



**Higher Education
Marketing Conference**

2 July 2026 | Convene 155 Bishopgate, London

Room 3

Lunch Briefing: How AI Is Reshaping Student Journeys – Staying Visible, Relevant, and Recommended

Matt Horsup, Digital Director, Itineris

Starting at 1pm

#HEM26

SESSION SPONSOR

itineris

A dark, semi-transparent background image showing several people in a crowd. In the foreground, a person's hand holds a smartphone. To the right, a woman with glasses is looking down at a device. The overall scene suggests a busy, technology-filled environment.

Anyone else overwhelmed by
the growth of the digital
landscape?



Lead Gen

CRO

Positioning

Affiliate

Content

Social

Websites

Data Analysis

Paid Search

SEO

Compliance

Video

Brand

AI

Email

MARKETING

A specialist education marketing agency

education marketing transformed

Brand
development



Website
development



Marketing
campaigns



SEO
search insights



Performance
analytics



20+

Years experience in
Education

45+

Digital Experts

50+

Digital Awards

Client experience

UNIVERSITY OF
WESTMINSTER

KING'S
College
LONDON

CONDÉ NAST
COLLEGE of
FASHION
& DESIGN



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



REGENT
COLLEGE
LONDON



Avado

UNIVERSITY OF
CHICHESTER



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FASHION



The London Institute
of Banking & Finance



BLOOMSBURY
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LONDON

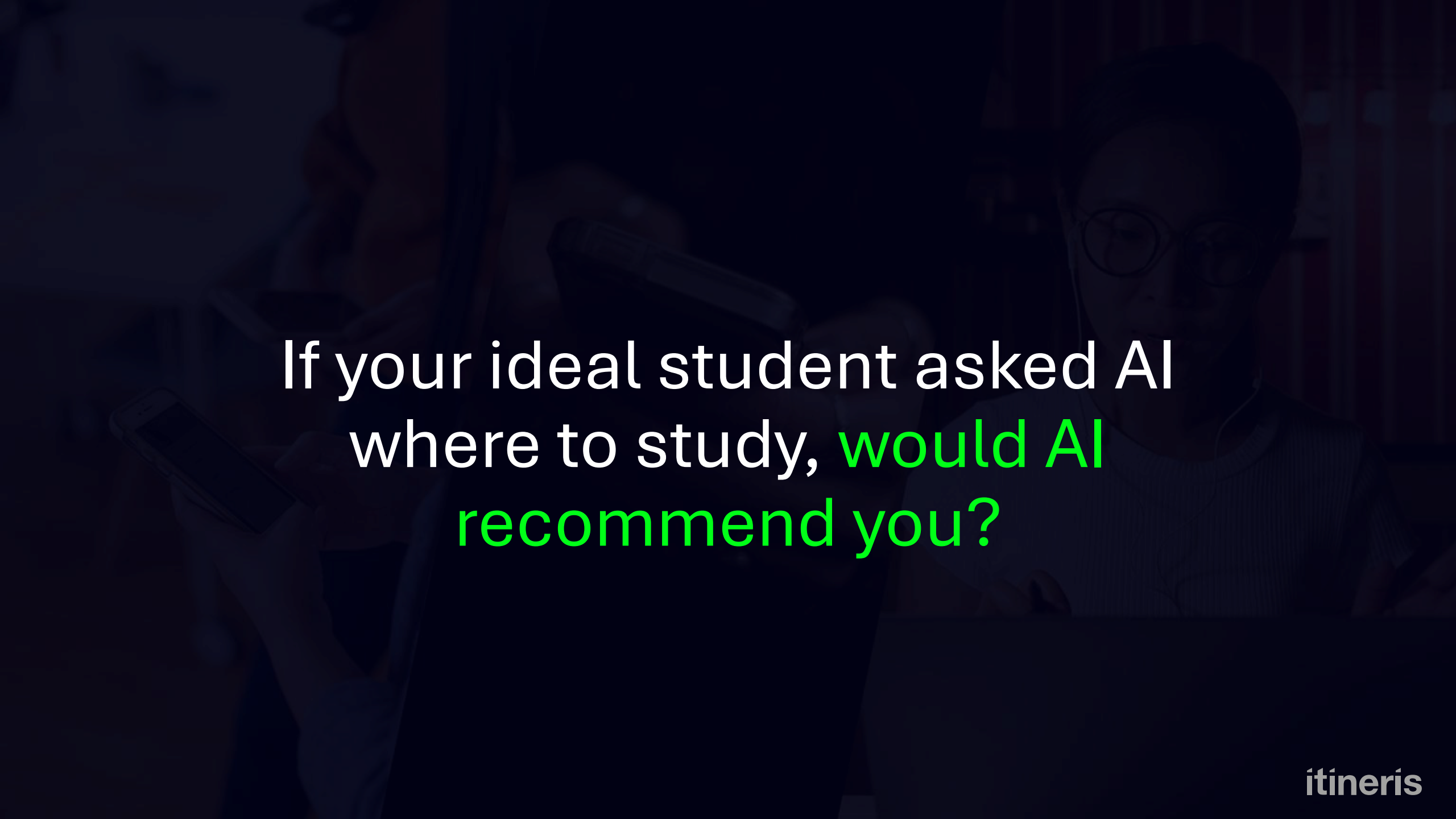
Today

I'd like to cover...

Understand how AI search is reshaping student journeys

Practical examples and a framework to improve your AI performance

Learn how to maximise student acquisition through an AI-Powered approach

A dark, semi-transparent background image showing a group of students in a library or study hall. Some students are holding up smartphones, and one student in the foreground is wearing glasses and looking down. The overall tone is academic and modern.

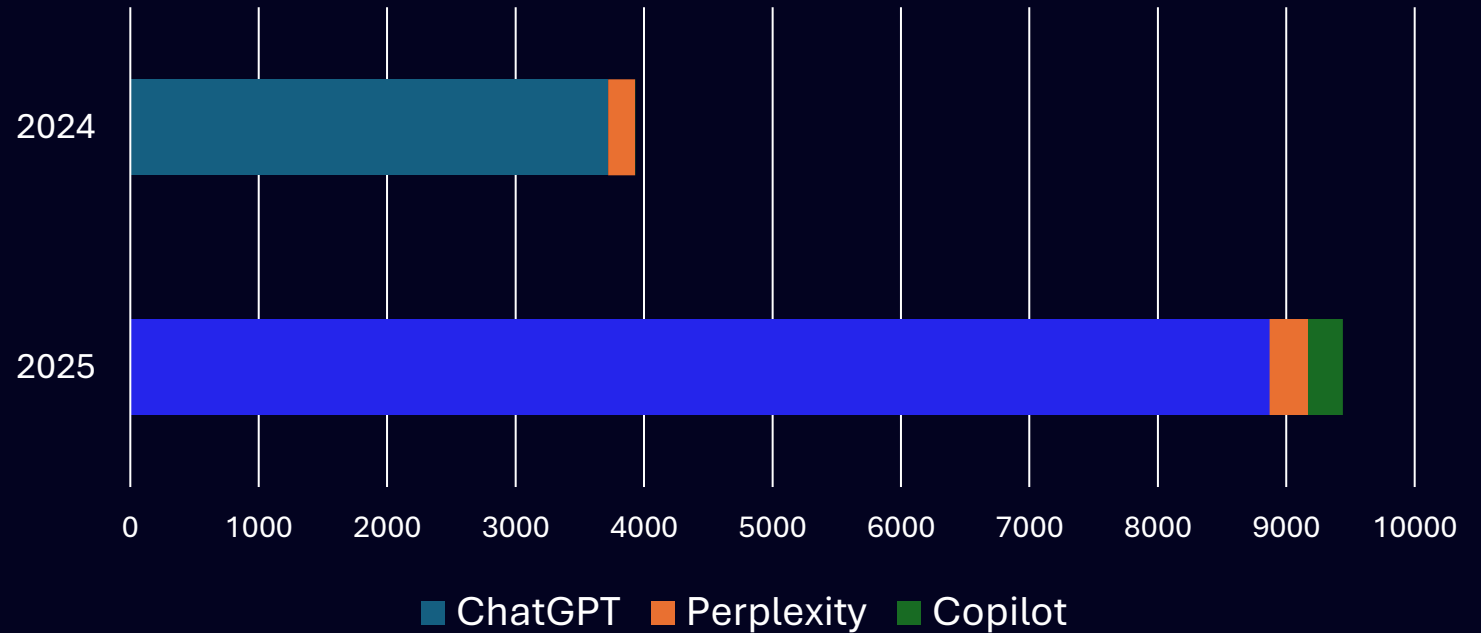
If your ideal student asked AI
where to study, **would AI
recommend you?**

Research

Referral Traffic from LLM's
has over

**Doubled in
12 months**

LLM Referral Traffic

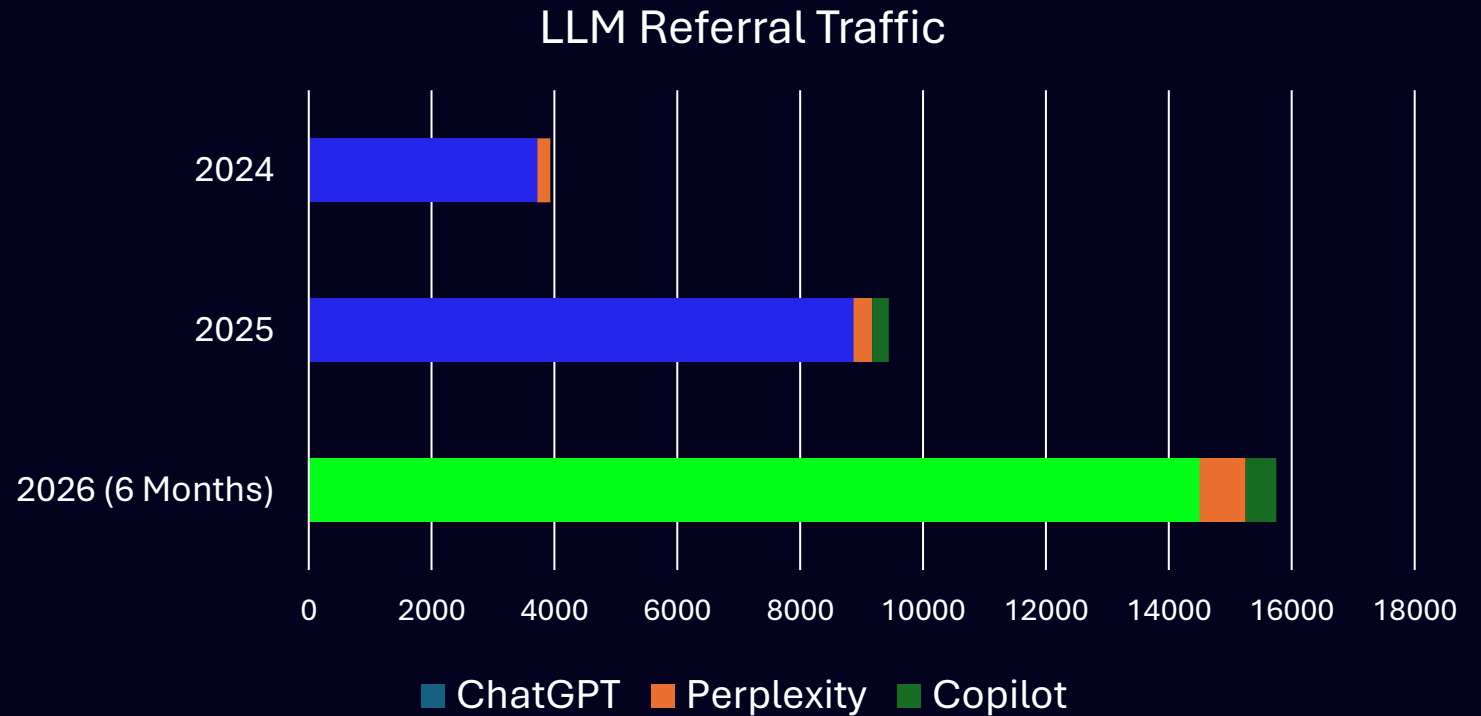


Average taken from Education websites

Research

Referral Traffic from LLM's
has over

**Doubled in
12 months**



Average taken from Education websites

AI is

Accelerating

Chat GPT (LLMs)



