AI Content Marketing aicontentmarketing.co.uk

The state of AI in content marketing

October 2026 edition

26 developments from May 2025 to September 2026, each dated and each with its source.

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A free report from AI Content Marketing. The latest edition is always at aicontentmarketing.co.uk/report/

In short

Nearly every content team now uses AI. Far fewer can show it has improved results. Drafting, design and ad variants are cheap and fast, and the tools that do them, from Canva to Google's Pomelli, increasingly start from your own website and brand. Distribution is where the real change has happened. Google's AI Overviews and AI Mode take a large share of clicks from top-ranking pages, and chatbot referrals are growing from a small base without replacing the traffic lost. The money has followed: AI-visibility trackers are attracting large funding rounds and acquisitions. In the UK, regulators have not written AI-specific content rules. The ASA treats AI output like any other ad, the government has dropped its preferred copyright opt-out without choosing a replacement, and the CMA is forcing Google to give publishers an AI opt-out. What still lacks evidence is that AI-made content performs better, as opposed to simply being produced in greater volume.

- AI use in content production is close to universal, but proven benefit is not: around 9 in 10 B2B marketers use AI to produce content, yet fewer than 4 in 10 say it has improved performance, and UK businesses that have adopted AI use on average only 1.6 AI technologies.
- Google's AI answers are cutting organic clicks sharply: Ahrefs estimates position-one click-through is about 58% lower on queries that show an AI Overview, and Pew found people clicked a result on 8% of visits with an AI summary against 15% without.
- Chatbots are being added on top of Google, not replacing it: 95% of ChatGPT users also used Google, only 6.8% of US ChatGPT answers included an external link, and just 4% of Britons use chatbots for news each week.
- UK regulators are applying existing rules rather than writing new ones: the ASA holds advertisers fully responsible for AI-made ads, and the government has set no UK obligation to label AI-generated content.
- Investors are backing measurement of AI visibility over content generation: Profound raised $180m at a $1.8bn valuation, Peec AI raised $21m, and Adobe completed its acquisition of Semrush to add generative engine optimisation.

- Audiences are tolerant of AI in general but penalise heavy or undisclosed use: 53% of consumers in one 2026 survey said they were less likely to buy from brands they know use AI in social content, and nearly 90% want it disclosed.

Search, AI answers and where traffic now comes from

6 developments

The biggest change for content teams in the past year has come from search engines, not writing tools. Google's AI Overviews and AI Mode are reducing the clicks that informational content used to earn, and chatbots send far less traffic than their user numbers would suggest. Google's own advice is still to write good content for people. The data suggests that good content now earns fewer visits.

30 Jul 2026

Similarweb data shows AI search is layered on top of Google, not replacing it

Search Engine Journal's coverage of Similarweb's 2026 report says 461 million of ChatGPT's 494 million users (95%) also used Google in March to May 2026. Search draws 3.3 billion average monthly unique visitors against 655 million for AI chatbots. Only 6.8% of US ChatGPT answers included an external link in May 2026, up from about 1% a year earlier. Generative AI platforms reached 9.5 billion average monthly visits, up 70% year on year.

Why it matters Google is still most of your search audience, and being cited in a chatbot answer is not the same as getting a visit. The article also notes that cited pages and the pages AI visitors land on are often different URLs, so measure them separately.

Source: Search Engine Journal searchenginejournal.com

18 Jun 2026

Digital News Report 2026: Britons barely use AI chatbots for news

The Reuters Institute's 2026 Digital News Report found that 4% of Britons use AI chatbots for news each week. Six per cent of UK respondents trust news from AI chatbots, against 20% globally. Journalism.co.uk's write-up places the UK at the bottom of the markets surveyed.

Why it matters If your audience is British, chatbot discovery is still a small channel for topical content. Watch it, but don't reorganise the programme around it yet.

