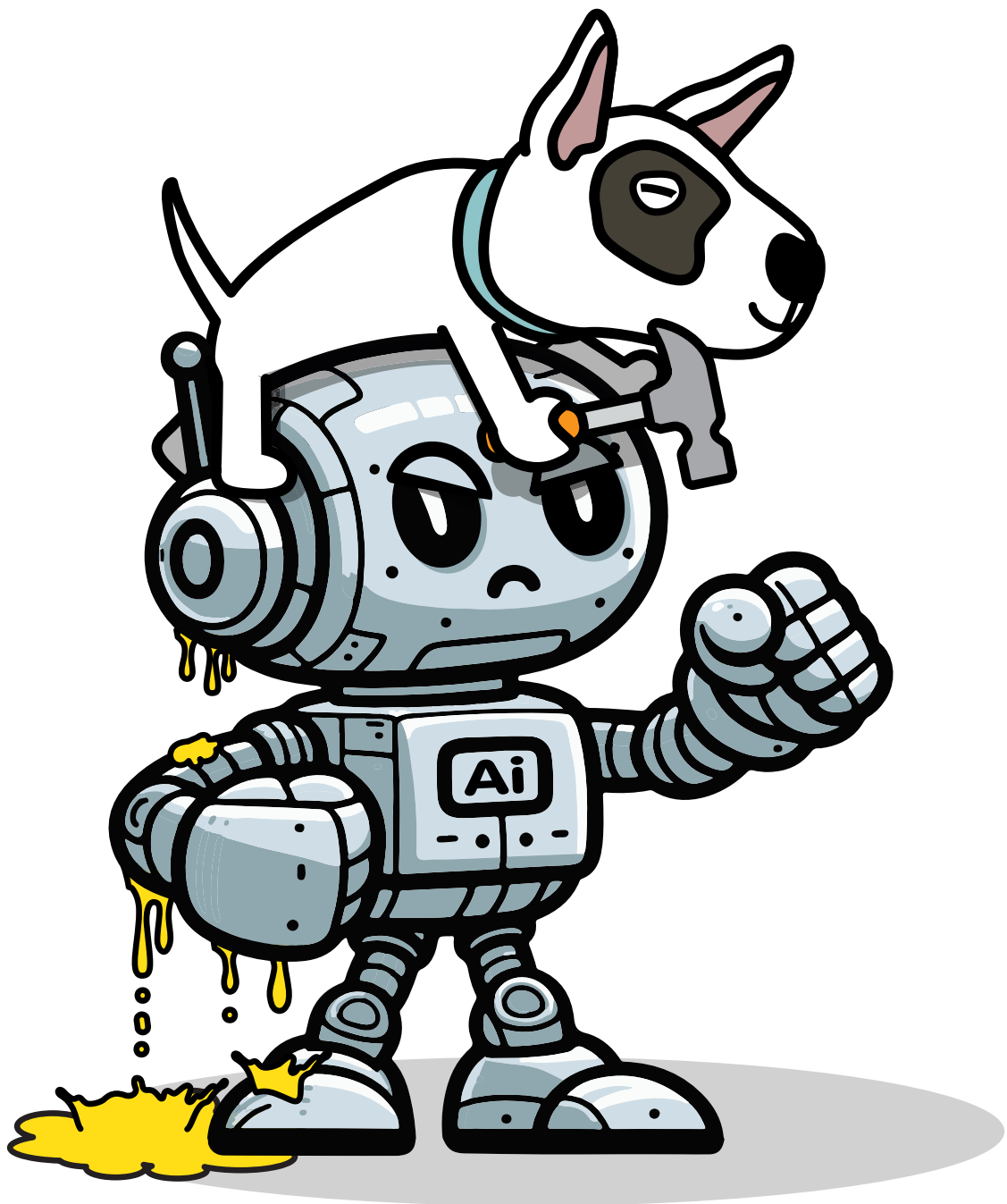


# The Impact of AI Generative Search on Credential Sites: Why Ignoring Your Website Is Risky Business.

Joanne Timney FCIM





## Joanne Timney FCIM

Joanne is a Fellow of the Royal Chartered Institute of Marketing, an award-winning content marketer, neuromarketing expert and published author. With over 35 years' experience, she also teaches Behavioural Design and Communication Theory at post graduate level at universities in the UK and USA. She is published in 7 countries and regularly speaks at conferences.



# Introduction: The New Reality of AI Generative Search

AI-driven search is changing how clients find and evaluate firms. If your authority score isn't high enough, you may not even show up—while your competitor will. IT'S time to ensure your site is always the AI-recommended choice.

## Exploring the Risks for Professional Services Firms

For years, many professional services firms have viewed their websites as “necessary evils” rather than valuable business assets. This mindset is becoming increasingly dangerous as AI-driven generative search transforms the way potential clients find and evaluate businesses.

