



The Ultimate 2026 Guide to Modern Search Optimization

Mastering **SEO · AEO · GEO · AIO · SXO**
for Sustainable Growth

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SITESBRAND — PSYCHOLOGY-DRIVEN AI SEARCH & GROWTH AGENCY



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The Ultimate 2026 Guide to Modern Search Optimization: Mastering SEO, AEO, GEO, AIO & SXO for Sustainable Growth

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Disclaimer: Search engines and AI platforms evolve rapidly. Every strategy in this book is based on official documentation, published studies, and hands-on client work current as of mid-2026. Always verify against the latest official guidance at developers.google.com/search.

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About the Author

Hassam Shabbir is the Founder & CEO of **SitesBrand**, a psychology-driven AI search and growth agency helping businesses win visibility in both traditional search engines and the new generation of AI answer engines.



The SitesBrand ecosystem — six integrated services around one goal: intelligent, measurable growth.

Hassam's background sits at the intersection of **content strategy, marketing psychology, and automation**. Long before "GEO" and "AEO" became industry buzzwords, he was building content systems designed around one core belief: *search engines follow humans — so if you deeply understand how people think, decide, and buy, the rankings follow.*

Through SitesBrand, Hassam and his team deliver:

- **Scalable SEO strategies** built for the AI search era
- **AI automation systems** that turn marketing operations into repeatable machines
- **High-performance web development** engineered for speed, conversions, and crawlability
- **Data-driven growth programs** measured against revenue, not vanity metrics

SitesBrand's promise: *Building Intelligent Systems. Driving Real Growth.*

This book distills the exact frameworks SitesBrand uses with clients — updated for Google's 2026 AI Optimization Guide, the new Generative AI performance reports in Search Console, and the realities of a search landscape where AI Overviews, AI Mode, ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Claude increasingly stand between your content and your customers.

Connect with Hassam:

- Website: sitesbrand.com
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- Free Audit: sitesbrand.com/free-audit

Foreword

In 2019, ranking #1 on Google was the whole game. In 2026, you can rank #1 and still lose the click.

Ahrefs' December 2025 study of 863,000 keywords found that when an AI Overview appears, click-through rates for top-ranking pages fall dramatically — with position 1 losing roughly a third of its expected clicks, and by some measurements far more. Meanwhile, **Semrush's analysis of over 10 million keywords** shows AI Overviews expanding across nearly every vertical, and their **2026 AI Visibility Index** analyzed **126 million AI search prompts** to map who wins in this new world.

The businesses that thrive in this environment are not the ones chasing hacks. They are the ones that understand the *system*: how classic SEO feeds AI retrieval, how answer engines choose what to quote, how generative engines decide which brands to recommend, and how the experience after the click turns visibility into revenue.

That system is what this book teaches — through five pillars:

1. **SEO** — the foundation that makes everything else possible
2. **AEO** — becoming the direct answer
3. **GEO** — getting cited and recommended by AI
4. **AIO** — making AI understand, trust, and recommend your brand
5. **SXO** — turning visitors into customers

Each chapter ends with implementation steps you can apply the same day. The final chapters give you a complete A-to-Z audit framework and a 90-day action plan.

Let's future-proof your growth.

— **Hassam Shabbir**, Founder & CEO, SitesBrand

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Introduction: The Evolution of Search — From Ten Blue Links to AI Answers

Key Takeaways

- Search has moved through four eras: **directories** → **ranked links** → **answer boxes** → **generative AI answers**. Each era rewarded a different optimization discipline.
 - In 2026, Google itself published its first official **AI optimization guide**, confirming that generative AI visibility is built on the same foundation as classic SEO. (Source: [Google's Guide to Optimizing for Generative AI Features](#), May 2026)
 - **Zero-click behavior is now the default** for informational queries — but AI answers create new, higher-intent visibility surfaces for brands that adapt.
 - Winning in 2026 requires all five pillars working together: **SEO, AEO, GEO, AIO, and SXO**.
-

The Four Eras of Search

Era 1: Directories & Keywords (1995–2003)

Early search was literal. Engines matched keywords on pages to keywords in queries. Optimization meant keyword density, meta tags, and directory listings. It was easy to game — and it was gamed relentlessly.

Era 2: Links & Authority (2003–2015)

Google's PageRank changed the question from *"which page mentions this word?"* to *"which page does the web trust?"* Backlinks became currency. The Panda (2011) and Penguin (2012) updates punished thin content and manipulative links, pushing the industry toward quality.

Era 3: Answers & Entities (2015–2023)

The Knowledge Graph, featured snippets, "People Also Ask," and voice assistants shifted Google from a search engine to an **answer engine**. RankBrain and BERT let Google understand *meaning*, not just words. Structured data and entity-based optimization became essential. This era gave birth to what we now call **AEO**.

Era 4: Generative AI Search (2023–Today)

ChatGPT's launch in late 2022 triggered the fastest platform shift in search history:

- **AI Overviews** rolled out globally in Google Search, now appearing across a large share of informational queries. Studies tracking their expansion through 2025–2026 show coverage growing quarter after quarter. (Source: [Semrush AI Overviews Study](#))
- **AI Mode** gave Google Search a full conversational interface.

- **ChatGPT, Perplexity, Claude, Gemini, and Copilot** became discovery channels in their own right — users ask them for product recommendations, comparisons, and "best X for Y" decisions that used to happen on Google's results page.
- In **May 2026**, Google published its official guide, "**Optimizing your website for generative AI features on Google Search**" — the first time Google formally documented how to optimize for AI search. (Announcement: [Google Search Central Blog, May 2026](#))

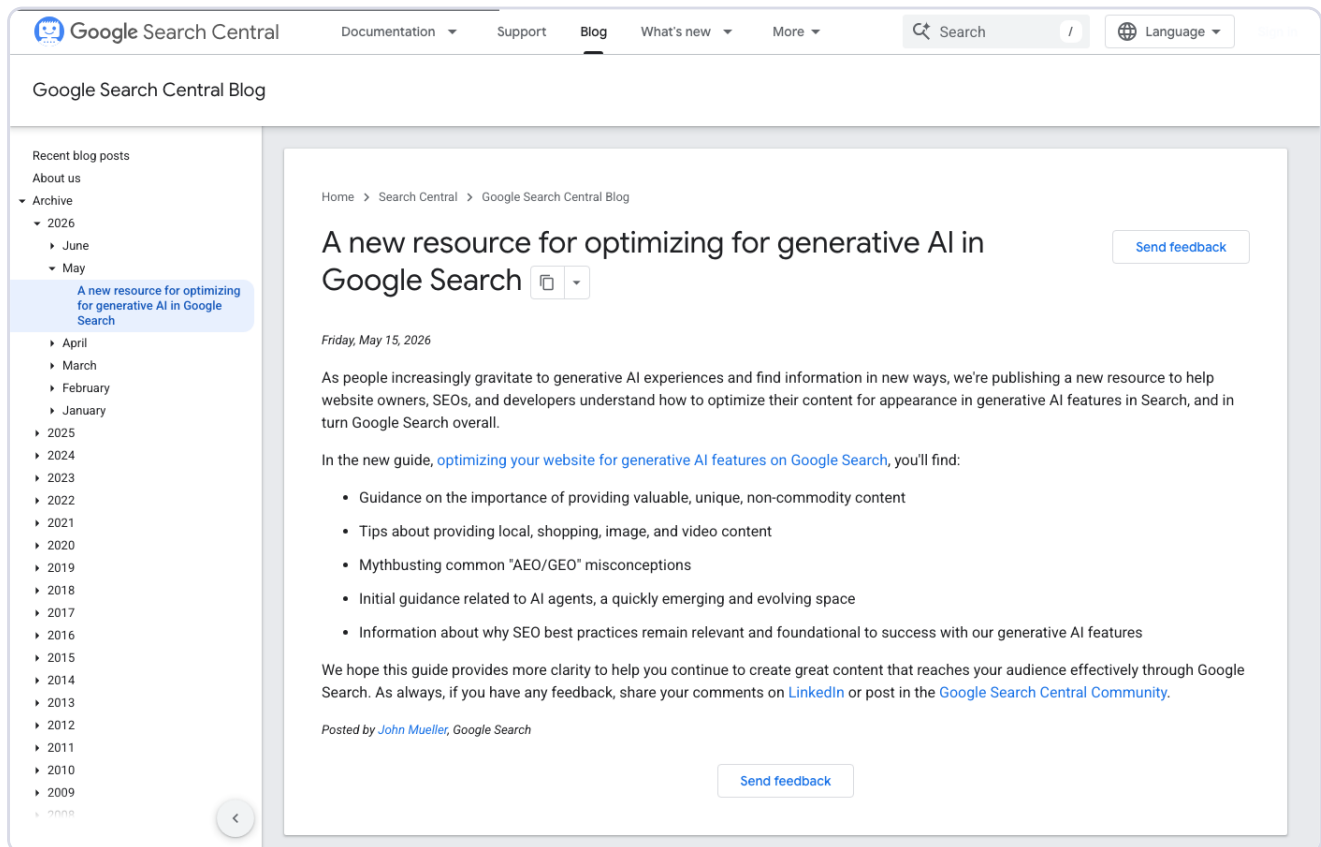


Figure 1: Google Search Central Blog announcing the new generative AI optimization resource (May 2026).

- In **June 2026**, Google launched **Generative AI performance reports in Search Console**, giving site owners dedicated visibility data for AI Overviews, AI Mode, and Discover AI features. (Source: [Google Search Central Blog, June 2026](#))

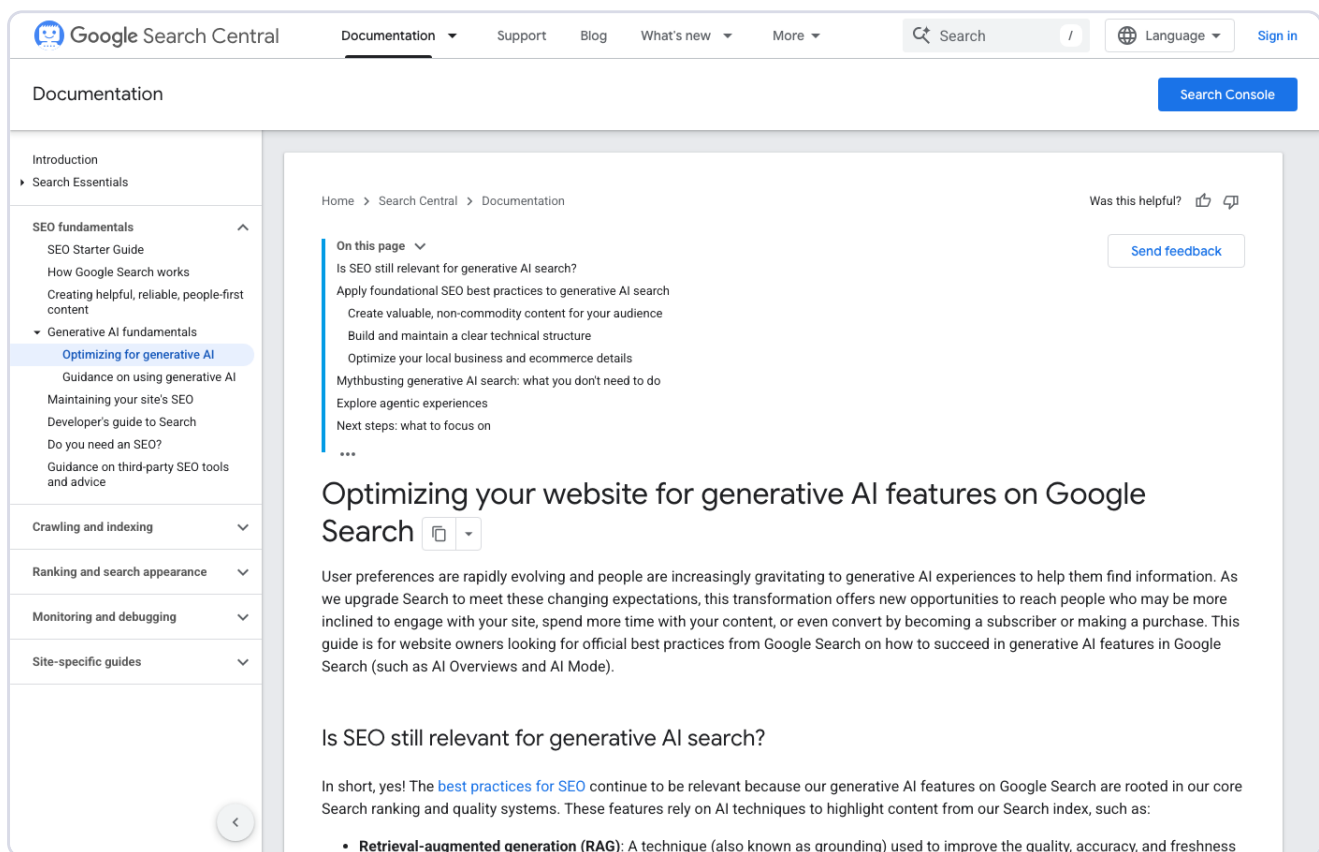


Figure 2: Google's official guide "Optimizing your website for generative AI features on Google Search" at developers.google.com — note Google's own answer: "Is SEO still relevant for generative AI search? In short, yes!"

