Competing for Visibility in the Age of AI

Strategies and Recommendations for Financial Brands to Win in LLM-Powered Search

FINTEL CONNECT

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Methodology & Research Approach

Findings

What This Means For Financial Brands and Their GEO Strategies

Conclusion

> *"The value of an affiliate is not just the direct response revenue that comes through on the click, it's also how they help brands become more visible in AI search. Today, that revenue is not [always] attributed back to the affiliates as the brand itself is capturing a lot of this value."*
>
> **— NICK LAFFERTY, HEAD OF MARKETING**
>
> **Profound**

Executive Summary

This report looks at factors influencing **financial brand visibility** in AI Search Engines and **what role affiliate marketing plays** in winning the discovery game.

The rise of GenAI has transformed how consumers discover and evaluate financial products, signaling a fundamental shift in the mechanics of digital visibility. As AI engines become the new starting point for financial research, discovery is increasingly happening within responses, not through clicks (commonly referred to as no-click or zero-click search), making visibility inside these ecosystems critical. For financial brands, this isn't simply a new search channel; **it's an evolution in how credibility and consumer trust are established**.

In this environment, affiliates play an important role. While owned content continues to play a role in shaping brand authority, it is affiliate and publisher content that often feeds the AI models guiding consumer decisions. These partners have become the connective tissue between brands and discovery ensuring financial products are not only visible but contextually represented where consumers now look for answers. The future of financial marketing will depend on how effectively brands combine strong, structured content with a strategic affiliate presence to secure relevance in the age of generative AI.

Key takeaways

Large Language Models (LLMs) such as **ChatGPT**, **Gemini**, **Perplexity**, and **Copilot** are fundamentally reshaping how consumers discover and evaluate financial products. Unlike traditional search engines, which surface a mix of ads, organic listings, and branded sites, LLMs generate conversational answers that rely heavily on external sources to inform recommendations.

In recognizing the increasingly important role LLMs play in acquisition, we conducted anecdotal research to assess the role affiliate content plays in brand discoverability.

We chose to focus our research on two key financial product categories - credit cards and high-yield savings accounts - using natural, conversational phrasing (e.g., "What's the best credit card for students?"). Each LLM's responses were analyzed for which sources were cited, how often financial institution (FI) websites appeared versus affiliate and publisher content, and what content formats (listicles, tables, educational articles) were most likely to be featured. The results provide a comparative view of how GenAI platforms currently ingest, prioritize, and present financial information offering a baseline for how brands can adapt their visibility strategies in this new discovery landscape.

LLMS RESEARCHED IN THIS REPORT

ChatGPT   Gemini   Copilot   perplexity

FINTEL CONNECT

Why this matters now

Consumer search behavior is evolving rapidly. Instead of typing keywords into Google and scanning through links, users are increasingly asking AI models open-ended, conversational questions like "Which high-yield savings accounts have hidden restrictions?" According to a survey by **Motley Fool Money**, 54% of Americans have used ChatGPT for personal finance recommendations. Furthermore, by 2028, organic search will **drop by 50%**, and AI search is predicted to overtake Google and other traditional search engines by 2030.

These shifts are upending traditional SEO and paid search strategies that financial brands and publishers alike have relied on for decades. While SEO, site authority, and brand familiarity still matter, headlines, structured formats, and third-party authority weigh more heavily in LLM responses than conventional ranking factors. Paid placements (sponsored ads, banners ads, iFrames) are also less visible in conversational outputs, further disrupting acquisition funnels.

As a result, awareness of a financial product, and how this product is presented (if at all), can be directly shaped by what an AI tool is able to source and therefore surface in its response(s) to user queries.

Who should read this

This report is designed for marketing leaders, affiliate managers, and product and growth teams at financial institutions who are navigating this new discovery environment. Whether the goal is driving acquisition, protecting brand visibility, or understanding how affiliate partnerships will evolve in an AI-first world, this report provides a roadmap to:

- **Benchmark** how financial brands currently appear across leading LLMs

- **Understand** which publishers and content formats most influence AI recommendations

- **Identify** the strategic levers available to stay visible as consumer discovery shifts to conversational AI

It is also highly relevant for affiliates and publishers who play an increasingly central role in shaping consumer perception within LLM outputs. As models consistently surface third-party content over brand-owned sites, affiliates and publishers have become essential gateways for financial brands to appear in AI-powered recommendations. For these partners, the findings highlight both the responsibility and opportunity to position themselves as trusted authorities in the evolving landscape of discovery.