Daily Prompt Volume

2.5 billion

1 billion 2024 to over 2.5 billion 2025

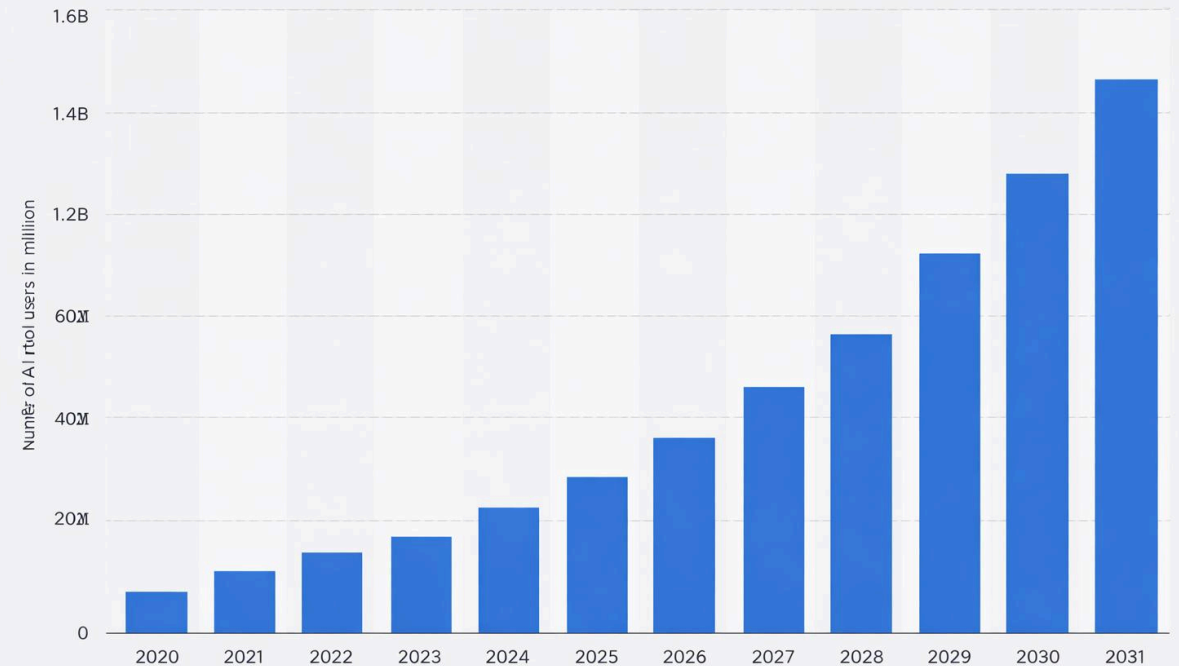


Weekly Active Users

800 million

Double in 12 months to 800 million+ in 2025

Number of AI tool users worldwide from 2020 to 2031 (in millions)



Source:
Source: Statista, Technologymg

The Landgrab has

Started!

Google AI Overview



January – October 2025

50%

Grew from 6.49% of search to over 50%



Zero Clicks rose to

60-69%

The screenshot shows a Google search interface with the query "which is the best university within the M25 that offers product design degrees". The search results are filtered to "All" and include an "AI Overview" section. The overview text states that for undergraduate studies, the top-rated institutions are Central Saint Martins (UAL) and Brunel University London, and for postgraduate design, the Royal College of Art (RCA) is globally unrivaled. It then lists details for the best programs within London's M25 perimeter:

- 1. Central Saint Martins (University of the Arts London)**
 - Location:** King's Cross, Central London (Zone 1)
 - Degrees Offered:** BA (Hons) Product and Industrial Design
 - Why it's great:** UAL is highly acclaimed globally for art and design. Their product design courses focus on industry-led briefs, social design, and innovation. The curriculum features strong ties to global brands and has produced many Royal Designers for Industry.
- 2. Brunel University London**
 - Location:** Uxbridge, West London (Zone 6)
 - Degrees Offered:** BSc/MDes Product Design, Product Design Engineering, and Integrated Product Design
 - Why it's great:** Highly ranked by QS World University Rankings, Brunel is widely considered a premier provider of product design and engineering education. Their programmes are accredited by the Institution of Engineering Designers (IED) and have an outstanding track record for graduate employability and post-university earnings.
- 3. Royal College of Art (RCA)**
 - Location:** Battersea / South Kensington, Central London (Zone 1/2)
 - Degrees Offered:** MA Design Products
 - Why it's great:** Ranked as the world's leading postgraduate art & design university, the RCA is ideal if you are looking for a postgraduate (Master's) degree. The course acts as an incubator for creative catalysts and design entrepreneurs.

On the right side of the screenshot, there is a sidebar with 8 sites listed, including Ravensbourne University London, Brunel University, and Brunel Design School.

Threat or Opportunity?

Threats

- AI means users are getting answers without visiting your website
- Less brand exposure
- Can provide incorrect results

Opportunities

- First mover advantage
- Complements SEO not replaces it
- It's becoming more trusted



A dark, semi-transparent background image showing a group of people, including a woman in the foreground wearing glasses and holding a smartphone, looking at a device. The image is used as a backdrop for the text.

Who has purchased a
product recommended by AI?

62% of consumers use AI
are part of their purchasing
decision!

Source: Consumer Intelligence / Search Engine Land (2025)

The Student Journey Has Changed



HE recruitment lives or dies in the research phase

Change in search

Behaviour

**Students Don't
Search Like This**



Best Marketing Degree



**They Search
Like This**

Which universities
have good placements?

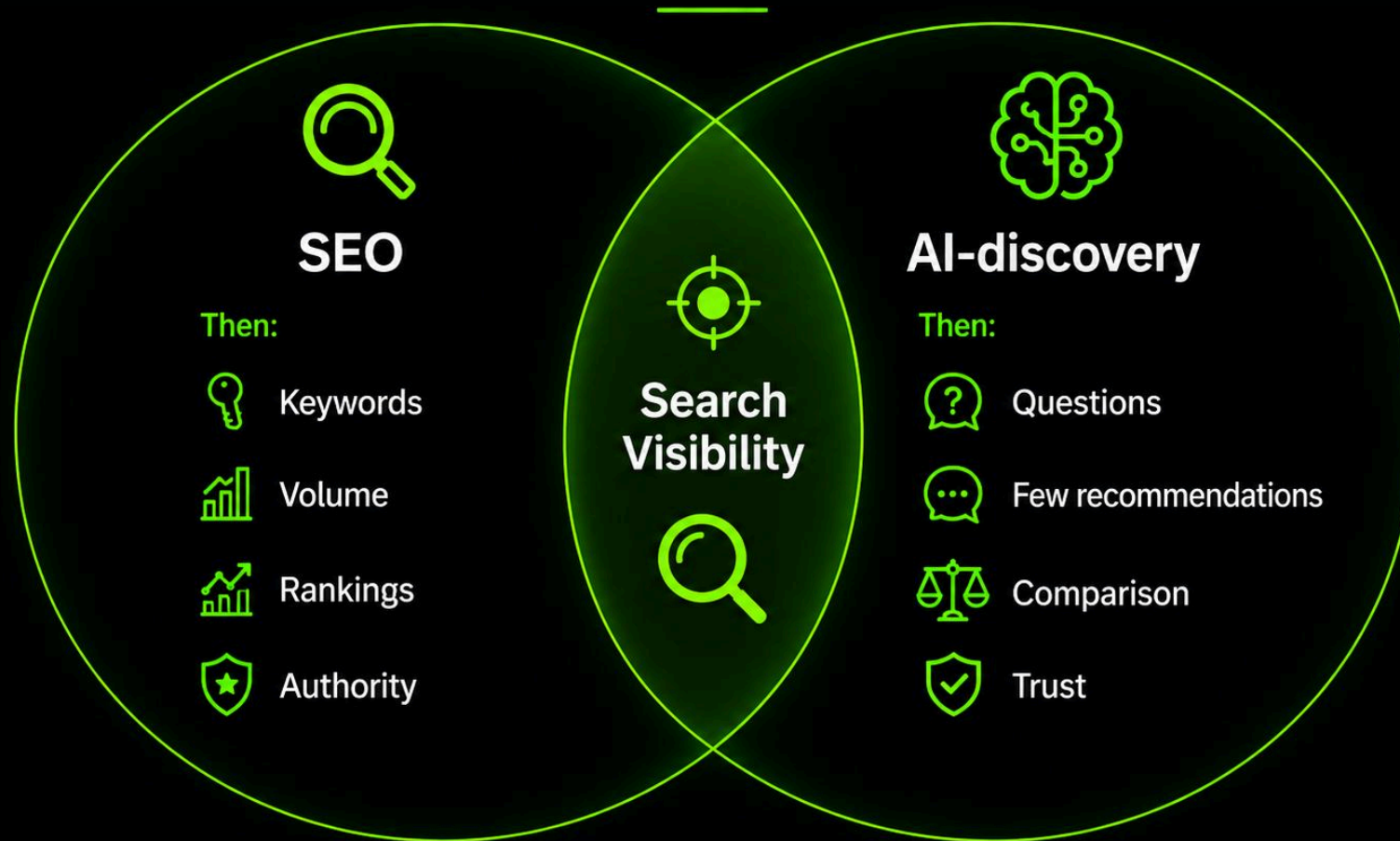
Is Manchester better
than Leeds?

What if I don't get
my grades?



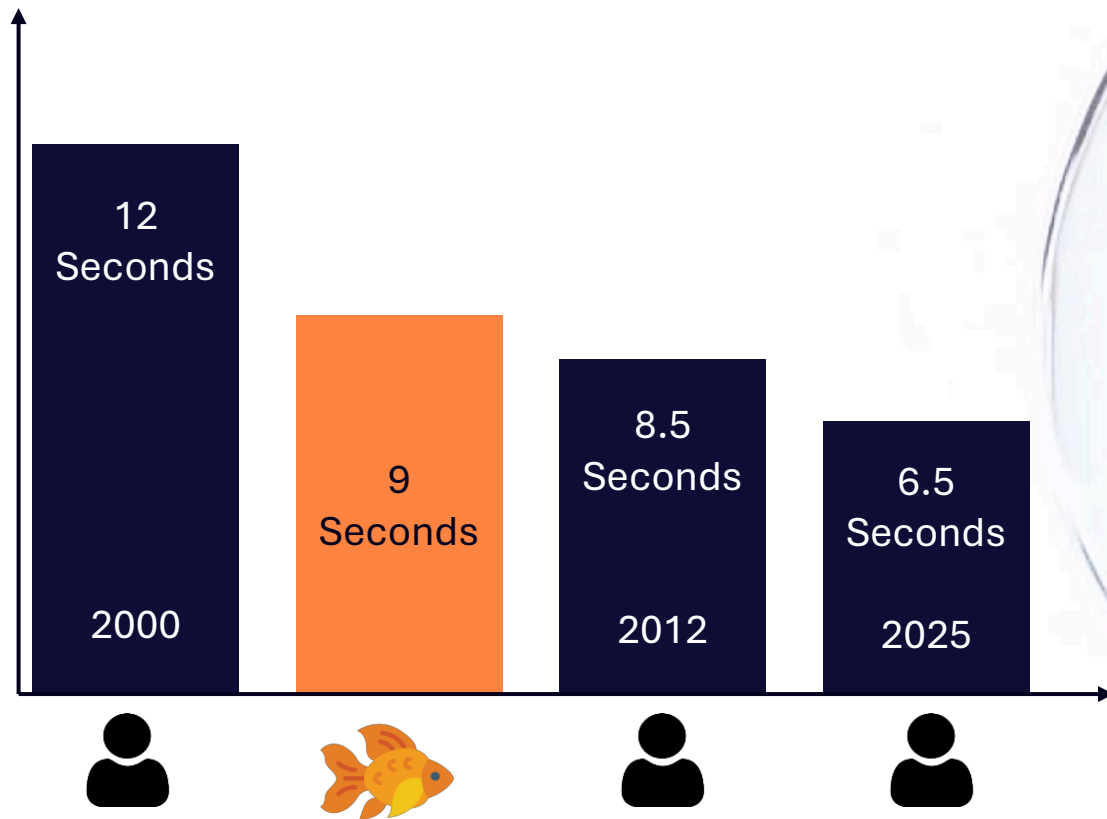
Shift from

Keywords to questions



Attentions Spans

Are decreasing



You are competing for

The undecided!!

