GUIDES

What is GEO, and why does it matter?

By Erik Mäkitalo, founder of Mandalytics · Updated 3 November 2026 · 5 min read

THE SHORT ANSWER

GEO, short for generative engine optimization, is the work of making your website easy for AI tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini and Perplexity to find, understand and name in their answers. It matters because more people now ask an AI a question and read the answer instead of clicking through ten search results. The good news: most of GEO is good SEO, so the work you do for Google carries over.

What does GEO mean?

GEO stands for *generative engine optimization*. A generative engine is any tool that writes an answer for you instead of listing links: ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Claude, Microsoft Copilot, and the AI answers at the top of Google (AI Overviews and AI Mode).

You will also see the names AEO (answer engine optimization) and "AI search optimization". They point at the same goal: when someone asks a question your business can answer, the AI names you, quotes you or links to you.

How is GEO different from SEO?

SEO gets your pages to show up and rank in a list of search results. GEO gets your name and your facts into a written answer. The two overlap a lot, as the table shows.

	SEO	GEO
The goal	A high spot in the results list	Being named, quoted or linked inside an AI answer

	SEO	GEO
The reader sees	Ten blue links	One written answer, often with a few sources
What helps most	Useful pages, clear titles, a healthy site, links from others	The same, plus clear facts, easy-to-quote text and other sites mentioning you
How you measure it	Rankings, clicks, visitors	How often AI tools name you for real customer questions

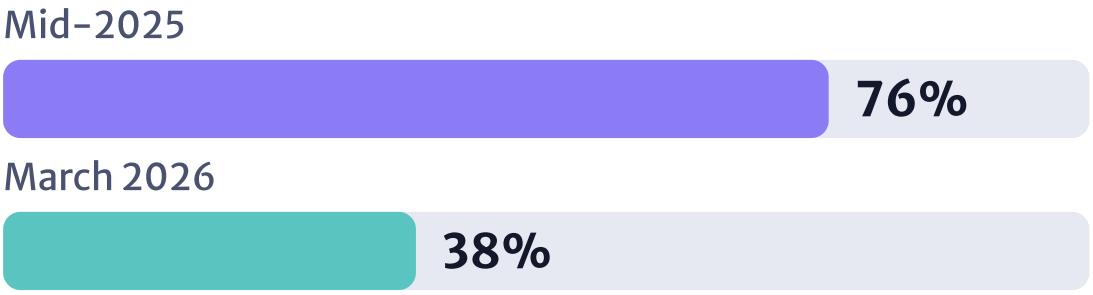
Google has said that its AI answers use the same crawl and index as normal search, with no extra technical requirements. That is why we say good SEO is good GEO.

Why does GEO matter for my website?

Because the way people look for businesses is changing under your feet. Someone who used to search "best physio in Uppsala" and click three results may now ask ChatGPT and act on the answer. If your business is not in that answer, you never get the visit.

It also changes which pages win. In one large study of 863,000 searches, only 38% of the pages cited in Google's AI Overviews came from the top ten results in March 2026, down from 76% in mid-2025 (Ahrefs). Ranking well still helps, but it is no longer the whole story.

The opportunity is real too. Most small and mid-sized sites have done nothing for AI search yet, so a few simple steps put you ahead.



Ranking in the top 10 matters less for AI answers than it did: 38% of AI Overview citations came from the top 10 in March 2026, down from 76% in mid-2025. Source: Ahrefs, 863,000 searches.

What are the first three steps?

1. **Ask the questions your customers ask.** Type five real questions into ChatGPT, Gemini and Perplexity ("where can I buy...", "who is the best... in..."). Write down who gets named. That is your starting line.
2. **Let the AI tools in.** Many sites block AI crawlers by accident. See Is your site open to ChatGPT and Perplexity?
3. **Put the answer first.** On your most important page, state the answer in the first two sentences, use question headings, and add a visible "updated" date. See how AI tools decide which sites to name.

Do those three and you have done more than most of your competitors. Celebrate that, then keep going one step a week.

Frequently asked questions

Is GEO replacing SEO?

No. Google says its AI answers use the same index as normal search, and most GEO work (useful pages, clear facts, a healthy site, other sites mentioning you) is also good SEO. Think of GEO as SEO with an extra goal: being named in the answer.

Can I pay to be included in AI answers?

Not in the way you can buy ads. AI tools choose sources by themselves. What you can do is make your site easy to find, read and trust.

How long does it take to see results?

Plan for weeks, not days. Google says a refreshed page takes about 30 days to be recrawled, and bigger recoveries can take three to six months. Small, steady steps add up.

Want these steps as a weekly to-do list for your own site?

Reading this is already a step forward. Mandalytics checks your website in Google and in AI tools every week, then sends the five tasks that will bring you the most visitors, each with the reason why and the steps to do it. You learn as you go, and every small win brings more visitors, more customers and, in the end, more revenue.

See how Mandalytics works

Where this comes from

- Ahrefs: AI Overview citations and the top 10
- Google: Search Console generative AI performance reports
- Arvow: Search Central Live Barcelona 2026 takeaways