Methodology & Research Approach

Scope of the study

This study examined how four leading LLMs - ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, and Copilot – generate responses based on what a consumer would search for when looking for financial products or services.

The research conducted was limited to two prominent financial product categories within the affiliate space - **credit cards** and **high-yield savings accounts**. The choice of products also allowed for representation and comparison across lending and deposit products.

The goal was to understand the mechanics of how each model cites and ranks sources, and to identify the degree to which financial institution websites, affiliate publishers, or other third-party sites influence visibility in AI-driven discovery.

Testing framework

To simulate realistic consumer behavior, 29 prompts were created, each phrased in natural conversational language, to replicate the way users typically engage with AI tools. Examples of the prompts used include:

- "What's the best **credit card** for students?"
- "What hidden terms should I watch for in **high-yield savings accounts**?"

The prompts were sorted into two intent types:

Intent Type	Description
Transactional	Prompts that make users want to **complete an action**, such as purchasing a service or completing a signup (e.g., "Should I get a new credit card?")
Informational	Prompts that **provide insight** on products/services and **educate the user** (e.g., "Which credit card has the best loyalty program?")

To ensure consistency, prompts were tested with controls for time of day and geography, reducing variability that could arise from contextual model adjustments.

Each LLM's responses were then analyzed for:

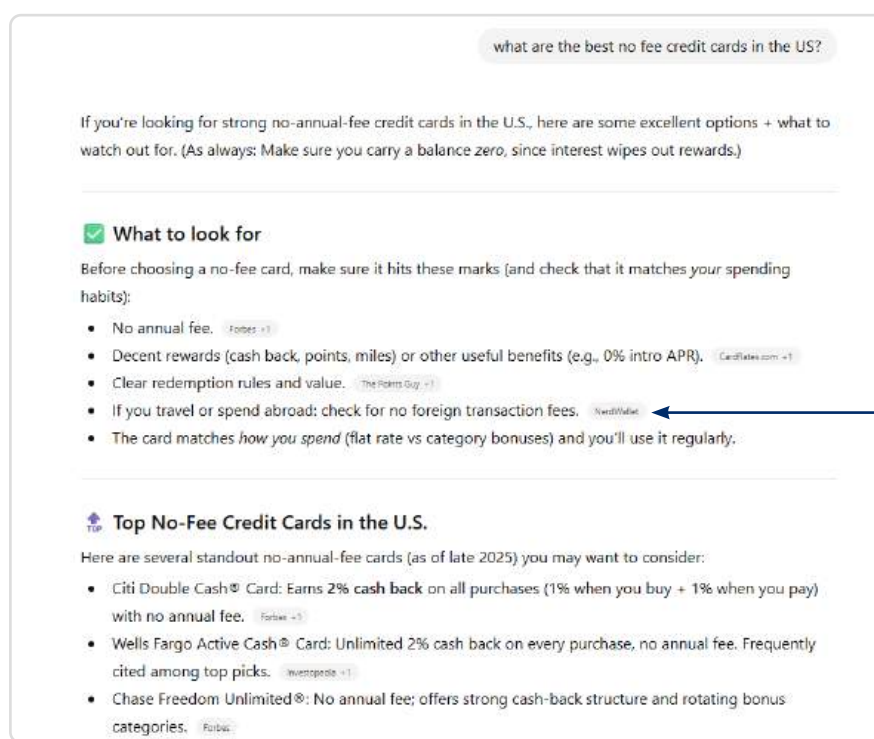| 🔖	#	🏛
The **sources** cited (both links and attributions in text).	The **number** of sources included in each response.	The **type** of sources (financial websites, affiliate publishers, paid placements).

