

# AI-DRIVEN COMMERCE: WHAT MID-MARKET BRANDS NEED TO KNOW

*Modern Impact White Paper | June 2026*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*AI shopping assistants are already making product recommendations, with or without your input.*

ChatGPT, Amazon's Rufus, and Google's AI-powered search don't wait for brands to get ready or alert them before they start summarizing, ranking, and recommending.

The brands that show up well in those recommendations share three things: their product information is consistent everywhere, their differentiation is explicit rather than implied, and the path from recommendation to purchase doesn't break.

This paper lays out what's happening, where most brands are getting it wrong, and the GEO (Generative Engine Optimization, also known as Answer Engine Optimization or AEO, and Artificial Intelligence Optimization or AIO) framework we use at Modern Impact to close the gap.

# WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING

*The numbers started speaking for themselves in 2025.*

+140%

Amazon Rufus  
YoY growth

700M

ChatGPT  
weekly users

59%

Of all US searches  
are zero-click

\$14B

AI influenced sales  
on Black Friday 2025

Amazon's Rufus (its AI shopping assistant, embedded directly in the shopping app & website) has been used by more than 250 million customers, and monthly active users have grown 140% year over year. Amazon projects Rufus will generate more than \$10 billion in incremental annual sales, as customers who engage with it during a shopping session are 60% more likely to complete a purchase.

ChatGPT now reaches 700 million weekly users. OpenAI launched a shopping research feature in late 2025 that builds personalized buyer's guides from conversational prompts: asking clarifying questions, pulling product data from across the web, and delivering structured comparisons rather than a list of links. It works especially well in considered-purchase categories like electronics, beauty, home goods, kitchen, and outdoor. In June 2026, Visa embedded its payment network directly into ChatGPT,

enabling AI agents to complete purchases on behalf of users at any Visa-accepting merchant – a significant expansion beyond the select-merchant limitations of earlier in-chat purchasing attempts.

On the search side, zero-click searches (queries answered directly on the results page, without sending the user to a website) now account for 58.5% of all US searches. Google's AI Overviews are a core driver of that number.

Not surprisingly, consumers are following AI's lead. According to a 2025 Adobe survey of 5,000 US shoppers, 53% now use AI tools in their shopping journey. AI influenced an estimated \$14 billion in online sales on Black Friday 2025 alone, and nearly two-thirds of consumers surveyed in December 2025 said they plan to use AI chatbots for shopping in 2026.

**This is not a trend to track. It's the current reality.**

# HOW AI SHOPPING ACTUALLY WORKS

AI shopping assistants are not search engines with a friendlier interface. They work very differently, and brands that treat GEO like SEO 2.0 will optimize for the wrong things.

These systems synthesize across multiple sources simultaneously: your product pages, third-party reviews, marketplace listings, structured feeds, and authority content from across the web. They're looking for uniformity in your content wherever it lives—so when the information they find about your product is consistent and clear, they can represent you accurately.

When your content is fragmented (different specs on your site vs. Amazon, marketing copy that never specifies audience, pricing that varies without explanation, etc.), they either get it wrong or skip you entirely in favor of a competitor they can explain with confidence.

There's also no single "AI shopping channel." Different platforms reach customers at different stages of the buying journey, and the optimization requirements vary—so brands need to keep all of this in mind when structuring their content.



Your customers are probably using more than one of these, so **your strategy needs to account for where they actually discover products, not where you're most comfortable operating.**

# HOW PRODUCT TYPE CHANGES EVERYTHING

Here's a mistake we see consistently: brands apply the same optimization approach to every product regardless of how customers actually buy it. That doesn't work because AI assistants behave differently based on purchase complexity. Most mid-market brands sell primarily in the "considered purchase" category, and that's where the optimization work has the highest return.

*Three categories matter for mid-market brands:*

## Commodity Products



Think batteries, cables and basic consumables. AI is purely transactional here, prioritizing price, availability, and aggregate ratings. Brand differentiation barely registers, so the right move is feed hygiene and competitive pricing—not brand storytelling.

