

Beyond SEO

Why AI Search Needs a New Playbook

Shopware Community Unconference · Köln 2026

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The Shift Is Happening

Your customers are asking AI — not Google — for recommendations.



40%

of Gen Z prefer
AI over Google



200M+

weekly ChatGPT
active users



79%

of AI answers cite
third-party sources

The question isn't whether AI search matters — it's whether you're visible in it.

Built on Science, Not Guesswork

14 peer-reviewed studies mapped to a practical framework

Princeton

Carnegie Mellon

UC Berkeley

ETH Zürich

Cornell Tech

MIT

U of Toronto

Columbia

AutoGEO (CMU, 2025)

Extracted actual preference rules from every major AI engine

Toronto Study (2025)

Largest empirical comparison: AI Search vs. Google

E-GEO (Columbia/MIT, 2025)

First GEO benchmark for e-commerce with 7,000+ queries

MillStone (Cornell, 2025)

Proved LLMs change recommendations based on authoritative sources

Finding #1

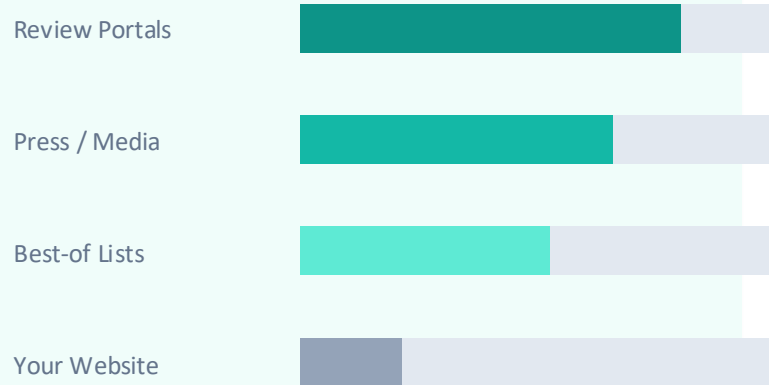
Earned Media Is King for AI Visibility

AI search systems systematically favor third-party sources over brand-owned content.

Review sites, press coverage, comparison lists, and expert mentions are weighted far more heavily than your own website copy.

This is the opposite of traditional SEO, where you optimize your own pages.

What AI Cites



Source: Chen et al., University of Toronto, 2025

Finding #2

Every LLM Has Its Own Rules

Engine-specific optimization outperforms generic optimization by ~36%

36%

improvement when
optimizing per engine

ChatGPT

Source citations,
conciseness,
freshness

Gemini

Comprehensive
coverage,
factual accuracy

Claude

Balanced views,
neutral tone

Perplexity

Direct answers,
specific evidence

Two Rules That Change Everything

Finding #3

Relevance Beats Style

If your content doesn't match the user's query topic, no amount of formatting, statistics, or authority signals will help.



Topic match = primary ranking factor



Style tricks alone = ineffective

Wan et al., UC Berkeley, ACL 2024

Finding #4

Neutral Tone Wins

LLMs actively penalize promotional language, superlatives, and biased claims. Objective, fact-based content gets cited.



"Best in class! Award-winning!"



"Supports 12 payment methods"

Wu et al., AutoGEO, CMU 2025 + Bagga et al., E-GEO, Columbia/MIT 2025

8 Universal Rules AI Engines Agree On

Extracted from AutoGEO analysis across ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude & Perplexity

Source Citation	Back claims with credible sources	Comprehensive Coverage	Cover all key aspects of a topic
Factual Accuracy	Verifiable, up-to-date information	Neutral Tone	No promotional language or bias
Logical Structure	Clear headings, lists, paragraphs	Clear Language	Precise, jargon-free writing
Freshness	Current information and data	Conciseness	No filler, no redundancy

These work across ALL domains. E-commerce adds: scannable format, specific evidence.

The Problem: Single-Perspective Tools

Most tools look at ONE layer. But visibility is a chain.