Data captured

The analysis produced both quantitative and qualitative insights, including:

- **Total number of sources cited** across all prompts, by platform
- **Breakdown by publisher**, highlighting which third-party sites dominated visibility (NerdWallet, Bankrate, Investopedia, Forbes, Yahoo Finance)
- **Content format favored by each LLM** such as listicles, comparison tables, or educational articles
- **Relative visibility of brand-owned vs. affiliate content**, showing how often FI websites appeared compared to third-party sites
- **Placement within responses**, noting whether brand mentions appeared prominently at the top of answers or further down the source list

Considerations

As with all studies of LLM behavior, several considerations apply:

- **Variability of outputs:** LLM responses can shift depending on prompt phrasing, user history, or timing
- **Transparency challenges:** Distinguishing between affiliate-driven links and purely organic editorial content was inferred from context, since not all models disclose monetization structures
- **Point-in-time snapshot:** Results capture model behavior during the testing period, and as LLMs are frequently updated and retrained, sourcing patterns may evolve over time

SCREENSHOT OF A PROMPT AND RESPONSE BY CHATGPT

This is an example of a **citation**.

Source: https://chatgpt.com/

1. Strong Variability in Sources Across Platforms

The research revealed significant variability in how each LLM selects and weighs its information sources. While all four models surface financial content from recognizable publishers, the composition and ratio of brand-owned versus third-party sources differ substantially:

Gemini

Gemini (developed by Google AI) emerged as the most **"organic content friendly,"** with **72% of its sources coming from financial institutions' own websites** across all tested prompts. This suggests Google's ecosystem leans toward rewarding authoritative, first-party content likely influenced by its integration with search data.

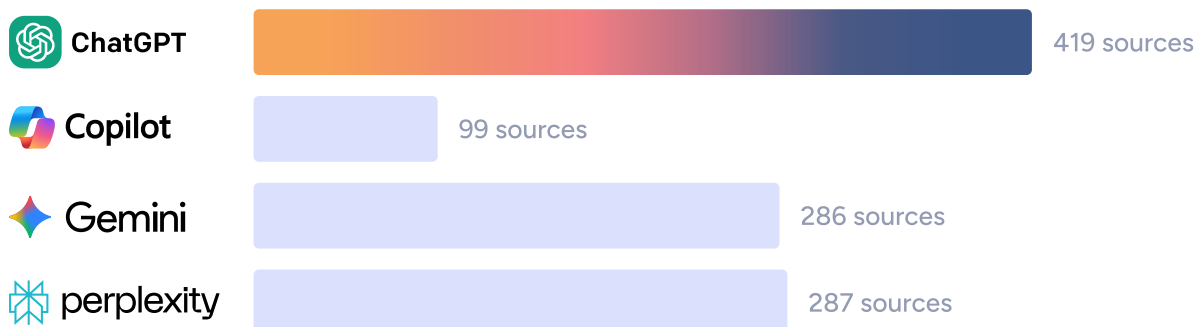**FOR EXAMPLE**

| What's the best **credit card** for students? | 🔍 |

Sources

🏦 **American Express** · www.americanexpress.com/	🏦 **Synchrony** · www.synchrony.com/
🏦 **PNC** · www.pnc.com/	🏦 **Experian** · www.experian.com/
🏦 **Discover** · www.discover.com/	🌐 **Bankrate** · www.bankrate.com/
🏦 **EverBank** · www.everbank.com/	🌐 **Investopedia** · www.investopedia.com/
🏦 **Capital One** · www.capitalone.com/	🌐 **NerdWallet** · www.nerdwallet.com/

