FIVE BLOCKS RESEARCH

REPUTATION REPORT · OCTOBER 2026

How AI Describes United Airlines

What ChatGPT, Gemini, Google's AI answers and four other AI engines tell travelers, investors and reporters about United Airlines and its CEO, Scott Kirby, compared with Delta Air Lines and American Airlines, and where United can take more control of the story.

Independent research by Five Blocks. Not commissioned, sponsored or endorsed by United Airlines. Company names and logos belong to their owners and are used only to identify the companies discussed.

SUMMARY

AI reads United's own website, but repeats its risks more than its record

We asked eight AI engines about United Airlines, its CEO and its two largest rivals every day for a month. Five findings stand out, each with the engines, dates and sources behind it, and each points to something United can change. AI answers change every day, so none of this is permanent.

FIVE FINDINGS

01 **The tone.** Google's AI Mode includes a negative point, mostly about fuel, in 23 of its 31 answers about United, against 4 for American and 5 for Delta. ChatGPT adds one to almost every answer about both United and American; Delta is the exception.

02 **The largest airline.** United's investor site calls United the largest airline in the world, and Google's AI cites that site in 53 of its 92 answers about United. Yet those answers call United the world's largest airline 4 times, and give the title to American in 42 of 93. ChatGPT repeated the claim, with its measure, in 10 answers that quoted United's annual report.

03 **Proof points.** Delta's stats and facts page is cited in 66% of answers about Delta, and 53% of answers about Delta mention its reliability. United's fact sheet is cited in 4% of answers about United, and 9% mention reliability, although United reports its best cancellation rate on record.

04 **The CEO.** AI introduces Scott Kirby by his résumé: American Airlines in 99% of answers, the Air Force Academy in 84%, premium travel in 15% (Delta's Ed Bastian: 39%). His most-cited sources, United's leadership pages and bio, list his career; his Wikipedia article covers his record mostly through recent, unflattering additions.

05 **What works.** United's Starlink Wi-Fi rollout appears in 78 answers about United, on all eight engines. The 2017 Flight 3411 incident does not appear in any of the 494 answers about United or Kirby.

THE NUMBERS

23 vs 4
AI Mode answers with a negative point: United vs American

4 vs 42
Google AI answers calling each the world's largest airline: United vs American

9% vs 53%
answers that mention reliability: United vs Delta

15% vs 39%
CEO answers that mention premium: Kirby vs Bastian

78
answers about United that mention its Starlink Wi-Fi rollout

WHY IT MATTERS

Billions of people now see an AI answer when they look something up

2.5B
monthly users of Google AI Overviews, the AI answer at the top of Google search.
Google, I/O 2026

1B+
monthly users of Google AI Mode, Google's conversational AI search, after one year.
Google, I/O 2026

900M
weekly users of ChatGPT.
OpenAI, February 2026

Travelers, investors, recruits, reporters and regulators look up United Airlines and its leaders, and many of them now read an AI answer before they open a single website. What those answers say, and which sources they rely on, is part of the airline's reputation.

HOW WE DID IT

Eight AI engines, two questions, asked every day for a month

Five Blocks AIQ asked ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, Perplexity, Grok, Claude, Google AI Mode and Google AI Overview the same two questions every day from September 6 to October 6, 2026: **"Tell me about United Airlines Holdings."** and **"Tell me about United Airlines Holdings' CEO."** That gave **494 answers** about United and Scott Kirby.

The same two questions were asked about Delta Air Lines and American Airlines Group, the two other airlines in the Fortune 100, and about every company in the Fortune 100. That gave 1,484 answers across the three airlines, and 24,667 company answers for the Fortune 100 average. Each was asked about by its Fortune 100 name: the holding company for United and American, which draws more investor sources, and the airline for Delta. That likely explains part of the gap in tone and sources.

THE EIGHT ENGINES

- ChatGPT
- Gemini
- AI Overview
- AI Mode
- Copilot
- Perplexity
- Grok
- Claude

THE PEER AIRLINES

- **Delta Air Lines** · CEO Ed Bastian
- **American Airlines** · CEO Robert Isom

HOW THE NUMBERS WERE COUNTED

Negative points. AIQ breaks each answer into key points and scores each one from 0 (neutral) to 5 (most negative), using an AI model. In this report, a negative point is a key point scored 3 or higher, the same standard used across the Five Blocks Fortune 100 study. Many negative points about airlines are risk statements (fuel prices, economic cycles) rather than criticism; the same scoring is applied to every company.

