



WHITE PAPER

How B2B Marketers Can Succeed in the Age of AEO



FUTURE

B2B



Answer engine optimization (AEO) – designing your content marketing strategy so that your brand is prioritized by AI-powered search engines – is reshaping B2B marketing. However, while AEO requires a strategic shift, you’ll discover that solid SEO principles and AEO principles are more like siblings than distant cousins.

Search marketing – organic and paid – ranks as the top bucket in B2B digital marketing budgets, [Gartner says](#).

On the buyers’ side, it’s right up there as well. [One-third of buyers use web search](#) when looking for new vendors and 32% use generative AI chatbots. Those numbers get higher when you look at millennials: [68% of whom prefer self-service research](#) versus talking with a salesperson first.

Looking at these numbers, it’s no wonder that the growth of AEO is a huge concern for B2B marketers. It’s AI. It’s new. It’s not driving site clicks. It’s not easily trackable.

So, what’s a B2B brand to do?

First, breathe. While AEO is changing search, many of SEO’s foundational principles still apply (i.e., just think in



terms of phrases and sentences, rather than keywords).

AEO grew out of the development of Google AI Overview, Perplexity AI, OpenAI’s ChatGPT and other AI-focused search tools and chatbots. They shifted how people use search engines. We’re no longer typing in keywords and short phrases. Instead, we’re asking questions, such as “*What’s the best media to reach CMOs?*” “*How do I make sure my email marketing is working?*”

HOW IS AEO CHANGING SEARCH?

Traditional search engines spider your site and index and rank pages based on factors such as keyword density and placement, backlinks, trust and others. These search results give users a list of links with page titles and meta descriptions. Ideally, those results provide enough information to pique a user's interest to click through to the top-listed websites to learn more.

Meanwhile, AI-powered search and their LLMs use pre-trained databases and real-time searches to seek out clear answers, structured, scannable and accurate content, trusted sources, etc. AEO provides detailed answers in a few paragraphs and lists, with links to the sources.

The potential problem is that the narrative result may be all that the searcher needs to answer their question. And then they move on, without feeling a need to click through or contact a brand. These zero-click searches are running about 20%, per a [Datos/SparkToro report](#).

It's also a problem if your brand is not among the top one, two, three or four references linked to, for those who do want to know more about their question, or contact a company representative.

The rise of voice search – via tools like Siri and Google Assistant – also ties into AEO. Millennials are the [top users of voice search](#), with 34% using it at least weekly and Generation Z is right behind them.

SEO vs. GEO vs. AEO

What's going on in search?!?

Today's search marketing can be overwhelming with all the alphabet soup: SEO, GEO and AEO. The gist of it is:

- **SEO** (which you should already know) is about ranking high for pertinent keyword searches in traditional search engines.
- **GEO** (generative engine optimization) is getting your content trusted and understood by LLMs so that, when your brand is included, it's accurate.
- **AEO** ties into GEO and is more about what shows up in search results. This involves getting your content so it can be digested and presented by AI-powered search engines.

WHAT ARE FOUNDATIONAL AEO CONTENT PRACTICES FOR B2B?

Whether SEO or AEO, the end result is the same: Be the top or VERY near the top of the results.

But how? Here are four things you can do to improve your chances of showing up in AEO results:

Structure your content

Make it easy for AEO to extract your information:

- Use hierarchical headings (H1, H2, H3, etc.) and heading phrases that match search queries.
- Place key information at the beginning of sections.
- Use bulleted lists.
- Add structured data markup (such as clearly labeling content as Products, FAQs, etc.).
- Be consistent in formatting.

Develop authoritative content

AEO – and SEO for that matter – values expertise on owned media:

- Create unique, research- and data-backed content such as studies and analysis of that data.
- Develop content based on personal experience, expert insights and customer stories such as thought leadership, how-to pieces and customer testimonials.
- Include author bios, providing their background and why they're worth reading or listening to. This helps AI-driven search engines distinguish between experts and generic (often [AI slop](#)) information.



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Finding the right partner for your AEO plans



Now that you know about AEO strategies, let's take the next step: What qualities should an AEO partner have?

To find out, we spoke with Shana Murik, Head of Marketing for Future B2B.

Why B2B brands should not go solo on AEO? Qualities of a good partner?

A strong AEO partner needs to deliver on first-party data and have trusted distribution channels, editorial credibility and measurable business impact. Additionally, a good partner delivers access to large, permission-based audiences with consistent engagement, which ensures your content generates the signals answer engines prioritize. Lastly, quality partners also hold a high level of editorial excellence and cross-channel reinforcement to strengthen the credibility and repetition that AI-driven platforms like Claude and ChatGPT rely on to surface answers.

How does Future B2B tie into these qualities?

Future B2B delivers on AEO by combining credibility, scale and behavioral intelligence into a unified ecosystem. With millions of subscribers and over a billion newsletter sends annually, Future B2B provides access to highly engaged first-party audiences. The editorial ecosystem ensures that content is relevant and trustworthy. It's critical for brands seeking to be cited and surfaced in AI-generated responses. Additionally, Future B2B's ability to engage audiences across email, display, social, virtual events and content syndication

helps strengthen the signals that AEO depends on.

How important is breadth of target audience?

Success isn't just about reaching a niche audience using one method, it's about achieving broad and relevant visibility across the entire digital ecosystem. Buying decisions are not made by one person with one target job title. They are more complex with more voices than ever, and you need first-party access to the full range of stakeholders – including your ideal ICP – to gain the influence you need. This is about elevating your brand from simply being seen to being recognized, trusted and actively surfaced during critical moments that influence B2B buying decisions today.



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Shana Murik

HEAD OF MARKETING,
FUTURE B2B.



Build brand authority

Brand mentions and backlinks are crucial for building authority, trust and visibility in AEO. Here's some ways to do it:

- Develop thought-leadership columns on authoritative third-party media.
- Regularly pitch expert insights on pertinent trends, products and other relevant topics to reputable media.
- Participate in social media, newsletters and, where appropriate, community/industry forums. (Hint: AI-powered search engines tend to like different sites, i.e., like Reddit, YouTube and LinkedIn, depending on market category, [per a Tinuiti study.](#))

Keep your content fresh

LLMs in AI-powered search want fresh content, and regular content audits go a long way to prevent content from getting stale. Here are some ideas:

- Revise factual information and statistics with the latest data.
- Refresh visuals at least every six months to align with current designs.
- Add sections that address recent developments.
- Remove or update outdated references and optimize for new keywords.

How do you measure AEO?

With the rise of zero-click search results, traditional SEO metrics like site traffic and conversions may be down, but are still valuable. Keep tracking them. In addition, add these to your toolbox:

- **Citation frequency** measures how often a brand or content is cited as a source in AI-generated answers, reflecting your visibility and authority.
- **Share of voice** gauges a brand's competitive stance, measuring how often it appears in AI answers relative to competitors for specific prompts or topics.
- **Sentiment analysis** seeks to understand the quality of a brand's presence in AI outputs. Monitoring the tone (positive, neutral or negative) and contextual accuracy provides deeper insights into brand perception and reputation.

What's next for your AEO strategy?

Remember, first, breathe. You have weathered significant marketing changes before, and you're still standing. AEO is changing the habits of your customers and prospects, but with some adjustments to your content marketing strategy and finding the right partner, you'll still be able to meet your marketing metrics and business goals.



ABOUT FUTURE B2B

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LEARN MORE

To learn how Future B2B can help you with your AEO strategy [please contact us here](#)