ChatGPT

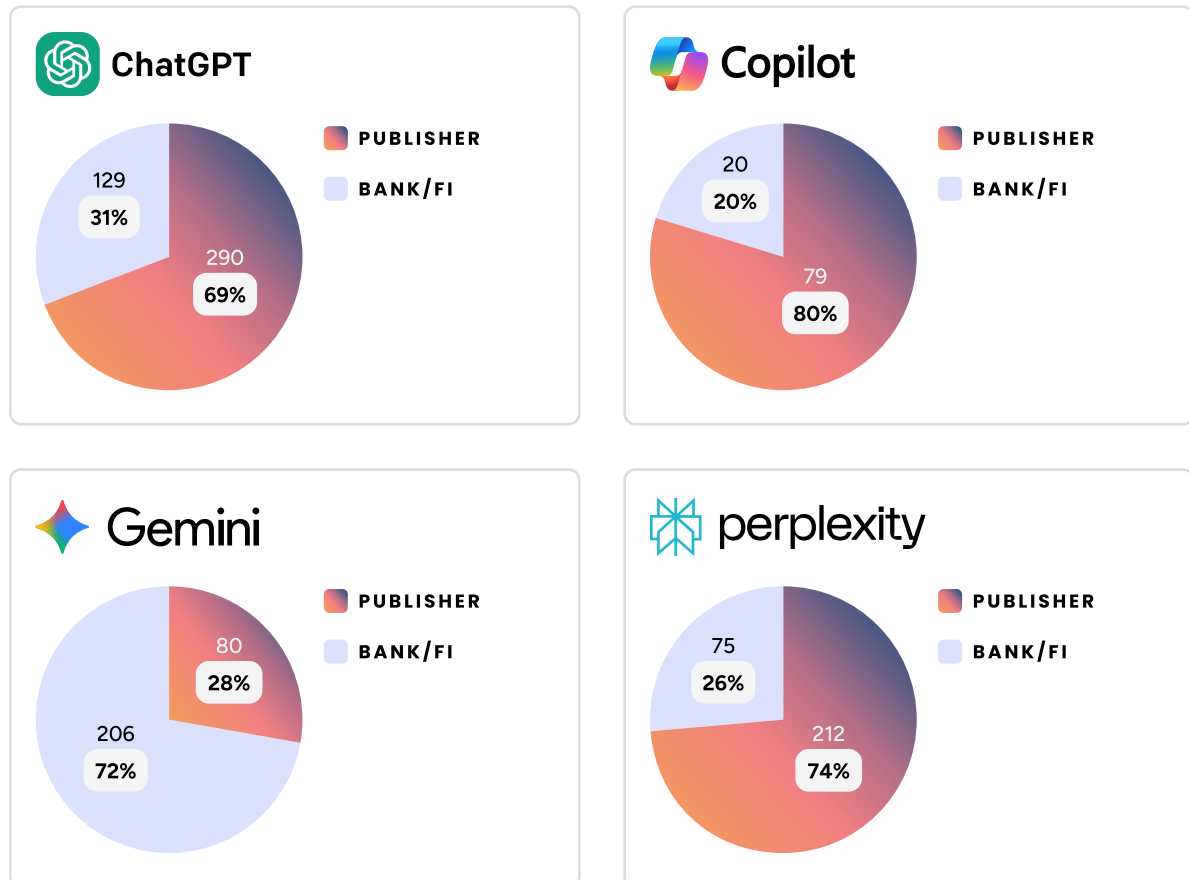ChatGPT demonstrated the broadest sourcing diversity, referencing 419 sources across the 29 prompts used in the research. It combined affiliate listicles, educational articles, and FI-owned content, creating a balanced (though third-party dominant) knowledge set.

Platform	Sources
ChatGPT	419 sources
Copilot	99 sources
Gemini	286 sources
perplexity	287 sources

Perplexity & Copilot

Perplexity and Copilot, on the other hand, relied overwhelmingly on affiliate and publisher content, with direct FI sources representing only 26% and 20%, respectively.

