



# **2025: A Very Strange Year in B2B Content Marketing**

**The Definitive Roundup of  
News, Insights & Unusual  
Developments**



# Executive Summary

2025 will be remembered as the year B2B content marketing was **simultaneously rescued and wrecked by artificial intelligence**. It was a year of stunning reversals—Google abandoned its cookie deprecation plan, only to demolish organic traffic with AI Overviews. HubSpot, the gold standard of content marketing for a decade, lost 80% of its blog traffic. OpenAI's CEO went from publicly "hating ads" to building an advertising platform. LinkedIn's algorithm cratered organic reach by 50%. And Reddit—yes, Reddit—became the second most-visited site from Google search.

If this sounds contradictory and chaotic, that's because it was.

# 1. The Great Traffic Reckoning: When Giants Fell

## HubSpot's Stunning Collapse

The single most discussed content marketing story of 2025 was HubSpot's dramatic traffic decline—a cautionary tale that sent shockwaves through the industry.

# 81%

### Year-over-year decline

Traffic dropped from 14.8M in January 2024 to approximately 2.8M in January 2025 according to Semrush

# 1.9M

### Organic traffic

HubSpot's estimated organic traffic at the end of January 2025 according to Ahrefs data

# 200K+

### Monthly visitors lost

The infamous shrug emoji post was getting this many visitors per month before being redirected

## What Went Wrong:

- HubSpot's downfall stemmed from ranking for topics that had no connection to its CRM platform—while these articles attracted high traffic, they didn't provide meaningful value to their target audience
- Some of the topics seeing huge declines appeared to be blogs about famous quotes, writing resignation letters, and cover letter examples
- One major factor behind HubSpot's sharp drop in organic traffic is Google's AI Overviews, which provide users instant answers to their queries without requiring them to click on a website

📌 **The Shrug Emoji Moment:** The infamous HubSpot article about "how to make a shrug emoji" became a symbol of everything wrong with the old content strategy—the shrug emoji post was reportedly getting 200k+ visitors per month before suddenly being redirected to a post about content audits.

## HubSpot's Response:

HubSpot acknowledged they had been adapting their strategy since early 2020, investing in channels like YouTube, podcasts, and social media, building out HubSpot Academy, and acquiring The Hustle—transforming their content from largely informational into cultivating influence rather than just providing information.

# Forbes Advisor's Manual Penalty

Another giant fell victim to Google's crackdown on "site reputation abuse."

## The Numbers

- Forbes Advisor's visibility plummeted, with over 1.7 million queries losing rank or disappearing from Google's search results altogether
- From October 2024 to November 2024, organic keywords ranked in top three positions dropped from 10,402 to 3,279
- Estimated \$8.6 million decline in traffic cost
- 60%–80% decline in organic search visibility over the 2024–2025 period

