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WHITE PAPER

How Are Marketers Handling GEO?



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On Halloween of 2024, OpenAI made an announcement that probably scared the folks at Google just a little bit: "Introducing ChatGPT search."

ChatGPT Search wasn't the first AI search engine on the market — Perplexity AI's answer engine, Microsoft's Bing Chat, and even platforms like You.com and Neeva had already made waves as early AI-based search engines that consumers could converse with. In some ways, you could even say SearchGPT, the limited access prototype that would eventually become ChatGPT Search, was late to the party.

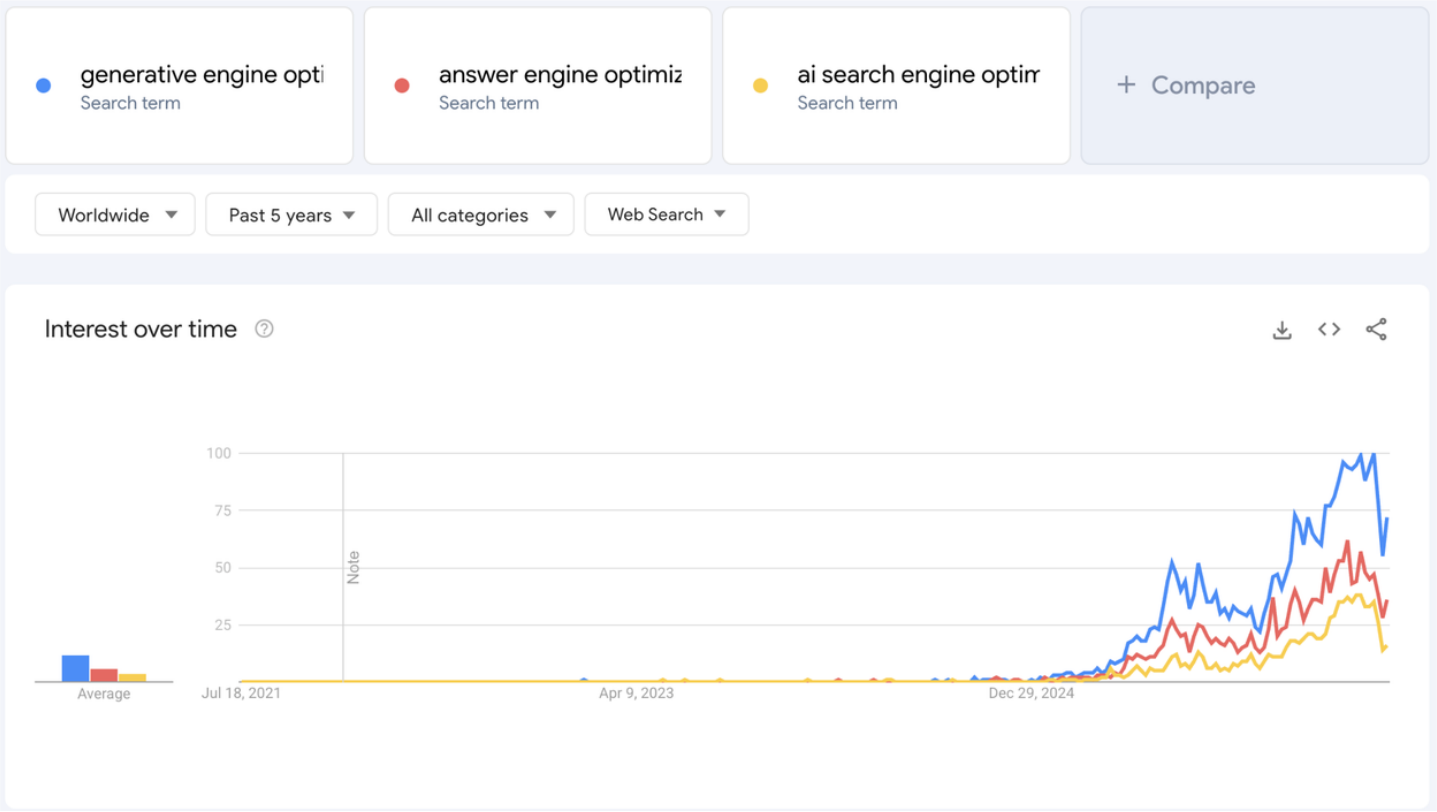
But the Oct. 31 announcement changed things in Search in a way that these previous models never could, and it's all due to OpenAI's user base. With so many people gaining access to a mainstream AI search platform, what would become of Google?