## What Is Generative AI Search?

Google introduced AI Overviews in the US in May 2024 (and are already beta testing it here in the UK) to enhance user experience by providing concise, AI-generated summaries at the top of search results. These overviews aim to deliver quick, informative responses without requiring users to click through multiple links. By synthesizing information from authoritative sources, generative AI search prioritizes websites that provide clear, valuable, and trustworthy content.

## The Key Issue: Competitors Are Just One Search Away

Consider this scenario: A prospective client searches for your firm to verify your credentials or reputation. In the age of AI search, the results might not lead them directly to your website. Instead, the AI might recommend competitors who:

- Have optimized their sites to better align with Google's guidelines for Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness (E-EAT).
- Have earned strong reviews, backlinks, and consistent online engagement.
- Publish regular, valuable content that positions them as leaders in their field.

When AI recommends a competitor as the “better option,” the opportunity to win that client is lost—possibly forever.

## Why Websites Are More Important Than Ever

1. **AI Search Prioritizes High-Quality Content:** AI algorithms are designed to favour websites that demonstrate clear expertise, offer helpful and relevant content, and establish trust with visitors. A static, bare-minimum website can no longer compete.
2. **Organic Search Is Still Critical:** A BrightEdge report highlights that organic search accounts for 53% of website traffic on average. If your site isn't optimized for search—both traditional and AI-driven—you're leaving a substantial chunk of potential business on the table.
3. **Low-Traffic Credential Sites Are at the Greatest Risk:** Professional services websites often fall into the “credential site” trap—sites that are functional but fail to engage or educate visitors. AI search doesn't reward the basics; it rewards comprehensive, high-value content that answers user intent.

## How Potential Buyers Use Credential Sites

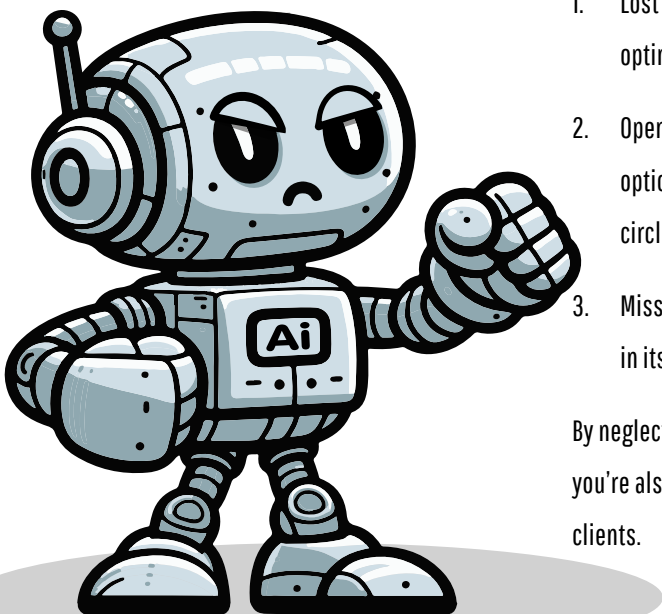
Credential sites often play a crucial role after a referral or a networking introduction. When a potential client is referred to your firm by an existing client or meets one of your team members at an event, their next step is usually an online check. They visit your website to:

- Validate your expertise and authority.
- Assess whether your firm aligns with their specific needs.
- Compare you with competitors to ensure they're making the best choice.

If your website falls short, here's the real danger:

1. **Lost Credibility at a Critical Stage:** Even with a strong personal referral, a poorly optimized or outdated site can make potential clients question your firm's capabilities.
2. **Open to Competitive Disruption:** When AI generative search offers competitors as better options based on their superior content and trust signals, your prospects may never circle back.
3. **Missed Relationship Opportunities:** A subpar website can stop a budding relationship in its tracks, no matter how strong the initial impression was.

By neglecting your website, you're not just harder to find than “rocking horse poop,” but you're also handing competitors an unchallenged opportunity to influence your potential clients.



## EEAT: The Foundation for Thriving in the AI Era

Google's EEAT (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness) guidelines have become essential for maintaining visibility in search results.

### A Quick Summary of EEAT:

**Experience:** Demonstrate real-world application of your expertise. Share case studies, testimonials, and practical examples.

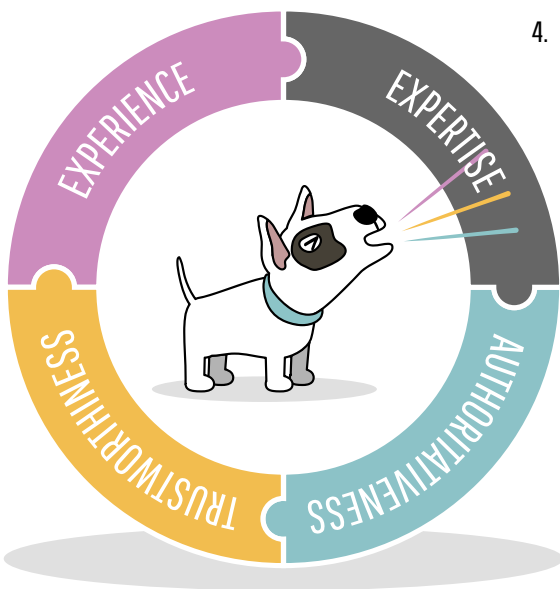
**Expertise:** Showcase your deep knowledge of your industry through detailed guides, white papers, and thought leadership.

