

The **AI**
Visibility
Imperative
for
Generic OTC
Companies

*A Strategic Framework for
Answer Engine Optimization (AEO)*



Abstract

Answer engines (Google AI Overviews/AI Mode, ChatGPT, Perplexity) and community platforms (Reddit, YouTube, TikTok) have fundamentally changed how consumers discover and evaluate OTC brands. Informational queries that trigger Google's AI Overviews have seen steep declines in organic and paid CTRs, shifting the marketing success metric from clicks to citations inside AI answers. Meanwhile, nearly 60% of U.S. Google searches end without a click to the open web, further compressing traditional funnels. This white paper defines Answer Engine Optimization (AEO), presents an Agilisium AEO Framework and Maturity Model, and offers a 90-day pilot plan with KPIs that tie to retailer PDP conversion and safety completeness-making OTC the ideal proving ground for next-generation discovery and trust.

Executive Summary

The U.S. OTC market remains large and resilient, but the path to consumer decision is no longer a sequence of clicks - it's a synthesized answer validated by communities. Where Google's AI Overviews appear, organic CTR declines by ~61% and paid CTR by ~65% for informational queries, making brand citations within AI answers a critical KPI. At the same time, nearly 58.5% of U.S. searches end without a click to any website, indicating that influence increasingly happens before a click. Brands must therefore optimize to be named and trusted inside AI answers and backed by authentic community validation.

OTC is the ideal proving ground for AEO: U.S. market size estimates range (e.g., \$52.8B in 2024 per Global Market Insights) due to differing definitions, and digital now accounts for roughly half of OTC advertising, with TV still material for reach - conditions that enable measurable AEO pilots tied to retail outcomes. Meanwhile, OTC availability delivers \$146B+ in annual U.S. healthcare savings, reinforcing the public-health value of safety-first educational answers presented directly in AI experiences.



Agilisium POV: We recommend a 90-day AEO pilot in a priority OTC category (e.g., Allergy, Pain, Digestive, Sleep) anchored in an AEO framework, MLR-approved answer blocks, and a community plan - with success measured by AI Citation Share, Safety Completeness, and retailer PDP conversion.