Source: Journalism.co.uk

4 Feb 2026

Ahrefs: AI Overviews cut position-one click-through by an estimated 58%

Ahrefs compared 150,000 keywords that trigger AI Overviews with 150,000 informational keywords that do not, using aggregated Search Console data for December 2023 and December 2025. Position-one CTR on AI Overview keywords fell from 0.073 to 0.016, about 58% below Ahrefs' forecast of what it would have been without AI Overviews. The estimated effect was -50.8% at position 2 and -19.4% at position 10. Ahrefs' earlier 2025 estimate was 34.5%.

Why it matters Ranking first for an informational query is now worth much less traffic than your historic benchmarks suggest. Reset forecasts and reporting baselines before reviewing performance. The figure is modelled against a forecast, not measured directly.

Source: Ahrefs ahrefs.com

29 Jul 2025

Google launches AI Mode in UK search

Google began rolling out AI Mode, a conversational search tab built on a custom Gemini 2.5 model, to UK users. It splits a query into subtopics, runs several searches at once and returns a combined answer with links. Google said early users' questions were two to three times the length of traditional queries.

Why it matters Longer, multi-part questions favour content that answers a whole task in depth, not pages built around a single keyword. It also means fewer chances for a click.

Source: Tech.eu

22 Jul 2025

Pew finds Google users click half as often when an AI summary appears

Pew tracked 900 US adults' browsing in March 2025, covering 68,879 Google searches, 18% of which produced an AI summary. Users clicked a traditional result on 8% of visits with a summary against 15% without. They clicked a link inside the summary on about 1% of visits, and ended their browsing session on 26% of visits with a summary against 16% without.

Why it matters This is independent behavioural evidence, not a vendor estimate. Being cited inside an AI summary generates very little traffic in its own right.

Source: Pew Research Center pewresearch.org

21 May 2025

Google says AI search needs the same fundamentals, not special optimisation

In a Search Central post by John Mueller, Google said the same fundamentals apply to AI Overviews and AI Mode: unique, non-commodity content, indexable pages and good page experience. Existing controls such as nosnippet and noindex also limit visibility in AI results. Google suggested measuring sales, sign-ups and engagement rather than clicks alone.

Why it matters Be sceptical of agencies selling GEO as a separate discipline. Google's official position is that it is SEO, and its own advice is to stop judging content on clicks alone.

Source: Search Engine Journal searchenginejournal.com

Regulation, copyright and advertising rules

8 developments

There is still no UK law aimed specifically at AI-generated marketing content. Existing advertising, competition and copyright rules are being applied to it instead. The most consequential decisions in this period were the CMA's interventions on Google and the government's retreat from a copyright opt-out. The EU's labelling regime now applies to UK firms publishing into the EU.

16 Sep 2026

ASA bans Midnite ad whose AI-generated character appeared under 25

The ASA ruled that a social ad for Midnite, made by an affiliate, breached CAP Code rules on the age of characters in gambling ads. The ASA noted the AI prompt did not specify an age, and that the character's features and styling suggested late teens or early twenties. The ad was flagged by the ASA's own AI-driven Active Ad Monitoring system, not by a complaint.

Why it matters The regulator now uses AI to find non-compliant ads, and an affiliate's AI output still lands on the brand. Prompts and output checks need to reflect the CAP Code rules for your sector.

Source: CMS cms.law

18 Jun 2026

ASA guidance: using AI tools does not shift responsibility for ads

The ASA published guidance on AI-generated content and deepfakes, confirming that the CAP Code applies regardless of how an ad is made. Cited rulings include an ad built with Google's automated tools, where the advertiser was still held primarily responsible. AI depictions of real people must not imply a genuine endorsement. The guidance sets no general AI-disclosure requirement.

Why it matters Brief your team that every AI-assisted asset needs the same pre-publication review as any other creative. 'The tool made it' is not a defence.

Source: Lewis Silkin lewissilkin.com

10 Jun 2026

EU publishes final code of practice on labelling AI-generated content

The European Commission published its final Code of Practice on marking and labelling AI-generated content, and the AI Act's Article 50 transparency obligations apply from 2 August 2026. Deployers must label deepfakes and AI-generated text published to inform the public on matters of public interest. That text duty does not apply where the text has undergone human review and is subject to editorial responsibility. About 190 organisations had signed the code by the end of July 2026.