Everything else is a count of answers, found by searching for key words and confirmed by reading the matches. Quotes are word for word from the answers, shortened where marked. Each engine gave one answer per question per day, so every engine carries the same weight.

FINDING 01 · THE TONE

Google's AI Mode flags risk in most answers about United, and rarely for its rivals

AI Mode, Google's conversational search, includes a negative point in 23 of its 31 answers about United, tied for the 10th highest count of any Fortune 100 company. For American it does so in 4 answers, for Delta in 5. Most of United's are about fuel. ChatGPT is different: it adds a risk point to nearly every answer about both United and American, so there the contrast is with Delta.

ANSWERS WITH A NEGATIVE POINT, OF 31	UNITED	AMERICAN	DELTA
AI Mode	**23**	4	5
ChatGPT	**31**	29	1
Copilot	**11**	11	6
Perplexity	**11**	7	1
Gemini	**3**	1	0
AI Overview	**2**	0	0
Grok	**0**	1	2
Claude	**0**	16	3
All eight engines	**33%**	**28%**	**7%**

Most negative points about the three airlines are risk statements (fuel prices, economic cycles, labor costs), not criticism. The Fortune 100 average across all engines is 20%.

AI MODE ANSWERS THAT MENTION FUEL (OF 31)

28 United

11 American

9 Delta

AI MODE · SEP 8, 2026 · UNITED AIRLINES

"Fuel Cost Inflation: Geopolitical conflicts have continuously driven up jet fuel prices, resulting in massive, hundred-million-dollar operational expense surges."

AI MODE · SEP 7, 2026 · UNITED AIRLINES

"Despite absorbing a nearly $6 billion headwind from rising jet fuel costs, United recently tightened and raised the floor of its full-year 2026 adjusted earnings per share (EPS) guidance to $9 to $11 per share..."

13 of the 28 put the fuel hit at about $6 billion. Only 4 mentioned that United is recovering the cost through fares.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR UNITED

United's response to fuel costs is public: it raised the floor of its 2026 earnings guidance despite the headwind. A short risk-and-response line on the investor home page, which AI Mode cites in 21 of its 31 answers about United, could put both halves of the story in front of it.

Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 6 - Oct 6, 2026, eight AI engines. Q: "Tell me about [company]." Base: 31 answers per engine per company (30 for AI Overview on United). A negative point is an AIQ key point scored 3 or higher. AI Mode rank: Fortune 100 companies by AI Mode answers with a negative point.

FINDING 02 · THE LARGEST AIRLINE

United says it is the world's largest airline. Google's AI gives the title to American

United's investor home page calls United "the largest airline in the world," and Google's AI cites that site in 53 of its 92 answers about United. Yet Google's three AI engines call United the world's largest airline in 4 of those answers, and call American the world's largest in 42 of 93. Most answers about United say it is "one of" the largest. American's Wikipedia article calls it the world's largest airline by passengers carried; United's article does not call United the largest airline.

4 United **42** American

answers from Google's AI that call the airline the world's largest

BY ENGINE	UNITED	AMERICAN
AI Overview	**4** of 30	**15** of 31
AI Mode	**0** of 31	**18** of 31
Gemini	**0** of 31	**9** of 31
Google's AI, total	**4** of 92	**42** of 93

AI MODE · SEP 17, 2026 · AMERICAN AIRLINES

"It is the parent company of American Airlines, which stands as the world's largest airline by passenger traffic, fleet size, and revenue."

AI MODE · SEP 6, 2026 · UNITED AIRLINES

"Its principal subsidiary is United Airlines, Inc., which stands as one of the largest air carriers in the world."

AVAILABLE SEAT MILES FLOWN, 2025 (BILLIONS)



On seat miles and mainline fleet, United is the largest; American carried the most passengers and has the most aircraft once regional jets are counted. On revenue, American is third. Outside Google, the five other engines call United the world's largest in 51 answers, against 38 for American.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR UNITED

Say what "largest" means and put the measure where AI looks: the investor home page, the fact sheet, and, through Wikipedia's disclosed process, the United article. ChatGPT shows how it works: in 10 answers (Sept 8 to 18) it repeated the claim with its measure, quoting United's annual report.

Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 6 - Oct 6, 2026, eight AI engines. Q: "Tell me about [company]." Google AI Overview, AI Mode and Gemini: 92 answers about United, 93 about American. Counts exclude "one of the largest" and largest alliance, network or fleet. Seat miles: company annual reports for 2025.

FINDING 03 · PROOF POINTS

Delta's proof points reach AI answers. United's barely do

Delta keeps a stats and facts page in its newsroom, and AI cites it in two of every three answers about Delta. Half of all answers about Delta mention its reliability, and a quarter its awards or customer rankings. United's corporate fact sheet is cited in 4% of answers about United. AI rarely mentions United's reliability record at all, including the results United itself reported for 2025.

ANSWERS THAT CITE EACH AIRLINE'S FACT PAGE

66%

Delta

news.delta.com/corporate-stats-and-facts

4%

United

united.com corporate fact sheet

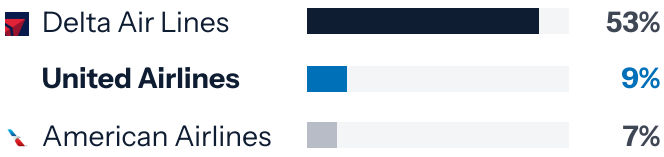
WHAT UNITED REPORTED

UNITED AIRLINES · Q4 RESULTS · JAN 20, 2026

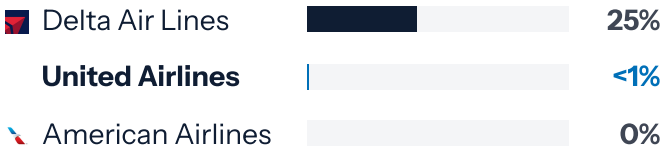
"...ranked #2 in on-time departures for the year, with the lowest seat cancellation rate in company history."

Google's AI engines and Claude did not mention United's reliability in any of their 123 answers about United. American, also asked about by its holding-company name, is close to United here (7%), so part of the gap with Delta reflects the question asked.

ANSWERS THAT MENTION RELIABILITY OR ON-TIME PERFORMANCE



ANSWERS THAT MENTION AIRLINE AWARDS OR CUSTOMER RANKINGS



GEMINI · SEP 8, 2026 · DELTA AIR LINES

"Delta frequently ranks near the top of major U.S. carrier lists for operational reliability, on-time performance (often recognized by aviation analytics firms like Cirium), and passenger satisfaction."

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR UNITED

A facts page built the way Delta's is: dated, specific numbers on reliability, cancellations, awards and scale, on a page AI already reads, and updated every quarter so the newest result is the one AI finds.

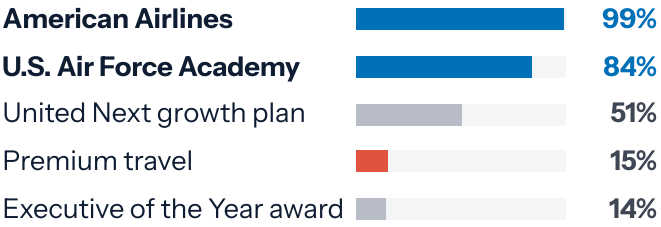
Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 6 – Oct 6, 2026, eight AI engines. Q: "Tell me about [company]." Base: 247 answers about United, 248 each about Delta and American. Reliability: on-time performance, reliability, cancellations or completion factor. Awards: industry awards and customer rankings, excluding award miles.

FINDING 04 · THE CEO

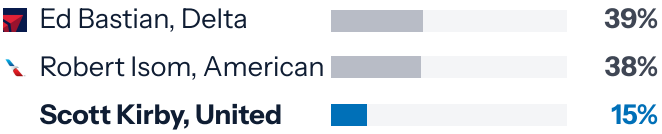
AI describes Scott Kirby by his résumé, not his record at United

Almost every answer about Kirby says he came from American Airlines, and most say he went to the Air Force Academy. Half mention United Next, United's growth plan. Premium travel, the heart of United's pitch, comes up in 15% of answers, against 39% for Delta's Ed Bastian. AI cites United's leadership pages most, where Kirby's bio lists his career and degrees, then his Wikipedia article, whose recent additions include a star rating, a one-month ranking and a jet-lag remark.