SOURCES CITED BY PLATFORM

ChatGPT

PUBLISHER
BANK/FI

129
31%

290
69%

Copilot

PUBLISHER
BANK/FI

20
20%

79
80%

Gemini

PUBLISHER
BANK/FI

80
28%

206
72%

perplexity

PUBLISHER
BANK/FI

75
26%

212
74%

Key takeaway

This variability underscores that **no single optimization strategy fits all LLMs.** Each model operates with distinct content preferences and data pipelines - essentially how AI platforms search for, collect, and organize content for answers. Meaning, financial brands must tailor their visibility strategies per platform rather than assuming a uniform approach.
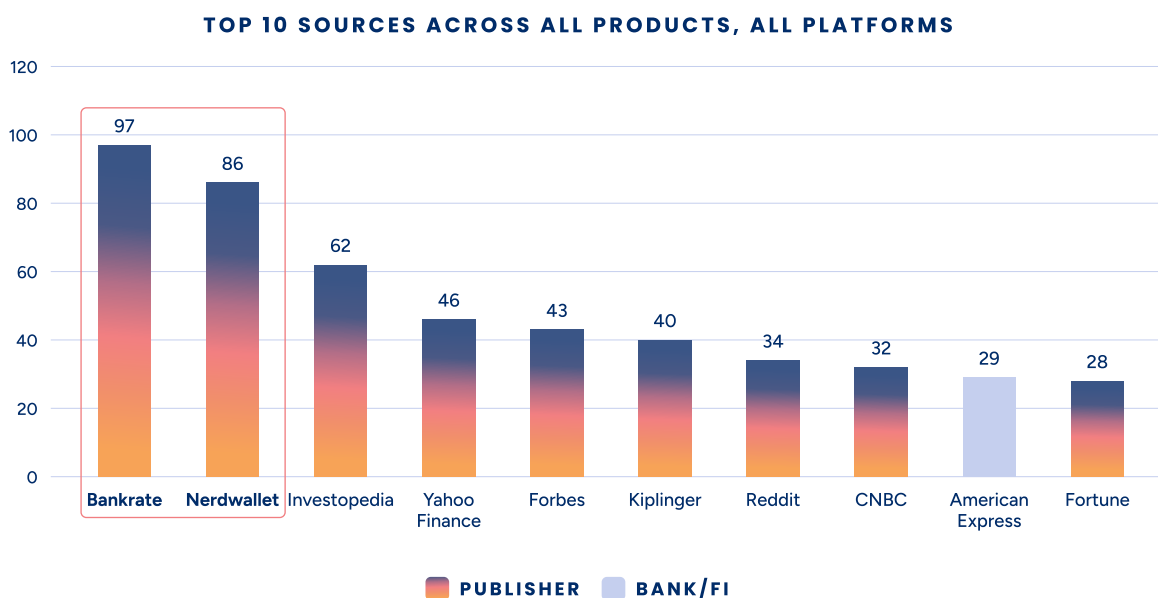
2. Affiliates and Publishers Play A Prominent Role in Results

Across ChatGPT, Copilot and Perplexity, affiliates and publishers were the dominant "data pipeline" for brand visibility. Sites like NerdWallet, Bankrate, Investopedia, Forbes, and Yahoo Finance consistently appeared as top-cited sources, far more frequently than FI domains.

Across both of the financial products and 29 prompts used, non-FI content appeared 60% of the time. And two publishers (NerdWallet and Bankrate) represented 15% of the total sources cited.

TOP 10 SOURCES ACROSS ALL PRODUCTS, ALL PLATFORMS

PUBLISHER   BANK/FI

These publishers act as trusted aggregators for financial product information - their structured, comparison-based formats align well with how LLMs process and summarize data. For example:

- **NerdWallet** appeared in nearly every Perplexity response and was cited multiple times within single outputs
- **Bankrate** was surfaced consistently across all models, particularly in Gemini and ChatGPT
- Copilot heavily favored **editorially styled affiliate content**, with 80% of cited links being publisher-based over FIs

Key takeaway

The implication is clear: for financial brands to appear in AI-generated recommendations, **they must be visible within the affiliate ecosystem**. Rather than competing against publishers, FIs will increasingly rely on them as the primary channels for representation within LLM-driven discovery.

FINTEL CONNECT

3. Content Type Matters

The format and structure of content significantly influence whether it appears in LLM responses. Across all platforms, listicles, comparison tables, and educational explainers dominated citation patterns.

