

*What AI sees, not what the organisation says.*

# AI Readiness

***What AI sees, not what the organisation says.***

*An organisation's AI readiness is measured by what AI can find, interpret, and act on across the full footprint of information the organisation has ever made available, not by the information the organisation believes it is presenting today*

*A board briefing, and research paper for the organisation, on owning the position, the trust, and the digital footprint AI is now reading.*

# Contents

Introduction .....	3
Executive summary.....	4
The misunderstanding.....	6
What is at stake.....	7
The shift is observable in the data now. ....	7
The cost of waiting .....	8
Implications for the board.....	9
The exposures.....	9
The value of getting this right.....	10
Use cases .....	11
Use case. Pharmaceutical.....	11
Use case. Local / municipal government.....	12
Use case. Government regulator.....	12
Use case. Financial services .....	13
Use case. Electrical product manufacturer.....	14
The AI readiness framework .....	15
Fundamentals.....	15
Governance .....	15
Visibility.....	15
The order is load-bearing .....	15
The AI fundamentals maturity scale™ .....	16
Example: AI Readiness Maturity™ .....	16
The scale .....	17
Fundamentals - The 10 principles.....	18
Example: AI Readiness assessment.....	19
Methodology.....	20
Summarizing Governance and Visibility.....	21
Visibility as an external outcome layer .....	21
Governance as the control layer.....	22
Discovery .....	23
Landscape mapping. ....	24
Landscape mapping 2. ....	25
Landscape mapping 3. ....	26
Why this matters now.....	27
Conclusion .....	28
Author.....	29
References.....	30

## Introduction

AI readiness, viewed from the outside in, is the position this paper sets out. The majority of discussions today are about how an organisation will use AI, the inside-out view. The outside-in view sits separately. It is the picture AI builds of the organisation from what it can find online, the position the organisation holds against that picture, and the maturity benchmark by which the position is read.

McKinsey research finds that brand-owned sites comprise only 5 to 10% of the sources AI search references in many categories. AAAnow data, drawn from risk profiling across 2017 to 2023 covering 100+ million websites, indicates that 41% of websites are unknown to the organisation's digital teams. The picture the market acts on, when AI is the reader, is being assembled from material the organisation does not own and material the organisation does not know it still has online.

This paper is read from the board down, each level taking a position it can act on. The board has a reading of where the organisation stands, the executive has a direction of travel against it, and the senior managers have the work the position points to. The organisation gains the foundation the position rests on. The same work that surfaces the position reduces cost across the digital estate, reduces cyber exposure as the unknown estate is brought into view, and produces a defensible argument the executive carries into commercial conversations with regulators, partners, and customers.

The picture AI now builds of the organisation, from material the organisation does not own and does not always know is online, shapes the brand, the trust, and the commercial position the CEO and the board hold. This paper is about creating visibility of the picture, so the organisation can progress online as the position of AI evolves.

### A word of caution... ensure building on solid foundations.

Pushing material at AI to outweigh what it already finds carries its own risk. The further promotion runs ahead of the foundations underneath, the wider the gap AI reads between the two, and the harder that gap is to close once the picture has set. GEO (Generative Engine Optimisation) and AEO (Answer Engine Optimisation) can accelerate misinformation when the underlying foundations have not been confirmed.

## Executive summary

AI is now a reader of what an organisation publishes. It sits alongside customers, partners, regulators, and the wider audience the organisation serves, and it assembles a picture of the organisation from the material it can find online. The picture the market acts on.

The material AI reads is not only the content the organisation considers current. It is the full footprint of information the organisation has ever made available. Years of published material, third-party references, archived assets, legacy domains, and the documents that sit across the wider digital estate. AirOps research analysing more than 21,000 brands finds that 85% of brand mentions in AI search come from third-party content. The picture is built across the wider web from material that has not been managed.

Many organisations are responding to this with spending on AI visibility, Generative Engine Optimisation and Answer Engine Optimisation. The spending rests on the assumption that promotion is the answer. Visibility built on weak foundations places the organisation in a more difficult position than the one it started in. An organisation promoting information it has not verified is out of date, inconsistent, or wrong is investing in the wider circulation of its own misrepresentation.

The AI readiness framework runs in one order. Fundamentals carry the structural integrity of what AI can read. Governance keeps the information correct and accountable over time. Visibility surfaces the result. The order is the discipline of the framework. Reversing it produces effort spent in the wrong place.

The AI readiness framework is measurable and independent of any single vendor. The fundamentals layer carries a maturity scale that gives the board a position to read, and each digital property is assessed against the framework's principles to show where the foundations hold and where they fail. The position is continual. Content changes, sites change, and discovery brings forgotten estate into the picture, with each shift carried in the assessment.

The reader of this document, the executive sitting with responsibility for brand, customer, regulatory position, and commercial performance, has a position to ask about inside the organisation. Where the AI readiness framework sits. Who owns it. Why a maturity position for the AI fundamentals layer is not already part of the board pack, when the picture being formed of the organisation is being formed without intervention.

The cost of waiting is the cost of letting the external picture set. AI is using what is online now. Competitors moving first are read accurately by AI first, and the comparison the market then uses is built from their picture. The work to take control is independent of any single vendor, scored against a clear framework, and capable of being costed and planned.

## Board action: The 30-day baseline

The first board requirement is not another general AI strategy. It is a baseline position that shows what AI can currently find, interpret, trust, and reuse across the organisation's external digital estate.

That position should be produced quickly enough to inform ownership, reporting, and immediate prioritisation. It should show where the organisation stands today, which parts of the estate are known, which parts remain outside active management, and where the highest exposure sits.

What the board should ask for	Why it matters
<b><i>A mapped view of the known digital estate</i></b>	Shows which websites, domains, PDFs, and public assets are already recognised internally.
<b><i>A discovery view of the unknown estate</i></b>	Shows what AI may be reading that the organisation no longer manages or remembers.
<b><i>A maturity score for the AI fundamentals layer</i></b>	Gives the board a readable position across the external foundations.
<b><i>A breakdown by website or digital property</i></b>	Shows which parts of the estate are strong, weak, exposed, or unclear.
<b><i>A priority exposure list</i></b>	Identifies outdated, inconsistent, inaccessible, misleading, duplicated, or risky material.
<b><i>A named internal owner</i></b>	Stops AI readiness falling between marketing, digital, IT, legal, risk, and compliance.
<b><i>A first 90-day action plan</i></b>	Turns the assessment into ownership, correction, monitoring, and reporting.

