



Playbook for Sustainable Brand Growth

The SEO & GEO guide



Inside, you'll find proven SEO tactics and a complete guide to GEO, optimisation for AI search engines. Not because it's fashionable. Because your customers are already using AI to find answers, and the brands that show up there are quietly building an advantage you can't buy with ads.

Here's What You're Getting

- What changed in SEO and how to adapt
- What GEO is and how to use it alongside SEO
- How to show up in ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google AI Overviews
- How to create content that builds authority, not just traffic
- Which technical fixes move the needle and which ones don't
- An action plan you can use immediately





The Real Reason Your SEO Keeps Underdelivering

Here's what we hear almost every week.

A company comes in, tells us they've already tried SEO. Hired an agency, paid for optimisation, published a load of content, and waited. A few months in, traffic nudged up. Looked promising. Then it stopped. And nobody could tell them why.

It wasn't a bad agency. It was the wrong approach entirely.

Most companies treat SEO like a project you tick off. Brief someone, get it done, move on. **But organic growth doesn't work like that.** It's a system. When it's built right, it compounds. When it isn't, every Google update tears down what took months to put up. You're back to square one and none the wiser.

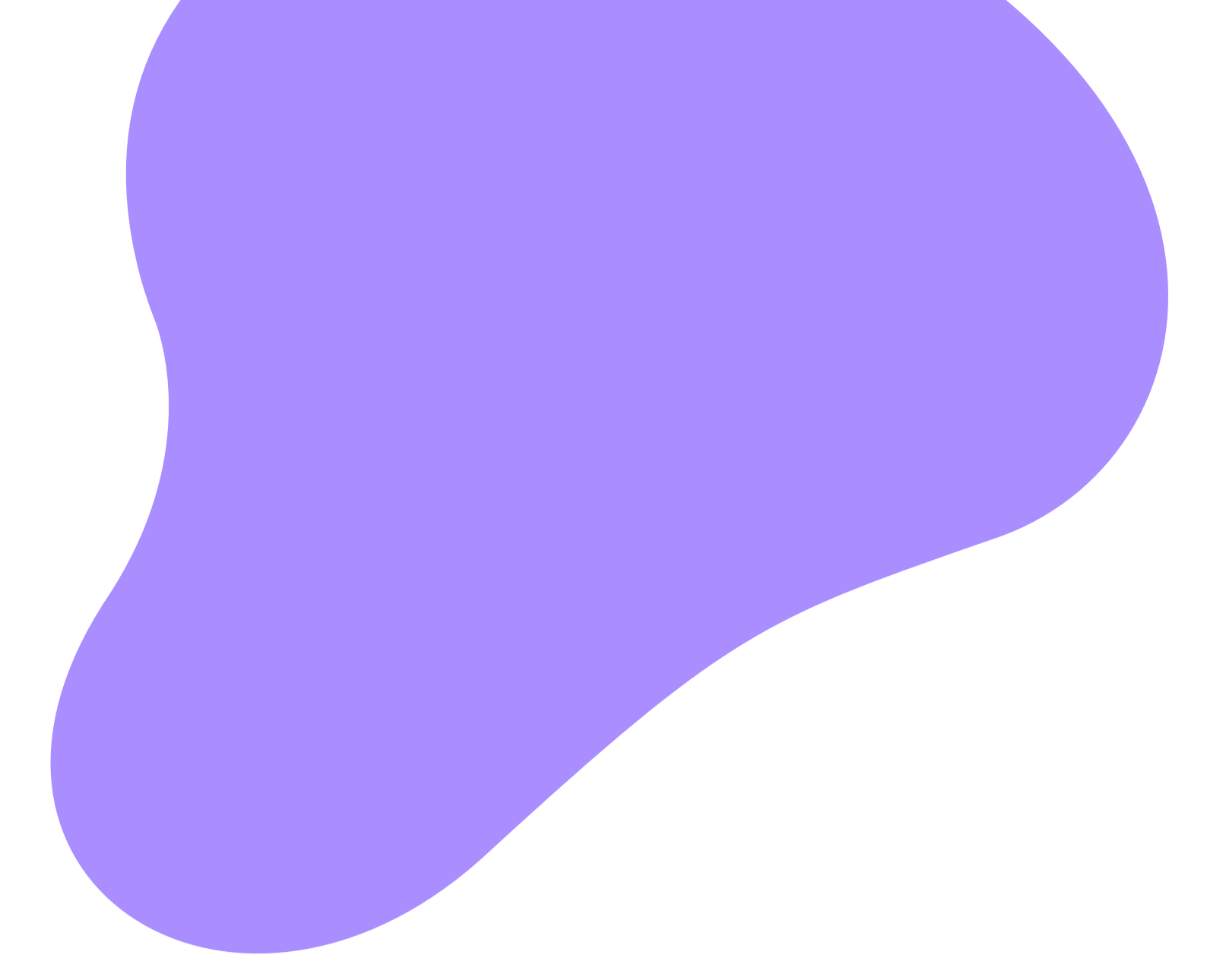
This is happening everywhere, constantly.