01

## Considered Purchases



Like mattresses, cameras, fitness equipment and skincare. AI earns its influence here because it asks clarifying questions, weighs trade-offs, and walks the user through reasoning before landing on a recommendation. If your differentiation isn't stated explicitly (who this is for, why it beats the alternatives, what problem it solves), AI has nothing to work with and will recommend whoever gave it a clearer answer.

02

## Category-Defining Products



For instance, the "what coffee maker should I buy" category, where the customer doesn't know the product well enough to search for a specific one. AI becomes an educator, framing the decision before making a recommendation. Brands that create category-level content, buying guides, comparison frameworks, and "how to choose" material, can establish themselves as the trusted authority before the recommendation happens.

03

# WHAT MOST ORGANIZATIONS GET WRONG

## Letting inconsistency accumulate over time

Most brands with product data problems don't realize they have them. The spec table on the owned site hasn't been updated since a product reformulation...the Amazon listing was built by a different team with different copy standards... a retail partner's PDP (Product Detail Page) still shows the discontinued colorway. None of this looks like a crisis from inside the organization, but from an AI's perspective, it reads as "this brand isn't sure what its own product is," and the recommendation goes elsewhere.

## Treating GEO as an SEO project

Traditional SEO is page-level: optimize this URL, rank for this keyword. GEO for AI shopping is ecosystem-level: how consistent is your product information across every source the AI might consult? A brand can have excellent SEO and still get misrepresented or ignored by AI shopping assistants if their Amazon listing says something different from their website, their reviews surface quality concerns the brand content doesn't address, or their product specs are buried in marketing copy the AI can't find.

## Writing for humans who already want to buy, not for AI that's deciding whether to recommend

Marketing copy generally covers the gamut of the funnel from awareness to conversion. AI shopping assistants operate differently, deciding whether your product deserves to be surfaced as a candidate based on clarity, not creativity. Copy that says, "crafted for those who demand the finest" loses to the copy that says "machine-washable, fits sizes XS-3XL, available in 12 colors, ships in 2 days". So while brand consistency is key, AI doesn't care about your tagline.

# THE APPROACH THAT WORKS

Modern Impact has been building AI shopping readiness for mid-market brands since early 2025. The framework has seven components, and they're sequential because each one supports the next.

## 1. Understand your starting position

Before optimizing, run 20-30 category-relevant queries through ChatGPT with shopping research enabled. Document what gets recommended, whether your product appears, and why the recommended products are getting cited.

You can't measure progress without a baseline, and the baseline usually surfaces surprises—like competitors you hadn't considered, signals your brand is missing and language patterns the AI keeps recognizing and pulling.

## 2. Establish product truth

Create a single source of record for every product, including canonical name, specs, key differentiators, use cases, and price logic. Then eliminate the contradictions.

This is the highest leverage and most tedious work because it requires coordinating across whoever owns your website, marketplace listings, retail partner feeds, and product database. Most brands don't have a clean process for this, which is why the inconsistencies accumulate over time.

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**THE APPROACH THAT WORKS (CONTINUED)****● 3. Make your product pages AI-readable**

