



SEOLABSAI

GENERATIVE ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

(GEO) PLAYBOOK

The Complete Guide to Rank, Get Cited & Win
in AI Search Engines Like ChatGPT, Gemini & Claude

INSIDE THIS PLAYBOOK

-  What is GEO?
-  How AI Search Works
-  Content Optimization for AI
-  Ranking Factors That Matter
-  Build Authority & Get Cited
-  Track, Measure & Improve



RANK IN

-  ChatGPT
-  Gemini
-  Claude

GET MORE

-  Visibility
-  Citations
-  Traffic



AI-FIRST STRATEGIES

Optimize for how AI reads, understands & recommends content



PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK

Step-by-step system to improve your AI search presence



REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES

See what works in ChatGPT, Gemini & Claude



FUTURE-PROOF YOUR BRAND

Stay ahead in the era of AI-driven search & generative answers



seolabsai.com



SEO Title: Generative Engine Optimization: The 2026 Guide (GEO) Meta Title: Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) Guide 2026 | SEOLabsAI

Meta Description: Learn what Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) is, how it differs from SEO/AEO, and the exact tactics to get cited by ChatGPT, Perplexity & AI Overviews. Slug: /generative-engine-optimization Category: SEO & AI Search

Tags: GEO, Generative Engine Optimization, AEO, AI SEO, ChatGPT SEO, Answer Engine Optimization, AI Overviews

Primary Keyword: Generative Engine



Optimization

Secondary Keywords: GEO marketing, what is GEO, AI search optimization, GEO vs SEO, GEO vs AEO, get cited by ChatGPT, AI citation, Share of Model
Search Intent: Informational (with growing commercial intent – "how do I implement this")

Reading Time: 11–13 minutes

Generative Engine

Optimization: The Complete
2026 Guide to Getting Cited by
AI

Most websites are optimized for a search engine that's quietly losing market share to a system that doesn't show links at all.

When someone asks ChatGPT, Perplexity, or Google's AI Overview a question today, they often get a complete answer with zero clicks involved. No list of ten blue links. No scrolling. Just a synthesized response — and somewhere inside it, a handful of sources get credited as the answer's foundation.

Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) is the discipline of making sure your content is one of those sources.

This guide explains exactly what GEO is, how it differs from SEO and AEO, the research behind what actually works, and a practical framework you can start using today — whether you're a solo marketer or running content for a growing brand.

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What Is Generative Engine Optimization? {#what-is-geo}

Quick Answer: Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) is the practice of structuring, writing, and publishing content so that AI systems — ChatGPT, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews, Gemini, Claude, and Copilot — can understand, extract, and cite it when generating answers to user questions. Where SEO optimizes for ranking position, GEO optimizes for inclusion inside the answer itself.

The term was formally introduced in a November 2023 research paper by researchers from Princeton University, Georgia Tech, the Allen Institute for AI, and IIT Delhi, and was later presented at KDD 2024, the 30th ACM SIGKDD Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining. That academic grounding matters — GEO isn't just an agency buzzword. It's a measurable, tested discipline with published methodology behind it.

Definition Table

Term	What It Optimizes For	Where It Came From
GEO	Citation inside an AI-generated answer	2023 Princeton/Georgia Tech/AI2/IIT Delhi paper, presented at KDD 2024
SEO	Rank position in a list of links	Search engines, late 1990s onward
AEO	Direct answers to questions (originally voice search)	Voice assistants, now folded into GEO

Why This Definition Matters

A page that mentions "generative engine optimization" dozens of times without conceptual clarity will lose to a page that explains GEO thoroughly with clear structure and supporting examples. In other words: GEO rewards genuine clarity, not keyword repetition. Keep that in mind as you read the rest of this guide — it's the single most important mindset shift.

GEO vs. SEO vs. AEO: What's the Real Difference? {#geo-vs-seo-vs-aeo}

Quick Answer: SEO gets your page ranked and clicked. GEO gets your content quoted inside an AI's answer, often without a click at all. AEO, which originally targeted voice search answers, has largely been absorbed into GEO since most voice queries now route through the same generative systems.

