

THE STATE OF —

AI Visibility 2026

Your customers stopped scrolling links. They ask machines — and machines don't rank ten options, they recommend one. This is the discipline of getting recommended.

2–4×

more visits to AI-
recommended brands

9.5B

monthly visits to AI
platforms, +70% YoY

8

measurable dimensions of
AI visibility

EDITION
1.0
JULY 2026

Discovery moved. Optimisation has to move **with it.**

For twenty-five years, being found meant ranking in a list of links. That era is closing. Buyers put their questions to AI assistants, and the machine does not return ten options — it returns **one answer**. The business inside it wins; those outside it are not on page two, they are simply absent.

THE DISCIPLINE — A DEFINITION

Answer Engine Optimization is making a business understandable, trustworthy and quotable to AI answer engines — so that when a buyer asks a machine, the machine **recommends you.**

SEO

Optimises for ranked links

Keywords, backlinks, positions. Gets you **listed** — if the buyer scrolls the list at all.

AEO

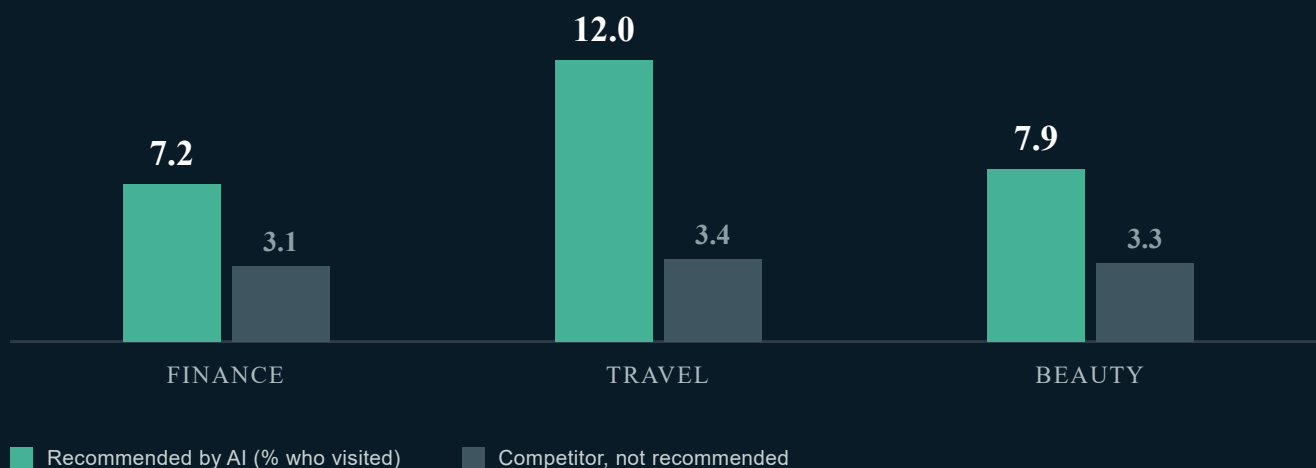
Optimises for being the answer

Extractable facts, verifiable proof, machine-readable structure. Gets you **recommended** — the single answer said out loud.

2-4x

the visits, for brands the AI recommends

Users who saw a brand recommended in an AI answer visited it two-to-four times as often as a competitor that was not — and it flips cleanly when the recommendation flips.