More than **96% of all web pages** receive zero organic traffic from Google. ([Ahrefs, 2024](#)).

The search landscape has changed more in the last two years than in any period before it. **Google's updates were brutal on low-value content.** Meanwhile, AI search, from ChatGPT to Google's own AI Overviews, started answering questions directly, no click needed. Companies with real authority and a genuine expert voice navigated that shift fine. Everyone else quietly haemorrhaged traffic and had no idea why.

Both of those shifts reward the same thing: **real expertise and consistency.** That's it. And it's buildable. We know because we've helped clients do exactly that, more than once, starting from zero.

This guide isn't SEO 101. You know the basics. What it is, is a practical framework for building organic visibility that actually holds, through algorithm updates, through the rise of AI search, through whatever comes next.



What Used to Work in SEO Is Now Actively Hurting You

If your organic traffic has stalled or dropped over the last two years, welcome to the club. And you probably didn't do anything wrong. Google changed the rules, and the companies that built their SEO on the old assumptions got hit hard.

This wasn't a tweak. The whole logic flipped.

What Google Started Penalising and Why

For years, the formula was simple: more content, more keywords, more backlinks, better rankings. Agencies sold monthly 'SEO packages' with a fixed number of articles and promises of growth. Companies paid, content went out, positions moved.

Then Google started penalising exactly that.

Between 2022 and 2024, Google rolled out a string of updates aimed directly at content built for search engines rather than real people. The result was brutal.

Thousands of websites that had spent years grinding out content lost up to **80% of their organic traffic overnight.**

Not because of technical mistakes. Because Google got smart enough to tell the difference between content that shows genuine expertise and content that just pretends to.

Old SEO vs. New SEO

Yesterday	Today
Writing for keywords	Google understands intent, not just words
More content = more traffic	Low-value content gets dropped from the index
Backlinks from anywhere	Source authority matters, not volume
Keyword density in copy	Context, depth, and real expertise
One page per keyword	Topical authority across the whole domain
Keyword-stuffed meta descriptions	Clickability and relevance to the user

E-E-A-T Isn't a Badge for Readers. It's a Signal for Google.

Google has no way to verify your expertise directly. So it looks for signals instead. A lot of them. Most companies are only aware of a fraction of them.

E-E-A-T stands for **Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness**. It's how Google decides whether your content is worth trusting. And it's not just reading your text. It's reading everything around it.

Three things matter most:

Who wrote it? Content with no author, or a generic 'admin' byline, doesn't reach page one anymore. The author needs to be a real person with a name, a visible face, and a track record people can actually check. Writing about tax advice? Someone whose LinkedIn confirms ten years in the field needs to sign that article. Not 'the team'. Not 'our experts'. A specific person.

Does it show experience or just awareness? Since 2022, Google has explicitly rewarded content written from first-hand experience. The difference is obvious. 'Experts recommend regular technical audits' is a generic filler, and Google knows it. 'During an audit for one of our clients, we found 340 broken links they'd had for two years without knowing' is an experience. One builds authority. The other doesn't.

Do others vouch for you? Backlinks still matter, but context is everything. One link from a credible industry publication is worth more than fifty from generic directories or 'partner sites' that exist purely to trade links. Google has gotten very good at telling the difference. Better than most SEO agencies give it credit for.



You're Ranking First. So, Why Is Your Traffic Dropping?

Here's something that will frustrate you. **You can be sitting at number one on Google and still be losing traffic.**

Not because your rankings dropped. Because Google answered the question before anyone clicked. AI Overviews, featured snippets, and knowledge panels exist for one reason: to keep users on Google. And it's working.

