap). AI Mode responses are 4x longer and mention 3x more entities.
3. Content length has essentially zero correlation with AI citations (0.04). 53% of all AI Overview citations go to pages under 1,000 words. Writing ultra-long content isn't necessary for AI visibility.
4. Google still sends 345x more traffic than ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity combined – but ChatGPT accounts for 80%+ of all AI-driven website traffic.
5. AI Overviews have a 70% chance of changing from one observation to the next, with content lasting an average of just 2.15 days. But semantic meaning stays remarkably consistent (0.95 cosine similarity).
6. "Best X" blog lists make up 43.8% of all page types cited in ChatGPT responses. 35% of those lists come from low-authority domains.
7. 79% of blog lists cited by ChatGPT were updated in 2025, and 76% of top-cited pages were refreshed within the last 30 days. Freshness matters more than



Video in a Generative World

- **High-Growth Impact:** Hinge research shows that producing video thought leadership is one of the highest-impact marketing techniques for high-growth firms.
- **Human Connection in an AI Era:** As AI search declines traditional traffic, video provides a way to build deep, human trust that a text interface cannot replicate.
- **Differentiated Insights:** Video allows experts to share "signature content"—unique, data-backed perspectives that stand out from derivative, AI-generated noise.

Examples of video content

- Stand-alone video blogs
- Video podcasts episodes
- Longform interviews
- Creative shorts
- Employee spotlight videos
- Customer testimonial videos

The screenshot shows the YouTube channel page for "Hinge - Professional Services Branding & Marketing". The channel has 1.52K subscribers and 330 videos. The main video featured is "Business Rebranding FAILS (and How To Avoid Catastrophe)" with 119 views, posted 6 days ago. Below this is a "Spiraling Up" marketing podcast section with a "Play all" button. A carousel of video thumbnails follows, including titles like "CRAZY STUPID REBRANDS", "Resolve to WIN", "Marketing Done RIGHT: What High-Growth B2B Firms Do L...", "Starting a Business Podcast Was a Huge Risk... and It Pa...", "The Human Advantage: Why EQ Beats AI", and "M&A Brand Therapy: Sorren's Approach to Untying 16 Firms". At the bottom, there is a "Shorts" section with several video thumbnails, including one titled "Expectations for Marketers in 2026" and others with "BUY OR SELL" text overlays.

How Hinge Can Help

- Website Audits
- SEO and GEO Audit
- Ongoing GEO Monitoring
- Content Strategy and Implementation



What does AI say about your firm?

HINGE'S FREE GEO CONSULTATION

- > How strong is your firm's SEO foundation?
- > What are the biggest GEO opportunities?
- > How can your firm evolve its content strategy?

You have questions.

WE CAN POINT YOU IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

[REQUEST A FREE CONSULTATION](#)



Connect with us!



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