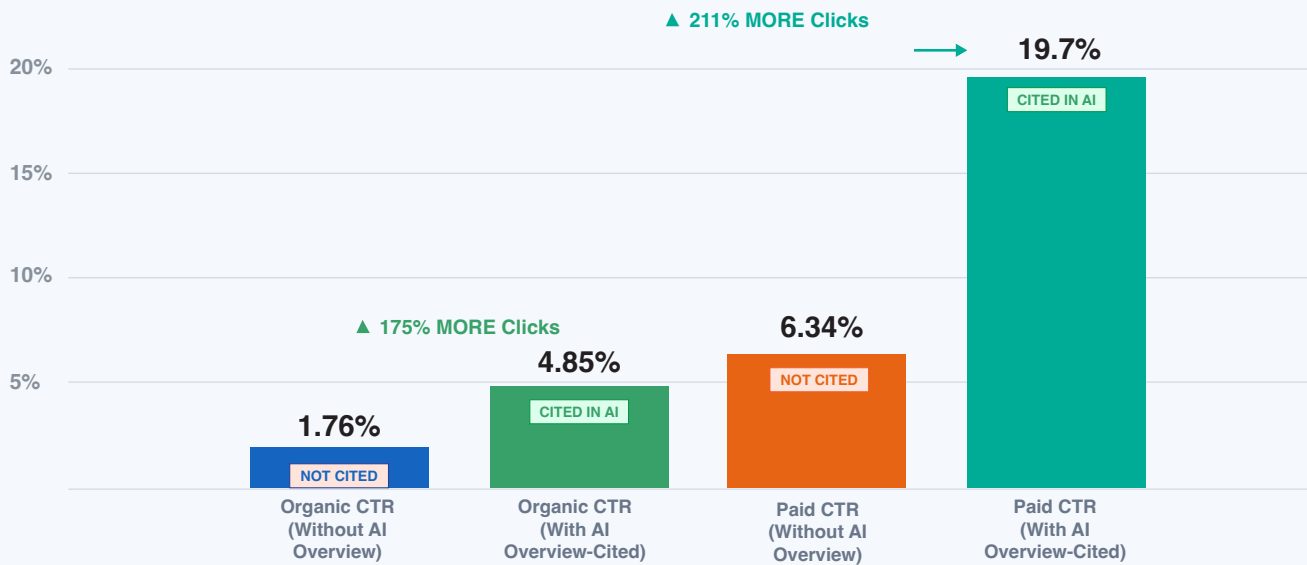
1. The New Discovery Reality for OTC

1.1 Answer Engines Compress Clicks and Flatten Brands

Google AI Overviews fundamentally reduce click opportunity. Across 3,119 informational queries (25.1M organic impressions), organic CTR fell ~61% (1.76% -> 0.61%) and paid CTR fell ~68% (19.7% -> 6.34%) when AI Overviews were present. Brands cited in AI Overviews earned significantly more clicks than those not cited-confirming that citation presence is the new “position zero.”

Impact of Google AI Overviews on Click-Through Rates

Informational Queries | 3,119 Queries | 25.1M Organic Impressions



Source: Seer Interactive dataset, Search Engine Land, Nov 2025 | Cited brands in AI Overviews vs. non-cited brands

- Citation presence = 'Position Zero.' Brands NOT cited in AI Overviews become effectively invisible for high-intent informational queries, regardless of paid spend.

1.2 Zero-Click Is the Norm

58.5% of U.S. Google searches (and 59.7% in the EU) now end without a click to the open web, while only ~36% of U.S. clicks reach the open web-making “traffic” an incomplete proxy for market presence in a zero-click world.

1.3 Community Validation Outweighs Broadcast Messaging

Consumers increasingly append “Reddit” to Google searches-an estimated 32B times in 2023-to find answers from real people. Reddit’s 2024 research highlights continuous recommendation-seeking behavior and indicates that users view Reddit conversations as more informative than those on other social platforms.

Platforms Influencing OTC Decisions

Generative AI & Answer Engines

Platforms like ChatGPT and Perplexity are increasingly the trusted guides for consumers making healthcare decisions.



Community & Social Trust

Platforms like Reddit have become the new frontier for health conversations, where two users ask for recommendations every second.



Retail & Marketplace

E-commerce platforms influence final purchase decisions through reviews, Q&A sections, and AI-generated summaries.



The Collapse of Brand Differentiation

A direct consequence of AI's preference for clarity and safety is the collapse of brand differentiation in generated responses. When an AI summarizes OTC pain relievers, it presents Tylenol, Advil, and Aleve as functionally similar choices, flattening carefully crafted brand narratives into simple utilitarian summaries.

The LiveWorld study highlighted that even popular brands fell short in AI reputation scores when their digital signals were fragmented or outdated.

2. Why AEO Is Different and Urgent

AEO (Answer Engine Optimization) is the practice of making your content and signals easy for AI-powered systems to find, trust, and cite, so your brand appears by name inside AI-generated answers - not only in traditional results. It complements SEO by prioritizing answer-readiness over rank-and-click.

Dimension	SEO	AEO
Primary Goal	Rank in SERPs → earn clicks	Earn citations in AI answers → brand named
Key Signals	Keywords, backlinks, page authority	E-E-A-T, schema, consistency, direct answers
Primary Metric	Organic traffic, keyword rank	AI Citation Share, Safety Completeness, PDP conversion
Content Format	Long-form, keyword-dense pages	Answer blocks ≤120 words + expanded sections
Geographic scope	Your domain / owned properties	Distributed footprint - PDPs, media, communities

How answer engines select sources:

They interpret the question, retrieve reputable evidence, privilege clarity and safety, and select structured, consistent, and verifiable information they can confidently attribute - especially for health.