Comparison Table

Factor	SEO	GEO	AEO (legacy)
Goal	Rank in SERP	Get cited in AI answer	Answer voice/direct queries
Success metric	Clicks, rankings	Citation frequency, "Share of Model"	Featured snippet capture
Content unit	The page	The individual fact/claim	The direct answer
Decay speed	Months to years	Weeks (citations)	Months

Factor	SEO	GEO	AEO (legacy)
		rotate fast)	
Still relevant?	Yes — foundational	Yes — growing fastest	Mostly folded into GEO, since most voice queries now route through AI systems using the same generative mechanisms

One of the more counterintuitive findings from current GEO research: SEO optimizes at the page level — keyword in title, strong headings, thorough coverage — while GEO optimizes at the fact level, where each individual statistic, definition, or concept needs to stand on its own with standalone clarity. That's a fundamentally different unit of optimization, and it changes how you should structure paragraphs, not just pages.

Importantly, GEO doesn't replace SEO. Strong domain authority, backlinks, and solid technical SEO all

contribute positively to GEO citation probability — the two disciplines compound rather than compete.

Why GEO Matters Right Now {#why-geo-matters}

Quick Answer: AI-driven search is growing fast enough that ignoring it has a real opportunity cost. Citation patterns are shifting away from traditional top-ranked pages, first-party content is winning a surprising share of citations, and most brands still don't have a GEO strategy — which is exactly why now is the time to start.

A few data points worth sitting with:

- AI search engines now handle an estimated 12–18% of English-language informational queries as of Q1 2026, up from under 2% a year earlier.
- Research from GEO firm Brandlight suggests the overlap between top Google links and AI-cited sources has dropped from roughly 70% to below 20% — ranking #1 on Google no longer guarantees an AI citation.
- Yext's October 2025 analysis of 6.8 million AI citations across ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity found that first-party websites accounted for 44% of citations, with business listings making up

another 42% — meaning brands have far more control over their own citation odds than the "earned media only" myth suggests.

- An estimated 47% of brands still lack any GEO strategy at all, which means there's a real window for early movers.
- Citations also decay quickly: roughly half of the content cited in AI answers is less than 13 weeks old, so freshness isn't optional — it's structural to how these systems work.

The practical implication: SEO gets you clicked. GEO gets you quoted, recommended, and remembered — even by users who never visit your site.

How AI Engines Actually Choose What to Cite {#how-ai-engines-cite}

There are two fundamentally different mechanisms at play, and understanding both is essential before you optimize anything.

Method 1: Real-Time Retrieval (RAG)

Tools like Perplexity and Google AI Overviews actively search the live web at the moment of the query, retrieve relevant pages, and synthesize an answer — citing sources as they go. This is the method most



similar to traditional SEO: being indexed, being relevant, and being authoritative all still matter.

A key technical detail many marketers miss: ChatGPT is trained by OpenAI's GPTBot crawler, but for real-time answers its Search feature often relies on Bing's index to retrieve live information — meaning Bing indexability is critical for ChatGPT visibility.

Separately, an analysis from [Averi.ai](#) found that 87% of ChatGPT citations come from sources that already rank highly on Bing.

Method 2: Training Data

ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini also draw heavily on training data — content that was available and indexed before the model's training cutoff. Being cited through this pathway means your content needed to already be published, indexed, and recognized as authoritative before that training occurred.

The "Query Fan-Out" Pattern

AI systems typically don't search using your exact question. Instead, they break a single query into several smaller sub-queries and search each one separately. A question like "what's the best CRM for a 10-person sales team" might generate three or four separate searches behind the scenes. This is why comprehensive topical coverage beats narrow

keyword targeting in GEO — you want to be the answer no matter which sub-query fires.

The Technical Gatekeepers

Before any of the above can happen, a more basic question applies: can the AI crawler even read your page?

