Webflow

The AEO playbook: How to optimize for AI-driven discovery

A practical framework to win in AI search

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The evolution from search to answers

AI is reshaping how people discover, evaluate, and choose brands. A recent Forrester study found that 95% of B2B buyers plan to use generative AI in their buying process this year, underscoring just how quickly AI is transforming customer behavior, especially when it comes to search.

Instead of typing short, keyword-driven queries, consumers now ask full questions — engaging in conversations that demand context, authority, and clear answers. SEMrush projects that AI search will surpass traditional search in just three years and Bain found that SEO traffic has dropped 15-25% across the board.

And marketers have taken notice.

In a recent Webflow study, 93% of marketing leaders said that Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) will be critical to their company's success in the next two years, yet only 25% of marketing practitioners fully understand what AEO is, illustrating a huge disconnect.

Why it's time to make the shift

Where traditional SEO focuses on ranking for keywords, AEO is about ensuring your brand delivers complete, credible, and structured answers that AI can understand and surface. But that puts new pressure on marketers to rethink their entire content and search strategies while maintaining their brand voice.

With AI interpreting your narrative and rephrasing it to answer search queries, brands risk being lost in a sea of sameness — where differentiation fades and narratives are diluted. That's why it's never been more critical to actively own your brand's narrative and ensure the work you've invested in differentiation is reflected in the AI summaries and overviews that answer engines deliver. Without that effort, years of brand-building risk being flattened into generic, interchangeable responses — or worse, distorted and misrepresented in ways that undermine your brand's credibility.

The potential upside for brands taking early action is huge. On webflow.com, simply increasing the pace of content refreshes **drove 42% more traffic — and 14% more signups — in under two months**.

This ebook provides an actionable framework to help teams navigate the evolution from SEO to AEO. The four categories of our AEO Maturity Model — content, technical, authority, and measurement — each play a vital role in determining how your brand shows up in AI search. In the following sections, you'll find detailed overviews of each category and clear guidance to help your team move toward the leading edge of AEO maturity.

Building consistency across these categories is what enables brands to strengthen visibility, protect their narrative, and ensure they're represented accurately in AI-driven discovery.

The AEO Maturity Model

As AI answer engines redefine how brands are discovered, marketers need a new framework for staying visible and credible. Webflow's *AEO Maturity Model* was built to help teams clearly assess their current standings and identify the steps required to stay competitive in an AI-first search landscape.

Grounded in research on how large language models surface and summarize brand information, the model organizes AEO progress across four key categories — **content, technical, authority, and measurement** — each representing a critical category of visibility in the age of AI.

We built it by combining insights from hundreds of CMO conversations, peer SEO experts, and Webflow's own traffic data and aggregate anonymized data across Webflow-hosted sites. After extensive research and testing with industry leaders, we refined this framework to give marketing and SEO teams a practical path for optimizing toward evolving AI standards.

Each category includes five levels of maturity, illustrating the progression from traditional SEO practices to adaptive, AI-ready optimization. Together, these categories and levels provide a shared roadmap for teams to align, advance, and build long-term resilience in how their brands are found and represented in the era of generative search.

> **"In conversations with hundreds of CMOs each quarter, one topic consistently rises to the top: AEO. It represents both a challenge and an opportunity for marketers — reshaping how we build brands and drive revenue. We created the AEO Maturity Model to give marketing leaders and practitioners a clear, actionable framework to guide their teams and measure progress. We're excited to keep learning alongside you as the AEO landscape evolves."**
>
> **Guy Yalif**
> Chief Evangelist at Webflow

Webflow

🔍 SEO   ✦ AEO

	LEVEL 1 **Keywords** On page keyword SEO	LEVEL 2 **Answers** Starting to reorient around answers	LEVEL 3 **Structure** Systematically creating answers & structuring site	LEVEL 4 **Pillar** Optimizing for AEO as thought leader	LEVEL 5 **Authority** Continuous adaptation to Answer Engine changes
🖼 **Content**	Keyword focused content	Some answer oriented content	Answering question clusters	Answer-hierarchy-driven content	Programmatic AEO with personalized content
</> **Technical**	On page keyword SEO	Some basic page structure	Consistent structure on a fast site	Automated site structure	MCP and early standards adoption
💬 **Authority**	Backlinks	Active Google E-E-A-T Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, & Trustworthiness	Proactive digital PR, Reddit, and thought leadership	Recognized pillar of thought leadership with engaging visual storytelling	Widespread, positive citations
📊 **Measurement**	Ranking for target keywords	Ad hoc mention checking	Systematically tracking LLM traffic, mentions, and sentiment	Share of voice and accuracy tracking	Real time analytics

01
Content

Content is the foundation of AEO, built to deliver clear, comprehensive answers that AI can understand and surface.

Content

Strong content is where every AEO strategy begins. It's the material that provides genuinely useful answers to commonly asked questions from throughout the buying journey. But traditional, keyword-driven SEO where we simply target only search head terms isn't enough anymore. Answer engines now expect comprehensive, structured, and current information.

That's why the content category matters: it ensures your brand has something valuable to say — and that answer engines recognize it. Well-structured, regularly refreshed content ([95% of ChatGPT citations point to pages updated in the last 10 months](#)) fuels every other aspect of AEO. It not only drives discoverability, but also reinforces authority and improves how your brand narrative is represented across AI-powered search.

