

HOW **AI** AFFECTS SEO AND SEA

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR MARKETERS



SEO / GEO / LLM (?!): Visibility in 2025

Search is now a conversation. Visibility beats clicks.

Status Quo: Where We Are Now

Search has evolved, but not vanished. Google still dominates, holding around 89–90% global market share, though this has slightly declined for the first time in years. AI-driven interfaces such as Google AI Overviews, ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Copilot are reshaping *how* users find answers, especially for longer, conversational, or explanatory queries.

So far, AI tools generate only a small share of search-like traffic (about 3%), but their influence is growing in specific niches and query types.

Users now expect direct, conversational answers instead of link lists. Even top-ranked pages see fewer clicks. Visibility increasingly means being mentioned or cited within AI-generated responses, not only ranking high in traditional SERPs.

- New metric: **Reference / Citation Rate**
- Fragmented platforms → different retrieval behavior
- Challenges: overlapping content, lower CTRs, and tracking gaps that obscure performance

Core Principles: Continuity Over Disruption

The fundamentals of SEO still apply. Indexability, crawlability, and clear, human-first content remain essential. LLM optimization is not a new discipline, it's SEO done right.

What made pages rank before still makes them quotable today: clarity, structure, and context. LLMs evaluate *meaning*, not keyword density, so internal linking and topic clusters help them interpret authority. **E-E-A-T** (Expertise, Experience, Authority, Trust) continues to be the strongest visibility signal, now evaluated by both users and machines.

Off-page authority remains vital: backlinks build credibility; citations amplify reach. Together they strengthen a brand's presence across both classic and AI-driven search.

Content for LLMs: Evolution, Not Reinvention

Good SEO content already works for LLMs. Write for people, structure for machines. Lead with clear, concise answers and build depth logically. Consistency in terminology and complete coverage of intent help models extract and reference content accurately.

Early results from our projects confirm this: well-optimized pages are now appearing across hundreds of AI Overview keywords and even within ChatGPT answers. What works for search largely works for LLMs, only the interface has changed.

Technical Requirements: Make It Discoverable

Accessibility and performance are still the foundation. Allow major crawlers (GPTBot, PerplexityBot, Bingbot) to access key pages, maintain Core Web Vitals, and keep content fresh. Clear site architecture and logical linking ensure content remains easy to crawl and interpret.

Finally, **logfile analysis** is emerging as a valuable approach — it can reveal which bots visit which pages and when, helping to distinguish genuine AI interest from automated scraping.

Measuring Visibility and Presence = Performance

Success now means *presence*, not just clicks. Classic KPIs still matter, but they no longer show the full picture. Track and evaluate:

- **Mentions & Citation Rate**
- **Prominence in AI answers**
- **AI Share of Voice & Sentiment**
- **Bot access patterns (GPTBot, PerplexityBot, Bingbot)**

Visibility across AI engines is becoming a parallel performance layer, complementary to traditional SEO metrics.

Tracking First — Then Tools

Before buying new tools, strengthen what you already have. **GA4 and Search Console** can already surface valuable AI-related insights.

Set up **referrer and domain tracking** for custom AI channels, log AI Overview clicks with snippets, and enable **bot detection** to filter non-human activity. Cross-reference GA4 with server logs to see where content is surfaced but not clicked, a sign of AI visibility.

Once that foundation is clear, we can help refine analytics, build transparency, and only then decide which external visibility tools add real value.

Manual Tracking Approach: A Practical Starting Point

You can already track key AI visibility indicators manually without external software:

- **Prominence & Share of Voice:** Define 10–20 prompts your audience would use. Run them in AI tools (Google AI Overviews, ChatGPT, Perplexity, Copilot) and record mentions of your brand and competitors in a simple spreadsheet. Note where your brand appears (first, middle, or not at all) and the tone of mention. Over time, compare frequency and order of appearance to build a visibility baseline.
- **Mentions & Citations:** Combine these checks with GA4 referral data from AI-related domains (e.g., perplexity.ai) to see whether mentions generate real visits.
- **Bot Access Patterns:** Review logfile data for GPTBot, PerplexityBot, and Bingbot to confirm which content is being accessed most frequently.

Even with these simple steps, you can start understanding where your content stands in AI ecosystems, using data you already control.

Strategy: Positioning for Sustainable Visibility

The fundamentals haven't changed: authority, trust, and clarity still win. Answer questions directly, include your brand and USP in quotable sections, and enrich content with data, studies, or tools that AIs can't reproduce. Off-page and on-page complement each other: **links build credibility, mentions amplify reach.**

We can support the groundwork: setting up GA4 channels, tracking AI Overview clicks, identifying which keywords appear in those results, and optimizing to turn visibility into relevant traffic and conversions.

In Short

Presence = Performance.

Search may be evolving, but its core principles remain. Appear in answers to earn trust — and when that visibility drives clicks, it becomes measurable growth.

Google Ads in times of AI Optimization

Paid Search is now predictive. Intent beats impressions.

Paid Search in an AI-Driven Landscape

On the paid front, search is also evolving. Paid Search giant Google still has one of the highest ad revenues on the digital marketing playing field, but its surface has changed: AI Overviews now reshape how results appear, **blending organic and paid visibility**. While Google has a clear incentive to preserve ad visibility until AI Overviews are fully monetized, early data shows technical and behavioral effects already at play.