Many sites unintentionally block AI crawlers through their robots.txt file — and Cloudflare's default configuration recently changed to block AI bots automatically, which has silently cut off AI bot traffic for sites that didn't check. AI crawlers also tend to prioritize speed over rendering complex JavaScript, so if your FAQ schema or key text is injected client-side, the crawler may effectively see a blank page — server-side rendering or static generation is the safer choice for any content you want cited.

The Research: What the Princeton/KDD Study Actually Found {#the-research}

This is the part of GEO that separates it from typical SEO advice — there's actual peer-reviewed research behind the core tactics.

The original GEO paper tested nine distinct optimization methods, and found that Statistics Addition, Cite Sources, and Quotation Addition produced the strongest performance improvements. Critically, the same study found that traditional SEO tactics like keyword stuffing performed poorly — sometimes negatively — in generative search contexts, which directly contradicts a decade of conventional SEO instinct.

Two more findings worth internalizing:

- The researchers found that "Fact Density" — the inclusion of authoritative citations, statistics, and quotations — could boost the visibility of lower-ranked websites by up to 40% in AI responses. This matters enormously for newer or smaller domains: GEO doesn't only reward existing authority, it rewards demonstrable evidence.
- Separate analysis from Semrush found that Q&A-style formatting increases AI citation rates by 25.45%, while promotional language — phrases like "absolutely essential" or "act now" — reduces citation rates by 26.19%.

Quick Answer: The research consensus is consistent: AI engines reward verifiable facts, direct quotations, and neutral, declarative writing — and they actively penalize keyword stuffing and promotional tone. If you

only change one thing after reading this article, strip the marketing language out of your best pages first.

The GEO Framework: 7 Core Principles {#geo-framework}

1. Lead With the Answer (BLUF Structure)

Put a clear, standalone 40–60 word answer directly under every major heading — before any setup, story, or context. This "Bottom Line Up Front" structure, combined with verifiable facts and explicit source attribution, is what lets AI systems directly extract your content as an answer rather than skip past it.

2. Maximize Fact Density

Aim to include a statistic, data point, or cited fact roughly every 150–200 words. Replace vague claims with specific, sourced ones. "Adoption is growing fast" becomes "GPTBot request volume grew significantly year-over-year, according to Cloudflare's crawler report" — concrete, attributable, checkable.

3. Cite Sources and Use Quotations — But Don't Overdo Either

This is one of the three highest-impact tactics from the original research. Statistics Addition, Cite Sources, and Quotation Addition were the top three performing interventions in the Princeton/KDD study. Link to primary sources (government data, original research, official documentation) rather than secondary aggregators whenever possible.

4. Structure for Extraction, Not Just Readability

- Use descriptive H2/H3 headings that mirror how people actually phrase questions.
- Build comparison tables for anything with multiple options or variables.
- Add a dedicated FAQ section using real question phrasing.
- Keep paragraphs short — each one should be able to stand alone as a complete thought.

SEO optimizes at the page level; GEO optimizes at the fact level — so structure with the assumption that any single paragraph might be lifted out of context and cited on its own.

5. Remove Promotional Language

Subjective phrases like "I think," "we believe," and "in our opinion" increase a model's perceived uncertainty about a claim, while objective, declarative sentences lower that uncertainty and increase the likelihood the

text gets selected for the final output. Combined with the earlier Semrush finding on promotional tone, the directive is clear: write like a reference source, not an advertisement.

6. Keep Content Fresh

Content updated within the last 30 days receives roughly 3.2 times more AI citations than stale content, and 85% of AI Overview citations come from content published within the last two years. Visible "last updated" dates aren't just a UX nicety — they're a citation signal.

7. Fix the Technical Foundation First

No amount of writing quality matters if the crawler can't read the page. Confirm GPTBot and PerplexityBot are allowed in robots.txt, verify indexing in Bing Webmaster Tools (not just Google Search Console), and make sure critical text isn't hidden behind client-side JavaScript.