- **Listicles** (e.g., "Best Student Credit Cards for 2025", "Top 10 High-Yield Savings Accounts") were the most frequently cited format, especially on Copilot and Perplexity
  - These layouts allow models to extract structured insights without ambiguity
  - Over 70% of all responses featured a standalone list or a list alongside a table, making this format type the most likely to show up on an LLM response
- **Educational articles** (e.g., "How High-Yield Savings Accounts Work", "How to Choose a Rewards Card") were also consistently referenced, often used to provide supporting context
- **iFrame-based promotional content** (an HTML element that embeds another webpage or content within the current website) did not appear in any LLM-generated responses despite being included in 12% of the cited websites, confirming that embedded content is not influential in LLM prompt responses

EXAMPLE OF A LISTICLE A LLM MAY CITE

Source: https://www.investopedia.com/high-yield-savings-accounts-4770633

Key takeaway

This reinforces a key optimization principle: **content presentation is as important as authority**. Financial brands and their affiliate partners should focus on clear formatting, structured data, and question-aligned headlines to increase the likelihood of citation in AI responses. And although embedded ads on websites may be effective for human consumption, they are not currently consumed by LLMs.
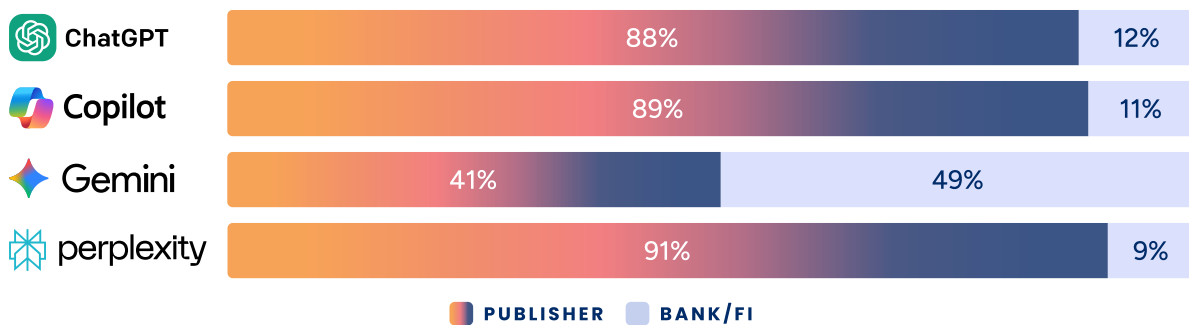
4. LLM Influencers Vary By Product

Visibility patterns differed between the two product categories tested - credit cards and high-yield savings accounts - suggesting that product type influences which sources LLMs favor.
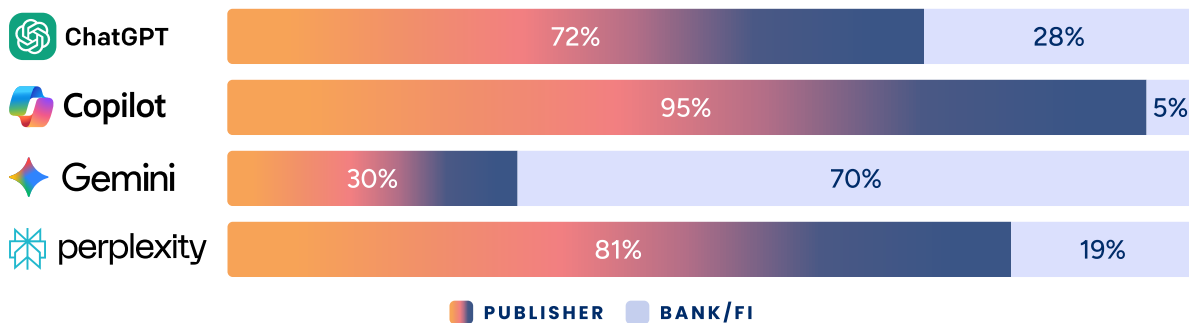
Credit card

Credit card prompts skewed heavily toward **affiliate-driven content**, as these products are widely covered in comparison lists (e.g., NerdWallet, Bankrate, The Motley Fool). The high commercial intent around credit cards correlates with a larger volume of paid and affiliate listings. Organic content from FIs accounted for only 32% of citations across all four LLMs, the lowest being on Perplexity at 9% and the highest being on Gemini at 49%.