In verticals like **healthcare, finance, and education**, where queries are heavily informational, AI Overviews take up significant screen space — often pushing ads further down the page out of the users' field of vision. Meanwhile, ecommerce and transactional searches remain relatively stable, as AI tends to summarize less and recommend more.

For advertisers, this means the competition for **visible, high-intent space** has never been tougher. Even when your ad still **appears** (and counts as an impression), its visual prominence and **click potential can decline**. CTRs are dropping for top-of-funnel (TOFU) informational searches, while bottom-of-funnel (BOFU) ads continue to perform. In theory, remaining clicks should be more qualified, as users' informational needs have already been satisfied.

In summary, while AI Overviews at first glance primarily impact organic performance, they do heavily influence paid marketing performance as well.

Core Principles: Strategy Over Automation

It's important to remember that AI is rewriting ad mechanics, **not marketing fundamentals**. The principles that made SEA work — relevant targeting, strong creatives, and cross channel strategies— still define success. What's new is the automation layer sitting between your strategy and execution. Unfortunately automated campaigns and changing user behavior increasingly blur conversion paths, user journeys and funnels.

Hyper-automated campaign types like Performance Max and Smart Bidding now drive the majority of ad delivery. Though manual control is fading, strategic input still defines results. Now, advertisers must feed the algorithm with **clean data**, structured campaigns, and sharp creative direction. If your signals are messy, AI will optimize for the wrong goal. If your structure is tight, AI amplifies your intent. However, structure no longer just encompasses your paid ads account. Instead, every data source from website to CRM needs to be clearly structured.

AI-Driven Campaigns: Guidance, Not Guesswork

Generative formats such as Responsive Search Ads or Performance Max's auto-generated assets rely heavily on the information you provide and the content on your landing pages. AI pieces together meaning from the assets and metadata available. This changes optimization:

- Ensure complete headline and description sets both in campaigns and on your website
- Keep landing pages consistent in tone, structure, and terminology
- Strengthen semantic relevance between keywords, ad copy, and content

Data from early campaigns shows that advertisers with **semantically aligned copy** (where keywords, landing pages, and structured data share meaning) see higher Quality Scores and better visibility within AI-curated results.

When advertisers “feed the system” better inputs, AI-driven campaign assembly becomes more predictable. We also expect new direct controls or at least more transparent reporting options to become available in time.

Technical Setup: Data Quality = Performance Quality

Every modern PPC campaign is only as smart as its data. AI tools don't “know” what success looks like; they learn it from your conversions and signals.

To-Dos:

- Enable enhanced conversions and accurate GA4 tracking
- Set up attribution across channels (Search, Display, YouTube, Discovery)

- Integrate CRM to feed real downstream conversions back into Google Ads

Advertisers who treat first-party data as fuel are already outperforming those relying on default automation. Without verified conversions and meaningful audience feedback, the algorithm optimizes for engagement – not revenue.

Measuring Performance: From Clicks to Contribution

Traditional PPC reporting – impressions, CTR, CPC – no longer tells the full story. AI Overviews now absorb a share of user intent that previously drove organic and paid clicks. Expect CTRs to decline specifically for TOFU queries. Clicks that remain could potentially be more qualified. As advertisers compete for fewer, higher-intent clicks, CPCs may rise – yet ROI can improve when targeting is sharp and funnel focus narrows. Lastly, keep in mind that paid impressions still count even if your ad sits below the AI Overview or even at the bottom of the page. Impressions at the end of 2025 are inflated compared to last year's performance.

So how can we measure AI Overviews' effect on Paid Ads? This traffic doesn't appear in Google Ads reports, and tracking its indirect impact remains challenging.

Tools and Tracking: Audit Before You Automate

Before adopting another PPC optimizer tool, revisit the data foundation you already own. GA4, Search Console, and Google Ads together already hold the clues:

- Segment keywords by intent (TOFU vs. BOFU) and monitor performance divergence.
- Cross-reference impression and CTR drops with SERP changes (AI Overview presence).
- Use server logs and bot access reports to see where AI crawlers like GPTBot or PerplexityBot are interacting with your pages – an emerging signal of AI-driven exposure.

Only after these baselines are clear should you consider specialized tools to track AI visibility share or conversational ad placements.

Strategy: Positioning for Predictive Performance

If search is becoming predictive, then strategy must become preemptive. **AI Overviews are beginning to replace the “research phase” of the funnel.** Users get enough information before they ever reach your site. As a result TOFU queries decline, BOFU and branded queries gain relative importance and the Clicks that remain come from users closer to conversion. This shifts SEA from “capture every click” to “**create awareness, then capture the decisive click.**”

Strategic implications:

- When it comes to Search, prioritize **transactional** and branded keywords
- Be prepared for less volume and focus on high-intent actions and KPI instead
- **Reduce budget on generic** TOFU terms that AI now answers directly
- Reinvest in Display, YouTube, and Discovery or even other platforms to recapture awareness lost from AI-dominated search visibility
- Consider spending on AI-driven campaigns to feed Google’s algorithm with information while you build out SEO
- Align SEO and SEA efforts — visibility synergy is key when AI curates what users see
- Keep changes in users’ search behavior in mind and experiment

In Short

The surface of search is changing, but its foundation isn’t. AI is compressing the funnel. Clicks are fewer but stronger. Automation replaces micromanagement, not intent. As long as you control your signals, feed the system with clarity, and track contribution instead of vanity, SEA remains one of the most controllable and profitable channels — even when AI decides where your ad appears.