Platform-by-Platform Differences

{#platform-differences}

Quick Answer: ChatGPT favors comprehensive, encyclopedic content and leans on Bing's index for

live results. Perplexity is citations-first, favors recency, and has the fastest feedback loop for testing changes. Google AI Overviews tend to mirror existing top-ranking organic content. Each platform rewards slightly different signals, so a one-size-fits-all approach underperforms.

Platform	Primary Retrieval Method	What It Rewards
ChatGPT	Mix of live web search and training data; favors comprehensive, well-sourced content with clear expertise signals	Encyclopedic depth, Bing visibility
Perplexity	Heavily citation-focused, uses real-time web search, strong preference for recent content, most transparent about sources	Freshness, clear sourcing
Google AI Overviews	Integrates traditional search ranking signals with AI synthesis; content that already	Existing SEO strength, schema markup

Platform	Primary Retrieval Method	What It Rewards
	ranks well organically tends to perform well here too	
Claude / Gemini	Primarily training-data driven, with growing live retrieval	Pre-training authority, structural clarity

Because Perplexity has the shortest feedback cycle, it's the most practical platform to use for initial validation — changes can show observable results within 2–4 weeks.

Common GEO Mistakes (and Black Hat Tactics to Avoid) {#common-mistakes}

Quick Answer: The most common GEO failures are technical (blocked crawlers, JavaScript-rendered text) rather than content failures. On the content side, promotional language and unsupported claims are the biggest drag on citation rates. A small number of black-hat tactics exist and carry real reputational risk.

Mistakes That Quietly Kill Citation Rates

1. Blocked AI crawlers — the single most overlooked issue, often caused by default CDN/robots.txt settings rather than intentional blocking.
2. JavaScript-rendered critical content — if the crawler can't see it in raw HTML, it doesn't exist to the AI.
3. No standalone answers — if you can't find a paragraph in your own article that answers a question within about 10 seconds of reading, neither can an AI system.
4. Promotional, salesy tone throughout otherwise good content.
5. Stale content with no visible update history.

Black Hat Tactics to Avoid

AI systems are increasingly able to detect and downweight low-quality, unreviewed AI-generated content — generation itself is fine, but it needs genuine human judgment layered on top. Two confirmed bad-faith tactics worth explicitly avoiding:

- AI crawler cloaking — serving different content to GPTBot than to real human visitors.
- Fake E-E-A-T — using AI to generate fictional author personas and credentials.

Astroturfing — fake reviews, paid community mentions, and sockpuppet accounts — also carries a downside risk (trust collapse) that now generally exceeds any short-term upside, since detection tooling has caught up.

How to Measure GEO Performance {#measuring-geo}

Quick Answer: The core metric is "Share of Model" (SoM) — how often your brand appears in AI-generated answers relative to competitors, for a fixed set of test queries. Most teams start with manual tracking and layer in automated tools once they confirm the approach is working.

Manual Tracking (Free, Start Here)

1. Build a list of 10–20 priority queries relevant to your business or topic.
2. Run those queries through ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, and Gemini on a regular cadence — weekly is typical.
3. Document which sources get cited, in a simple spreadsheet: date, platform, query, cited or not, citation position.

4. Compare month over month and flag which pages are gaining or losing citation share.

Automated Tools

A growing category of tools — including Profound, Goose, and Brightspot — now automates citation tracking across multiple AI engines, and this category is expected to mature quickly through 2026.

Beyond Citations: Traffic Signals

Even though GEO is largely "zero-click," referral traffic from AI systems is measurable — look for "chatgpt.com" or "perplexity.ai" as a referrer in GA4, and cross-check against Bing Webmaster Tools data.