The purpose of the first 30 days is not to resolve every weakness. The purpose is to give the board a factual position it can hold, a named owner who can be accountable, and a first plan for reducing exposure.

From that point, AI readiness moves from a concern to a managed discipline, with a position that can be reviewed, evidenced, and improved over time.

## The misunderstanding

AI readiness has been treated, across many organisations, as an internal matter. The conversation runs through productivity, tooling, automation, adoption rates, internal use cases, and the efficiency gains AI can produce inside the business. Budgets follow that conversation. Programme owners are appointed against it. Board updates are written against it.

The conversation is real, and the internal use of AI is a legitimate question for any organisation. It is not the question this document is addressing.

The external view sits outside that conversation. It is the view AI has of the organisation when it reads the public footprint and assembles a picture for the market. The question is not what the organisation is doing with AI. The question is what AI is doing with the organisation. What it sees. What it finds. What it interprets. What it carries into the answers, the comparisons, and the recommendations it presents on the organisation's behalf.

The two views measure different things.

1. Internal AI maturity measures how the organisation is using AI.
2. External AI readiness measures how AI is using the organisation.

An organisation can be advanced on the first and exposed on the second. The internal programme may be running well while the external picture is being formed from material the organisation has stopped managing, content that no longer reflects its position, and a digital estate it has lost track of.

Any misunderstanding matters because it shapes where attention and budget go. Effort spent on internal adoption does not correct the external picture. Effort spent on AI visibility, without the foundations in place, accelerates the circulation of whatever AI is reading, including the material the organisation would not stand behind today. The reader who treats AI readiness as an internal programme is leaving the external position to form without intervention.

This document is about that external position. The reading. The interpretation. The picture that emerges from it. Every thing that follows in the document is in service of that position.

## What is at stake

The picture AI assembles is the picture the market acts on. It is read by customers, partners, prospects, regulators, journalists, analysts, and the AI agents now acting on behalf of buyers. Each of those readers carries what AI presented to them into the next decision they make about the organisation.

Brand position is at stake first.

The narrative being read about the organisation is being read by AI alongside everyone else, and the question of whose narrative it is, and who has assembled it, sits inside the picture AI carries. When the assembled picture draws from material the organisation has stopped managing, the narrative the market sees is the narrative the organisation no longer recognises as its own.

Commercial position is at stake next.

AI agents now mediate the comparison set the buyer sees before any human contact. A buyer asking AI to compare products, providers, or options is presented with a comparison built from what AI has been able to read.

- i. Adobe reports that traffic from AI sources to US retail sites grew 393% year on year in Q1 2026, with AI-sourced traffic converting 42% better than other traffic in March 2026.
- ii. Salesforce reports that AI and agents accounted for \$262 billion of 2025 holiday spend.
- iii. Deloitte's 2026 Global Retail Industry Outlook reports that more than 9 in 10 retail leaders expect AI to be used more than traditional search by 2026, and that 50% expect today's multi-step shopping journey to collapse by 2027 into a single AI-driven interaction.

### **The shift is observable in the data now.**

Regulatory position is at stake on the same content. Historic material still online may no longer represent the organisation's current position. Out-of-date safety information, superseded operating procedures, conflicting product documentation, and stale claims continue to feed the picture AI forms.

In regulated industries, the obligation is heavier. Financial services, life sciences, and any sector where the regulator carries the right to scrutinise published material face a regulator now reading the same external picture AI is reading, including the parts the organisation has stopped looking at.

Cyber position is at stake on the same estate. Old domains, forgotten subdomains, legacy applications, and abandoned campaign assets are still software, and software that has not been maintained is software that has not been patched - the exposure is structural. The same estate that distorts the AI picture is the estate that carries the cyber risk.

## The cost of waiting

The cost of waiting is the cost of letting the external picture set without intervention. AI is using what is online now, building from it, and presenting the result to the next reader. Once a picture is formed and reused, it is the picture that gets surfaced, summarised, and acted on.

Recovery is harder than first action. Competitors that move first are read accurately by AI first. The picture they own becomes the basis of the comparison the market uses. The organisation acting later is correcting a picture that has already formed, against competitors AI is already representing accurately to the market.

The compounding effect, over time - AI systems carry learned patterns forward, so the longer a picture has been in circulation, the more it has been retrieved, summarised, cited, and used in subsequent answers. Each retrieval reinforces the picture across the wider system, and each reinforcement makes the picture harder to displace.

The compounding is observable in the audience data. Harvard Business Review reports that in a 2025 survey of 12,000 consumers, 58% had turned to generative AI tools for product or service recommendations, against 25% in 2023. The same article reports a 1,300% surge in AI search referrals to US retail sites during the 2024 holiday season.

BCG's 2025 Black Friday Consumer Study, surveying 10,240 consumers across 10 countries, reports that 48% had used or planned to use generative AI during the year-end sales events, 9 (nine) points higher than 2024. The audience is moving through AI in numbers measurable across sectors and markets.

The measurement landscape has moved with the audience. Forrester reports that clicks were the primary measure of both paid and organic search performance for the past two decades, and that in an AI-mediated environment, organic success is being redefined as frequent appearance in AI-assisted conversations.

McKinsey research finds that just 16% of brands today systematically track AI search performance. The other 84% are operating without a measurement framework against the channel that increasingly mediates discovery for them.

The cost is not visible inside conventional reporting until the position has already shifted. Search referrals fall. Comparison shortlists thin. Recommendations move to competitors. Each of those shifts is observable after the fact, by which point the picture AI is using has been formed from the material the organisation did not act on at the time it could have.

**The organisation that acts now is acting on the picture as it is forming.**

**The organisation that acts later is correcting the picture after the market has acted on it.**

The 90 to 95% of the picture that is not owned content does not respond to promotion. It responds to the foundations of what AI can find when it reads the material the organisation has placed on the public internet.

## Implications for the board

The board is responsible for brand, customer, regulatory position, and commercial performance. Each of those is now being shaped by what AI is reading externally and presenting to the market on the organisation's behalf. The board either owns the picture AI forms of the organisation, or accepts the one AI assembles from what is currently online.

The question for the executive sitting with this responsibility is where the AI readiness framework sits inside the organisation today, who owns it, and why a maturity position for the AI fundamentals layer is not part of the board pack already. The position is continually being formed. The picture is already in circulation across the market.

The board's normal disciplines transfer to AI readiness without modification. Risk is registered against named owners, reporting is structured to a regular cadence, and position is reviewed at intervals appropriate to the rate of change. Each of those disciplines applies to AI readiness once the question of where it sits has been answered.