While the engineers at Google wrestled with that question (and with their own run at it with AI Overviews, AI Mode and Gemini), marketers began unraveling another mystery:

How do we get these large language models to recommend our brand?

And what do we call the practice of doing so?

The vocabulary has been fractured since the beginning: AI search engine optimization, answer engine optimization and generative engine optimization all took off around the same time:



Generative engine optimization (GEO) has taken the lead — but that doesn't mean there isn't still confusion in our industry. To understand how marketers are thinking about and acting on these changes, we decided to ask them.

Between April 7 and June 22, 2026, we surveyed 142 professionals to learn how the industry is handling this shift we're all experiencing. The results show us that...

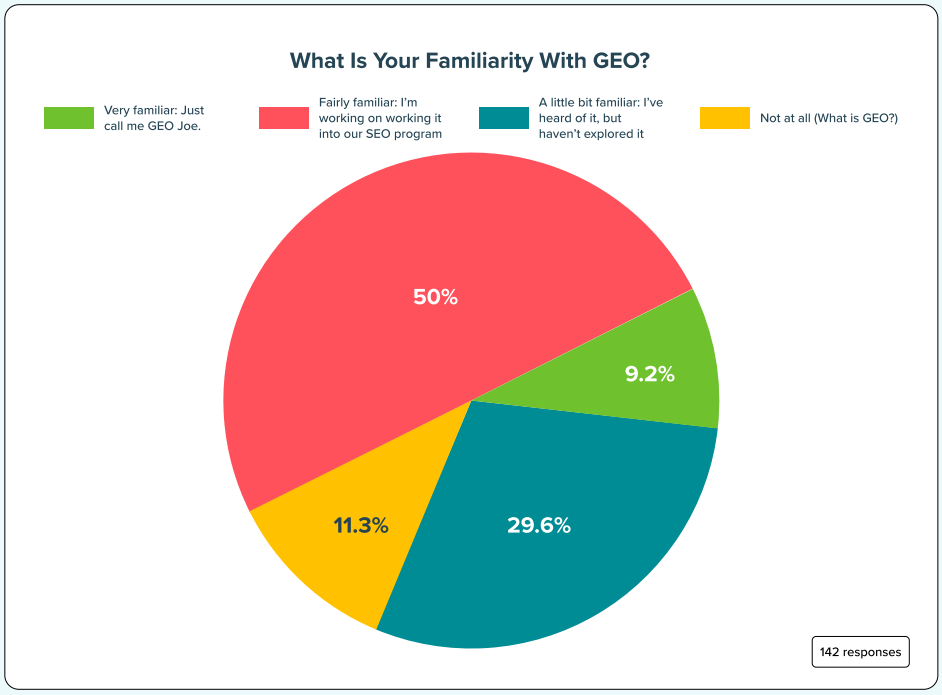


- Only 9% of marketers consider themselves to be "very familiar" with GEO.
- One-third of marketers still don't know how to measure the traffic impact of AI search.
- Most marketers are seeking out GEO education and training on their own.
- Nearly everyone is concerned with their own knowledge/skills gap and the lack of available information about how these strategies and systems work.

Let's take a closer look at what's really going on with the rise of generative engine optimization.

What Are We Talking About?

Considering the variation in vocabulary marketers have created for this rising focus, it only made sense for us to begin by asking simply, how familiar are you with GEO?



