

Point of View: AI & exploreminnesota.com

Fall 2025

current challenge

Artificial intelligence (AI) is beginning to transform our world, particularly digital spaces and how consumers may find, search for, or interact with information and products. While the web and social media have previously disrupted traditional print and broadcast media, AI is now disrupting tried-and-true digital marketing methods by providing content that supplants flagship websites; search engine queries now direct curious consumers to AI summaries “above the fold”, resulting in an increasing number of “zero-click” searches.

Since Gemini, Google’s AI summary tool, came to prominence beginning in spring 2025, web traffic across industries has been down 40%. Exploreminnesota.com traffic is down 30-37%, meaning we align with this universal, market-wide trend. We believe this trend is likely similarly affecting our Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) partners, along with city, municipal and government web properties.

One thing is certain: exploreminnesota.com and our partners' websites will receive less traffic now and in the future. In reaction, we must answer these two questions:

- What can Explore Minnesota do to ensure we remain the authoritative source of truth about all things Minnesota online?
- How can Explore Minnesota continue to amplify our partner in-state destinations, ensuring consumers refer to *their* websites and channels as sources of truth for their own destinations?

exploreminnesota.com point of view (POV)

Our short-term strategy:

Our approach has been in place since spring 2023, when we began implementing a comprehensive website audit. We regularly review our web content to ensure it is accurate, reflects the types of questions travelers have about Minnesota and fits into a cohesive, strategic content plan that aligns with Explore Minnesota’s broader brand, vision and messaging framework.

Additionally, we are investing more in our earned media and presence on certain social media sites, such as Reddit, as these are becoming more authoritative AI sources. By ensuring our content is strategically created and continues to be optimized, we put our best foot forward in being the most authoritative source used as an input for AI algorithmic scraping about all things Minnesota. We’ve also implemented a pilot AI-powered search tool into exploreminnesota.com to improve the performance of our in-site searches and analyze data from them, to gather more insights into how and when AI is best deployed.

Finally, Explore Minnesota is committed to showing authentic imagery of our state, and does not post AI-generated images or allow those with listings in events or the extranet

to post AI-generated imagery. Large language models (LLM) may be used for brainstorming, but no AI-generated copy will be used on the website, and our freelance writers are contractually forbidden from using LLM to generate content.

- **Short-term downside:** Traffic volume will continue to wane, as those searching for quick information (events listings, verifying locations) will receive it via AI scrape without clicking through to exploreminnesota.com.
- **Short-term upside:** exploreminnesota.com is a key, authoritative source that feeds AI engines like ChatGPT and Google Gemini, and the information scraped reflects our vision to promote Minnesota as the best place for travel, quality of life and economic opportunity. Additionally, although traffic volume will wane, the *quality* of the traffic to exploreminnesota.com will increase; our time-on-site metrics are up over 11% since July 2025.
- **Our recommendations for industry partners:**
 - Conduct web audits to ensure your content is accurate, concise, consistently hitting the same messaging and optimized for SEO, as many of the same techniques that increase SEO increase your presence in scrapes.
 - Understand how your destination is currently surfacing in Gemini and ChatGPT; is your website an authoritative source?
 - A simple way to understand this is to ask ChatGPT about your destination, and then follow up with a “what sources did you use”
 - Consider rethinking your web KPIs. While you should continue to track total website traffic, begin to consider time on site and page depth as primary KPIs, if you do not already.
 - Continue cultivating earned media strategies, as media mentions are seen as more authoritative sources for AI scraping. Consider implementing social strategies around sites that serve as authoritative sources for AI, like Reddit, and using owned organic channels and email marketing to ensure you continue to reach your target audience. Consider investing in other awareness techniques for organic and owned channels, like boosting social media posts.
 - Submit your destination’s information, events, photos, videos to Explore Minnesota, so your information can benefit from our authoritative scores and similarly be surfaced in Minnesota-related AI scrapes.
 - We do not recommend using AI-generated copy or imagery on your owned channels. If you are not internally staffed for this type of content creation, we suggest using Explore Minnesota grant or co-op programs to hire photographers, videographers, designers, and writers.

Our long-term strategy: Destination websites as we know them – alongside social media strategies – may need to evolve dramatically. Beyond our pilot investment in an AI search capability, Explore Minnesota will not invest in an AI chatbot that lives *inside* our website; in our reasoning, this will not alleviate the root problem—that AI is taking traffic in the first place. We will continue to monitor web traffic, social channels, and overall digital trends, shifting course as needed to ensure Explore Minnesota continues to be the authoritative source on all things Minnesota, and that our partner destination organizations and industries are able to communicate their distinct value propositions.

- **Our recommendation for industry partners:** Keep connecting with Explore Minnesota about your AI questions, quandaries and concerns. We can all work together to ensure that Minnesota and its destinations rise to the top.