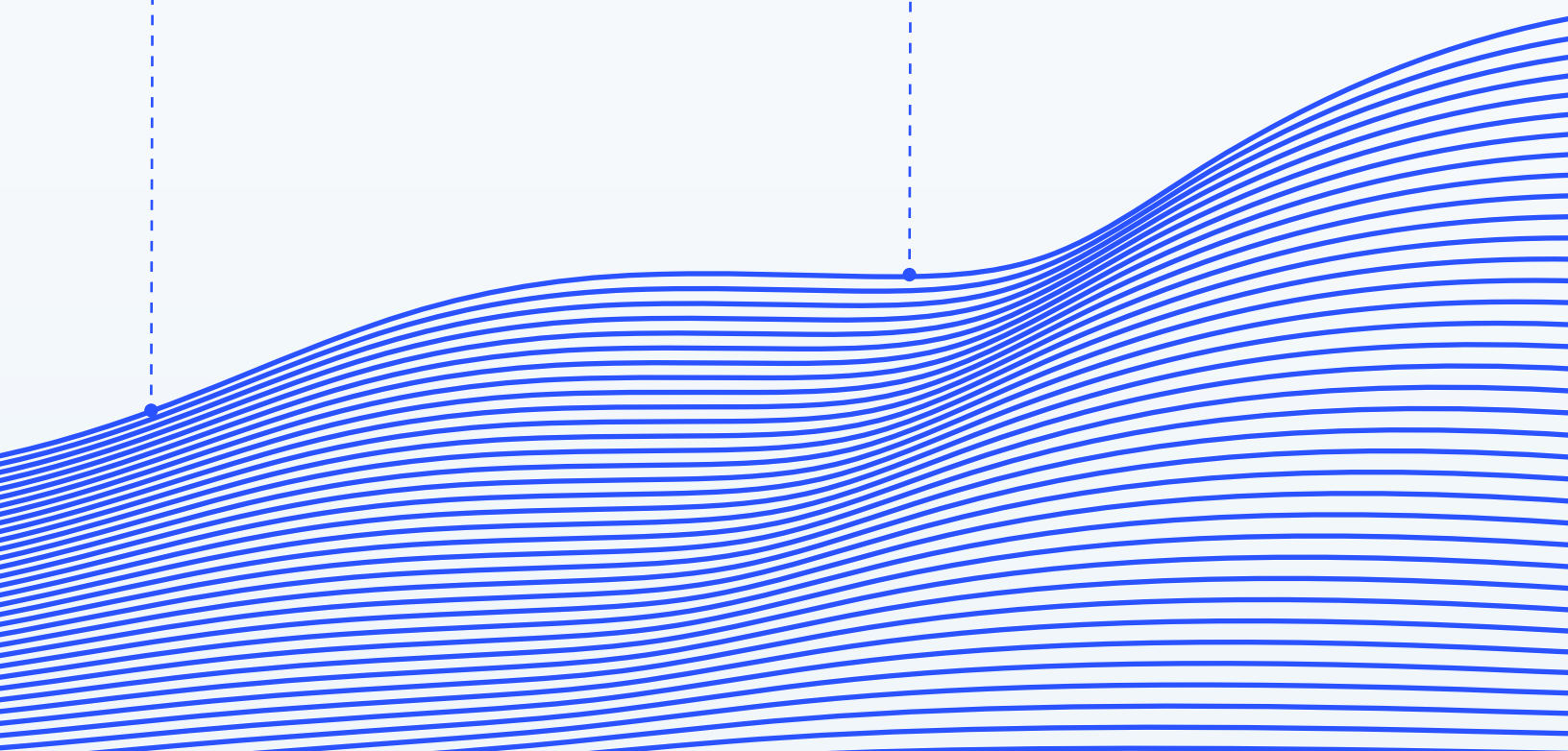
Develop a clear heading hierarchy, features in structured lists (not buried in paragraphs), and explicit use-case statements ("Best for..." and "Not for...") above the fold. Your schema markup should include product descriptions, offer language, consumer reviews and FAQ pages where applicable.

These aren't new ideas; they're just good page structure that happens to be exactly what AI systems need to parse and represent you accurately.

**● 4. Build real credibility signals**

The baseline threshold for credibility is more than 100 reviews with recent activity (within 30 days), but volume isn't enough. You also need review responses that show the brand is paying attention, return and warranty policies that are findable and clear, and pricing logic that doesn't surprise anyone at checkout.

AI systems are evaluating whether you're trustworthy enough to recommend, so any friction or opacity are red flags. Be responsive, open and transparent.



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**THE APPROACH THAT WORKS (CONTINUED)****● 5. Get your feeds right**