What Actually Changed — And What Didn't

Here is the most important strategic insight of 2026, straight from Google's own guide:

"From Google Search's perspective, optimizing for generative AI search is optimizing for the search experience — and thus, still SEO." — (*Paraphrased from Google's AI Optimization Guide, 2026*)

Google's AI features use **retrieval-augmented generation (RAG)**: the AI model retrieves relevant, up-to-date pages from the core Search index, then generates an answer grounded in those pages. This means:

What changed	What didn't change
Answers are synthesized from multiple sources	Retrieval still runs on core Search ranking systems
Clicks per query are down for informational content	Crawlability, indexability, and quality still decide who gets retrieved
Citations, not just rankings, are the new battleground	E-E-A-T signals still determine trust
Queries are longer and conversational	User intent is still the organizing principle
New measurement surfaces (GSC Generative AI reports)	Search Console remains the source of truth

The psychology-driven view (the SitesBrand lens): AI didn't change *why* people search — it changed *where the friction lives*. People still search to solve problems, reduce uncertainty, and make decisions. AI simply compresses the journey. Brands that map content to the *decision psychology* of their customers — awareness anxiety, comparison paralysis, purchase justification — win in every era, because the machines are trained to serve those same humans.

The Five Pillars, Defined

Pillar	Full Name	Core Question It Answers	Primary Surface
SEO	Search Engine Optimization	Can machines find, crawl, index, and rank you?	Google/Bing organic results
AEO	Answer Engine Optimization	Are you the direct answer to specific questions?	Featured snippets, PAA, voice, AI Overviews
GEO	Generative Engine Optimization	Do AI engines cite and quote you in generated answers?	AI Overviews, AI Mode, ChatGPT, Perplexity
AIO	AI Optimization	Does AI understand, trust, and <i>recommend</i> your brand?	Brand mentions and recommendations across all AI
SXO	Search Experience Optimization	Does the visit convert into a customer?	Your website, post-click

Think of it as a funnel:

SEO gets you into the index → **AEO** gets you into the answer → **GEO** gets you cited → **AIO** gets you recommended → **SXO** gets you paid.

Miss any layer and the layers above it underperform. That's why this book treats them as one integrated system, not five separate tactics.

How to Read This Book

- **If you're a business owner:** read the Key Takeaways of each chapter, then jump to Chapter 6 (the integrated framework) and the 90-Day Action Plan.
- **If you're an SEO or marketer:** read linearly. Chapters 1–5 build on each other deliberately.
- **If you're a developer:** Chapters 1, 4, and the schema appendix are your core; skim the rest for context.

Every chapter ends with an implementation checklist and a **SitesBrand Insight** — a field note from real client work.

► **Before you start:** run a free baseline audit of your site at sitesbrand.com/free-audit. You'll get far more from this book if you can apply each chapter to your own real data.

Chapter 1: SEO Fundamentals — Still the Essential Base in 2026

Key Takeaways

- **AI search runs on the classic Search index.** If Googlebot can't crawl and index you, you don't exist in AI Overviews or AI Mode either. (Source: [Google AI Optimization Guide, 2026](#))
- The winners' circle is small: studies show the **top 20 cited domains capture roughly two-thirds of all AI Overview citations** — authority compounds. (Source: [Semrush 2026 AI Visibility research](#))
- Core Web Vitals, clean architecture, and E-E-A-T are no longer "nice to have" — they are the entry ticket to every AI surface.
- 2026 SEO = **technical excellence + entity clarity + genuinely useful content**, in that order of operations but reverse order of importance.

1.1 Why SEO Still Comes First

There's a popular myth in 2026: "SEO is dead — it's all about AI now." Google's own documentation kills this myth. AI Overviews and AI Mode use **retrieval-augmented generation** grounded in the ordinary Search index. [Ahrefs' research](#) confirms the overlap in practice: a large share of AI Overview citations — around 38% by their measurement — come straight from the top 10 organic results.

Translation: you cannot GEO your way out of bad SEO. The retrieval layer *is* SEO.

The screenshot shows the Ahrefs blog interface. The header includes the Ahrefs logo, navigation links (Marketing, AI Search, SEO, Data & Studies, Product, Guides), a search icon, and a Subscribe button. The main content area has a blue background with a graduation cap icon and the text 'AI SEARCH, DATA & STUDIES'. The article title is 'Update: 38% of AI Overview Citations Pull From The Top 10'. Below the title, it says 'By Louise Linehan, Xibeiija Guan' and 'Reviewed by Ryan Law'. The date 'March 2, 2026' and '7 min read' are also present. At the bottom, there is a 'Contents' section with a link to 'How frequently do pages ranking in the SERPs get cited in AI Overviews?' and a small profile picture of a woman.

Figure 3: Ahrefs' analysis of 1.9M citations: 38% of AI Overview citations pull from the top-10 organic results — classic rankings still feed the AI layer. (ahrefs.com/blog/ai-overview-citations-top-10)

The 2026 SEO Stack

1. **Crawlability & Indexability** — can bots reach and store your content?
2. **Site Architecture** — is your content organized into logical, linkable topic clusters?
3. **Page Experience** — is it fast, stable, and mobile-first?
4. **On-Page Relevance** — does each page target a clear intent with clear language?
5. **Entity & Structured Data** — do machines understand *what things are*?
6. **Authority (E-E-A-T + Links)** — does the web (and the model) trust you?

1.2 Technical Foundations

Crawlability Checklist

- ☐ `robots.txt` allows Googlebot **and** doesn't accidentally block `Google-Extended` if you want Gemini visibility (know the difference: blocking Google-Extended removes you from Gemini training but not from AI Overviews, which use the standard Googlebot crawl)
- ☐ XML sitemap submitted in Search Console, updated automatically, no 404s/redirects inside it
- ☐ No orphan pages — every important URL reachable within 3 clicks of the homepage
- ☐ Canonical tags on every page; parameter handling under control
- ☐ Server returns proper status codes (no soft-404s, no redirect chains > 2 hops)
- ☐ JavaScript-dependent content renders server-side or via SSR/hydration — AI crawlers are less patient with client-side rendering than Googlebot

♦ **Tip:** In 2026, audit your log files for AI crawlers too: GPTBot (OpenAI), ClaudeBot (Anthropic), PerplexityBot, Google-Extended. Your robots.txt policy toward these bots is now a *strategic business decision*, not an IT default. Blocking them removes you from answer engines your customers use daily.

Core Web Vitals in 2026

Metric	Target	What it measures
LCP (Largest Contentful Paint)	≤ 2.5s	Loading speed of main content
INP (Interaction to Next Paint)	≤ 200ms	Responsiveness to user input
CLS (Cumulative Layout Shift)	≤ 0.1	Visual stability

INP replaced FID in 2024 and remains the metric most sites fail. Common fixes: break up long JavaScript tasks, defer third-party scripts, use `content-visibility` for below-the-fold sections.

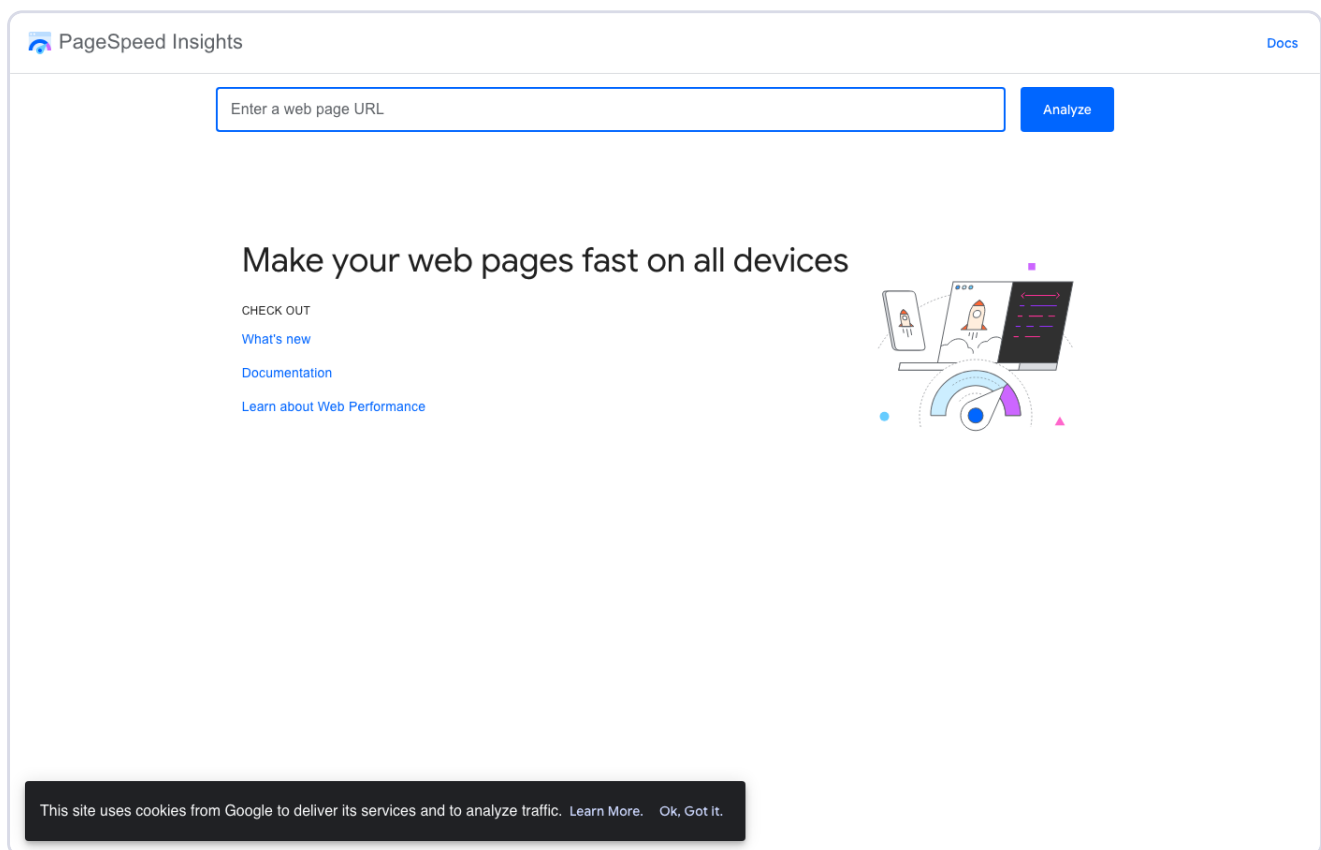


Figure 4: Google PageSpeed Insights (pagespeed.web.dev) — run every money page here; fix INP and LCP first. Save before/after reports as proof assets for stakeholders.

Site Architecture: Topic Clusters

Organize content as **pillar pages + cluster pages**:

- **Pillar:** comprehensive guide targeting the head topic (e.g., "Email Marketing")
- **Clusters:** focused pages answering sub-intents ("email subject line psychology," "email automation for e-commerce"), each linking up to the pillar and across to siblings

This matters *more* in the AI era because generative engines assess **topical coverage**: a site that covers a topic completely is more likely to be treated as an authoritative source worth citing across many related prompts.

1.3 On-Page SEO That Feeds AI

Classic on-page advice still applies — titles, headings, internal links — but 2026 adds nuance:

1. **Write extractable passages.** Google's AI features quote *passages*, not pages. Every H2/H3 section should be able to stand alone: a clear claim, supporting evidence, done. (This foreshadows AEO — Chapter 2.)
2. **Front-load answers.** State the answer in the first sentence under a heading, then elaborate. Humans skim; RAG systems extract.