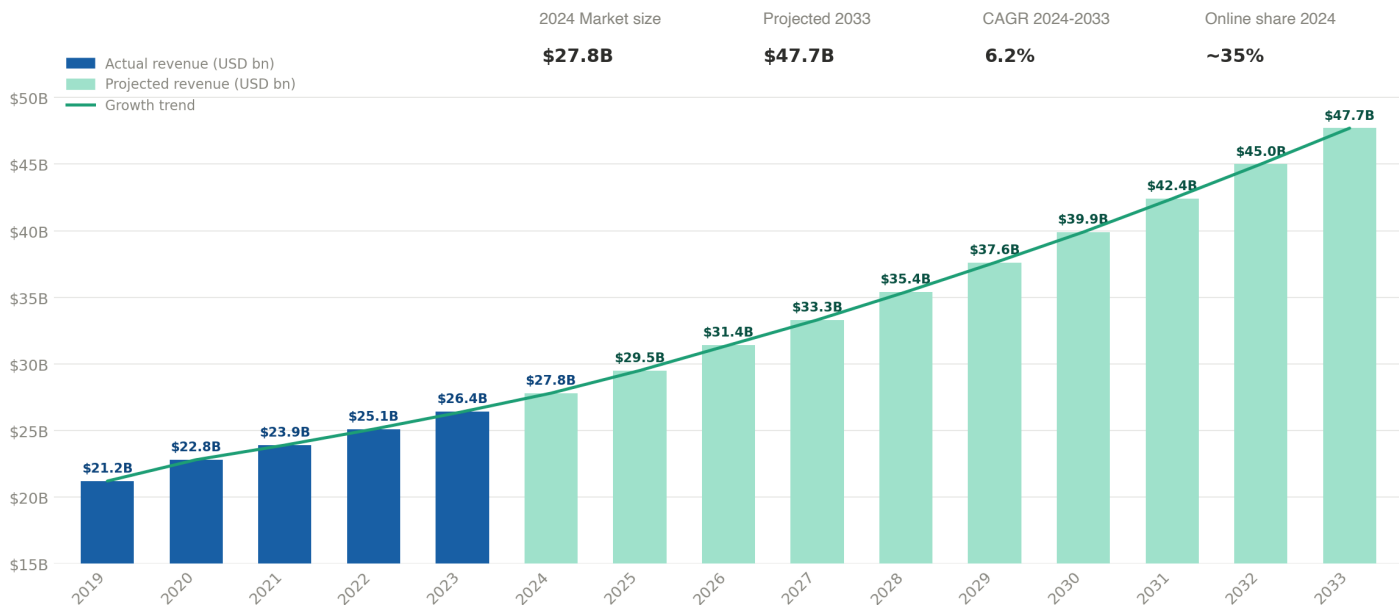
Key differences vs. SEO:

- Goal: Earn citations/mentions in AI answers (AEO) vs. ranking in SERPs (SEO).
- Signals: Direct answers, schema, EEAT, consistency across owned and retail PDPs, and originality (data/expert reviewers).
- Metrics: AI Citation Share, Safety Completeness, platform share of voice, and PDP conversion are superior leading indicators to CTR in an answer led journey.

US OTC Market Size & Economics: A Foundation for Strategy

Market Valuation and Growth Projections

U.S. OTC Drugs Market - Revenue & Projections (2019-2033)



Sources: Market Data Forecast (2025), Statista Market Insights (2024-25), Precedence Research (2026). U.S. OTC drugs market; narrower definition excludes vitamins/supplements. Projections at 6.2% CAGR.

