

Get**Cited** — by Cited

THE AEO PLAYBOOK · 2026

Get found, understood, and **recommended by AI.**

Google's front page is no longer the front page — AI answer engines are. This is the field guide to being the business ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini and Google's AI actually cite. Backed by real 2026 research, not opinion.

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SEO is table stakes. AEO is the game now.

People increasingly ask an AI instead of scrolling ten blue links — and the AI names a few businesses, not a page of them. If it doesn't name you, you're invisible, however good your SEO is.

The proof is in the numbers: **page-one Google rank is no longer sufficient** — only ~38% of AI-Overview citations now come from top-10 pages (down from 76%). The other ~62% is earned and distributed across the open web. The discipline that wins this is **AEO / GEO** — optimising to *be the answer*, not to rank a page.

What this playbook gives you: the five levers that move AI citations, what to do on each of the six pillars, a per-engine cheat sheet, and a checklist you can run this week.

What actually moves AI citations.

Ranked by evidence. Most businesses spend on the wrong one (their own website) and ignore the dominant one (earned media).

Lever 1

Earned media is the dominant lever — not your website.

~82% of AI citations come from **earned media** (journalism, third-party mentions), not owned or paid content. A brand on 4+ non-affiliated platforms is **2.8x more likely** to appear in ChatGPT. Even unlinked brand mentions move the needle. Digital PR beats on-site polish.

Lever 2

Reddit · YouTube · LinkedIn are where AI sources citations.

Three UGC/authority platforms, not owned sites. **YouTube has the single strongest correlation with AI visibility (~0.74)** — higher than branded web mentions, domain rating or backlinks. Captioned, transcript-rich video is the #1 asset most businesses don't have.

Lever 3

Optimise per-engine — they barely overlap.

Only ~11% of domains are cited by both ChatGPT and Perplexity. One generic strategy can't win all four. You place differently for each engine (cheat sheet on the next page).

Lever 4

Distribute off-site; cite outward.

Syndicating one piece across wide third-party outlets lifted citations **up to ~325%**. Adding outbound citations to authoritative sources inside your own pages lifted lower-ranked pages **+115%**. Reach beats polish.

Lever 5

On owned pages: evidence-backed, answer-first, fresh.

Adding **statistics + citations + quotations** lifts **generative visibility up to ~40%**. Answer-first (a 40–60 word direct answer per section), one-concept chunks, named authorship, schema. AI-cited URLs are **25.7% fresher** than Google organic — refresh cadence matters.

Where you win the points — and what to do.

PILLAR 1 · AI VISIBILITY

Get recalled by the models

A sustained digital-PR program: earn coverage, expert roundups and unlinked mentions across ≥ 4 non-affiliated platforms. Map per-engine and place accordingly. Answer-first blocks + original stats on owned pages.

PILLAR 2 · ENTITY / KNOWLEDGE GRAPH

Be a real, named entity

Claim a Wikidata entry → pursue Wikipedia where you qualify → Organization/Person schema with **sameAs** linking every profile → Google Knowledge Panel → consistent name/NAP everywhere. Cheapest, most controllable pillar.

PILLAR 3 · FINDABILITY

Rank your name, then distribute

Rank for your own name and target queries, but don't stop at page one. Server-render content (no JS-only shell) so AI crawlers read it. robots.txt + sitemap + **llms.txt** + canonical. Then lean on distribution for the ~62% off page one.

PILLAR 4 · CREDIBILITY

Third-party corroboration

Reviews on the platforms AI actually cites (for B2B: G2/Capterra/TrustRadius), analyst inclusion, trade-publication features. Consumer star ratings help less than earned authority — chase the cited surfaces.

PILLAR 5 · OWNED HEALTH

Fast, fresh, machine-readable

Real speed (Lighthouse), refresh cadence (AI favours ~26% fresher pages), Schema + FAQ markup, one-concept chunks so each block is independently citable. llms.txt + AI-crawler allow-list.

PILLAR 6 · INFLUENCE / REACH

The AI-cited platforms first

Prioritise **YouTube > Reddit > LinkedIn** over Instagram/TikTok (reach, but low citation value). Transcript-rich long-form is the citable asset; clip it into shorts for reach.

They cite different places. Place accordingly.

ENGINE	LEANS TOWARD	YOUR MOVE
ChatGPT	Wikipedia (heavy) + Reddit + Forbes	Wikidata/Wikipedia entity, earn Reddit mentions, aim for business-press features.
Perplexity	Reddit + LinkedIn + G2 + primary sources	Active LinkedIn, organic Reddit presence, B2B review profiles, cite primary sources on-page.
Claude	Legacy journalism (NYT, Atlantic, Economist)	Earn credible editorial coverage; quality > volume of mentions.
Google AI Overviews	YouTube-dominated (~200× other video) + local	Captioned YouTube, Google Business Profile + reviews, LocalBusiness schema.

Sources: Muck Rack Generative Pulse · Peec AI (30M sources) · Ahrefs Brand Radar · Princeton GEO · 5W Citation Index 2026. This is why one generic "SEO" strategy can't win AI — you place per engine.

The starter checklist.

Cheapest, highest-yield moves first. Tick them off and you'll move before month-end.

- ❑ **Publish an llms.txt** — a Markdown brief (H1 + summary) at your root, so AI crawlers get a clean read of who you are.
- ❑ **Open your robots.txt to AI crawlers** — GPTBot, ClaudeBot, PerplexityBot, Google-Extended. Many sites accidentally block them.
- ❑ **Claim a Wikidata entry + add Organization schema with sameAs** linking every profile you own.
- ❑ **Add an answer-first block** to your top 3 pages — a 40–60 word direct answer at the top of each.
- ❑ **Stand up one captioned YouTube video** — the single highest-correlation AI-visibility signal.
- ❑ **Get one genuine mention** on a non-affiliated platform (Reddit thread, directory, trade feature) — earned beats owned.
- ❑ **Add statistics + outward citations** to a key page — up to ~40% generative-visibility lift.
- ❑ **Set a refresh cadence** — dates, stats, examples. AI favours fresher pages.

KNOW YOUR NUMBER, THEN HAVE IT DONE

Get your free **Footprint Score** in 90 seconds.

See exactly where you stand across all six pillars — real Google Lighthouse + live AI-answer checks, no card. Then, if you'd rather not do the checklist yourself: **we do all of it for you** — rebuild, AEO, entity, managed social, influencer distribution, and monthly Share-of-Model tracking. An audit tells you. We do it.

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