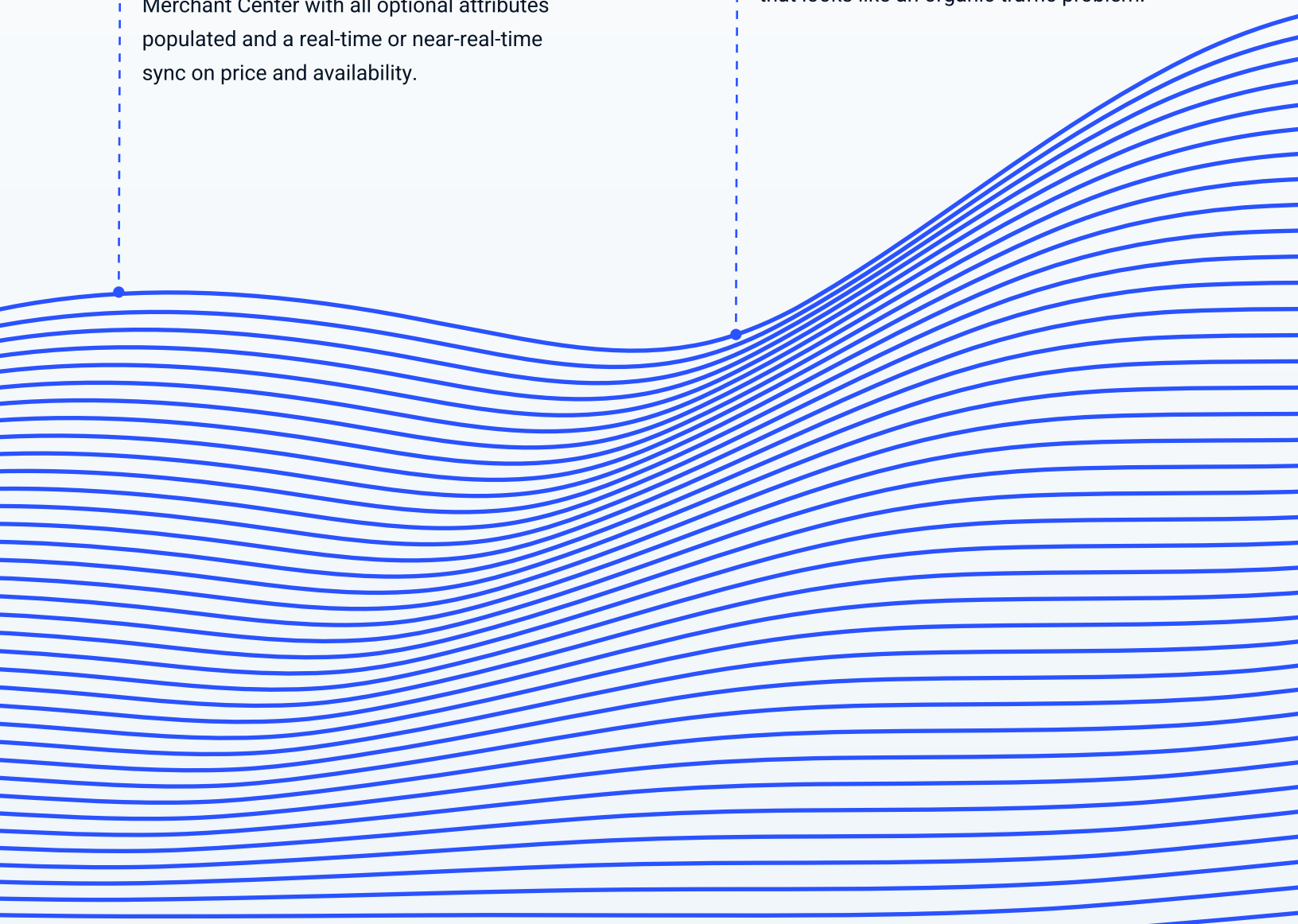
Google Merchant Center, Amazon Seller Central and Meta Product Catalogs are all structured feeds that are increasingly how AI systems access your product data directly, without scraping your website.

Mid-market brands should invest time and effort to create an infrastructure layer that produces less than a 5% disapproval rate in Merchant Center with all optional attributes populated and a real-time or near-real-time sync on price and availability.

**● 6. Fix the conversion path**

While purchase still happens on your website or on a marketplace, discovery is happening in AI. The path between those two points needs to be seamless, with deep links that land on the exact product (not the homepage), mobile checkout in three steps or fewer and naming consistency from AI summary to cart.

A user who clicks through from a ChatGPT recommendation and can't immediately find the product they were just shown is a lost sale that looks like an organic traffic problem.



