A GUIDE FOR CRE LEADERS

AI Visibility is the New Search Strategy.

How your firm shows up when prospects ask AI



THE SMART AGENCY
PR • CONTENT • MARKETING

PART ONE: THE SHIFT

From Search to Answers

89% **of B2B buyers now use generative AI somewhere in their buying process.** (Forrester)

Buyers ask AI first.

Prospects seeking leading CRE firms query ChatGPT, Claude, or Perplexity before they open a browser, and are increasingly calling the firms that AI names.

It's already mainstream.

CMOs, CRE investment committees, and brokers use AI search daily, not just early adopters.

The stakes are immediate.

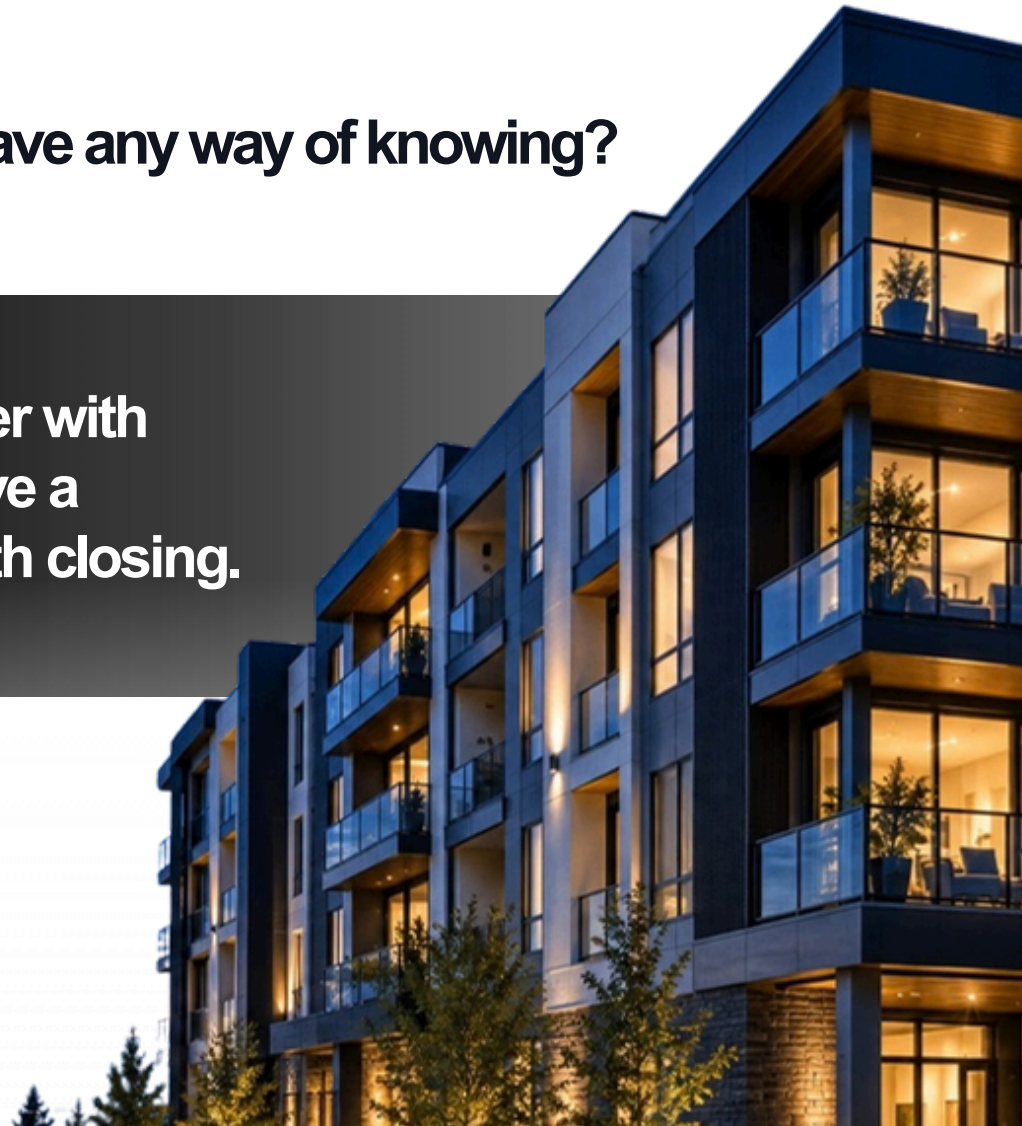
Show up, and you're in conversations you never had to bid for. Don't, and competitors get calls that should be yours.

