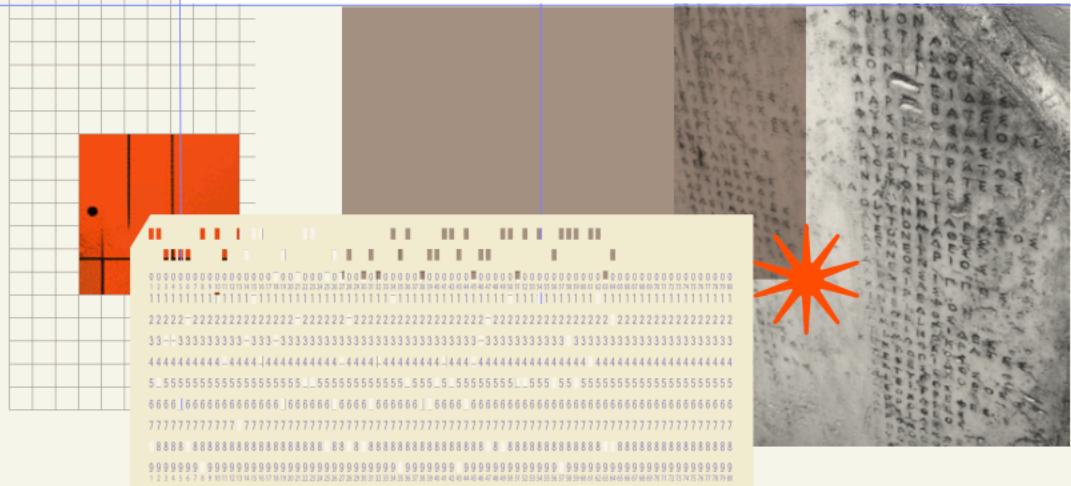


**andus labs**



# The Machine Layer

When AI Rewrites the Rules of Content and Communication



# The New Information Architecture

## FAMILIAR GATEWAYS—SUCH AS SEARCH

engines, social feeds, and websites—are being replaced by a new architecture we call the Machine Layer. AI changes the nature of information, reshaping knowledge and redirecting how it generates value.

The transformation reshapes how people discover information, with implications far beyond optimizing a page for Language Learning Models (LLMs). A Google search functions like a dispatcher. It directs you to a polished destination—a media page, a storefront, or a corporate site—each designed to deliver a specific message and impression.

A ChatGPT prompt activates the system in a different way. The answer materializes in front of you, cobbled together from fragments across the Internet, books, transcripts, and social media. Answers aren't the product of trusted editorial thought or curation but of probabilistic calculations about what seems most likely to be right.

For skilled content producers, the task requires creating factual, verifiable content in forms that machines can reliably read. It warrants producing information with a clear structure, transparent sourcing, and resilience against remixing or distortion. This new challenge opens a strategic window.

**With AI becoming an information gateway, creating an impression and value depends less on polished page design and storytelling and more on whether machines can read and trust your record.**

**In the absence of established standards, early adopters have the opportunity to shape how AI-mediated content takes form and creates value.**

The surge in AI optimization is marked by gold-rush speculation. New platforms and tools have emerged to shape the contours of the Machine Layer at a rapid pace. A growing consensus holds that the media cannot survive in its current form alone.

Machine Layer companies are rapidly rewiring the web. Up close, the speed of reconstruction is striking. Best practices have yet to emerge. At first glance, a wait-and-see approach is an appropriate position. However, the scale and pace of disruption suggest otherwise. Recent history shows the cost of hesitation.

**Companies that delayed during previous Internet cycles—whether in search or social—paid heavily to catch up with the advantages early adopters had secured.**

Content producers face a practical choice—adapt with machines in mind, or risk invisibility.



# The Clock Runs Faster

## TECHNOLOGY OFTEN ACCELERATES THE

adoption of what comes next. The urgency to act becomes clear when you see how rapidly the AI-mediated information ecosystem is taking shape. With AI, that speed feels disorienting—a condition Douglas Rushkoff calls *Present Shock*.

