

GEO is mostly bullshit.

Generative Engine Optimisation, LLM visibility scores, llms.txt files, schema fan-outs and the \$2K-a-month dashboards that come with them. Most of it doesn't hold up to ten minutes of scrutiny. Here is what the data actually says, and what to buy instead.

By **Scott Purcell**, Co-Founder, Man of Many

7-MIN READ

A field guide for agencies, brands, and anyone being pitched a "proprietary GEO strategy" this quarter.

0.77% of US desktop activity is AI search. Google still gets 373x more searches than ChatGPT. SPARKTORO · DATOS · DEC 2025	-4.6% change in Google AI Overview citations after pages added schema. The most-pushed GEO tactic moved the needle backwards. AHREFS · 1,885 PAGES · MAY 2026	0.1% of AI crawler requests hit /llms.txt over 90 days. Nobody is reading it. OTTERLYAI EXPERIMENT · SE RANKING · 300K DOMAINS	<1/100 chance ChatGPT or Google's AI returns the same brand list twice. "Rank position in AI" is theatre. SPARKTORO · GUMSHOE · 2,961 PROMPTS
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THE PITCH / WHAT THEY'RE SELLING

"Google is dying. AI is the new front door. Buy our dashboard."

- "Your SEO playbook is dead."
- "We've decoded the ranking signals inside ChatGPT."
- "You need a separate GEO strategy and bespoke tooling."
- "Add schema, write an llms.txt, install our tracker."
- "\$2K a month, locked in for twelve."

THE REALITY / WHAT THE DATA SAYS

LLMs ground in Google, Bing and Brave. So "rank in ChatGPT" reduces to plain old SEO + PR.

- ChatGPT Search** uses Bing's index (87% overlap).
- Claude** uses Brave Search (86.7% overlap).
- Perplexity** uses Bing + Google APIs.
- AI Overviews / Copilot** use Google and Bing respectively.
- The "AI surface" is the same surface you already optimise for.

"

If a GEO service doesn't openly tell you that success in AI visibility is **80% good fundamental SEO**, they are selling you snake oil.

Jeremy Moser · CEO, uSERP

Any tool that gives a "ranking position in AI" is **full of baloney**.

Rand Fishkin · [SparkToro](#), Jan 2026

Many so-called GEO tactics are simply **repackaged core SEO** using a different name.

Lily Ray · VP SEO, Amsive

THE RECEIPTS • SCHEMA	THE RECEIPTS • LLMS.TXT																
AHREFS · 1,885 PAGES · AUG '25 – MAR '26 SCHEMA'D <table><tr><td>Google AI Overviews</td><td>-4.6%</td></tr><tr><td>Google AI Mode</td><td>+2.4% (noise)</td></tr><tr><td>ChatGPT citations</td><td>+2.2% (noise)</td></tr><tr><td>LLMs reading JSON-LD</td><td>IGNORED</td></tr></table> VERDICT Didn't move	Google AI Overviews	-4.6%	Google AI Mode	+2.4% (noise)	ChatGPT citations	+2.2% (noise)	LLMs reading JSON-LD	IGNORED	AHREFS · SE RANKING · OTTERLYAI · 300K DOMAINS LLMS.TXT <table><tr><td>AI crawler hits on /llms.txt</td><td>0.1%</td></tr><tr><td>Correlation with citations</td><td>NONE</td></tr><tr><td>OpenAI · Anthropic · Google</td><td>DON'T USE IT</td></tr><tr><td>Compared by Ahrefs to...</td><td>obsolete meta keywords tag</td></tr></table> VERDICT Read by nobody	AI crawler hits on /llms.txt	0.1%	Correlation with citations	NONE	OpenAI · Anthropic · Google	DON'T USE IT	Compared by Ahrefs to...	obsolete meta keywords tag
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The Grift Checklist.

Tick three boxes on this list and the post you're reading is selling you something. Tick six and close the tab. Tick all ten and consider blocking the sender.

- ✗

01 · FOMO opener.
"AI is changing everything. You'll be invisible by next year." Urgency manufactured at the top to short-circuit your critical thinking.
- ✗

03 · One client. No control group.
"Our client saw a major shift in lead flow." That's not data. That's a case study with a single data point and a flattering chart.
- ✗

05 · Tactics overlap with Lily Ray's "Eight Risky Patterns".
Programmatic comparison pages, FAQ farms, "best X for Y" listicles where you rank yourself #1, competitor-alternatives doorways. Google has flattened these once already.
- ✗

07 · Tactics align with features Google is deprecating.
FAQPage rich results died in May 2026 — the same week vendors were pitching FAQ schema as the "AEO play". You can't make this up.
- ✗

09 · The cross-promotional flywheel.
Software + the agency that uses it + the client that "won" + the free webinar. Not journalism. A vendor stack with a content layer.