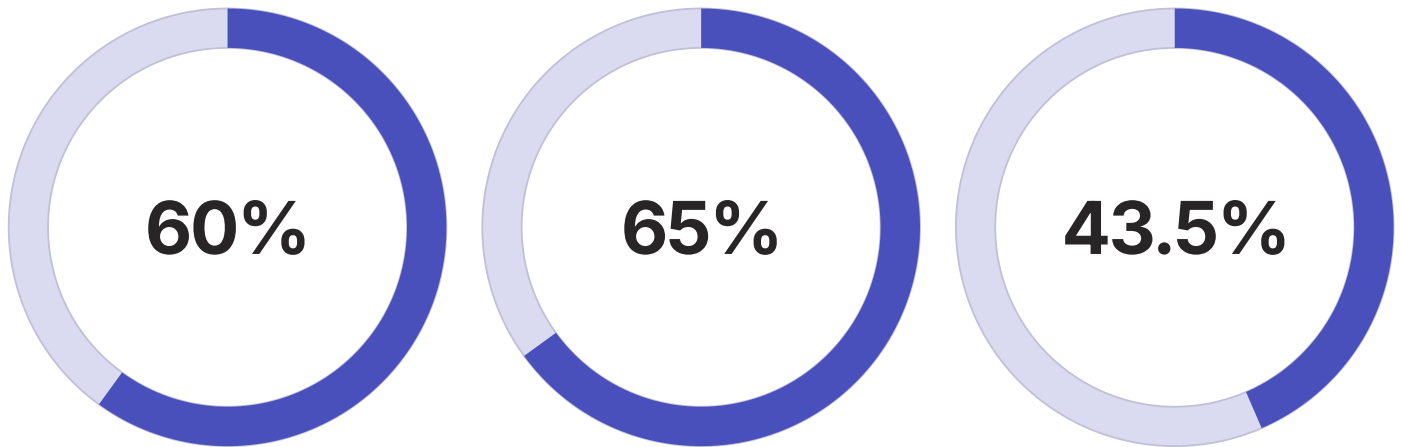
## The Lesson

Forbes Advisor achieved rapid growth through a partnership with Forbes Marketplace, a separate company that used the powerful Forbes brand to gain instant authority—a strategy Google deemed **"site reputation abuse"**.

# 2. Zero-Click Apocalypse: The End of Traffic As We Knew It

## The 60% Threshold

2025 marked the moment zero-click searches became the dominant behavior:



### Zero-click searches

Now dominate all queries, with AI Overviews appearing in 13% of searches

### No-click searches

Of Google searches now end without a click, rising to 75% on mobile devices

### EU/UK click rate

Of searchers clicked on an organic result in March 2025 versus 47.10% in March 2024

## The Traffic Collapse

- The majority of content publishers are losing traffic, with median declines of 10% and some marquee brands experiencing 40-80% losses
- Across the United States, websites have experienced an average drop of nearly 60% in organic search traffic, with the global decline standing at approximately 52%
- According to Gartner, by 2028, brands' organic search traffic will decrease by 50% or more as consumers embrace generative AI-powered search