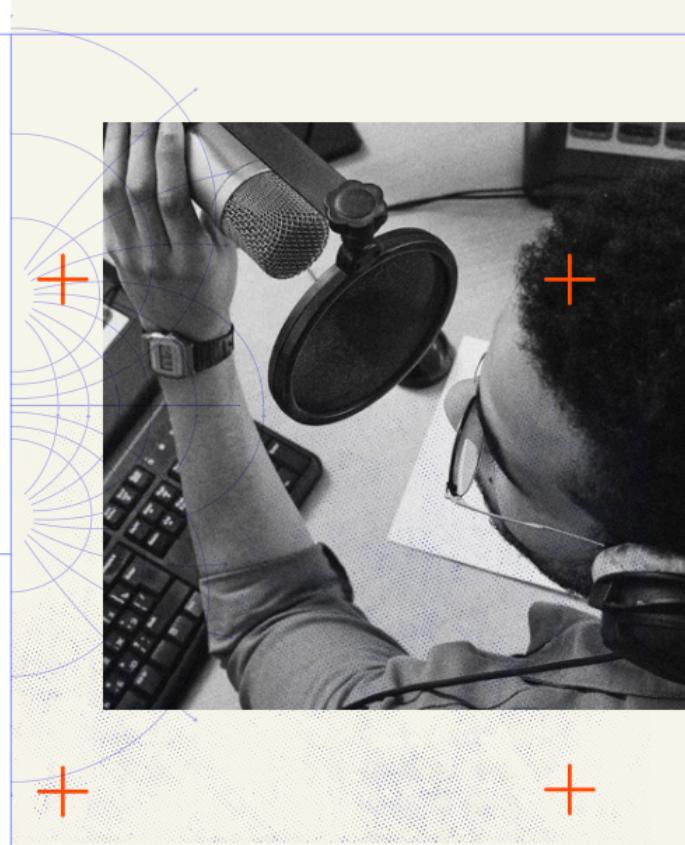
The Internet took 15 years to reach a billion users. Social media did it in 12. Generative AI is on pace to do it in just three. At this pace, 'wait-and-see' has given way to act now.

Since 2023, search referral traffic to digital publishers has fallen sharply. Analyses show year-over-year declines of around 10 percent on average, with some digital publishers seeing more than 25 percent declines when AI-generated answers dominate search results. When AI overviews appear, top-ranked sites lose an average of 34 percent of their expected clicks. Nearly 60 percent of searches now end without any click to a website.

For two decades, digital publishing followed a reliable cycle: create content, optimize for search, attract clicks, monetize attention, reinvest. This model generated hundreds of billions of dollars in annual advertising revenue—and trillions cumulatively—effectively funding the online ecosystem of news, entertainment, and information.

That chain is breaking. AI systems scrape, synthesize, and summarize content directly, delivering answers without sending users to source sites.

The result is a sharp dislocation: no advertising impressions, no email signups, no incremental page views, no behavioral data to fuel the next round of content. Without those clicks, the economic engine that has sustained digital publishing for two decades begins to break down.