WHAT ANSWERS ABOUT SCOTT KIRBY MENTION (OF 247)



CEO ANSWERS THAT MENTION PREMIUM TRAVEL

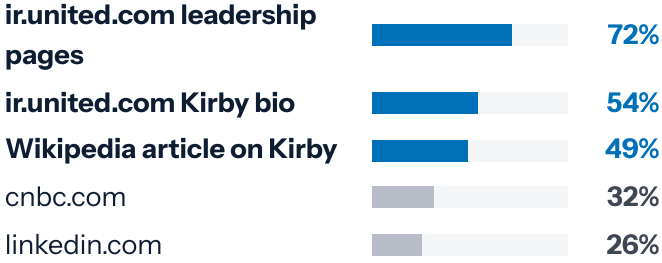


COPILOT · SEP 11, 2026 · SCOTT KIRBY

"United under Kirby has achieved a 75% on-time performance (9th out of 18 North American airlines), though its Skytrax rating remains 3 stars, typical for U.S. carriers."

Copilot repeated the 9th-of-18 ranking in 9 answers, Sept 10 to 24, each citing Wikipedia.

THE SOURCES AI READS ABOUT KIRBY



WHAT KIRBY'S IR.UNITED.COM BIO COVERS

President of US Airways, then American, then United; CEO since 2020; Star Alliance and IATA boards; Air Force Academy and George Washington University degrees. **Nothing on** premium strategy, results or awards.

AMONG THIS YEAR'S ADDITIONS TO HIS WIKIPEDIA ARTICLE

Jan 2026	A 3-star Skytrax rating
Jan 2026	His jet-lag remark, "I've never once eaten a meal," and that it "was met with ridicule from online users"
Jul 2026	A 75% on-time rate, "9th (out of 18 airlines)," from one month of OAG data

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR UNITED

United's leadership pages and Kirby's Wikipedia article are the sources AI cites most about him. A bio that adds his record at United, the premium strategy and recent recognition, and sourced additions proposed on Wikipedia through the disclosed process, give AI more than a résumé to work with.

Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 6 - Oct 6, 2026, eight AI engines. Q: "Tell me about [company]'s CEO." Base: 247 answers per CEO. Bio and Wikipedia article checked Nov 4, 2026.

FINDING 05 · WHAT WORKS

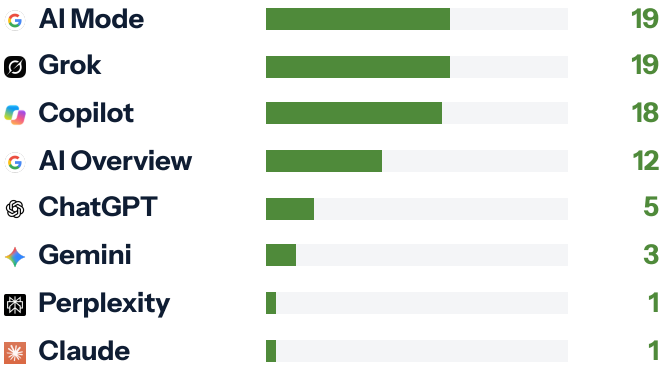
What AI gets right: Starlink reaches every engine, and Flight 3411 is gone

United's Starlink Wi-Fi rollout, a specific program with dates and aircraft counts, appears in 78 of 247 answers about United, on all eight engines. ChatGPT, quoting United's annual report, also repeated the scale claim with its measure. And the 2017 removal of a passenger from Flight 3411, which dominated coverage at the time, does not appear in any of the 494 answers about United or Kirby.

78 of 247 **8 of 8**

answers about United that mention its Starlink Wi-Fi rollout, on all eight engines

ANSWERS ABOUT UNITED THAT MENTION STARLINK, BY ENGINE (OF 31)



AI MODE · SEP 13, 2026 · UNITED AIRLINES

"It also captured major headlines for upgrading its inflight experience by partnering to roll out SpaceX Starlink Wi-Fi across nearly 1,000 aircraft."