Why it matters If you publish into EU markets, the editorial-review exception is the practical route for written content. Document your human review step.

Source: European Commission digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu

3 Jun 2026

CMA orders Google to let publishers opt out of AI Overviews and AI Mode

The CMA imposed a conduct requirement giving publishers effective tools to stop their content powering Google's AI search features and being used to fine-tune AI models. Google must also attribute publisher content in AI results with clear links. Google has nine months to implement the changes and must publish compliance reports every six months for the first year.

Why it matters For the first time, UK site owners will be able to choose whether Google's AI features use their content. Whether opting out costs visibility is the decision content leads will face in 2027.

Source: Advanced Television advanced-television.com

18 Mar 2026

UK government drops copyright opt-out plan and sets no AI labelling duty

In its statutory report under the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025, the government said a broad copyright exception with opt-out is no longer its preferred way forward and that it will gather more evidence first. There are no UK obligations to label AI-generated content. The government will instead work with industry on labelling best practice, and proposes ending copyright protection for wholly computer-generated works while keeping it for AI-assisted works.

Why it matters Content made with no human creative input may not be protected. Keep a record of the human contribution to work you want to own.

Source: GOV.UK

4 Nov 2025

Getty largely loses UK High Court case against Stability AI

The High Court rejected Getty Images' remaining secondary copyright claims against Stability AI over Stable Diffusion. Getty won some trade mark claims, which the judge, Mrs Justice Joanna Smith, called 'extremely limited in scope'. Getty had earlier dropped its training-based claim.

Why it matters The ruling did not test whether training an AI model is lawful in the UK, so the legal risk around image generators is lower but not settled.

Source: Cleary Gottlieb clearygottlieb.com

10 Oct 2025

CMA designates Google with strategic market status, AI Overviews included

The CMA confirmed that Google has strategic market status in general search and search advertising, with AI Overviews and AI Mode in scope. The Gemini assistant was excluded but kept under review. The CMA said the designation is not a finding of wrongdoing and creates no immediate requirements.

Why it matters This is the legal basis for the June 2026 publisher opt-out and for any further CMA rules on how Google treats UK content.

Source: Advanced Television advanced-television.com

25 Sep 2025

US judge gives preliminary approval to Anthropic's $1.5bn authors' settlement

Judge William Alsup granted preliminary approval to a $1.5bn settlement between Anthropic and authors and publishers, worth about $3,000 per covered book across about 465,000 books. Alsup had earlier ruled that training Claude was fair use, but that Anthropic violated authors' rights by keeping pirated books.

Why it matters It sets a price on unlicensed training data and makes the provenance of AI vendors' training data a reasonable question in procurement.

Source: CBS News cbsnews.com

Production tools and new channels

4 developments

Production tools now read your website or brand kit and produce finished assets, rather than giving you a blank template. Ad platforms are pushing towards end-to-end automation, and ChatGPT has become an ad channel in the UK. Most of these tools reduce effort. None has published independent evidence that its output performs better.

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6 Jun 2026

ChatGPT ads go live in the UK

OpenAI's VP of Monetisation, Benji Shomair, confirmed the ChatGPT advertising pilot is active in the UK, the first European market. Ads appear for Free and Go users, not for Plus, Pro or Enterprise subscribers. In the US the minimum spend fell from $200,000 to $250,000 at the February 2026 launch to nothing for self-serve advertisers by 5 May, when CPC bidding was added.

Why it matters Paid placement in chatbot answers is now available in the UK, which may make it harder for organic content to be seen there. Watch how sponsored and organic answers interact before committing budget.

Source: PPC Land ppc.land

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3 Nov 2025

Canva launches 'Creative Operating System' with its own design model

Canva launched a Design Foundational Model that generates editable on-brand designs. Alongside it came Canva Grow for creating and tracking campaigns, Email Design, Video 2.0, and a free version of Affinity. Canva cited more than 260 million monthly active users, $3.5bn annualised revenue and a $42bn valuation.

