



# AEO Playbook 2026

How CMOs Win the AI-First Search Economy

An AdLift Guide

**ADL↑FT**  
Acquire. Amplify. Advance.

# Search Has Changed. Visibility Has Not.

The traditional "click-to-site" economy is fracturing. To lead in 2026, marketing leaders must acknowledge three data-backed realities:



## 60%+ Zero-Click Reality

According to SparkToro and Datas (2025), nearly 60% of Google searches now end without a click, as answers are delivered directly through AI overviews, snippets and other on-SERP experiences.



## AI-Driven Buyer Research

Gartner (2025) reports that 83–89% of B2B buyers research solutions online before engaging sales, increasingly using search engines and AI assistants to evaluate vendors before visiting a company website.



## Expansion of Intent

Research from BrightEdge (2025) shows AI-generated answers increasingly appear for commercial queries such as "best tools," "top software," and "product comparisons," placing AI directly in the buyer evaluation stage.

**CMO Takeaway:** You are no longer competing for a blue link on Page 1. You are competing to be the **cited authority inside the AI's generated answer.**

# The New KPI: Citation Share

Traditional SEO metrics still matter, but in an AI-first search environment, they no longer tell the full story. AI answers change by context and session, so rankings alone cannot measure visibility anymore.

## What your Dashboard should look like



### Citation Frequency

How often is the brand the source of truth?



### Brand Mention Share

Volume of brand presence across the LLM ecosystem.



### Authority Tier Coverage

Presence in high-trust publications the AI retrieves from.



### Prompt Coverage %

What percentage of category-relevant prompts include the brand?



### Volatility Index

Measuring stability of visibility across model updates.



# How AI Search Works

## The Retrieval + Generation Model



### Interpretation

Understands the user's question and intent.



### Retrieval

Pulls from trusted, high-authority sources.




### Authority Filtering

Prioritizes credible, information-rich sources.



### Synthesis & Citation

Generates answer and cites sources.

 **CMO Insight:** If your brand isn't in AI's sources, it won't appear in the answer.

# The AdLift AEO Framework

Once we understand how AI search works, the next step is influencing it. AdLift's AEO framework focuses on five pillars that increase the chances of your brand appearing in AI-generated answers.

## Authority Access

Backlinks help AI decide which sources are reliable enough to include in answers.

**Strategy :-** Focus PR and outreach on trusted publishers that AI systems frequently cite.

## Answer Architecture

AI models prefer content that is easy to understand and extract.

**Strategy :-** Structure content clearly with direct answers, question-based sections, and concise explanations.

## Entity & Brand Signals

AI builds a knowledge map of brands, people, and products.

**Strategy :-** Strengthen brand signals using structured data, consistent brand mentions, and authoritative profiles.

## Citation Engineering

AI prefers sources that offer unique insights and reliable data.

**Strategy :-** Publish original research, data, and expert insights that other sources can reference.

## Measurement & Optimization

Traditional analytics tools do not track AI visibility.

**Strategy :-** Measure how often your brand appears across prompts on platforms like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity.

# Budget Reallocation Model for 2026

AI search is changing how marketing budgets should be allocated. Instead of focusing only on driving traffic, brands must invest in visibility inside AI-generated answers.

Below is a simplified view of how marketing spend may shift.