Reconciling Market Size Estimates

Global Market Insights (2024)	\$52.8B
IQVIA OTC/OTX (2024)	\$16.9B
Discrepancy reflects different market definitions	

Growth Projections (2025-2034)

Global Market Insights CAGR	5.2%
Projected to reach by 2034	\$86.3B
IQVIA projects more modest	2.8% CAGR

Key Growth Drivers

- ↑ Rising consumer awareness of self-medication
- 💰 High cost of prescription drugs pushing OTC alternatives
- 🛒 Expansion of e-commerce and e-pharmacy platforms
- 🌿 Favorable FDA regulatory support for new OTC approvals

The Economic Value of OTC Medicines

\$167.1B

Annual Healthcare System Savings

\$110.3B

Clinical Visit Avoidance
65% of total savings

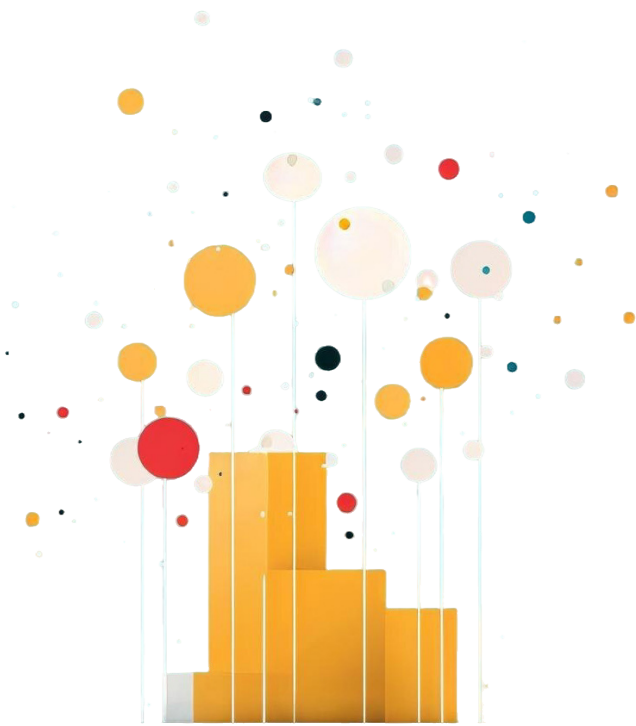
\$56.8B

Drug Cost Savings
35% of total savings

Every dollar spent on OTC medicines creates a ripple effect of value, saving the broader healthcare system an average of \$7.33.

OTC Advertising & Digital Spend: The Shift to a Digital-First Model

Total Advertising Investment



Global OTC Advertising Spend

2021 Actual	\$20.1B
2023 Projected	\$22.7B
Growth vs 2019	+36%

Estimated US Market Share

Annual US OTC Advertising	\$6-9B
~30-40% of global total	

Strategic Rationale

OTC brands invest heavily in advertising to differentiate in crowded marketplaces, educate consumers, and drive point-of-purchase decisions. The growth reflects increasing media complexity and fragmentation.

Projected growth rates:
7.6% (2022), 5.0% (2023)

The Evolving Media Mix

Television Declining Dominance

2021 TV Share (OTC)	38%
vs All Categories	21%
Projected Growth	3%/yr

TV remains important but declining as digital channels grow

Digital Channels Rising

Digital Growth Rate	11%/yr
2023 Share Projection	49%
vs TV Growth	3x faster

Digital offers targeting precision and performance measurement

🔍 Impact of Google Search and Zero-Click Results

Declining Click-Through Rates

Google's AI Overviews and zero-click features lead to significant CTR declines as users get direct answers without visiting websites.

Strategic Response Required

Brands must shift focus from driving website traffic to influencing AI-generated answers through Answer Engine Optimization (AEO).

- Create AI-friendly structured content
- Build authority across multiple platforms
- Focus on being cited in AI answers

3. The Agilisium AEO Framework (How to Win Answers)

The framework is organized into six interdependent pillars. Together they ensure that AI systems can find, trust, attribute, and cite your brand content across owned properties, retail PDPs, and community platforms.