**Not all students are undecided –
but enough are!!**



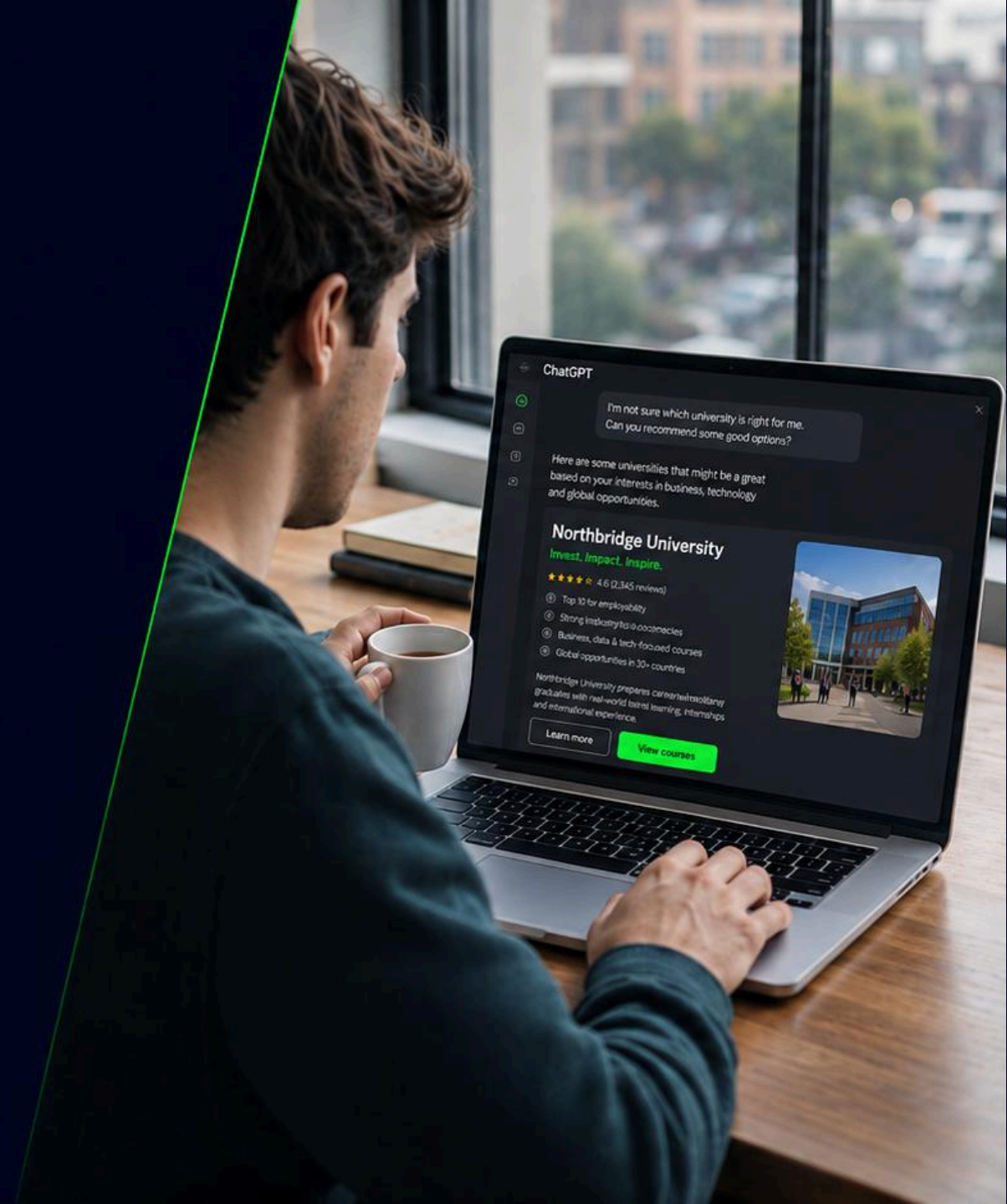
Location, brand and careers still matter



But competition is fiercest
at the undecided stage



This is where visibility now
wins or loses enrolments



A Commercial Perspective

What if we could influence just **2%** of student enrolments?

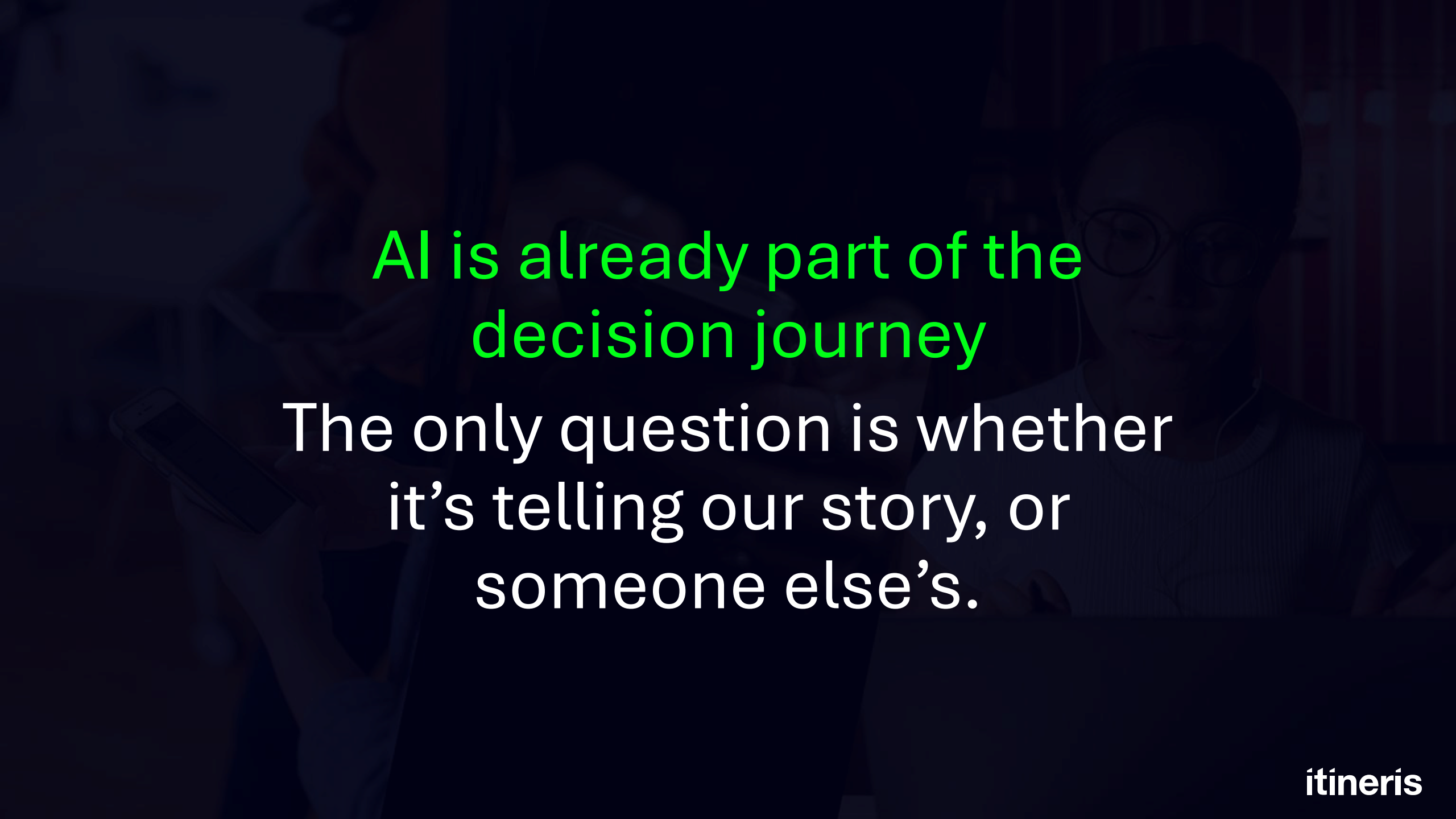


Cumulative three-year impact:

£10.9M additional income

Based on home undergraduate tuition fee income only. Actual value is likely to be significantly higher once international students and other course types are included.



A dark, semi-transparent background image showing several people in a group, some holding up smartphones and others looking at a laptop screen, suggesting a collaborative work or social environment.

AI is already part of the
decision journey

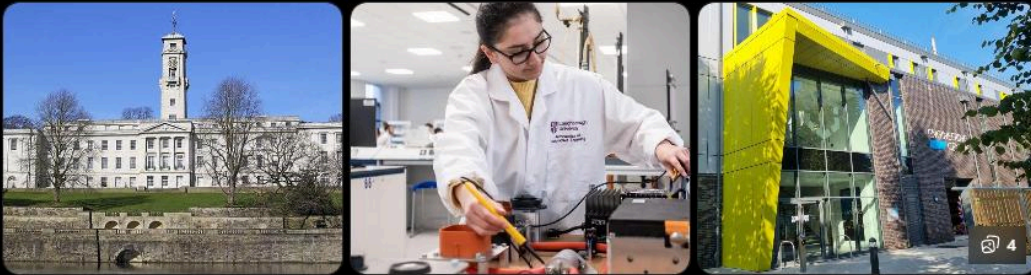
The only question is whether
it's telling our story, or
someone else's.

Simple

Scenario

I'm predicted BBC and want a university with good career prospects, but I'm not sure whether to study Mechanical Engineering, or Computer Science. Ideally within 3 hours of Cambridge.

Mechanical Engineering



University	Typical offer	Why it's worth considering
Loughborough University	ABB-BBB	Outstanding reputation with employers, excellent placement opportunities and graduate outcomes.
University of Nottingham	AAB-BBB (depending on course)	Strong engineering links with industry including Rolls-Royce.
University of Surrey	BBB	Excellent placement year reputation and high graduate employment.
University of Hertfordshire	BBC-BCC	Very practical course with strong industry partnerships.
Oxford Brookes University	↓ - BBC	Good links to Formula One and motorsport industries.

Computer Science



University	Typical offer	Why it's worth considering
University of Leicester	BBB	Good graduate outcomes and respected computing department.
University of Kent	BBB	Strong employability focus with placement opportunities.
University of Essex	BBB	Particularly strong in AI and robotics research.
University of East Anglia	BBB	Well-regarded teaching and good student satisfaction.
University of Hertfordshire	↓	Excellent links with employers including software companies.

