

HOW AI FINDS PRODUCTS IN ONLINE STORES · OCTOBER 2026

What will AI tell a shopper about your store? We asked AI to find an external drive in 10 UK stores and checked the offers it brought back.

Currys · Argos · John Lewis · Scan · Overclockers UK · Ebuyer · Box · CCL Computers · Novatech · Wex Photo Video

A consumer study, not a ranking. The stores' own chatbots were not tested. Gemini and Perplexity got the same task; their answers were checked against store pages saved the same day.

- 1 A convincing answer is not yet a verified offer: in Gemini's answer 2 of the 5 prices we could check differed from the store pages, and its cheapest offer could not be confirmed.**
 - 2 A correct price does not yet mean the best option: all 4 of Perplexity's checked prices matched, but it dropped a cheaper pre-order the shopper had not ruled out.**
 - 3 An unreachable page does not mean the offer disappears: Perplexity included the Novatech offer using information from the search index, but could not confirm offers from Scan and CCL.**
 - 4 Three sites out of ten did not open to our automated tools; Currys did not open even to a regular browser from abroad.**
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Sergei Ponomarev · AI Business · aibusiness.vc · version 1.0 · 13 October 2026

How AI finds products in online stores: an external drive in ten UK stores

Checking the offers collected by a shopper's AI assistants, October 2026

Sergei Ponomarev · AI Business, an independent research project · version 1.0 of 13 October 2026 · search, AI answers and store pages captured on 13 October 2026

1. What we learned

I needed an external drive for photos and backups. Instead of going through stores myself, I asked AI to find a suitable option. I do this more and more often: the shopper is the same, the way of searching has changed.

The task was ordinary: a 1 TB drive, fast enough, no more than £250 including delivery to London. We chose 10 UK stores. First we collected offers with Claude and saved the product pages, then gave Gemini and Perplexity the same task and checked their answers against those pages.

Both AIs brought back tables with products, prices and links. But the check showed that getting a list of offers and getting a well-founded choice are not the same thing.

The main result. We asked for a suitable drive and got one more task: checking the choice we were offered. In one answer, some prices differed from the store pages. In the other, the prices matched, but the AI on its own excluded an option the shopper had not ruled out. So it is worth checking not only the details in the table, but also why this particular product was chosen.

Three findings.

A convincing answer is not yet a verified offer.

In Gemini's answer, 2 of the 5 prices we could check differed from the saved pages, by £20 and £30. A product named as available was shown as out of stock on its page. The cheapest offer, "£119.99 at Box", could not be confirmed: the link led to a catalogue section where that price did not appear.

A correct price does not yet mean the best option for the shopper's request.

All 4 of Perplexity's checked prices matched the pages. But it dropped a cheaper pre-order at £135, although we had not asked for in-stock items only, and named a £140 option as the cheapest. We did not confirm that the chosen option was the cheapest with delivery.

An unreachable page does not mean the offer disappears.

Perplexity reported that the Novatech store page did not open, yet included the Novatech offer using information from the search index, and the price was confirmed. For Scan and CCL, where we had found suitable drives, it could not confirm offers: for Scan it wrote that it could not verify the price and gave unconfirmed details from the index, which it did not count itself; for CCL it wrote that the site did not open because of a connection error.

Our own initial search was incomplete too: the other AIs helped us spot a missed product at Novatech and an unnoticed pre-order label at Ebuyer.

What this means. AI can shorten the search, but a ready-made table does not answer the shopper's questions: does the product fit, can it be ordered, what will it cost with delivery, why was this option

chosen. For a store, it is a reason to check what exactly AI says about its products, not only whether the site opens. For a shopper, it is a reason to open the link to the chosen product before deciding to buy.

We checked the search for offers, not the checkout. The findings refer to these answers and to the pages saved on one day. This is not a ranking of stores or of AIs.

2. What we looked for and where

The shopper and the requirements. A London resident, postcode EC1A 1BB. One new 1 TB external SSD: USB-C, USB 3.2 Gen 2 (10 Gbit/s) or faster, manufacturer-rated read speed of at least 1,000 MB/s, a ready-to-use drive with its cable, not an internal drive and not an empty enclosure. Budget up to £250 including delivery. Availability "right now" and delivery time were not specified, so a pre-order does not contradict the task.

The stores. Ten UK online stores that sell external SSDs and deliver across the country. The list was made before the start; all three searches used the same list of stores, and it was not changed whether a site opened or not. It includes stores where an ordinary shopper would most likely look for a drive, plus a few others, to include stores of different types.