LLM	Publisher	Bank/FI
ChatGPT	88%	12%
Copilot	89%	11%
Gemini	41%	49%
perplexity	91%	9%

🔶 **PUBLISHER**   🔷 **BANK/FI**

High-yield savings account

High-yield savings account prompts, in contrast, saw a **greater share of organic FI citations (42%)**, particularly on Gemini (70%). These pages were typically used to provide educational or definitional context rather than direct recommendations.

LLM	Publisher	Bank/FI
ChatGPT	72%	28%
Copilot	95%	5%
Gemini	30%	70%
perplexity	81%	19%

🔶 **PUBLISHER**   🔷 **BANK/FI**

Key takeaway

Although both product categories largely favor publisher sources, there is a visible bias towards bank and financial institution websites for high-yield savings account prompts. **This indicates a difference in the content landscape** between more offer-heavy categories (credit cards) and more informational or educational categories (savings) that LLMs prioritize for citations.

5. Audience Intent Matters

Prompt intent (or the type of question being asked by a consumer) proved to be a major factor in determining which content types and sources appeared.

Informational prompts

Informational prompts tend to surface FI and educational publisher content, aligning with informational depth.

> How does a high-yield savings account **work**? 🔍

Comparative prompts

Comparative prompts overwhelmingly generated affiliate-driven listicles and comparison articles.

> What's the **best** credit card for students? 🔍

Conversational/advisory prompts

Conversational/advisory prompts generated more editorial commentary from publishers like **Forbes** or **Investopedia**.

> What should I **avoid** when opening a savings account? 🔍

Key takeaway

LLM responses will leverage content sources relevant to the types of prompts entered by a consumer. It shows the **importance of having a diverse affiliate strategy** that addresses both top-of-funnel awareness and education as well as bottom-of-funnel intent and consideration.

What This Means For Financial Brands and Their GEO Strategies

The findings from this report, and the fact that searches on LLMs have grown 150% YoY versus only 20% for searches on Google, make one thing clear: visibility in GenAI-driven discovery is now an essential part of financial brands' acquisition strategies.

Traditional SEO and paid search no longer guarantee discoverability when AI models determine which content appears in answers. Instead, brands must adopt Generative Engine Optimization (GEO), optimizing both their owned and partner content to ensure inclusion in LLM-generated results.

Below are three core implications for financial marketers building GEO strategies based on this report's analysis of ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, and Copilot.

1. Consumers are turning to GenAI engines for financial research and visibility is now imperative

Our study found that the number of sources cited by each LLM varies dramatically, with ChatGPT using the most (419) and Copilot, the fewest (99). Yet across all models, third-party sources dominate, meaning consumers are more likely to discover financial products through summarized, AI-curated answers rather than direct brand pages.

As more consumers research products through GenAI tools, being cited within LLM answers is becoming as important as ranking on Google once was.

Recommendations

- **Create GEO strategies per platform**
  - When optimizing for Gemini visibility, which sourced 72% of its results from FI websites, focus on strengthening on-domain educational and product content with clear formatting, FAQs, and schema markup
  - ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Copilot, which cumulatively own **81% of the Gen AI market share**, all rely heavily on affiliate content, which means financial brands should invest in publisher visibility partnerships to ensure inclusion in their articles and lists
- **Use keyword research to build prompt-aligned content**, mirroring the natural language questions users ask (e.g., "Which savings accounts have the highest yield?")
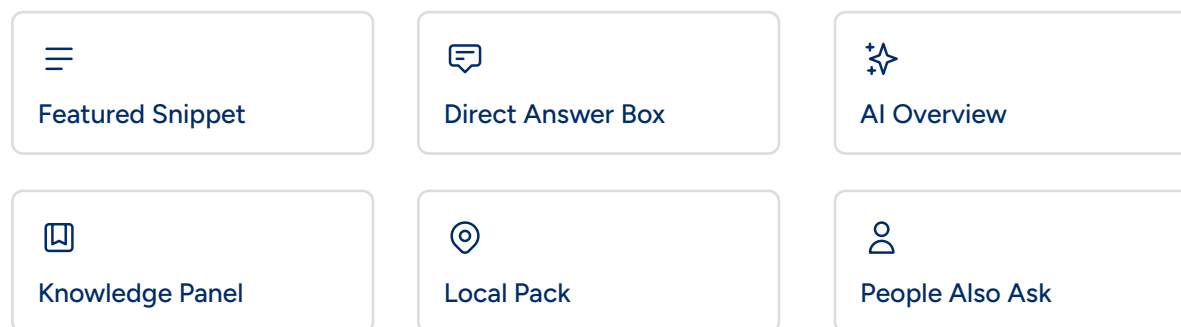
2. In a no-click world, affiliates are the new visibility gatekeepers