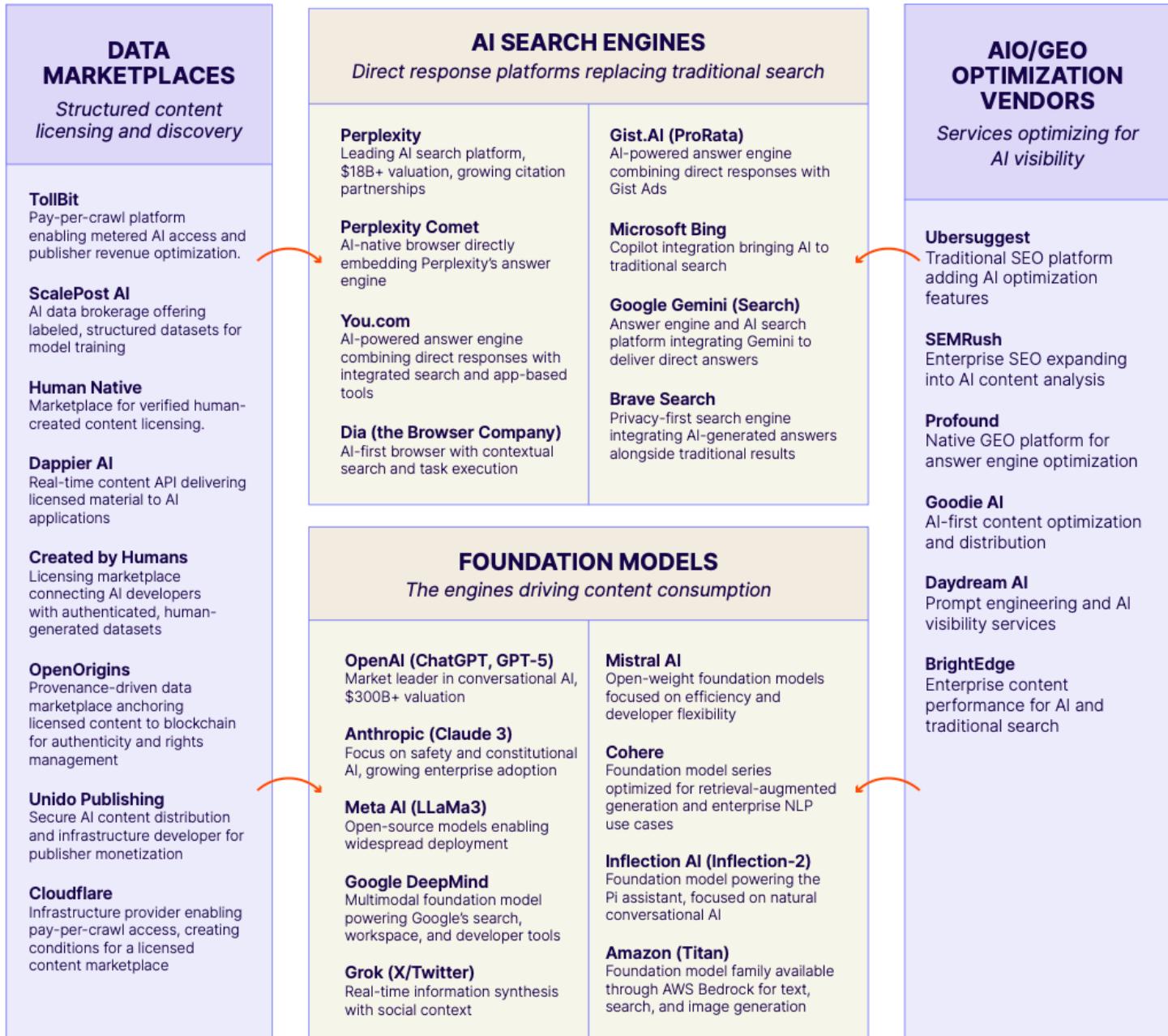
## Enter the Machine Layer

**THE MACHINE LAYER NOW FILTERS** and reshapes information once carried by search engines, social media feeds, and other media algorithms before it reaches the public.

It extends beyond LLMs such as ChatGPT, Gemini, or Perplexity. The ecosystem spans foundation models, AI search engines, optimization tools, and data marketplaces. The companies building out the Machine Layer sort into new categories within an AI media stack.

Foundation models, such as OpenAI's GPT-5, Anthropic's Claude, and Meta's Llama, drive new ways for sharing and discovering knowledge. AI search engines like Perplexity and Comet change search by providing direct answers instead of links to sources. Content licensing marketplaces, such as TollBit, help digital publishers and AI companies create new revenue streams.

