5W | 5W Public Relations
Research · 2026

5W PUBLIC RELATIONS · 2026 RESEARCH

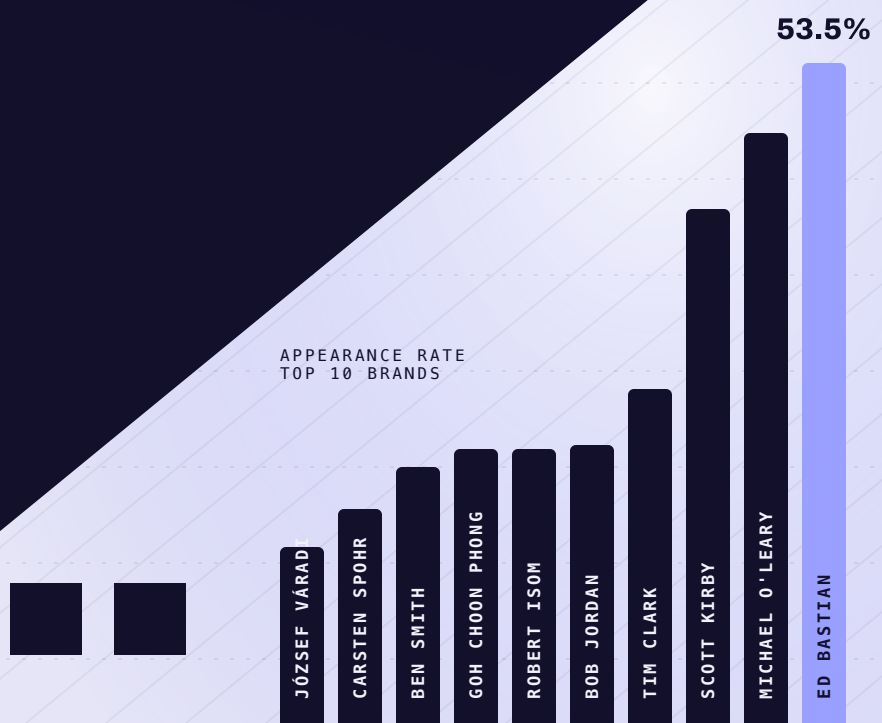
AIRLINE CEOS INDEX 2.0

Which airline chief executives AI engines name
288 AI answers · November 3, 2026

Measured :
November 3, 2026
24 questions × 3 runs · 288 AI answers

Engines :
ChatGPT · Claude · Gemini · Perplexity
plus 57 Google AI Overviews

Prepared by :
5W Public Relations
5wpr.com



AT A GLANCE

Ed Bastian and Michael O'Leary lead. Too close to separate.

Ed Bastian: 154/288 (53.5%; 95% interval 47.7–59.1%). Michael O'Leary: 138/288 (47.9%; 95% interval 42.2–53.7%). Their 95% intervals overlap; neither can be called the sole leader.

Version 2. This version replaces the first version of this study, first published July 25, 2026. It uses measured counts, so the two versions are not comparable.

288
AI answers analyzed across ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Perplexity

53.5%
of answers named Ed Bastian, the most-named (154 of 288)

29
tracked CEOs named at least once (of 29)

100%
of Google searches showed an AI Overview (57 of 57)

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KEY FINDINGS

01 What the data shows

MEASURED LEADERS

Ed Bastian and Michael O'Leary

Ed Bastian and Michael O'Leary lead this measured set. Ed Bastian: 154/288 (53.5%; 95% interval 47.7–59.1%). Michael O'Leary: 138/288 (47.9%; 95% interval 42.2–53.7%). Their 95% intervals overlap; neither can be called the sole leader.

NAMED FIRST

92/288 (31.9%)

Ed Bastian was the first CEO named in 92 of 288 answers, more than any other tracked CEO. Ed Bastian's average first position was 1.9.

OWN-SITE CITATIONS

56/288 (19.4%)

Ed Bastian's own domains were cited in 56 of 288 grounded answers, more than any other tracked CEO. Michael O'Leary followed at 29 of 288. 12 of 29 tracked CEOs had 0 of 288.

