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# GEO vs AEO vs Traditional SEO

The new visibility framework for the AI search era — and why relying on SEO alone now means playing only one-third of the game.

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PREPARED BY

**Lifewood Data Technology**

**INSIGHTS**

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## The rules of being found online just changed

For two decades, making a business visible online meant SEO: get your website near the top of Google through the right content, the right keywords, and links from reputable sites. Simple enough.

Something has shifted. More and more people no longer scroll a list of links. They ask AI tools – ChatGPT, Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, Perplexity – and get one direct answer back. That answer mentions certain companies and ignores others. If your business is not being mentioned, you are losing customers before they ever reach your website. This is why two newer strategies, AEO and GEO, have become as critical as traditional SEO.

## Three strategies, three very different goals

**SEO – Search Engine Optimization: getting to the top of Google.** SEO makes your website rank higher in search results. When someone types “best data annotation company” into Google, SEO determines whether you appear at position 1 or position 50. It works through relevant content, reputable links, and a fast, well-built site. Success is measured in traffic.

**AEO – Answer Engine Optimization: getting AI to quote you directly.** Rather than competing for links, AEO is about becoming the source AI tools draw on when constructing answers. When a user asks ChatGPT “What is human-in-the-loop machine learning?”, it synthesises an answer from trusted sources. AEO is the work of making sure your content is among them – through clear question-and-answer formatting, factual depth, and verifiable credibility.

**GEO – Generative Engine Optimization: getting AI to recommend your brand.** Where AEO gets your content quoted, GEO makes generative systems aware of and favourable toward your brand overall. When someone asks “Who are the leading AI data service companies?”, GEO determines whether your name makes the list. It is built through consistent presence: industry articles, expert commentary, and third-party mentions. Success is measured in mentions and citations.

## Side by side

- **Primary goal** – SEO: website rankings. AEO: direct answers. GEO: AI citations and recommendations.
- **Audience** – SEO: search engines. AEO: answer engines. GEO: generative AI systems.
- **Success metric** – SEO: traffic. AEO: featured answers. GEO: mentions and citations.
- **Content style** – SEO: keyword-focused. AEO: question-focused. GEO: entity-focused.
- **Platforms** – SEO: Google, Bing. AEO: AI Overviews, voice search. GEO: ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Perplexity.
- **Outcome** – SEO: clicks. AEO: answers. GEO: trust and visibility.

SEO wins you a click. AEO wins you a quote. GEO wins you a recommendation. Relying on SEO alone means playing one-third of the game.

## How AI search actually works today

When someone asks an AI tool a question, it synthesises information from many trusted places across the internet and returns one direct answer – often without the user ever opening a traditional results page. Having a

good website is no longer enough; you need to be part of the ecosystem the model draws from. Being trusted and broadly present online now matters more than keyword rankings.

## **Where to start**

Treat the three as one program, not three teams. Keep the SEO foundation — crawlability, speed, and structure still gate everything else. Add AEO by restructuring your highest-intent pages into clear, answerable questions with sourced facts and dates. Add GEO by building the off-site entity footprint that makes generative systems confident naming you in a category.

Lifewood runs all three as a single motion. See our [AEO services](#) and [GEO services](#) for scope, and the [glossary](#) for definitions of share-of-answer, entity canonicalization, and the other terms used here.