Key takeaway from the content category:

Create content that earns trust by delivering complete, credible answers — structured for AI to understand and designed for people to value.

Write for keywords

Goal to advance:

Shift from counting keywords to answering real buyer questions.

At level 1, content strategy is anchored in page-focused SEO. Most efforts center on keyword-heavy, product-oriented pages like homepages, landing pages, product pages, or about us sections. Content is typically created as one-off pieces, with little connection to an ongoing narrative, and rarely updated. Blogs and FAQs, which LLMs often favor for their digestible, well-structured answers, are either missing or stale.

At this level, organic traffic is mostly driven by branded search, primarily capturing people who already know you or are close to buying.

Questions to ask:

- ? For our top buyer questions, what related questions should we also be answering?

- ? How are we planning content across the next two quarters to ensure consistent storylines?

- ? As we scale, how do we make sure our voice stays consistent and on-brand?

How to get started:

- ✓ Identify the top 10 buyer questions from sales calls, support tickets, Reddit, or other community forums

- ✓ Track the content of pages receiving traffic from answer engines — the strongest available intent signal

- ✓ Create or update 5 pages that directly answer each one of these questions in plain language

- ✓ Refresh 5 high-traffic, but outdated pages with updated info, visible "last updated" dates and an FAQ section

LEVEL 2

Start answering questions

Goal to advance:

Evolve from isolated and scattered answers to cohesive clusters that cover core topics.

At level 2, content starts to shift from keyword repetition to directly answering buyer questions. A handful of pages may appear in featured snippets or "People Also Ask" results. Content freshness improves, with about half visibly updated in the last year, and writing is clearer and more comprehensive. Still, much of the strategy remains keyword-driven.

Questions to ask:

⑦ For our top buyer questions, what related questions should we also be answering?

⑦ How are we planning content across the next two quarters to ensure consistent storylines?

⑦ As we scale, how do we make sure our voice stays consistent and on-brand?

How to get started:

⊘ Create multiple answer pages around 5 high-priority buyer questions

⊘ Focus on bottom-funnel content that target high "visit website" intent queries (for example, templates, competitor comparisons, or case studies)

⊘ Rewrite answer pages into shorter, extractable passages with clear subheads

⊘ Improve readability for all new content to a Flesch score of 80+

LEVEL 3

Organize question clusters

Goal to advance:

Organize your clusters under a clear hierarchy to fully own entire topics.

At level 3, content evolves from scattered answers to structured clusters. Pages are semantically rich, easy to read, and designed in chunks that AI engines can readily surface. At this stage, brands often introduce a cornerstone piece of content — such as an annual report, original research study, or in-depth guide — to anchor one of their core topics. Competitor comparison pages begin to appear, and your authority on certain topics becomes clearer.

Questions to ask:

- ? Which priority topic will we comprehensively own next?
- ? What will our annual cornerstone piece of content be?
- ? Where can we add original insights or data to differentiate from competitor content?

How to get started:

- ✓ Map one core topic across the funnel (awareness → consideration → purchase → advocacy)
- ✓ Create a cornerstone anchor asset such as an annual report or research study
- ✓ Create multi-level answers that comprehensively cover related questions
- ✓ Refresh high-priority pages every 3-6 months, localize content, and improve readability to Flesch 90+

LEVEL 4

Establish a hierarchy

Goal to advance:

Move beyond coverage to personalization.

At level 4, content is structured around intentional hierarchies spanning the funnel from awareness through advocacy. Each major topic is anchored by a cornerstone piece and surrounded by supporting answers. Updates are consistent, content is localized, and underperforming content is pruned.

Questions to ask:

? Which content assets do prospects most engage with and would benefit from personalization?

? What cornerstone format or asset will set us apart this quarter?

? How are we aligning campaigns and hierarchies so every funnel stage is covered consistently?

How to get started:

✓ Create segmented landing pages by industry, persona, or use case

✓ Personalize examples, visuals, proof points, and CTAs for each audience

✓ Introduce at least one new format — video, animation, or interactive graphics

LEVEL 5

Deliver personalized answers

Goal to advance:

Stay agile in a rapidly evolving space. Continuously adapt to new formats, technologies and buyer behaviors to keep your content at the forefront of AI-driven discovery.

At level 5, teams practice programmatic AEO: a fully developed content program delivering personalized, relevant experiences for each segment, persona, account, and even individual. Traffic may be lower, but conversion rates rise thanks to tailored storytelling and 1:1 personalization. Cornerstone content becomes referenceable across your industry, accelerating sales cycles and strengthening brand authority.

Questions to ask:

- ? How are we personalizing content for the segments that matter most this quarter?

- ? What new formats are we testing to stay ahead of competitors?

- ? How are we ensuring cornerstone assets remain industry-defining and relevant?

How to get started:

- ✓ Expand personalization as new segments emerge

- ✓ Add interactivity with tools, calculators, or benchmarks

- ✓ Monitor AI outputs to confirm our answers appear in search experiences

AEO content: Bringing it all together

Content is becoming less of a numbers game. In AEO, quality answers delivered in the right structure will consistently win over sheer volume.