3. **Use precise, consistent terminology.** Call your product category the same thing everywhere. Entity consistency helps machines resolve *what you are*.
4. **Support text with original images and video.** Google's official guide explicitly notes that generative AI features surface relevant multimedia — an under-exploited visibility channel. (Source: [Google AI Optimization Guide](#))
5. **Keep content fresh and dated.** Show visible "last updated" dates and actually update. RAG favors fresh, accurate pages.

What Google Says You DON'T Need

Google's 2026 guide is refreshingly blunt about snake oil. You do **not** need:

- X `llms.txt` files (Google may crawl them but gives them no special treatment)
- X AI-specific meta tags or "AI markup"
- X Separate Markdown versions of your pages for AI crawlers

(Source: [Google AI Optimization Guide, updated June 2026](#); coverage: [Search Engine Journal](#))

Note: other ecosystems (some indie AI crawlers) do read `llms.txt` — it's cheap to add and harmless. But never let it substitute for real optimization.

1.4 E-E-A-T: The Trust Layer

Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness — the quality framework from Google's Search Quality Rater Guidelines — is the closest thing to a "ranking philosophy" Google publishes. In the AI era it matters doubly, because generative engines are *actively tuned to avoid citing untrustworthy sources* (hallucination risk is their #1 reputation problem).

Practical E-E-A-T implementation:

- **Author pages** with real names, credentials, photos, and links to social profiles — connected to articles via `author` schema
- **First-hand experience signals:** original photos, screenshots of your own dashboards, "we tested this" language, real numbers
- **About page** that establishes who runs the company, where, and why you're qualified
- **Citations out:** link to primary sources; engines associate you with the company you keep
- **Reviews and third-party validation:** G2, Clutch, Trustpilot, industry mentions

1.5 Links & Digital PR in 2026

Backlinks remain a core authority signal, but the *purpose* has expanded: links now also drive **brand co-occurrence** — your brand appearing next to your topic across the web — which is how LLMs learn that "SitesBrand" belongs in conversations about "AI search optimization."

2026 link priorities, in order:

1. **Digital PR:** original data studies, surveys, and tools that earn editorial links + brand mentions
2. **Topical relevance over raw DR:** one link from a respected industry publication beats five generic guest posts
3. **Unlinked brand mentions:** valuable for AI visibility even without the hyperlink
4. **Listicle placement:** "Best X tools/agencies" roundups are disproportionately cited by generative engines (more in Chapter 3)

How to Implement on Your Site (This Week)

1. Run Search Console → Pages report: fix every "Crawled – currently not indexed" pattern you can explain.
2. Run PageSpeed Insights on your 10 most valuable pages; fix INP and LCP first.
3. Map your content into topic clusters on a spreadsheet; identify the 3 biggest gaps.
4. Add/upgrade author pages and About page with real E-E-A-T signals.
5. Check robots.txt policy for GPTBot, ClaudeBot, PerplexityBot, Google-Extended — make it a deliberate decision.
6. Add visible "last updated" dates to your top 20 pages and actually refresh them.

✓ Chapter 1 Checklist

- ☐ Site fully crawlable and indexable (verified in GSC)
- ☐ Core Web Vitals green on mobile for money pages
- ☐ Topic cluster architecture documented
- ☐ Author + About pages with E-E-A-T signals
- ☐ AI crawler policy decided and implemented
- ☐ Freshness program: top pages updated quarterly

◆ SitesBrand Insight

On client audits, the single most common (and most expensive) issue we find isn't content — it's **index bloat**: thousands of thin tag pages, filtered URLs, and staging leftovers diluting crawl budget and topical clarity. Fixing indexation alone has produced 20–40% organic lifts before we wrote a single new word. Foundation first, always.

Want us to find your hidden technical debt? Get a free audit at sitesbrand.com/free-audit.

Chapter 2: AEO (Answer Engine Optimization) — Becoming the Direct Answer

Key Takeaways

- AEO is the discipline of structuring content so machines can **extract you as the answer** — in featured snippets, People Also Ask, voice assistants, and AI Overviews.
- The winning unit of content is no longer the page; it's the **passage**: a self-contained question-and-answer block of 40–60 words.
- Question research has replaced pure keyword research: mine PAA, forums, support tickets, and sales calls for the *actual* questions your buyers ask.
- Schema markup (FAQ, HowTo, Q&A) doesn't guarantee answer placement — but it dramatically improves machine comprehension of your answers.

2.1 What AEO Is (and Isn't)

Answer Engine Optimization means engineering your content to be selected as the *direct answer* to a specific question. It predates generative AI — featured snippets have existed since 2014 — but AI Overviews raised the stakes: the same extractable structure that wins snippets is what RAG systems pull into generated answers.

AEO is not keyword stuffing questions into headings. Answer engines evaluate whether your answer is *accurate, complete, current, and trustworthy* — then whether it's *extractable*.

The Answer Engine Landscape, 2026

Surface	How it selects answers
Featured snippets	Best extractable passage from a top-ranking page
People Also Ask	Question-matched passages, often from pages ranking 5–30
AI Overviews	RAG synthesis across multiple retrieved passages, with citations
Voice assistants (Google Assistant, Siri, Alexa)	Usually a single snippet-style answer
AI Mode / ChatGPT / Perplexity	Conversational RAG with citations (covered deeper in Ch. 3)

2.2 Question Research: The AEO Keyword Research

Your buyers ask questions in five psychological modes. Build your question inventory around all five:

1. **Definition questions** — "What is [concept]?" (*learning mode — low intent, high volume*)
2. **Process questions** — "How do I [task]?" (*doing mode — medium intent*)
3. **Comparison questions** — "X vs Y — which is better for [use case]?" (*deciding mode — high intent*)
4. **Evaluation questions** — "Is [product] worth it? [Product] reviews?" (*justifying mode — highest intent*)
5. **Troubleshooting questions** — "Why is my [thing] not working?" (*pain mode — loyalty-building*)

Where to mine questions:

- Google's **People Also Ask** boxes (expand recursively — each click loads more)
- **AlsoAsked.com** and AnswerThePublic for question trees
- Ahrefs/Semrush "Questions" keyword filters
- **Reddit and niche forums** — Reddit remains one of the most-cited domains in Google AI Overviews (holding roughly a fifth of AIO citations per [Adweek's January 2026 analysis](#)), so the questions asked there literally shape AI answers
- **Your own goldmine:** support tickets, sales call transcripts, live chat logs — questions no tool can see

♦ **Psychology note:** The *phrasing* of a question reveals the emotional state behind it. "Is X worth it?" signals purchase anxiety — the answer must reduce risk (guarantees, proof, social evidence), not just list features. Match the answer's emotional register to the question's psychology and both humans and engines reward you.

2.3 The Anatomy of an Extractable Answer

Use this structure for every question you target — we call it the **Answer Block**:

```
## [The exact question as an H2 or H3]

[Direct answer in 40–60 words: subject + verb + answer + one supporting fact.]

[2–4 paragraphs of elaboration: evidence, examples, numbers, edge cases.]

[Optional: table, list, or steps if the answer has structure.]
```

Example:

How long does SEO take to show results?

Most websites see measurable SEO results within 3–6 months, with significant traffic growth typically arriving in 6–12 months. Timelines depend on domain authority, competition, and content velocity — newer domains in competitive niches sit at the longer end.

(...followed by elaboration, data, and caveats...)

Rules that make passages win:

1. **Answer first, context second.** Never make the reader (or the model) scroll for the verdict.
2. **40–60 words** for the core answer — long enough to be complete, short enough to quote.
3. **Standalone comprehension:** the passage must make sense with zero surrounding context.
4. **One question per heading.** Don't merge three questions into one section.
5. **Use the question's own words** in the heading, then vary phrasing naturally in the body.
6. **Numbers, dates, and specifics** beat vague hedging — engines prefer confident, verifiable claims.

Format–Match the Intent

Question type	Winning format
"What is..."	Paragraph definition
"How to..."	Numbered steps (+ HowTo schema)
"Best..."	Ranked list with criteria
"X vs Y"	Comparison table
"How much / how many"	Number in the first sentence + table
"Why..."	Paragraph + causal list

2.4 Schema Markup for AEO

Structured data is how you *label* your answers for machines. Priority schema types:

- **FAQPage** — for genuine FAQ sections (Google restricts rich-result display to authoritative sites, but the comprehension benefit remains for all)
- **HowTo** — for step-by-step content
- **Article / BlogPosting** with `author`, `datePublished`, `dateModified`
- **Organization** and **Person** — your entity backbone (critical for Chapter 4)
- **Product** with `aggregateRating` — for commercial pages

Minimal FAQ example (JSON-LD):

```
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org",
  "@type": "FAQPage",
  "mainEntity": [{
    "@type": "Question",
    "name": "How long does SEO take to show results?",
    "acceptedAnswer": {
      "@type": "Answer",
      "text": "Most websites see measurable SEO results within 3–6 months..."
    }
  }]
}
```

Full schema templates are in **Appendix B**.

2.5 Optimizing Existing Content for Answers

You don't need new content to win AEO — most sites sit on unrealized answer inventory:

1. Pull your pages ranking **positions 2–10** for question queries (GSC → Queries containing "how," "what," "why," "best," "vs").
2. For each, check: is the answer front-loaded under a matching heading? Usually not.
3. Restructure into Answer Blocks. Add a summary box ("Quick Answer") at the top of long guides.
4. Add FAQ sections targeting the PAA questions adjacent to your main query.
5. Re-submit for indexing; monitor snippet/AIO pickup over 2–6 weeks.

♦ **Pro move:** keep a before/after archive — the restructured page next to its GSC impressions curve. Nothing sells AEO internally like one chart that bends upward after a 30-minute rewrite.

How to Implement on Your Site (This Week)

1. Build a question inventory: 50 questions across the five psychological modes.
2. Map each question to an existing page (restructure) or a new page (create).
3. Rewrite your top 10 money-adjacent pages with Answer Blocks and Quick Answer boxes.
4. Deploy FAQPage + Article schema sitewide via your CMS or tag manager.
5. Track featured snippet and AI Overview presence weekly (tools in Chapter 7).

✓ Chapter 2 Checklist

- ☐ 50+ question inventory mapped to pages
- ☐ Answer Blocks (40–60 word direct answers) on all priority pages

- ☐ Format-matched content (tables for comparisons, steps for how-tos)
 - ☐ FAQ/HowTo/Article schema deployed and validated
 - ☐ PAA-adjacent FAQ sections added to pillar pages
 - ☐ Snippet/AIO tracking in place
-

◆ SitesBrand Insight

The highest-ROI AEO move we make for clients is boring: adding a **"Quick Answer" box** to the top of existing guides that already rank on page one. No new content, 30 minutes per page — and it routinely captures snippets and AI Overview citations within weeks, because Google already trusted the page; it just couldn't *extract* it.

Want your answer-opportunity map? Book a strategy call via sitesbrand.com.

Chapter 3: GEO (Generative Engine Optimization) — Getting Cited & Recommended by AI

Key Takeaways

- GEO is about winning **citations inside AI-generated answers** — Google AI Overviews/AI Mode, ChatGPT, Perplexity, Claude, Gemini, and Copilot.
 - Citation concentration is brutal: research shows the **top-cited domains capture the majority of citations** — but citation patterns differ sharply *by engine*, creating openings for focused brands. (Source: [Semrush 2026 AI Visibility Index](#))
 - The original [Princeton GEO research](#) found that adding **citations, quotations, and statistics** can boost a source's visibility in generative answers by 30–40%.
 - Third-party presence — Reddit, YouTube, Wikipedia, review sites, listicles — is half the GEO game, because those are the sources engines cite most.
-

3.1 The GEO Landscape in 2026

Generative Engine Optimization (the term comes from the 2023 Princeton/Georgia Tech/IIT paper "[GEO: Generative Engine Optimization](#)") targets a simple outcome: when an AI generates an answer in your category, **your brand is in it** — cited as a source, quoted as evidence, or named as a recommendation.