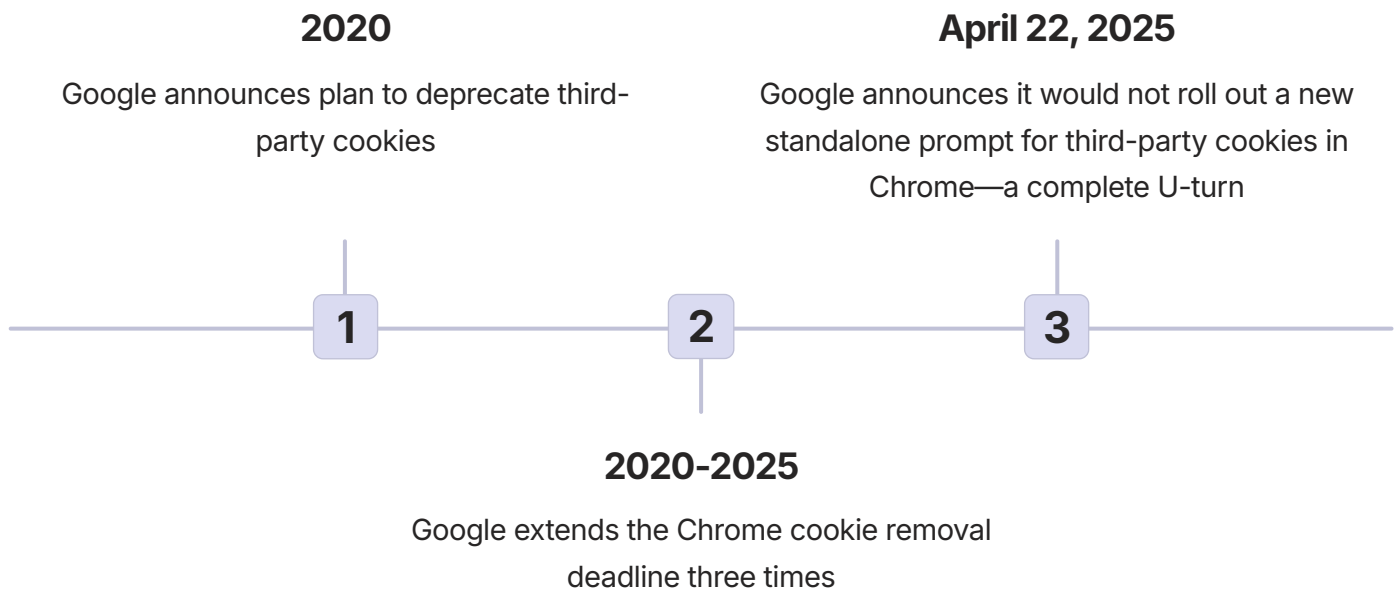
### The Silver Lining

Despite the chaos, organic search still drives **53% of all website traffic** and converts at rates far superior to paid channels, with well-executed SEO strategies continuing to deliver extraordinary results for businesses with differentiated content and strong technical foundations.

# 3. Google's Year of Contradictions

## The Third-Party Cookie Saga Ends (Sort Of)

In one of the strangest reversals in digital marketing history, Google abandoned its years-long plan to deprecate third-party cookies:



On April 22, 2025, Google announced it would not roll out a new standalone prompt for third-party cookies in Chrome, meaning ad tech companies can still use the targeting technology in the world's most popular web browser—a move that amounts to a U-turn on Chrome's earlier approach. 61% of B2C marketers had said they did not believe Google would deprecate the third-party cookie—and they were right. Since the initial announcement in 2020, Google had already extended the Chrome cookie removal deadline three times before the complete reversal.

**Industry Reaction:** "There won't be a 'cookie renaissance' – and that's a good thing," said Teiffyon Parry, chief strategy officer at Equativ—noting that despite the change in approach, third-party cookies are still likely to become obsolete as the industry has already adapted.

## Google I/O 2025: AI Mode Changes Everything

The May Google I/O conference introduced fundamental changes to search:

- AI Mode reframes the search experience—instead of showing a list of links, Google's Gemini-powered assistant interprets the query, runs multiple sub-searches, and synthesizes the results into a summarized response with citations
- Google announced AI Mode is rolling out to all users in the U.S., with global expansion on the horizon—Google even started testing an "AI Mode" button on the Google homepage, replacing the iconic "I'm Feeling Lucky" button
- Google's AI will use insights gleaned from Gmail, Google Maps history, YouTube watch history, and other products associated with your Google profile to personalize search responses

# June 2025 Core Update

On June 30, 2025, Google launched its June core algorithm update with a global rollout that took up to three weeks, emphasizing topical authority, E-E-A-T, and preparation for AI-driven features. Early indicators showed heightened volatility across all industries, with news, health, finance, and shopping sectors being especially affected

## 4. The Rise of AI Search & Answer Engines

### ChatGPT's Massive Growth

# 800M

**Weekly active users**

ChatGPT reportedly now boasts this many weekly active users as of June 2025, doubling from 400 million in February

# 47.7B

**Annual visits**

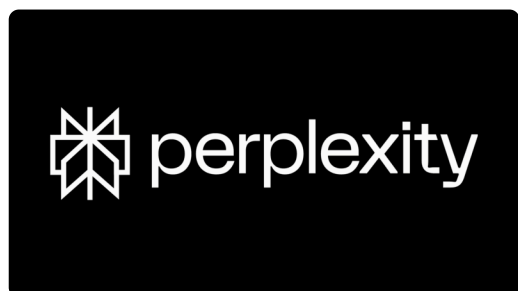
ChatGPT reached this many visits for the period from April 2024 to March 2025, up from 28.5 billion

# 86.32%

**Market share**

ChatGPT's share of total AI chatbot visits.