- Currys, the largest UK electronics chain.
- Argos, a catalogue and delivery chain.
- John Lewis, a department store.
- Scan, Overclockers UK, Ebuyer, Box, CCL Computers: computer stores.
- Novatech, a technology supplier to businesses and consumers.
- Wex Photo Video, a photo and video equipment store.

The task for the AIs, the same for everyone. Check the ten stores on the list one by one. In each, find one suitable drive, the cheapest among those that can be verified on the store's own website; do not use price comparison sites or marketplaces, and where a store sells through third-party sellers, take the store's own offer. Give a table: store, model, specifications, price, stock status, delivery cost and time to London, warranty, direct link. If nothing is found, write "not found" and what was searched. If the site did not open, write "could not access" and why. Do not guess prices from memory. At the end, name the cheapest verified offer and the stores that could not be verified. Do not buy anything.

How we checked, in short. Our search helped us collect offers to check the answers against: Claude, in a built-in browser, found a suitable drive wherever the site opened and saved the product page. Then every line of Gemini's and Perplexity's answers was opened through the AI's own link and compared with the saved pages. We checked separately whether the details matched the pages, and for which stores the AI found offers at all. Details are in section 6.

3. What the AIs offered and what was confirmed

Statuses: "confirmed" means the product and price matched the page at the AI's own link; "differs" means the saved page shows a different price or stock status; "could not confirm" means there is no product at that price at the link; "not checked" means the site was not accessible to us and we did not assess it.

Store	Our search	Gemini	Perplexity
Currys	did not open	SanDisk 800 MB/s, below the threshold, then Samsung T7, £229.99; not checked	SanDisk Extreme, £149; not checked
Argos	did not open	SanDisk Extreme V2, £164.99; not checked	Samsung T9, £204.99; not checked
John Lewis	Lexar SL300, £219; confirmed	Samsung T7, £228.89, "in stock"; price matches, page says "out of stock"	Lexar SL300, £219; confirmed
Scan	Samsung T7, £169.98; confirmed	SanDisk Extreme V2, £149.99; differs, page shows £179.99	"could not verify"
Overclockers UK	not found: section empty	not found	not found, listed where it searched
Ebuyer	Kingston XS1000, £135 (pre-order label missed) and £140	Lexar, £129.98; differs, page shows £149.99	Kingston XS1000, £140 in stock, £135 as pre-order; confirmed
Box	Synology BeeDrive, £149.49; confirmed	Crucial X9, £119.99; could not confirm, link to a section	Synology BeeDrive, £149.49; confirmed
CCL Computers	Kingston XS1000, £197.99; confirmed	Kingston XS1000, £197.99; confirmed	"could not access"
Novatech	not found: external SSD section empty	SanDisk Extreme PRO, £249.98; confirmed	same, from the search index; product price confirmed, stated delivery £5.99 differs from the page (from £7.99)
Wex Photo Video	did not open	"none within budget", £259; not checked	Integral SlimXpress Pro, £214.99, special order; not checked

The results in numbers.

	Our search	Gemini	Perplexity
Stores with a priced offer	5	8	7
Prices we could check against pages	6	5	4
Of these, matched	6	3	4
Differ on price	0	2	0
Differ on stock status	1 (pre-order missed)	1	0
Could not confirm	1 (Crucial X9)	1 (main recommendation)	0
Not checked by us (site not accessible)	3	3	3
Stores with a confirmed product but no offer named	1 (Novatech)	0	2 (Scan, CCL)
Response time, approximate	about 35 minutes	about 2 minutes	about 25 minutes

Novatech: with the delivery rate shown, £7.99, the total is £257.97, over budget. At Overclockers nobody found a suitable drive. Cheaper drives appeared in the results, at £128.49 and £159.98, but their rated speed, 550 and 800 MB/s, is below the threshold in the task.

4. What helps verify an offer, and what gets in the way

Four examples from these answers and pages.

A stock label you can see.

Next to the red Kingston at £135, Ebuyer shows "PRE-ORDER"; the black one at £140 has no such label. Perplexity read this and separated the pre-order from the in-stock product. Our manual pass missed the label. The more visible the stock status, the fewer such misses, for people and for AI alike. The other side: AI can quietly narrow your choice. The shopper did not rule out a pre-order, but Perplexity excluded it. So it helps to check not only the product offered, but also the reasons other options were dropped.

Data in the search index when the page does not open.

Perplexity could not open the Novatech product page, but named the product, price and "only 3 left" from the index, and all of it matched the saved page. In this session, information from the search index allowed Perplexity to name the Novatech offer even though the page was not accessible. Our search missed this product: it sat in the external hard drives section, while the external SSD section was empty.

Price and stock that differ from the site.