3.1 Content Clarity (Answer-First)

Build MLR-approved answer blocks for top questions-indications, usage, contraindications, interactions, and when to see an HCP-in ≤ 120 words with an expanded section below. This mirrors how answer engines extract and summarize.

3.2 Structure & Schema

Use FAQPage for top questions, Product/Drug schema as appropriate, plus tables for dosing and checklists for use/don't use. Keep metadata consistent across your .com, retailer PDPs, and PDFs to avoid conflicting signals.

3.3 Authority (EEAT)

Make authorship and medical reviewers visible, cite reputable sources, and keep safety language aligned across all surfaces-improves trust and reduces hallucinations.

3.4 Distributed Footprint

Ensure the same facts live beyond your site: retailer PDPs, reputable media/education placements, and community AMAs-answer engines cite across the web, not just owned properties.

3.5 Community Strategy (Reddit, YouTube, TikTok)

Host verified expert Reddit AMAs; equip creators with safety-first scripts; disclose sponsorship; create escalation paths for misinformation. Consumers increasingly turn to Reddit for authentic recommendations.

3.6 Measurement & Governance

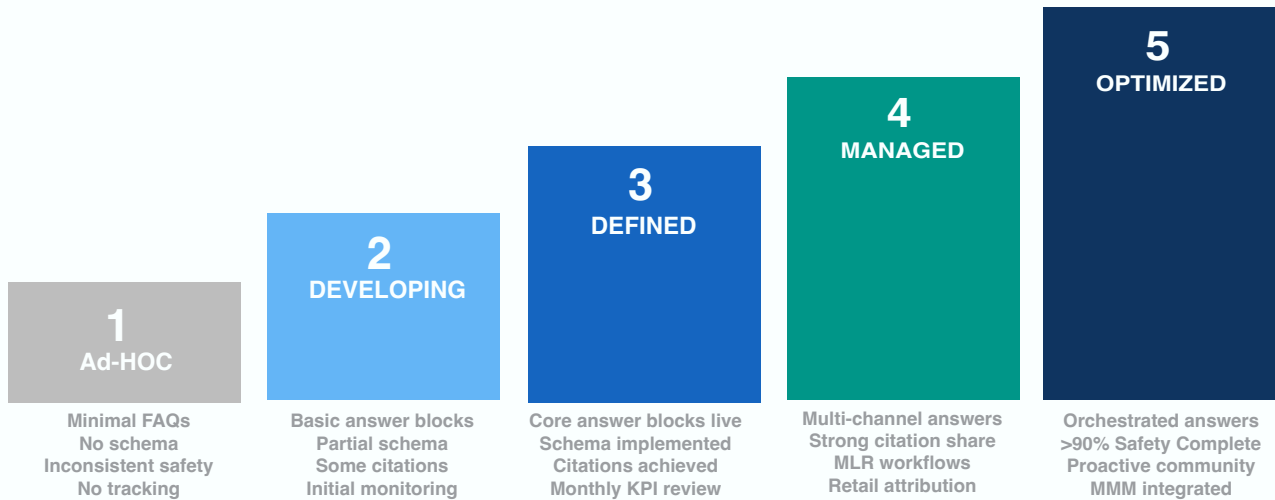
Track AI Citation Share, platform SoV, and Safety Completeness; tie to PDP conversion and review sentiment. Run monthly MLR calibration and quarterly risk audits; treat answer blocks as controlled content.

4. AEO Readiness Maturity Model

Dimensions: Content clarity | Schema & structure | EEAT | Citation footprint | Community presence | Risk & MedLegal | Measurement.

