Can ChatGPT and other AI tools discover your business?

Yes, they can - but not in the way a human would. AI tools such as ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google's Search Generative Experience (SGE) pull information from the open web. They do not "crawl" your site in the traditional sense. Instead, they rely on the data that search engines have already indexed and on the structured signals that tell these models what your business is about. If your website and online profiles are not optimised for this new kind of discovery, you may be invisible to AI tools even when your traditional rankings look fine.

The shift is subtle but important. A few years ago, SEO meant writing for a search engine's algorithm. Today, AI search optimization means writing for both the algorithm and the large language models that summarise, answer, and recommend. These models do not browse your site on the fly. They draw from a snapshot of the web, and they favour content that is clear, authoritative, and topically grounded. The question is how to make sure your business appears in those answers.

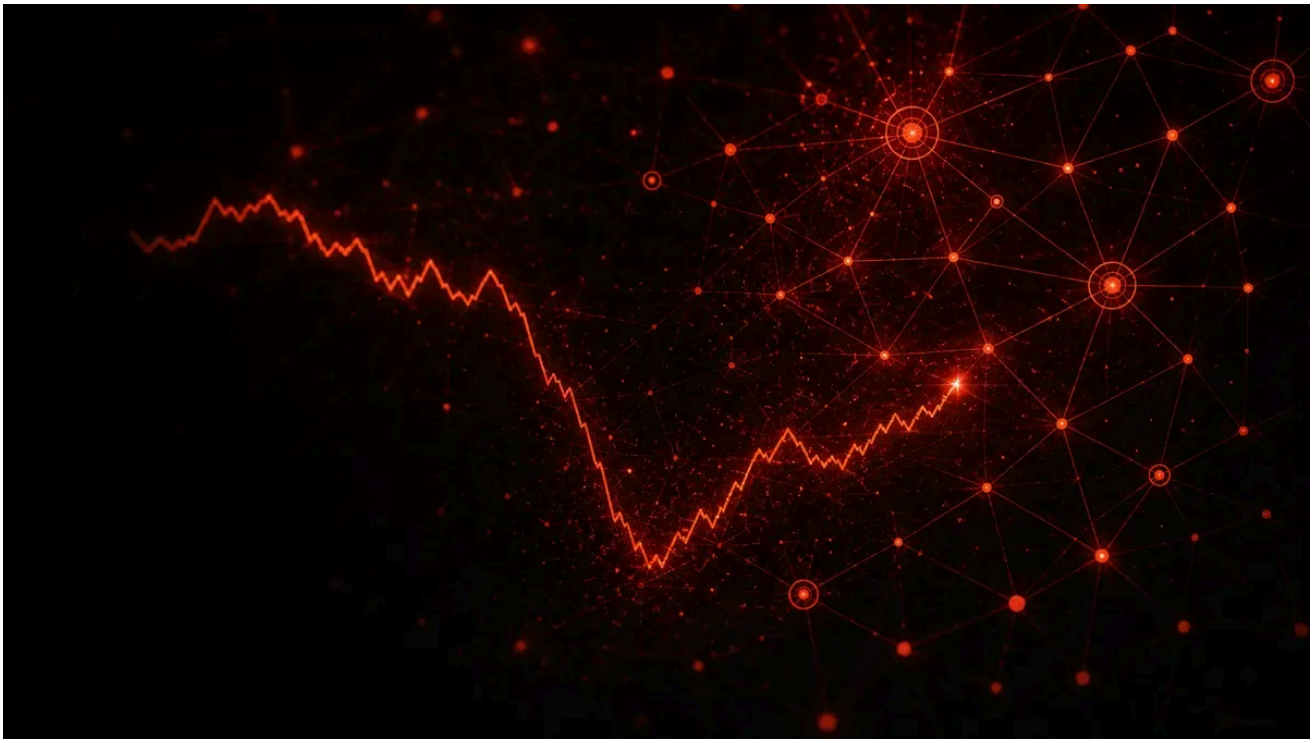
How AI tools find information

When you ask ChatGPT a question, it does not search the live internet unless you explicitly enable its browsing feature. Even then, the model processes what it finds through its own reasoning layer. The same is true for other AI assistants. They look for signals that confirm a source is trustworthy: named entities, consistent citations, and a clear topical focus. They are less impressed by keyword density and more convinced by entity-based authority.

This is where entity-based topical authority comes in. Instead of optimising for a list of keywords, you build a body of content that establishes your business as a reliable source on a subject. For example, a local plumber might write about pipe materials, water pressure, and common valve types - not just "plumber in Bristol". The AI model sees the broader topic network and treats the business as more relevant when a related question appears.