- ✗

02 · The author sells the dashboard that "proved" the result.
The vendor's own software finds the problem, prescribes the fix, then measures the win. A perfect circle. *Sometimes literally one person.*
- ✗

04 · The "fixes" are SEO from 2014 in a new hat.
About Us pages. Author bylines. FAQs. Pricing pages. Terms & conditions. Calling this "AEO" is the rebrand. *Patrick Stox at Ahrefs has recommended all of it for a decade.*
- ✗

06 · No primary data, only vendor self-reporting.
Correlation dressed as causation. Charts with no axis labels. Sample sizes you have to email for.
- ✗

08 · Implicit admission that the tactics expire.
"This field is moving fast. What works today may not work in six months." If your own pitch says it churns, it's not strategy. It's a subscription.
- ✗

10 · No mention of the 80/20 filter.
If the pitch doesn't acknowledge that *80% of AI visibility is fundamental SEO and PR*, walk away. Per Jeremy Moser, that's the snake-oil test.

A note on fairness: most GEO vendors are not con artists, and a few of these tactics genuinely move the needle a little. The risk is the trade-off. Reallocating budget from technical SEO, editorial and earned media into "AI dashboards" and *llms.txt* audits is a bad swap on the evidence. Do the fundamentals. Then, by all means, experiment at the margins.

THE E-E-A-T TEST

If you're going to invest in earned media (and the data says you should), here are five questions worth asking any publisher partner before you sign.

Full disclosure: this is the Experience, Expertise, Authority and Trustworthiness bar we hold ourselves to. Apply it to us. Apply it to anyone else.

01
Industry authority
Has the publisher earned independent industry recognition?
Mumbrella Media Brand of the Year 2025 · Website of the Year x4 · AFR Most Innovative x#5.

02
Editorial standards
Are they accountable to a recognised press council with verifiable standards?
Australian Press Council member.

03
Human, expert-reviewed
Are humans actually writing this, and is YMYL content reviewed by credentialed experts?
100% human editorial; dietitians, psychologists, dermatologists review YMYL.

04
AI relationships
Are they at the table with the AI companies shaping how journalism surfaces?
WAN-IFRA Newsroom AI Catalyst Programme, in partnership with OpenAI.

05
Audience scale & quality
Real reach to the right reader, with verifiable audience data?
Australia's largest mens lifestyle site · \$140k avg HHI · metropolitan, key decision makers

SNAKE OIL THAT COULD BITE YOU

SNAKE OIL

Tactics with no proven payback — and a documented downside.

1. **Mass "AI summary" / "Key takeaways" blocks** stuffed at the top of every page to get scraped. No public evidence base, degrades the read.

2. **Self-ranking listicle spam** where you name yourself the #1 best. Ray tracked **40+ sites** down 40–95% from late Jan 2026.

3. **"Optimising" *llms.txt* files and schema fan-outs** sold by vendors. Ahrefs: zero evidence; John Mueller: "they don't even check for it."

4. **"AI visibility tracking" subscriptions** that scrape ChatGPT a few times a day. Non-deterministic, personalised, unrepeatable.

5. **Rewriting evergreen content to be "AI-friendly"** at the expense of human clarity. translation degrading the thing that drives 99% of traffic to court 1%.

6. **Scaled programmatic content:** comparison pages, FAQ farms, "alternatives to" doorways, location/language clones. **54% of 220+ sites Lily Ray tracked lost 30%+ of peak organic.** Glenn Gabe calls it "Mount AI". Steep up, steeper down.

WHAT TO ACTUALLY DO

7 THINGS

Boring, evergreen, *actually works.*

1. **Fundamental SEO**, harder than ever. Authority, technical health, EEAT.

2. **Bing and Brave indexation.** Check Bing Webmaster Tools. Welcome BraveBot.

3. **PR and earned media.** 48% of LLM citations come from third-party publications. The branded mention is the new backlink.

4. **Brand demand.** Brand search volume is the strongest single predictor of LLM citation (Indig, $r = 0.334$). Outweighs backlinks.

5. **Show up where audiences actually search.** YouTube. Reddit. TikTok. Amazon. Podcasts. LinkedIn.

6. **Track outcomes, not "AI rank".** Direct traffic, brand search, GA4 AI referrals, conversions.

7. **Skip the GEO subscriptions.** Until they publish stats-backed, reviewable methodology, it's theatre.

*GEO isn't nothing. AI search is real, growing, and worth paying attention to. But it's 1% of activity, it grounds in indexes you already optimise for, and its outputs are too noisy to "rank" inside. The brands winning AI citations are winning because their SEO works and their PR works. If you want a label, use the one Rand Fishkin endorses. Same acronym. **No grift.***

THE HONEST TERM

Search Everywhere Optimisation

Coined by Ashley Liddell, BrightonSEO 2022. Endorsed by Rand Fishkin, 2025.

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

Lily Ray (Amsive) "It Works Until It Doesn't" — 14 May 2026 · Ryan Law / Ahrefs — schema (1,885 pages) & llms.txt studies · Rand Fishkin / SparkToro — "Stop with the new acronyms" & AI inconsistency research (2,961 prompts) · Seer Interactive · OtterlyAI · Semrush · BrightEdge · AirOps (21,311 brand mentions, Oct 2025) · Omniscient Digital (23,000+ citations) · Kevin Indig / Digital Bloom · SE Ranking (300k domains) · OtterlyAI 90-day experiment · TechCrunch on Anthropic + Brave · Digiday "GEO hype busted".

MANOFMANY

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