

SEO vs. AEO vs. GEO

Research Report

*How Search Visibility, Answer Visibility, and Generative
Visibility Work Together*

Executive Summary

SEO, AEO, and GEO are best treated as overlapping visibility disciplines rather than isolated marketing channels. SEO strengthens discovery, crawlability, indexing, relevance, and authority. AEO emphasizes clear, direct answers to questions. GEO emphasizes whether content is suitable for retrieval, grounding, citation, and reuse in generative experiences.

Microsoft's current webmaster guidance explicitly states that SEO fundamentals also support eligibility for Bing grounding results and citations. It also describes GEO as focusing on content eligibility for grounding and reference in AI responses. Google similarly states that the same foundational SEO best practices apply to its AI search experiences.

Working Definitions

Discipline	Primary question	Typical optimization focus	Primary outcome
SEO	Can search engines discover, understand, rank, and present this page?	Technical health, relevance, content quality, links, local signals, user usefulness	Rankings, impressions, clicks
AEO	Can the content provide a clear answer to a specific question?	Direct answers, FAQs, concise definitions, structured sections, intent alignment	Answer extraction and high-confidence understanding
GEO	Can an AI system retrieve, verify, ground, cite, or recommend this content?	Original evidence, clear entities, focused URLs, authority, freshness, verifiable claims	Mentions, citations, grounding, recommendations

Where They Overlap

- Clear titles, headings, and page focus improve both search understanding and AI grounding.
- Crawlable internal links and canonical URLs help engines discover the intended authoritative page.
- Original, useful, independently verifiable content strengthens both ranking and citation potential.
- Entity consistency and reputable external references help systems connect claims to a real organization or expert.
- Fresh, accurate content is important for both search results and AI-generated answers.

Where They Differ

Scenario	SEO emphasis	AEO/GEO emphasis
Commercial service page	Rank for service + location/intent terms	Explain service, expertise, process and differentiators in quotable sections
Educational article	Match informational query and earn organic visibility	Provide concise definitions, evidence, examples and self-contained passages
Original research	Earn links and rankings for unique findings	Provide verifiable data that AI systems can cite as evidence
Local business	Local relevance, profiles, reviews, service/location pages	Consistent entity/location information suitable for local AI answers

CJ Integrated Model

CJ Design & Consulting's recommended operating model is: Technical Eligibility → Search Discoverability → Answerability → Authority → AI Citation → Conversion. SEO creates the discoverable foundation; AEO improves answer clarity; GEO strengthens retrievability and citation potential; conversion design turns visibility into business outcomes.

Research Conclusions

1. SEO should not be abandoned for AI visibility. Current Google and Bing guidance treats strong SEO foundations as prerequisites for AI visibility.
2. AEO is most useful as a content-design discipline: answer the user's question clearly, early, and in a structure that can stand on its own.
3. GEO adds a stronger emphasis on grounding, citation, verifiability, authority, and entity clarity.

4. No tactic guarantees rankings or AI citations. Measurement must track search and AI outcomes separately.
5. The strongest long-term strategy is integrated: technically sound pages, focused intent, original expertise, independent authority, and measurable conversion paths.

Sources and Research Basis

External methodology references:

- Google Search Central, AI features and your website: <https://developers.google.com/search/docs/appearance/ai-features>
- Bing Webmaster Guidelines: <https://www.bing.com/webmasters/help/webmaster-guidelines-30fba23a>
- Bing Webmaster Tools, AI Performance: <https://www.bing.com/webmasters/help/ai-performance-9f8e7d6c>
- Microsoft Bing Webmaster Blog, Introducing AI Performance in Bing Webmaster Tools (February 10, 2026): <https://blogs.bing.com/webmaster/February-2026/Introducing-AI-Performance-in-Bing-Webmaster-Tools-Public-Preview>

CJ-specific baseline observations in these documents are based on CJ Design & Consulting's September 2026 Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools review. They are internal observations, not industry-wide statistics.