



# Get *Found* in the Age of AI

A LOCAL BUSINESS GUIDE TO SEO + GEO

Search has changed. Sixty percent of searches never produce a click. AI is now answering your customers' questions — with or without you. This guide reveals why, shows you what it costs, and helps you diagnose exactly where you stand.



60%

OF SEARCHES END  
WITHOUT A CLICK

3

AI PLATFORMS NOW  
ANSWER LOCAL QUERIES

GEO

THE NEW DISCIPLINE  
EVERY BUSINESS NEEDS

# The Shift in *Search*

SOMETHING FUNDAMENTAL HAS CHANGED – AND MOST BUSINESSES HAVEN'T NOTICED YET

For the first time in the history of the internet, **the majority of people who search for something never visit a single website.** They get their answer directly – from an AI.

60%

OF ALL GOOGLE SEARCHES NOW  
END WITHOUT A CLICK

Heading to 65%

AND CLIMBING – THE TREND  
IS ONLY ACCELERATING

This isn't just a Google problem. Every day, potential customers are asking ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google's AI Overviews questions like:

*"Who's the best tree trimmer near Grand Rapids?"*

*"Where can I find a trusted dog trainer in Hudsonville?"*

*"What's the best local HVAC company for older homes?"*

*"Who do locals recommend for kitchen remodels?"*

If your business doesn't appear in AI-generated answers, **you're invisible to a growing majority of potential customers – even if your website ranks on page one of Google.** Traditional SEO is no longer enough on its own. A new discipline has emerged to fill the gap: **Generative Engine Optimization (GEO).**

# SEO Gets You *Seen*. GEO Gets You *Cited*.

GENERATIVE ENGINE OPTIMIZATION — WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT'S DIFFERENT

If SEO helps your website rank on Google, **GEO helps your content get quoted by AI platforms** like ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google's AI Overviews. Same goal — helping people find your business — entirely different playbooks.

SEO — Search Engine Optimization	GEO — Generative Engine Optimization
TARGETS Traditional search results pages (SERPs)	TARGETS <b>AI-generated answers and responses</b>
RELIES ON Keywords, links, and metadata	RELIES ON <b>Contextual clarity and structured information</b>
SUCCESS MEASURED BY Clicks and traffic	SUCCESS MEASURED BY <b>Mentions, citations, and AI visibility</b>
OPTIMIZES Web pages for search engine crawlers	OPTIMIZES <b>Information to be readable, quotable, standalone</b>
BUILDS VISIBILITY THROUGH Rankings and keyword density	BUILDS VISIBILITY THROUGH <b>Authority, trust signals, and AI references</b>

GEO is **not a replacement for SEO** — it's the evolution of it. Traditional SEO still matters. But without GEO, you're only visible in 40% of the search landscape and falling. The businesses that win in 2026 and beyond will combine both.

Even if a user never clicks through to your website, if an AI platform references your business by name, you're still building awareness, credibility, and trust — at zero additional cost per impression. That's the power of GEO done right.

# The Four *Search* Driver Model

WHY PEOPLE SEARCH — AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOUR GEO STRATEGY

To show up in modern discovery, you need to understand the reason behind a search — not just the words. We developed this framework with local businesses across West Michigan to identify the right content approach for each type of searcher. **GEO content performs best when it speaks to all four simultaneously.**

F

## FACT-FINDING

People looking for clear, objective answers to specific questions. This is AI's home turf — and your biggest GEO opportunity. Content that directly answers a question wins citations.

### Search example:

*"How tall should a maple tree be before trimming?" — a business that answers this clearly gets cited when someone asks ChatGPT.*

C

## CROWD-SOURCING

People wanting validation from others — recommendations, reviews, community opinions. AI platforms pull from reviews, local directories, and reputation signals to build these answers.

### Search example:

*"Best dog trainers near Hudsonville recommended by locals" — businesses with strong, detailed reviews appear here.*

T

## TASTE-TUNING

People searching for inspiration and style that fits their vision. Portfolio content, project galleries, and style-specific descriptions help AI match your business to their aesthetic.

### Search example:

*"Creative backyard landscaping ideas Grand Rapids" — businesses with descriptive visual content get surfaced.*

H

## HABIT-DRIVEN

Returning customers looking for a brand they already trust. Consistent brand mentions, updated profiles, and fresh content keep your business top-of-mind across AI platforms.

### Search example:

*A repeat client searching directly for "VanDenBerg Web and Creative" — brand consistency is the foundation.*

**Most local businesses only optimize for *one driver*.  
The ones AI recommends optimize for *all four*.**

THE FOUR SEARCH DRIVER MODEL — VANDENBERG WEB + CREATIVE

# What *AI-Invisible* Looks Like

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BUSINESSES AI RECOMMENDS — AND BUSINESSES AI IGNORES

There's a widening gap forming right now between local businesses that AI platforms confidently recommend and those they skip over entirely. The gap isn't about size, budget, or how long you've been in business. It's about **how your information is structured, contextualized, and presented** across the web.

