

How to Build a Real Web Search Strategy with ChatGPT (Beyond Google)

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Most people using ChatGPT assume it knows everything or has access to all the internet — but that's not really true. When you ask ChatGPT a question, you usually have no idea where the answer is coming from. Is it based on an old knowledge base? A Bing search? A few trusted sites? We don't really know. And that creates a big gap for people doing serious research or decision-making.

Even when ChatGPT uses the web, it doesn't use Google. Instead, it uses **Bing**, thanks to a partnership between OpenAI and Microsoft. And while Bing is powerful, it's still not as widely used as Google — which holds over 70% of the global search market. That means ChatGPT may not be looking at all the most relevant or updated sources unless you guide it.

Here's another important point: ChatGPT doesn't give you a list of all the sources it used unless you specifically ask for it — and even then, the list might be incomplete. That's why, as a user, **you often know better than ChatGPT which sources are trusted** in your field or topic. So what if you could help ChatGPT by building your own list of trusted sources?

Well, you can — and that's the whole point of this article.

This feature is actually a superpower: ChatGPT can **read and summarize websites** very well. That means you can feed it all the links you care about — from Google, from your own research, from any list — and it will help you extract the important points without you having to read every word.

In this article, we'll walk you through how to:

- Understand how ChatGPT searches the web
- Identify what it can and can't see
- Build your own list of trusted links
- Use ChatGPT to summarize and analyze those sources
- Combine online sources with your own documents

This isn't just a cool trick — it's the beginning of building **your own research assistant**, based on your own knowledge base, powered by ChatGPT.

Let's get into it.

Section 1: Understanding the ChatGPT Search Process and How to Reveal Its Source Links

Let's now break down exactly how ChatGPT handles your query from a search perspective, and how you can uncover and guide the sources it uses.

Step-by-Step: What Happens When You Ask ChatGPT a Question

1. Internal Knowledge Check:

First, ChatGPT checks its internal knowledge base — the data it was trained on. This knowledge is frozen at a certain point in time (for example, April 2023). It includes a huge number of websites, books, datasets, and publicly available information, but you don't get to see the exact list.

2. If Web Browsing is Enabled (Pro users only):

ChatGPT sends your query to **Bing** (not Google). It fetches the top results, reads through the content, and brings back the summary. However, it still won't show you all the links it used unless you ask for them.

3. You Ask ChatGPT to List Its Sources

You can type something like:

"Can you list the links or sources you used to answer this?"

If web search was involved, ChatGPT can return a list of links from Bing. If not, it may respond with something like:

"This answer is based on my trained knowledge and not from a live search."

So always double check!

Demo Example: "Dubai Tourism"

Let's say you ask:

"Tell me about the tourism industry in Dubai."

ChatGPT might give you a nicely structured answer. But you have no idea whether it's from a government site, a travel blog, or 5-year-old information.

Now try this follow-up:

"Can you list 5 trusted websites you used to answer the Dubai tourism question?"

ChatGPT may respond with:

- <https://www.visitdubai.com>

- <https://www.tripadvisor.com>
- <https://edition.cnn.com/travel>
- <https://www.lonelyplanet.com>
- <https://www.viator.com>

These are real sources, but now you can copy and verify them. Better yet, you can build on them and add more of your own.

Main points

- You don't always know what ChatGPT is pulling from
- You might miss better sources shown on Google
- You can guide the process by collecting and supplying a list of high-quality links

Section 2: How to Build Your Own Link-Based Knowledge Base for ChatGPT

Now that you understand how ChatGPT searches and what it can or cannot show you, let's go one level deeper.

You don't have to rely on what ChatGPT chooses to read. You can actually guide it with a **custom set of links** that you collect yourself. This is perfect for researchers, writers, analysts, or anyone who wants more control over the sources being used.

Here's how to do it step by step:

Step 1: Start with Your Own Google or Bing Search

Use your browser to search for your topic. Look for:

- Official websites (government, universities, well-known organizations)
- Trusted news sources (CNN, BBC, Reuters, etc.)
- Authoritative blogs, forums, and guides
- Research papers or public reports

Search through the first 2–3 pages of Google or Bing to find a variety of useful sources.

Step 2: Collect the Links Automatically

Instead of copying links one by one, you can use browser extensions that extract all visible links from a web page.

Recommended Chrome/Edge Extensions:

- **Link Grabber**
[Install on Chrome](#)
[Install on Edge \(via Chrome Store\)](#)

This tool instantly collects all links from the current page and displays them in a list.

- **Copy All URLs**
[Install on Chrome](#)

This one collects all URLs from currently open tabs.

Use these tools on page 1, page 2, and so on of your search results to collect a richer batch of links.

Step 3: Organize Your Links (Optional but Smart)

If you're working with many links, drop them into a spreadsheet like Excel or Google Sheets. Add helpful columns like:

- **Title** of the page
- **Category** (e.g., news, official, blog)
- **Type** (article, report, product listing, etc.)

This will help you track your sources and give ChatGPT more context if needed.

Step 4: Feed the Links to ChatGPT

Now you're ready to put ChatGPT to work. You can:

- **Paste the links directly** into ChatGPT with a message like:

"Here are trusted sources I want you to use. Please summarize them and use them for future answers in this chat."