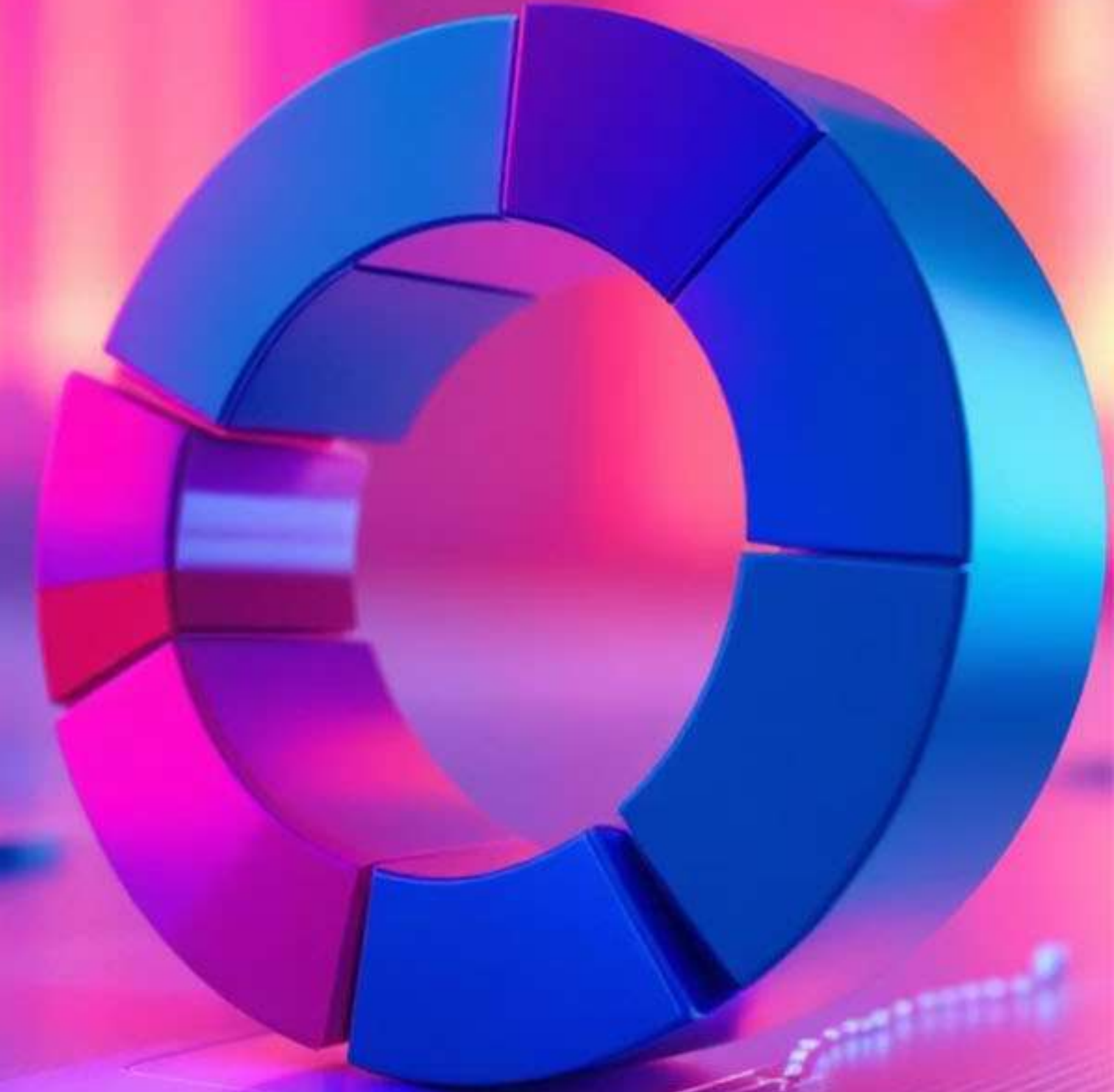
## 2025 Allocation

- Traditional SEO: 40%
- AEO & Answer Architecture: 0%
- Authority & PR: 15%
- AI Insights & Tracking: 5%
- Paid Search: 40%

## 2026 Allocation

- Traditional SEO: 20%
- AEO & Answer Architecture: 30%
- Authority & PR: 25%
- AI Insights & Tracking: 15%
- Paid Search: 10%

**CMO Insight:** AI is compressing the marketing funnel. **Discovery, evaluation, and shortlisting increasingly happen inside the AI-generated answer.**



# Measuring Visibility in AI Search

To help brands understand how they appear in AI-driven search experiences, AdLift's proprietary AI visibility platform, **Tesseract**, tracks key signals that influence brand discovery and perception across AI engines. Tesseract analyzes how brands appear in platforms such as Google AI Overviews, ChatGPT, Gemini, and other large language models, giving marketing teams direct visibility into how brands appear across AI search platforms.

- **Brand Visibility Score**

Consolidated metric measuring how frequently your brand appears across important prompts and AI-generated answers.

