

AEO BRIEF · OCTOBER 2026

Winning in AEO.

Where brands need to focus when answer engines
decide who gets quoted.

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DEEP QUIVER
**Everything you need.
Nothing you don't.**

THE SHORT ANSWER

Answer engines don't rank pages. They pick a handful of sources to quote, and the brands that win are the easiest correct answer to lift and the most corroborated name in the category.

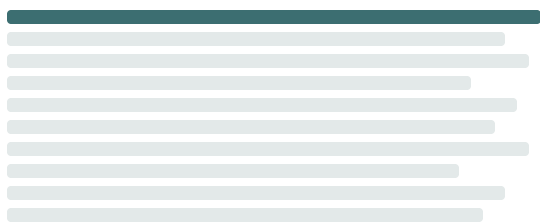
01 · THE SHIFT

From ten blue links to a handful of citations

Answer Engine Optimization (AEO, also called GEO) is the work of getting a brand mentioned, recommended, and cited inside AI-generated answers from Google AI Overviews and AI Mode, ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, Copilot, and Claude. Classic SEO competes for ten blue links. AEO competes for three to eight citations in a synthesized answer, often with no click at all.

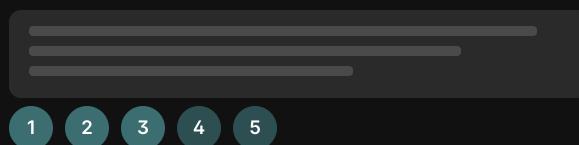
CLASSIC SEO

10 blue links



ANSWER ENGINES

3–8 citations



THREE THINGS CHANGE

01

Passages, not pages

Engines retrieve passages, so a buried answer is an invisible answer.

02

The web vouches for you

Engines weigh what the rest of the web says about you, so your own site is only part of the evidence.

03

Every engine is its own pool

Each engine draws from a different source pool, so visibility in one does not carry to the next.

02 · WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Four signals from the research

Fewer clicks, more third-party influence, less overlap between engines, and higher-intent traffic when a click does happen.

CLICKS ARE COMPRESSING

8% vs. 15%

Users clicked a result on about 8% of searches with an AI summary, vs. 15% without.



Pew Research Center, 2025

THIRD PARTIES CARRY THE ANSWER

~1/2

Nearly half of ChatGPT citations in one 6.8M-citation study came from listings and directories, not brand sites.



Yext

ENGINES DISAGREE

62%

ChatGPT, AI Mode, and AI Overviews recommended different brands 62% of the time.

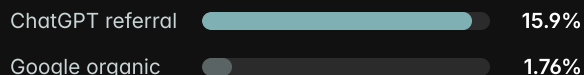


BrightEdge

AI TRAFFIC CONVERTS

15.9% vs. 1.76%

ChatGPT-referred sessions converted at 15.9%, vs. 1.76% for Google organic, in one benchmark.



Seer Interactive (as reported)

Figures come from third-party studies with differing methods; treat them as directional, not universal.

03 · THE EIGHT FOCUS AREAS

Four questions every engine asks

Every AEO outcome traces back to four questions an engine asks of a brand. The eight areas that follow are where brands win or lose on each.

QUESTION 1	QUESTION 2	QUESTION 3	QUESTION 4
Can I reach it?	Can I understand it?	Can I trust it?	Does it answer what was asked?

01 Retrieval access

WHY IT DECIDES CITATIONS

An engine cannot cite what its search bot cannot fetch. Blocking OpenAI's OAI-SearchBot, for example, removes a site from ChatGPT search answers. Content rendered only by JavaScript is often invisible to AI crawlers.

WHAT WINNING LOOKS LIKE

Search and retrieval bots allowed at robots.txt and the CDN/firewall; core content in raw HTML; training-bot access treated as a separate policy decision.

02 Entity clarity

WHY IT DECIDES CITATIONS

Engines answer about entities. If the brand's who, what, for whom, and where are vague or inconsistent, the model fills gaps with guesses or with competitors.

WHAT WINNING LOOKS LIKE

One plain-language entity statement, repeated consistently across the site, LinkedIn, Google Business Profile, directories, and Organization schema with sameAs links.

03 Extractable answers

WHY IT DECIDES CITATIONS

Engines lift self-contained passages. Answers buried under brand narrative, or sections that lean on "as mentioned above," don't survive extraction.

WHAT WINNING LOOKS LIKE

Question-shaped headings, a direct answer leading each section, definitional sentences for core concepts, and tables for anything compared.

04 Coverage of the buyer question set

WHY IT DECIDES CITATIONS

AI prompts are conversational and decision-oriented: cost, comparisons, alternatives, "best X for Y." Brands that only publish product pages miss the prompts that drive shortlists.

WHAT WINNING LOOKS LIKE

Pages that answer pricing, comparison, alternatives, use-case, and fit questions honestly, mapped to the questions buyers actually ask.

05 Proof and specificity

WHY IT DECIDES CITATIONS

Generic claims give an engine nothing to cite. Numbers, ranges, timelines, criteria, and original data make a page the quotable source.

WHAT WINNING LOOKS LIKE

Proprietary data, named experts with credentials, case-study numbers, visible publish and update dates, and sources cited inline.

06 Off-site corroboration

WHY IT DECIDES CITATIONS

Engines cross-check. Reviews, directories, roundups, communities like Reddit, and earned media often outweigh the brand's own site.

WHAT WINNING LOOKS LIKE

Complete, consistent third-party profiles; a steady review flow that names the services you want known for; presence on the domains engines already cite in your category.

07 Structured data

WHY IT DECIDES CITATIONS

Schema tells machines what a page is about and how entities relate. It supports understanding, not guaranteed rich results.

WHAT WINNING LOOKS LIKE

Organization, Service or Product, Article with author, BreadcrumbList, and genuine FAQ markup that matches visible content.

08 Measurement by engine

WHY IT DECIDES CITATIONS

AI answers vary by engine and by run. Without a tracked prompt set, brands can't see mention share, misstatements, or competitor gains.

WHAT WINNING LOOKS LIKE

A fixed buyer prompt set re-run monthly per engine; mention rate, citation rate, and share of voice tracked; AI referrers segmented in analytics and CRM.

04 · WHAT SEPARATES THE BRANDS THAT WIN

Reputation, not markup

They treat AEO as reputation, not markup

Schema and formatting help, but citations follow clarity, proof, and what others say about the brand.

They own a narrow set of positions

They pick the topics where they can credibly be the best answer and go deep, rather than publishing thin pages on everything.

They build where engines already look

They find the third-party domains cited in their category and earn a presence there.

They measure per engine and correct fast

When an engine misstates the brand, they publish the corrective answer and strengthen the sources behind it.

THE BOTTOM LINE

01

Be reachable

02

Be unambiguous

03

Be specific

04

Be confirmed by others

Brands that do all four become the default answer. Brands that do one or two stay invisible.

SOURCES

- OpenAI crawler documentation (OAI-SearchBot, GPTBot, ChatGPT-User)
- ChatGPT vs Perplexity for AI visibility in 2026 (summarizes Yext, BrightEdge, and Seer studies)
- AEO playbook: get cited by AI in 2026 (summarizes Pew Research click data)



NEXT STEP

Where does your brand show up in AI answers?

We'll show you where you're cited today, where competitors are winning, and which of the eight areas to fix first.

[Talk to a CMO](#)