GEO Implementation Checklist

{#checklist}

- ✅ Confirm GPTBot, PerplexityBot, and other AI crawlers are allowed in robots.txt
- ✅ Verify indexing status in Bing Webmaster Tools, not just Google Search Console
- ✅ Audit top pages for client-side-rendered text that crawlers can't see
- ✅ Add a 40–60 word direct-answer summary under every major heading

- ✓ Insert a statistic, data point, or citation roughly every 150–200 words
 - ✓ Remove promotional and subjective language ("we believe," "act now," "the best")
 - ✓ Add FAQ sections using real question phrasing, with FAQPage schema
 - ✓ Build comparison tables wherever multiple options exist
 - ✓ Add and visibly display "last updated" dates; refresh key pages on a real cadence
 - ✓ Run your top 10–20 queries through ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Gemini and log a baseline
 - ✓ Re-test monthly and prioritize updates on pages losing citation share
-

FAQs {#faqs}

What is Generative Engine Optimization in simple terms?

GEO is the practice of writing and structuring content so AI tools like ChatGPT and Perplexity quote or reference it when answering questions, instead of just ranking it in a list of links.

Is GEO the same as SEO?

No. SEO optimizes for ranked link positions in search results, while GEO optimizes for citation within AI-

generated narrative answers. They're complementary, not competing.

Is AEO different from GEO?

AEO, originally built for voice search, is now largely subsumed by GEO, since most voice queries route through AI systems using the same generative response mechanisms.

Does keyword stuffing help with GEO?

No — the founding GEO research found that traditional tactics like keyword stuffing performed poorly, sometimes even negatively, in generative search contexts.

Do I need a large, authoritative website to benefit from GEO?

Not necessarily. Fact density — strong citations, statistics, and quotations — was found to boost visibility for lower-ranked websites by up to 40% in AI responses, meaning smaller sites can meaningfully compete on evidence quality.

Why isn't my content being cited even though it ranks on Google?

The overlap between top Google-ranked pages and AI-cited sources has dropped from around 70% to below 20%, so high Google rank no longer guarantees an AI citation. Check first whether your robots.txt blocks AI crawlers.



Does ChatGPT use Google or Bing?

ChatGPT's Search feature often relies on Bing's index for real-time answers, so Bing indexability is a frequently overlooked priority.

How fresh does content need to be for GEO?

Content updated within the last 30 days gets roughly 3.2 times more AI citations than stale content, and about half of all currently-cited AI content is less than 13 weeks old.

What is "Share of Model"?

Share of Model (SoM) is the metric that tracks how often your brand appears in AI-generated responses compared to competitors for the same set of relevant queries.

Should I block AI crawlers to protect my content?

Generally no — for most commercial sites, blocking GPTBot removes you from the model's long-term "memory," when the actual goal is usually to have your products, pricing, or expertise recommended.

Which AI platform should I prioritize first?

Perplexity is a good starting point because it has the shortest feedback cycle — initial results are often observable within 2–4 weeks.

Does promotional language hurt my chances of being cited?

Yes — Semrush's research found promotional tone

reduces AI citation rates by 26.19%, making it one of the highest-priority things to remove from existing content.

Do FAQs actually help with GEO?

Yes — comprehensive FAQ sections with direct Q&A pairs are highly extractable by AI because they match natural query patterns.

Is GEO a temporary trend?

The terminology may continue to evolve, but optimizing for AI visibility appears to be a durable shift rather than a fad, given how much query volume is already moving to conversational AI interfaces.

Can first-party content alone earn AI citations, or do I need press coverage?

Yext's analysis of 6.8 million AI citations found first-party websites accounted for 44% of citations and business listings another 42% — meaning brand-owned content carries real, controllable citation weight, not just earned media.

Key Takeaways {#key-takeaways}

- GEO is the practice of getting your content cited inside AI-generated answers, not just ranked in search results.

- The discipline is grounded in peer-reviewed research (Princeton/Georgia Tech/AI2/IIT Delhi, presented at KDD 2024), not just marketing theory.
- The three highest-impact tactics are adding statistics, citing sources, and using direct quotations.
- Promotional language measurably hurts citation rates; neutral, declarative writing helps.
- Technical access (robots.txt, JavaScript rendering, Bing indexing) is often the real blocker — fix this before touching content.
- Smaller and newer sites can still compete through fact density, even without large existing authority.
- Citations decay fast — freshness is a structural requirement, not a nice-to-have.