AIO TRIGGER

57/57 (100%)

Google AI Overviews appeared on 57 of 57 searches (CI 93.7–100%).

AIO LEADER

27/57 (47.4%)

Ed Bastian was the CEO named most often in AI Overviews, at 27 of 57, followed by Michael O'Leary at 25 of 57 (43.9%). In the four-engine set, Ed Bastian was named in 154 of 288 answers (53.5%).

TOP DOMAIN

71/288 (24.7%)

viewfromthewing.com was cited in 71 of 288 grounded four-engine answers, with 90 of 2,517 citations (3.6%). en.wikipedia.org came second with 83 citations in 60 answers (20.8%).

NO TRACKED NAME

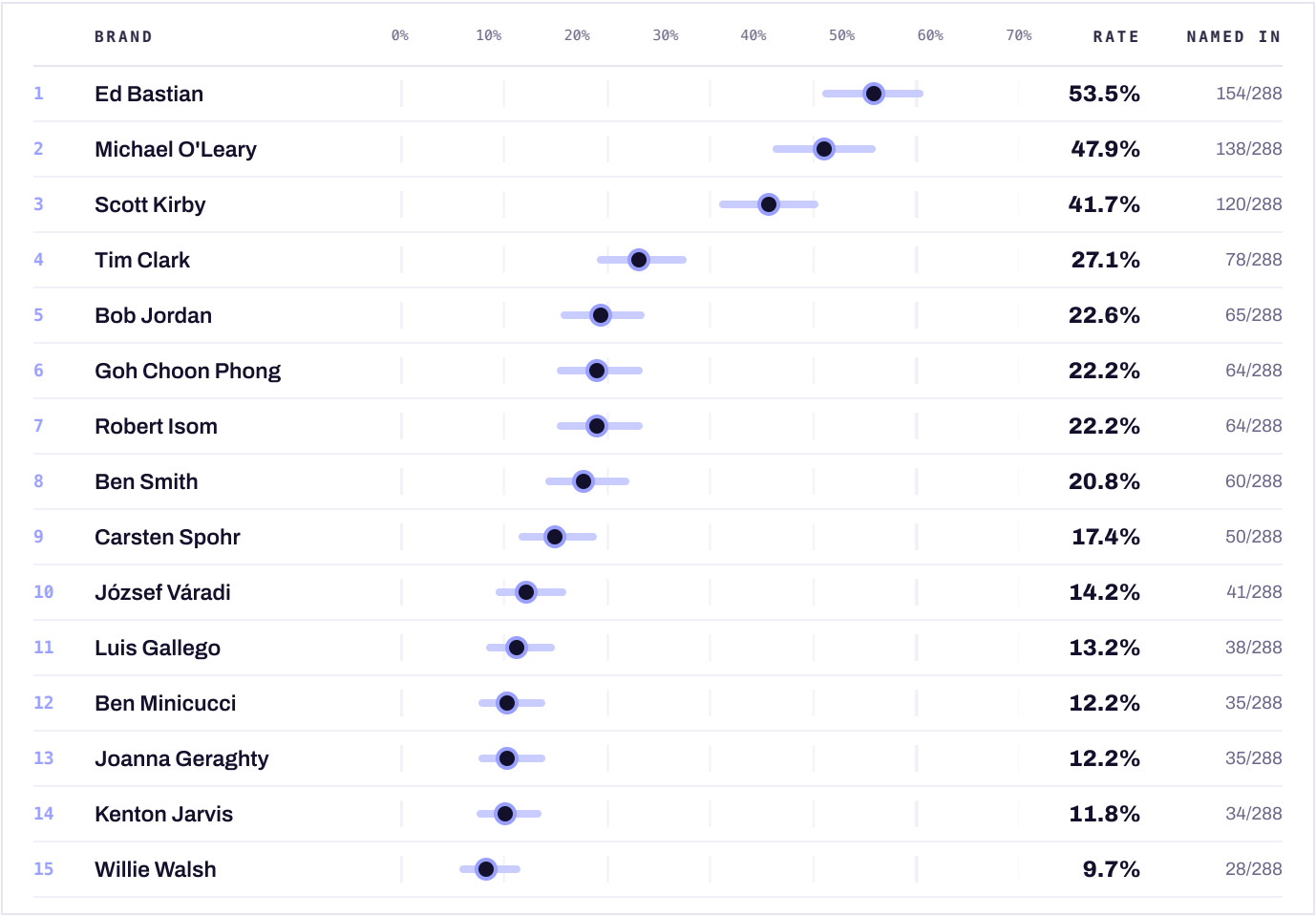
0/12 (0.0%)