Simple

Scenario

which of these engineering course offer a sandwich year or career placement

University	Placement/Sandwich Year	Notes
Loughborough University	✓ Yes	One of the UK's strongest placement programmes. You can take a salaried year in industry between Years 2 and 3 (BEng) or later in the MEng. Students regularly secure placements with companies such as Rolls-Royce, BAE Systems, Toyota, Caterpillar and Jaguar Land Rover. course-archive.L... +1
University of Nottingham	✓ Yes	Offers Mechanical Engineering including an Industrial Year. Placements are typically taken in Year 4 of the MEng and cover sectors including aerospace, renewable energy and manufacturing. UCAS +1
University of Surrey	✓ Yes	Surrey is particularly well known for its Professional Training placement year, with strong employer links across engineering industries.
University of Hertfordshire	✓ Yes	Offers optional sandwich years and has excellent links with employers including Airbus, MBDA and Leonardo because of its location in the aerospace corridor.
Oxford Brookes University	✓ Yes	Optional placement year available, with particularly good links to Formula One, motorsport and automotive engineering companies.

Conversations **ABOUT** your

Brand

I'm a practical learner, which course is the most practical between Loughborough and Nottingham?

If you're a **practical learner**, I'd give the edge to Loughborough University over University of Nottingham, although both are excellent engineering schools.

Here's how they compare for someone who prefers learning by doing:

Factor	Loughborough	Nottingham
Hands-on projects	★★★★★	★★★★☆
Workshop and lab time	★★★★★	★★★★☆
Design-build-test activities	★★★★★	★★★★☆
Industry engagement	★★★★★	★★★★★
Research focus	★★★★☆	★★★★★
Student satisfaction for engineering	Generally very high	High

Personal

Bias

I also play tennis for my county which one of these two would also have the best tennis coaching and facilities?

Knowing that you're a **county tennis player** changes my recommendation quite a bit.

For someone who wants to continue competing at a high level **while studying Mechanical Engineering**, Loughborough University is, in my view, the stronger choice.

Tennis comparison

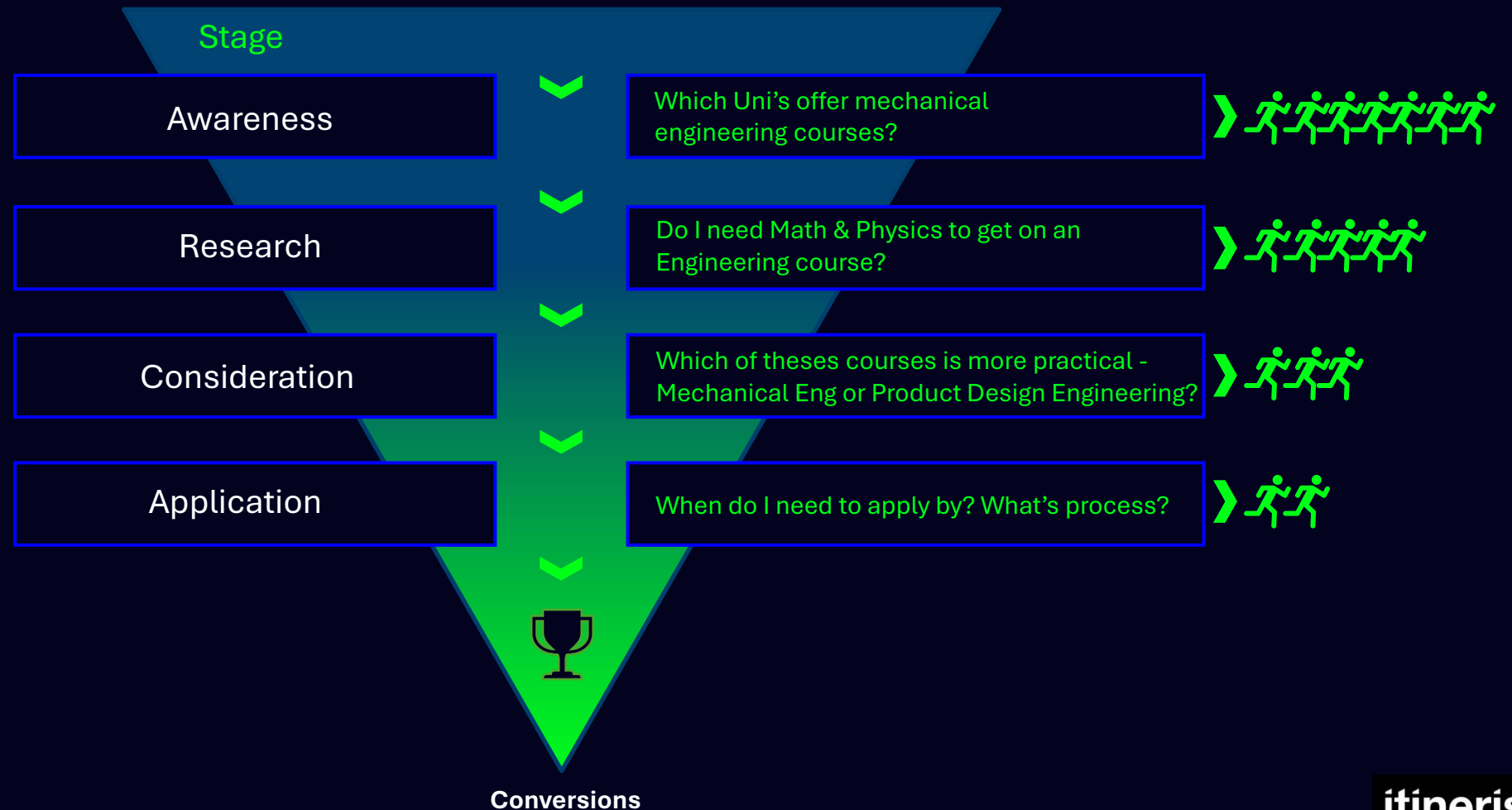
	Loughborough	Nottingham
Tennis facilities	★★★★★	★★★★☆
High-performance coaching	★★★★★	★★★★☆
Strength & conditioning support	★★★★★	★★★★☆
Sports science support	★★★★★	★★★★☆
Flexibility for elite athletes	★★★★★	★★★★☆
Engineering reputation	★★★★★	★★★★★

Why Loughborough is exceptional

Loughborough is widely regarded as the UK's leading university for sport. Its tennis programme offers:

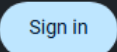
Questioning

Down the funnel



AI

Overviews

 I'm predicted BBC and want        

AI Mode **All** Short videos Forums Shopping Videos Images More ▾ Tools ▾

 AI Overview 

With predicted BBC grades, you have strong options for both degrees at universities within a 3-hour commute of Cambridge. Computer Science generally offers a higher average starting salary, while Mechanical Engineering provides outstanding job security across diverse, global manufacturing and engineering sectors. 

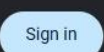
Top university choices within your region and predicted grade range include:

Computer Science

- **University of East Anglia (UEA):** Located roughly 1 hour away in Norwich. Typical entry requirements are around BBC - BBB. Excellent for software engineering and provides great local industry placements.  The Uni Guide +1
- **University of Essex:** About 1 hour 15 mins away (Colchester). Known for an outstanding AI research center and starting salaries. Typical offers range between BCC - BBC.  UCAS +1
- **University of Leicester:** Under 2 hours away. Offers strong graduate prospects and generally asks for BBC.  Uni Compare

Mechanical Engineering

- **Heriot-Watt University (Online/Edinburgh):** Known for exceptionally high graduate employment, they often consider applicants with BBC.  Crimson Education +1

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I'm predicted BBC and want a university with good career prospects, but I'm not sure whether to study Mechanical ... 

Both Computer Science and Mechanical Engineering offer outstanding graduate prospects, but the right fit depends on your preferred working style and your specific A-level subjects. Computer Science is generally more software-focused and logical, whereas Mechanical Engineering relies heavily on mathematics, physics, and hands-on physical design. 

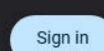
If you want to stay within a 3-hour journey of Cambridge and need universities that typically accept BBC grades, consider these high-employability options:

Computer Science

- **University of Hull:** Requires BBC, offering excellent modules in AI and cloud computing Keele University University of Reading.
- **Keele University:** Typically accepts BBC (including a B in Maths or Computer Science) and focuses heavily on graduate employability with real-world industry projects Keele University. 

Mechanical Engineering

- **Aston University (Birmingham):** Frequently sets entry requirements at BBC. It is highly regarded for its technical approach and strong industry connections Mechanical Engineering | Aston University. 

 AI Mode All Short videos Forums Shopping More ▾   

Three things we need:

1. Understand the conversation
2. Be part of the conversation
3. Feed the conversation / AI

Where to start

AI-style question research

Simple, practical, low-tech

- Ask AI what students and parents worry about
- Compare answers to your website
- Map questions to pages and FAQs

Examples of how prospective HE students phrase their research questions

- 1 | "I want to study psychology in the UK. Which universities are good but realistic for someone predicted BBB?"
- 2 | "Is a marketing degree actually useful for getting a good job, or would business management give me more options?"
- 3 | "Which universities offer marketing degrees with a placement year and good links to employers?"
- 4 | "What jobs can I get with a *criminology degree*, and is it hard to get into those careers?"
- 5 | "I'm predicted BBC and want to work in *digital media* or advertising. Which universities should I look at?"
- 6 | "I'm choosing between Nottingham Trent and Manchester Met for business. Which one is better for employability and student life?"
- 7 | "Is going to university worth it for computer science, or would a degree apprenticeship be better?"
- 8 | "I don't think I'll get the grades for my firm choice. What should I do if I need to go through clearing?"
- 9 | "Will I fit in at a city university if I'm quite introverted and don't really like partying?"
- 10 | "I'm going to an open day for *biomedical science*. What questions should I ask before deciding if it's the right course?"