Mapping real buyer questions across the journey, leading with clear answers up front, and structuring content so both humans and answer engines can easily scan it is how to win in search.

Where to focus today:

- ⊘ Add FAQs, tables of contents, and summary snippets to give AI more to cite

- ⊘ Refresh content to be up-to-date and relevant to current questions

- ⊘ Double down on cornerstone pieces like research reports and anchor clusters to build authority

How Webflow is evolving our own content

5x
more refreshed content

40%
lift in visits to updated pages

Challenge

Both search engines and LLMs reward freshness, but our content refresh process was time-consuming and manual. We needed a scalable way to optimize more content, faster.

Approach

We built an automated content refresh workflow that combines SEO data with our brand voice and tone to scale updates efficiently and maintain quality.

Impact

We refreshed 5x more content and saw a 40% lift in visits to updated pages within days. We also rolled out FAQ generation workflows using real customer questions to boost relevance in AI-driven search.

> "At Webflow, our AEO content strategy focuses on both brand-related content — content that answers user questions and positions our brand as the solution — and non-branded, high "visit website" intent content. AEO is an evolution of SEO: structured for agents, optimized for humans."

Vivian Hoang
SEO and AEO Lead, Webflow

02
Technical

Good technical best practices are the backbone of AEO, enabling content to be discovered, interpreted, and trusted by both people and AI.

Technical

While content is the foundation for creating useful answers that resonate with both people and machines, it's not enough on its own. Without a strong technical backbone, even the best-crafted pages risk being invisible to answer engines.

That's why the technical category matters: it's the work that makes your content easily discoverable by LLMs, strengthens your content and authority efforts, and compounds the benefits of every other category. Important tools like schema markup help crawlers and answer engines interpret context and relationships more accurately. When implemented, schema makes it far more likely that your content is surfaced accurately in AI summaries and search overviews — and when paired with structured content, speed, strong security, and high availability, it ensures that both humans and machines can access and trust your site experience.

And yet adoption is still low for some of the most impactful practices. For example, while 73% of page-one results use schema markup, 88% of sites don't use schema at all — leaving a major opportunity for forward-thinking brands.

Key takeaway from the technical category:

Build a technical foundation that makes your content fast, accessible, and easy for both people and AI systems to find and interpret.

LEVEL 1

Optimize on-page SEO

Goal to advance:

Nail the fundamentals and begin to introduce basic structure — clear headings, bullet points, numbered lists, and FAQs — so LLMs can interpret your content.

At this stage, teams are focused on basic keyword targeting and site crawlability. Crawling is how search engines discover new pages, while indexing is what makes those pages visible in results.

Without proper metadata, much of that effort is lost — and there's plenty of work to do. Research shows that [25% of top-ranking pages are missing meta descriptions](#), one of the most fundamental SEO elements.

Level 1 is about getting the fundamentals right: on-page keyword optimization, clean URL and site structure, few broken links, secure pages that always resolve to HTTPS, optimized SEO metadata (title tags, meta descriptions, header tags), and a working robots.txt.

Questions to ask:

? Where are our biggest SEO hygiene gaps?

? Which core or high-traffic pages need attention for proper SEO hygiene and basic content structure?

? Which pages should we prioritize for schema rollout?

How to get started:

⊘ Check for clear, logical site architecture optimized for both search and AI crawlability

⊘ Audit responsiveness, crawlability, and indexing across devices

⊘ Start adding structure to on-page content with:

- Clear headings that mirror likely questions
- "In summary" statements
- Bullet points or numbered lists

- Tables of contents for long pages.
- Callouts and FAQs
- Optimize metadata for targeted queries, not just keywords

⊘ Fix broken internal links

LEVEL 2

Set up page structure

Goal to advance:

Achieve consistency and scale structured metadata across your site to lay the groundwork for deeper technical improvements.

At level 2, the shift moves from foundational SEO to machine-readable structure that LLMs can easily process. Schema markup — a standardized vocabulary created by Google, Bing, Yahoo, and Yandex — helps search and answer engines understand page content more effectively. It provides structured data for nearly every page type, from products and FAQs to articles and events.

Teams also focus on on-page structure: clear question-based headings, consistent hierarchy (<h1>→<h2>→<h3>), summaries up front, bullets, and FAQs at the bottom of long pages.

Questions to ask:

- ? Do our top pages consistently use structured on-page content?

- ? Is our site fully secure — beyond HTTPS — and available at least 99.9% of the time?

- ? Is our site fully accessible?

How to get started:

- ✓ Add schema markup to your top 20 pages with a goal of reaching 75%+ sitewide coverage

- ✓ Validate structured data using Google's Rich Results tool

- ✓ Maintain a clear heading hierarchy (H2, H3, H4) across pages

- ✓ Ensure sitemap.xml includes all key pages with last modified dates and priority

- ✓ Maintain ~100% crawlability

- ✓ Achieve 95%+ accessibility coverage (alt text, etc.)

- ✓ Use canonical tags to define preferred page versions

- ✓ Keep your site secure with regular package updates, DDoS protection, CSPs, and PCI-compliant gateways where applicable

- ✓ Prioritize server-rendered content when possible to ensure visibility to non-Gemini crawlers

LEVEL 3

Maintain speed and consistency

Goal to advance:

Scale structure consistently while maintaining both machine readability and a strong user experience.