CHATGPT · SEP 8, 2026 · UNITED AIRLINES

"In its 2025 annual report, United said it carried roughly 181 million passengers to more than 380 destinations across six continents and was the world's largest airline as measured by available seat miles."

0 of 494

answers about United or Kirby that mention the 2017 removal of a passenger from Flight 3411

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR UNITED

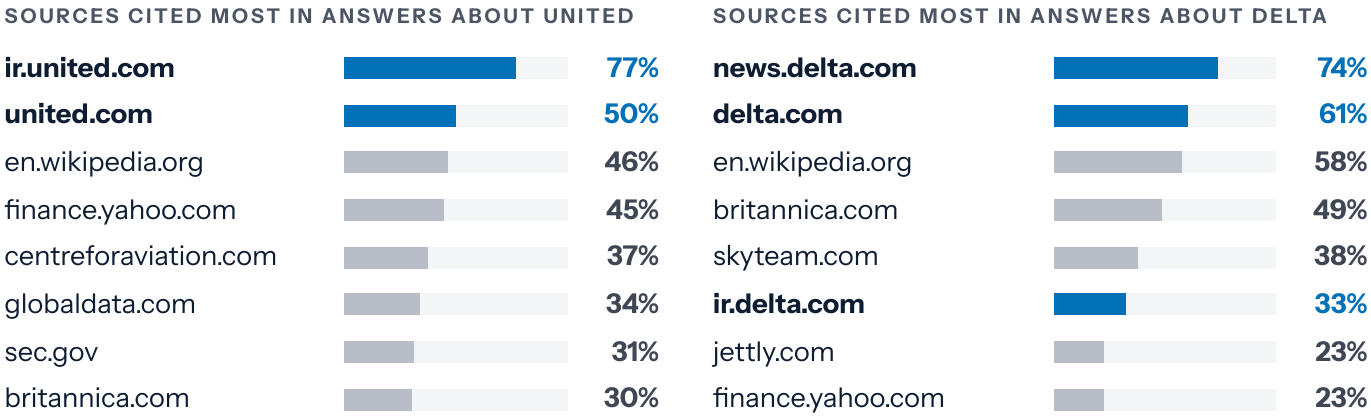
Specific, dated programs with numbers show up widely. Each opportunity in this report applies the same pattern to a gap: a clear fact, a measure and a date, on a page AI already reads.

Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 6 - Oct 6, 2026, eight AI engines. Q: "Tell me about [company]." and "Tell me about [company]'s CEO." Base: 247 answers about United; 494 about United and Kirby combined.

DISCUSSION · THE SOURCES

AI already reads United's own pages. What those pages say is the opportunity

United does not have a visibility problem. Its own sites are cited in 84% of answers about the company, the same as Delta (83%), and ir.united.com in 94% of answers about Kirby. The difference with Delta is which pages AI finds. For Delta, it finds a newsroom and site built to answer questions: a stats and facts page, a company overview, a history. For United, it mostly finds the investor home page, a corporate summary and a bio. (Part of this reflects the question: United was asked about as a holding company, which draws investor pages.)



84% vs 83%
answers that cite the airline's own sites: United vs Delta

4% vs 66%
answers citing the fact page: United vs Delta

15% vs 74%
answers citing the newsroom: United vs Delta

46% · 49%
answers that cite Wikipedia: about United · about Kirby

What United's most-cited pages say

United's investor home page is the single most-cited page about United, in 58% of answers. It carries a short company profile, including the “largest airline in the world” claim, but no measure behind the claim, no reliability results and no named awards. Kirby's bio lists his career and degrees. AI repeats what it finds, and fills the gaps from elsewhere.

Where the gaps get filled

Where United's pages are silent, AI turns to finance sites such as Yahoo Finance's stock pages (45% of answers), to industry databases (CAPA, GlobalData) for scale, and to Wikipedia for color on the CEO. Each of these is a source United can inform, through better pages of its own, briefings and, on Wikipedia, the disclosed process.

Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 6 - Oct 6, 2026, eight AI engines. Q: "Tell me about [company]." Base: 247 answers about United, 248 about Delta; CEO: 247 answers about Kirby. Share of answers that cite each domain at least once. Newsroom: united.com/newsroom pages; news.delta.com.