- Or **upload the spreadsheet** with the links, then say:

"Please analyze and summarize the sources from this file. Use them to answer related questions."

Once you do this, ChatGPT can:

- Read each link (if publicly accessible)
 - Extract insights
 - Compare sources
 - Build a summarized overview for you
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Main points

By building and supplying your own link knowledge base, you take full control of your research process. You know exactly where the information is coming from — and better yet, you let ChatGPT do the reading for you.

Section 3: What ChatGPT Can (and Can't) Do With the Links You Provide

Once you've collected and shared your custom list of links with ChatGPT, what happens next? Let's break it down clearly.

What ChatGPT Can Do With Your Links

1. **Read Public Pages in Real Time**

If the link is public and not behind a login, ChatGPT can usually access it (especially if browsing is enabled). It will read the content live and extract useful information from that page.

2. **Summarize the Content**

One of ChatGPT's best features is that it can quickly read a long page and give you a clean, structured summary — saving you tons of time.

3. **Compare Multiple Sources**

You can give ChatGPT 5–10 links and ask it to compare what each one says about the same topic. It can point out similarities, contradictions, missing points, and more.

4. **Use Links in the Same Session**

Once you provide links during a chat, ChatGPT will remember and use them during that same conversation. It treats them like your custom data source.

5. **Answer Questions Based on Those Links**

After feeding the links, you can ask:

"Based on these sources, what are the pros and cons of [topic]?" "Can you list the most common points mentioned across these pages?"

What ChatGPT Cannot Do (or Limitations to Be Aware Of)

1. **It Doesn't Store Links Beyond the Session**

Once the session ends, ChatGPT won't remember your link list. You need to re-upload or re-paste them in future chats unless you use tools like custom GPTs.

2. **It Can't Access Login-Restricted or Paywalled Pages**

If a page requires you to sign in (like academic journals, private dashboards, etc.), ChatGPT won't be able to fetch the content.

3. **It Won't Follow Redirect Chains or Dynamic JavaScript Sites**

Some modern websites load content dynamically, and ChatGPT may miss part of it if it's not rendered in plain HTML.

4. You Must Tell It What to Focus On

If you paste 20 links, but don't give a clear instruction like "compare" or "summarize each," the results may be general. Always guide it with specific prompts.

Main points

Feeding ChatGPT your own links is powerful — it's like giving your assistant hand-picked research material. But you need to:

- Make sure links are public
- Use clear instructions
- Keep in mind the session limitations

Summary: What ChatGPT Can vs. Can't Do With Links

Action/Feature	☑ Can Do	✗ Can't Do / Limitation
Read public web pages	Yes, if not behind login or paywall	No access to restricted/private content
Summarize long articles or reports	Very well, with structured output	Needs clear prompts to avoid being too generic
Compare multiple sources	Yes, up to 5–10 links efficiently	May struggle with vague instructions or too many links
Use link info across the conversation	Yes, during the same session	Forgetful after session ends unless links are re-provided
Combine links with questions/analysis	Yes, supports pros/cons, insight lists, conclusions	Cannot detect missing context unless user points it out
Access Google search results directly	No, only uses Bing	Cannot interact with Google links unless user copies them manually
Follow links through login or complex JS	No	Dynamic, user-authenticated, or app-based sites won't be read properly

Feeding ChatGPT your own links is powerful — it's like giving your assistant hand-picked research material. But you need to:

- Make sure links are public
- Use clear instructions

- Keep in mind the session limitations

Section 4: Combining Links with Uploaded Files for Full Research Power

Now that you know how to guide ChatGPT with custom URLs, it's time to take it one step further: **combine your web links with your own documents.**

This is where things get really powerful. You can merge external knowledge with your internal data, reports, and research. The result? A fully personalized research assistant that understands both what's online and what matters to you.

What You Can Upload to ChatGPT

ChatGPT supports several file types, including:

- **PDFs** (reports, whitepapers, research summaries)
- **Word documents** (project plans, strategy docs, interview transcripts)
- **Excel/CSV files** (data sets, source lists, pricing tables, link collections)

Once uploaded, these documents become part of the session's context, and you can refer to them alongside your links.

Example Use Case

Let's say you're writing a report about sustainability in the tourism sector:

1. You upload your internal company report as a PDF
2. You create an **Excel file with all the links** you found from Google or Bing:

Title	URL
UN Tourism Sustainability Guidelines	https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development
World Bank Eco-Tourism Data	https://www.worldbank.org/eco-tourism
National Geographic Article	https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainability

3. You upload this Excel file into ChatGPT

Then you ask:

"Use the uploaded report and these links from the Excel file to write a 2-page summary comparing global best practices with our company's current approach."

Boom. ChatGPT reads your internal data **and** public information to generate meaningful insights.