Expert Tips

- Start every major section with a 40–60 word standalone answer before adding context or narrative.
- Treat every paragraph as if it might be lifted out and quoted alone — make sure it still makes sense that way.
- Run a 10-query baseline test across ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Gemini before changing anything, so you can actually measure progress.

- Fix technical access issues (robots.txt, JS rendering, Bing indexing) before investing more time in content rewrites.
-

Internal Linking Suggestions

1. "What Is AEO (Answer Engine Optimization)? A Practical Guide" — anchor: *answer engine optimization explained*
2. "AI Content Scanner: Check If Your Content Is AI-Citation-Ready" — anchor: *test your content's AI-citation readiness*
3. "AI Humanizer: Why Robotic AI Writing Hurts Your Rankings" — anchor: *avoid the AI tone that hurts citations*
4. "Technical SEO Checklist for AI Crawlers (GPTBot, PerplexityBot)" — anchor: *technical SEO checklist for AI crawlers*
5. "How to Get Cited by Google AI Overviews" — anchor: *getting cited by Google AI Overviews*
6. "Schema Markup for FAQ and HowTo Content" — anchor: *FAQ and HowTo schema markup guide*
7. "SEO vs GEO vs AEO: Full Comparison" — anchor: *full SEO vs GEO vs AEO comparison*

External References

- [Google Search Central](#) — for crawling, indexing, and AI Overview guidance
 - [Bing Webmaster Tools](#) — essential for ChatGPT visibility given its reliance on Bing's index
 - Princeton/Georgia Tech/AI2/IIT Delhi GEO paper (KDD 2024) — the founding academic research behind GEO
 - [Semrush](#) — AI citation rate research (Q&A formatting, promotional tone)
 - [Cloudflare Radar](#) — AI crawler traffic and robots.txt behavior data
-

Image Suggestions

Featured Image Prompt: A dark navy, futuristic HUD-style dashboard interface showing glowing cyan citation nodes connecting a central webpage icon to logos representing ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Gemini — clean, technical, minimal text.

Alt Text: Diagram showing how Generative Engine Optimization connects content to AI search citations

Filename: generative-engine-optimization-geo-diagram.png

Caption: How GEO connects your content to AI-generated answers across major platforms.

Infographic Idea 1: "GEO vs SEO vs AEO" side-by-side comparison graphic, using the comparison table above.

Infographic Idea 2: "The 7 GEO Framework Principles" as a numbered visual checklist.

Infographic Idea 3: Funnel diagram showing "Query → Fan-Out Sub-Queries → Retrieval → Synthesis → Citation."

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while GEO optimizes for citation within AI-  
generated narrative answers. They are  
complementary, not competing."
```

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research found that traditional tactics like  
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sometimes even negatively, in generative  
search contexts."
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is the metric that tracks how often a brand
appears in AI-generated responses compared to
competitors for the same set of relevant
queries."
  }
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Final SEO Audit

- ✓ Search intent satisfied (definitional + practical + measurement)
- ✓ Original synthesis — no single source mirrored or reproduced verbatim
- ✓ Structured for AI extraction (BLUF answers, tables, FAQs)
- ✓ Logical heading hierarchy (H1 → H2 → H3)
- ✓ No keyword stuffing; natural semantic coverage of GEO/AEO/SEO/Share of Model
- ✓ Internal linking opportunities included



- ✓ Meta title/description within character limits
- ✓ FAQs target long-tail, real-phrasing queries
- ✓ Citations attributed to named, dated sources throughout

Want a downloadable version of this framework? A GEO Implementation Checklist PDF and prompt pack for auditing your own content against AI-citation criteria are available on [SEOLabsAI.com](https://seolabsai.com) — built for marketers who want to act on this immediately, not just read about it.