DISCUSSION · THE OPPORTUNITY

Five ways United can take more control of how AI tells its story

Each finding in this report traces back to a source AI reads, and most of those sources are United's own or open to United's input. That makes the gaps fixable. These five moves start with the pages AI already trusts and work outward.

	THE MOVE	WHAT IT INVOLVES	TODAY
01	**Put a measure behind "largest"**	State the claim with its metric and date (capacity, 330 billion seat miles in 2025) on the investor home page and fact sheet, and propose the sourced fact for the United article on Wikipedia.	**4 of 92** Google AI answers calling United the world's largest. American: 42 of 93.
02	**Build a facts page AI can cite**	A newsroom stats and facts page in Delta's mold: on-time rank, cancellation record, awards, fleet, hubs, employees, each dated and sourced, refreshed every quarter.	**9%** answers about United that mention reliability. Delta: 53%.
03	**Answer each risk where it is raised**	A short risk-and-response line on the investor home page, the page AI cites in 58% of answers about United, covering fuel, labor and capacity, so the risk and United's response travel together.	**23 of 31** AI Mode answers with a negative point. American: 4.
04	**Give Kirby's bio a record**	Add what he has built at United: premium growth, the United Next fleet, reliability results and recent recognition. Extend it through interviews and earned media on the sites AI favors for CEOs.	**15%** answers about Kirby that mention premium travel. Bastian: 39%.
05	**Fix the Wikipedia articles the approved way**	Through a disclosed editor, propose sourced, neutral additions on the talk pages of the Kirby and United articles, such as full-year on-time rankings, following Wikipedia's conflict-of-interest rules.	**49%** answers about Kirby that cite his Wikipedia article.

HOW TO KNOW IT IS WORKING

Every number in the right-hand column can be tracked daily, by engine. Some answers shift within days; others, like the scale claim, take longer and need several sources to agree. Starlink shows the goal: specific, dated news that reached all eight engines.

Source: Five Blocks AIQ, Sept 6 - Oct 6, 2026, eight AI engines. Figures as reported in Findings 01 to 05.

WHAT IT TAKES

None of this is a one-time fix

AI answers change every day as the sources they draw on rise and fall. Keeping AI answers about United accurate and complete takes steady work on four fronts.

Pages built for AI to read

Planned content across ir.united.com, the united.com newsroom and the fact sheet, built around the questions travelers, investors and reporters ask AI, and refined in rounds as the answers change.

Kirby's own words, in more places

Results, investor days and Scott Kirby's interviews carried into summaries, earned media and the sources each engine favors, so United's own account is there when news breaks.

Disclosed work on Wikipedia

Through Wikipedia's approved process, with an expert firm, on the articles AI reads. Wikipedia is cited in 46% of answers about United and 49% of answers about Kirby, and Wikipedia's own rules set out how companies can take part.

Steady tracking

How each engine answers, measured every day, so new claims, stale facts and new narratives are caught early and traced to their sources.

Method. Five Blocks AIQ asked eight AI engines two questions every day from September 6 to October 6, 2026: "Tell me about United Airlines Holdings." and "Tell me about United Airlines Holdings' CEO." That gave 494 United answers. The same questions were asked about Delta Air Lines, American Airlines Group and all other Fortune 100 companies, each by its Fortune 100 name. Sources, facts and topics were counted in all answers; topics were found by key word and the matches read to confirm them. Tone uses AIQ's key-point scores (0 to 5); an answer counts as negative with one point at 3 or higher. Quotes were checked against the engines' original answers. United's leadership bio and the Wikipedia article on Scott Kirby were checked on November 4, 2026. These results describe September 6 to October 6, 2026. This is independent research by Five Blocks; it was not commissioned, sponsored or endorsed by United Airlines, Delta Air Lines or American Airlines.

ABOUT FIVE BLOCKS

Five Blocks tracks, analyzes and improves the digital reputations of companies and their leaders around the world

Since 2003, Five Blocks has worked on how organizations are seen on Google, on Wikipedia and now in AI answers. Our IMPACT and AIQ platforms follow tens of thousands of brands every day across search results and the leading AI engines.

This research shows how AI responds to questions about one company and its CEO. It is meant to help companies understand, and better curate, the way they are seen by AI engines. Five Blocks publishes research like this and also works with companies to act on what it finds. For more information, please contact us.

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