Searches that trigger AI Overviews have an **average zero-click rate of 83%**. Eight out of ten users get their answer without ever landing on a website. ([CLICKVISION Digital](#)).

Optimising for rankings alone isn't enough anymore. You need to optimise for presence.



How to make zero-click search work in your favour

If someone asks Google 'how long does SEO take' and Google's AI Overview answers using your content, that still counts. Your name just showed up for someone who had never heard of you. No click needed. That's the core logic behind GEO, which we cover properly in the next chapter.

Zero-click isn't just a problem. Companies that structure their content well enough for Google to surface it in its own answers are getting in front of people who weren't even looking for them yet. That kind of reach is very **hard to buy with ads**.

Brands cited in AI Overviews achieve **35% higher organic CTR** compared to brands that aren't. ([Deep Marketing](#)).



How to Create Content That Builds Authority

Content is the cheapest thing on the internet. Any tool writes it in minutes. Any agency delivers it in a day. Your competitors publish it every week. And most of it gets read by nobody.

But some content is different.

Google cites it. AI platforms pull from it. People share it and bring it up in meetings months later. Not because it was well-formatted or published on a schedule. Because real expertise sits behind it.

That's what this chapter is about. What that content looks like, and how to start producing it.

Here's the difference in practice:

Traffic content	Authority content	Why it works
'What is SEO?'	'Why our clients still aren't seeing SEO results after 6 months and what we changed'	Real experience
'5 tips for better email marketing'	'How we hit 38% open rates in a B2B campaign with a single email'	Specific result
'The benefits of marketing automation'	'The part of marketing automation most companies skip and what it ends up costing them'	Specific problem
'How to write a good blog post'	'Our internal formula for content that ranks and converts'	Proprietary system
'How to choose a marketing agency'	'7 questions to ask before you sign and the answers that should give you pause'	Clear point of view

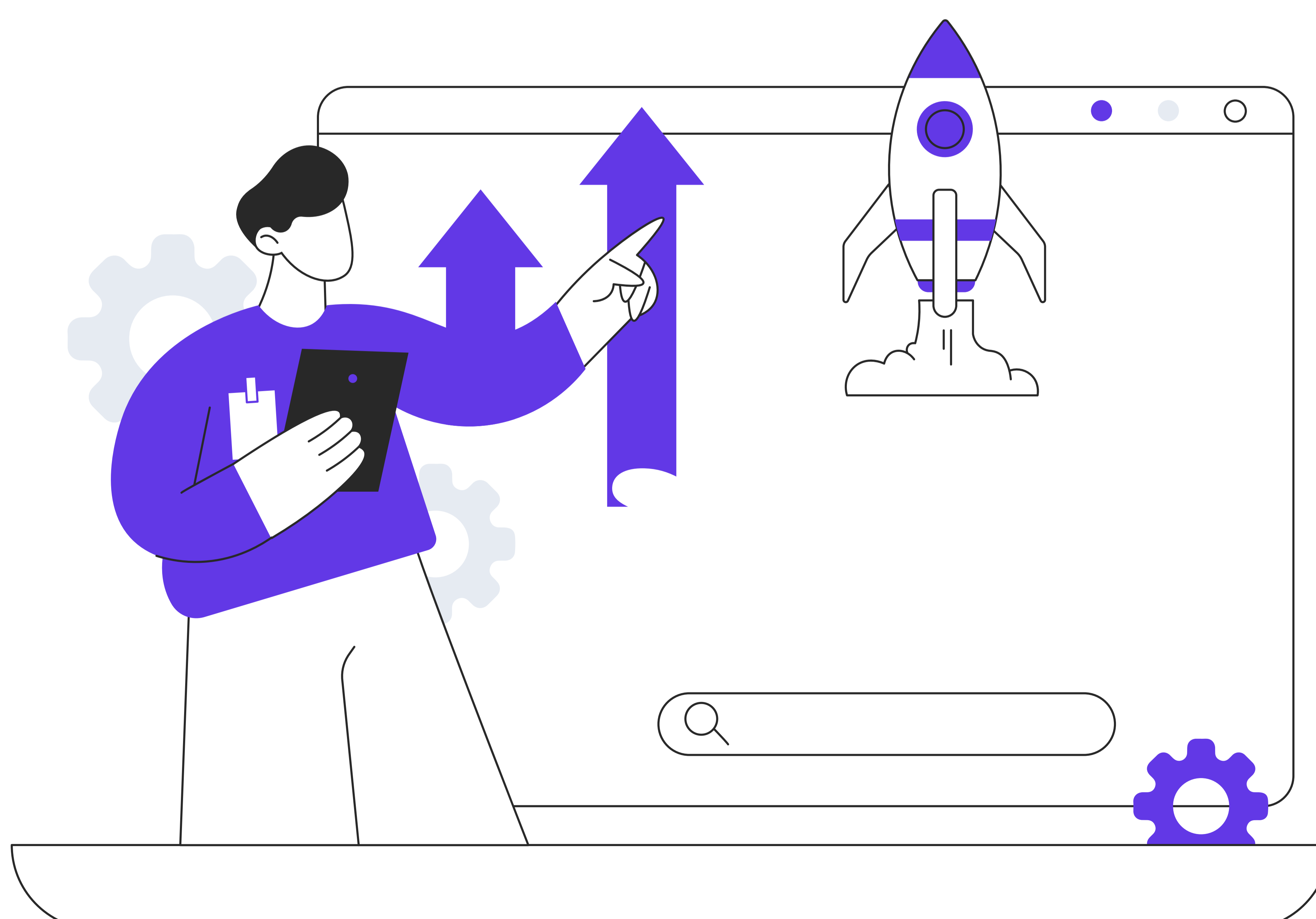
Run Every Piece of Content Through These 5 Questions