Where to start

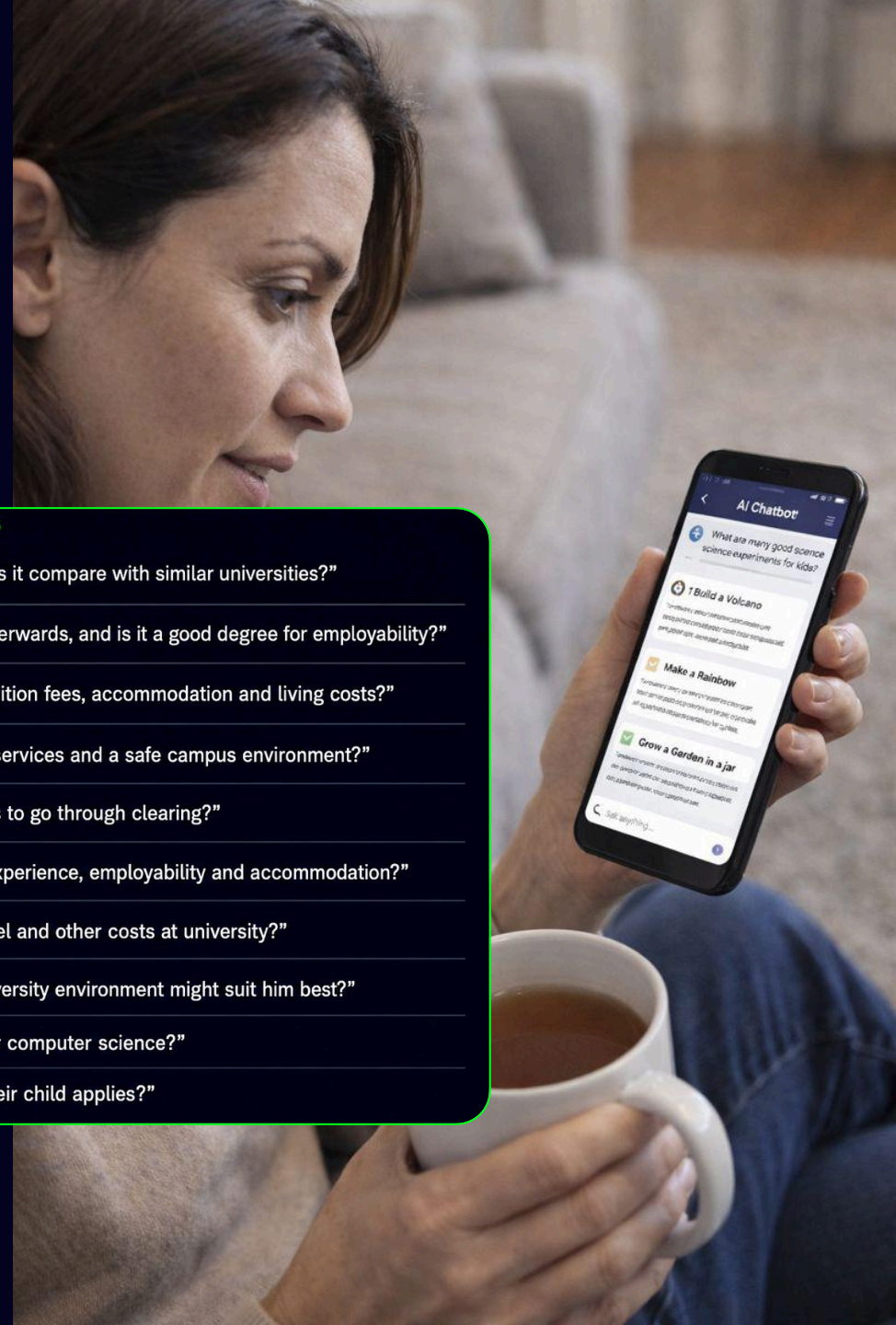
AI-style question research

Simple, practical, low-tech

- Ask AI what students and parents worry about
- Compare answers to your website
- Map questions to pages and FAQs

Examples of how parents phrase their university research questions

- 1 "Is Anglia Ruskin University a good university for business, and how does it compare with similar universities?"
- 2 "My son wants to study psychology. What jobs can he realistically get afterwards, and is it a good degree for employability?"
- 3 "Is it worth my daughter going to university for marketing, considering tuition fees, accommodation and living costs?"
- 4 "Which universities are known for good student support, mental health services and a safe campus environment?"
- 5 "My daughter might miss her firm offer. What should we do if she needs to go through clearing?"
- 6 "How do Nottingham Trent and Sheffield Hallam compare for student experience, employability and accommodation?"
- 7 "How much should we budget each year for accommodation, food, travel and other costs at university?"
- 8 "My son is quite shy and worried about moving away. Which type of university environment might suit him best?"
- 9 "Which universities offer strong placement years and employer links for computer science?"
- 10 "What questions should parents ask at a university open day before their child applies?"



AI-style questions

What we think students ask

- What engineering courses do you offer?
- What are the entry requirements?
- What is the pastoral care like?
- Which Uni has the best facilities?

These are sensible, rational, marketing-friendly questions.

What students actually ask AI

- *I didn't get the grades I wanted, what's my safest option?*
- *I like practical work but hate exams, will I cope?*
- *Which route keeps my options open if I change my mind?*
- *How long is the bus journey?*

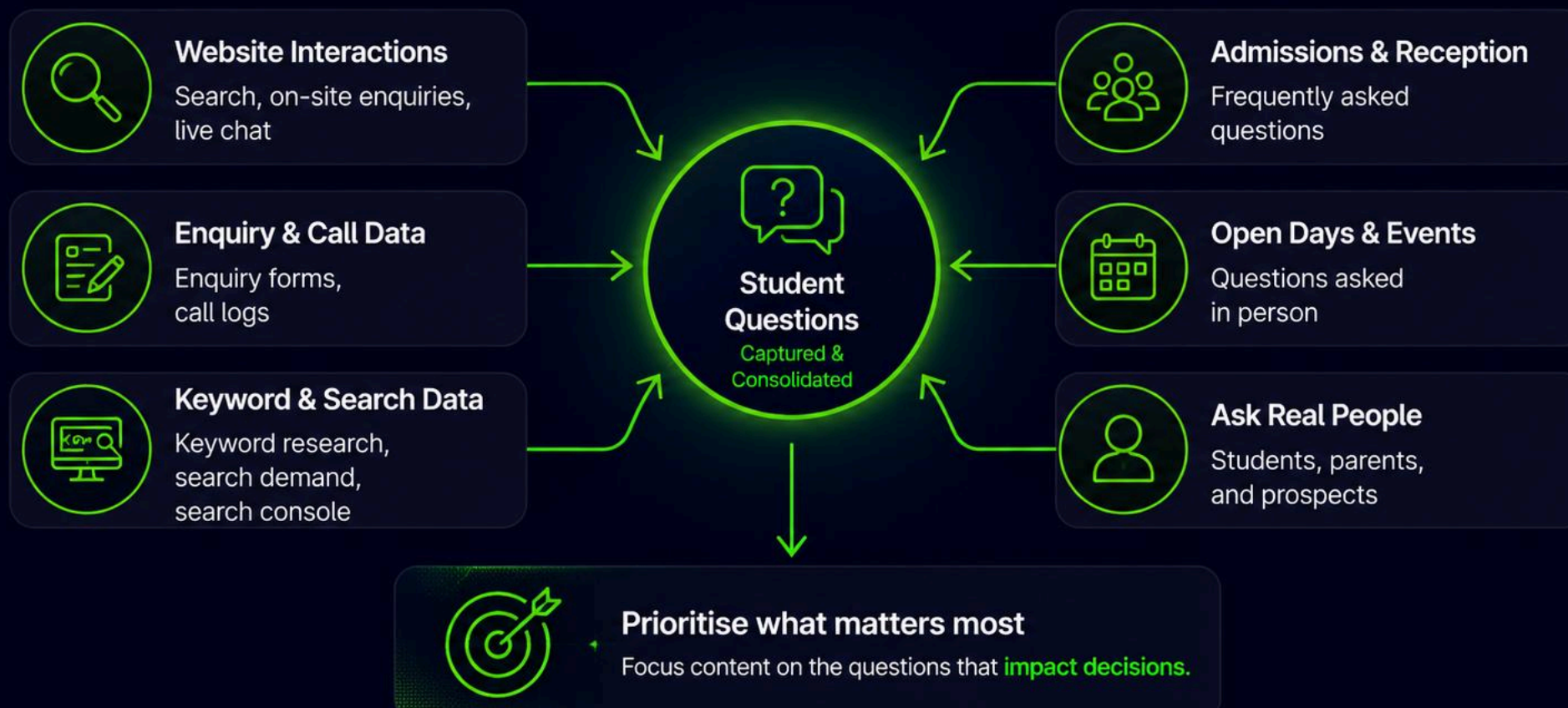
These are emotional, private, and risk-driven questions

If your website doesn't answer the questions on the right, AI will, using someone else's content.

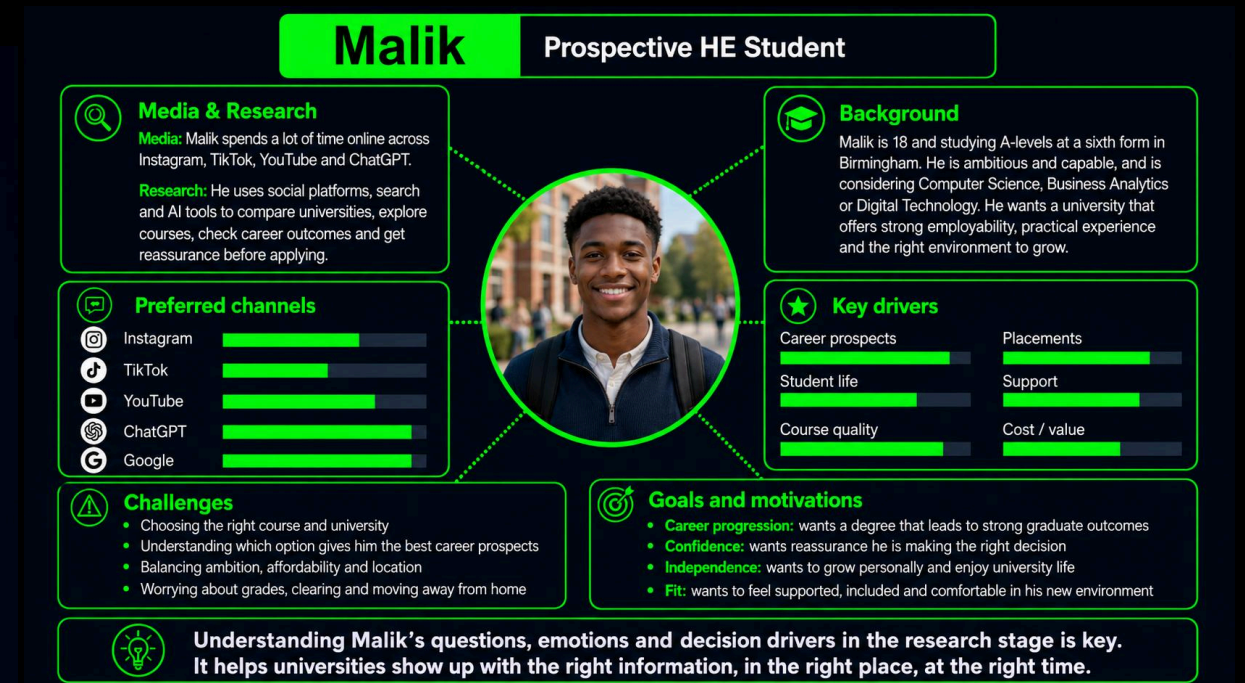
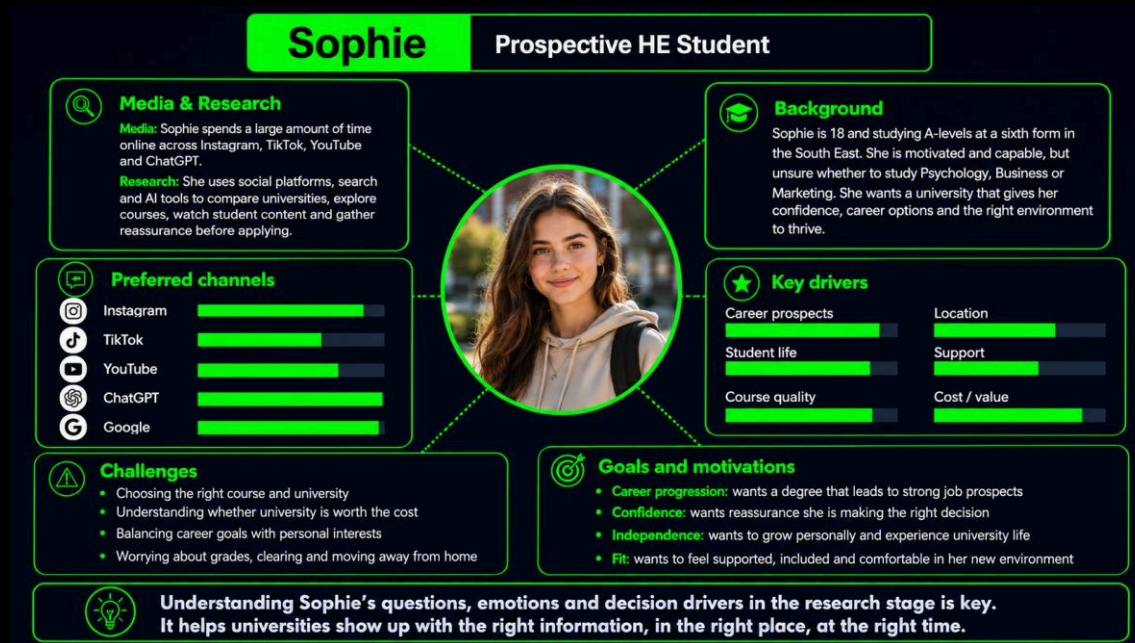
Building your

