

Belfast Digital Expert Warns Organic Search Traffic Fragmenting Across AI Platforms

ProfileTree founder says businesses relying solely on Google rankings face significant visibility loss as users shift to AI-powered search alternatives.

BELFAST, CO. ANTRIM, UNITED KINGDOM, January 1, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A leading Northern Ireland digital marketing expert is warning businesses across Ireland and the United Kingdom that organic search traffic is fragmenting across multiple AI platforms, requiring urgent strategy changes before 2026.



Ciaran Connolly, founder of Belfast-based digital agency ProfileTree, says businesses that rely solely on traditional Google rankings risk losing significant visibility as users increasingly turn to AI Overviews, ChatGPT, Perplexity, Claude, and other AI-powered search alternatives.

“

The search landscape has fragmented across AI platforms. Businesses preparing now will thrive. Those waiting risk invisibility.”

Ciaran Connolly, ProfileTree Founder

The warning comes as research indicates that up to 25 percent of traditional organic search traffic could shift to AI chatbots and answer engines by 2026, fundamentally changing how consumers in Belfast, Dublin, London, and across the UK discover and choose businesses.

The Fragmentation of Search

“We’re seeing a fundamental shift in how people find information online,” said Connolly, who has led ProfileTree’s growth from a Belfast startup to one of

Northern Ireland’s most established digital agencies over the past 14 years. “It’s no longer just about ranking on page one of Google. Your business now needs to appear in AI Overviews, be cited by ChatGPT, show up in Perplexity results, and be referenced by Claude and Gemini. The search landscape has fragmented, and most businesses haven’t adapted.”

Google's own AI Overviews feature, which provides AI-generated summaries at the top of search results, has already reduced click-through rates by 25 to 60 percent for many queries. This means that even businesses ranking in the top three positions on Google are receiving significantly fewer website visitors than they did just 12 months ago.

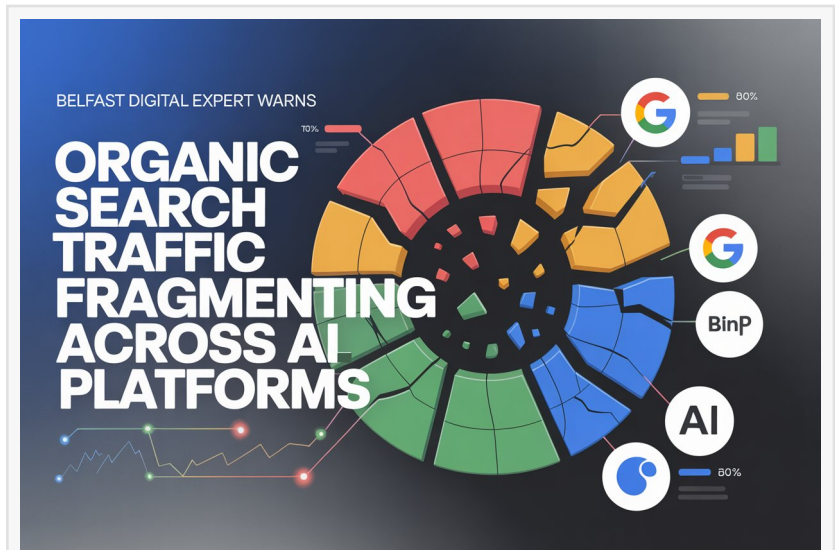
For small and medium-sized enterprises across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and the wider UK market, this shift presents both challenges and opportunities. Businesses that adapt quickly to the new AI search environment stand to gain market share from competitors who remain focused solely on traditional SEO techniques.

Impact on Northern Ireland and Irish Businesses

The Belfast digital marketing sector has seen significant growth in recent years, with businesses increasingly seeking expertise in AI-driven marketing strategies. ProfileTree, which operates from its headquarters in County Antrim, has been at the forefront of this shift, delivering over 1,000 [AI training programmes](#) to businesses across the island of Ireland and throughout the UK.

"Northern Ireland businesses are particularly well-positioned to adapt to these changes," Connolly explained. "We have a strong tradition of SME innovation, and the cross-border nature of many Irish businesses means they're already used to operating across multiple markets. The same flexibility that helps Belfast companies serve clients in Dublin, London, Manchester, and beyond will help them adapt to serving customers across multiple AI search platforms."

The agency has observed that businesses in sectors including professional services, hospitality, retail, manufacturing, and technology are all being affected by the AI search shift. Local businesses that previously relied on Google Maps listings and local SEO to attract customers in Belfast, Derry, Newry, Lisburn, and other Northern Ireland towns are now finding that AI



ProfileTree Digital Agency Belfast - Organic Traffic



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assistants are increasingly mediating these local discovery moments.

Understanding AI Search Behaviour
According to Connolly, the key difference between traditional search and AI-powered search lies in how these systems select and present information to users.

"When someone searches on Google, they see a list of results and choose which website to visit," he said. "But when someone asks ChatGPT or Perplexity for a recommendation, the AI provides a direct answer, often citing just two or three sources. If your business isn't one of those cited sources, you're invisible to that user entirely."

This shift has significant implications for digital marketing strategy. Traditional SEO focused heavily on keyword rankings, backlink profiles, and technical website optimisation. While these factors remain important, AI search optimisation requires additional considerations. AI systems tend to favour content that is clearly structured, factually accurate, frequently cited by other authoritative sources, and written in a style that can be easily quoted or referenced. Businesses need to create content that AI systems view as trustworthy and quotable, not just content that ranks well in traditional search results.