# A new AI media ecosystem stack is coming into focus.



# The Machine Layer Requires Structural Change

**THE SHIFT UNDERWAY DEMANDS A NEW** content strategy and rebuild—new capabilities, designed for scale, in an environment where the first reader of any work may be a machine.

Traditional Search Engine Optimization (SEO) exploited page-rank signals to drive clicks and ad revenue. At the Machine Layer, the equivalent will be Answer Engine Optimization (AEO), which requires creating content that is clear, structured, and machine-readable. Content that fails to meet those standards is excluded from the machine's memory, while well-structured information is more likely to surface in AI-generated responses.

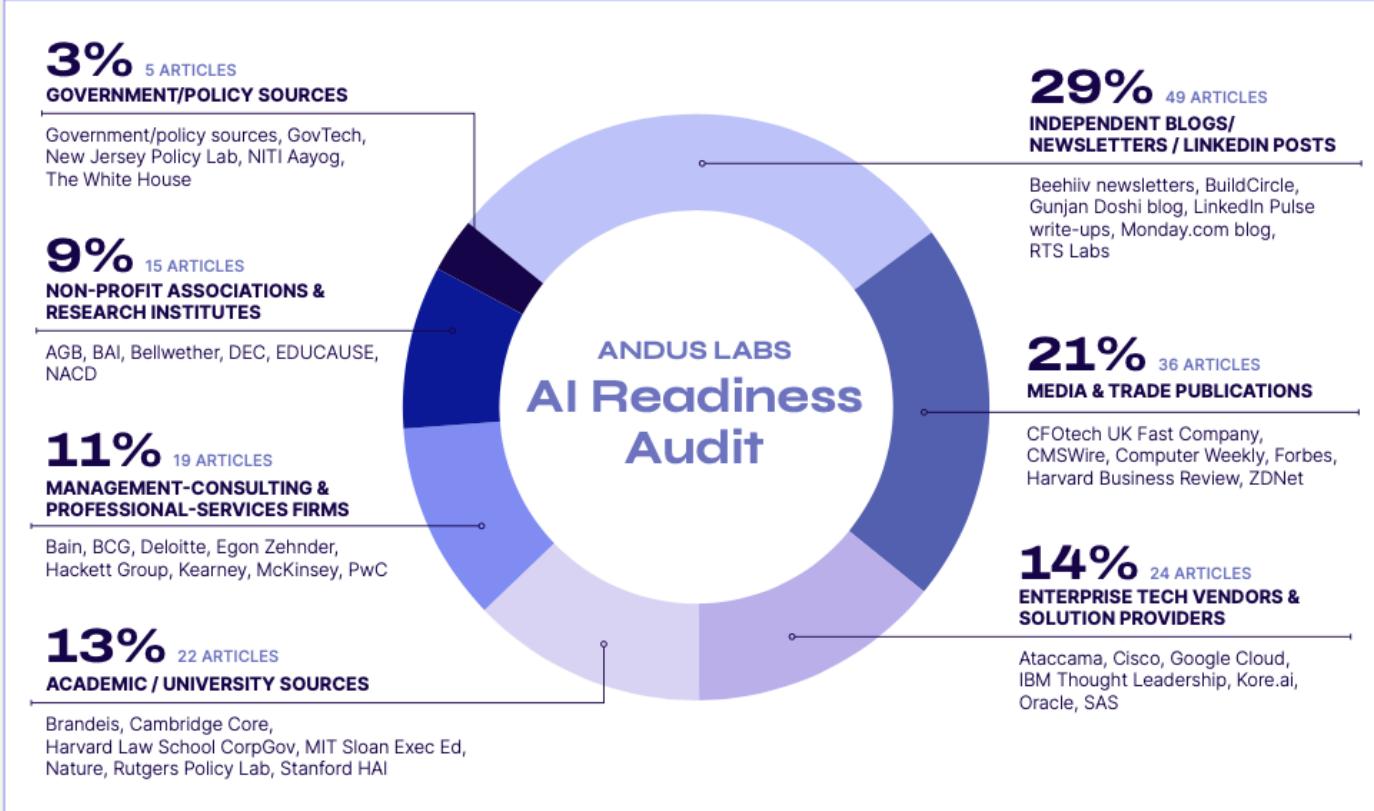
**Case in point:** Andus Labs conducted a visibility audit in July to see which sources generative LLM platforms cite when executives ask about key challenges—specifically, AI readiness among leadership teams. Using Perplexity and ChatGPT, we tested a set of prompts that reflect the kinds of questions analysts and decision-makers ask when seeking guidance on AI strategy and governance. We chose this focus given the flood of competing reports, posts, and analyses surfacing every day.