For 'Which US airline is the best run?', none of the tracked CEOs was named in any of 12 four-engine answers.

THE LEADERBOARD

02 Which brands AI engines name

Appearance rate across 288 four-engine answers. The bar is the 95% confidence interval; overlapping bars cannot be told apart at this sample size.



	BRAND	RATE	NAMED IN
1	Ed Bastian	53.5%	154/288
2	Michael O'Leary	47.9%	138/288
3	Scott Kirby	41.7%	120/288
4	Tim Clark	27.1%	78/288
5	Bob Jordan	22.6%	65/288
6	Goh Choon Phong	22.2%	64/288
7	Robert Isom	22.2%	64/288
8	Ben Smith	20.8%	60/288
9	Carsten Spohr	17.4%	50/288
10	József Váradi	14.2%	41/288
11	Luis Gallego	13.2%	38/288
12	Ben Minicucci	12.2%	35/288
13	Joanna Geraghty	12.2%	35/288
14	Kenton Jarvis	11.8%	34/288
15	Willie Walsh	9.7%	28/288

02 THE LEADERBOARD

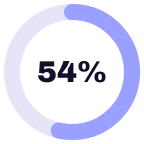
The full list

Own-domain citation is the share of 288 grounded answers that cited the tracked name's own domains (subdomains included). Citation share is of all 2,517 citations. None means no personal website is tracked for that person.

#	PERSON	NAMED IN	APPEARANCE RATE	95% INTERVAL	FIRST MENTION	OWN-DOMAIN CITATION	CITATION SHARE
1	Ed Bastian	154/288	53.5%	47.7–59.1%	1.9	19.4% (56/288)	2.3%
2	Michael O'Leary	138/288	47.9%	42.2–53.7%	2.1	10.1% (29/288)	1.2%
3	Scott Kirby	120/288	41.7%	36.1–47.4%	2.7	None	None
4	Tim Clark	78/288	27.1%	22.3–32.5%	3.2	6.6% (19/288)	0.8%
5	Bob Jordan	65/288	22.6%	18.1–27.7%	3.5	5.6% (16/288)	0.6%
6	Goh Choon Phong	64/288	22.2%	17.8–27.4%	3.4	3.8% (11/288)	0.4%
7	Robert Isom	64/288	22.2%	17.8–27.4%	3.6	3.8% (11/288)	0.4%
8	Ben Smith	60/288	20.8%	16.5–25.9%	4.3	3.8% (11/288)	0.4%
9	Carsten Spohr	50/288	17.4%	13.4–22.2%	3.4	5.2% (15/288)	0.6%
10	József Váradi	41/288	14.2%	10.7–18.7%	4.4	4.2% (12/288)	0.5%
11	Luis Gallego	38/288	13.2%	9.8–17.6%	3.8	4.9% (14/288)	0.6%
12	Ben Minicucci	35/288	12.2%	8.9–16.4%	3.7	5.2% (15/288)	0.6%
13	Joanna Geraghty	35/288	12.2%	8.9–16.4%	4.5	4.2% (12/288)	0.5%
14	Kenton Jarvis	34/288	11.8%	8.6–16%	3	8% (23/288)	0.9%
15	Willie Walsh	28/288	9.7%	6.8–13.7%	3.6	None	None
16	Johan Lundgren	23/288	8%	5.4–11.7%	3.7	None	None
17	David Neeleman	17/288	5.9%	3.7–9.2%	3.4	0% (0/288)	0%
18	Akbar Al Baker	16/288	5.6%	3.4–8.8%	4.6	None	None
19	Ronald Lam	15/288	5.2%	3.2–8.4%	2.7	1.7% (5/288)	0.2%
20	Mitsuko Tottori	12/288	4.2%	2.4–7.1%	3.7	1.4% (4/288)	0.2%
21	Hamad Al-Khater	11/288	3.8%	2.1–6.7%	2.2	None	None
22	Anko van der Werff	8/288	2.8%	1.4–5.4%	2.1	0% (0/288)	0%
23	Badr Mohammed Al-Meer	8/288	2.8%	1.4–5.4%	3.8	None	None
24	James Dempsey	7/288	2.4%	1.2–4.9%	3.6	1.4% (4/288)	0.2%
25	Michael Rousseau	7/288	2.4%	1.2–4.9%	2.4	None	None
26	Vanessa Hudson	7/288	2.4%	1.2–4.9%	4.9	1% (3/288)	0.1%
27	Dave Davis	6/288	2.1%	1–4.5%	6.2	None	None
28	Barry Biffle	4/288	1.4%	0.5–3.5%	2	None	None
29	Yuji Akasaka	4/288	1.4%	0.5–3.5%	3.8	None	None

