

## STRATEGY

# Your SEO Isn't Dead — It's the Foundation Your AEO Is Built On

By Scott Tischler · September 8, 2026 · 8 min read

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**The most damaging idea in marketing right now is that AEO replaced SEO. It didn't. Answer Engine Optimization is built directly on top of the search work you've already done — and if you tear out that foundation because someone told you SEO is dead, you'll knock down the thing your AI visibility stands on.**

I say this as someone whose whole focus is AI visibility, so I have no incentive to defend old SEO for its own sake. But the truth is that the two are far more continuous than the "SEO is dead" crowd wants to admit. A huge share of what makes you findable in AI answers is the same work that made you findable in search. Understanding exactly what carries over — and what genuinely doesn't — is how you extend your existing effort instead of starting from zero or throwing away what works.

## What carries straight over

Start with the overlap, because it's larger than most people expect. These SEO fundamentals do just as much work for AI answers as they ever did for Google:

- **Crawlability.** If a machine can't fetch and parse your content, it can't rank you and it can't cite you. The AI crawlers are different bots, but the requirement is identical. This is the floor for both.
- **Clear structure.** Good headings, logical hierarchy, and clean HTML helped search engines understand you and help answer engines extract you. Same discipline, same payoff.
- **Quality, depth, and accuracy.** Substantive content that genuinely answers a question won in search and wins in AI answers. Thin content lost then and loses now.
- **Authority and reputation.** Search rewarded credible, well-regarded sources. AI answers do the same, arguably more so. The trust you built transfers.
- **Structured data.** Schema markup that helped you earn rich results also helps machines understand what your content is. It didn't stop mattering; it got more useful.

If you've done real SEO, you are not starting from scratch. You're standing on a foundation that most of AEO is built to use. That should be reassuring — the work wasn't wasted, it was prerequisite.

## What's genuinely new

Now the honest other half: AEO is not just SEO with a new name, and pretending it is will cap your results. Several things really are different, and these are where you have to extend rather than repeat:

- **Extraction over ranking.** Search rewarded being on the page for a query. AI answers reward being the cleanly liftable best answer to a specific question. That changes how you write — lead with the answer, make passages self-contained, assume any paragraph might be quoted alone.
- **Corroboration weighs heavier.** Both channels value authority, but AI answers lean unusually hard on what third parties say about you. Off-site mentions and genuine community presence do more work here than they did for rankings.
- **Entity clarity beats keywords.** The old game leaned on keyword targeting. The new game leans on being a clear, consistent, recognized entity — a known thing the model can identify and trust across sources.
- **Citation scarcity.** Ten blue links left room to place somewhere. An AI answer names a handful of sources. Being "pretty good" no longer shows up; you have to be one of the few worth citing.
- **A new measurement surface.** Rankings were observable. AI mentions mostly aren't, unless you deliberately test for them. You need a new instrument, not just your old analytics.

## The right mental model

Think of it as a stack, not a swap. SEO is the foundation — crawlable, structured, quality, authoritative. AEO is the layer you build on top — extractable, corroborated, entity-clear, present in a scarce citation set, and measured on a new surface. You don't demolish the foundation to add a floor. You keep it solid precisely because the new floor rests on it.

This reframe matters practically because it tells you how to spend. You keep maintaining your search fundamentals — not out of nostalgia, but because they're load-bearing for AI visibility. And you add the genuinely new work on top rather than treating it as a replacement project that lets you neglect the base. The businesses that get this wrong split into two failure modes: the ones who abandon SEO and watch their foundation crumble, and the ones who assume SEO alone covers AI and never build the new layer. Both lose.

## How to extend your work this quarter

If you've got a real SEO program, here's the honest sequence to extend it into AEO without wasting anything. First, confirm your foundation is genuinely solid — crawlable by AI bots, cleanly structured, substantive, schema-marked. Most of this you've done; verify it. Second, start measuring AI answers for your key questions so you can see where you're absent. Third, rewrite your most important pages for extraction, leading with direct answers. Fourth, invest in corroboration — the off-site, third-party authority that AI answers reward more than search did. Fifth, tighten your entity consistency so the model recognizes you as one clear thing everywhere it looks.

None of that requires abandoning what works. It requires building on it. SEO isn't dead — it's the ground floor. AEO is what you put on top. Keep the foundation strong and add the layer that gets you named in the answer.

### Key takeaways

- ♦ AEO didn't replace SEO — it's built directly on top of it, and gutting your search foundation knocks down what your AI visibility stands on.
- ♦ Crawlability, clear structure, quality, authority, and structured data carry straight over from SEO to AI answers — if you've done real SEO, you're not starting from zero.
- ♦ What's genuinely new: extraction over ranking, heavier corroboration, entity clarity over keywords, citation scarcity, and a measurement surface your old analytics can't see.
- ♦ The right model is a stack, not a swap: SEO is the load-bearing foundation, AEO is the layer you build on top.
- ♦ Two failure modes lose: abandoning SEO so the foundation crumbles, or assuming SEO alone covers AI and never building the new layer.
- ♦ Extend, don't restart: verify your foundation, measure AI answers, rewrite key pages for extraction, invest in corroboration, and tighten entity consistency.

## Frequently asked questions

### Is SEO dead now that AEO exists?

No, and treating it as dead is dangerous. AEO is built on top of SEO — crawlability, structure, quality, authority, and structured data all carry straight over and remain load-bearing for AI visibility. Search is contracting as a channel, but its fundamentals are the foundation AI answers rely on. Abandoning SEO knocks out the base your AEO stands on.

## What does AEO add that SEO didn't have?

Five things mainly: optimizing for clean extraction rather than just ranking; heavier weight on third-party corroboration; entity clarity over keyword targeting; competing in a scarce citation set of just a few named sources; and a new measurement surface, since AI mentions aren't visible in normal analytics. These are additions on top of SEO, not replacements for it.

## If I've done good SEO, what should I do next for AI visibility?

Verify your foundation is solid for AI crawlers, then extend it: start measuring AI answers for your key customer questions, rewrite important pages to lead with direct, extractable answers, invest in off-site corroboration, and tighten your entity consistency so the model recognizes you as one clear thing everywhere. You're building on your SEO, not starting over.

**About the author.** Scott Tischler is the Founder & Chairman of Alrecommend.ai and a practitioner-authority on AI search and Answer Engine Optimization. With 20+ years in marketing technology — including American Express, MetLife, and UBS — and executive and professional study at Wharton, Harvard, and Oxford, he helps businesses become the ones AI recommends.