

AI PLAYBOOK 32

Future-Proofing Search Strategy in the AI Era: SEO to GEO

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theCMA.ca

Content partially generated by artificial intelligence, refined by human expertise.

This Playbook is part of the CMA's AI Mastery Series, empowering marketers to Implement AI in ways that earn regulatory confidence, maintain strong brand reputation, and foster consumer trust

The search evolution

Search engines are evolving into answer engines with AI systems providing direct responses rather than lists of links. This shift from keyword-based to conversational search requires new optimization approaches as it is fundamentally changing how information is discovered and consumed.

This evolution requires a shift from traditional traffic-focused optimization to authority-based optimization. Traditional Search Engine Optimization (SEO) optimized for "How do I get people to click to my website?". The emerging discipline of Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) optimizes for "How do I become the source AI systems trust and cite?". Success increasingly means becoming the definitive reference that AI platforms cite when users seek expertise in your domain.

The opportunity varies. B2B companies can establish thought leadership that AI systems recognize for complex, consultative queries, positioning themselves as the go-to authority when prospects research solutions. B2C brands can optimize for product discovery, comparison scenarios, and local recommendations, ensuring their offerings are prominently featured in AI-powered shopping and decision-making experiences. Both approaches require demonstrating genuine expertise and trustworthiness that AI systems can verify and confidently reference.

The reality is that companies that adapt to AI-mediated search will get mentioned, cited, and recommended in response to user queries.

Are you ready for GEO? Three key questions

Question 1: Content readiness

When someone asks AI a question about your expertise area, would your content provide a clear, helpful answer? Look at your main service or product pages, do they directly solve specific problems rather than just describe features? This is the foundation of AI-friendly content.

Question 2: Authority signals

Can visitors easily verify your expertise? This includes author credentials, customer testimonials, industry certifications, or partnerships with recognized organizations. AI systems look for the same trust signals humans do when evaluating sources.

Question 3: Discoverability

Is your website technically sound with clear navigation, fast loading, and mobile optimization? Do you regularly create helpful content that addresses your customers' questions? These basics remain essential as AI systems evaluate and reference online sources.

Get started

If you answered yes to all three questions, you're ready to optimize for AI discovery. If you answered no to any question, that's your priority area for improvement. This isn't about perfection, it's about having solid fundamentals before adding AI-specific optimizations.

From SEO to GEO: Transition map

Keep doing SEO fundamentals: Site speed, mobile optimization, clean URLs, and logical site structure. Quality content creation and regular publishing. Basic keyword research to understand user intent. Link building from reputable, relevant sources.

Add new GEO elements: Conversational content that answers complete questions. Authority signals like credentials, certifications, and expert partnerships. Regular AI testing to monitor your visibility. Specific, factual information that AI systems can extract and cite.

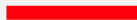
Stop wasting time on: Keyword stuffing and exact-match optimization. Link schemes or low-quality backlink building. Content created solely for search rankings rather than user value. Obsessing over traditional ranking positions.

Integration approach: GEO doesn't replace your SEO work. It builds on it. You'll maintain your technical foundation while adding AI-specific optimizations. Think of it as SEO 2.0: everything you know still applies, plus new strategies for AI visibility.

Mindset shift

Move from how do I rank #1 for this keyword to how do I become the source AI trusts when users ask questions in my expertise area?

Creating content AI wants to reference



AI systems prefer content that directly answers questions with specific, factual information rather than broad statements.

Traditional marketing copy	AI-optimized content
B2B: We provide exceptional IT support services with years of experience helping businesses succeed."	Our IT support team resolves 95% of technical issues within 4 hours, with 24/7 monitoring for Toronto-area businesses. We've maintained 99.8% uptime for over 200 client networks since 2020."
B2C: Premium winter jackets designed for Canadian weather conditions.	This parka maintains core body warmth to -40°C based on Edmonton winter testing, with wind-resistant fabric that blocks Prairie gusts up to 60 km/h.

Action plan:

Step 1: Review your main service or product descriptions. Replace general statements with specific outcomes, measurements, or credentials.

Step 2: Write for conversational queries. Structure content to answer the complete questions people ask AI systems, not just keywords. Think 'How does this help solve my specific problem?' rather than 'digital marketing services'.

This structure follows natural problem-solving logic that both humans and AI systems prefer. AI can extract and cite specific facts confidently, while humans get the concrete information they need to make decisions.

Improving your current website content for AI discovery

Don't try to fix everything at once, focus on the content that matters most to your business. Start with pages that generate the most business inquiries, represent your core services, already get good traffic, or address common customer questions. These will give you the biggest impact for your effort.

For each page, note: 1) What question does this page answer? 2) Is the answer clear in the first paragraph? 3) Does it include specific details (numbers, timelines, locations)? 4) Would this help someone decide?

Process:

Step 1: Identify the main question each page should answer. For a service page, it might be "How does this service solve my problem?" For a product page: "Why is this the right choice for my situation?"