Gemini named a Lexar at Ebuyer at £129.98 and a SanDisk at Scan at £149.99, and a Samsung T7 at John Lewis as "in stock". At its own links, the saved pages showed £149.99, £179.99 and "Currently out of stock online". We do not know where the details in the answer came from; the pages were checked after the answer. Meanwhile, the Lexar at £219 at John Lewis was in stock, and Gemini did not name it.

Search and sections built for people.

Searching "portable SSD" on the Overclockers and John Lewis sites returned laptops with an SSD inside. The "Portable SSD" section at Overclockers was empty. Where the search went by sections, the product was not found; where it went through site search and the index, it was. What a site returns for a shopper's natural query, and where the product sits, affects whether it ends up in the AI's answer.

5. What to check in your own store

Ask AI to find a product in your store for an ordinary shopper's need. In the task, write "find the product without placing an order" rather than "buy". Then check: which option it chose, whether it passed on the price and stock status correctly, whether it kept the shopper's requirements, and whether it gave a link where the offer can be checked.

If your product is not in the answer, do not rush to change the site. First find out what happened: the AI did not find the product, could not check the page, or excluded the offer by a condition of its own.

AI helps collect options faster. Shoppers need more than a list: they need a choice they can verify. That is exactly what we checked: what stands behind the named price, link and recommendation.

6. How we checked and what we did not check

Participants and conditions. Three participants, but not in equal conditions. Our search was done by Claude in a built-in browser, manually, on 13 October at about 13:00 UTC, with my clarifications along the way, without additional paid model calls; it saved the pages of the products found. This is not an equivalent test session: our search helped collect offers to check the answers against. Gemini and Perplexity received the same task separately, at about 13:20 UTC, and each gave one answer. Modes and versions were not recorded, and response times are approximate. We do not know where their infrastructure is located; the connection from Bulgaria applies only to our own access and page checks.

The comparison list. Confirmed by saved store pages: HTML, text, screenshot and SHA-256 hash of each file. After the Gemini and Perplexity answers, the list was refined twice: the Novatech product and the Ebuyer pre-order label were added. All three versions are kept. Pages were checked after the AI answers, not at the same moment, which is why we write "differs from the saved page" rather than "the price is wrong".

Verification. Every line of every answer was opened through the AI's own link and compared with the saved pages. Four statuses: confirmed; differs; could not confirm; not checked by us.

What we did not check. The basket, checkout and delivery to the postcode; delivery notes are the stores' own promises. The Currys, Argos and Wex sites, which did not open to our automated tools: the AIs' statements about them were not assessed. The specifications of every product named by the AIs against manufacturers' sites. The reasons why pages did not open. Lost sales, fault of the sites and shopper reactions were not studied and are not claimed.

Appendix A. By store

For each store: whether the page opened to our tools, what we found, what Gemini and Perplexity answered, what helped find and verify the product in these sessions, and what could be improved. Where a site did not open to us, there is no assessment.

Argos.

- **Access.** Opened to a regular browser, not to automated tools.
- **Our search.** Not carried out.
- **Gemini.** SanDisk Extreme V2 £164.99; not checked.
- **Perplexity.** Samsung T9 £204.99; did not confirm London availability, as the site asks to check by postcode; not checked.
- **What could be improved.** Not assessed, the pages were not read by us.

Box.

- **Access.** Opened.
- **Our search.** Synology BeeDrive £149.49, confirmed; Crucial X9 £164.99 seen in the section listing, could not be confirmed with a saved page.
- **Gemini.** Crucial X9 £119.99, link to the internal SSD section, could not confirm.
- **Perplexity.** BeeDrive £149.49, confirmed.
- **What helped.** The BeeDrive page with specifications, stock and delivery date "by Thursday 15 October".
- **What could be improved.** Site search did not open by URL; we had to search through sections.

CCL Computers.

- **Access.** Opened.
- **Our search.** Kingston XS1000 £197.99, confirmed.
- **Gemini.** Kingston XS1000 £197.99, confirmed.
- **Perplexity.** "could not access", connection error.
- **What helped.** The product page states capacity, interface, speed "up to 1,050 MB/s", delivery time and a 5-year warranty in words.
- **What could be improved.** Site search returned no results for three queries; the product was found through the "External storage" section.

Currys.

- **Access.** Did not open either to a regular browser from abroad or to automated tools.
- **Our search.** Not carried out.
- **Gemini.** SanDisk 800 MB/s, below the threshold, then Samsung T7 £229.99; not checked.
- **Perplexity.** SanDisk Extreme £149; not checked.
- **What could be improved.** Not assessed.

Ebuyer.