Before you write anything, run it through these five questions. Content that passes this filter has a much better shot at being treated as a credible source by Google and AI platforms.

- 1. Do I know this from experience or just from research?** First-hand experience shows in the writing. 'We tested this with a client and here's what happened' lands differently than 'studies suggest'. Google can tell. So can your readers.
- 2. Is this signed by a real person with a credible background in this field?** A named author with a visible track record gets treated differently by Google than a byline that says 'the marketing team'.
- 3. Does this answer what my audience is actually searching for?** Before you write, check Google Search Console. What you assume people are searching for and what they actually type are often not the same thing.

***Quick tip:** Filter 'Queries' by individual page and sort by 'Impressions'. High impressions with low clicks mean the content isn't matching the search intent.

- 4. Will someone know more after reading this than they did before?** If it could have been written by anyone with a basic understanding of the topic, it needs more depth and more of your actual experience.
- 5. Is this the best answer available on this topic right now?** Check what's on page one. If your content doesn't clearly offer more than what's already there, Google won't swap it out.



Building Topical Authority in the Real World

Google doesn't just evaluate individual articles. It evaluates how well your entire domain covers a subject. Depth on one topic beats volume across many.

That's topical authority. It's built through a **pillar/cluster structure**, and it's one of the most underused levers in SEO.

Example for an accounting firm

Pillar page (*your main, comprehensive page on the topic*)

'The Complete Guide to Tax Optimisation for UK Businesses'

Cluster articles (in-depth pieces that connect back to the pillar)

- Tax reliefs available for limited companies in 2026
- How to correctly handle VAT on services provided abroad
- Sole trader vs. limited company: the tax implications
- When registering for VAT actually makes financial sense

Every cluster article links to the pillar page and back. Google reads that interconnected structure as a signal that you genuinely own this topic, not just that you've published something about it once.

The minimum setup for topical authority

1 pillar page

One comprehensive page that covers the full topic end-to-end.

4+ cluster articles

Each covering a specific sub-question that your audience is actually searching for.

Internal links throughout

Cluster articles point to the pillar; the pillar points back. This is how Google maps your authority across a subject.

A named author with a verifiable background

Every article needs a real person behind it. Someone can Google it. Without that, the E-E-A-T signal is weak.

Expect first results after 2 to 3 months

Topical authority builds over time. It compounds, but only if you publish consistently.

Start with topics people are already searching for

Check Search Console before you write anything. Write what your audience is searching for, not what seems interesting to you.

Everything else in this guide, including GEO, depends on getting the content right first.



Getting Started With GEO Optimisation

Someone asks ChatGPT: 'Which digital marketing agency is good for SEO in the UK?' ChatGPT answers. Lists a few names. Yours isn't there.