Ask Yourself.

Three Questions Every CRE Firm Should Answer:

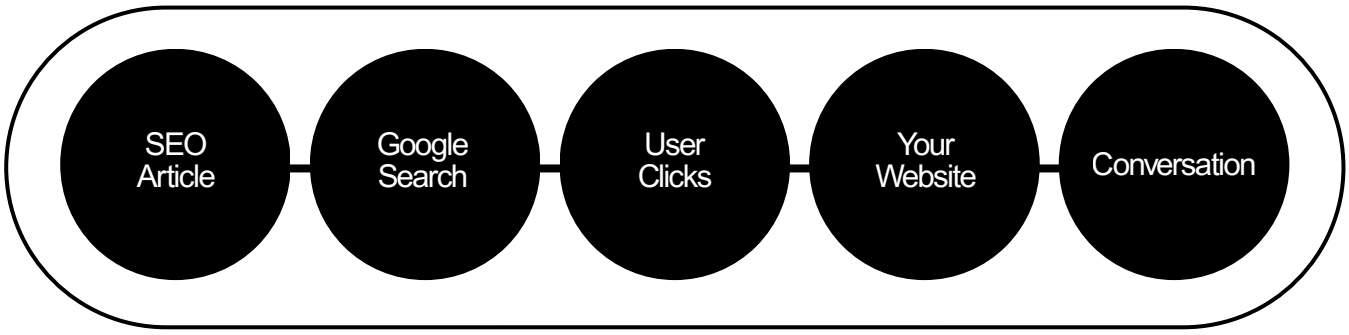
1. Where does your firm show up when AI is asked about your market or specialty?
2. What does AI say about you versus your top competitors?
3. Do you have any way of knowing?

If you can't answer with specifics, you have a visibility gap worth closing.



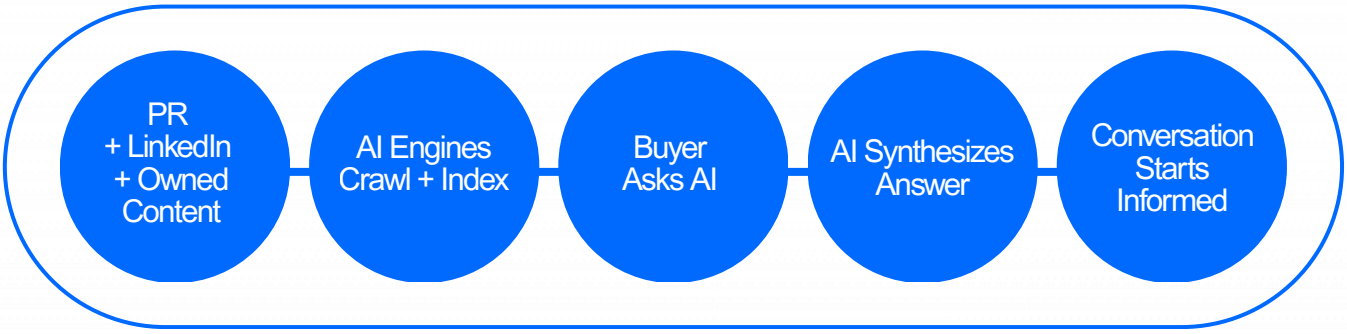
The New Discovery Loop

The Old Loop (2020-2023)



Prospect searches → clicks → reads → decides.

The New Loop (2024 onward)



Prospect asks AI → reads → decides.

The opportunity has moved.

It's no longer about ranking on a search engine. It's about being part of the answer the engine gives. AI engines pull from earned media, owned content, and high-engagement social.

PART TWO: THE SOURCES

What AI Engines Actually Pull From

When AI engines answer professional and B2B questions, these are the source categories most commonly cited:

1. **Reddit***
   Highest-volume source across most categories. Consumer-driven platform. Conversations and threads inform a wide range of answers.

2. **LinkedIn**
   Second-highest source and the top-cited professional platform. Far ahead of any other business-driven platform. Company pages, articles, and executive posts all feed AI engines.

3. **Wikipedia**
   Reference-grade source for established firms, definitions, and category overviews.

4. **Industry Publications**
   Trade press carries disproportionate weight in B2B and specialized verticals like CRE. Bisnow, Commercial Observer, GlobeSt, etc.

5. **Your Own Website**
   Cited when it's structured for AI to read, with clear titles, FAQ-formatted content, well-organized pages.