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Computer Science > Machine Learning

[Submitted on 16 Nov 2023 (v1), last revised 28 Jun 2024 (this version, v3)]

GEO: Generative Engine Optimization

Pranjal Aggarwal, Vishvak Murahari, Tanmay Rajpurohit, Ashwin Kalyan, Karthik Narasimhan, Ameet Deshpande

The advent of large language models (LLMs) has ushered in a new paradigm of search engines that use generative models to gather and summarize information to answer user queries. This emerging technology, which we formalize under the unified framework of generative engines (GEs), can generate accurate and personalized responses, rapidly replacing traditional search engines like Google and Bing. Generative Engines typically satisfy queries by synthesizing information from multiple sources and summarizing them using LLMs. While this shift significantly improves user utility and $\text{generative search engine}$ traffic, it poses a huge challenge for the third stakeholder -- website and content creators. Given the black-box and fast-moving nature of generative engines, content creators have little to no control over when and how their content is displayed. With generative engines here to stay, we must ensure the creator economy is not disadvantaged. To address this, we introduce Generative Engine Optimization (GEO), the first novel paradigm to aid content creators in improving their content visibility in generative engine responses through a flexible black-box optimization framework for optimizing and defining visibility metrics. We facilitate systematic evaluation by introducing GEO-bench, a large-scale benchmark of diverse user queries across multiple domains, along with relevant web sources to answer these queries. Through rigorous evaluation, we demonstrate that GEO can boost visibility by up to 40% in generative engine responses. Moreover, we show the efficacy of these strategies varies across domains, underscoring the need for domain-specific optimization methods. Our work opens a new frontier in information discovery systems, with profound implications for both developers of generative engines and content creators.

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Figure 5: The founding GEO research paper (arXiv:2311.09735) — its experiments showed citations, quotations, and statistics boost visibility in generative answers by up to 40%.

Where citations come from

The 2025–2026 studies converge on a clear picture:

- **YouTube** has become one of the most-cited sources across LLM answers overall, accounting for roughly a quarter of Google AI Overview citations in cross-industry measurements. (Sources: *AI Overview statistics compilations, 2026*, *Searchlab AIO Statistics 2026*)
- **Reddit** holds around a fifth of AI Overview citations and dominates "real opinion" queries.
- **Wikipedia** remains a top-three source, anchoring entity facts.
- In Google AI Overviews specifically, roughly **38% of citations come from the existing top-10 organic results** — classic rankings still feed the machine. (Source: *Ahrefs*)
- Different engines have different "diets": Perplexity leans on Reddit and recent editorial content; ChatGPT favors authoritative editorial and its search partners; Google leans on its own index and YouTube.

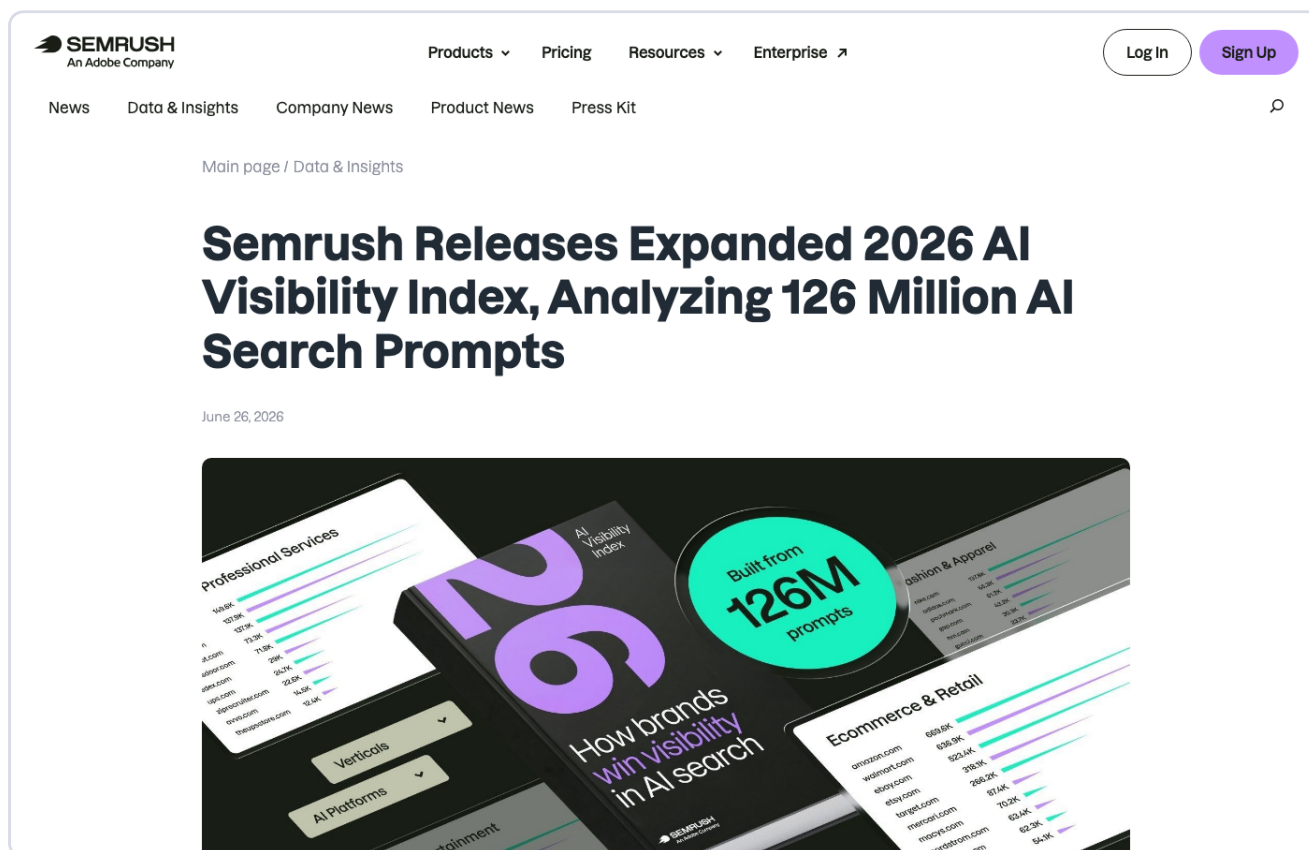


Figure 6: Semrush's expanded 2026 AI Visibility Index analyzed 126 million AI search prompts to map how brands win visibility in AI search (semrush.com, June 2026).

Strategic implication: GEO is played on two boards at once — **your site** (make it maximally citable) and **the third-party web** (be present where engines already look).

3.2 On-Site GEO: Making Content Citable

The Princeton GEO study tested nine optimization methods. The three that consistently boosted visibility:

1. **Cite sources** — add references to authoritative primary sources
2. **Add quotations** — include expert quotes with attribution
3. **Add statistics** — replace vague claims with specific numbers

Combined, these lifted source visibility in generative answers by **up to 40%** — while old-school "keyword stuffing" *reduced* it.

The Citability Formula

For every important page, engineer these elements:

Element	Why engines cite it
Original statistics ("our analysis of 500 audits found...")	Unique data = must-cite; can't be paraphrased away
Named expert quotes	Provides attributable authority for claims
Clear definitions	Engines need canonical definitions to ground answers
Specific numbers, dates, prices	Verifiable specifics beat generic advice
Structured comparisons (tables)	Perfect raw material for comparison answers
First-hand experience ("when we tested...")	E-E-A-T signal engines are tuned to prefer
Fresh timestamps	RAG systems weight recency for evolving topics

Content types that earn disproportionate citations

1. **Original research & data studies** — the single strongest GEO asset. Even a small survey of your customer base becomes citable "industry data."
2. **Statistics roundup pages** — "X Statistics 2026" pages are citation magnets (notice how many such pages appeared in this book's own research).
3. **Definitive glossaries** — own the definitions in your niche.
4. **Honest comparison content** — including comparisons where you're not always the winner; engines detect and discount pure self-promotion.
5. **Expert commentary on news** — fast, opinionated takes on industry changes get cited while the topic is hot.

3.3 Off-Site GEO: Winning the Third-Party Web

When someone asks ChatGPT *"best AI search agency for small businesses"*, the model's answer is assembled largely from **listicles, review platforms, Reddit threads, and editorial mentions** — not from your homepage.

The Off-Site GEO Playbook

1. **Listicle campaigns.** Identify every "best [your category]" article that AI engines cite (ask the engines directly — literally prompt them and note the sources). Pitch inclusion via genuine outreach, partnerships, or the publications' listing processes.
2. **Review platform depth.** G2, Capterra, Clutch, Trustpilot — complete profiles + a steady review velocity. Engines quote review language verbatim.
3. **Reddit presence (the right way).** Participate authentically in niche subreddits; provide genuinely useful answers with disclosure. Astroturfing gets detected and banned — and one negative viral thread can poison AI answers about you for months.

4. **YouTube.** With YouTube among the most-cited sources across AI engines, even modest videos (tutorials, comparisons, walkthroughs) create citable assets. Transcripts make videos machine-readable.
5. **Wikipedia/Wikidata.** If you're notable enough, a neutral Wikipedia presence anchors your entity. If not, ensure Wikidata/Crunchbase/LinkedIn are accurate and consistent.
6. **Digital PR.** Every editorial mention teaches models the association between your brand and your category.

♦ **Psychology note:** AI engines synthesize *consensus*. Ten small consistent signals ("SitesBrand — AI search agency" appearing across Reddit, listicles, reviews, podcasts) beat one big inconsistent one. This is the machine equivalent of **social proof** — and it compounds exactly the same way.

3.4 Measuring GEO

New discipline, new instrumentation:

- **Google Search Console** → **Generative AI performance reports** (launched June 2026): dedicated impressions data for AI Overviews, AI Mode, and Discover AI features, broken down by page, country, and device. Rolling out globally after the initial UK cohort; note that click data isn't included yet. (Source: [Google Search Central Blog](#), [GSC Help](#))
- **AI visibility platforms:** Semrush AI Visibility Toolkit / Enterprise AIO, Ahrefs Brand Radar, Profound, Otterly, Peec AI — these track brand mentions, citations, and share-of-voice across engines and prompts.
- **Manual prompt audits:** monthly, run your 20 money prompts ("best X for Y", "X vs Y", "is X worth it") across ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, and Google AI Mode. Log: are you mentioned? cited? recommended? what sources shaped the answer?
- **Referral analytics:** segment traffic from chatgpt.com, perplexity.ai, gemini.google.com, copilot.microsoft.com. AI referral traffic is small but converts at dramatically higher rates — these visitors arrive pre-sold by the AI's recommendation.

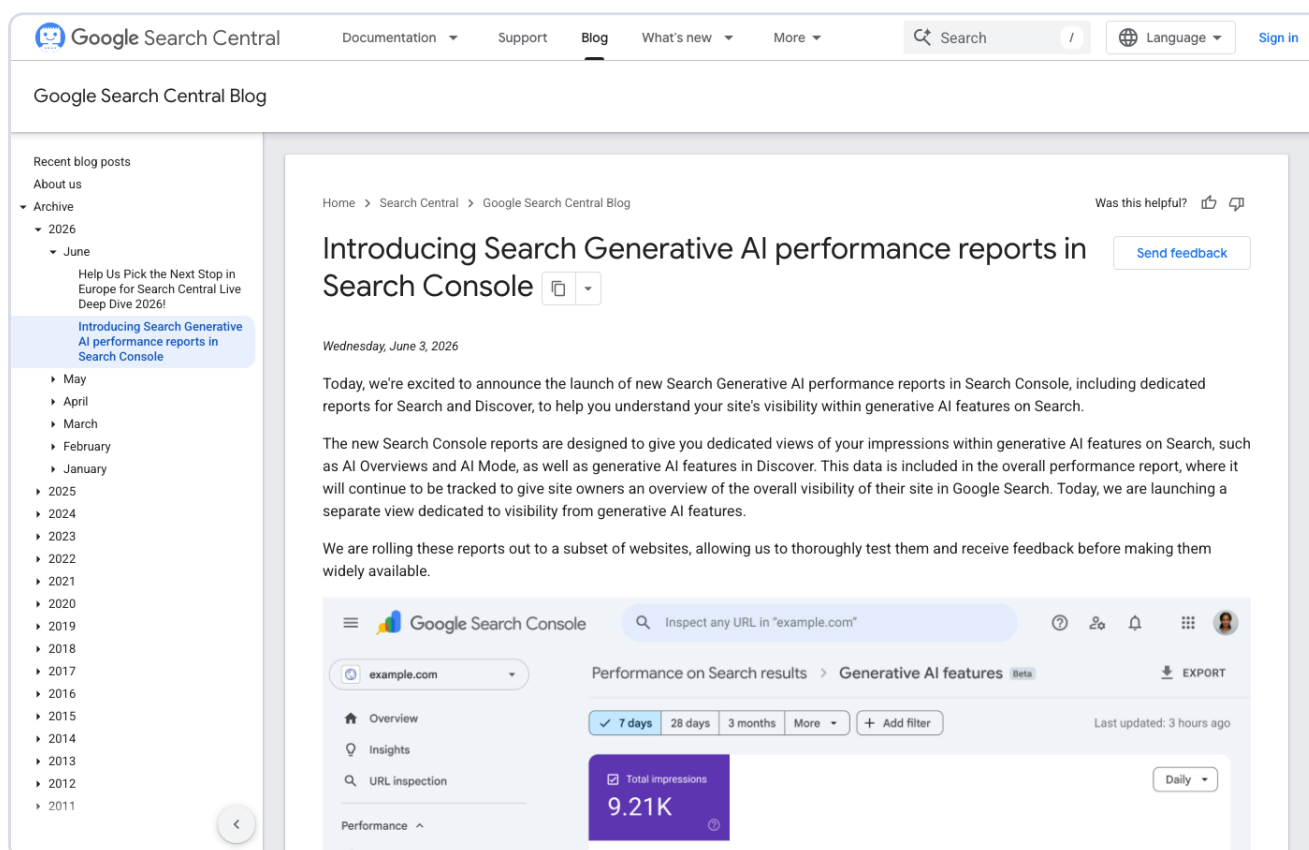


Figure 7: Google's June 3, 2026 announcement of Search Generative AI performance reports in Search Console — dedicated visibility data for AI Overviews and AI Mode (developers.google.com).