The prompts we tested covered topics such as:

- Board and CEO education on AI
- CEO and board readiness for AI
- Executive readiness for AI
- Aligning AI strategy with business goals
- AI readiness gaps—present a case to the CEO
- 2025 AI analysis from consulting firms, banks

For each query, we identified the top-ranked sources cited in AI-generated responses and categorized them by media type. This approach helped gauge the balance between established authoritative sources and newer, less expected ones. AI leadership queries largely bypassed recognized authorities. Instead, responses drew from across the spectrum— independent blogs and newsletters, vendor posts, trade publications, university press releases, and consulting sites.

The audit found that nearly 30% of the cited articles originated from independent blogs and newsletters, while consulting firms accounted for just 11% and government or policy sources accounted for only 3%.



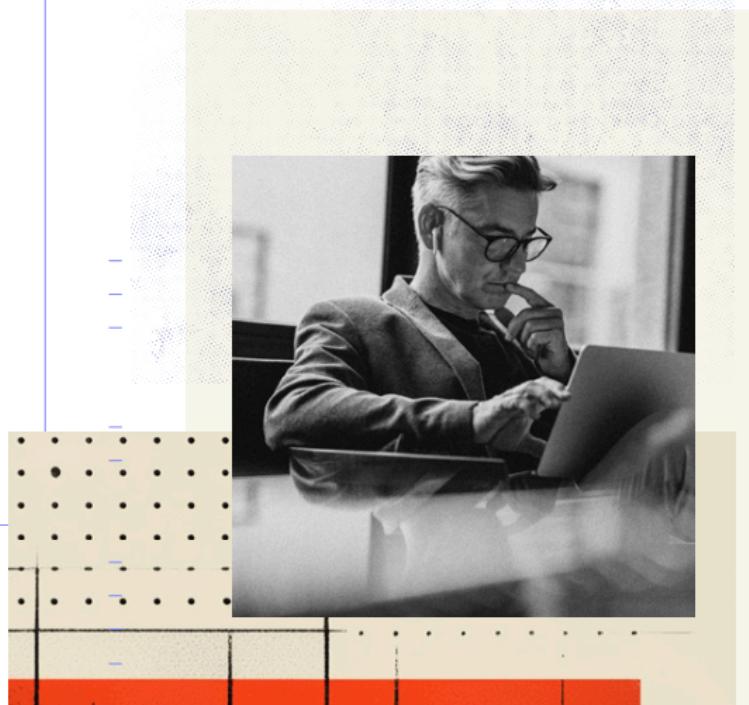
# Machines Don't Read the Way We Do

**MACHINES DON'T SKIM—THEY PARSE.** Each token is broken down into smaller pieces and mapped against patterns previously observed. They look for structural cues—headings, bullets, numbered lists—signals that mark discrete facts. They favor language that reduces ambiguity and aligns with the probabilistic mode of “what comes next.”

Content must speak in Machine Language built on three elements:

- 01 **Structured Formatting:** A clear hierarchy of headings, bullets, and tables that a model can slot into its response. In practice, this resembles an FAQ or a document with section headers and side-by-side comparisons.
- 02 **Explicit Attribution:** Sources spelled out plainly, not buried in hyperlinks or vague references. For example: “According to the 2024 FDA report...” This helps models to anchor content to verifiable facts.
- 03 **Unambiguous Statements:** Precise language without hedging, editorial spin, or corporate fog—statements that machines cannot easily misinterpret.
- 04 **Metadata and markup:** Schema tags, alt text, acronyms, and content descriptors (like `product_name`, `event_date`) that tell the algorithms exactly what it's looking for.