Questions Bank

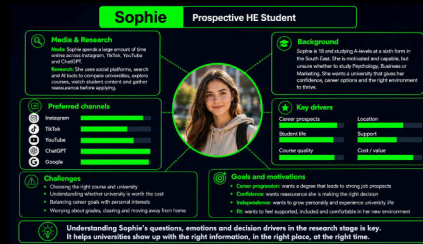
Capture. Consolidate. **Prioritise.**



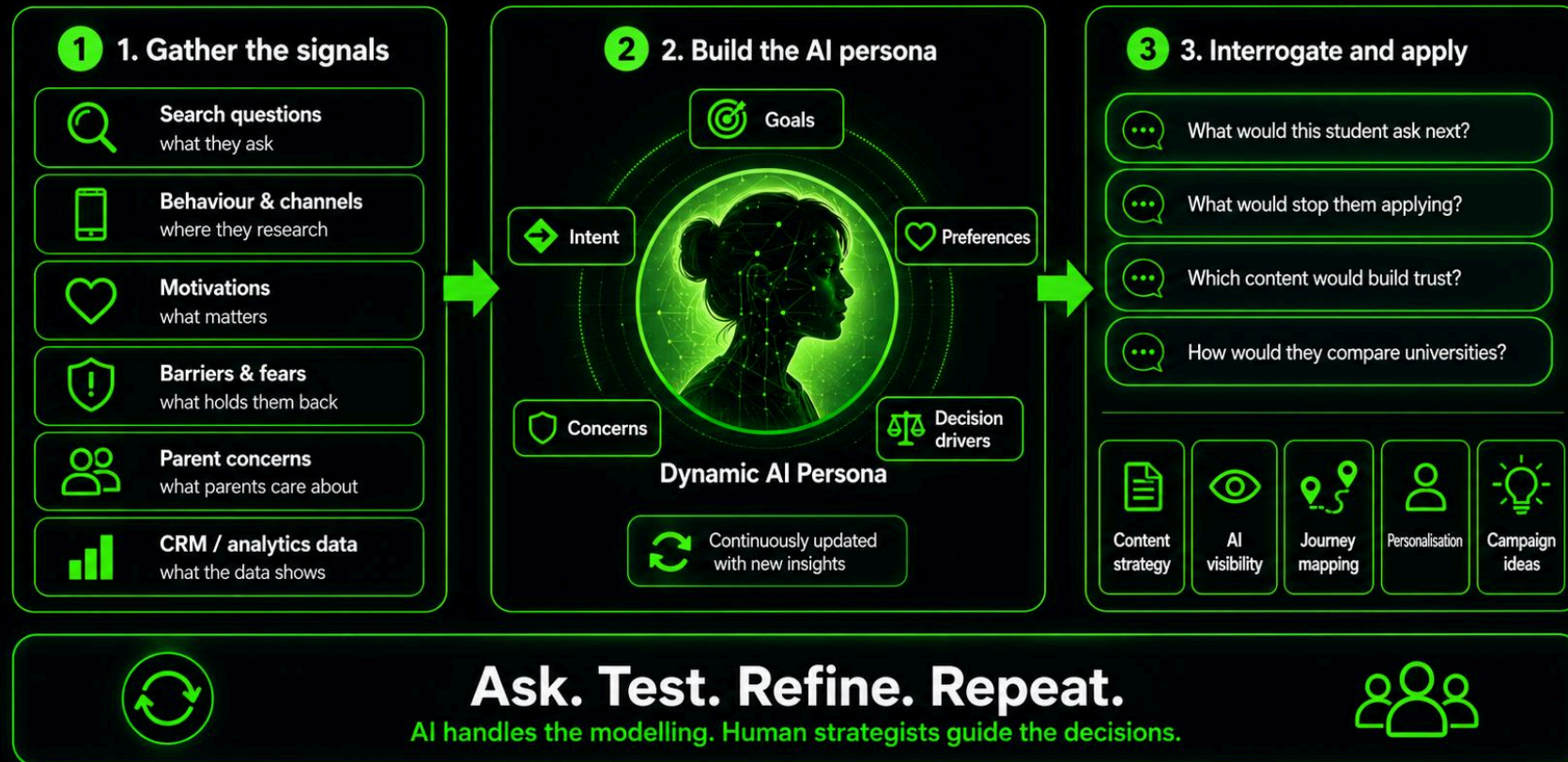
Feed this into The AI



Feed this into The AI



Turn audience insight into a live persona you can interrogate throughout the student journey



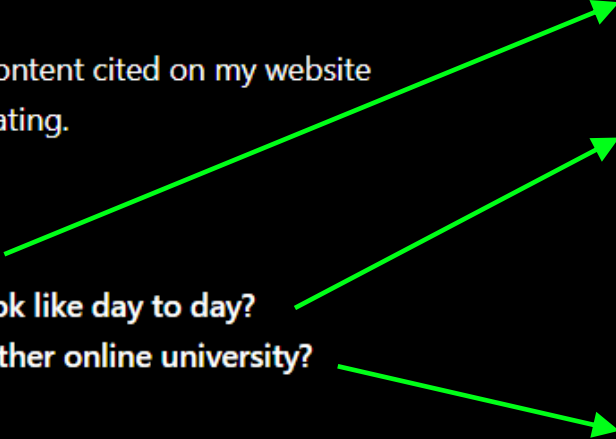
Where are

Our Gaps?

You are going to help me audit my content against questions students may ask AI. Find me the answers to the following questions. Does my website provide answers to these questions? Check against this URL:

<https://distancelearning.aru.ac.uk/> ➤

Give me a clear breakdown so I can identify content cited on my website and which content needs improving or generating.

1. Will I be supported if I study online?
 2. What does distance learning actually look like day to day?
 3. How do I choose between ARU and another online university?
- 

1. "Will I be supported if I study online?" — Excellent

- **Current content:** ARU clearly explains that distance learning students receive support from a dedicated Distance Learning Support Team and specialist tutors.
- **Assessment:** ✅ **Strong answer.** This directly addresses a major concern: *"Will I be left on my own?"*
- **Action:** Keep, but surface more prominently on course pages using student-style headings such as: *"What support will I get as an online student?"*

2. "What does distance learning look like day to day?" — Needs improvement

- **Current content:** ARU explains how distance learning works and how it fits around lifestyle and work commitments.
- **Assessment:** ⚠️ **Good foundation, but not specific enough.** Students need clearer answers on workload, study hours, tutor contact, deadlines and assessments.
- **Action:** Create a guide: *"A typical week as an ARU distance learning student."*

3. "How do I choose between ARU and another online university?" — Needs new content

- **Current content:** ARU has support, quality and course information, but no clear comparison-style guidance.
- **Assessment:** ❌ **New content needed.** Students are likely to ask AI this during the comparison stage, and AI may rely on competitor or third-party content.
- **Action:** Create a page: *"How to choose the right online university."*

Where are

Our Gaps?

Self-fit: “Is engineering actually right for me?”

Question	Status	Existing content link	Notes
Do I need to be really good at maths?	⚠	Engineering subject area: https://www.uni.ac.uk/course-subjects/engineering/	Maths requirements appear only in individual course entry criteria, not explained in plain English
What if I like practical work but struggle in exams?	⚠	Engineering subject area: https://www.uni.ac.uk/course-subjects/engineering/	Practical learning is implied (workshops), but anxiety around exams is not addressed directly
What kind of people do well on engineering courses?	✗	—	No learner-profile or “who this suits” content
Is engineering boring or hands-on?	⚠	Engineering subject area: https://www.uni.ac.uk/course-subjects/engineering/	Facilities are described, but lived experience is not

Where are

Our Gaps?

2. Entry requirements & options (anxiety-driven)

Question	Status	Existing content link	Notes
What grade grades do I need?	✓	BSC Engineering (example): https://www.uni.ac.uk/courses/detail/engineering-peo-2/	Entry requirements are clear but written for admissions, not students
What happens if I don't get the grades?	✗	—	No safety-net or “what next” explanation
Can I still do engineering if I fail maths or English?	⚠	Beng Engineering: https://www.uni.ac.uk/courses/detail/engineering-peo-2/	Maths/English requirements listed but no reassurance or alternative routes explained
Difference between BSc & BEng	✗	—	Content exist but meaning is not explained

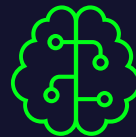
The right content

Using AI to generate the right content
(not more content)



Start with real student questions

- **Emotional** – Is this right for me?
- **Practical** – What if I don't get the grades?
- **Comparative** – Which route keeps my options open?