How to Implement on Your Site (This Month)

1. Run the **prompt audit**: 20 category prompts × 4 engines; log mentions and sources into a spreadsheet.
2. Reverse-engineer the citations: list every third-party page the engines relied on → that's your outreach hit list.
3. Upgrade your 10 most important pages with the Citability Formula (stats, quotes, sources, tables, dates).
4. Commission or DIY one **original data study** this quarter.
5. Fix your review-platform presence; start a Reddit/YouTube participation cadence you can sustain.
6. Set up AI visibility tracking (GSC Gen-AI report + one dedicated tool).

✓ Chapter 3 Checklist

- ☐ Baseline prompt audit completed across 4+ engines
- ☐ Citation source hit-list built; outreach begun
- ☐ Citability Formula applied to priority pages
- ☐ One original data asset in production

- ☐ Review platforms complete with steady velocity
- ☐ AI visibility measurement stack live

◆ SitesBrand Insight

A client in a competitive B2B niche couldn't crack ChatGPT recommendations despite excellent SEO. The unlock? We found that **three specific listicles** were shaping nearly every AI answer in their category. Getting into two of them (one via partnership, one via a genuinely better data-backed pitch) put the client into AI recommendations within six weeks — driving demo requests that converted 3× better than organic search visitors.

Want us to run your AI visibility audit? Start free at sitesbrand.com/free-audit.

Chapter 4: AIO (AI Optimization) — Making AI Understand, Trust & Recommend Your Brand

Key Takeaways

- AIO operates at the **brand/entity level**, not the page level: it's the discipline of shaping how AI systems *model your brand* — what you do, who you serve, how good you are.
 - The three levers: **entity clarity** (structured data + consistent facts), **knowledge presence** (being in the sources AI learns from), and **sentiment shaping** (what the web says about you).
 - AI models form brand impressions from *training data + retrieval* — you influence both differently.
 - In 2026, "brand marketing" and "AI optimization" have effectively merged: every PR hit, review, and podcast appearance is now also training data.
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4.1 From Pages to Entities

SEO optimizes pages. AEO optimizes answers. GEO optimizes citations. **AIO optimizes the model's internal representation of your brand.**

When a user asks an AI "Should I hire SitesBrand?", the answer draws on two knowledge layers:

1. **Parametric knowledge** — what the model absorbed about your brand during training (from articles, reviews, forums, directories crawled months ago)
2. **Retrieved knowledge** — what the engine fetches live from search at answer time

You influence layer 2 with GEO (Chapter 3). Layer 1 — the model's *baked-in impression* — is AIO's territory, and it moves slowly: what the web says about you this year becomes what models "know" about you next year. **AIO is compound-interest brand building.**

4.2 Lever 1: Entity Clarity

Machines need to resolve your brand into an unambiguous **entity** with stable facts. Fragmented or contradictory information = weak entity = AI hedges or ignores you.

The Entity Audit

Check that these are *identical everywhere* (site, LinkedIn, Google Business Profile, Crunchbase, directories, social bios):

- Exact brand name and spelling
- One-line description of what you do (your "entity definition")
- Category / industry terms

- Founder names and roles
- Location, founding year, contact details

The Entity Home: Organization Schema

Your website should declare a canonical `Organization` entity, linked to all your profiles via `sameAs`:

```
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org",
  "@type": "Organization",
  "@id": "https://www.sitesbrand.com/#organization",
  "name": "SitesBrand",
  "url": "https://www.sitesbrand.com",
  "logo": "https://www.sitesbrand.com/logo.png",
  "description": "Psychology-driven AI search and growth agency specializing in SEO, AI automation, and high-performance web development.",
  "founder": {
    "@type": "Person",
    "name": "Hassam Shabbir",
    "jobTitle": "Founder & CEO"
  },
  "sameAs": [
    "https://www.linkedin.com/company/sitesbrand",
    "https://twitter.com/sitesbrand",
    "https://www.crunchbase.com/organization/sitesbrand"
  ]
}
```

Add `Person` schema for key people, `Service` / `Product` schema for offerings, and interlink them with `@id` references. (Templates in Appendix B.)

The "About" Layer

Build a set of pages that answer, definitively and on your own domain, every factual question about your brand: About, Team, Methodology, Pricing philosophy, Case studies. When engines retrieve facts about you, *your* canonical version should be the best-structured source available.

4.3 Lever 2: Knowledge Presence

Models learn from a recognizable diet: Wikipedia, news, high-authority publications, Reddit, Stack Exchange, YouTube transcripts, GitHub, review platforms, podcasts (via transcripts). **Be in the diet.**

Priority actions, ranked by effort-to-impact:

1. **Directory & profile completeness** — LinkedIn, Google Business Profile, Crunchbase, industry directories. Cheap, foundational.
2. **Review platforms with real volume** — models quote review consensus ("users praise X's support but note the learning curve").

3. **Podcast appearances** — transcripts are training data; a 45-minute interview creates thousands of words associating your brand with your expertise.
4. **Contributed expertise** — quotes in journalists' pieces (Qwoted/HARO successors, direct pitching), guest essays in industry publications.
5. **Open resources** — free tools, templates, datasets, calculators that earn ongoing mentions and links.
6. **Wikipedia/Wikidata** — if notability allows; never astroturf it.

✦ **Psychology note:** Humans trust brands through **repeated exposure from independent sources** (the mere-exposure effect + source triangulation). LLMs mathematically replicate this: frequency and consistency of brand-topic co-occurrence across independent domains literally strengthens the association weights. Good brand psychology is good AI optimization.

4.4 Lever 3: Sentiment & Reputation Shaping

AI engines don't just know *of* you — they summarize *opinions* about you. Ask any engine "What are the pros and cons of [brand]?" and you'll see your reputation, compressed.

The AIO reputation program:

1. **Quarterly sentiment audit:** ask each major engine "pros and cons of [you]", "is [you] legit?", "[you] reviews summary". Log the verbatim answers and their sources.
2. **Trace negative themes to sources.** A single old Reddit thread or a cluster of 2-star reviews often drives an engine's entire "cons" list.
3. **Fix upstream, not downstream.** Respond to reviews, resolve real product issues, publish transparent responses to criticism. Engines notice resolution narratives.
4. **Flood the zone with genuine positives:** case studies with named clients, video testimonials, third-party award submissions.
5. **Monitor continuously** with AI visibility tools (Chapter 7) — sentiment tracking across engines is now table stakes for brands.

4.5 AI Crawler Policy: A Strategic Decision

Your robots.txt is now brand strategy. Know the major bots:

Bot	Operator	Controls
Googlebot	Google	Search + AI Overviews/AI Mode retrieval
Google-Extended	Google	Gemini model training
GPTBot	OpenAI	ChatGPT model training
OAI-SearchBot	OpenAI	ChatGPT search/browsing
ClaudeBot	Anthropic	Claude training
PerplexityBot	Perplexity	Perplexity answers
CCBot	Common Crawl	Many models' training data

Default recommendation for growth-focused brands: allow them. Being absent from AI answers in 2026 is like being absent from Google in 2010. Block only where you have a genuine content-licensing business to protect. Google's new GSC controls now let you see what AI features show from your site before you decide anything drastic. (Context: [GSC AI reports & controls preview](#))

How to Implement on Your Site (This Month)

1. Run the **entity audit**: one spreadsheet, every profile, every fact field — fix inconsistencies.
2. Deploy interlinked Organization/Person/Service schema with `sameAs` graphs.
3. Build/refresh the About layer (About, Team, Methodology, Case Studies).
4. Run the quarterly **sentiment audit** across 4 engines; trace and address the top negative theme.
5. Book two podcast appearances and complete two review-platform profiles this quarter.
6. Set your AI crawler policy deliberately; document the decision.

✓ Chapter 4 Checklist

- ☐ Entity facts consistent across all web properties
- ☐ Organization + Person + Service schema live, interlinked, validated
- ☐ About layer complete and structured
- ☐ Baseline sentiment audit logged; remediation plan for negatives
- ☐ Knowledge-presence pipeline (podcasts, reviews, contributed quotes) running
- ☐ AI crawler policy documented

◆ SitesBrand Insight

One client's AI answers kept calling them "expensive" — traced to a single three-year-old forum thread comparing an outdated pricing page. We fixed it with a transparent, well-structured pricing page (which engines began retrieving instead), plus fresh review velocity mentioning "value." Within one quarter, the "cons" summary across engines changed. **You can't edit the model — but you can out-publish its sources.**

Curious what AI says about your brand right now? We'll show you — free — at sitesbrand.com/free-audit.

Chapter 5: SXO (Search Experience Optimization) — Turning Visitors into Customers

Key Takeaways

- SXO closes the loop: visibility means nothing if the click doesn't convert. **$SXO = SEO \times UX \times CRO$** treated as one discipline.
- In the AI era, fewer clicks arrive — but they arrive **hotter**: AI-referred visitors are pre-qualified and pre-educated, and convert at significantly higher rates than classic organic visitors.
- Behavioral signals (engagement, task completion, return visits) feed back into rankings and AI retrieval quality assessments — good UX is now an input to visibility, not just an outcome.
- The core method: map every landing page to the visitor's **psychological state on arrival**, then remove friction between that state and the next commitment.

5.1 Why SXO Is the Profit Pillar

Run the math on two sites:

	Site A	Site B
Monthly organic visits	10,000	4,000
Conversion rate	0.8%	3.5%
Leads	80	140

Site B "loses" at SEO and wins the business. In 2026, with AI answers absorbing a share of informational clicks (Ahrefs measured **CTR reductions around 58% for top-ranking pages** on queries with AI Overviews — [source](#)), every click that survives the AI layer is more precious. SXO is how you honor it.

The silver lining: visitors who click *through* an AI answer or arrive from a ChatGPT/Perplexity recommendation have already been educated and filtered. Multiple 2025–2026 analyses show AI-referred traffic converting at multiples of standard organic. Your job is a landing experience worthy of that intent.

5.2 The Psychology of the Post-Click Moment

Every visitor arrives in a psychological state defined by three questions:

1. **"Am I in the right place?"** (relevance anxiety — resolved in ~5 seconds or they bounce)
2. **"Can I trust this?"** (risk assessment — resolved by design quality + proof signals)

3. "What should I do next?" (decision guidance — resolved by one clear path)

Answer all three above the fold

- **Message match:** the HI should continue the conversation from the query/ AI answer that sent them. If they searched "AI search agency for e-commerce," the page says exactly that — not a clever slogan.
- **Instant proof:** one number, one logo strip, or one testimonial visible without scrolling.
- **One primary CTA:** every additional competing option measurably reduces action (choice overload / Hick's law).

♦ **Psychology note:** The most under-used conversion lever is **specificity**. "Get more traffic" is noise; "Get your 27-point AI visibility audit — free, in 48 hours" is a decision someone can make. Specificity reduces ambiguity, and ambiguity is the enemy of action.