PROFILES

03 The top eight, side by side

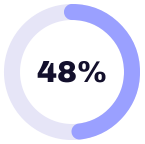


RANK 1

Ed Bastian

154/288 answers · 95% CI 47.7–59.1%

1.9	19.4%	2.3%
first-mention position	owned-domain citation (56/288)	citation share

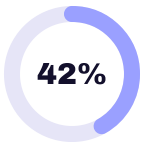


RANK 2

Michael O'Leary

138/288 answers · 95% CI 42.2–53.7%

2.1	10.1%	1.2%
first-mention position	owned-domain citation (29/288)	citation share

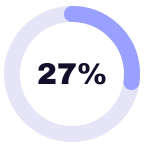


RANK 3

Scott Kirby

120/288 answers · 95% CI 36.1–47.4%

2.7
first-mention position

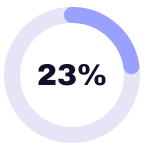


RANK 4

Tim Clark

78/288 answers · 95% CI 22.3–32.5%

3.2	6.6%	0.8%
first-mention position	owned-domain citation (19/288)	citation share



RANK 5

Bob Jordan

65/288 answers · 95% CI 18.1–27.7%

3.5	5.6%	0.6%
first-mention position	owned-domain citation (16/288)	citation share



RANK 6

Goh Choon Phong

64/288 answers · 95% CI 17.8–27.4%

3.4	3.8%	0.4%
first-mention position	owned-domain citation (11/288)	citation share

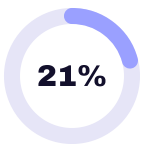


RANK 7

Robert Isom

64/288 answers · 95% CI 17.8–27.4%

3.6	3.8%	0.4%
first-mention position	owned-domain citation (11/288)	citation share



RANK 8

Ben Smith

60/288 answers · 95% CI 16.5–25.9%

4.3	3.8%	0.4%
first-mention position	owned-domain citation (11/288)	citation share

04 HOW THE ENGINES DIFFER

Same questions, different answers

The four engines named the leading names at similar rates.

ChatGPT

	72 ASKED	72 RETURNED	72 GROUNDED
Ed Bastian			**48.6%**
Michael O'Leary			**47.2%**
Scott Kirby			**37.5%**
Robert Isom			**26.4%**
Goh Choon Phong			**19.4%**
Carsten Spohr			**19.4%**

Claude

	72 ASKED	72 RETURNED	72 GROUNDED
Ed Bastian			**51.4%**
Michael O'Leary			**47.2%**
Scott Kirby			**41.7%**
Bob Jordan			**36.1%**
Robert Isom			**31.9%**
Goh Choon Phong			**25%**