Across three of the four LLMs, affiliate and publisher content outweighed brand-owned sources by a wide margin.

- **NerdWallet and Bankrate appeared most frequently and across multiple LLMs:** They were the only publishers present in nearly every test prompt
- **Perplexity and Copilot were the most affiliate-dominant:** 74–80% of their cited links were paid or affiliate-driven, while FI sites appeared rarely and usually in fourth position or later
- **Gemini was the exception:** 72% of its sources were bank/FI websites

In a GenAI-powered, "no-click" world, financial brands no longer compete for rankings, but rather for representation. Affiliates and publishers have effectively become the intermediaries between brands and AI visibility.

TYPES OF NO-CLICK SEARCH RESULTS

Featured Snippet	Direct Answer Box	AI Overview
Knowledge Panel	Local Pack	People Also Ask

Recommendations

- **Reframe affiliate programs** from being purely lead-generation channels to GEO visibility partnerships
- **Work closely with large affiliates** that consistently show up on LLMs to ensure your products are accurately listed in listicles and educational articles, which LLMs prefer and surface most often
- **Be extra clear and specific about key target segments** and how to build content that speaks to those segments, particularly in categories like SMB banking
- **Optimize together:**
  - Use headlines and subheads that align with consumer prompts ("Top Credit Cards for Students," "Best High-Yield Accounts")
  - Ensure content uses structured data and clear comparisons, not promotional banners or iFrames, which LLMs ignore
- **Ensure clarity around priority prompts** and share this with affiliate partners

3. GEO reporting and measurement need to evolve

Because LLMs summarize and synthesize content without generating direct clicks, traditional attribution models miss the visibility value of being mentioned in AI responses.

For example, this report shows that ChatGPT and Gemini were the most "source-rich" platforms, meaning affiliate or brand mentions in those environments may drive awareness that isn't captured in existing analytics.

Therefore, financial brands will need new visibility metrics that measure inclusion and influence, not just impressions or traffic to their site.

Recommendations

- Expand reporting beyond SEO to include GEO visibility metrics, such as:
  - **Track Citations:** The number of citations that reference your FI and compare across periods of time
  - **Prompt Share of Voice:** % of relevant prompts in which your brand or product appears
  - **AI Visibility Rate:** How often your product is cited across different GenAI platforms
  - **Affiliate Visibility Index:** Weighted measure of how frequently partner sites featuring your products appear in AI answers
- **Build GEO measurement dashboards** that sit alongside SEO and SEM reporting to track AI-era performance more holistically
- **Partner with affiliates and data providers** to establish shared visibility KPIs, aligning on how AI inclusion contributes to brand equity and downstream conversions

Conclusion

From our research, it is clear that **affiliates are a significant influencer in GenAI visibility**. While owned content continues to play a role in shaping brand authority, it is affiliate and publisher content that most often feeds the AI models guiding consumer decisions.

These partners have become the connective tissue between brands and discovery ensuring financial products are not only visible but contextually represented where consumers now look for answers. The future of financial marketing will depend on how effectively brands combine strong, structured content with a strategic affiliate presence to secure relevance in the age of generative AI.

Ready to get discovered by LLMs?

Connect with us

FINTEL CONNECT

Connect with Us to Start Optimizing Your Affiliate Program & Acquisition Strategy

FINTEL
CONNECT

Think **finance affiliate marketing,**
Think **Fintel Connect**