The position the board needs is straightforward. A maturity score for the AI fundamentals layer of the organisation's digital estate. A breakdown by digital property. A view of the unknown estate sitting outside active management. A direction of travel against the principles, with an indication of where the foundations hold and where they fail. The position is read at the same level as any other governance position, continual, scored, evidenced, and reviewed.

The reader of this document is the executive in the room when those questions are asked, or the executive who should be asking them. The first move is internal, the executive asks:

*“where the AI readiness framework sits inside the organisation, who owns it, and why the maturity position is not in the board pack today.”*

The picture being formed of the organisation is being formed without intervention, and the organisation has the position it has chosen by asking, or the position it has chosen by not asking.

## The exposures

Each exposures share a single root cause. AI is reading material the organisation does not own, does not manage, and in many cases does not know is still visible.

1. McKinsey research finds that brand-owned sites comprise only 5 to 10% of the sources AI search references in many categories.
2. AirOps research analysing more than 21,000 brands finds that 85% of brand mentions in AI search come from third-party content.
3. The picture is built across the wider web. The organisation is one of many sources, and the others continue to operate whether the organisation engages with them or not.
4. The reader being told that AI Visibility, Generative Engine Optimisation, or Answer Engine Optimisation is the answer is being told that promotion will solve a problem promotion cannot reach.

## The value of getting this right

The value of getting AI readiness right is felt across the same dimensions the exposure runs through. Brand, regulatory, commercial, and cyber positions each move with the underlying work.

The first value is confidence in the position. An organisation that knows what its external footprint contains, that has scored the foundations layer, and that has a direction of travel for each digital property, knows where it stands. The board has a position to read. The executive has a position to act on. The wider organisation has a frame against which technical, content, and governance work is prioritised.

The second value is cost reduction across the digital estate. The work involves taking control of digital landscape sprawl, the websites, pages, documents, and legacy assets that have accumulated over many years. Each unmanaged asset carries a hosting cost, a security cost, a maintenance cost, and a misinformation cost. Remediation or removal of unmanaged assets reduces direct cost across each of those lines. The exercise reaches the cost base of the digital estate at the same time as it reaches the AI picture.

The third value is reduced carbon footprint. An inefficient, bloated, and poorly maintained digital estate consumes energy at each layer, the hosting infrastructure, the network traffic, and the rendering of content that is never used. Removal of duplicate, abandoned, and superseded material reduces the underlying load. Carbon in this framework is one of the 10 principles, held because it is a measurable consequence of digital discipline.

The fourth value is reduced cyber exposure. The unknown estate is the part of the digital footprint still online and visible to AI, software that has not been maintained, and software that has not been maintained is software that has not been patched. Old domains, forgotten subdomains, legacy applications, and abandoned campaign assets sit inside this surface. Reducing the unknown estate reduces the cyber surface.

The fifth value is a defensible argument the executive can take to peers, to the board, and into commercial conversations with regulators, partners, and customers. The argument rests on knowing where the organisation stands, having that position scored against a clear framework, and showing a direction of travel against it.

The values reinforce one another. Cost reduction makes the case to finance, carbon reduction to sustainability, cyber reduction to risk and security. Brand and regulatory confidence make the case to the board, and the same underlying work feeds each conversation.

## Use cases

The use cases that follow illustrate the same root cause across different sectors. Each one shows AI reading, interpreting, and acting on material the organisation no longer recognises as its own, and the consequence of that material remaining visible.

The explanations, positioning statements are illustrative.

### Use case. Pharmaceutical

Pharmaceutical companies publish prescribing information, administration guidance, and patient-facing material across their own websites, partner sites, and historic documents. Older versions remain online alongside current ones, and AI now reads this public material to answer clinical and patient questions on the company's behalf.

When superseded guidance, discontinued lines, or withdrawn products remain visible, AI may present them as current, with consequences for patient safety, regulatory standing, and the company's position.

As clinicians, trained administrators, and patients turn to AI for how a medicine is used, the published estate becomes the source of clinical instruction. Accuracy at source decides what AI tells them.

#### Consolidated pandemic resource

During the pandemic a pharmaceutical company stood up a website to bring a wide range of documentation into one place, built at speed to meet urgent demand from clinicians, administrators, and the public.

The compliance oversight that would normally govern published clinical material was not applied at the time, a reasonable trade-off under the conditions. The site stayed online after the pandemic eased. Documents that have since been superseded still sit alongside current versions. Products no longer part of the company's offer are still presented as available.

One product withdrawn from the market still carries full guidance on how clinicians and trained administrators should use and administer it. AI reading the site returns this material as current clinical instruction.

## Use case. Local / municipal government

The ongoing positioning in relation to efficiency and innovation is to automate more support, including chatbots and voice services for citizens needing additional help.

AI systems read what councils / municipals publish: policy pages, archived service procedures, older departmental sites, and PDFs, so inaccurate or outdated content surfaces in chatbot answers and voice agents, producing cost, delays, complaints, legal exposure, and poor public service outcomes.

As AI agents act on behalf of citizens, the published estate becomes the operating manual. Accuracy at source decides whether AI serves the public.

### Chatbot failure and withdrawal

- An authority deployed a chatbot for citizen enquiries.
- AI read the published estate, including a 2-year-old planning microsite the digital team had no record of.
- AI presumed the structured PDFs were authoritative and returned them as current planning guidance. Planning applications failed on the back of wrong information.
- The chatbot was withdrawn following legal challenge and reputational damage.
- The digital team had been warning of the 'sprawl' for years. The first step in correcting AI was understanding the actual digital footprint.

## Use case. Government regulator

Regulators publish legislative documents, guidance, operating handbooks, and PDFs that AI systems now read on behalf of the organisations they oversee. When versions conflict, when procedures no longer apply, when links point to material moved, removed or superseded,

AI returns answers that reflect those conflicts, and misinterpretation carries significant public and legal consequences.

As AI agents interrogate regulatory content to answer compliance questions, the regulator's published estate becomes the working interpretation.

Current, accurate, machine-readable guidance should now be considered a regulatory function.

### Poor document management

A national financial regulator publishes key regulatory and legal documents as PDFs which contain links to other web content. However, 20% of links within the documents are broken, including the core legal basis for some of the documents. Additionally, documents are poorly named and pages within each PDF have the same title, effectively making them unreadable to AI tools.

84% of AI-generated summaries produced from these documents contained inaccuracies, with the potential to give erroneous positions on legal and regulatory matters. Correcting the AI's understanding was estimated at 650 hours of work, based on the number of documents.