Gemini

	72 ASKED	72 RETURNED	72 GROUNDED
Ed Bastian			**59.7%**
Michael O'Leary			**47.2%**
Scott Kirby			**44.4%**
Tim Clark			**40.3%**
Bob Jordan			**26.4%**
Goh Choon Phong			**22.2%**

Perplexity

	72 ASKED	72 RETURNED	72 GROUNDED
Ed Bastian			**54.2%**
Michael O'Leary			**50%**
Scott Kirby			**43.1%**
Tim Clark			**31.9%**
Ben Smith			**26.4%**
Goh Choon Phong			**22.2%**

05

GOOGLE AI OVERVIEWS

The fifth engine

Google AI Overviews were captured through 57 U.S. desktop searches and scored only where an overview appeared, so five-engine figures use 288 + 57 = 345 answers.



TRIGGER RATE

Google AI Overviews appeared on 57 of 57 searches (100%, CI 93.7–100%). The other 0 searches showed no overview. Within the 57 overviews, Ed Bastian was named in 27 (47.4%), Michael O'Leary was named in 25 (43.9%), Scott Kirby was named in 23 (40.4%), Goh Choon Phong was named in 13 (22.8%). youtube.com was the most-cited source, with 35 citations and an appearance in 24 of 57 overviews.

FIVE-ENGINE RANK (FOUR-ENGINE RANK IN ARROWS)

1	Ed Bastian	52.5%	=
2	Michael O'Leary	47.2%	=
3	Scott Kirby	41.4%	=
4	Tim Clark	26.1%	=
5	Bob Jordan	22.3%	=
6	Goh Choon Phong	22.3%	=
7	Ben Smith	21.2%	▲ 1
8	Robert Isom	20.3%	▼ 1
9	Carsten Spohr	15.9%	=
10	József Váradi	13.3%	=

LEADERS BY QUESTION

06 Who each question surfaces first

Six questions from the set. Each tile uses that question's own four-engine answers as the denominator.

Q01 · 12 ANSWERS

Ed Bastian 100%

Tim Clark	83.3%
Goh Choon Phong	83.3%

AI Overview shown on 3 of 3 searches

Q03 · 12 ANSWERS

Scott Kirby 100%

TIED WITH ED BASTIAN

Ed Bastian	100%
Michael O'Leary	83.3%

AI Overview shown on 2 of 2 searches

Q04 · 12 ANSWERS

Ed Bastian 91.7%

David Neeleman	50%
Scott Kirby	33.3%

AI Overview shown on 3 of 3 searches

Q05 · 12 ANSWERS

Scott Kirby 100%

TIED WITH MICHAEL O'LEARY, ED BASTIAN

Michael O'Leary	100%
Ed Bastian	100%

AI Overview shown on 2 of 2 searches

Q06 · 12 ANSWERS

Michael O'Leary 75%

Goh Choon Phong	66.7%
Ed Bastian	58.3%

AI Overview shown on 3 of 3 searches

Q07 · 12 ANSWERS

Michael O'Leary 100%

TIED WITH LUIS GALLEGO

Luis Gallego	100%
Carsten Spohr	91.7%

AI Overview shown on 3 of 3 searches

07

WHO THE ENGINES CITE

Most-cited domains

The four engines produced 2,517 citations in total. viewfromthewing.com was cited most often, with 90 citations (3.6%) across 71 answers. Next came en.wikipedia.org (83), onemileatatime.com (69), fortune.com (64), 5wpr.com (52), skift.com (51).