- **Access.** Opened.
- **Our search.** Kingston XS1000 red £135 and black £140; we missed the "PRE-ORDER" label on the red one.
- **Gemini.** Lexar £129.98, page shows £149.99, differs; the cheaper Kingston was not named.
- **Perplexity.** Kingston XS1000 black £140, confirmed; the £135 option is available as a pre-order, and Perplexity named it separately.
- **What helped.** The pre-order label in the listing, the next-day delivery banner.
- **What could be improved.** Site search does not open by URL, only from the search box.

John Lewis.

- **Access.** Did not open to a regular browser from abroad, opened to automated tools.
- **Our search.** Lexar SL300 £219, in stock, confirmed.
- **Gemini.** Samsung T7 £228.89 "in stock", page says "out of stock"; differs on stock.
- **Perplexity.** Lexar SL300 £219, confirmed.
- **What helped.** The product page says "Currently in stock online" plainly, with free delivery and a 2-year guarantee.
- **What could be improved.** Searching "portable SSD" returns laptops; out-of-stock products appear in the listing alongside available ones.

Novatech.

- **Access.** Opened.
- **Our search.** Not found, the external SSD section was empty; the product sat in the external HDD section.
- **Gemini.** SanDisk Extreme PRO £249.98, confirmed.
- **Perplexity.** Same, from the search index. The product price is confirmed; the stated delivery cost of £5.99 differs from the saved page, which shows delivery from £7.99. With either rate the total is over budget.
- **What helped.** A product page with stock "only 3 left" and delivery time.
- **What could be improved.** The external SSD section is empty while an external SSD sits among hard drives.

Overclockers UK.

- **Access.** Opened.
- **Our search.** Not found, the "Portable SSD" section showed "Nothing found".
- **Gemini.** Not found.
- **Perplexity.** Not found, listed the sections and queries it tried.
- **What could be improved.** Searching "portable SSD" and "external SSD" returned laptops and enclosures; a section for portable SSDs exists but is empty.

Scan.

- **Access.** Opened to a regular browser, not to the windowless automated browser, opened to the one with a window.
- **Our search.** Samsung T7 £169.98, in stock, "Get it Tomorrow", confirmed.
- **Gemini.** SanDisk Extreme V2 £149.99, page shows £179.99, differs.
- **Perplexity.** "could not verify".
- **What helped.** Each product in the listing shows price, delivery date and stock status.
- **What could be improved.** We do not assess why the AI could not open the site.

Wex Photo Video.

- **Access.** Opened to a regular browser; the search page did not open to automated tools.
- **Our search.** Not carried out.
- **Gemini.** "none within budget", nothing below £259; not checked.
- **Perplexity.** Integral SlimXpress Pro £214.99, special order; not checked.
- **What could be improved.** Not assessed, the pages were not read by us.

Appendix B. Access check

On 13 October we opened the home page and the search page of each store in three ways, with UK visitor settings and a connection from Bulgaria: a regular Chrome, an automated Chrome without a window and an automated Chrome with a visible window. An automated browser is what tools that search and buy on a person's behalf use. A browser without a window tells sites by itself that it has no window. "Did not open" means a refusal or check page instead of the site.

Store	Regular Chrome	Automated, no window	Automated, with window	What Perplexity wrote
Currys	did not open	did not open	did not open	named an offer
Argos	opened	did not open	did not open	named an offer
John Lewis	did not open	search opened	opened	named an offer
Scan	opened	did not open	opened	"could not verify"
Overclockers UK	opened	home did not open, search opened	opened	"not found"
Ebuyer	opened	opened	opened	named an offer
Box	opened	did not open	opened	named an offer
CCL Computers	opened	home did not open, search opened	opened	"could not access"
Novatech	opened	opened	opened	offer from the index
Wex Photo Video	opened	search did not open	search did not open	named an offer

At the first attempt, on 7 of 10 sites at least one of the checked pages, the home page or the search page, did not open to the automated browser without a window; with a visible window, four more opened; Currys, Argos and Wex did not open to our automated tools either way, while Argos and Wex did open to a regular browser. The check was repeated within an hour; repeated requests from one connection may themselves have affected how sites responded. How the same sites respond to a shopper's AI assistants can only be seen from the assistants' own answers.

Appendix C. Evidence

Folder offers_ssd_uk_2026-10-13: the exact task; the saved texts of the Gemini and Perplexity answers, with formatting changes marked; three versions of the comparison list; two line-by-line verifications; saved product and listing pages (HTML, text, PNG); a SHA-256 manifest of 66 files. Access check: protocol file for series 7 UK, section 7, and folder reference_ssd_uk_2026-10-13 (244 files, SHA-256 manifest). Contact: Sergei Ponomarev, aibusiness.vc.