## Use case. Financial services

Financial services firms run data-heavy websites, forms, product disclosures and regulatory communications that customers and AI agents now interrogate to make decisions and act on their behalf. AI reads what is published, so inaccurate or outdated content produces wrong answers at the point of a financial decision, hitting customers directly.

The competitive advantage runs to firms whose content AI can read accurately, interpret correctly, and transact against without ambiguity. Consumer harm, regulatory penalty, and commercial liability follow when accuracy fails.

### Partner-site promotion

A financial institution ran a joint market promotion on a partner site 2 years earlier. The products covered were no longer applicable to that market. No central record of the shared positioning existed. AI surfaced the partner page as current product information.

A regulatory inspection followed, citing misrepresentation of products to a market the firm could no longer serve.

### Summer holiday insurance

A summer holiday insurance promotion was published online. The page differed from the underlying policy document. Cover levels on the page conflicted with the contract. The emergency contact had also changed to a global 0800 number, not shown on the surfaced page.

AI returned the outdated page to customers, producing wrong cover information at the point of need.

## **Use case. Electrical product manufacturer**

Electrical product manufacturers sell into many countries, each with its own safety standards, certifications, and approved usage. The material that supports a product, the manuals, datasheets, safety notices, and setup guides, has to match the standard that applies in the market where the product is used.

AI now reads this material to answer how a product is installed, configured, and operated safely. When out-of-date or conflicting versions remain online across the estate,

AI may return guidance wrong for the market or the model, carrying regulatory and liability consequences. Full control and current knowledge of the digital landscape is what keeps published safety information correct.

### Superseded manuals across the estate

A manufacturer has out-of-date safety information spread across its published material.

Multiple manuals, documents, and versions of the same product data sit across the estate, and the links inside each point to material that has moved or been superseded. AI reading the estate cannot resolve which version is current, so it returns setup and safety guidance that no longer applies.

The consequences show up in support. Customers cannot set up the items and devices from the information they are given. Support contact rises, and product returns are materially higher.

Brand quality is judged on a setup experience the manufacturer is no longer controlling.

# The AI readiness framework

The AI readiness framework is independent of any single vendor and structured to be applied to organisations of any size, sector, or jurisdiction. It runs in 3 layers, in a specific order, and the order is the discipline of the framework.

## Fundamentals

Fundamentals are the structural layer of the framework. They cover what AI can find, read, interpret, and act on when it encounters the organisation's digital estate.

The layer includes the structural integrity of pages, documents, and entities, the findability of content, the clarity of authority and provenance signals, the accessibility of forms and content paths, the consistency of information across the estate, and the technical health that lets each of those qualities hold over time.

The fundamentals layer is the layer on which the other two are built. Governance applied without strong fundamentals manages content that AI cannot read correctly in the first place. Visibility applied without strong fundamentals promotes content that AI is misreading.

## Governance

Governance keeps the information correct, current, and accountable over time. The layer covers ownership of content, review cadence, authority for change, evidence of decisions taken and decisions deferred, privacy and trust controls, and carbon and digital efficiency as part of how the estate is run.

Governance applied to a sound fundamentals layer holds the position the organisation has built. Governance applied without that layer is a process applied to material that does not reliably carry the meaning the organisation intends.

## Visibility

Visibility surfaces what the organisation has built. It is the discipline now re-named Generative Engine Optimisation or Answer Engine Optimisation in the wider market conversation, and the spending that conversation now attracts.

Visibility applied to a sound fundamentals layer, with governance in place, surfaces material AI can read accurately and the organisation can stand behind. Visibility applied without those layers surfaces whatever is currently in circulation, including the material the organisation no longer recognises.

## The order is load-bearing

Building on weak foundations carries the weakness into everything built above. Promoting without governance circulates content the organisation has not verified. The discipline of the framework is that each layer rests on the layer below, and the order is the way the framework holds against the rate of change in the external environment.

What AI sees, not what the organisation says.

# The AI fundamentals maturity scale™

The maturity scale measures the AI fundamentals layer of the framework. It expresses an organisation's position across the foundations on a 0 to 100% scale, with 6 bands, from Foundational to Leading. The scale measures the foundations.

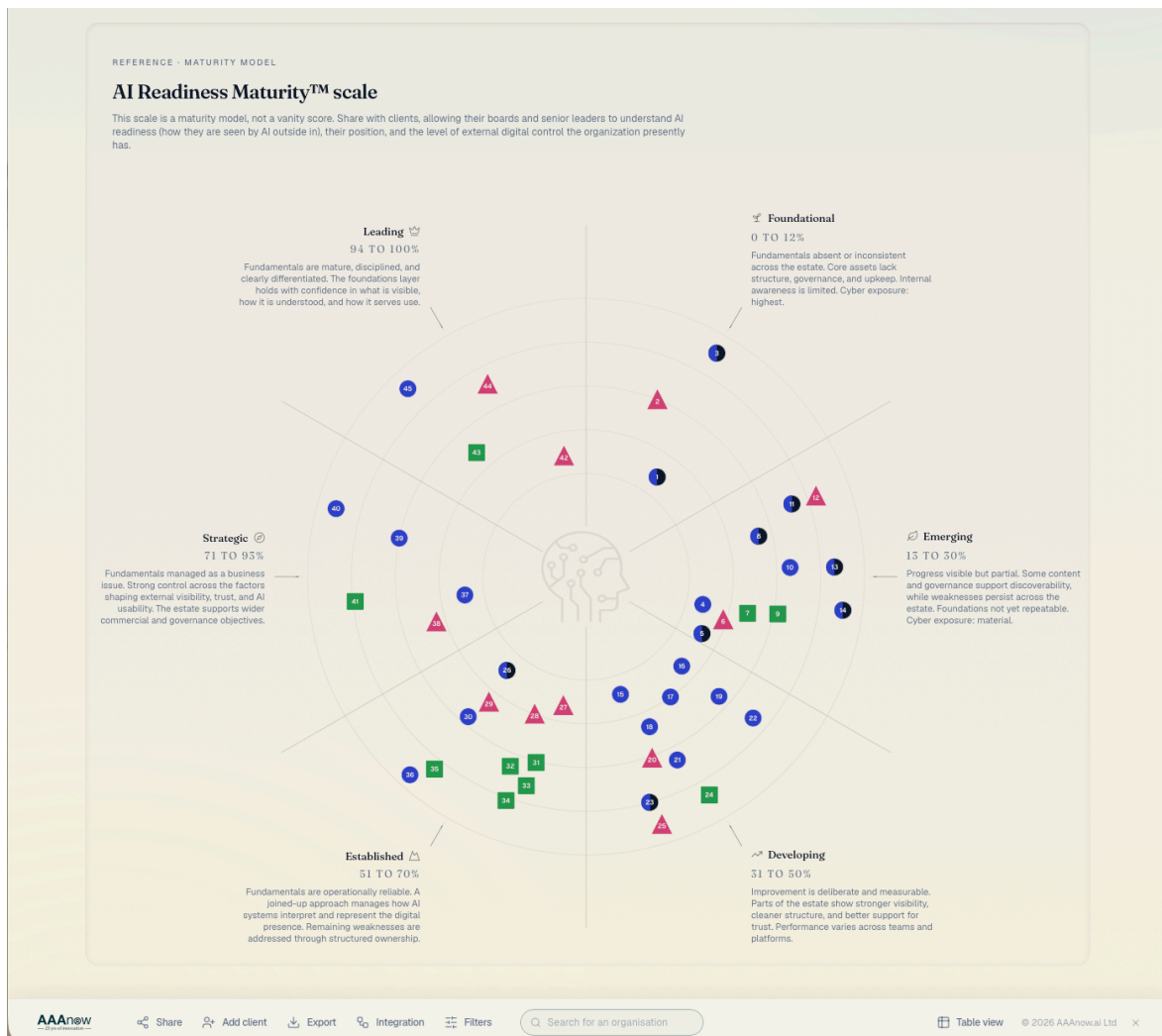
Governance and visibility are read against their own assessments inside the framework.