At level 3, teams focus on delivering consistent structure and site performance globally. Pages are semantically rich and formatted in ways that LLMs can easily interpret. Schema markup is applied across most pages, and the site is fast, reliable, and secure.

Security extends beyond HTTPS — maintaining up-to-date software, SSL/TLS, firewalls, CAPTCHAs, and two-factor authentication. Sitemaps are comprehensive and refreshed regularly, helping AI bots efficiently crawl and prioritize new or updated pages.

Questions to ask:

- ? Do we know which parts of our site are hardest for crawlers to parse?

- ? Are we ensuring Bing and other AI-driven search engines capture our site updates?

- ? How are we keeping up with evolving AEO technical standards?

How to get started:

- ✓ Use schema on virtually every page, ideally with nested schema to represent relationships (e.g., Organization → WebPage → Article/FAQ)

- ✓ Conduct quarterly technical audits to maintain hygiene

- ✓ Use clean semantic HTML accessible to both users & bots

- ✓ Implement IndexNow to boost freshness ranking in Bing (used heavily by ChatGPT)

LEVEL 4

Automate site structure

Goal to advance:

Use automation and infrastructure improvements to scale visibility and performance.

At this stage, teams are effectively optimizing their websites for three types of discovery: human visitors, LLM pre-training, and real-time LLM search. Achieving full schema and accessibility coverage requires automation. Sites are optimized to efficiently manage LLMs' crawl budgets — the time and resources LLM bots dedicate to discovering and indexing your content — and structured data is implemented programmatically. Nested schema clarifies relationships, accessibility is uniform, and semantic code ensures both humans and LLMs can easily parse pages.

Questions to ask:

ⓘ How are we using automation to scale structured data?

How to get started:

⊘ Redirect hallucinated or mistyped URLs from AI referrals

⊘ Automate schema generation across all pages

⊘ Optimize global site speed through CDN distribution

Goal to advance:

Balance innovation with resourcing and scalability.

Adopt next-generation site standards

At level 5, organizations adopt emerging standards like llms.txt and MCP servers, which allow AI agents to directly interact with site functionality. Redirecting hallucinated URLs and enabling structured agent interactions ensures efficiency and precision.

These frameworks help early adopters gain an edge before they become standard practice. Technical foundations at this level are adaptive, continuously evolving alongside the AI ecosystem — reducing manual overhead and amplifying the impact of content and authority strategies.

Questions to ask:

? Which emerging standards should we test now to stay ahead?

? How do we balance experimentation with scaling proven practices?

? How are we identifying LLM-hallucinated URLs that prospects are being sent to?

How to get started:

⊘ Pilot emerging standards like llms.txt

⊘ Explore enabling site functionality through an MCP server

⊘ Continue optimizing globally for speed, structure, and accessibility

AEO technical: Bringing it all together

Technical excellence powers everything else in AEO. A site that's fast, accessible, and structured for both humans and LLMs multiplies the impact of your content and authority work. The most advanced teams automate structure, streamline performance, and maintain a technical backbone that evolves alongside AI-driven discovery.

A strong technical foundation amplifies every other AEO effort, ensuring your best work gets discovered and accurately represented by both people and machines.

Where to focus today:

- ⊘ Automate schema markup across core page types
- ⊘ Audit site accessibility and crawlability quarterly
- ⊘ Redirect hallucinated or mistyped AI referral URLs to the correct destinations
- ⊘ Continue improving load speeds, typically through a global CDN

How Webflow strengthened our own technical AEO

485%

QoQ growth in LLM-attributed signups

Challenge

We had thousands of template tag pages generated by creators adding freeform tags, which were either duplicate or low-quality.

Approach

We decreased the directory size by 85% by removing low-impact and duplicate pages. LLMs generally respect noindex tags, so this helped both search engines and AI crawlers focus on priority pages. We also added unique copy optimized for answer engines, targeting specific personas and detailing value props.

Impact

Our template category optimizations led to 485% QoQ growth in LLM-attributed signups.

> As AI systems become the primary interface between people and information, your technical foundation becomes your brand's handshake with the machine. Schema, structure, and speed aren't backend details anymore...they're visibility itself."

Josh Grant
VP, Growth Marketing, Webflow

03
Authority

Authority is the measure of credibility in AEO, built with consistent visibility, authenticity, and design that signals trust.

Authority

Experience

Highlight direct, hands-on experience with your subject. Show real creators, practitioners, and case studies — not just theory.

Expertise

Demonstrate depth through accurate, well-sourced, and technically informed content. Where relevant, feature credentialed voices or contributors with proven domain knowledge.

Authoritativeness

Build credibility by publishing consistently high-quality insights that earn organic mentions, references, and engagement across respected industry platforms.

Trustworthiness

Prioritize transparency — cite reliable data, make sources and authors clear, and maintain accessible, well-designed experiences that reflect integrity and reliability.

If content defines what you say, and technical determines that it can be discovered, authority is about who values your content as a trusted source.

The biggest shift in authority from SEO to AEO is how much more weight LLMs give to plain-text, positive mentions of your brand across trusted sources. That means digital PR — including podcasts, guest articles, interviews, Reddit discussions, and thought leadership — plays a larger role in shaping your visibility than it ever did in traditional search.