Use AI



What AI is good at

- Speed
- Coverage
- Consistency

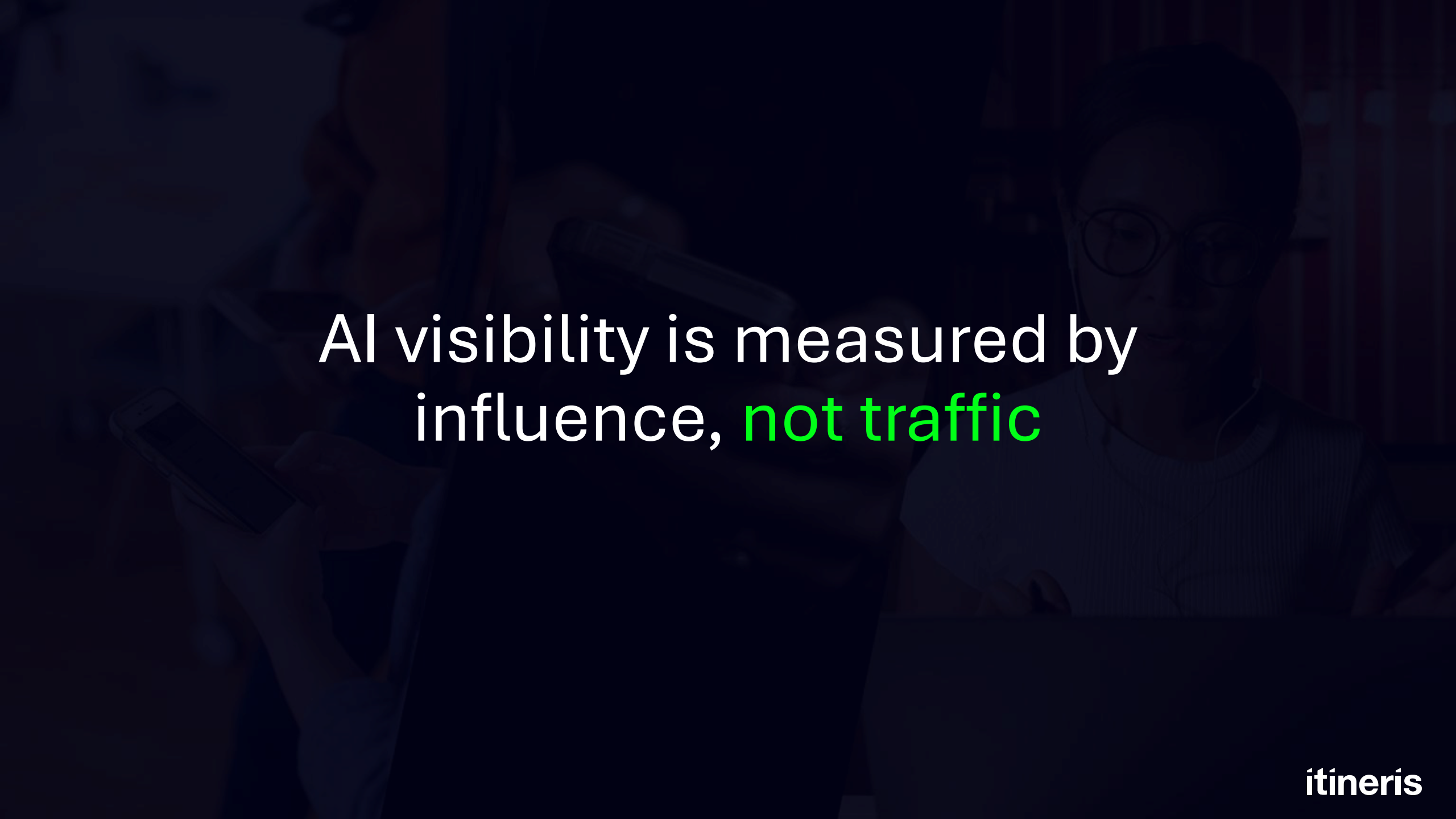


What humans still control

- Accuracy
- Tone
- Reassurance
- Context

Roadmap





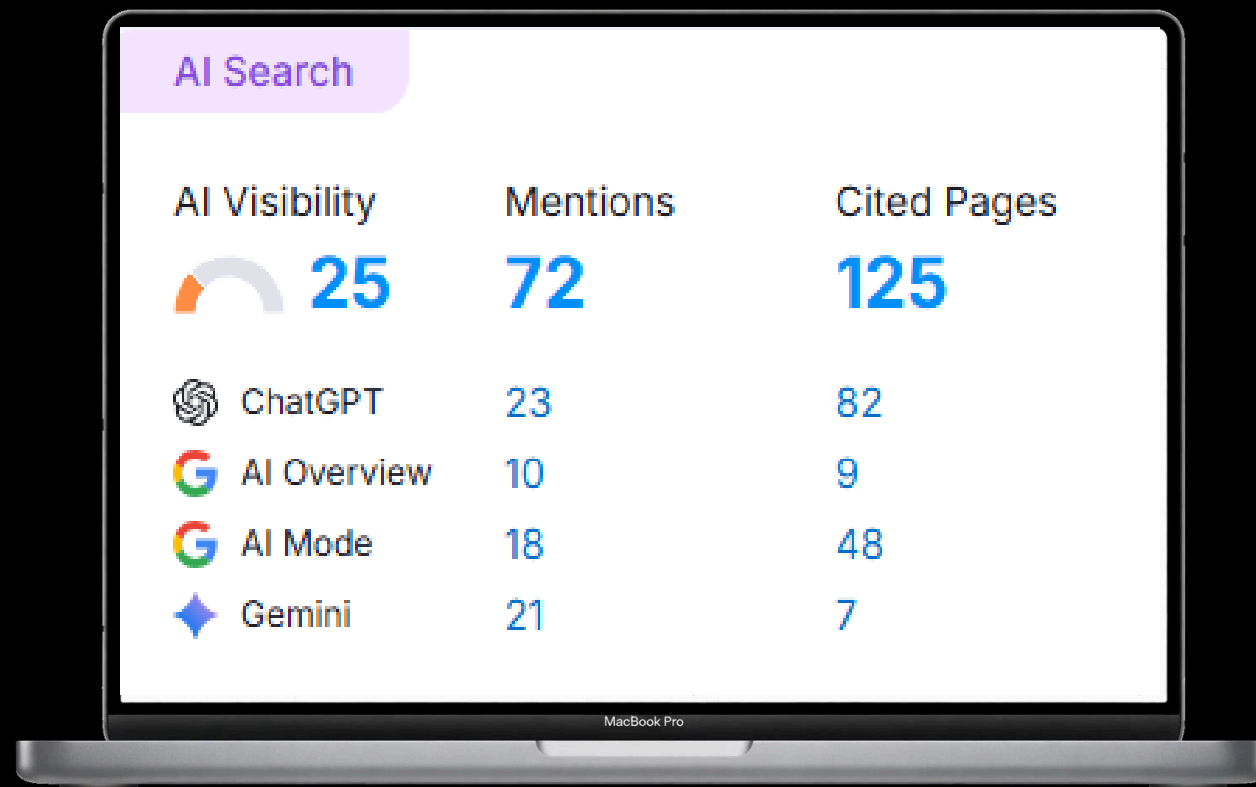
AI visibility is measured by
influence, **not traffic**

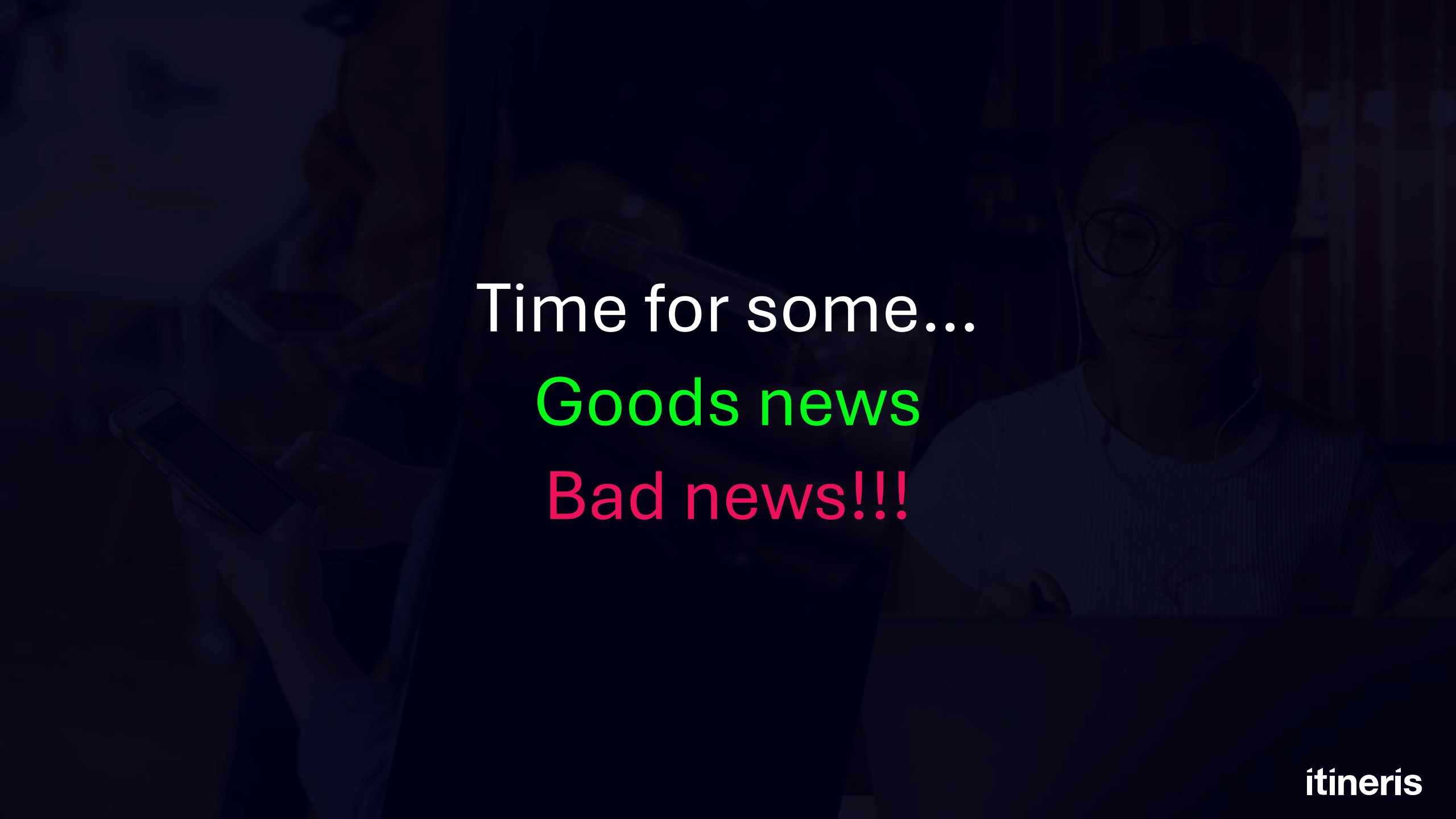
Measuring

Performance

- AI doesn't behave like traditional search
- Influence happens before a click
- Measurement is about signals, no silver bullets

Visibility ≠ traffic, but it matters

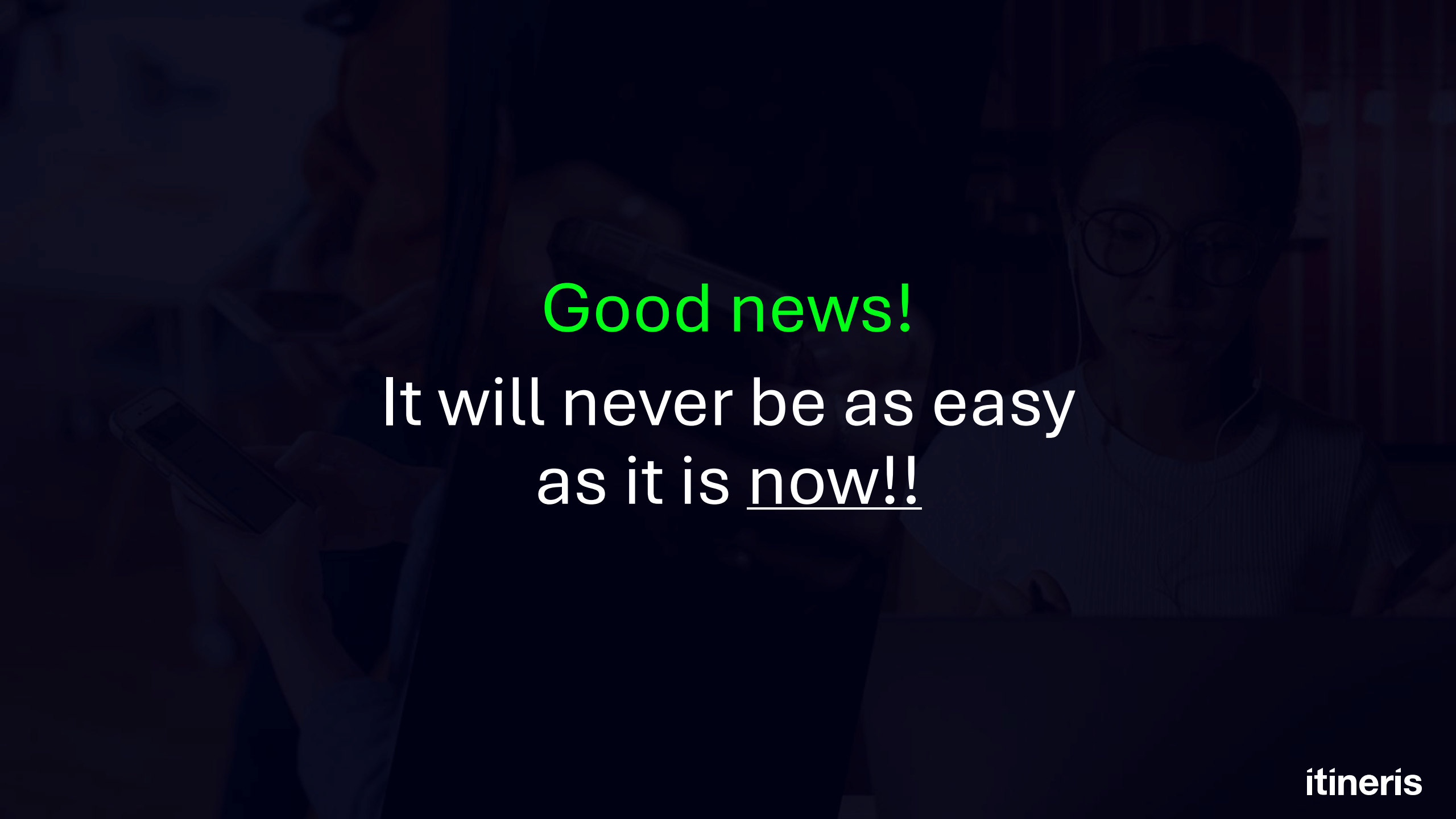




Time for some...