9.5B

monthly AI-platform visits, +70% YoY

5x

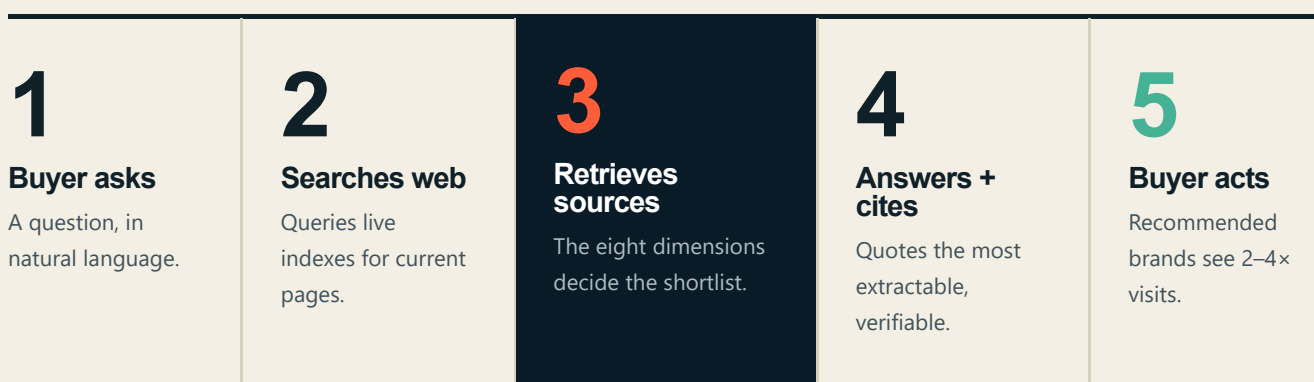
rise in cited AI answers, in a year

58.8%

of AI referrals land on homepages

Retrieval, not **memory**.

Every major AI search product retrieves live pages and builds an answer from what it finds. These five steps are the whole of AEO — and step three is where you are chosen or skipped.



The shortcut that backfires

Brands that mass-produced thin AI content to game step four damaged their step-two organic visibility and lost on both. The retrieval layer rewards genuinely useful, structured, verifiable content. There is no volume shortcut to being cited — only being worth citing.

What it means

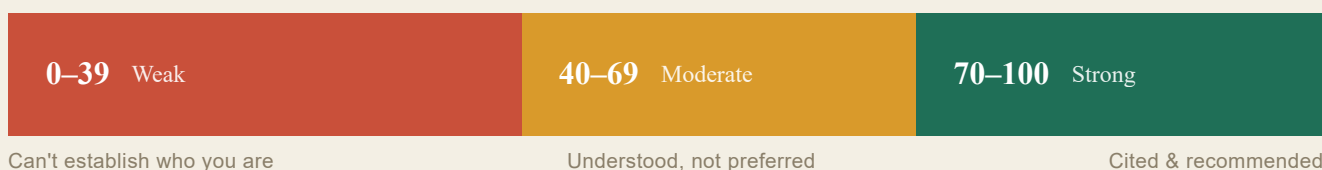
AEO is the disciplined work of taking what is genuinely true about a business and publishing it in the form a machine can **extract, attribute, and repeat** with confidence. And that work is measurable.

Eight dimensions. One score.

Every recommendation is the output of the same underlying questions. The framework names them, and weights them into a 0–100 AI Visibility Score.

- | | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|--|
| 01 | AI Visibility
Can machines resolve who you are and extract your claims? | 05 | Technology Stack
Does the tech layer help or hide content? |
| 02 | Buyer Intent
Are cost, comparison, eligibility answered on-page? | 06 | Security & Privacy
Do browser-visible signals undermine confidence? |
| 03 | Trust & Credibility
Is proof machine-verifiable? Reviews, case studies, credentials. | 07 | Performance
Fast enough for cold-visiting crawlers and agents? |
| 04 | SEO & AEO
Does structure serve ranked search and answer extraction? | 08 | Competitive Position
How do you compare vs the rivals an engine would recommend? |

THE AI VISIBILITY SCORE



What machines trust, in order.

Two sites can make identical claims and be treated completely differently. What separates a cited source from an ignored one is the *form* of the evidence. Most sites live at levels 4 and 5; their reality deserves 1 and 2. The whole of AEO is the climb.