Backlinks still matter, but they're no longer the sole signal of authority. What matters now is how your brand shows up — consistently, credibly, and usefully — wherever people (and models) discover information.

As with SEO, the foundation of strong authority still comes from genuine **E-E-A-T** — **Experience**, **Expertise**, **Authoritativeness**, and **Trustworthiness**.

Design also plays an unexpected role in perceived authority. [94% of first impressions are design related](), and both humans and LLMs take cues from the usability and presentation of your site. Just as Google monitors when users quickly return to search results, models likely evaluate whether a page offers genuine value and engagement.

Key takeaway from the authority category:

Earn credibility through consistent, authentic presence across trusted platforms — becoming the brand others cite as the source of truth.

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LEVEL 1

Goal to advance:

Move beyond backlinks to grow authority through consistent, positive visibility on authoritative sites and publications.

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Expand backlink strategies

At this early stage, teams are focused on building backlinks and traditional SEO best practices. You may have limited third-party mentions, and your link-building history might include a mix of sources with varying quality. While backlinks still support SEO, AI-driven answers place even greater value on consistent, high-quality mentions of your brand across the web.

Questions to ask:

- ⑦ What topics best position us as thought leaders in our market?

- ⑦ What unique expertise or perspective strengthens our authority in those areas?

- ⑦ Which focus areas will most engage our audience and set us apart from competitors?

How to get started:

- ⊘ Create content that signals E-E-A-T:
  - Add author bios to key content
  - Show behind the scenes accounts, or personal experiences
  - Cite authoritative sources
  - Use reliable citations, clear sources, and transparent authorship
  - Share clear contact information

- ⊘ Claim your brand entity in Google Search and ensure your Knowledge Graph is accurate

- ⊘ Create or update your Wikipedia page

LEVEL 2

Show up in new channels

Goal to advance:

Extend your content beyond your own channels through trusted external platforms.

At level 2, you're creating more content that reflects your unique perspective. Now, it's time to expand visibility of your brand through digital PR and consistent, credible storytelling.

Questions to ask:

(?) Which sources are cited in AI answers for the questions we care about?

(?) Which sites drive industry conversations — and which should we target for mentions?

(?) For citations missing us, how are we working to get included?

(?) Are all spokespeople sharing consistent, thought-leading stories?

(?) Do we have unified narratives for spokespeople to repeat across channels?

(?) How are others discussing our brand in authentic spaces like Reddit, Quora, and TechRadar?

(?) How can we engage our community, partners, and affiliates to share and discuss our content more?

How to get started:

(✓) Get spokespeople active through podcasts, webinars, interviews, and guest posts

(✓) Build a team to engage authentically on Reddit, Quora, and other LLM-prioritized forums

(✓) Identify citation sources in LLM answers to target questions, and if missing, pursue inclusion through:

- Add author bios to key content
- Show behind the scenes accounts, or personal experiences
- Cite authoritative sources
- Use reliable citations, clear sources, and transparent authorship
- Share clear contact information

<div style="border:1px solid #000; display:inline-block; padding:4px 12px; background:#2563eb; color:#fff">**LEVEL 3**</div>

Grow credibility through digital PR

Goal to advance:

Deepen authority through original insights, elevate the quality of every on-site experience, and proactively correct inaccurate depictions of your brand, products, or offerings in the market.

At this stage, your narrative is consistently represented in the market. The next step is to create original thought leadership that others frequently cite — and to make your owned content visually stunning, emotionally evocative, and deeply engaging. A site that captivates both the eye and the mind reinforces your brand's authority and credibility. With LLMs creating their own browsers, as Perplexity has done, the quality of engagement on your site will increasingly shape how these systems perceive and prioritize your brand.

Questions to ask:

- ? Are we monitoring and correcting out-of-date or inaccurate information on Wikipedia and other key sites?

- ? Do we have an integrated marketing plan to bring that story to life?

- ? What's the story, whether about our product or our brand, that we want the market to remember and share?

- ? How can we make our site more visually engaging, emotionally evocative, & immersive?

How to get started:

- ? Proactively monitor and correct inaccuracies on Wikipedia and key third-party sites

- ? Systematically track earned mentions and sentiment

- ? Create a cornerstone piece of thought leadership that you can build an integrated campaign around at least once a year

- ? Maintain and update your Google knowledge panel as a signal of recognized expertise

- ? Invest in storytelling design: infographics, animations, interactivity, and video

- ? Actively manage citations — confirm research is linked, accurate, and properly attributed

Stand out with visual storytelling

Goal to advance:

Manage and expand visibility while maintaining accuracy and quality across citations.

You've established yourself as a recognized thought leader through original content and widespread engagement in the market. You've furthered your authority through engaging experiences on your website. The next step is about scale and consistency so that you are cited broadly and positively across media and industry ecosystems.

Questions to ask:

- ? What would make our brand and content impossible not to cite — even in companies' internal conversations?

- ? How can we expand citations across new outlets and communities?

How to get started:

- ✓ Reach out to creators and journalists to add your resources as updated references in their work

- ✓ Co-create articles or resources with partners who can authentically extend your brand's reach

LEVEL 5

Maintain broad recognition

At the highest level of maturity, your brand is widely recognized as an authority in its field. Others use your research to make business decisions, and your name carries credibility across industries.

