Search Influence's Paula French Discusses AI Search Branding on The Near Memo Podcast

August 20, 2026

NEW ORLEANS, LA - August 20, 2026 -
Paula French, director of sales and marketing at Search Influence, a New Orleans-based digital marketing agency, joined a panel of local search practitioners on Episode 269 of The Near Memo podcast to discuss AI search branding and how businesses build recognition that shapes visibility in AI-generated search results. The episode, titled ?Tactics for Building a Local Brand in the Age of AI Search ? An Agency Panel,? was produced by Near Media.

Hosted by Mike Blumenthal and Greg Sterling, the panel also included Joy Hawkins of Sterling Sky, Andrew Shotland of Local SEO Guide, and Matt McGee of SEO Savvy Agent. The episode, released August 14, is the fifth installment in a Near Media series on brand building, following earlier solo interviews with John Jantsch, Cyrus Shepard, and Gyi Tsakalakis.

The conversation examined how businesses can build recognition that AI systems draw on when generating answers to local search queries, including mentions on third-party websites, video content, and citation

consistency across business directories. Panelists said brand recognition increasingly influences whether AI tools reference a business by name in response to searches such as best-in-category queries, a shift they described as distinct from traditional ranking factors based primarily on online reviews.

During the discussion, French described how Search Influence broke into the competitive higher education marketing sector by partnering with a recognized industry association to produce original research for university administrators, rather than leading with the agency's own credentials. "A lot of people don't even know what they want to be known for. Or they want to be known for too many things," French said. "You have to get really clear about what you want to be known for, and then make sure the right people know you for it. That's a big hurdle a lot of brands have to get over."

French traced the strategy to Search Influence's earlier work with Tulane's School of Professional Advancement, a New Orleans continuing education school that gave the agency early insight into how adult learners search for and evaluate university programs. That experience shaped its later partnership with the Online and Professional Education Association (UPCEA), through which Search Influence has co-produced four rounds of research examining adult learner search behavior, program discovery patterns, and university enrollment costs.

French said the resulting research has been distributed through webinars, landing pages, and a series of derivative blog posts covering higher education marketing statistics, giving the agency multiple points of reference across the sector rather than a single campaign. Many of the higher education units Search Influence works with, she said, had relied heavily on traditional-age undergraduates and needed help reaching a broader range of prospective learners. She described the UPCEA research as a resource for helping administrators make informed marketing decisions, distinct from materials designed to promote the agency itself.

Asked for closing advice, French said businesses often underestimate their ability to shape how they appear in AI search results. "You have more control over your AI visibility than you realize," she said. "There are a lot of things you can test and try. You just need to start getting stuff out there, talk about your programs or services in a clear, focused way, and see what magic happens."

The full panel discussion is available on the Near Media website. Additional information about Search Influence's work in higher education marketing is available on the agency's website.

About Search Influence

Search Influence is a woman-owned, ROI-focused digital marketing agency that helps drive prospects into and through the marketing funnel with analytics-backed strategies, including organic and AI SEO and paid digital advertising. Founded in 2006, Search Influence's core purpose is to optimize potential. The agency collaborates with well-regarded brands and institutions both nationally and locally in New Orleans. Clients include: Harvard University, New Orleans & Company, and Audubon Nature Institute.

###

For more information about Search Influence, contact the company here:Search InfluenceAngie Scott(504) 208-3900info@searchinfluence.com1423 Pine St New Orleans, LA 70118

Search Influence

Search Influence, a national SEO and digital advertising agency since 2006, delivers demonstrable ROI for clients. Specialties include SEO, Paid Advertising, and Analytics. In-house experts collaborate with clients for results. Also an informative blog.

Website: https://www.searchinfluence.com/?siembed

Email: info@searchinfluence.com

Phone: (504) 208-3900