Best Practices for Combining Sources

Task	Tip
File prep	Make sure your files are clear and well-structured (avoid scanned PDFs when possible)
Prompting	Be specific: "Use the uploaded file AND the Excel sheet containing the links..."
Follow-up	Ask questions like: "What's missing from our report compared to the external sources?"
Scope control	Don't upload too many documents at once — focus on what's most relevant

Why This Combo Is So Useful

- You get up-to-date info from the web **and** proprietary insights from your own docs
- You can validate internal claims against external sources
- It's ideal for content creation, reports, strategic analysis, and decision-making support

Section 5: Prompting Strategies and Best Practices to Maximize ChatGPT with Your Sources

Once you've uploaded your documents and shared your list of links, it's time to master the way you **communicate with ChatGPT**. Clear and intentional prompts make a massive difference in how well the assistant performs.

Let's go over practical prompting techniques and best practices.

1. Be Explicit with Your Instructions

ChatGPT doesn't read your mind. Tell it exactly what you want.

Examples:

- "Summarize the top 5 points from the attached PDF."
 - "Compare the uploaded document with the following links."
 - "What insights can be extracted from these articles based on our internal report?"
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2. Combine and Guide

You can direct ChatGPT to use both online sources and uploaded files in one go:

"Use the uploaded Excel file of links along with the attached market analysis report to generate a competitor comparison."

3. Break Down Complex Tasks

If your task is large, split it into smaller, focused prompts:

- Part 1: "Summarize this report"
- Part 2: "Now compare it with the data from the URLs in the Excel sheet"
- Part 3: "Highlight the gaps between our strategy and industry best practices"

This helps ChatGPT stay focused and gives you more control.

4. Use Follow-Up Prompts

Don't stop after one prompt. Dig deeper:

- "What areas need more data?"

- "Which source is the most aligned with our strategy?"
- "What are the contradictions between these references?"

ChatGPT can handle back-and-forths — use them to refine your output.

5. Prompt Like You’re Giving Instructions to a Research Assistant

Think of ChatGPT as your junior analyst. You wouldn’t say, “Tell me about tourism.” Instead, you'd say:

“Analyze the sustainability practices mentioned in the uploaded files and compare them with the public sources provided. Then list out the common KPIs used.”

This mindset ensures clearer outcomes.

Bonus Tips

Scenario	Recommended Prompting Tip
Writing a report	Ask: "Create an outline first before writing the full report."
Data validation	Ask: "Do the facts from these sources align or contradict each other?"
Gap identification	Ask: "What's missing from our document compared to external content?"
Summary needs	Ask: "Can you give me bullet points instead of a paragraph?"

By using smart prompts, you unlock the full value of your custom knowledge base — and you make sure ChatGPT is working *with* you, not just for you.

Final Recap and Call to Action

By now, you've learned that ChatGPT isn't just a tool you ask questions to — it's a research partner that becomes **smarter and more useful** when you guide it intentionally.

Let's recap the key lessons:

What You've Learned in This Guide:

1. **ChatGPT doesn't use Google.** It uses Bing and a limited set of trusted sources unless you step in.
 2. **The default search behavior is limited.** You don't always know what sources it's referencing.
 3. **You can build your own link-based knowledge base.** By collecting trusted links and giving them to ChatGPT, you guide the research process.
 4. **Excel or CSV files work great.** Instead of pasting links one by one, organize them and upload them in a clean format.
 5. **You can combine links with your own documents.** This lets ChatGPT merge online data with your internal insights.
 6. **Prompting matters.** The way you ask questions makes all the difference in the quality of the output.
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Your Call to Action

If you want trustworthy, comprehensive, and useful results from ChatGPT:

- **Take control of the sources.** Don't rely on vague background data.
- **Use browser extensions** to gather links easily.
- **Organize your sources** in Excel or a simple list.
- **Upload your own files** to bring internal knowledge into the mix.
- **Prompt clearly, like a manager briefing a research assistant.**

This isn't just about better AI results — it's about building a custom research engine tailored to *you*.

Final Thought

Most people use ChatGPT the same way they use a search engine — but this guide showed you how to go beyond that. With the right setup, you're not just searching. You're building an **intelligent, focused, and reliable assistant** that works the way *you* work.

Now it's your turn — try it out on your next project. Your future self will thank you.

Did you ever wonder *how* ChatGPT actually searches the web?

Spoiler: it's not Google. And no — you don't really know what sources it's using unless you ask.

Most people trust the answer, but they don't question the process.

In my newest article, I dive deep into something most people overlook:

👉 How to **build your own trusted link knowledge base** and guide ChatGPT to search *your* way.

From grabbing links with one click...

To feeding them into ChatGPT...

To combining them with your own documents and getting smart, customized insights — this is a game changer for anyone doing real research, writing, or analysis.

I even show you how to ask the right prompts to get the best results — and make ChatGPT feel like your personal research assistant. 🤝

This is **Article #6** in my ongoing Web Searching series — and probably the most practical one yet.

Read it. Try it. Share it.

Let's start using AI *intelligently* — not blindly.

#AI #ChatGPT #WebSearch #KnowledgeBase #LLM #PromptEngineering #AIforResearch #OpenAI
#MicrosoftBing #TrustedSources #DigitalResearch #SmartSearching #PersonalAI #AIWorkflows
#SearchSmarter #ProductivityTools #DataSummarization #ResearchAssistant #InformationQuality
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