The Rise of Generative Engine Optimisation

The digital marketing industry has begun using the term Generative Engine Optimisation, or GEO, to describe the practice of optimising content for AI-powered search systems. ProfileTree has been developing GEO strategies for clients across Belfast, Dublin, and the UK since early 2024.

"GEO is fundamentally different from traditional SEO," Connolly noted. "With traditional SEO,

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you're trying to convince Google's algorithm that your page is the most relevant result for a particular query. With GEO, you're trying to ensure that AI systems understand your business well enough to recommend you when users ask relevant questions."

Key elements of an effective GEO strategy include creating comprehensive 'Why Choose Us' pages that clearly articulate a business's unique value proposition, ensuring consistent brand information across all online platforms, building citations and mentions on websites that AI systems frequently reference, and structuring content in formats that AI systems prefer to cite.

Practical Steps for UK and Irish Businesses

ProfileTree recommends that businesses across Northern Ireland, Ireland, and the UK take several immediate steps to prepare for the continued fragmentation of search traffic.

First, businesses should audit their current AI search presence. This involves searching for their brand name, products, and services in ChatGPT, Perplexity, Google's AI Overviews, and other AI platforms to understand how they are currently being represented. Many businesses are surprised to find that AI systems have outdated or inaccurate information about their offerings.

Second, businesses should review their content strategy to ensure they are creating material that AI systems want to reference. This includes developing clear, factual content that answers specific questions, creating comprehensive guides and resources that establish expertise, and ensuring all business information is consistent across the web.

Third, businesses should diversify their digital presence beyond Google dependency. This means building authority on platforms that AI systems frequently cite, including LinkedIn, YouTube, industry publications, and reputable news sources. ProfileTree's own YouTube channel, which recently surpassed 250,000 subscribers with business education content, has become an increasingly important source of referral traffic as AI systems cite video content more frequently.

Fourth, businesses should invest in building genuine expertise signals. AI systems are increasingly sophisticated at identifying authoritative sources, and they tend to favour businesses with demonstrated expertise, clear credentials, and strong reputations. This means that traditional reputation-building activities such as earning media coverage, collecting customer reviews, and participating in industry events have become more important, not less.

The Role of AI Training in Business Adaptation

ProfileTree, which was recently [featured in the Belfast Newsletter](#) for making its comprehensive AI masterclass available free to local businesses, has seen demand for AI training increase significantly over the past 18 months.

"When we started offering AI training, most businesses wanted to understand how to use tools like ChatGPT for content creation or customer service," Connolly recalled. "Now, we're seeing

much more sophisticated requests. Businesses want to understand how AI is changing their entire digital presence, from how customers find them to how they can use AI internally to improve operations."

The agency's AI training programmes cover topics including AI search optimisation, AI-assisted content creation, AI tools for business productivity, and strategic AI implementation for SMEs. Training is delivered both in-person at ProfileTree's Belfast headquarters and remotely to businesses across Ireland and the UK.

"The businesses that will thrive in 2026 and beyond are those investing in AI understanding now," Connolly said. "This isn't about replacing human expertise with AI. It's about understanding how AI is changing customer behaviour and adapting your business accordingly."

Implications for the Digital Marketing Industry

The shift toward AI-powered search has significant implications for the digital marketing and SEO industry itself. Agencies that built their business models around traditional Google rankings are being forced to adapt or risk obsolescence.

ProfileTree has been investing heavily in developing new methodologies for measuring and improving AI search presence. The agency now offers AI SEO audits that assess how businesses appear across multiple AI platforms, alongside traditional SEO services.

"The agencies that will succeed are those that view AI as an opportunity rather than a threat," Connolly observed. "Yes, AI is changing how search works. But it's also creating new opportunities for businesses that are prepared to adapt. Our job as a digital agency is to help our clients navigate these changes successfully."

The Belfast digital marketing sector has shown resilience in adapting to previous industry shifts, including the move to mobile-first design, the rise of social media marketing, and changes to Google's algorithms. Industry observers expect Northern Ireland agencies to adapt successfully to the AI search shift as well.

Looking Ahead to 2026

Connolly predicts that the pace of change in AI-powered search will accelerate throughout 2025 and 2026. Google is expected to expand the reach of AI Overviews, while OpenAI, Microsoft, and other technology companies continue to develop their own AI search products.

"By the end of 2026, I expect the search landscape to look dramatically different from today," he said. "Businesses that start preparing now will have a significant advantage over those that wait. The time to act is now, not when the changes become impossible to ignore."

ProfileTree continues to publish research and guidance on AI search developments through its

website and YouTube channel. The agency also offers free initial consultations for businesses looking to understand their current AI search presence and develop strategies for improvement.

About ProfileTree

ProfileTree is a digital marketing and creative media agency headquartered in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Founded in 2011 by Ciaran Connolly, the agency provides web design, SEO, content marketing, video production, and AI training services to businesses across Northern Ireland, Ireland, and the UK.

Over 14 years in operation, ProfileTree has accumulated more than 450 five-star client reviews and built a YouTube following of over 250,000 subscribers. The agency has completed more than 1,000 business projects and delivered AI training to organisations ranging from small local businesses to large enterprises.

ProfileTree has been featured in publications including the Belfast Newsletter and the Irish News, and has worked with clients including Tourism Northern Ireland, National Trust, and Derry Halloween, Europe's largest Halloween festival.

For more information about AI search optimisation, digital marketing services, or AI training programmes, visit ProfileTree at <https://www.profiletree.com> or contact the team directly.

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