That's not a minor gap. That's lost business.

GEO, Generative Engine Optimisation, is the practice of getting AI search engines to recognise your brand as a credible source and cite you in their answers. It's not about Google rankings. It's a completely different discipline.

Still not sure this applies to you? **In 2026, 55% of users already use AI as their primary search tool.** Your customers are already there.

Let that sink in for a second.

Here's how SEO and GEO compare:

	SEO	GEO
Goal	High position in Google results	Being mentioned and cited in AI answers
How it works	Google indexes and ranks pages	AI summarises content and cites sources
What matters	Backlinks, technical foundation, and content relevance	Authority, structure, and clarity of answers
How you measure it	Rankings, organic traffic, CTR	AI mentions, branded search, AI traffic
Timeframe	Weeks to months	Months, depending on domain authority

Does GEO replace SEO? Not even close. They complement each other. Good SEO lays the groundwork for GEO, and GEO builds on what SEO starts.





Your Five-minute GEO Visibility Check

Before you optimise anything, find out where you actually stand. It takes five minutes.

1. Open ChatGPT or Perplexity
2. Type in a question your target audience would actually ask
3. See whether your brand appears in the answer
4. Check whether what it says about you is accurate
5. Repeat with at least ten different questions

Write down which questions mention you and which don't. That's your **GEO gap**.

In 2026, you're not fighting for page one. You're fighting to be the brand AI recommends.

How to Start Showing Up in AI Search Results

Check your content structure

Open your most important page right now. Does it have clear headings, short paragraphs, direct answers, and a FAQ section with questions your customers actually search for? If not, that's where you start.

Add schema markup

Hand this to a developer and get it done. FAQ schema on your blog, Author markup on every article, HowTo schema on guide pages. Check the result with Google Rich Results Test. This is one of the most direct signals you can send to AI platforms.

Sign your content properly

Pull up your last five published articles. How many have a named author, a photo, and a two-line bio? ChatGPT and Perplexity actively look for real experts behind content. Anonymous posts don't cut it.

Get mentioned in relevant publications

One guest column or one quoted comment in a credible industry publication does more for your GEO visibility than a month of blog posts. AI learns from what gets cited across the web. Start there.

Keep your content current

Go through your ten most important pages and check the last update date. Anything older than a year needs refreshing with new data. AI platforms favour fresh content, and the difference between an updated page and a stale one shows up in citations.

How to measure your GEO progress

Metric	What it measures	Tool
AI mentions	How often AI platforms cite your brand	Manual testing or Perplexity
Branded search volume	Whether people are searching for you by name	Google Search Console
AI traffic	Visits from AI platforms (needs additional GA4 setup or manual tracking)	Google Analytics 4
Presence in AI Overviews	How often you show up in Google's AI summaries	Google Search Console

GEO doesn't replace SEO. It builds on it. And ignoring it is getting more expensive by the month. Luka Lavriša, our advanced SEO specialist, puts it bluntly:

'Good SEO already covers more than two-thirds of GEO on its own. But that remaining third is exactly where your competitors are building their advantage right now.'





How to Audit Your Technical SEO and Track the Right Results

Technical SEO is full of activity that **looks productive and changes nothing.**

Long reports, hundreds of line items, a to-do list that keeps growing. Rankings don't move. Nobody can explain why. Sound familiar?

What we see at almost every site we audit is the same pattern. Not a hundred real problems. A handful that actually matter, and a long list of minor issues added to make the report look like it justified the fee.

Four Technical Factors Google Explicitly Confirms as Ranking Signals

1. Core Web Vitals are the only technical metric Google explicitly confirms as a ranking factor. Not PageSpeed score. Not the number of pages in your sitemap. Core Web Vitals, LCP, CLS, and INP, are what Google actually measures and acts on. Everything else is correlation, not causation.

Red or orange Core Web Vitals on mobile means you have a problem directly affecting your rankings. A PageSpeed score of 67 with green Core Web Vitals means you don't. Simple as that.

2. 'Crawled but not indexed' is the most common problem nobody mentions. At most sites we audit, we find pages Google has seen but chosen not to index. The reason is almost always the same: no real value. Duplicate pages, empty category pages, old campaign landing pages sitting around. Google reads them, decides they're not worth indexing, and moves on. Those pages don't just hurt themselves. They drag down the authority of your entire domain.