- **Search Overview Performance**

How your brand appears in AI Overviews and AI-driven search experiences, including frequency and source citations.

- **LLM Visibility**

How often your brand is mentioned or cited across major AI platforms such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity.

- **Sentiment Analysis**

How positively or negatively your brand is positioned when it appears in AI-generated answers and cited sources.

- **Trend Analysis**

How your AI visibility changes over time, helping teams identify growth opportunities or visibility decline.

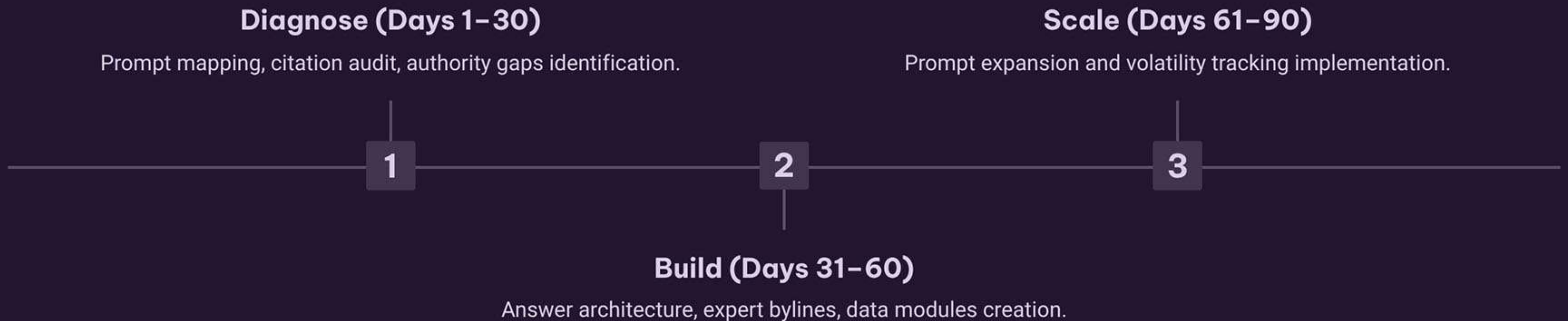
- **Competitor Overview**

How your brand's AI visibility compares with competitors across prompts, citations, and authority sources.

📌 **CMO Insight:** In the AI era, the key question is no longer just "How do we rank?" but "**How often does AI trust our brand enough to include it in the answer?**"

# Implementation Roadmap

Metrics provide the 'what,' but the roadmap provides the 'when.' This 90-day plan outlines the transition from diagnostic auditing to active scaling, ensuring your brand captures AI market share in one fiscal quarter.



**i** This structured 90-day approach ensures a systematic transition from understanding your current AI visibility gaps to actively building authority and scaling your brand's presence across AI-generated answers.

# Real Results from AEO Implementation



## Payment Platform

- 929% AI brand visibility
- 174% AI Overviews
- 474% LLM citations



## Real Estate Company

- 4,559% AI Overviews
- 1,000+ AI Overview keywords



## Consumer Electronics

- 1,200% LLM mentions
- 408% AI Overviews



## Online Book Retailer

- 2,313% AI keyword coverage
- 757% top AI keywords



## Pet Care Aggregator

- 3X LLM brand mentions
- 75% AI brand visibility

# Get the AdLift Advantage

The results in the previous section show what's possible when AEO is executed with the right strategy and technology. At AdLift, we support brands with proprietary tools and frameworks designed to strengthen their presence across the AI search ecosystem.



Our AI visibility platform that tracks brand visibility scores, AI Overviews presence, LLM mentions, sentiment, trends, and competitor performance across platforms such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity.



Our authority-building framework that helps brands secure placements on trusted publishers frequently used as sources by AI systems.



# Does AI Search Trust Your Brand?

AI search is changing how brands are discovered and evaluated. Visibility inside AI-generated answers is becoming just as important as traditional rankings.

## Next Step?

See how your brand appears across AI Overviews and major LLM platforms, and identify opportunities to improve your AI visibility and authority.

[Book a Demo](#)