Goal to advance:

Maintain consistent thought leadership and proactively shape your industry's conversation.

Questions to ask:

⑦ Should we partner with other organizations to create something larger — an industry movement or cornerstone study?

⑦ How can we stay one step ahead of current market conversations?

⑦ What should we invest in next to ensure our leadership remains unmatched?

How to get started:

⊘ Continue investing in cornerstone content and research that drives new insights

⊘ Expand on your co-creation strategy by forming ongoing partnerships that amplify your brand through joint content, research, and distribution

AEO authority: Bringing it all together

Authority in AEO is built through credibility, design quality, and consistent third-party validation. As your brand matures, the focus shifts from earning mentions to shaping the story others tell about you. The strongest brands appear repeatedly and positively across trusted platforms, becoming a definitive source of truth in their category and across communities.

When authority is executed well, others cite your brand as the source of truth, giving you lasting control of the narrative.

Where to focus today:

- ⊘ Strengthen E-E-A-T signals through firsthand experience, credible authorship, and transparent sourcing

- ⊘ Pursue earned media, guest features, and co-marketing opportunities

- ⊘ Maintain and audit key public profiles such as Wikipedia and Google's Knowledge Graph

- ⊘ Create engaging website experiences to further reinforce authority

- ⊘ Track earned mentions and sentiment

> "Machines decide how you are found, but humans decide what you are worth. AEO maturity isn't about mastering algorithms. It's about mastering coherence through constant testing."

Kyle Arteaga
CEO and Co-founder of The Bulleit Group

How Webflow strengthens our own brand authority

Challenge

TechRadar, a highly trusted publication often cited by LLMs, featured an outdated Webflow review that no longer reflected the platform's current capabilities. Because TechRadar is a prominent source for AI-generated answers, this outdated information risked misrepresenting the brand in AI-driven discovery.

Approach

Working cross-functionally, the team identified TechRadar as a valuable citation source, then the Communications team partnered directly with TechRadar's editorial staff to update Webflow's review while our Growth team engaged them as an affiliate. We provided updated product information, clarified positioning, and ensured the content reflected Webflow's latest features and value.

Impact

After updating the review, Webflow's presence across AI search became more accurate and consistent. This effort improved how LLMs referenced Webflow but also reinforced the importance of maintaining trusted third-party profiles as part of a proactive AEO strategy.

04

Measurement

Measurement is the link between visibility and impact, showing how every AEO effort contributes to growth.
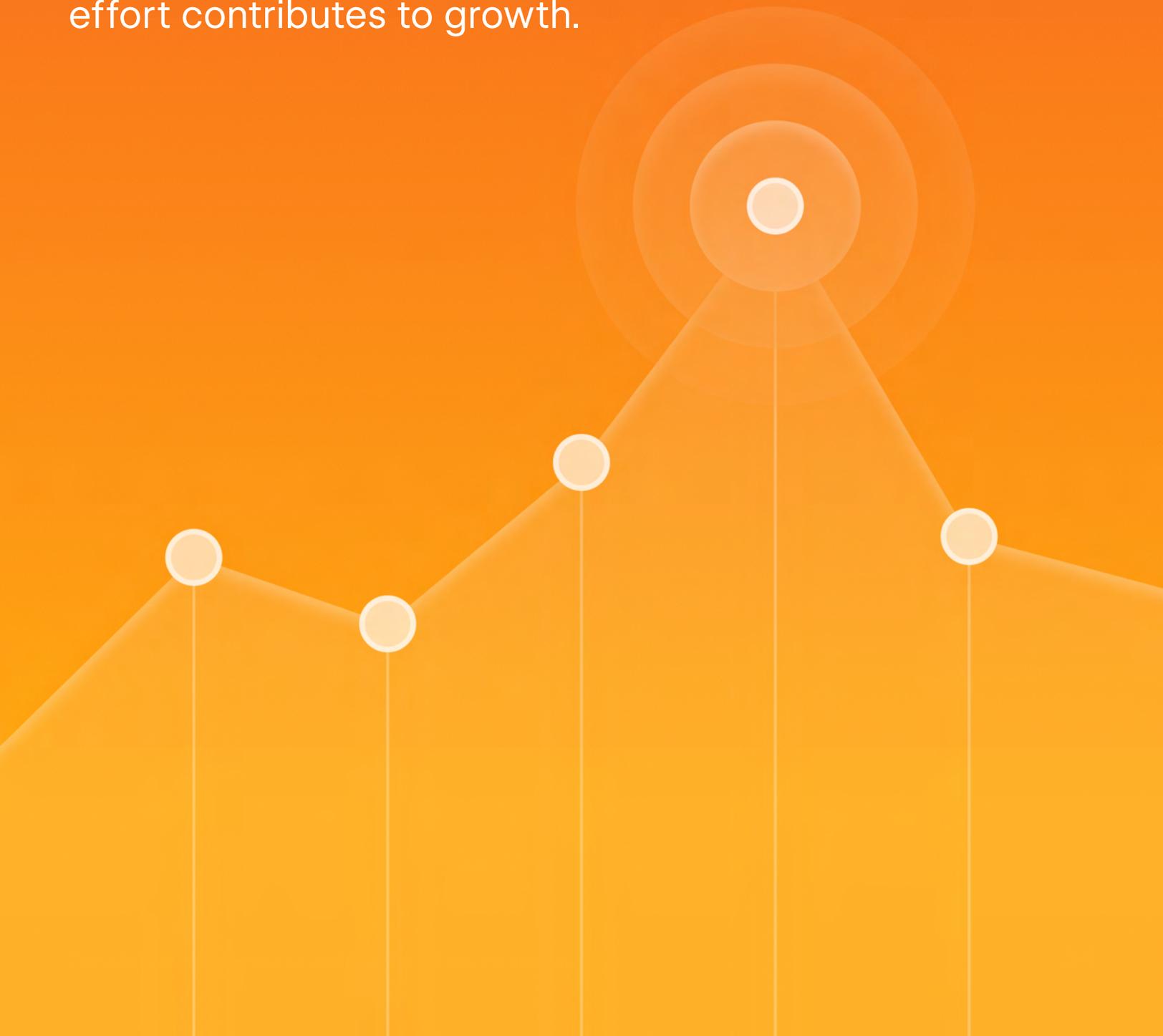
Measurement