Why it matters For small teams, one tool now covers brand-locked design generation, email and ad variants. That makes it a candidate for consolidating your tools, but test the output quality against your brand standards first.

Source: Business Today businesstoday.in

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29 Oct 2025

Google Labs releases Pomelli, a free AI campaign generator

Google Labs and DeepMind released Pomelli in public beta. It scans a company's website to build a 'Business DNA' profile of tone, fonts, colours and imagery, then proposes campaigns and produces editable social, web and ad assets. At launch it was available only in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, in English.

Why it matters It was not available in the UK at launch. It does show where generic brand-matched assets are heading: free and automatic, so they no longer set your work apart.

Source: Unite.AI

4 Jun 2025

Meta reportedly aims to fully automate ad creation and targeting by end-2026

Citing the Wall Street Journal, Verdict reported that Meta wants brands to supply a product image and budget goal and let AI generate the images, video and copy, set targeting and suggest budgets, by the end of 2026. Meta also plans real-time personalisation of ad variants. Some major advertisers are reported to be cautious.

Why it matters If it ships, paid social creative becomes a platform-generated commodity. Your brand guidelines and source assets then become the main control you have.

Source: Verdict verdict.co.uk

Funding and acquisitions

3 developments

In this period most of the money went into tools that measure how brands appear in AI answers, not tools that generate content. That tells you where buyers feel least able to see what is happening. It does not prove the metrics are reliable: AI answers vary from one run to the next, and these tools sample them.

15 Sep 2026

Profound raises $180m Series D at a $1.8bn valuation

Profound, a New York AI-visibility platform founded in 2024, raised $180m co-led by Sequoia Capital and Kleiner Perkins, with Lightspeed and Khosla returning. The valuation nearly doubled from its February 2026 round, and total funding since 2024 is more than $335m. Revenue was not disclosed.

Why it matters This category is now well funded and will be selling to you. Ask vendors how they sample prompts and how stable their figures are before paying.

Source: The Next Web thenextweb.com

28 Apr 2026

Adobe completes acquisition of Semrush

Adobe completed its acquisition of Semrush, adding SEO, generative engine optimisation and agentic search optimisation to its CX Enterprise platform. Semrush will sit alongside Adobe Experience Manager, Adobe LLM Optimizer and Adobe Brand Concierge. Adobe said it would keep investing in Semrush customers.

Why it matters Many small teams rely on Semrush. Watch pricing, packaging and roadmap as it moves inside an enterprise suite.

Source: Pulse 2.0 pulse2.com

18 Nov 2025

Berlin's Peec AI raises $21m Series A for AI-search tracking

Peec AI raised a $21m Series A led by Singular, with Antler, Combination VC, identity.vc and S20, taking total funding to $29m. Since launching in February 2025 it has onboarded more than 1,300 brands and agencies.

Why it matters This is a European, agency-friendly alternative in the AI-visibility category. Its fast take-up suggests many agencies already report AI visibility to clients.

Source: Tech.eu

Adoption, evidence and audience reaction

5 developments

The survey data agrees on one thing: more people are using AI, but they are not using it more deeply or getting much better results. Detection studies suggest machine-written articles make up about half of new web articles but show up much less in search. Consumer surveys, most of them vendor-run, show tolerance for AI content that turns hostile when its use is hidden or it misleads.

8 Sep 2026

Clutch: 53% less likely to buy from brands using AI in social content

Clutch surveyed 601 US consumers in August 2026. 86% had seen AI-generated content on social media, and 53% said they were less likely to buy from brands they know use AI in social content. 64% would trust a brand less if AI content misrepresented products, and nearly 90% said brands should disclose AI-generated social content.

Why it matters Disclosure is not legally required in the UK, but audiences expect it. Decide your disclosure policy deliberately rather than by default. This is a vendor survey of US consumers.