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**THE APPROACH THAT WORKS (CONTINUED)****7. Measure the right things**

You can't see "AI impressions" the way you see search impressions. What you can track includes recommendation share (how often does your brand appear when you run category queries through ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity?), review velocity, branded search volume trends, and direct traffic quality.

These are proxy metrics, not perfect attribution, but they build a defensible picture of whether your AI visibility is improving over time.

### *A Note On What Comes Next*

The work in this paper prepares your brand for recommendation. The next layer of AI commerce, Agentic commerce, where AI assistants don't just recommend but act on behalf of the customer (filtering, comparing, reserving, eventually purchasing), is forming now. The foundation is the same: canonical product data, structured attributes, clean feeds, real-time sync. A brand that's done the GEO work is positioned to plug into the protocols that enable agentic commerce when they're ready. A brand that hasn't won't have that option. Modern Impact covers the Agentic layer in a companion paper.

# ONE IMPORTANT NOTE ON IN-CHAT PURCHASING

On the checkout side of AI shopping, the story has moved fast – and not always in a straight line.

OpenAI launched Instant Checkout in September 2025, partnering with Etsy, Walmart, and Shopify to let users buy directly inside ChatGPT. In March 2026, they pivoted away from it after conversion rates didn't meet expectations. The core problem: Instant Checkout was limited to select enrolled merchants, shopping behavior is habit-based, and consumer trust in AI-mediated payments wasn't there yet.

Then, on June 10, 2026, Visa embedded its payment network directly into ChatGPT. The significance is structural: where Instant Checkout required individual merchant enrollment,

Visa's integration extends in-chat purchasing to any merchant that accepts Visa. That removes the merchant coverage constraint that stalled the first attempt.

The trust constraint remains. Visa's own chief product officer acknowledged that building consumer comfort with AI agents completing purchases autonomously will take time. At launch, most transactions still require human approval – ChatGPT notifies users to confirm before completing a purchase. The vision is that trust accumulates through repeated use, and approval requirements decrease as a result. Mastercard is developing competing capabilities, focused initially on business procurement rather than consumer shopping.

## *The honest read for mid-market brands:*

The infrastructure problem is being solved at network scale. The behavior problem is not solved yet. Getting your discovery and hand-off right is still the work that matters most right now. But the direction of travel is clear, and the window between "AI recommends you" and "AI buys for your customer" is closing faster than it looked six months ago.

# WHAT TO DO NEXT

## *Start Here: Your 30-Day Action Item Reset:*

### • **Week 1: Run The Queries.**

Pick 20 category queries relevant to your top products and run them through ChatGPT (with shopping research enabled), Gemini, and Amazon Rufus. Document what you see: What gets recommended? Do you appear? What are the recommended brands communicating that you're not?

### • **Week 2: Audit Product Truth.**

Pull your product specs from your website, your Amazon listing, your Google Shopping feed, and one or two retail partner PDPs. Build a comparison matrix and flag every conflict (you'll find some). The goal isn't to be shocked; it's to know what you're dealing with so you can fix it.

### • **Week 3: Score Your AI Readiness.**

The Modern Impact AI Shopping Readiness Scorecard covers six areas: product truth consistency, PDP clarity and structure, review health, credibility signals, feed quality, and conversion path. Each area scores 1-3 across four metrics and the total gives you a prioritized fix list based on weighted impact. The scorecard is available as a companion tool to this paper.

### • **Week 4: Fix The Highest-Leverage Item.**

Don't try to do everything at first. Start with the lowest-scoring, highest-weighted category from your scorecard. Most brands find the biggest gap in product truth consistency or review health, and either one is fixable in a few weeks with focused effort.

Run The  
Queries

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Score Your Ai  
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Fix The Highest  
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# ABOUT MODERN IMPACT

Modern Impact is a Brand Performance Agency helping mid-market to enterprise brands grow smarter across the full ecosystem: strategy, creative, media, and technology. We've been building AI readiness since early 2025 across retail, DTC, and B2B commerce categories. Our practice spans discovery (GEO) and Agentic commerce.

If you want to assess where you stand, the **AI Shopping Readiness Scorecard** is the right starting point.

[Download the Scorecard](#)