3. Redirect chains are quietly reducing your link equity. Every redirect pointing to another redirect loses a portion of the link value passing through it. If you've ever migrated, redesigned, or changed your URL structure, there's a strong chance you have redirect chains somewhere undermining your most important pages. Run a crawl in Screaming Frog, filter by 'Redirect Chains', and see for yourself.

4. Internal links are one of the most underused ranking signals in SEO. Most companies treat them as navigation. Google reads them as votes of importance. A page with strong internal links using descriptive anchor text carries significantly more weight than one sitting in isolation. Every time you publish something new, ask: which existing pages should link here, and where should this page link back to?

With every new post, ask yourself one question: which existing pages can I link this content to, and vice versa?



A Technical SEO Audit With Just Three Tools

Google Search Console

Open it once a week. Ten minutes on the 'Coverage' report for indexing errors and 'Core Web Vitals' for technical health. Check 'Search results' once a month to track how rankings and CTR are moving. That's it.

PageSpeed Insights

Don't use it to chase a high score. Use it to diagnose. The only section that matters is Core Web Vitals under 'Field data'. Real data from real users. Not a lab simulation that bears no resemblance to how your site actually performs.

Screaming Frog

Once a quarter is plenty. You're looking for redirect chains and broken links. Both directly reduce your domain's authority, and both are easy to miss without a crawl. Look through the rest of the report, but don't waste time fixing things that won't move rankings.

How to Present SEO Performance to Leadership in Two Minutes

Most SEO reports are too technical for leadership and not concrete enough for the marketing team. Neither group gets what they need. A good report answers one question:

Is our SEO investment generating measurable business results?

Metric	Why leadership cares
Organic traffic	Traffic growth without additional ad spend
Conversions from organic traffic	The ROI of SEO in actual numbers
Traffic value	What the same traffic would cost in paid ads (*Ahrefs calculates this automatically, but it's a paid tool)
Branded search volume	Whether SEO is building brand recognition
Keyword rankings	Visibility with people actively searching for what you sell

One reporting tip: calculate your traffic value. It's the cost equivalent of your organic traffic if you were buying it through Google Ads. Ahrefs pulls this for any domain automatically, but it's a paid tool. Google Search Console is free and gives you clicks and average positions, which is enough to build a rough estimate yourself. When you show leadership that your organic traffic is worth €15,000 a month in ad spend equivalent, SEO stops being a cost centre and starts being a business case.



Your Action Plan for Sustainable SEO and GEO Growth

Not every action on this list deserves equal time. Some deliver results fast without much effort. Others take longer, but skip them, and sustainable growth won't happen.

Use this matrix to prioritise:

	Fast impact	Slower but lasting impact
Easy to implement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Signed content with author and LinkedIn• Schema markup on key pages• Google Search Console review and error fixes• FAQ section on key pages <p>Do these first. Low effort, fast results within weeks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular updates to existing content• Internal links between relevant pages• Monthly GEO monitoring in ChatGPT and Perplexity <p>Regular maintenance. Not urgent, but consistently skipping these will cost you.</p>
Harder to implement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Core Web Vitals fixes on mobile• PR mention in a relevant publication• GEO audit <p>Needs more work or outside support, but delivers fast results when executed properly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pillar/cluster content structure• Topical authority in your chosen area• Traffic value reporting for leadership <p>Long-term strategy. Slow to build, but everything else depends on it.</p>

At Madwise, we believe sharing knowledge is the most honest form of marketing. This guide was written in that spirit.

Now go make it happen!



Ready to Build Organic Visibility That Lasts?

Most companies that come to us have already tried SEO. Some have tried it more than once. The situation is usually some version of the same thing.

See if any of this sounds familiar:

- Your website exists, organic traffic is flat or falling, and nobody can tell you why.
- Competitors are outranking you on Google despite having a weaker offer.
- You don't have the time or the in-house capacity to do SEO and GEO properly.
- All search engines aren't mentioning you while your competitors are already there.
- Leadership wants results, and you don't have the numbers to show them.

If you've read this far, you know what to do. If you want a team with the experience to actually get this done, we're here. Send us a message and let's talk over coffee.

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Your Notes and Findings