AEO Readiness Maturity Model

Five Levels from Ad-Hoc to Orchestrated Excellence



Maturity Level	Description
Level 1 - Ad-Hoc	Minimal FAQs; no schema; inconsistent safety language; no KPI tracking
Level 2 - Developing	Basic answer blocks started; partial schema; some citations emerging
Level 3 - Defined	Core answer blocks live; schema implemented; initial citations achieved; monthly KPI review
Level 4 - Managed	Multi-channel answers; strong AI Citation Share; MLR workflows in place; retail attribution
Level 5 - Optimized	Orchestrated answers across all channels; ≥90% Safety Completeness; proactive community leadership; MMM integrated

POV: Most OTC portfolios sit at Level 2-3.

Fastest lifts come from:

- (a) deploying answer blocks,
- (b) harmonizing retailer PDPs,
- (c) community activations.

5. 90-Day Pilot (One OTC Category) - Plan & KPIs

The 90-day pilot is structured around one priority OTC category (Allergy, Pain, Digestive, or Sleep) with four sequential phases. Each phase builds on the previous, culminating in a full attribution report tied to retailer PDP conversion and AI Citation Share.

90-Day AEO Roadmap

one Priority OTC Category | From Baseline to Attribution

1	Weeks 1-2 BASELINE & DESIGN	2	Weeks 3-6 PUBLISH & HARMONIZE	3	Weeks 7-10 COMMUNITY ACTIVATION	4	Weeks 11-13 OPTIMIZE & ATTRIBUTE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Select 25 high-volume queriesBenchmark AI enginesSet citation targetsDefine KPIs		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Launch answer-first contentImplement schema markupHarmonize retailer PDPsClinician-reviewed explainers		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Reddit AMA with expertsYouTube shorts educationTikTok safety scriptsListening + escalation		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Re-benchmark all enginesClose safety gapsMeasure PDP conversionAI citation share report

TARGET KPIs: +25-50% AI Citation Share >=90% Safety Completeness +10-20% PDP Conversion

Weeks 1-2 : Baseline & Design

- Select 25 high-volume questions (symptom/condition/category “best for” queries).
- Benchmark Google AI Overviews/AI Mode, ChatGPT, Perplexity for brand citations, position, and safety coverage using no scrape, reproducible prompts.
- Set targets: +25-50% AI Citation Share, ≥90% Safety Completeness, +10-20% PDP conversion on optimized SKUs.

Weeks 3-6 - Publish & Harmonize

- Launch answer-first content with schema; harmonize retailer PDP facts (indications, dosing, safety).
- Publish clinician-reviewed explainers and short video answers (transcripts help extraction).

Weeks 7-10 : Community Activation

- Host a Reddit AMA with verified experts; seed YouTube Shorts/TikTok education with safety-forward scripts; enable listening + escalation.

Weeks 11-13 : Optimize & Attribute

- Rebenchmark; close safety gaps; refine answer blocks.
- Attribute impact via PDP conversion, share of search, and AI Citation Share.

6. Category Playbooks

Each playbook follows the same template: top questions to answer, required safety inclusions, schema & structure, and community notes. Always align with label and MLR.

6.1 Allergy Relief

- **Top queries:** “best OTC for pollen allergies”, “non-drowsy allergy relief”, “allergy med safe with [condition]”.
- **Answer block:** Indication; drowsiness profile; interactions; duration; when to see an HCP.
- **Structure:** FAQ + comparison table (classes & onset).
- **Community:** Pre-season AMAs; creator explainers on antihistamines vs. nasal corticosteroids (safety emphasis).

6.2 Pain Relief

- **Top queries:** “tension headache medicine”, “ibuprofen vs acetaminophen”, “gentle on stomach pain relief”.
- **Answer block:** Use by pain type; dosing; stomach/bleeding cautions; not for prolonged use without HCP.
- **Community:** Short videos clarifying when each class is appropriate; do not combine cautions.

6.3 Digestive Health

- **Top queries:** “fast heartburn relief OTC”, “antacid vs H2 vs PPI”, “antidiarrheal safe for elderly”.
- **Answer block:** Relief ladder; red flags; duration limits; interactions.
- **Community:** Q&As on lifestyle triggers + proper OTC selection.