5.3 The SXO Layer Stack

Layer 1: Performance (the invisible UX)

Core Web Vitals (Chapter 1) are the floor. Beyond them: instant navigation (prefetching), zero layout shift on CTAs, forms that don't lose state. Every 100ms of delay compounds abandonment.

Layer 2: Information Architecture

- Content matches intent depth: informational visitors get depth + a soft next step (newsletter, tool, related guide); commercial visitors get proof + a hard next step (demo, quote, call).
- **Intent bridges:** every informational page carries a contextual path toward commercial pages ("Reading about AI audits? See how our audit works →"). This is where SEO traffic becomes SXO revenue.
- Navigation reflects your topic clusters — visitors (and engines) should sense the site's organized expertise.

Layer 3: Trust Architecture

Order of psychological weight for B2B/services:

1. **Named, specific case studies** (real client, real numbers, real timeframe)
2. **Third-party validation** (reviews, ratings, awards, certifications)
3. **Radical transparency** (pricing or pricing logic, process, team faces)
4. **Risk reversal** (guarantees, free audits, no-commitment starts)

Layer 4: Conversion Paths

- Primary CTA repeated at natural decision points (after proof, after process, at end)

- **Low-commitment alternative** for the not-ready-yet majority (free audit, checklist, tool) — this is your lead engine
- Forms: minimum viable fields; every field you remove raises completion
- Post-conversion: instant confirmation + what-happens-next reduces buyer's remorse and no-shows

5.4 Measuring SXO

Metric	What it tells you	Tool
Conversion rate by landing page × source	Where experience matches intent	GA4
Engagement rate / engaged sessions	Relevance + content quality	GA4
Scroll depth to CTA	Whether people reach your ask	GA4 events / Clarity
Rage clicks, dead clicks, quick-backs	Friction and frustration	Microsoft Clarity / Hotjar
Form abandonment by field	Exactly which field kills you	Clarity / form analytics
AI-referral conversion rate	Quality of your AI-era traffic	GA4 segments (chatgpt.com, perplexity.ai, etc.)

The SXO loop: identify the highest-traffic × lowest-conversion pages → watch 20 session recordings → form one hypothesis → change one thing → measure two weeks → repeat. Boring, compounding, unbeatable.

♦ **What to look for first in Clarity:** rage-clicks on non-clickable elements (users expecting a button), dead clicks on images, and quick-backs from mobile — the three classic "invisible friction" patterns that never show up in GA4.

How to Implement on Your Site (This Month)

1. Build the **landing page × source × conversion** report in GA4; sort by traffic-to-conversion mismatch.
2. Install Microsoft Clarity (free); watch 20 recordings on your worst mismatch page.
3. Fix message match + above-the-fold trust + single CTA on your top 5 landing pages.
4. Add intent bridges from your 10 highest-traffic informational pages to commercial pages.
5. Create one low-commitment conversion offer (audit, tool, template) if you don't have one.

6. Set up AI-referral segments in GA4 and benchmark their conversion rate.

✓ Chapter 5 Checklist

- ☐ Message match verified on top 10 landing pages
- ☐ Above-the-fold: relevance + proof + single CTA
- ☐ Intent bridges from informational → commercial content
- ☐ Trust architecture (cases, reviews, transparency, risk reversal) in place
- ☐ Clarity/heatmaps live; monthly recording reviews scheduled
- ☐ AI-referral conversion tracking benchmarked

◆ SitesBrand Insight

Psychology-driven design is our founding thesis, and this is where it pays. For one services client, we changed nothing about rankings — only rewrote H1s for message match, added one named case study above the fold, and cut the contact form from nine fields to four. **Leads doubled in 30 days on identical traffic.** SEO earns the visit; psychology earns the customer.

Want a conversion teardown of your key pages? Book a strategy call at sitesbrand.com.

Chapter 6: The Integrated Framework — Updating Any Website for All 5 Pillars, A to Z

Key Takeaways

- The five pillars are one system. This chapter gives you the **complete audit-and-implementation sequence** SitesBrand runs on client sites — in order, with no steps skipped.
- Sequence matters: **Foundation** → **Structure** → **Answers** → **Citations** → **Brand** → **Experience**. Doing GEO before fixing indexation is decorating a house with no roof.
- Budget expectation: a full transformation takes **90–180 days** for most SMB sites; the audit itself takes one focused week.

6.1 The Master Sequence

PHASE 0: Baseline & Measurement	(Week 1)
PHASE 1: Technical Foundation (SE0)	(Weeks 1–3)
PHASE 2: Architecture & Entities (SE0+AI0)	(Weeks 2–5)
PHASE 3: Content & Answers (AE0)	(Weeks 4–10)
PHASE 4: Citations & Presence (GE0)	(Weeks 6–14)
PHASE 5: Brand & Reputation (AI0)	(Ongoing from Week 8)
PHASE 6: Experience & Conversion (SX0)	(Weeks 8–16)
PHASE 7: Measure, Iterate, Compound	(Forever)

6.2 Phase 0: Baseline & Measurement (Week 1)

Before touching anything, capture the "before" picture:

- ☐ Search Console: export 16 months of queries, pages, CTR, positions
- ☐ Search Console: check access to **Generative AI performance reports** (rolling out through 2026 — [details](#))
- ☐ GA4: conversion events verified and firing; landing-page conversion report saved
- ☐ **Prompt audit:** 20 money prompts × 4 engines (ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, Google AI Mode) — log mentions, citations, sentiment
- ☐ Rankings snapshot for 50 priority keywords
- ☐ Core Web Vitals snapshot (CrUX data for top 10 pages)
- ☐ Review-platform snapshot: count, average rating, last-review date per platform
- ☐ Backlink profile export

Deliverable: one baseline document. Every claim of progress in month 3 traces back to this.

6.3 Phase 1: Technical Foundation (Weeks 1–3)

Crawl the site (Screaming Frog / Sitebulb), then fix in this order:

1. **Indexation control:** noindex/remove thin pages, tag archives, parameter URLs, staging leftovers.
Target: every indexed URL earns its place.
 2. **Status-code hygiene:** kill redirect chains, fix 404s with inbound links, eliminate soft-404s.
 3. **Canonical + sitemap coherence:** sitemap contains only canonical, indexable, 200-status URLs.
 4. **Core Web Vitals:** LCP (optimize hero media, preload critical assets), INP (defer/split JS), CLS (dimension attributes on all media).
 5. **Rendering check:** verify critical content is visible without JavaScript execution (fetch as Googlebot; test with JS disabled).
 6. **AI crawler policy:** deliberate robots.txt decisions for GPTBot, ClaudeBot, PerplexityBot, OAI-SearchBot, Google-Extended, CCBot.
 7. **HTTPS, mobile, hreflang** (if multi-language — critical for Pakistani businesses serving local + international markets).
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6.4 Phase 2: Architecture & Entities (Weeks 2–5)

1. **Content inventory:** every URL classified — Keep / Improve / Merge / Kill.
 2. **Topic cluster map:** pillars and clusters matching your revenue lines; identify gaps.
 3. **Internal linking rebuild:** clusters interlinked; money pages within 3 clicks; descriptive anchors.
 4. **Entity layer:**
 5. **Organization** schema with full **sameAs** graph
 6. **Person** schema for founders/experts
 7. **Service / Product** schema on commercial pages
 8. **Article** + **author** + dates on all content
 9. **Entity consistency sweep:** every external profile aligned (name, description, category, NAP).
 10. **About layer:** About, Team, Methodology, Case Studies pages built to be retrieval-worthy.
-

6.5 Phase 3: Content & Answers (Weeks 4–10)

1. **Question inventory:** 50–150 questions across the five psychological modes (Ch. 2), mapped to intent stage.
2. **Refit existing winners:** pages ranking 2–15 get Answer Blocks, Quick Answer boxes, FAQ sections, format matching, fresh dates. *Fastest wins live here.*
3. **Fill cluster gaps:** new content prioritized by (business value × ranking feasibility).

4. **Citability upgrade (GEO-prep):** statistics, expert quotes, cited sources, comparison tables into every priority page.
5. **Multimedia:** original images with descriptive alt text; video where intent supports it (with transcripts).
6. **Editorial standards doc:** so every future page ships AEO/GEO-ready by default.

Content velocity guidance: 4–8 substantial pieces/month for SMBs beats 30 thin posts. Depth and originality are the currency now — AI engines have infinite access to shallow content; they cite what adds information.

6.6 Phase 4: Citations & Presence (Weeks 6–14)

1. **Citation reverse-engineering:** from your prompt audit, list every third-party source shaping AI answers in your category.
 2. **Listicle outreach:** systematic campaign to get into the "best of" content engines already cite.
 3. **Review velocity program:** operationalize review requests (post-project emails, QR cards, follow-up sequences).
 4. **Community presence:** sustainable Reddit/forum participation cadence — value first, disclosure always.
 5. **YouTube starter set:** 5–10 videos answering your highest-value questions (tutorials, comparisons).
 6. **One original data asset:** survey, benchmark, or analysis — your citation magnet for the next 12 months.
 7. **Digital PR pipeline:** journalist-source platforms, expert commentary, guest essays.
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6.7 Phase 5: Brand & Reputation (Ongoing from Week 8)

1. Quarterly **sentiment audits** across engines; trace negatives to sources; fix upstream.
 2. **Knowledge presence pipeline:** 1–2 podcasts/quarter, contributed quotes monthly, directory completeness.
 3. **Case study engine:** every successful project becomes a named, numbered, structured case study.
 4. Monitor with an AI visibility platform; alert on new negative themes.
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6.8 Phase 6: Experience & Conversion (Weeks 8–16)

1. GA4 landing-page × source × conversion analysis → prioritized fix list.
2. Message match + above-the-fold trust + single-CTA rewrite on top 10 landers.
3. Intent bridges from informational to commercial pages.
4. One low-commitment offer (free audit / tool / template) with follow-up sequence.
5. Form reduction + post-conversion experience.

6. Session-recording review cadence (monthly) with one-variable iteration loop.

6.9 Phase 7: The Compounding Loop

Monthly rhythm (half a day, once the system is built):

Week	Ritual
1	GSC (classic + Generative AI reports) review; ranking movements; fix regressions
2	Prompt audit refresh; citation source changes; outreach adjustments
3	Content: 1 refit + new pieces per velocity plan
4	SXO: recordings review + one experiment shipped; sentiment spot-check

Quarterly: full baseline re-capture and compare. Annually: strategy reset against the engine landscape (it will have changed).

The One-Page Master Checklist

Foundation: ☐ Clean index ☐ CWV green ☐ Rendering verified ☐ AI-bot policy set **Structure:** ☐ Clusters mapped ☐ Internal links rebuilt ☐ Schema graph live ☐ Entity consistency **Answers:** ☐ Question inventory ☐ Answer Blocks on priority pages ☐ FAQ/HowTo schema ☐ Freshness program **Citations:** ☐ Prompt audit ☐ Listicle campaign ☐ Review velocity ☐ Original data asset ☐ YouTube set **Brand:** ☐ Sentiment audits ☐ Podcast/PR pipeline ☐ Case study engine ☐ AI visibility monitoring **Experience:** ☐ Message match ☐ Trust architecture ☐ Intent bridges ☐ Low-commitment offer ☐ Experiment loop

◆ SitesBrand Insight

Clients often ask which phase to skip to save budget. Our data says: **none — but you can shrink each.** A "minimum effective dose" version of all seven phases beats a maximal version of three. The pillars multiply each other; a zero anywhere in the chain multiplies through. This is exactly the integrated program we run as a service — if you'd rather have it done than do it, talk to us at sitesbrand.com.

Chapter 7: Tools, Tracking & Measurement — Including AI Visibility

Key Takeaways

- Your 2026 stack has **three layers**: classic search data (GSC, rank trackers), AI visibility data (prompt tracking, citation monitoring), and behavior/conversion data (GA4, Clarity).
- The newest instrument is Google's own: **Generative AI performance reports in Search Console** (June 2026) — impressions in AI Overviews, AI Mode, and Discover AI features, by page, country, device, and time. (Source: [Google Search Central Blog](#))
- Measure what maps to money: impressions → citations → mentions → AI-referred sessions → conversions.