The scale is a maturity model, used by boards and senior leaders to understand current position, the exposure that follows from that position, and the level of external digital control the organisation presently has. It shows whether the foundations layer is weak, partial, credible, strategic, or clearly differentiated, in a form senior leaders can act on.

The position is continual. Content and websites change, and the foundations need to be monitored so they do not break and produce new failures.

Discovery brings forgotten estate into the picture, with newly identified sites carrying their own foundations weaknesses into the score. The maturity position moves with the underlying estate, and the movement is what the scale is built to show.

## Example: AI Readiness Maturity™



## The scale

The AI Readiness Maturity Scale gives executives and boards an immediate view across the digital landscape. Each Website can be placed against a recognised maturity scale, showing where it stands, what needs attention, and where confidence is strongest or weakest. Creating the foundation for oversight, prioritisation, reporting, and informed action.

Agencies use this to map a client's digital landscape or individual websites against the scale, showing where maturity sits.

<b>0 to 12%</b>	<b>Foundational</b>	Fundamentals are absent or inconsistent across the estate. Core digital assets exist without the structure, governance, or upkeep that AI systems rely on to interpret content accurately. Internal awareness of what AI can see, infer, or reuse is limited. Cyber exposure from the unknown estate is highest.
<b>13 to 30%</b>	<b>Emerging</b>	Progress on fundamentals is visible but partial. Some content, governance, and digital practices support discoverability, while important weaknesses persist across the estate. Foundations are not yet dependable or repeatable. Cyber exposure from the unknown estate remains material at this position
<b>31 to 50%</b>	<b>Developing</b>	Improvement on fundamentals is deliberate and measurable. Parts of the estate show stronger visibility, cleaner structure, and better support for trust. Performance varies across teams, platforms, content types, and third-party dependencies.
<b>51 to 70%</b>	<b>Established</b>	Fundamentals are operationally reliable. A joined-up approach manages the factors shaping how AI systems interpret and represent the digital presence. Remaining weaknesses are less systemic, visible internally, and addressed through structured ownership and review.
<b>71 to 93%</b>	<b>Strategic</b>	Fundamentals are managed as a business issue, reaching beyond the technical. Control is strong across the factors shaping external visibility, trust, and AI usability. The digital estate supports accurate interpretation, reduced exposure, and wider commercial, governance, and brand objectives.
<b>94 to 100%</b>	<b>Leading</b>	Fundamentals are mature, disciplined, and clearly differentiated. The foundations layer holds with confidence in what is visible, how it is understood, and how it serves human and AI use. External representation is accurate, trusted, and advantageous.

## Fundamentals - The 10 principles

Each digital property the organisation owns is assessed against 10 principles. The principles set out what AI sees when it reads the property, the same principles that determine whether AI's reading produces an accurate picture of the organisation.

The 10 principles are named on the diagram with category prefixes that link each principle to its area of impact within the wider framework.

1. **ALL | MX Experience.** Journeys, navigation, labels, forms, tasks, and content paths support confident human and AI use.
2. **SEO | Findability and Access.** The right content can be found, reached, retrieved, and permitted for search, AI systems, and AI agents.
3. **ALL | Machine Structure.** Pages, documents, entities, headings, links, and data are organised so AI systems can interpret content accurately.
4. **GEO | Authority and Provenance.** It is clear who is speaking, who published the content, when it changed, and why the source should be trusted.
5. **GEO | Integrity and Consistency.** Content is accurate, current, non-conflicting, non-duplicative, and not undermining the organisation's position.
6. **FND | Inclusion.** People and AI systems and agents can access, understand, and use content and forms, and interact with the organisation online.
7. **ALL | Performance.** Content loads, renders, responds, and remains technically available for people, search systems, AI systems, and agents.
8. **GOV | Carbon.** The digital estate avoids unnecessary waste across pages, assets, and scripts. De-duplication minimises misinformation.
9. **GOV | Privacy and Trust Penalty.** Privacy behaviour supports trust through consent, transparency, responsible tracking, and working privacy statements.
10. **FND | Agent Operability and Safety.** AI agents can understand permitted actions, complete tasks safely, and avoid misuse or unsafe outcomes.