For most people, it's not totally unfamiliar; only 11% said they were "not at all" familiar with GEO. Still, this is a larger proportion than the 9% who said they were "very familiar" with the concept.

That means most people fall somewhere between "I have no idea what this is" and "I'm already an expert" — but even within that spread, there's a difference between having heard about GEO and actively seeking out information about it.

Half of respondents said they're "fairly familiar" with GEO — they're working on working it into their strategy. Meanwhile, 29.58% said they were "a little bit familiar" — they've heard of it, but haven't started exploring it yet.

This division reflects what we've anecdotally observed at Brafton. Most marketers we talk to have heard of this, and have even been tasked with figuring it out for their brands. But given its recency, there's been little time for anyone to become a true "expert" in this field — unless they're granted considerable time and resources for diving deeply into it.

So, who were these "very familiar" folks, these GEO Joes, as we called them in the survey?

Out of the 13 people who claimed the highest level of familiarity:

- 11 of them were marketing managers or directors (as opposed to individual contributors or CEOs/executives).
- 8 of them had 11+ years of experience.
- 12 of them were from the United States.
- 6 of them work at companies with 501+ employees.

Being familiar with GEO is one thing. But considering how closely tied it is to the well-established discipline of SEO, there are expected differences in how marketers approach these various systems.

Just how differently do they view GEO from SEO? According to 74% of respondents, these two practices have some differences and some similarities. Only 9% said they were "not at all" different, and 17% indicated that they consider them to be "very different."

Who cares how marketers see GEO in relation to SEO? What difference does it make if people see them as one and the same, or totally separate?

Well, marketers who want to master these practices care. Having a common language helps us talk about these concepts effectively. And, as it happens, the way people answered this question gave insight into how they'd respond to other questions later on.

For example, we also asked our participants about their biggest concerns related to generative search. Dissecting these answers and comparing them to the other information each marketer shared with us highlighted the many factors influencing GEO adoption.

The most common concern among the few who believe that GEO and SEO are basically synonymous was their knowledge/skills gap. Interestingly enough, this is the same top concern among those who believe they're totally different.

Marketers at either end of the spectrum are all asking the same question: How do we learn about this thing? Meanwhile, the majority of marketers — the 105 respondents who see both the similarities and differences — had much more variation in their concerns:

Knowledge/Skills Gap	**35%**
Measurement & Attribution	**21%**
Resource Constraints	**18%**
Rapid Change	**16%**

Are you seeing a theme here? It's the knowledge/skills gap — we all want to close it. So let's dive deeper into how marketers today understand and approach GEO.

Which Generative Engine Platforms Matter?

Despite the wide range of AI search tools available to consumers, there's one name on everyone's minds when we say "AI search": ChatGPT.

Indeed, when asked "Which generative platforms are most relevant to your audience?", 86% of respondents included ChatGPT in their answer.