Source: Clutch clutch.co

20 Jul 2026

ONS: 35% of UK firms use AI, but use has barely deepened

The ONS found about 35% of UK businesses with 10 or more employees use at least one AI technology, up from about 12% in September 2023. The average number of AI technologies per adopting business rose only from 1.4 to 1.6, and 10% of adopters describe their use as extensive. Large language models (18%) and visual content creation (16%) are the most-used technologies.

Why it matters Content work, text and visuals, is the main way UK businesses use AI. The low depth of use suggests most teams have not yet built AI into how they work.

Source: Office for National Statistics ons.gov.uk

6 Nov 2025

Coca-Cola's AI-made holiday ads draw criticism again

Coca-Cola's 2025 holiday campaign included an AI remake of its 'Holidays Are Coming' trucks ad made with AI studio Silverside, plus a version from Secret Level. Viewers criticised visual errors such as trucks with extra wheels, and many of roughly 2,300 YouTube comments objected to using AI. System1 testing suggested audiences were more forgiving than online comment implied.

Why it matters Even a brand with a large budget can't stop visible AI flaws becoming the story. Quality control matters more than tool choice.

Source: eWEEK eweek.com

23 Oct 2025

Graphite study: AI-written articles overtook human-written ones in November 2024

Graphite analysed 65,000 English-language article URLs sampled from Common Crawl, published between January 2020 and May 2025, using Surfer's AI detector. AI-generated articles first outnumbered human-written ones in November 2024 and have since plateaued. The study notes AI articles appear to perform poorly in search, and it did not measure human-edited AI drafts.

Why it matters Unedited AI articles now make up about half the web and mostly don't rank. Producing more of them is a weak strategy. Detector-based figures are approximate.

Source: Stacker (via ABC17 News) abc17news.com

8 Oct 2025

CMI: 9 in 10 B2B marketers use AI for content, under 4 in 10 see gains

The Content Marketing Institute's 2026 B2B research surveyed more than 1,000 B2B marketers. Nine in 10 already use AI to produce content, but fewer than 4 in 10 say it has improved performance. 45% named AI-powered marketing tools as a top-three area for increased investment in 2026.

Why it matters Having AI is not an advantage when nearly everyone has it. CMI's conclusion is that the teams doing well are strengthening fundamentals and using AI to build on them.

Source: Content Marketing Institute contentmarketinginstitute.com

What to watch next

Google's publisher opt-out controls

Google has until around March 2027 to implement the CMA's AI opt-out and attribution requirements, and the CMA expects some controls sooner. The open question is whether opting out of AI Overviews costs traffic in practice. Google's first six-monthly compliance reports should give the first data.

ChatGPT ads and self-serve in the UK

ChatGPT ads are live in the UK, and the US has already dropped minimum spends and added CPC bidding. Watch how quickly UK self-serve matures, how many answers carry ads, and whether sponsored placements push organic citations further out of view.

Meta's end-2026 automation target

Meta's reported goal is fully AI-generated and AI-targeted campaigns by the end of 2026. Whether it ships, and what brand controls come with it, will decide how much paid social creative is still made by your team.

UK copyright and labelling follow-up

The government has promised more evidence-gathering on copyright, industry work on labelling best practice, and an end to protection for wholly computer-generated works. Neither the timing nor the legal vehicle is set. Until it is, keep records of the human input in content you want to own.

Whether AI-visibility metrics hold up

Large sums are going into tools that track brand mentions in AI answers, but those answers vary from run to run and few send clicks. Check whether vendors can link visibility scores to visits or revenue before treating them as KPIs.

How this report was made

Every development here was found in a public source dated from May 2025 to September 2026: trade press, regulators, journals and company announcements. Each one names its source, so you can read the original.

All 26 source links were checked on 12 Oct 2026; 2 of those sites do not allow automated checking, so those links were not opened by the check. Nothing here is advice; it is a record of what happened.

The next edition, and the guides behind this one, are at aicontentmarketing.co.uk/report/