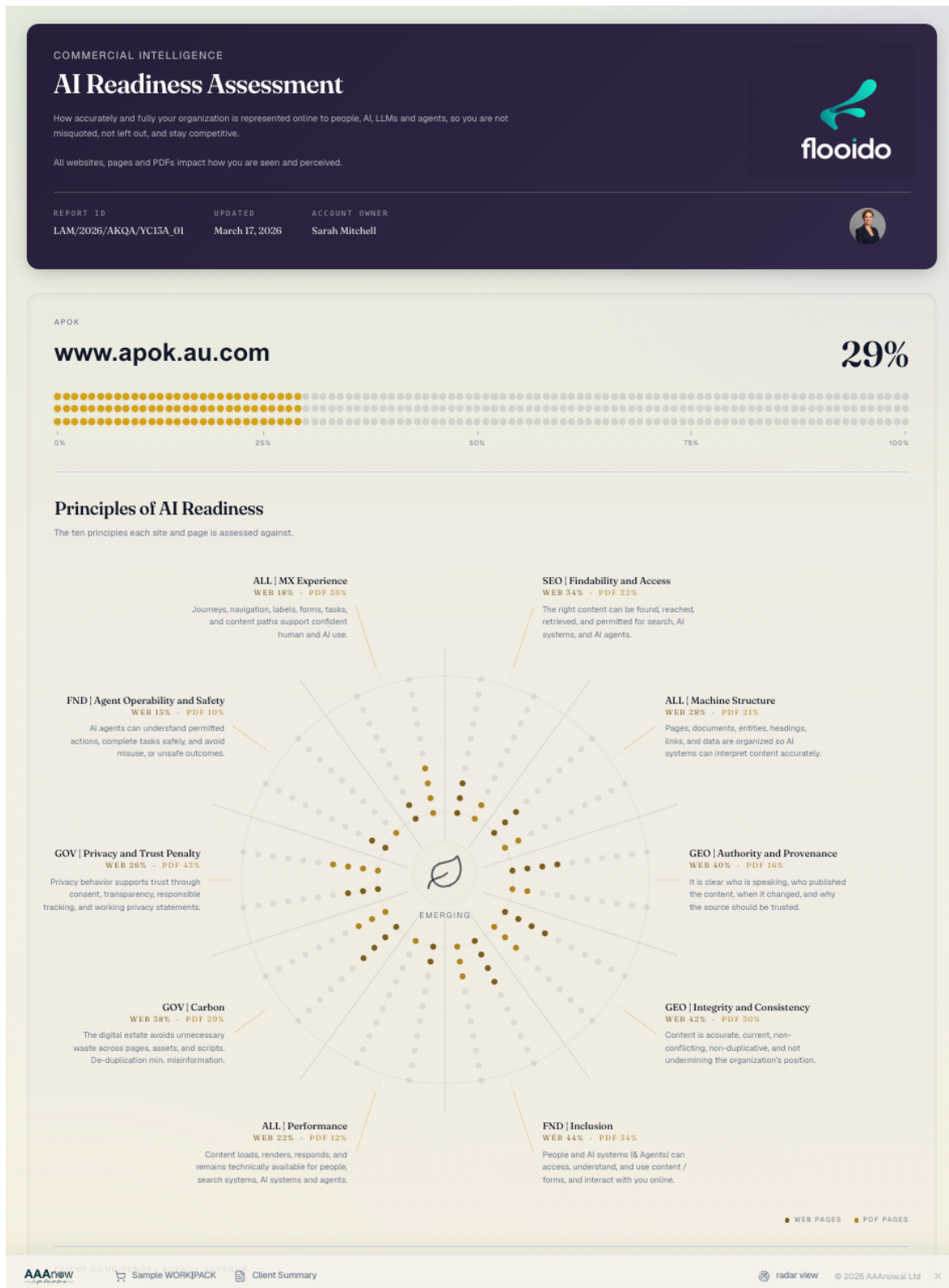
The principles operate together. A site can perform well against any one of them and still fail against the picture AI assembles, because AI reads across them.

The assessment scores each principle for each digital property, with scoring shown separately for web pages and for PDF pages within each property, producing a position the organisation can read at the level of detail it requires.

What AI sees, not what the organisation says.

## Example: AI Readiness assessment

Offers the board, the CEOs immediate clarity on where the organisation stands, by principal, ensuing progress can be monitored. It is built for owned, independent reporting, without technical help, vendor influence, or reliance on internal interpretation.



## Methodology

The maturity score is produced against a fixed rubric applied the same way to each property. Each digital property is assessed against the same 10 principles, with web pages and PDF pages scored separately, so each input traces to the property it came from.

Each principle carries a set weighting applied uniformly across assessments, with inclusion weighted heavily and carbon weighted light, reflecting their respective impact on how AI reads the estate. The same inputs return the same score, which is what makes the position reviewable and repeatable.

The rubric is held independently of the remediation work, so the standard a score is measured against does not move with the party doing the work. No external standard for AI readiness yet exists to score against, so the position rests on the rubric itself and on the dataset behind it, risk profiling from 2017 to 2023 across 100+ million websites.

Our own data, collected over some 25 plus years is probably one of the largest data sets available covering websites, the ability to map recent results against 3.7 trillion data points is a unique capability, and ability to set the first maturity metric.

The organisation can re-run the assessment against the same 10 principles to confirm the position for itself, and discovery feeds the same scoring, so a newly identified site enters the position at its actual foundations rather than lifting the score by being left out.

**EACH PRINCIPLE HAS ITS OWN RELEVANCE AND WEIGHTING. CARBON IS IMPORTANT, BUT ITS IMPACT IS LIMITED IN TERMS OF AI VALUE, WHEREAS INCLUSION IS ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT.**

## Summarizing Governance and Visibility

The three-pillar model provides that structure.

1. Fundamentals establish whether the estate is ready.
2. Visibility shows whether the organisation is being surfaced and represented.
3. Governance creates the control needed to monitor, improve, and evidence readiness over time.

The organisations that manage this well will not treat AI readiness as an internal technology project. They will treat it as a public-facing discipline that protects reputation, supports trust, strengthens visibility, and improves how the organisation is understood by people and AI systems.

### Visibility as an external outcome layer

Visibility is not the same as Findability. Findability asks whether content can be reached, retrieved, and permitted. Visibility asks whether the organisation is actually being surfaced, cited, compared, recommended, selected, and represented correctly across search and AI environments.

Visibility area	What it measures
<b>Search presence</b>	Whether the organisation appears for relevant searches.
<b>AI answer inclusion</b>	Whether AI systems include, omit, or overlook the organisation.
<b>Citation quality</b>	Whether the right pages and documents are being used.
<b>Representation accuracy</b>	Whether summaries reflect the current organisation correctly.
<b>Comparison presence</b>	Whether the organisation appears in relevant comparative answers.
<b>GEO performance</b>	Whether content supports generative answer environments.
<b>Source preference</b>	Whether current authoritative sources are preferred over weaker alternatives.
<b>Misrepresentation risk</b>	Whether AI outputs distort, simplify, or misstate the organisation's position.

## Governance as the control layer

Governance turns AI Readiness from an assessment into an operating discipline. It defines who owns external AI readiness, how public-facing risks are monitored, how AI representation is reviewed, how outdated content is corrected, how high-risk issues are escalated, and how progress is evidenced.