SEO Tools

Measures:

Google Rankings

Misses:

AI visibility, content quality,
business intent

GEO-Only Tools

Measures:

AI Mentions

Misses:

Why you're missing,
what to fix first

Content Audits

Measures:

Website Analysis

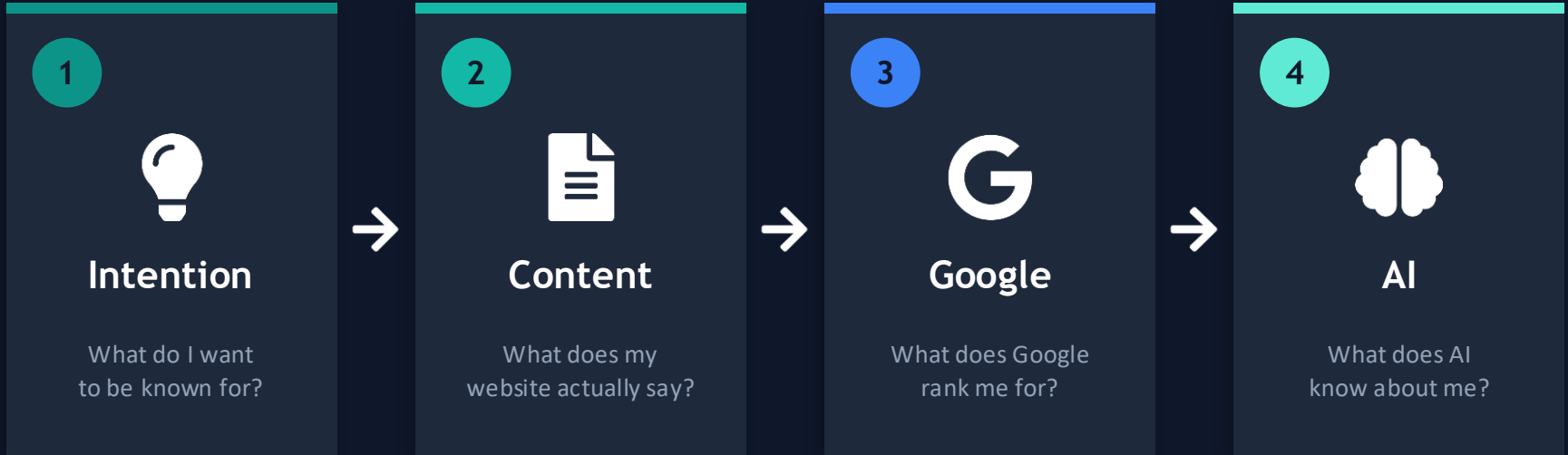
Misses:

Search rankings,
AI perception

You can't fix what you can't trace back to a root cause.

The 4-Perspective Model

From intention to AI perception — one connected chain



→ Forward = Diagnosis

← Backward = Therapy (Backtracking)

Every gap between perspectives = a specific, actionable recommendation

The Backtracking Engine

AI doesn't recommend you? Let's trace back to find out why.



Priority order: Content gaps first → SEO second → GEO fine-tuning last

Backtracking in Practice

Example: Shopware Agency

Goal: Rank for "Shopware Agency Cologne"

Status: Content exists → Google position #34 → No AI mentions

Diagnosis: SEO Problem — improve Google ranking first. AI will follow automatically.

Example: E-Commerce Brand

Goal: Be recommended for "sustainable fashion Germany"

Status: Website never mentions "sustainable" → No Google ranking → No AI mentions

Diagnosis: Content Gap — create content first. No SEO or GEO optimization before content exists.

What This Means for Shopware Merchants



Product Visibility in AI

When someone asks "best running shoes under €150," is your product in the answer? AI shopping is growing fast — and it's a different game than Google Shopping.



Schema.org Is Your AI Resume

Product schema, FAQ schema, review schema — these are the structured signals that help AI engines understand and recommend your products.



Earned Media > Product Descriptions

AI trusts what others say about you more than what you say about yourself. Reviews on Trustpilot, press mentions, comparison articles — these drive AI recommendations.



Neutral, Factual Product Content

"Best quality at the lowest price" gets ignored. "Made from 100% organic cotton, ships from Germany in 2 days" gets cited.

Key Takeaways

1

AI search is not a future problem — it's happening now. Your customers are already asking ChatGPT for product recommendations.

2

Earned media matters more than ever. Reviews, press, comparison lists are the currency of AI visibility.

3

Each AI engine plays by different rules. One-size-fits-all optimization leaves 36% on the table.

4

Fix problems in order: Content gaps → SEO → GEO. Skipping steps wastes resources.

5

Write for trust, not for hype. Neutral, factual, well-structured content wins in AI search.

Thank You!

Let's talk about making your brand visible in AI search.

geolyze.de

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Slides based on 14 peer-reviewed studies from Princeton, CMU, UC Berkeley, ETH Zürich, Cornell Tech, MIT, U of Toronto, and Columbia University.