FOUR AI ENGINES · SHARE OF 288 GROUNDED ANSWERS

viewfromthewing.com	**24.7%**
onemileatatime.com	**22.9%**
en.wikipedia.org	**20.8%**
5wpr.com	**18.1%**
fortune.com	**17%**
skift.com	**15.6%**
dealstream.com	**14.2%**
aviationweek.com	**12.8%**
wikipedia.org	**11.5%**
aviationa2z.com	**11.1%**

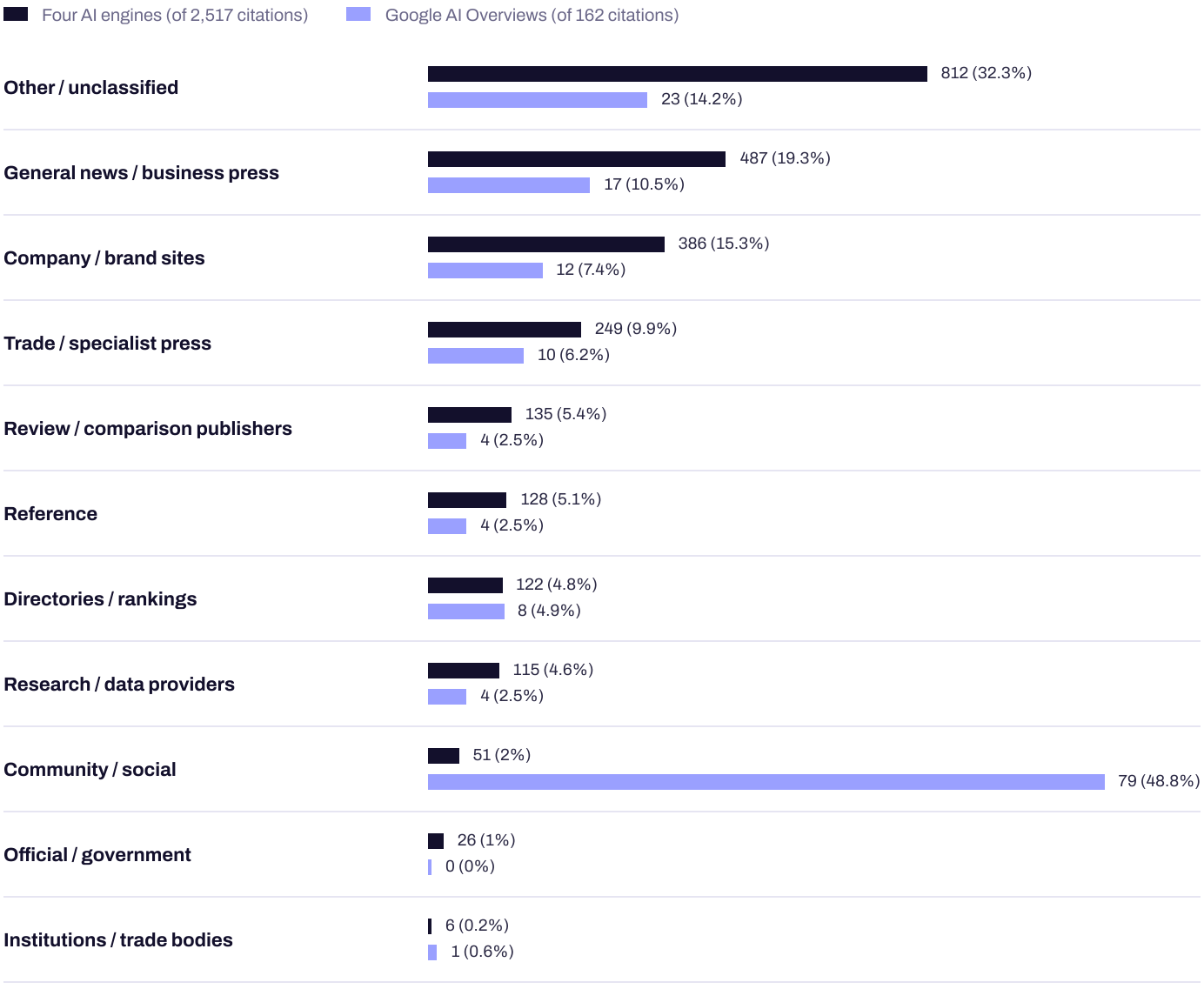
GOOGLE AI OVERVIEWS · SHARE OF 57 OVERVIEWS

youtube.com	**42.1%**
facebook.com	**36.8%**
instagram.com	**17.5%**
linkedin.com	**10.5%**
dealstream.com	**7%**
en.wikipedia.org	**7%**
forbes.com	**7%**
simpleflying.com	**7%**
news.delta.com	**5.3%**
onemileatatime.com	**5.3%**

WHO THE ENGINES CITE

08 Citation share by source type

Share of all citations by the type of site cited.