## Perplexity's Explosive Rise



### The Numbers

- Perplexity AI exploded to **22M active users** and **780M monthly queries** in 2025
- The platform now handles 30 million daily queries compared to just 3,000 daily queries in 2022
- Perplexity grew from 388.5 million to 1.3 billion visits, achieving a **243.74% year-over-year increase**
- Perplexity reached an **\$18 billion valuation** in 2025
- Made a bid for TikTok on August 10, 2025

# AI Traffic Quality Surprise

Here's the counterintuitive finding: Visitors arriving from AI platforms spend **67.7% more time on sites** than those coming from organic search results—an average of about 9 minutes 19 seconds compared to 5 minutes 33 seconds for Google and other search engines.

**23x**

AI search traffic converts at 23 times the rate of organic search—that 0.5% of traffic from AI platforms generates 12.1% of signups

**6x**

LLM traffic converts 6x better than traditional search, attributed to users' built-up intent through AI conversations

## The Birth of AEO and GEO

New disciplines emerged to address this shift:



### AEO (Answer Engine Optimization)

Optimizing content to be the answer delivered by search engines and voice queries



### GEO (Generative Engine Optimization)

Optimizing for AI-driven search results

📌 AI sends **1% of website traffic currently**—and most of it is from ChatGPT

# 5. OpenAI's Advertising Flip-Flop

## From "I Kind of Hate Ads" to Building an Ad Platform

One of 2025's strangest reversals came from OpenAI:

### Previously

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman said during a podcast interview "[I kind of hate ads](#)," adding that he believed OpenAI could pay for its computational needs without resorting to ads and that he liked "that people pay for ChatGPT and know that the answers they're getting are not influenced by advertisers"

### Now

- OpenAI appears to forecast a billion dollars in new revenue from "free user monetization" in 2026, growing to nearly \$25 billion by 2029
- Fidji Simo, OpenAI's chief of applications, is looking for a candidate to "lead a new team that will be tasked with bringing ads to ChatGPT"
- OpenAI is preparing the launch of ChatGPT Ads with sponsored answers and rewarded ads

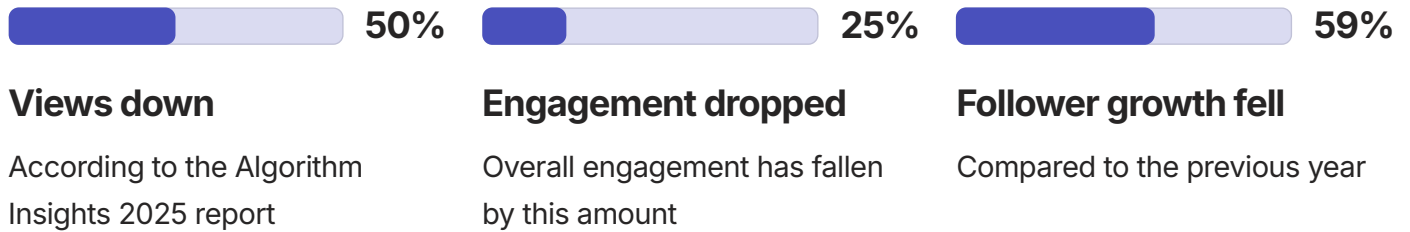
### Why the Change:

During H1 2025, OpenAI burned through **\$2.5 billion** and recorded a **\$7.8 billion operation loss**, with the company expecting to burn through **\$115 billion through 2029** before finally turning a profit in 2030.

# 6. LinkedIn's Dramatic Algorithm Shift

## The 50% Reach Collapse

LinkedIn made major algorithm changes that devastated organic performance:



For 95% of creators, reach has dropped by nearly 50%, follower growth has fallen 31%, and overall engagement has dropped by 25%. Company pages have been hit harder, with reach dropping from 7% in 2021 to 1% on desktop and 2% on mobile in 2024.