1 · Verified third-party

Reviews w/ schema, press, registries

2 · Named, dated first-party

Case studies with real numbers

3 · Structured claims

Prices, specs, credentials in schema

4 · Prose claims

True statements buried in paragraphs

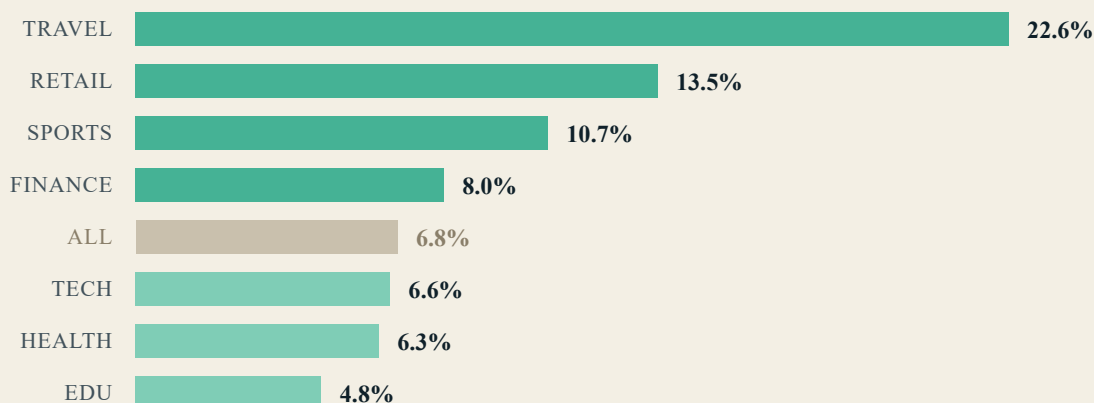
5 · Slogans

"Best in class." Zero extractable content.

Ask of every claim on your site: *what level does its evidence live at?* "68 to 82 on 23 July 2026" is a level-2 fact a machine can quote. "Trusted by thousands" is a level-5 slogan it cannot.

Where AEO pays the **most**.

Citation demand is a signal: the more an industry's AI answers pull live sources, the more being cited is worth. Where buyers compare and plan, retrieval happens on nearly every query.



% of ChatGPT answers containing web citations, by industry. US desktop, May 2026. Chart: Instly Technologies. Data: Similarweb.

DEMAND TIERS

Highest — Travel, Retail, E-commerce (13–23% cited; marketplaces carry the most AI referrals).

Strong — Finance, Insurance, Sports (~8–11%; compare-before-you-buy journeys).

Rising — Technology, Health (~6–7% and climbing; highest trust bar).

SOURCES DIFFER BY CATEGORY

Beauty → retail & e-comm **54.7%**

Travel → reviews & UGC **54.1%**

Finance → publishers **36.6%**

30 days, worst-first.

Identity before answers, answers before proof, measurement last — each week ending in a re-scan, because a fix that didn't move the needle didn't land.

WK 1

Crawlability

llms.txt, robots and sitemap real and consistent; Organization schema live; staging-domain sweep clean; every CTA a real, followable link.

WK 2

Answers

The ten questions buyers ask, answered on-page; pricing published even as a range; FAQ pages with FAQPage schema; one honest comparison page.

WK 3

Proof

Three named testimonials with Review schema; one dated case study with numbers; credentials as structured text; a review pipeline started.

WK 4

Measure

Performance pass to sub-4s mobile LCP; full re-scan; plot the wheel again; publish your own before/after as fresh, dated proof.

Then benchmark. Visibility is relative — scan yourself and three-to-four named rivals the same day, read the result for the checks the whole category fails (**your cheapest wins**) and the checks a rival leads (**your exposure**), and repeat quarterly.

What gets measured gets recommended.

Instly Scout is the instrument for this framework: it scans a site's highest-intent pages, scores all eight dimensions, ranks every fix by impact, benchmarks against named rivals, and re-scans to prove movement.

THE LOOP, RUN ON OURSELVES — IN ONE DAY

AI Visibility Score

68 → 78

Google Lighthouse, mobile

69 → ~90

The method is not theoretical — we run it on our own studio. A single day's audit of instlytechnologies.com found zero structured data, render-blocking fonts and JavaScript-only conversion paths; same-day fixes produced the movement above. **Audit, fix, prove, publish** — the loop this report describes, closed in public, and the same one we run for clients.

Visibility is no longer about ranking in one place. It is about being **the answer** wherever **decisions are made.**

The businesses that build authority, earn visibility and measure their AI performance **now** will define how customers discover, evaluate and choose tomorrow. This report gives you the framework to measure it and the method to win it.



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INSTLY TECHNOLOGIES
JULY 2026

Market data drawn from Similarweb's 2026 *Generative AI Landscape: The Evolution of AI Search* (visits & unique visitors worldwide Jun 2025–May 2026; recommendation lift & citations US desktop to May 2026), with context from Cloudflare Radar and HUMAN Security. All charts are original works by Instly Technologies. The AI Visibility Framework is published at instlyscout.com/framework.