09

WHAT THE DATA SUGGESTS

How can brands improve their AI visibility?

These steps follow from the measured results above. They describe what the engines cited in this study and are not a guarantee of results.

STEP	WHAT THIS STUDY MEASURED
Put your facts on your own domain.	Ed Bastian's own domains were cited in 19.4% of grounded answers, Michael O'Leary's in 10.1% and Kenton Jarvis' in 8.0%.
Keep your facts accurate on the sites engines cite.	The most-cited sites other than the tracked names' own were viewfromthewing.com (in 24.7% of grounded answers), onemileatatime.com (22.9%), en.wikipedia.org (20.8%), 5wpr.com (18.1%) and fortune.com (17.0%). General news and business press supplied 19.3% of citations and trade and specialist press 9.9%.
Check each engine separately.	Gemini named Tim Clark in 40.3% of answers against 12.5% on ChatGPT. Claude named Bob Jordan in 36.1% of answers against 12.5% on Perplexity.
Watch names outside the tracked list.	Ryanair Holdings plc (41 answers), Delta Air Lines (37 answers), Southwest Airlines (30 answers), United Airlines (23 answers), Emirates (22 answers) were named often but were not tracked.
Re-run the same questions every month.	Compare counts and intervals, not ranks. The 24 questions are in the appendix.

QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

10 What AI answers

Q1 Which airline CEOs lead these AI answers?

Ed Bastian and Michael O'Leary lead this measured set. Ed Bastian: 154/288 (53.5%; 95% interval 47.7–59.1%). Michael O'Leary: 138/288 (47.9%; 95% interval 42.2–53.7%). Their 95% intervals overlap; neither can be called the sole leader.

Q2 Which CEO is named first most often?

Ed Bastian was the first CEO named in 92 of 288 answers, with an average first position of 1.9.

Q3 How often do Google AI Overviews appear for these questions?

An overview appeared on 57 of 57 searches (100%, CI 93.7–100%). Within those 57 overviews, Ed Bastian was named most often, in 27 (47.4%).

Q4 Which sources do the engines cite?

Across 2,517 four-engine citations, viewfromthewing.com was cited most (90 citations, in 71 of 288 grounded answers), followed by en.wikipedia.org (83 citations).

Q5 Do the four engines agree?

Largely. No tracked name differed by more than 12 points between engines.

METHODOLOGY

11 How this study was measured

24	×	3	×	4	=	288	+	57
questions		runs each		AI engines		answers		Google searches · 57 AI Overviews

24 questions asked three times on each of ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Perplexity, measured November 3, 2026. United States, English; Google retrieval uses desktop results. Models: gpt-5-mini, claude-sonnet-5-5, gemini-3.6-flash only, sonar-pro. Google AI Overviews come from DataForSEO, not inferred chat answers. Appearance counts returned text, including ungrounded answers; citation rates use grounded answers. Longer overlapping names suppress shorter ones; First mention is the earliest eligible name order. Own-domain rates include declared domains and subdomains; shared parent scopes may count for multiple names and cannot be summed as unique citations.

ENGINE	MODEL IDS CALLED	ASKED	RETURNED	GROUNDED
ChatGPT	gpt-5-mini	72	72	72
Claude	claude-sonnet-5-5	72	72	72
Gemini	gemini-3.6-flash	72	72	72
Perplexity	sonar-pro	72	72	72
Google AI Overviews	DataForSEO Google SERP (live, advanced)	57	57 shown	57

Own-domain citations count a domain plus all its subdomains, with the same rule in every table.

METRIC DEFINITIONS

- Appearance rate: answers naming the tracked name ÷ answers returned, with Wilson 95% intervals.
- First mention: average order in which the tracked name first appears (1 = first).
- Own-domain citation: grounded answers citing the tracked name's domains ÷ grounded answers.
- Citation share: citations to the tracked name's domains ÷ all citations.