## What Changed

- The 2025 algorithm update now prioritizes **relevance instead of recency**—if you are still posting expecting immediate engagement spikes and visibility that disappears by lunchtime, you are using an outdated strategy
- "Dwell time"—the amount of time someone spends looking at your post—is now a major ranking signal
- LinkedIn's 2025 algorithm updates placed more weight on meaningful engagement, niche authority, and content, impacting many B2B brands

## What Works Now



### Employee advocacy

73% of buyers trust thought leadership shared by employees more than content directly from brands



### Personal images

Personal images increase engagement by 60% and help to build credibility, whereas generic stock photos underperform



### Expert content

The LinkedIn algorithm in 2025 has increased its focus on expert content and thought leadership, using AI to identify authoritative voices

# 7. Reddit's Surprising Ascendance

## The Second Most-Visited Site from Google

In perhaps the most unexpected development of the year:

# #2

### Google ranking

As of April 2025, Reddit is the #2 most-visited site via Google search traffic in the US, second only to Wikipedia

# 600M

### Monthly searches

Over 600 million Google searches per month now end up clicking on Reddit threads

# 91M

### Daily active users

Reddit reached this in 2024, a 51.6% year-over-year increase

Reddit boasts that tech decision-makers heavily use the site for peer reviews (72%) and product research (49%). Advertising revenue is projected to surge 30.9% in 2025—the fastest growth rate among all tracked social platforms.

## Why Google Loves Reddit

Google's algorithms have started favoring authentic user-generated content over polished marketing copy—few sites do UGC better than Reddit, where real users share advice and upvote the best answers.

## The G2-Reddit Partnership

Reddit and G2 announced a partnership on October 28, 2025 that allows G2-listed companies to activate Reddit Pro accounts pre-filled with verified profile data—this matters because 70% of B2B software buyers now use AI search tools, and both Reddit and G2 are platforms AI chatbots cite most.

📌 **The Irony:** Reddit isn't a thought-leadership playground—it's a community ecosystem where trust is earned, not self-declared, and overly promotional brands get downvoted, ignored, or called out.

# 8. CMI's Sobering Reality Check

The Content Marketing Institute's annual report (surveyed June-August 2025) revealed the industry's struggles:

## The "AI Isn't Everything" Finding

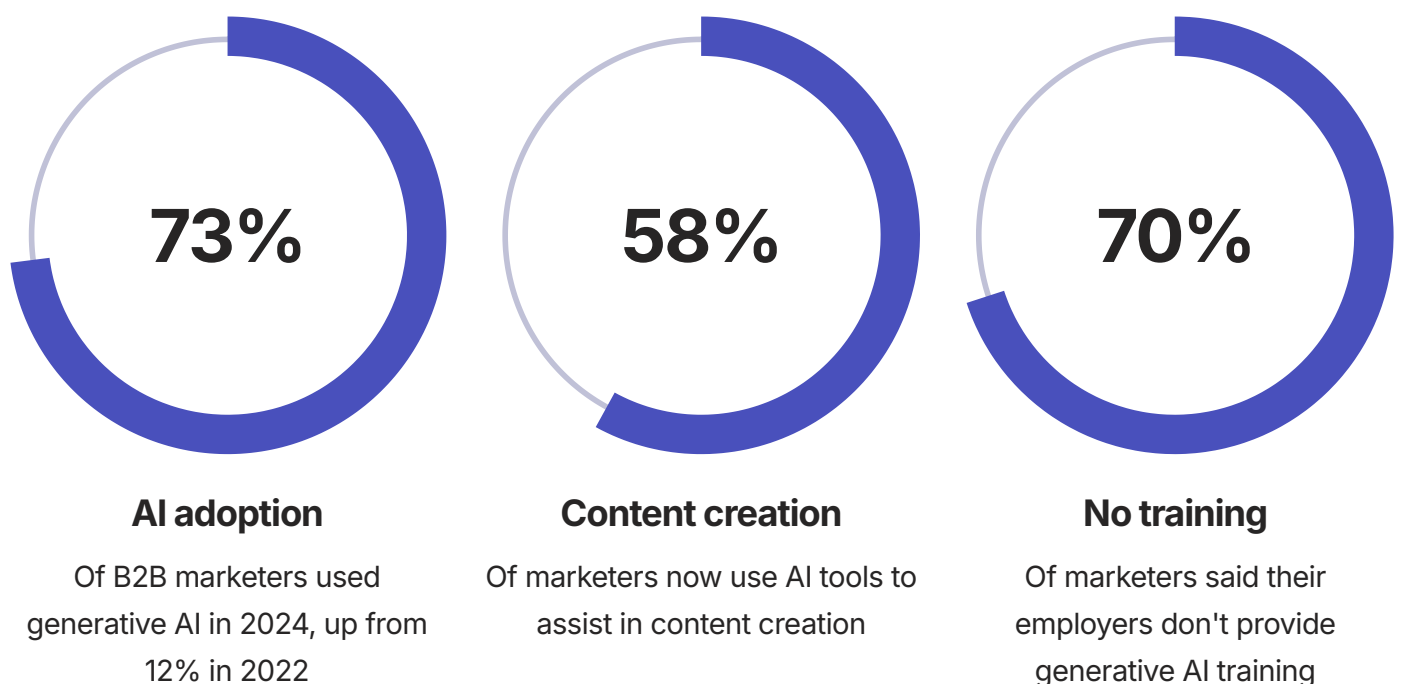
The headlining takeaway from the survey of 1,015 B2B marketers reads: **Teams winning in 2026 aren't playing with prompts, churning out more content, or managing to the algorithms—AI may be the oxygen in the room, but it's your people, your processes, and your portfolio of experiences that form the lungs**