6.4 Sleep Aids (Occasional)

- **Top queries:** “OTC sleep aid safe for older adults”, “non-habit-forming”, “how long can I take [ingredient]”.
- **Answer block:** Indication for occasional use; duration guidance; daytime drowsiness; contraindications.
- **Community:** Sleep hygiene education; stress occasional use and when to see an HCP.

7. Community Strategy (Reddit, YouTube, TikTok)

Consumers frequently seek recommendations on Reddit and perceive conversations there as highly informative; to find answers from real people - a trend reflected in Reddit's 1,328% Google search visibility surge to obtain real people answers. Approach with education, transparency, and safety.

Channel	Recommended Tactics
Reddit	Verified-expert AMAs; collaborate with moderators; disclose affiliation; focus on education/safety (no diagnosis, no off-label)
YouTube	Clinician-approved education scripts; on-screen safety checklists; links to answer-first landing pages; transcripts aid AI extraction
TikTok	Pre-approved short-form scripts; safety-forward framing; sponsorship disclosure; escalation path for misinformation
Social Listening	MLR escalation protocol for misinformation; monthly AI output monitoring; brand safety index tracking

8. Measurement & Governance

Primary KPIs

- AI Citation Share (by engine & query set).
- Platform SoV (presence in AI answers vs. competitors).
- Safety Completeness (% of answers with appropriate warnings/premises).

Secondary KPIs

- Retailer PDP conversion, review sentiment, direct search lift on brand terms.

Governance

Frequency	Activity
Weekly	AI Citation Share and Safety Completeness trend review
Monthly	MLR calibration of answer blocks; AI output monitoring
Quarterly	Risk audit of AI-visible content; consistency check across .com, PDPs, PDFs; strategy review
Annual	Full AEO Citation Scorecard across brands; MMM integration assessment

9. Regulatory Context & Enablers

The FDA's Additional Condition for Nonprescription Use (ACNU) final rule (effective May 27, 2025) broadens the path for certain Rx products to obtain nonprescription status under managed conditions, signaling a future with more consumer-enabled self-care and higher demand for digital education. While implementing AEO for current OTCs, monitor ACNU as a catalyst for category expansion.

10. Implementation Roadmap

Phase	Scope & Deliverables
Phase 1: Prove (0-90 days)	Baseline benchmark (25 queries x 3 engines); publish answer-first content & schema; harmonize PDPs; 1 AMA + creator series; report AI Citation Share, Safety Completeness, PDP conversion
Phase 2: Scale (Q2-Q3)	Expand to 75-100 questions; deepen category coverage; extend retailer harmonization; add language variants as needed; second community AMA cycle
Phase 3: Institutionalize (Q4+)	Embed AEO in content ops & MLR workflows; conduct quarterly AI risk reviews; integrate with MMM/retail media; formalize AEO Citation Scorecard across brands