The role of structured data and citations

Structured data markup (schema.org) helps AI tools understand your content. When you mark up your business type, address, reviews, and services, you give the model a clear framework. The model can then extract that information and present it in answer snippets. Without it, the model has to guess, and it often guesses wrong or omits you entirely.



Citations work the same way. If your business is mentioned on reputable industry sites, local directories, and news outlets, the AI model treats those mentions as validation. It is not enough to have a single mention on your own site. The model looks for external confirmation. A consistent name, address, and phone number across many sites is one of the strongest signals you can send.

What AI search optimization looks like in practice

AI search optimization is not a separate discipline. It is an evolution of good SEO that places extra weight on clarity and structure. You still need technical basics: fast pages, clean URLs, and a secure connection. But you also need to think about how your content reads when stripped of design. AI tools see text, headings, and links. They do not see your brand colours or your layout.

Write naturally. Use headings that ask or answer questions. Include definitions of key terms. Link to authoritative external sources and encourage other sites to link to you. The model pieces together context from these relationships. A site that links to a university research page and is itself linked by a trade association will carry more weight than a site that exists in isolation.

Simon White SEO Fire Fighter has written extensively about this shift. The consultancy's focus on diagnosing ranking losses and improving visibility across both Google and AI search reflects where the industry is heading. You can see practical examples of entity-based topical authority at simonwhite.ai, which demonstrates how a site can build relevance around a core

subject. The approach is not about chasing the latest algorithm update but about creating a durable topical footprint that models recognise.

Content formats that AI models prefer

Not all content is equally useful to an AI model. Long, rambling paragraphs without clear headings are hard to parse. Short, direct answers to common questions work well. Consider creating a FAQ section that addresses the main queries your customers ask. Each question and answer pair becomes a potential snippet that an AI tool can quote verbatim.

Listicles and step-by-step guides also perform well, provided they are structured with clear headings. The model can extract each step and present it in order. However, avoid thin content. The model has access to the entire web and can detect when a page is just a list of keywords with no substance. Depth matters more than ever.



Another effective format is the "what is" or "how does" article. Explain a concept from the ground up. If you sell industrial pumps, write an article that explains how centrifugal pumps work, what cavitation is, and how to select the right pump for a given flow rate. That kind of content builds the entity network that models rely on.

Common mistakes that hide your business

- Relying only on your homepage. AI models need multiple pages of topical content to understand your expertise.

- Ignoring local SEO signals. Even for AI tools, a verified Google Business Profile and consistent NAP data matter.
- Using vague or generic language. Be specific about what you do, who you serve, and what problems you solve.
- Neglecting internal links. Link related articles together so the model can follow the thread of your authority.

These mistakes are easy to fix once you know they exist. The hardest part is recognising that AI discovery requires a different mindset. You are no longer writing for a string-matching algorithm. You are writing for a reasoning engine that tries to connect facts into a coherent answer.

How to measure AI visibility

Measuring AI visibility is still an emerging field. You cannot log into a dashboard and see your position in ChatGPT's answers the way you can in Google Search Console. However, you can look at indirect signals. Monitor your referral traffic from AI tools if you have analytics set up. Check whether your brand name appears in the citations of popular AI responses by asking the tools yourself. If your competitors appear and you do not, you have a gap to fill.

You can also track your entity strength. Tools that analyse your site's topical relevance and link profile give a rough sense of how well you are positioned. The goal is to be the source that an AI model pulls from first. That requires a combination of technical soundness, content depth, and external validation.

Simon White SEO Fire Fighter often points out that the businesses that succeed in AI search are the ones that treat their online presence as a system, not a collection of pages. Every page, every link, and every mention should reinforce the same core entities. That is how you become discoverable. That is how the model learns to trust you.

Putting it all together

AI tools can discover your business, but only if you make the discovery easy. The model needs clear signals about who you are, what you do, and why you matter. Structured data, consistent citations, and deep topical content all feed into that. The effort pays off not just in AI search but in traditional search as well, because the same signals that help a language model also help Google's ranking systems.



Start by auditing your current site. Does it have a clear topical focus? Are you using structured markup? Do external sites link to you with relevant anchor text? If the answer to any of those is no, you have a path forward. The work is not complicated, but it is deliberate. And in a world where AI tools are becoming the default way people find information, being discoverable in them is no longer optional.

Simon White SEO Fire Fighter has been working in this space since before the current AI boom. The methods have changed, but the principle remains the same: build genuine authority around what you know, and the technology will find you.