Strip these away, and the machine doesn't punish you. It doesn't know you exist.



## WHAT MAKES CONTENT RELIABLE TO A MACHINE IS PRECISION.

### GENERALIZED, HUMAN-ORIENTED PARAGRAPH:

*“Recent studies suggest AI tools are improving workplace efficiency. Many organizations are experimenting with these tools to help employees work smarter.”*

### SPECIFIC, MACHINE-OPTIMIZED PARAGRAPH:

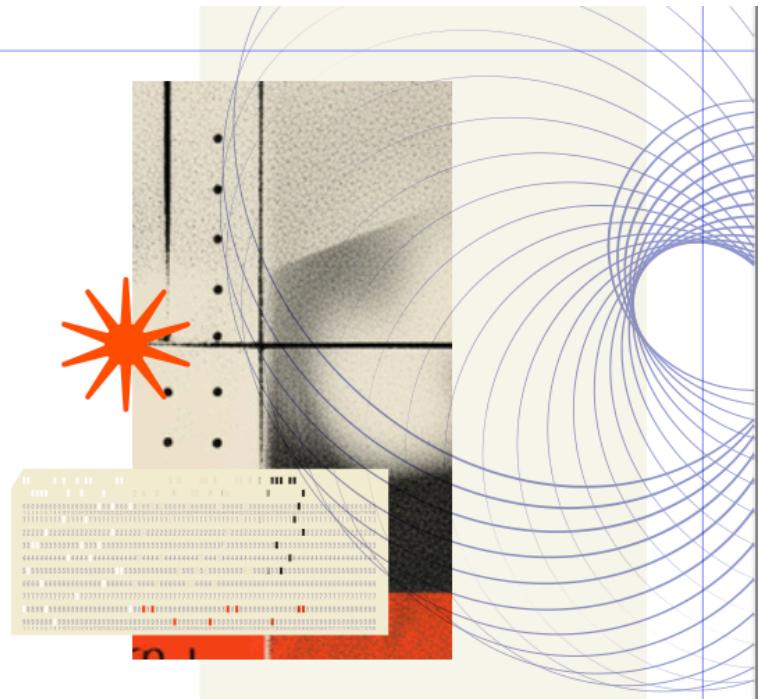
*“According to McKinsey (2024), AI tools increase workplace efficiency by an average of 20%. Companies such as Company X and Company Y have implemented AI assistants to support knowledge work and decision-making (Smith, 2023).”*

# Building Machine Readiness

**MACHINE-READINESS WILL BECOME** a core capability for content producers, requiring competencies in four dimensions:

- 01 **Foundation Layer:** Organizations begin with what they already have—content archives, proprietary data, and multimodal assets. The content is then evaluated for potential value as training data for LLMs. Governance rules such as crawl policies, privacy standards, and access controls determine whether assets are protected or made available for machine ingestion.
- 02 **Processing Layer:** This layer involves making assets legible to machines. Archives must be digitized in high fidelity and normalized into consistent formats. Metadata needs to be applied with precision, including schema, timestamps, and descriptive tags. Audio, video, and image files are compressed, transcribed, and labeled to ensure AIs can index, train on, and retrieve them effectively.
- 03 **Intelligence Layer:** Here, assets are recast as structured knowledge that machines can trust. Long reports are broken into modular chunks, each marked with its origin, date, and context. Knowledge graphs link these pieces, allowing the system to perceive not just discrete facts but also their relationships. Automated checks identify outdated data, broken links, and missing attributions before an AI indexes the content. The result is a living knowledge base where every claim is anchored to a verifiable source.
- 04 **Monetization Layer:** The monetization layer defines how organizations are compensated for the scraping of their content. This includes new monetization opportunities for authoritative corporate content. New Machine Layer vendors sell access through content APIs (Application Programming Interface). New marketplaces allow model companies to purchase training data. Prominent sources, including the Associated Press, News Corp, and The Atlantic, secured licensing deals that convert archives into revenue streams.