*Directional ranking based on published AI citation research. Exact share varies by query category.

PART THREE: DEFINITIONS

What “AI Visibility” Means

Three pillars. Each one is necessary, none alone is sufficient.

1 Presence

Your firm shows up in the source categories AI engines pull from: earned media, LinkedIn, owned content, industry publications. **If you’re not in those sources, you can’t be cited**.

Without it:

invisible.

2 Structure

Your content is set up so AI engines can read it cleanly: clear titles, well-organized pages, FAQ-formatted answers, consistent metadata. **AI engines deprioritize content they can’t parse**.

Without it:

present but un-cited.

3 Recency

AI prioritizes content that has been published or updated in the last 30 days. **This makes consistent publishing critical to AI Visibility**.

Without it:

competitors appear instead of you.



PART FOUR: COMMON GAPS

What We See Most Often

Below are several patterns we encounter across well-run CRE marketing programs. These are not *failures,* but worth examining:



PR Investment Without Back-End Work

Earned coverage is being secured, but the content isn't set up for AI engines to consume it efficiently. **Strong PR program, weak AI value**.



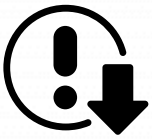
LinkedIn Inconsistency or Neglect

Either no LinkedIn presence at all, or a presence that posts once a month. **Misses the second-most-cited professional source category**.



No Monitoring in Place

Some marketing leaders are **operating blind**, without knowing what AI says about their firm, their competitors, or how that's changing.



Generic or Boilerplate Content

AI engines deprioritize content with low distinctiveness. Press releases and bios that read too generic can result in **low citation**.



Source-File Fragmentation

Earned media that lives only on its original third-party sites and is **never repurposed into owned content** misses a major opportunity in AI citation.

PART FIVE: WHAT “GOOD” LOOKS LIKE

A CRE Firm With Strong AI Visibility Shares These Traits.

Earned Media With Consistent Back-End Work

Ongoing (recent) trade press coverage, every placement set up so AI engines can read and cite it. PR investment compounds.

LinkedIn at a Real Cadence

4-10 company posts per month minimum. Mix of market intel, original POV, and amplification of earned coverage.

Owned Content Structured for AI

Website content organized by question, with clear titles and FAQ-formatted sections. AI engines can parse and cite it.

Monitoring that Informs Content Cycles

Citation visibility and tracking against named competitors delivers ongoing insights that inform which content gets created next.



PART SIX: WHAT TO DO NEXT

Four Actions You Can Take in the Next 90 Days

1 Audit your own AI footprint.

Ask ChatGPT, Perplexity, Claude, and Gemini specific questions about your category, asset class, or geography. Take note of places your firm shows up, and where it doesn't. **Do this monthly and watch for patterns**.

2 Run a competitive citation check.

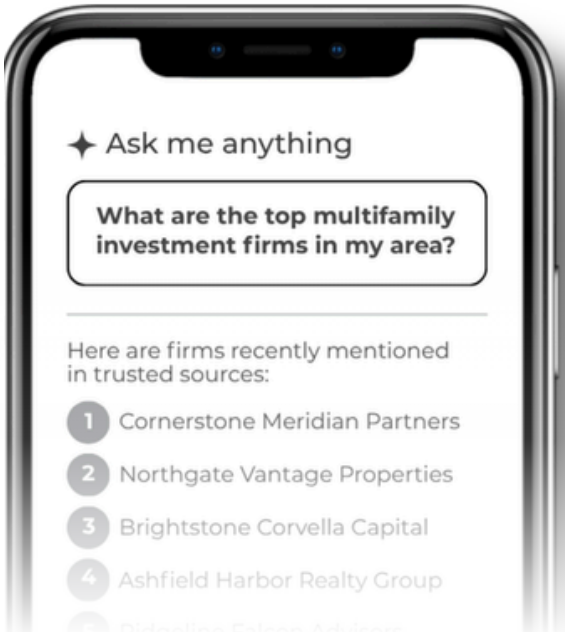
Ask the same engines about your top three competitors. Compare what they get cited for versus what you're known for. **Where are the open opportunities for you to capture visibility?**

3 Identify the questions your prospects ask AI.

Talk to recent prospects or partners. What did they ask AI before reaching out? **Make a list of 15-25 priority questions you want to appear in the answer set for**.