Step 2: Move your best answer to the top of the page. Lead with the most helpful information instead of company background or generic descriptions.

Step 3: Add specific details that prove your point. Replace "experienced team" with "15-person team with average 8 years industry experience." Replace "fast service" with "typical project completion in 3-5 business days."

Example

Before

We offer comprehensive digital marketing services to help your business grow.

After

We help B2B companies generate qualified leads through targeted LinkedIn campaigns, typically delivering 15-25 new prospects per month within 60 days.

Website basics for AI optimization

If your website loads reasonably fast, works on mobile, and has clear navigation, you already have most of the technical foundation you need for AI optimization. Don't get overwhelmed by technical complexity.

The essentials:

1. Make sure your business name, address, phone number, and service areas are clearly displayed and consistent across your website.
2. Each page should have a descriptive title that explains what it's about. "About Us" is less helpful than "About [Company Name]: Toronto Web Design Since 2018. This aligns with digital accessibility standards.
3. Organize your website so visitors (and AI) can easily find related information. Group similar services together, create clear categories for products.
4. Fresh content signals that your business is active and current. Add new case studies, update service descriptions, or publish helpful articles as often as possible.

What you can skip (for now)

Schema markup, complex technical SEO, and advanced analytics setup. Focus on content quality and clear organization first. The technical optimizations can wait until the content fundamentals are in place.

Test and check

Can a first-time visitor understand what you do within 10 seconds of visiting your homepage? If yes, you're ready to focus on content. If no, that's your priority.

Your first 30 days

Week 1: Assessment and setup

- Complete the 3-question readiness assessment from slide 3
- Set up Google Search Console and Analytics
- Test your current visibility by searching your business in AI systems

Week 2: Content improvements

- Choose your 3-5 most important web pages
- Rewrite the first paragraph of each using the direct answer approach
- Add specific details: numbers, timelines, locations, credentials

Week 3: Technical basics

- Update contact information and service areas
- Add clear page titles that describe what each page covers
- Create or update a simple FAQ section

Week 4: Testing and planning

- Test your updated content with colleagues or customers
- Search your business again in AI systems - any improvements?
- Plan next month's content improvements based on what you learned

After month 1, focus on creating new helpful content that answers your customers' specific questions. Build momentum with consistent, small improvements rather than trying to perfect everything at once.



Master the basics to accelerate your GEO success.

Tools for growing your GEO efforts

Free tools to start with:

- **Google Search** console shows how people find your website and which pages perform best. Essential for understanding your current visibility.
- **Google Analytics** tracks website visitors and helps you see which content works. Focus on pages where visitors spend more time and visit multiple pages.
- **Google My Business** helps with local AI search results.
- **Answer The Public** shows you questions people ask about your industry. Great for finding content ideas that match how people search.

Remember to do regular AI testing. Ask ChatGPT, Google, or Perplexity questions your customers might ask. Track whether your business appears in their responses.

When ready to invest

- Platforms like Semrush or Ahrefs can help you find new content ideas and see what topics your competitors are covering. Start with free trials.
- Tools like Grammarly or Hemingway Editor help create clearer, more readable content that both humans and AI systems prefer.
- Content organization tools like Trello, Notion, or Airtable help you plan and organize your content creation efforts, especially important as you build topic clusters.

Leverage the free tools first, then gradually add paid tools as your understanding and capability grows. Content quality drives everything else.

Advanced website set up for AI Discovery

Once you've mastered the basics, these website improvements will help AI systems better understand and reference your expertise.

Organize content by topic areas: Group related content together so AI systems can see the depth of your knowledge. Create dedicated sections for your main services or expertise areas. For example, if you're a marketing agency, have separate areas for digital strategy, content marketing, and web design, each with multiple helpful articles addressing client questions, case studies, and guides.

Add structured business information: Help AI systems understand your business details by adding consistent information across your site: your full business address, service areas (which provinces or cities you serve), hours of operation, and contact methods. Make sure this information appears in the same format everywhere.

Create resource hubs: Build comprehensive resource centers around your key expertise areas. Instead of scattered blog posts, create organized guides that cover topics thoroughly. This shows AI systems you're a definitive source on these subjects.

Canadian-specific improvements: Reference relevant Canadian regulations or standards when they apply to your industry. Link to authoritative Canadian sources like Statistics Canada or government agencies. If you serve multiple provinces, clearly indicate which services are available where.

Start with organizing existing content, then add consistent business information, and finally build resource hubs as you create new content.

Building authority signals AI recognizes

Authority building takes time, but these strategies help AI systems recognize you as a credible expert in your field.