LIMITATIONS

- Only 29 tracked CEOs are ranked; results are not an exhaustive market ranking.
- Only the tracked people were scored. Untracked names that appeared often were not scored, including Ryanair Holdings plc (41 answers), Delta Air Lines (37 answers), Southwest Airlines (30 answers), United Airlines (23 answers), Emirates (22 answers).
- 345 of 360 planned results were returned. 15 AI Overview lookups were excluded after at most three total attempts.
- 57 successful Google searches: 57 overviews shown; 0 without an overview. Failures are excluded, not scored as zero.
- All returned chat answers had search sources.
- No Core question names a tracked name.
- Names with no tracked own site are shown as None. Source types use Company / brand sites only for verified official organisations; other unresolved sites are Other / unclassified.
- Wilson 95% intervals are descriptive; overlapping leading intervals do not establish a sole leader. Measurements do not endorse medical, legal, financial or product claims.
- Fifteen chief executives from the earlier edition, updated to the people in office now, plus leaders of the largest Middle East, Asia-Pacific and Canadian carriers. Each person's own domain is their current airline's website; former leaders get no airline domain. Recent changes: James Dempsey replaced Barry Biffle as Frontier CEO (interim December 2025, permanent January 2026). Kenton Jarvis succeeded Johan Lundgren at easyJet in January 2025. Hamad Al-Khater became Qatar Airways Group CEO on December 7, 2025, succeeding Badr Mohammed Al-Meer. Spirit Airlines stopped flying on May 2, 2026; Dave Davis remains CEO for the wind-down. Michael Rousseau retired from Air Canada on August 31, 2026. Air Canada has no chief executive in office: no acting CEO was named, and its executive committee reports directly to the board until Anko van der Werff joins by the end of January 2027. Until then only flysas.com (SAS, which he still leads) is credited to him; aircanada.com is credited to no one. Tim Clark remains Emirates President. Former leaders are tracked so that answers naming them as current can be counted.

APPENDIX

12 The 24 questions

Questions marked "Core question" are the original study questions, asked word for word. The others are added neutral questions.

#	QUESTION	GROUP	SOURCE
01	Who are the best airline CEOs in the world?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	CORE QUESTION
02	Which US airline is the best run?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	CORE QUESTION
03	Who are the most influential leaders in the airline industry?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	CORE QUESTION
04	Which airline executives have handled a crisis well?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	CORE QUESTION
05	Which airline CEOs are the most outspoken?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	CORE QUESTION
06	Which airlines have the strongest leadership right now?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	CORE QUESTION
07	Who runs the biggest airlines in Europe?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	CORE QUESTION
08	Which airline CEO has led the best turnaround?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	CORE QUESTION
09	Who runs the leading low-cost airlines?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	CORE QUESTION
10	Who are the CEOs of the major US airlines?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION
11	Which US airline CEO is most respected by employees?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION
12	Who are the most successful airline chief executives of the past decade?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION
13	Which airline leaders are known for strong operational reliability?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION
14	Which airline CEOs have faced the most criticism after service disruptions?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION
15	Which airline executives are most visible in the media?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION
16	Who leads the largest airline groups in Europe?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION
17	Who are the chief executives of the major Middle East airlines?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION
18	Who runs the leading airlines in Asia?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION
19	Which airline CEOs are shaping the future of premium air travel?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION
20	Who are the CEOs of the biggest budget airlines in Europe?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION
21	Which US low-cost airline has the strongest leadership?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION
22	Which airline CEOs have the best reputation with investors?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION
23	Which airline leaders have recently taken over at major carriers?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION
24	Who are the longest-serving airline CEOs today?	Airline CEOs Index 2.0	ADDED QUESTION

5W

5W PUBLIC RELATIONS · RESEARCH

Airline CEOs Index 2.0

Measured November 3, 2026 · 5W Public Relations

WEB
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RESEARCH
5wpr.com/research