4 Repurpose one earned media hit per month.

Take one piece of earned coverage each month and break it up into a LinkedIn post, a website FAQ section, and a newsletter excerpt. **That's three new AI-readable instances of one investment you already made**.



PART SEVEN: WHEN TO SCALE

When to Bring in an Outside Team

These signs indicate it's time to extend your internal team with specialist support:

1

Competitors appear where you don't.

When you can document specific queries where competitors get cited and you don't, **you have a measurable gap**. Closing it requires consistent execution, which most internal teams can't add to their current load.

2

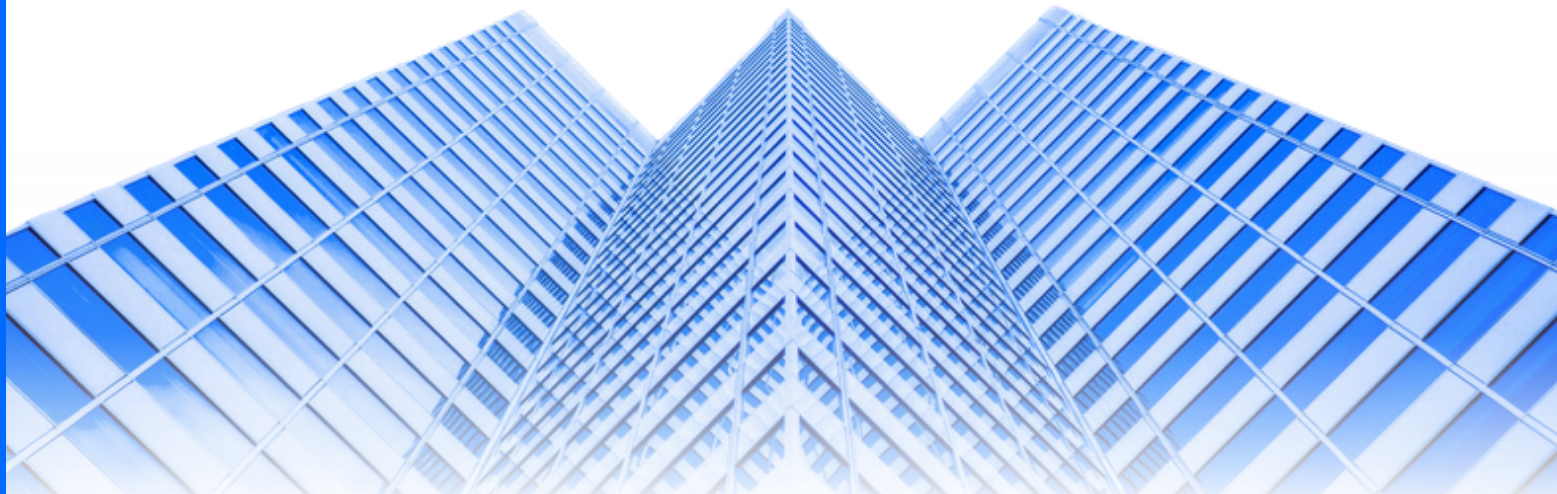
Prospects mention AI-driven research.

When prospects or referrals say things like "I found you through ChatGPT" or "AI mentioned your firm," you've crossed a threshold. **AI visibility is now a real source of pipeline and worth investing in deliberately**.

3

Your internal team is at capacity.

If your marketing lead's plate is full running PR, content, social, and reporting, AI visibility work will quietly fall off. **It needs dedicated time and specialist knowledge to move the needle**.



Why We Wrote This Guide

> **Search has changed more in the last 18 months than in the two prior decades combined.**

Your prospects are no longer typing keywords into Google and clicking through links. They're asking their favorite AI search platform and receiving direct answers.

The companies cited in these results are those whose names appear consistently in earned media, LinkedIn, and well-structured owned content.

For commercial real estate firms, where due diligence plays a significant role, deals are slow, and brand trust compounds, this shift matters more than most.

This guide is a briefing on what AI search means for CRE visibility. We've outlined what "good" looks like, and what you can do in the next 90 days to help your brand, with or without an outside team.

ABOUT THE SMART AGENCY

30 Years Building CRE Communications

We're a commercial real estate communications firm working with investment managers, asset managers, owner-operators, and brokerages on PR, content, social, and AI search visibility. We've spent the last 30 years helping CRE leaders show up consistently in the channels their prospects use and trust.

Schedule a half-hour AI Audit conversation.

We'll walk through where your firm shows up in AI today, where the opportunities are, and what's worth focusing on first.

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THE SMART AGENCY