7.1 Layer 1: Classic Search Measurement

Google Search Console (free, non-negotiable)

- **Performance reports**: queries, pages, CTR, position — your ground truth
- **Generative AI performance reports (new, 2026)**: dedicated impressions data for AI features in Search and Discover. Dimensions: pages, countries, devices, dates (hourly→monthly). **Limitation**: no click data yet; Google says more metrics are coming. Initially rolled out to a UK cohort, expanding globally. (Sources: [announcement](#), [help doc](#))
- Indexing, sitemaps, Core Web Vitals reports

♦ **Tip**: the moment the report unlocks for your property, screenshot your first Generative AI impressions trend and annotate it against your optimization timeline — that becomes your "before" evidence.

Rank trackers & crawlers

- **Ahrefs / Semrush** — keywords, backlinks, competitive gaps; both now ship AI-visibility modules (below)
- **Screaming Frog / Sitebulb** — technical crawls
- **PageSpeed Insights / CrUX dashboard** — field performance data

7.2 Layer 2: AI Visibility Measurement

The new category. What to track: **presence** (are you in answers?), **citations** (is your site a source?), **sentiment** (how are you described?), **share of voice** (vs competitors, across prompts).

Tool	Strength
Semrush AI Visibility / Enterprise AIO	Prompt-level tracking at scale; backed by their 126M-prompt AI Visibility Index research
Ahrefs Brand Radar	Brand mentions & citations across AI surfaces, integrated with their SEO data
Profound	Enterprise answer-engine insights, citation analytics, bot traffic analysis
Otterly.AI	Accessible prompt monitoring for SMBs
Peec AI	Competitor benchmarking across engines

Budget option (works): a disciplined manual prompt audit – 20 prompts × 4 engines, monthly, logged in a spreadsheet with screenshots. Consistency beats tooling.

SXO Master — the five-pillar audit in one dashboard

At SitesBrand we run this entire measurement framework through **SXO Master**, our content audit system that scores every page across the book's pillars — SEO, AIO, GEO, and SXO — in a single view, with prioritized issues and AI-assisted fixes.



Figure 8: SXO Master’s audit dashboard: per-page scores across SEO, AIO, GEO and SXO, score trends over time, and engine-update alerts in one place.

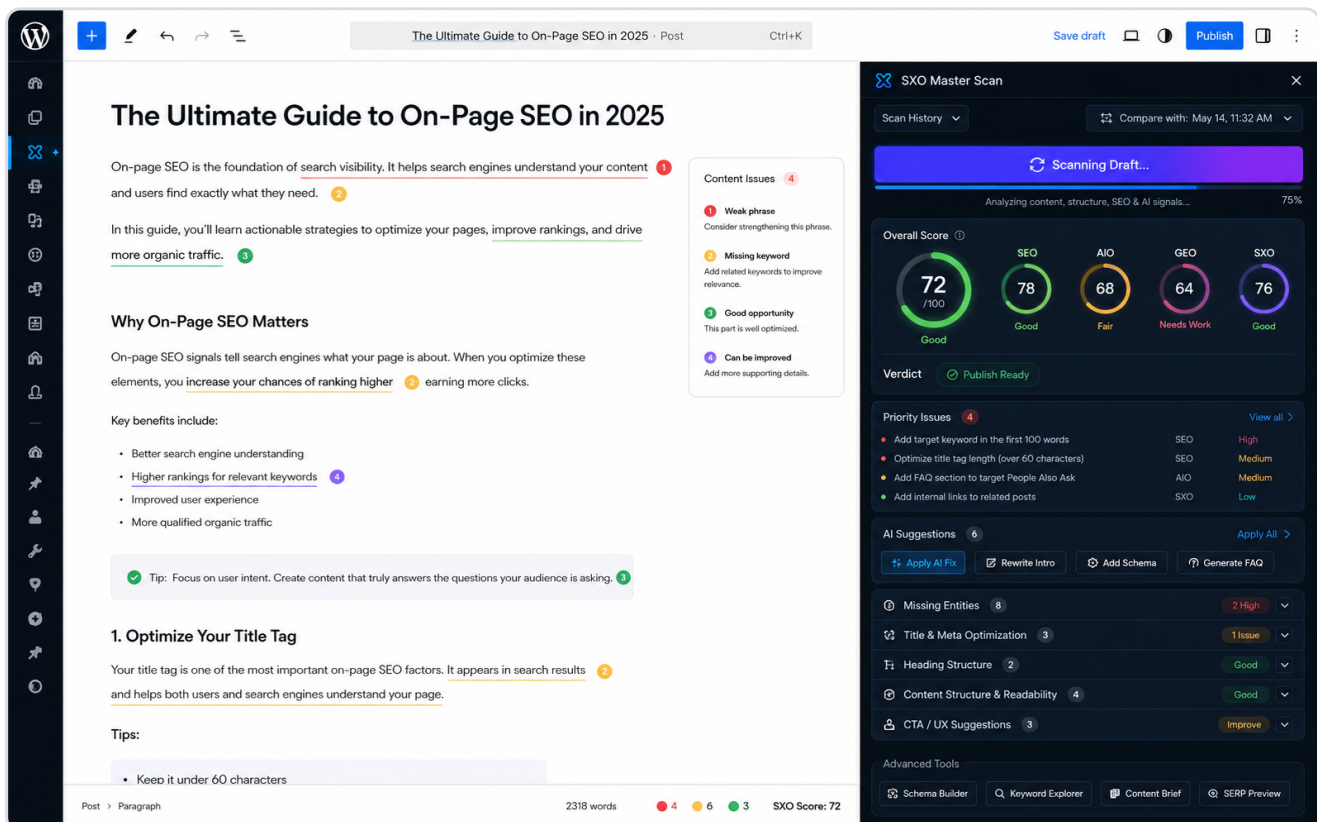


Figure 9: SXO Master scanning a draft in real time — inline content issues, missing entities, schema suggestions and FAQ generation before the post ever publishes.

Tracking AI referral traffic in GA4

Create a custom channel group or exploration segment matching source containing: `chatgpt.com`, `perplexity.ai`, `gemini.google.com`, `copilot.microsoft.com`, `claude.ai`. Compare engagement and conversion rates against organic search — expect fewer sessions with meaningfully higher conversion.

Bot-level intelligence

Server logs (or Cloudflare AI Audit) show which AI crawlers fetch what, how often. Rising `0AI-SearchBot` hits on a page cluster = that content is being used in ChatGPT answers.

7.3 Layer 3: Behavior & Conversion

- **GA4:** conversions, landing-page × source analysis, funnels
- **Microsoft Clarity (free):** heatmaps, recordings, rage-click detection
- **CRM attribution:** tag AI-referred and organic leads through to revenue — the only metric leadership truly cares about

7.4 The Measurement Framework: From Visibility to Revenue

IMPRESSIONS (GSC classic + Generative AI reports)
→ CITATIONS & MENTIONS (AI visibility tools / prompt audits)
→ SESSIONS (GA4: organic + AI-referral segments)
→ ENGAGED SESSIONS (GA4 engagement)
→ CONVERSIONS (GA4 events)
→ REVENUE (CRM)

Monthly scorecard (one page):

Metric	Source	This month	Δ vs baseline
Organic clicks	GSC		
Gen-AI impressions	GSC Gen-AI report		
Prompts where brand appears (of 20)	Prompt audit		
Citations of our domain	AI visibility tool		
AI-referral sessions	GA4		
Organic + AI conversions	GA4		
Pipeline/revenue attributed	CRM		

Report *this*, not 200 keyword positions. Stakeholders fund what they understand.

✓ Chapter 7 Checklist

- ☐ GSC verified; Generative AI reports checked/enabled
- ☐ Rank tracking on 50 priority keywords
- ☐ AI visibility tracking live (tool or manual audit protocol)
- ☐ GA4 AI-referral segment + conversion events verified
- ☐ Clarity installed on key templates
- ☐ Monthly one-page scorecard template adopted

◆ SitesBrand Insight

The most common measurement mistake we see: tracking **rankings** obsessively while having zero visibility into **AI answers** — where a growing share of the buyer journey now happens. The second most common: tracking everything and reporting nothing usable. One page, seven numbers, every month. That cadence has saved more client relationships than any ranking win.

Chapter 8: Case Studies, Templates & Real-World Application

Key Takeaways

- The framework works across business models — but the *emphasis* shifts: local services lean AEO+SXO, SaaS leans GEO+AIO, e-commerce leans SEO+SXO.
- Every case below follows the same skeleton: **baseline** → **bottleneck** → **intervention** → **result**. Steal the skeleton for your own case studies (it's also your best AIO asset).
- Templates in this chapter: case-study structure, prompt-audit log, outreach email, review-request sequence.

Note: The following case studies are drawn from SitesBrand client engagements and industry-typical scenarios; details are anonymized and figures rounded. Your results will vary with market, baseline, and execution consistency.

8.1 Case Study: B2B Services — From Invisible to AI-Recommended

Profile: Professional services firm, competitive niche, solid classic SEO (page-one rankings for core terms) but **zero presence in AI answers**.

Baseline (prompt audit): mentioned in 0 of 20 category prompts across ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, and AI Mode. Every engine's recommendations were assembled from the same handful of "best providers" listicles and review-site pages.

Bottleneck diagnosis: strong pillar 1 (SEO), absent pillars 3–4 (GEO/AIO). The firm didn't exist in the sources engines synthesized from.

Intervention (12 weeks):

1. Citation reverse-engineering → hit list of 14 third-party pages shaping AI answers
2. Placement secured in 2 major listicles (one partnership, one data-backed pitch)
3. Review velocity program: 4 → 31 detailed reviews across two platforms
4. Citability upgrade on 10 site pages (original stats, expert quotes, comparison tables)
5. One original benchmark study published + promoted via digital PR

Result (day 90): appeared in 11 of 20 prompts; recommended by name in 6. AI-referred demo requests began arriving — converting at roughly **3× the organic rate**. The benchmark study earned 27 referring domains, lifting classic rankings as a side effect.

Lesson: when SEO is already strong, the marginal dollar goes to GEO — the off-site citation layer.

8.2 Case Study: Local Service Business — Owning the Answer

Profile: Multi-location service business; traffic plateaued; phone leads flat despite decent rankings.

Bottleneck: content ranked but answered nothing directly (no snippets, no AIO citations), and landing pages had severe message-match failure — every location page led with the same generic brand slogan.

Intervention (8 weeks):

1. Question inventory from 6 months of call logs (receptionists were sitting on a goldmine)
2. 25 Answer Blocks + FAQ schema across service pages
3. Location pages rebuilt: locality-specific H1s, local proof, one CTA
4. Google Business Profile + review program (consistency of NAP = entity work)
5. Quick Answer boxes on the 8 guides already ranking top-5

Result (day 60): featured snippets captured for 9 question queries; AI Overview citations on 5; calls up ~40% with rankings essentially unchanged. The wins came from *extraction and conversion*, not position.

Lesson: for local businesses, AEO + SXO usually beats chasing more rankings.

8.3 Case Study: E-commerce — Surviving the AI Overview Squeeze

Profile: Niche e-commerce store; informational blog traffic fell double digits as AI Overviews expanded across their query set (consistent with [industry CTR studies](#)).

Bottleneck: blog strategy built for a click economy that no longer existed for their informational queries.

Intervention (10 weeks):

1. Query triage: informational queries with AIO presence → optimized *for citation* (be the source, win the brand impression) rather than the click
2. Investment shifted to **commercial-intent content** (comparisons, buying guides) where clicks survive
3. Product schema + original product photography + genuine review collection
4. Intent bridges: every surviving informational visit routed toward collections
5. SXO pass on collection pages (filters, trust badges, load speed)

Result (day 90): total blog sessions still below old peak — but **revenue from organic + AI channels up ~25%**, because the traffic mix shifted to commercial intent and conversion improved. Brand searches rose as AIO citations kept the brand visible in zero-click answers.

Lesson: in the AI era, optimize the *economics* of your traffic, not its raw volume.

8.4 Template: The Case Study Skeleton (Your AIO Asset)

Publish every client win in this structure — it's simultaneously sales collateral, GEO citation bait, and AIO training data:

1. CLIENT & CONTEXT — who, industry, size (named if possible)
2. BASELINE — 3–5 specific numbers, dated
3. BOTTLENECK — the diagnosis (teach something here)
4. INTERVENTION — what was done, in what order, how long
5. RESULT — numbers + timeframe + caveats (honesty = citability)
6. QUOTE — client's words, name, title
7. CTA — one next step

8.5 Template: Prompt–Audit Log

#	Prompt	Engine	Date	Mentioned?	Cited?	Recommended?	Sources shaping answer	Sentiment
1	"best [category] for [ICP]"	ChatGPT						
2	same	Perplexity						
...								