For the past 15 years, a key measure of marketing success has been keyword rankings — tracking where our content appears among Google's blue links for the terms that matter most. But in the world of LLMs, keyword rankings no longer apply. These models don't surface direct excerpts from our sites; instead, they reformulate our words into new paragraphs of their own.

In the era of AEO, measurement must evolve to answer the same core question through a new lens: Are we showing up where our prospects are asking for us?

AEO measurement often starts by tracking whether your brand appears in the answers to key questions. From there, it matures into measuring your share of voice — how often your brand appears compared to competitors — and the sentiment of those mentions. Unlike SEO, where Google used our exact language, LLMs generate their own, making tone and context essential indicators of brand strength.

At the highest levels of maturity, measurement becomes a rapid feedback loop that connects directly to your content, technical, and authority efforts — helping your team make smarter, faster investment decisions.

Key takeaway from the measurement category:

Build a measurement practice that connects visibility, accuracy, and sentiment — turning performance data into continuous improvement across every pillar of AEO.

LEVEL 1

Track target keyword rankings

Goal to advance:

Start tracking mentions of your brand for some of the questions you care about.

Traditional SEO measurement focuses on keyword rankings. At this stage, you're identifying topics your prospects care about, grouping them into keyword clusters, and using tools like Semrush or Ahrefs to track how your site ranks in Google's search results for those terms.

Questions to ask:

? Which LLMs are driving the most referral traffic and crawling our site most often?
  - If we don't have that data, focus on ChatGPT, Gemini, and Copilot — the current market leaders

? When we ask LLMs our top buyer questions, do they mention or cite us?

How to get started:

✓ Review analytics to see which LLMs drive the most referral and crawl traffic, and to which pages
  - Use that data to prioritize updating or expanding high-traffic pages with limited content

✓ Ask your top buyer questions in the leading LLMs and note whether your brand is mentioned or cited
  - Use these insights to focus outreach on cited sources and opportunities to get your brand mentioned

LEVEL 2

Monitor mentions manually

Goal to advance:

Move from casual spot checks to consistent, standardized monitoring of brand mentions in AI search results.

Once you start listening to what's happening in LLMs, the next step is to formalize that listening. This typically means using a tool that systematically asks questions across LLMs and tracks when and how often your brand is mentioned or cited. It's similar to how SEO tools like Semrush or Ahrefs regularly query Google for your target keywords to monitor rankings. Today, there are dozens of tools available that automate this process.

Questions to ask:

? How will we track and discuss brand mentions and sentiment in key LLM answers during our regular meetings?

? How are we measuring conversion rates, value, or behaviors from LLM-sourced traffic compared to other channels — especially unbranded SEO?

How to get started:

⊘ Use third-party tools like SEMrush, Ahrefs, Profound, Scrunch, or Graphite for systematic AEO monitoring

⊘ Track daily or weekly brand mentions and analyze:

- Inclusion: Is your brand included in the AI output?
- Citation: Are your owned resources linked?
- Prominence: How early or prominently does your brand appear?

⊘ Systematically track conversion rates (to the on-website actions you care about) for LLM-sourced and non-LLM-sourced traffic. Bonus for tying this to revenue

⊘ Begin monitoring sentiment — positive, neutral, or negative — to understand perception in AI-generated responses

LEVEL 3

Benchmark LLM performance signals

Goal to advance:

Evolve from consistent mention measurement to competitive benchmarking, measured as share of voice and LLM content accuracy.

By this stage, you're reliably measuring and reporting on mentions, sentiment, and conversion rates. You are likely using an AEO measurement tool along with your existing web analytics. The next step is to move from mentions to share of voice — and to add in accuracy tracking.

Questions to ask:

- ? How frequently are we mentioned relative to our top competitors?

- ? Is the content being mentioned in the answers accurate and up to date?

How to get started:

- ✓ Define success metrics across the funnel, including visibility, share of voice, engagement, and conversions

- ✓ Track citations, visits, and leads to tie results back to initiatives and experiments

- ✓ Track zero-click mentions — instances where your brand is cited but not linked — and, if possible, assign value to them in your reporting

- ✓ Review LLM outputs regularly to ensure your brand is represented accurately and that the information remains current

Integrate real-time feedback

Goal to advance:

Evolve from periodic measurement reviews to near real-time monitoring that informs investment decisions, helping your team quickly capitalize on emerging trends.