## Experiential Marketing Struggles

More than two-thirds (78%) of B2B marketers report allocating budget to experiential marketing, but less than a third (30%) rate their efforts as established, advanced, or leading—the rest are stuck in exploratory (35%) or developing (35%) stages.

Experiential marketing is hard—it takes more planning, more budget, and more risk than publishing another blog article or an AI-driven campaign, which may explain why so many programs are stuck in early stages.

## AI Usage Paradox



Over 58% of marketers now use AI tools to assist in content creation. Yet 70% of marketers said their employers don't provide generative AI training—even though over half said it's important for their role, and 43% said they don't know how to get the most value out of generative AI.

# 9. Content Operations & Budget Trends

## Budget Bifurcation

### Big Spenders Growing

There are more big spenders in 2025, with **11.3% of content marketers** planning to invest over \$45,000 per month—up from 4.1% in 2024

### Small Budgets Dominating

Simultaneously, **64.3% of content marketers** are now spending under \$1,000 per piece of content on average, compared to less than half in 2024

## Top Frustrations

About two-thirds (66.5%) of content marketers aren't confident about where to allocate their resources.

Key frustrations include:

- **Resource allocation challenges**
- **Content ranking difficulties**
- **Meeting user intent**

## AI Correlation with Success

Only 21.5% of content marketers who use AI claim that their strategy is underperforming, compared to 36.2% of those who don't.

# 10. AI Content Detection & Authenticity

## The EU AI Act Takes Effect

The EU AI Act, effective March 2025, now requires that all AI-generated content be labeled using detectable signals, including watermarking or metadata indicators—this regulation applies to any output published or distributed within the European Union's digital ecosystem.

## Detection Technology Advances

- Detection tools like Originality.ai and Copyleaks now boast accuracy rates between 85% and 92% depending on the model
- Detection is increasingly tied to content provenance—the ability to track how, when, and by whom content was created or modified
- The ITU Multimedia Authenticity Framework, introduced mid-2025, recommends embedding creator IDs, timestamps, and edit trails directly into file metadata

## **The Authenticity Premium**

Writers are advised to avoid words that trigger AI detection scores including: foster, embarking, delve, tapestry, realm, resonate, additionally, navigate, holistic, revolutionize, and landscape—as well as adjectives like adept, ever-evolving, innovative, robust, seamless, thought-provoking, and transformative.