Governance area	Why it matters
<b>Ownership</b>	External AI readiness needs named accountability.
<b>Monitoring</b>	Public content, AI representation, and visibility change constantly.
<b>Correction</b>	Outdated, conflicting, and misleading content must be addressed.
<b>Evidence</b>	Progress must be shown through repeatable assessment.
<b>Escalation</b>	High-risk issues need business-level prioritisation.
<b>Review cadence</b>	Readiness must remain current as content and AI systems change.
<b>Maturity tracking</b>	Leaders need a clear view of progress over time.

## Discovery

Discovery is the operational capability through which an organisation sees what is visible to AI across its external digital footprint. It runs continuously, because the footprint is not static. Sites are stood up, archived, mirrored, copied, and referenced across the wider web at a pace no manual exercise can match.

The starting position covers only the known estate, with the remainder of the digital footprint sitting outside it. AAAnow data, drawn from risk profiling across 2017 to 2023 covering 100+ million websites, we have mapped 41% of websites are unknown to the organisation's digital teams. The unknown estate carries old domains, archived campaigns, forgotten subdomains, obsolete reference pages, third-party hosted material, and public material created for earlier operational needs. AI reads what is online, regardless of whether the organisation still considers it current.

Discovery turns the unknown estate into knowable estate. It locates sites the organisation has lost track of. It identifies third-party properties that carry the organisation's content. It surfaces the PDFs distributed across owned sites, partner sites, and supplier portals. The same internal data indicates that 19% of PDFs on organisational websites are duplicates, and that 37% of PDFs become untracked once they leave the producer's website, including through circulation in annual reports and product catalogues.

The continuous nature of discovery is the point. New content is published. Old content moves. Third parties cache, mirror, and republish material at intervals the organisation does not control. A static assessment of the footprint expires the moment it is produced. A discovery capability that runs continuously gives the organisation a footprint position that holds against the rate of change.

The maturity position responds to discovery. When a newly identified site enters the scope of the assessment, the foundations of that site enter the scoring. An old site with basic failings against the 10 principles drops the maturity position. Improvement of the foundations on the underlying site raises the position back. The movement is the model working, with the score reflecting the estate as it actually is, rather than the estate as the organisation has been remembering it.

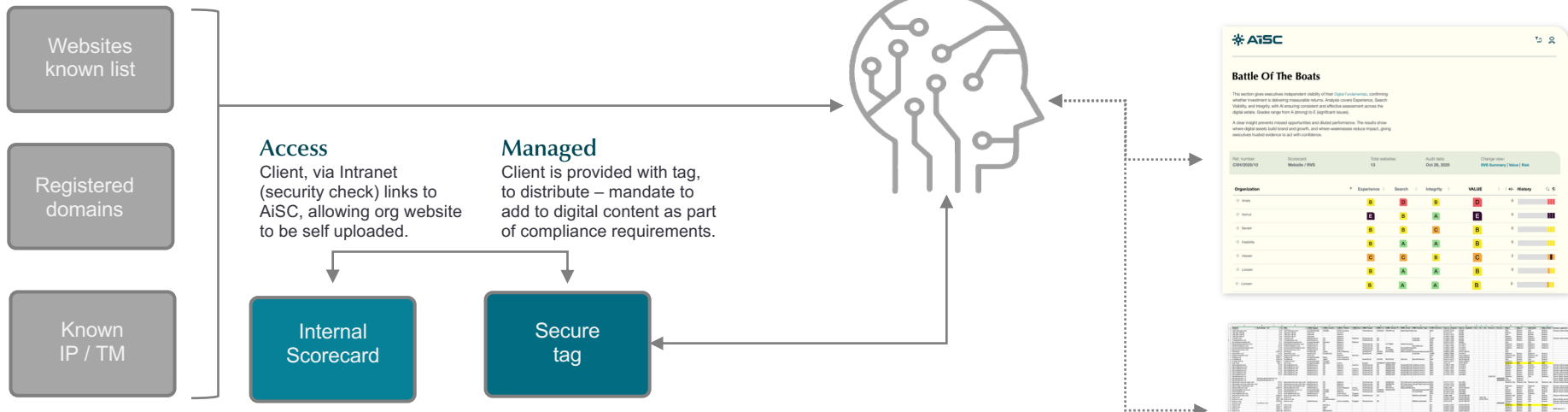
Discovery sits alongside the assessment, not after it. The assessment scores what is known. Discovery brings the unknown into the known. Without discovery, the assessment is partial. With discovery, the assessment is honest about the position the organisation is actually in.

What AI sees, not what the organisation says.

## Landscape mapping.

### Start here

Client provides the details they have. Where a prospect's activity starting point can be just known websites.