At level 4, you've expanded from tracking mentions to tracking your share of voice. You're also measuring the accuracy and freshness of LLM content.

Questions to ask:

⑦ How are we using measurement insights to shape our content, authority, and technical priorities?
- For example, how do we decide which content to update or create next?

⑦ What can our measurement data reveal about the buyer journey?

⑦ Can we anticipate which questions or topics will become important next?

How to get started:

✓ Stay informed as LLM reporting evolves and begins providing richer context and visibility, much like traditional search did over time

✓ Establish a process that links measurement insights directly to your content, authority, and technical planning cycles

✓ Increase the frequency of reporting — move from monthly summaries to weekly or automated updates for faster action

✓ Develop a framework to quantify the impact of zero-click mentions by mapping them to brand visibility, share of voice, and downstream engagement metrics — even when they don't produce direct traffic

LEVEL 5

Anticipate trends and respond fast

Goal to advance:

Let measurement insights inform how you allocate resources — keeping your investments focused, adaptive, and innovation-led.

At the highest level of maturity, measurement and strategy work in sync, enabling your team to move quickly on content creation, refreshes, authority, and technical improvements. Measurement insights are fully integrated into AEO decision-making, turning data into real-time guidance. At this stage you're using insights to anticipate and prioritize your next investments.

Questions to ask:

? Where should we invest next based on current measurement trends?

? How far ahead can our data help us look — and act — before competitors do?

How to get started:

⊘ Refine your measurement approach as the business operationalizes content, authority, and technical strategies take shape

⊘ Use data trends to identify new topics or authority opportunities

⊘ Keep a tight feedback loop between insights and execution

⊘ Track how LLMs evolve to offer deeper context and reporting

AEO measurement: Bringing it all together

> **"The question isn't just 'Where do we rank?' anymore. It's 'Do AI models know who we are, and how are they telling our story?' Measurement bridges the gap between visibility and results that matter."**

Chris Andrew
CEO, Scrunch

Measurement maturity is the shift from keyword ranking to share of voice relative to competitors. In AEO, it's understanding where, how often, and with what sentiment your brand appears in AI-generated results, and using those insights to continuously optimize your content, authority, and technical investment strategies.

When measurement is done well, it's a system for continuous optimization that keeps your brand visible, relevant, and ahead in AI-driven discovery.

Where to focus today:

- ⊘ Track brand visibility across priority question clusters against competitors

- ⊘ Monitor sentiment and accuracy in AI-generated answers, addressing errors proactively

- ⊘ Integrate AI-attributed traffic and conversions into holistic performance reporting

- ⊘ Establish clear feedback loops between measurement insights and content or technical updates

- ⊘ Evolve dashboards from reporting tools into decision-making engines that guide decisions on time allocation for projects

How Webflow measures our own AEO efforts

8%

of total new signups came directly from LLms

24%

increase in signups year-over-year

Challenge

With the emergence of AI search as a new channel at Webflow, we needed to redefine our KPIs to measure the influence and actual business impact of AEO efforts, rather than focusing on traditional SEO metrics.

Approach

We shifted our measurement framework from tracking traffic and rankings to tracking influence, with different success metrics across the funnel — including visibility, citations, share of voice, and conversions. We also focused on north star metrics — like LLM-attributed visits, signups, and new customers — and unified AI chatbot and non-brand SEO metrics into one holistic search channel, to gain a more complete view of organic discovery performance.

For AI brand visibility tracking, we use an AEO measurement tool to track both brand and non-brand queries across our top product categories and different personas. This helps us understand where to prioritize our AEO efforts.

Impact

We saw measurable business results from tracking and understanding our AEO efforts, with 8% of total new signups coming directly from LLMs. Overall, AI signups account for 42% of total non-brand organic signups, and when combined with non-brand SEO, the channel drove a total of +24% new signups year-over-year.

Turn your AEO insights into action

AEO is still in its early days, but its impact is already reshaping how brands are discovered and perceived. As organic search declines and AI-driven answers dominate, marketing teams face losing out on visibility, traffic, conversions, brand dilution and misrepresentation if they fail to adapt. The narratives that once lived on your own website are now being retold — sometimes inaccurately — by large language models and answer engines.

That's why we built the AEO Maturity Model — to help brands control their visibility and voice. It gives teams a way to benchmark where they stand across content, technical, authority, and measurement, while making it easy to pinpoint gaps and turn progress into action.

Like the early days of SEO, this era will be defined by rapid innovation, new tools, and evolving standards. And just as SEO became a core marketing discipline, AEO will soon be essential for driving growth and shaping how audiences discover and experience your brand.

At Webflow, our goal is to keep learning and leading alongside you — sharing the latest research, data, and best practices to help you stay current, confident, and visible as AEO continues to evolve.

[Get your AEO assessment →]

Own your brand voice in the age of AI

Meet with our team to walk through your personalized AEO results and transform your biggest opportunities into measurable impact.

Talk to our team →

Join the community

Check out our discussion forums, learn more at Webflow University, follow us on social, or reach out at contact@webflow.com.