## ⚠️ AI-Invisible Business

### What AI sees — and skips

- ❌ Homepage says "Quality Service Since 1998" — no services, no location
- ❌ Google Business Profile last updated 2021
- ❌ No FAQ content — nowhere for AI to pull a direct answer from
- ❌ Reviews exist but are generic — no specifics AI can extract
- ❌ No blog, no local content, no credibility signals
- ❌ Business name/address inconsistent across directories

## ✓ AI-Ready Business

### What AI sees — and skips

- ✓ Homepage clearly states: what, where, who for, and why you
- ✓ Google Business Profile current, complete, and active
- ✓ FAQ section answers real customer questions directly
- ✓ Detailed reviews that mention services, staff, and location
- ✓ Short local blog posts that answer "near me" questions
- ✓ Consistent business information across every platform

## West Michigan Example

A dog trainer in Hudsonville had a functional website, solid reviews, and years of experience — but almost zero AI visibility. After structuring their About page around the 5 Ws, adding a 6-question FAQ answering what customers actually asked, and updating their Google Business Profile with accurate service details, the business began appearing in AI Overviews and ChatGPT responses for Hudsonville dog trainer queries within weeks.

**The difference wasn't their reputation. It was their readability to AI.**

# Your AI Readiness Scorecard

ANSWER HONESTLY — THEN TALLY YOUR SCORE TO FIND OUT WHERE YOU STAND

For each question below, give yourself the points if your answer is genuinely yes. Partial credit doesn't count — if you're unsure, it's a no. Total your score at the bottom and find your result band.

## A · Your Website Foundation

- Your homepage clearly states what you do, what city/area you serve, and who your ideal customer is — all above the fold. **+10**

Can a stranger understand your full offer in 5 seconds without scrolling?

- Your About page answers Who, What, Where, When, and Why — in plain language, not marketing speak. **+10**

AI crawlers prioritize About pages for entity extraction — this is critical.

- Your site loads in under 3 seconds on mobile. **+5**

Check at [pagespeed.web.dev](https://pagespeed.web.dev) — slow sites get deprioritized by both Google and AI crawlers.

- Every service you offer has its own dedicated page with a clear description and your service area mentioned by name. **+10**

## B · Local Presence & Trust Signals

- Your Google Business Profile is fully completed and has been updated within the last 90 days. **+10**

Hours, services, photos, description — all current and accurate.

- Your business name, address, and phone number are identical across your website, Google, Yelp, and every other directory listing. **+10**

Even small inconsistencies (St. vs Street) reduce AI confidence in your listing.

- You have 10+ Google reviews with an average above 4.2 stars, and at least some reviews mention your specific services and location by name. **+10**

- Your website has visible trust signals: team bios, credentials, years in business, or local partnerships. **+5**

## C · AI-Readable Content

- At least one of your service pages has an FAQ section that answers 3 or more real questions your customers ask, in plain conversational language. **+10**
- You have published at least 2 blog posts or articles in the last 12 months that answer a specific local question (e.g. "When to trim trees in West Michigan"). **+10**
- Your content is written conversationally — the way a customer would ask a question, not the way an industry professional would describe a service. **+5**

AI matches conversational queries to conversational answers.

### MAXIMUM POSSIBLE SCORE

**95** points

Add up your checked items. Your total reveals exactly where you stand — and how visible you are to AI right now.

**0–35**

● **AI-INVISIBLE**

Your business likely doesn't appear in AI-generated responses. Competitors with even basic GEO signals are capturing attention you're missing entirely.

**36–55**

● **PARTIALLY VISIBLE**

You show up occasionally, but inconsistently. A few targeted improvements could move you into regular AI recommendations relatively quickly.

**56–74**

● **BUILDING MOMENTUM**

You have a solid foundation. Closing specific gaps — especially content depth and FAQ structure — would significantly increase your AI citation rate.

**75–95**

● **AI-READY**

You're well-positioned. The focus now is maintenance, expanding content, and tracking where you're already being cited — and where gaps remain.

READY TO CLOSE THE GAP?



# Your score reveals the *what*. We deliver the *how*.

Diagnosing where you stand is the first step — and now you have it. The next step is closing the gaps, building the content, and putting the technical architecture in place so AI platforms have no choice but to cite you. That's where we come in.



## WEBSITE DESIGN & STRATEGY

Custom architecture and UX optimized for both human visitors and AI crawlers.



## SEO + GEO OPTIMIZATION

Schema markup, local directory management, content structuring, and AI citation strategy.



## ONGOING WORDPRESS MAINTENANCE & CARE PLANS

Security monitoring, updates, backups, and site speed so you never fall behind.

[BOOK A FREE STRATEGY CALL](#)

## ABOUT VANDENBERG WEB + CREATIVE

We help local businesses win online with clear websites, reliable hosting, and marketing support that's smart and effective. Rooted in West Michigan, relationship-first, with 25+ years of navigating every major shift in search.

### OUR PROMISE

Clarity over "geek speak"

### OUR APPROACH

Relationship-first, results-driven

### OUR MISSION

Get Found. Generate Leads. Grow.