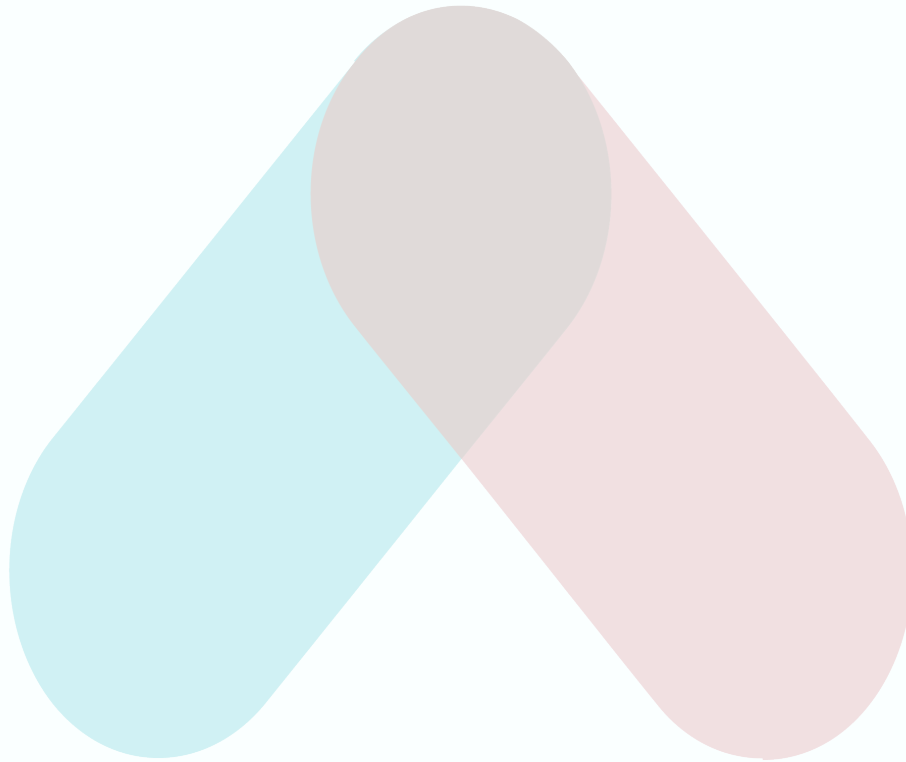
11. Agilisium POV: What “Good” Looks Like in 180 Days

- ✓ Consistent citations across ≥50% of priority queries in Google AI Overviews and at least one other engine.
- ✓ ≥90% Safety Completeness of AI answers aligned with label language.
- ✓ Harmonized PDPs + answer-first content deliver +10-20% PDP conversion on optimized SKUs.
- ✓ Community mentions reflect positive clarity/safety sentiment.
- ✓ AMAs and short-form education operating on a quarterly cadence.
- ✓ AEO Citation Scorecard embedded in monthly brand health reporting.

Data Notes and Source References

All primary data points in this white paper have been verified against original sources. Key references are listed below for reader verification.

Data Point	Scope & Deliverables
Organic CTR decline 61% / Paid CTR decline 65%	Seer Interactive, 'AIO Impact on Google CTR: September 2025 Update', published November 2025. Dataset: 3,119 queries, 42 organisations, 25.1M organic impressions, June 2024–September 2025.
58.5% zero-click U.S. searches / 59.7% EU	SparkToro / Datos Zero-Click Search Study, Rand Fishkin, 2024.
Reddit search visibility +1,328%	Sistrix data cited by Amsive, July 2023-April 2024.
OTC healthcare savings \$167B+ annually	CHPA / IRI Value of OTC Medicines Study, December 2022. (Earlier 2019 edition: \$146B.) Each dollar spent saves \$7.33 on average.
U.S. OTC market size \$52.8B (2024)	Global Market Insights (broader definition including diagnostics and devices). Narrower drug-only estimates: Statista ~\$27.8B; IQVIA OTC/OTX ~\$16.9B. Discrepancy reflects scope differences.
Global OTC ad spend \$20.1B (2021), \$22.7B (2023)	Zenith / Publicis Groupe OTC Healthcare Business Intelligence Report, March 2022.
TV share 38% vs 21% all categories; digital 11%/yr growth	Same Zenith report.
Reddit AI citation share 44% of social media citations in Google AI Overviews	Tinuiti Q1 2026 AI Citations Trends Report.



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About Agilisium

Agilisium is Life Sciences industry's premier AI-powered Data Innovation partner. Agilisium collaborates with leading pharmaceutical, biotech and medical devices companies to provide data-driven insights and innovative solutions across the value chain accelerating scientific innovation, improving patient outcomes, and enhancing access to affordable care. The company delivers cutting-edge solutions that drive impactful change by combining our strong domain expertise with Data, Cloud, Agentic AI, and Advanced Analytics.

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