Run monthly. Twenty prompts, four engines, ~90 minutes. The "Sources" column is your outreach roadmap.

8.6 Template: Listic Outreach Email

Subject: Data for your "[Best X]" guide — [one-line credential]

Hi [Name] — your guide currently shapes how AI engines answer "[query]" (it's cited by ChatGPT and Perplexity). Two updates that might strengthen it: [genuinely useful correction/update #1], and [#2].

Also — we're [Brand], [one-line what/who]. Since publishing [data asset with number], we've [proof point]. If you're refreshing the guide, we'd be glad to share the full dataset, a customer you can interview, and [differentiator]. Either way, the corrections above are yours.

[Name, role, link]

Why it works: leads with *their* interest, proves you understand the AI-citation stakes, offers value before the ask.

8.7 Template: Review-Request Sequence

1. **Trigger:** project milestone / delivery +3 days
2. **Email 1:** personal thank-you + one-click review link ("60 seconds, means the world to a small team")
3. **Email 2 (+7 days, if no review):** "What should we improve?" — dissatisfied clients answer this instead of posting the 2-star review
4. **In-person/call ask** for your happiest clients — specific platform, specific topic ("if you mention the onboarding, that helps others most")

◆ SitesBrand Insight

Notice what every case above has in common: the win came from fixing the **weakest pillar**, not doubling down on the strongest. Diagnosis before prescription — that's why we always start engagements (and recommend you start) with the full baseline audit from Chapter 6.

Get your baseline free: sitesbrand.com/free-audit

Conclusion: Your 90-Day Action Plan & The Road Ahead

The 90-Day Action Plan

This condenses the entire book into a single executable program. Block the time; do it in order.

Days 1–7: Baseline Week

- ☐ GSC + GA4 exports; conversion events verified
- ☐ Prompt audit: 20 prompts × 4 engines, logged with screenshots
- ☐ Core Web Vitals + crawl snapshot
- ☐ Review-platform and entity-consistency snapshot
- ☐ One baseline document; share with stakeholders

Days 8–30: Foundation Month

- ☐ Indexation cleanup (noindex thin/duplicate; fix 404s/chains)
- ☐ CWV fixes on top 10 pages (LCP → INP → CLS)
- ☐ AI crawler policy decided and deployed
- ☐ Organization/Person/Service schema live with sameAs graph
- ☐ Entity consistency sweep across all profiles
- ☐ Topic cluster map + content inventory (Keep/Improve/Merge/Kill)

Days 31–60: Answer & Citation Month

- ☐ Question inventory (50+, five psychological modes)
- ☐ Answer Blocks + Quick Answer boxes on top 10 ranking pages
- ☐ FAQ/HowTo schema deployed
- ☐ Citability upgrade (stats, quotes, sources, tables) on priority pages
- ☐ Citation reverse-engineering → outreach hit list → first 10 pitches sent
- ☐ Review velocity program launched
- ☐ Original data asset in production

Days 61–90: Experience & Compounding Month

- ☐ Message-match + trust + single-CTA rewrite on top 5 landers
- ☐ Intent bridges from informational to commercial pages
- ☐ Low-commitment offer live with follow-up sequence
- ☐ Clarity recordings reviewed; first SXO experiment shipped
- ☐ Data asset published + PR push

□ Day-90 re-audit vs baseline; scorecard to stakeholders; next-quarter plan

Expected outcomes at day 90 (typical, not guaranteed): measurably cleaner index and faster site, first snippet/AIO captures, first AI-engine mentions, improved conversion on rewritten landers, and — most importantly — a running system that compounds.

The Road Ahead: Search Beyond 2026

Nobody can predict this space 5 years out, but the trendlines are clear enough to plan against:

1. **Agentic search.** AI agents will increasingly *complete tasks*, not just answer questions — researching, shortlisting, even purchasing. Structured data, clear pricing, and machine-readable trust signals become transactional infrastructure.
2. **Measurement matures.** Google shipping **Generative AI reports in Search Console** is the start; expect click data, more engines reporting referrals, and standardized AI-visibility metrics.
3. **Consolidation of trust.** Citation concentration data suggests authority will keep compounding to fewer, deeper sources. The moat is original information: data, experience, expertise that isn't already in the training set.
4. **Brand is the algorithm-proof asset.** Every era transition — links, mobile, answers, AI — punished tactic-chasers and rewarded brands people (and now machines) actually trust. The five pillars are ultimately one instruction: *be genuinely the best answer, and make it machine-legible.*

Final Word

You now hold the complete system: **SEO** to be found, **AEO** to be the answer, **GEO** to be cited, **AIO** to be recommended, **SXO** to be chosen. None of it requires genius. All of it requires sequence, consistency, and 90 days of honest work.

Start with the baseline. Everything follows from knowing where you stand.

— **Hassam Shabbir** Founder & CEO, SitesBrand

➤ Ready to move faster?

Free audit: sitesbrand.com/free-audit — your baseline, done for you, in 48 hours. **Strategy call:** sitesbrand.com — bring the audit, leave with a 90-day plan. *SitesBrand — Building Intelligent Systems. Driving Real Growth.*

Appendices

Appendix A: The Master Audit Checklist (Print This)

Technical SEO

- ☐ robots.txt correct (search + AI bots deliberate)
- ☐ XML sitemap clean (canonical, indexable, 200-only)
- ☐ No index bloat; no orphan pages; ≤3 clicks to money pages
- ☐ LCP ≤2.5s, INP ≤200ms, CLS ≤0.1 (mobile, field data)
- ☐ Critical content renders without client-side JS
- ☐ HTTPS everywhere; mobile-first verified

On-Page & AEO

- ☐ One clear intent per page; message-matched H1s
- ☐ Answer Blocks (40–60 word direct answers) under question headings
- ☐ Format matched to intent (tables/steps/lists)
- ☐ Visible, honest "last updated" dates
- ☐ Original images/video with descriptive alt text

Structured Data

- ☐ Organization + sameAs graph
- ☐ Person (founders/authors)
- ☐ Article/BlogPosting with author + dates
- ☐ FAQ/HowTo where applicable
- ☐ Product/Service + ratings on commercial pages
- ☐ All validated (Rich Results Test / Schema.org validator)

GEO

- ☐ Monthly prompt audit (20 × 4 engines)
- ☐ Statistics, quotes, cited sources on priority pages
- ☐ Presence in category listicles engines cite
- ☐ Review platforms complete + velocity program
- ☐ YouTube answer set; Reddit participation cadence
- ☐ One original data asset per year, minimum

AIO

- ☐ Entity facts identical across all properties
- ☐ About layer (About/Team/Methodology/Cases) retrieval-ready
- ☐ Quarterly sentiment audit + upstream fixes
- ☐ Podcast/PR knowledge-presence pipeline

SXO

- ☐ Above the fold: relevance + proof + one CTA
- ☐ Intent bridges informational → commercial
- ☐ Low-commitment offer + follow-up
- ☐ Minimal forms; post-conversion clarity
- ☐ Heatmaps/recordings reviewed monthly; one experiment live

Appendix B: Schema Templates

Organization (site-wide, homepage)

```
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org",
  "@type": "Organization",
  "@id": "https://www.example.com/#organization",
  "name": "Your Brand",
  "url": "https://www.example.com",
  "logo": "https://www.example.com/logo.png",
  "description": "One-sentence entity definition.",
  "email": "hello@example.com",
  "founder": { "@type": "Person", "@id": "https://www.example.com/about/#founder" },
  "sameAs": [
    "https://www.linkedin.com/company/yourbrand",
    "https://x.com/yourbrand",
    "https://www.crunchbase.com/organization/yourbrand"
  ]
}
```

Person (author/founder pages)

```
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org",
  "@type": "Person",
  "id": "https://www.example.com/about/#founder",
  "name": "Full Name",
  "jobTitle": "Founder & CEO",
  "worksFor": { "@id": "https://www.example.com/#organization" },
  "knowsAbout": ["SEO", "AI Search Optimization", "Conversion Psychology"],
  "sameAs": ["https://www.linkedin.com/in/yourname"]
}
```

Article (all content)

```
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org",
  "@type": "Article",
  "headline": "Page Title",
  "author": { "@id": "https://www.example.com/about/#founder" },
  "publisher": { "@id": "https://www.example.com/#organization" },
  "datePublished": "2026-07-01",
  "dateModified": "2026-07-04"
}
```

FAQPage

```
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org",
  "@type": "FAQPage",
  "mainEntity": [{
    "@type": "Question",
    "name": "Exact question text?",
    "acceptedAnswer": { "@type": "Answer", "text": "40-60 word direct answer." }
  }]
}
```

Appendix C: Glossary

AEO (Answer Engine Optimization) — Structuring content to be selected as the direct answer in snippets, PAA, voice, and AI answers.

AI Mode — Google Search's conversational AI interface, powered by Gemini models over the Search index.

AI Overviews — AI-generated summaries with citations at the top of Google results.

AIO (AI Optimization) — Brand-level optimization of how AI systems understand, trust, and recommend a brand.

Answer Block — A heading + 40–60 word direct answer + elaboration; the atomic unit of AEO.

Citation concentration — The tendency of AI engines to cite a small set of domains for most answers.

Core Web Vitals — Google's UX metrics: LCP (loading), INP (responsiveness), CLS (stability).

E-E-A-T — Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness; Google's quality framework.

Entity — A uniquely identifiable thing (brand, person, product) machines can resolve and connect facts to.

GEO (Generative Engine Optimization) — Optimizing to be cited/quoted inside AI-generated answers; term coined by the [Princeton GEO paper](#).

Generative AI performance reports — Search Console reports (June 2026) showing impressions in AI features. ([docs](#))

Intent bridge — A contextual link routing informational visitors toward commercial pages.

Prompt audit — Systematically querying AI engines with category prompts and logging brand presence, citations, sentiment.

RAG (Retrieval-Augmented Generation) — AI answering grounded in freshly retrieved documents; the mechanism behind Google's AI features.

Share of voice (AI) — The proportion of AI answers in a category that mention your brand vs competitors.

SXO (Search Experience Optimization) — Unifying SEO, UX, and CRO to convert search visibility into customers.

Zero-click search — Queries resolved on the results page (or in the AI answer) without a website visit.

Appendix D: Source Library

Official Google documentation

1. [Google's Guide to Optimizing for Generative AI Features](#) — the canonical reference (May 2026, updated June 2026)
2. [A new resource for optimizing for generative AI](#) — launch announcement
3. [Introducing Search Generative AI performance reports in Search Console](#) — June 2026
4. [Generative AI performance report help documentation](#)
5. [Google Search Essentials & SEO Starter Guide](#)

Research & studies

1. [GEO: Generative Engine Optimization — Princeton et al.](#) — the founding GEO research
2. [Semrush AI Overviews Study \(10M+ keywords\)](#)

3. [Semrush 2026 AI Visibility Index \(126M prompts\)](#)
4. [Ahrefs: AI Overview citations vs top-10 rankings](#)
5. [Semrush: AI SEO Statistics for 2026](#)

Industry coverage & analysis

1. [Search Engine Land: Google publishes AI optimization guide](#)
2. [Search Engine Journal: "AEO and GEO are still SEO"](#)
3. [Brodie Clark: GSC AI report & controls preview](#)
4. [AI Overviews statistics compilations, 2026](#)

SitesBrand resources

1. [SitesBrand blog & guides](#) — implementation walkthroughs and updates to this book's frameworks
2. [Free AI visibility & SEO audit](#)

Appendix E: Bonus — The 20-Prompt Starter Pack

Adapt these for your monthly prompt audit (replace bracketed terms):

1. best [category] for [primary ICP]
2. best [category] in [your market/country]
3. [your brand] review — is it worth it?
4. [your brand] vs [top competitor]
5. top [category] agencies/tools 2026
6. affordable [category] for small business
7. how to choose a [category]
8. is [category] worth the money?
9. [category] pricing — what should I pay?
10. alternatives to [market leader]
11. what does [your brand] do?
12. pros and cons of [your brand]
13. how to [core job-to-be-done]
14. best way to [core outcome] in 2026
15. [industry] trends 2026
16. who are the experts in [niche]?
17. [category] case studies with real results
18. common mistakes when [core activity]
19. [category] for [secondary ICP/vertical]
20. should I DIY [activity] or hire a [category]?



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