## **11. Content Strategy Pivots**

### **The "Be The Source" Movement**

Expert SEOs and content creators are talking less about creating lots of content quickly and more about making each piece more competitive—it's a call to prioritize adding something novel, a unique perspective or new data, to make content rise above the sea of sameness. The average content marketer earned 16.75% more in 2024 compared to 2023, reflecting increased demand for quality content.

### **Video Dominance Continues**

- Short-form videos shared on social media have become a central part of B2B content strategies for 2025—B2B marketers chose short-form social videos as producing the highest ROI followed by testimonials/case studies and product/service demos
- 90% of businesses already use video in their overall digital marketing strategy

### **Bottom-of-Funnel Focus**

Focus on transactional and bottom-of-funnel queries that AI summaries struggle to answer in full—these keywords are less cannibalized by AI and more aligned with visitors ready to convert.

# 12. Thought Leadership & Employee Advocacy

## The Hidden Buyer Insight

The 2025 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report revealed: Thought leadership isn't just content marketing—it's a strategic tool for building trust, driving alignment, and opening doors where ads and traditional sales methods fall short, reaching both visible and hidden decision-makers.

## Employee Advocacy Becomes Critical



### 73% trust employees

Buyers trust thought leadership shared by employees more than content directly from brands



### 8x higher engagement

Employee-generated content receives 8x higher engagement than brand-shared posts



### 45% increased traffic

Of organizations report increased web traffic from employee advocacy

## Sustainability Messaging

Sustainability is becoming a significant driver—companies are focusing more on eco-friendly initiatives and social responsibility efforts in their content.

# 13. Unusual & Less-Covered Developments

## The "Vouchergeddon"

Google's enforcement of the site reputation abuse policy brought mass disruption to the coupon space—URLs for coupon pages on the Daily Express, The Mirror, Reuters, USA Today, Washington Post, Forbes, and others now lead to either 404 errors or redirects.

## Reddit's Special Treatment

A noted observation in the SEO community: "Reddit is in a special deal with Google—Google penalizing Reddit would be the same thing as throwing their own money away"

## Interactive Content Decline (Then Resurgence)

Content marketers are spending less per piece in 2025, which correlates with declining investment in interactive content—but with Google prioritizing E-E-A-T and helpful content, teams may want to begin investing in interactive content once again.

## AI Search Referrals Surprising Winners

Industry giants won on expert and professional queries—Google, Microsoft, Adobe, Deloitte, McKinsey, and SAP were among the brands most cited by AI in Tech & B2B queries.

## The Metric Shift

New metrics include citation frequency by AIs, residual traffic quality (session time, engagement), and thematic authority—raw traffic volume becomes less relevant than citation quality.

# Key Takeaways for 2026

## What the Winners Are Doing



### Building "Uniqueness Moats"

The brands that build unforgeable uniqueness moats will be the winners of attention and trust—creatively sourcing new data from unexpected places that AI can't compete with



### Shifting from Traffic to Revenue Metrics

Companies that maintained or grew revenue shared two characteristics: an omnichannel approach creating seamless customer experiences and a strong focus on conversion rate optimization



### Authentic Community Participation

Strategic participation in relevant subreddits can boost brand authority, uncover content gaps, and influence what ranks for target keywords



### Optimizing for Citation, Not Just Ranking

Success now depends on becoming a trusted source that algorithms cite—and that users still want to engage with beyond a summary



### Investing in People Over Tools

Teams winning in 2026 aren't playing with prompts—they're exercising their people, processes, and portfolio of experiences well

# Final Thought

2025 proved that B2B content marketing is neither dead nor dying—it's transforming into something fundamentally different. The old playbook of "more content, more traffic, more leads" has been replaced by a new reality where **quality, authenticity, and strategic distribution matter more than volume.**

The strange contradictions of 2025—Google killing cookies then killing traffic, AI enabling scale while demanding uniqueness, platforms prioritizing content they don't want you to leave—all point to one truth: **the winners will be those who create genuine value, not those who optimize for algorithms.**

As one source aptly summarized: "AI may be the oxygen in the room, but it's your people, your processes, and your portfolio of experiences that form the lungs."