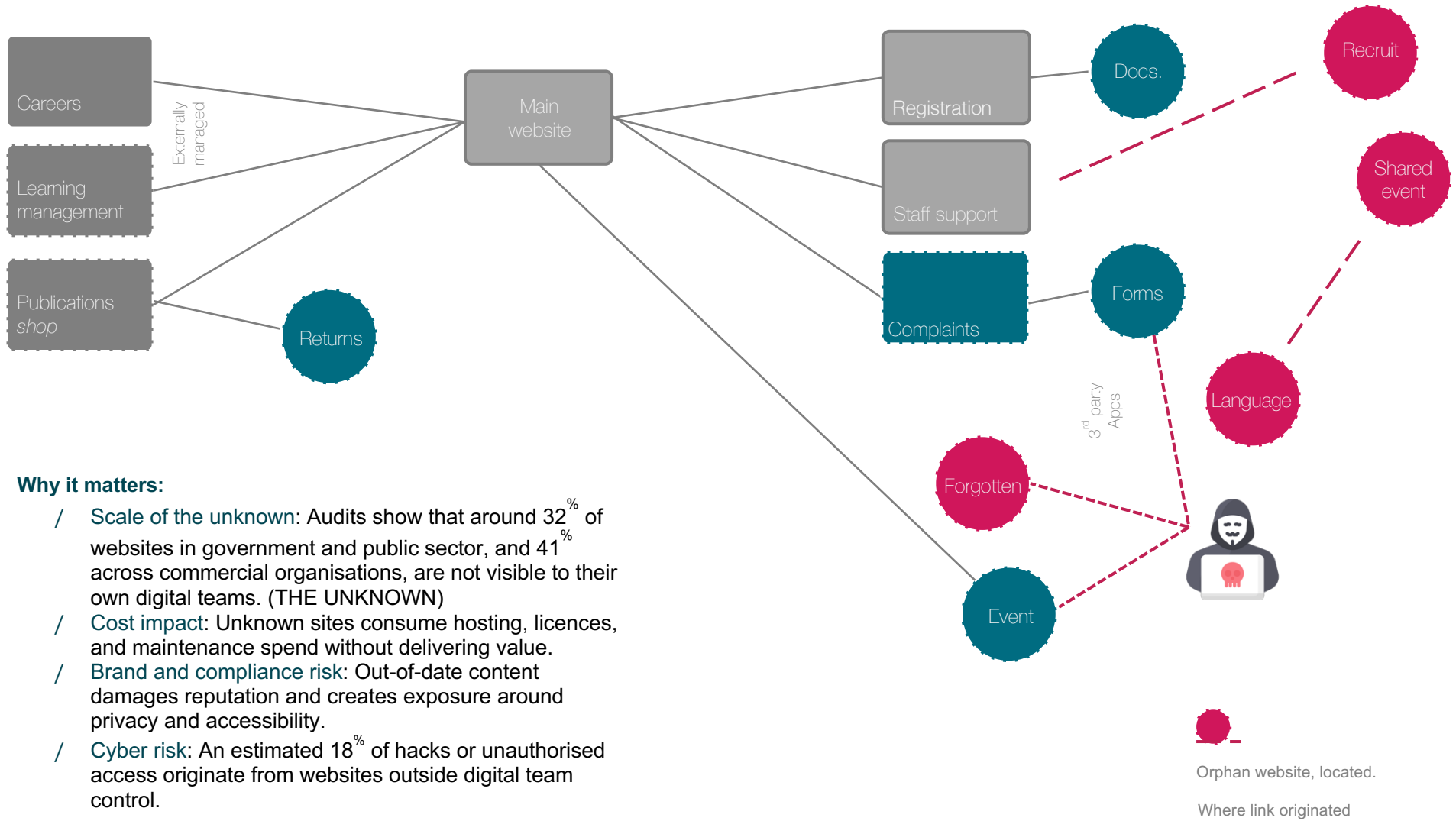


Using the intelligence to create a master profiling from exiting websites; using Ai to profile content of linked and associated websites; and mapping of domains and IP matches. Ai / innovation: identifying the unknown, and then project manage the clean up or site removal.

### Output

Choice of outputs, Value / Risk profiling of the websites, XLS (data feed) for systems integration.

## Landscape mapping 2.





## Why this matters now

AI is using what is online now, not what is online next year, after the next governance review, or after a fresh content audit. The picture being formed of the organisation is being formed against today's external position, with today's gaps in it.

The shift in audience behaviour is observable in the data. Harvard Business Review reports that in a 2025 survey of 12,000 consumers, 58% had turned to generative AI tools for product or service recommendations, against 25% in 2023. BCG's 2025 Black Friday Consumer Study, surveying 10,240 consumers across 10 countries, reports that 48% had used or planned to use generative AI during year-end sales events, 9 points higher than 2024.

Deloitte's 2026 Global Retail Industry Outlook reports that more than 9 in 10 retail leaders expect AI to be used more than traditional search by 2026.

The measurement landscape has moved with the audience. Forrester reports that the established measurement framework for search is shifting to AI-mediated metrics. McKinsey research finds that just 16% of brands today systematically track AI search performance, leaving 84% operating without a measurement framework for the channel that increasingly mediates discovery. Similarweb reports that zero-click search on Google grew from 56% to 69% in the year following the launch of AI Overviews, with the audience being intercepted before it reaches the source.

The picture AI carries is reinforced by use. Each query that retrieves a piece of material strengthens the place of that material in subsequent retrievals. An organisation whose external picture is being formed from material it does not own carries that position forward day by day, and the position deepens the longer it is left untreated.

Competitors moving first are read accurately by AI first. The picture they own becomes the basis of the comparison the market uses. The organisation arriving later is correcting a picture already in circulation, against competitors AI is already representing accurately.

The cost of waiting is not a future cost. It is the daily cost of the picture forming without intervention, and the cost of the recovery that becomes harder the longer the picture has been in use.

## Conclusion

What AI sees, and what the organisation says, are now two different things. The first is read by the market. The second sits inside the organisation. The work of AI readiness is to make those two pictures the same picture, and to keep them the same picture as the external environment continues to move.

AI readiness is continual. The estate changes. AI models and agents change. The position the organisation holds against the framework moves with both. The maturity score is a reading of the foundations layer at a moment in time, taken regularly, with the trend showing whether the position is improving, holding, or weakening against the rate of external change.

The framework is independent of any single vendor. The maturity scale is scoreable, evidenced, and reviewable. The 10 principles are applied to each digital property in the estate. Discovery brings the unknown estate into the picture. The work that follows is costed and planned against the position the organisation reads.

The reader of this document has a position to ask about inside the organisation.

- I. Where the AI readiness framework sits. Who owns it.
- II. Why a maturity position for the AI fundamentals layer is not part of the board pack today.

The picture being formed of the organisation is being formed regardless. The board either holds the position the organisation is in, or the board accepts whichever position AI has assembled from the material currently online.

## Author

This document is published by AAAnow. The framework, the maturity scale, and the principles it sets out are drawn from work that began with the discipline of measuring digital estates at scale, across sectors, and across jurisdictions, over many years.

The underlying capability is built on a continually maintained record of more than 3.7 trillion data points across the world's external digital estates, with the foundations established through risk profiling work running from 2017 to 2023, covering 100+ million websites. The dataset is the basis on which a framework for AI readiness, applicable to organisations of any size or sector, has been built.

The work behind the framework is the same work that turned a measurement of digital quality into a measurement of AI readiness. The structural elements that determine whether a screen reader can interpret a page are the same elements that determine whether an AI system can interpret a page. The same governance signals that determine whether a person can trust a source determine whether AI can. The framework reflects that convergence.

AAAnow's position is to support boards, executives, and the teams that operate the digital estate with the position, the scoring, the discovery capability, and the framework that lets the organisation hold its own picture of where it stands. The work is independent of any single vendor's AI products and is sector-neutral.

Across the group (which includes Sitemorse®, AAAtraq® and Privacy and Cookies) we have over 25 years of direct experience assessing digital performance, we have built one of the most comprehensive data sets in the sector – trillions (literally) data points covering all areas of digital behaviour, value and risk.

Where are we featured, our data utilized?

MARSH

BRIT

  
Gallagher

THE  
CFO

Forbes



CIO

The Pensions Regulator

CMSWIRE

finma

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