- **Partner with local organizations:** Join your local chamber of commerce, industry associations, or professional groups. These partnerships create credibility signals that both humans and AI systems recognize. Mention these partnerships on your website and get involved in their events.
- **Share your knowledge publicly:** Speak at local business events, contribute to industry publications, or participate in community workshops. When you're quoted or featured, add these mentions to your website.
- **Publish original insights:** Share what you've learned from serving your customers. Create annual reports on trends you've observed, surveys of your client experiences, or analysis of changes in your industry - especially with Canadian context that others might miss.
- **Get featured by others:** The goal is to become someone others reference and cite. This happens when you consistently provide helpful, accurate information and build genuine relationships in your industry and community.
- **Canadian authority advantages:** Leverage your understanding of Canadian regulations, seasonal factors, cultural considerations, or cross-border business issues. These give you natural expertise areas where international competitors can't compete.

Remember: Focus on being genuinely helpful rather than trying to appear authoritative. Authority comes from consistently solving real problems for real people.

Common pitfalls and how to avoid them

Over-optimization for AI: Avoid creating content solely for AI consumption that provides no human value. AI systems are increasingly sophisticated at detecting low-quality, purely algorithmic content. Focus on genuine expertise and helpful information that serves both AI understanding and human needs.

Neglecting traditional SEO: GEO complements rather than replaces traditional SEO. Maintain technical SEO fundamentals, continue building quality backlinks, and preserve existing organic search performance while adding AI optimization layers.

Generic content approach: Failing to differentiate B2B versus B2C optimization strategies. B2B content requires deeper technical expertise demonstration, while B2C content needs practical problem-solving focus. Canadian businesses must balance local relevance with broader appeal.

Impatience with results: AI citation building takes time as AI systems develop trust in new sources. Expect 3-6 months for initial citation improvements. Focus on consistent, high-quality content creation rather than immediate results. Track leading indicators like content quality improvements and technical implementation progress.

Ignoring content maintenance: AI systems favour fresh, updated content. Establish ongoing content review and update processes. Monitor accuracy of AI citations to ensure your content is being represented correctly. Address any misinformation or incomplete citations proactively.

Tracking GEO progress

Month 1-3: Foundation indicators

Are you getting clearer, more qualified inquiries? When people contact you, do they seem more informed about your services? Are you appearing in AI responses when you test your business name and expertise areas?

Month 3-6: Visibility growth

Search your business and main services in ChatGPT, Google AI, and Perplexity. Are you appearing more frequently? Are the descriptions accurate and helpful? Check Google Analytics for improvements in visitor engagement: longer time on site, more pages viewed, better conversion rates.

Month 6-12: Authority building

Are other websites or publications starting to reference your content? Are you being invited to speak at events or contribute to industry discussions? Are competitors starting to cite your research or insights?

Monthly tests: Ask AI systems 5 questions your customers typically ask. Track which queries return your business as a source. Document improvements over time using a simple spreadsheet.

Quality over quantity: Focus on the caliber of inquiries rather than total website traffic.

Red Flags: If AI systems consistently provide incorrect information about your business, you need to improve your online presence clarity. If you never appear in AI responses after 6 months, revisit your content strategy.

Recommended Reading

For further learning, these resources provide practical guidance on responsible AI adoption, strategy, and implementation.

CMA resources

- [CMA Guide on AI for Marketers](#)
- [Setting the Stage on Artificial Intelligence: A CMA Primer on AI for Marketers](#)
- [CMA Accountability Checklists for AI in Marketing](#)
- [CMA Mastery Series: AI Playbooks](#)
- [CMA Generative AI Readiness Survey](#)
- [Canadian Marketing Code of Ethics and Standards](#)

External references:

- Semrush: [GEO vs SEO, a Comparative Guide for Digital Marketers](#)
- SearchEngineLand: [What is Generative Engine Optimization \(GEO\)](#)
- HubSpot: [Generative Engine Optimization – What we know so far about generative SEO](#)
- The Rank Masters: [GEO Case Study: ChatGPT Traffic Growth](#)
- Coherent Market Insights: [AI Search Engines Market Size and Share Analysis – Growth trends and forecasts 2025-2032 Report](#)
- Wix Studio: [AI Search vs Google Research](#)

The CMA

This playbook is developed with guidance by the CMA AI Committee and is part of the CMA's comprehensive AI initiative designed to empower Canadian marketers with the knowledge, skills, and ethical frameworks needed to implement AI responsibly and effectively.

As the voice of Canadian marketing, the CMA champions our profession's powerful impact. We are the catalyst to help Canada's marketers thrive today, while building the marketing mindset and environment of tomorrow.

We provide opportunities for our members from coast to coast to develop professionally, to contribute to marketing thought leadership, to build strong networks, and to strengthen the regulatory climate for business success. Our Chartered Marketer (CM) designation signifies that recipients are highly qualified and up to date with best practices, as reflected in the CMA's Canadian Marketing Code of Ethics and Standards.

We represent virtually all of Canada's major business sectors, and all marketing disciplines, channels and technologies. Our Consumer Centre helps Canadians better understand their rights and obligations.

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Begin the GEO journey.

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