Goods news

Bad news!!!



Good news!
It will never be as easy
as it is now!!

A dark, semi-transparent background image showing several people in an office or public space. In the foreground, a person's hand holds a smartphone. To the right, a woman with glasses is looking down at a device. The overall tone is professional and tech-oriented.

Bad News!

Passive optimisation
only goes so far!

Won't Fix a Visibility Problem



Maturity Curve



The advantage is **not AI alone** — it is **the system** behind it.

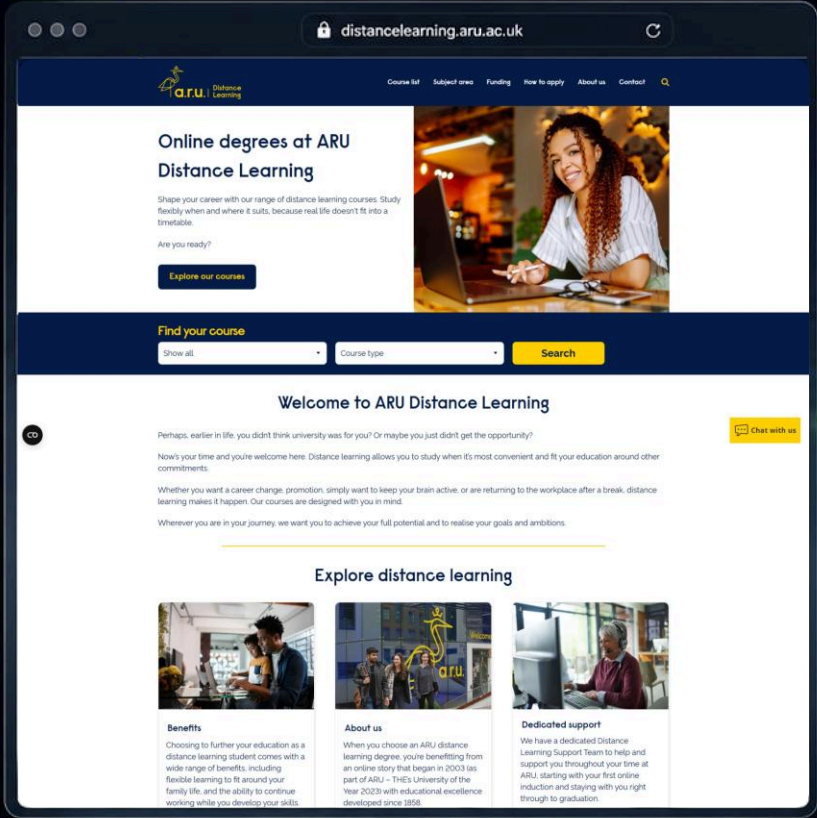
Our Multi-Agent Pipeline

A governed multi-agent workflow for higher-quality content at speed



AI handles execution. Human strategists **drive decisions.**

Delivering results
Quickly



AI Search Performance
Current visibility snapshot

AI Visibility	Mentions	Cited Pages
38	1.9K	2.9K

Platform	Mentions	Cited Pages
ChatGPT	415	1.3K
AI Overview	531	937
AI Mode	475	1.1K
Gemini	485	341



+423%

AI visibility growth



3 months

Timeframe

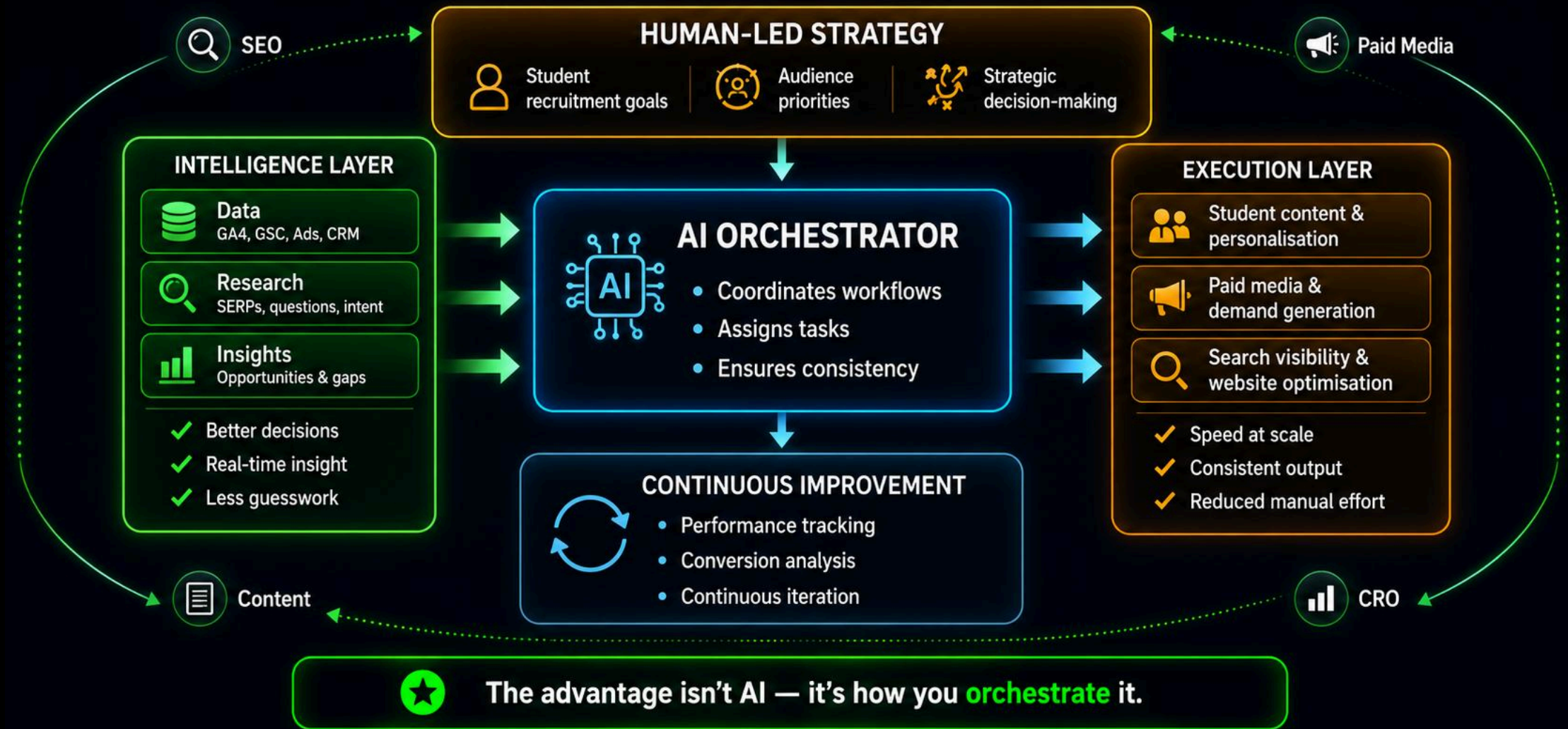


+40%

Increase in cited page coverage



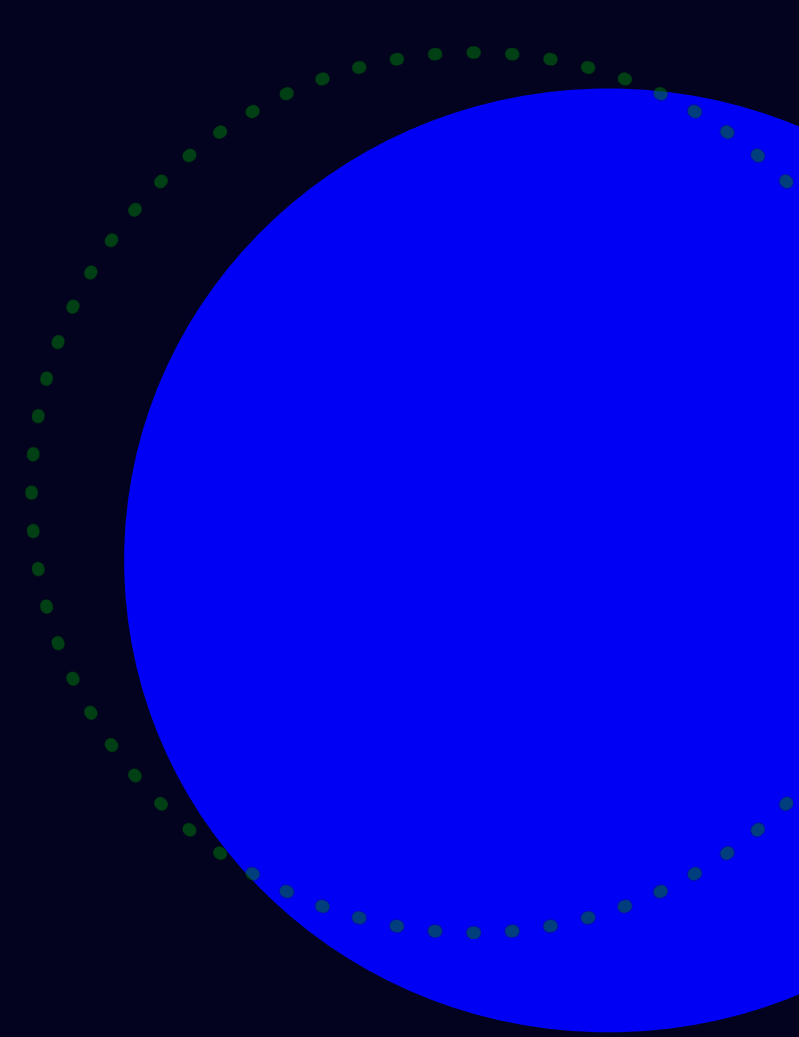
Our Multi-Agent System



Some

Take aways

- | Write for questions, not just keywords
- | Create answers AI can understand and trust
- | Prioritise content that influences decisions
- | Use AI to do the heavy lifting
- | Take the first mover advantage



Complimentary AI Visibility Report

For your university and a selected competitor set

- ✓ Benchmark your current AI visibility
- ✓ Compare against selected competitors
- ✓ Identify your biggest opportunities



Speak to Matt after the session
to request yours →



Complimentary for delegates

Complements of

itineris

itineris

EXAMPLE REPORT

ABC University

May 2025

AI Visibility & Opportunity Insight Report

Example report for ABC University

AI VISIBILITY SCORE ⓘ

72 /100

High

MENTIONS ⓘ

2,184

+18% vs prior 90 days

CITED PAGES ⓘ

1,046

+22% vs prior 90 days

COMPETITOR COMPARISON ⓘ

RANK	UNIVERSITY	AI VISIBILITY SCORE ⓘ
1	University A	86
2	University B	78
3	ABC University	72
4	University C	61
5	University D	49

We're Itineris,

Experts in **education marketing**

Thank you & say Hello

Matt.Horsup@itineris.co.uk

Brand
development



Website
development



Marketing
campaigns



SEO
search insights



Performance
analytics