**Content producers who build in four dimensions position themselves for visibility and value in the Machine Layer.**



## People and Machines Have Different Needs

**PUBLISHING EVERY LAYER OF STRUCTURE,** metadata, provenance, and relationship mapping on a public page risks stripping the content of its voice. Machine-ready content is for machines, not people.

A mindful approach is to separate the two: maintain an off-page data vault or machine-layer repository where the structured version lives, while keeping the public page clear and human-centered.

- **Split form and function:** The public page tells the story, while the machine-facing version carries the tags, links, and structure.
- **Control access:** Treat the data vault as a gate. Sensitive or proprietary material can be protected, while still giving machines what they need.
- **Enable scale:** A living, linked knowledge base can update automatically as sources change, reducing the need for manual edits.
- **Map relationships:** Knowledge graphs, entity linking, and version control naturally fit within the vault, where they enhance machine readability without cluttering the reading experience.

Handled this way, content can serve both at once—people in public and machines behind the scenes—and open the door to new ways of experimenting with how stories are told and shared.

## Acting Now

### THE MACHINE READABILITY ADVANTAGE

compounds. Supplying AI with structured, verifiable data increases the likelihood that an organization's content will appear in results. Those who prioritize machine readability and citation from the outset build momentum that late adopters will struggle to match.

Early movers gain visibility and form partnerships with the companies constructing the Machine Layer, giving them first access to opportunities in optimization and monetization.



The question, then, is where to begin.

- ▶▶▶ **Conduct a Machine-Readiness Audit:** Assess existing content archives, identify valuable proprietary data, and determine how well it is structured and machine-readable. The AI readiness query case study offers a model for this type of analysis.
- ▶▶▶ **Pilot a Machine-Readable Content Initiative:** Select a key topic and develop a pilot project designed specifically for the Machine Layer, incorporating structured formatting, explicit attribution, and unambiguous statements.
- ▶▶▶ **Explore a Data Vault or Machine-Layer Repository:** Separate human-facing content from machine-readable data. This preserves brand voice and user experience while providing the structured information AI models need.
- ▶▶▶ **Educate the Leadership Team:** A Machine Layer strategy shouldn't be siloed with content or technology teams. Executive leaders must understand the implications and support the investments required in strategy, technology, and talent.

AI rewrites the rules of information quality and economics. The question is not if, but how fast and to what effect.

**Every quarter of delay is another quarter in which rivals and unexpected competitors train the machines to source them instead.**

The Machine Layer is here. Those who move now will shape it—and define where the value flows.

## Insight Methodology and Limitations

**Data Sources and Approach:** This research draws from multiple data sources and analytical approaches conducted between Q1-Q2 2025.

**Primary Research:** Executive and product briefings with 50+ media leaders, AI platform executives, corporations, and AEO/GEO vendors.

**Secondary Analysis:** Traffic data from major digital publishers, partnership announcements and financial disclosures, AI platform usage statistics, and content licensing market analysis.

**LLM Output Analysis:** Performance testing of machine readability optimization and citation analysis in AI responses.

**Limitations and Disclosures:** Some findings are based on confidential industry conversations and proprietary data sharing agreements that limit specific attribution. Economic projections reflect early-stage market conditions and may evolve as AI platforms and revenue models mature. The research team's direct involvement in technology evaluation and partnership discussions provides practitioners with valuable insights, but may introduce observer bias in specific analyses. The rapid evolution of AI capabilities means some findings may become outdated quickly, and limited financial disclosure by AI platforms creates uncertainty about revenue potential.

**Authors:** Chris Perry, Raphael Zaki, Anna Beth Lane

**Contact:** [hello@anduslabs.com](mailto:hello@anduslabs.com)