**Authoritativeness:** Build your reputation through backlinks, media mentions, and collaboration with other experts.

**Trustworthiness:** Ensure transparency, accuracy, and up-to-date information across your site.

### Key Takeaways from AI Generative Search for Professional Services Firms

1. **Enhanced Content Quality:** Ensure your website content is authoritative, clear, and directly answers common client questions. High-quality content increases the likelihood of being referenced in AI Overviews.
2. **Structured Data Implementation:** Utilize structured data (schema markup) to help search engines understand your content's context and relevance, improving the chances of being featured in AI-generated summaries.
3. **Focus on User Intent:** Align your content strategy with the specific needs and queries of your target audience to enhance relevance and engagement.
4. **Monitor AI Overview Citations:** Regularly check if your website is being cited in AI Overviews to assess content performance and identify opportunities for improvement.



## Consequences of Not Adapting

If professional service firms neglect to optimize their websites for AI integration, they risk reduced visibility in search results. As AI Overviews provide immediate answers, users may bypass traditional search listings, leading to decreased organic traffic for sites not featured in these summaries.

## The Danger of Doing Nothing

If you continue treating your website as a “necessary evil,” the risks are significant:

### Lost Clients:

Potential clients who search for your firm may be redirected to competitors deemed more authoritative or trustworthy by AI algorithms.

### Eroding Credibility:

A static, outdated website signals to clients that your firm is behind the times.

### Declining Traffic:

Without a strategy to improve content quality and optimize for search, organic traffic will steadily drop.

### Missed Opportunities:

Firms that adapt to the new landscape will attract more clients and dominate search visibility, leaving others to play catch-up.



***OVER HERE!!!!***

## Action Plan: Transform Your Website into an Asset

1. Invest in Content That Adds Value: Develop educational resources such as guides, case studies, and videos to address common client questions.
2. Optimize for AI and Traditional Search: Use SEO best practices to ensure your site meets both current and emerging search requirements. Tools like BrightEdge can help track performance.
3. Engage in Reputation Management: Regularly monitor and respond to reviews and ensure consistent messaging across all platforms.
4. Build EEAT-Centric Strategies:

Highlight your firm's experience through case studies.

Leverage expertise by publishing thought leadership content.

Strengthen authority with quality backlinks and collaborations.

Enhance trust by maintaining transparency and accuracy.

5. Rethink Your "Credential Site": Treat your website as an evolving resource hub, not a static place holder. Regular updates and user-centric design can transform it into a lead-generating powerhouse.

## Conclusion: Act Now to Stay Ahead

The rise of AI generative search has elevated the stakes for professional services firms. Treating your website as a "necessary evil" is no longer an option. To stay competitive, you need to optimize your online presence, build trust, and position your firm as the go-to choice for clients.

Don't let AI recommend your competitors. Take action today to secure your place at the top of search results—and in the minds of your clients.





**Joanne Timney FCIM**  
**Founder, Principal Consultant**  
**Bark Like a Big Dog Ltd**

Joanne is a Fellow of the Royal Chartered Institute of Marketing, an award-winning content marketer, neuromarketing expert and published author. With over 35 years' experience, she also teaches Behavioural Design and Communication Theory at post graduate level at universities in the UK and USA. She is published in 7 countries and regularly speaks at conferences.

Bark Like A Big Dog is a specialist marketing content agency providing fully outsourced marketing content solutions, branding, direct marketing and website development for professional service firms.

Specialising in Neuromarketing, Bark Like a Big Dog uses behavioural design to create content and marketing that makes sense to the decision-making centre of the brain. Most of our decisions are made subconsciously deep inside the emotional cortex of our brain. Our conscious, thinking brain, comes in a sloppy second to our incredibly fast, judgemental, risk averse, emotional brain. To make matters worse the emotional brain cannot process language ... yep, it's illiterate.

Bark Like a Big Dog use research developed by neuroscientists from around the world to develop content that resonates with the illiterate, highly emotional brain. You can't make people buy, but you can make them like you, and if they like you, they might just hang around long enough to read you.

Their results speak for themselves with high performing direct campaigns converting at 40%+ and social engagement levels at 3 x national average. A little bit of science goes a long way.

With over 29 years in business, Bark Like a Big Dog has the experience, expertise and skills to make your content sing and your ROI fly.

UK - based in Hampshire offering National coverage.

USA - based in Long Island, serving East Coast of America.

Spain - based in Granada Province, offering National coverage.

Email: [joanne@barklikeabigdog.com](mailto:joanne@barklikeabigdog.com)