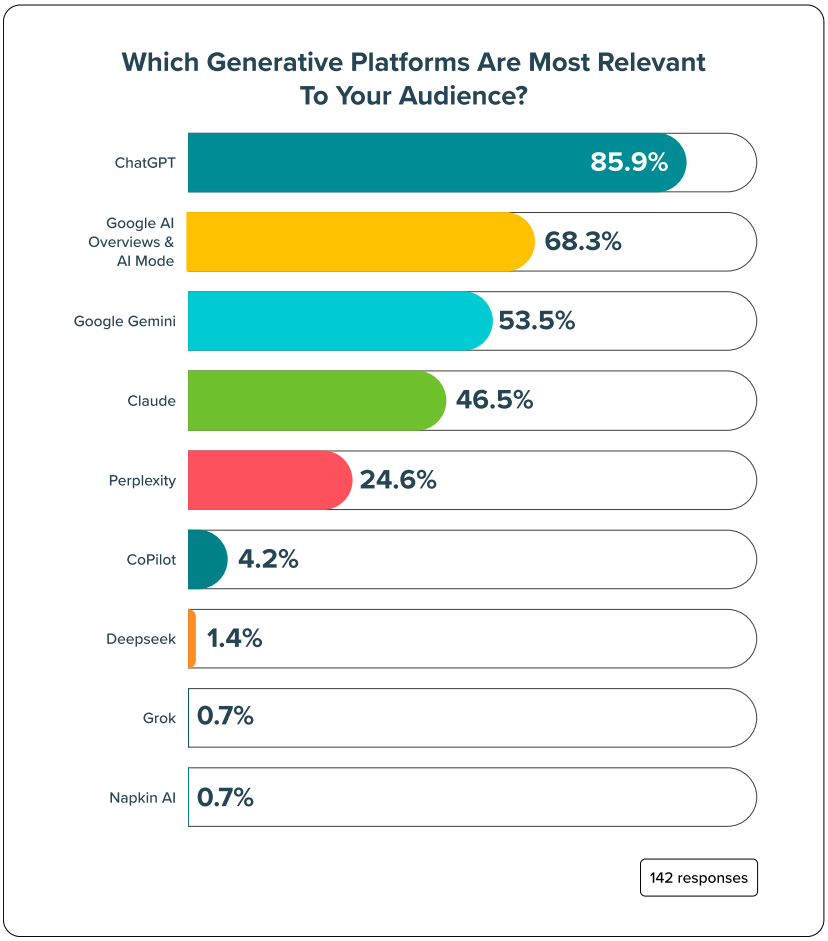
ChatGPT is an important AI platform, primarily due to its user base — the very thing that scared Google back when OpenAI announced its search engine.

But is being most popular with your audience really all it takes for a platform to be important to marketers? It's a factor, sure, but when we're thinking about quantifiable business metrics, there are other factors at play, too.

That's why we often advise clients to focus their AI visibility plans on Google's AI Overviews and AI Mode. The ability to measure successes and track outcomes from these platforms is much stronger than it currently is with ChatGPT, Perplexity or any others out there.

We expected ChatGPT to be top of the list because of its high global adoption rates. And we were pleased to see that Google AI Overviews & AI Mode took second place with 97 respondents, or 68% of our total survey.

Here's a breakdown of how our survey participants answered this question:



Now, we know that marketers who are concerned about their ChatGPT visibility are often concerned about visibility in at least one other platform. This was a "select all that apply" question, so we could see how marketers view not just AI visibility in general, but where their specific focuses are. The top two answer combinations?

1

ChatGPT + Google AI Overviews & AI Mode: 22 people.

2

ChatGPT + Google AI Overviews & AI Mode + Google Gemini + Perplexity + Claude: 21 people.

Most marketers are keeping their focus fixed on the two biggest players in the game: Google's AI features and ChatGPT. A nearly equal proportion are not so streamlined, and indicate that all five of today's top generative search tools are highly relevant for AI visibility.

There's a good chance that people in your audience are using some combination of these five systems. But here's a bit of advice: when you try to focus on everything, you can't truly focus on anything.

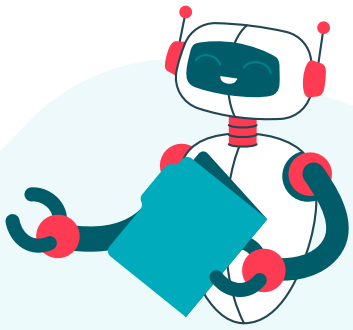
Smart marketers are sticking to one or two systems to target and track. This streamlines your activities and eases the pressure of trying to measure everything, everywhere.

Plus, keep this in mind: GEO best practices for one platform will broadly apply to many platforms. When you're doing GEO for AI Overviews, there's a good chance you're also improving visibility in ChatGPT, Perplexity and Claude, too.

One factor that seemed to influence how marketers responded to this question was geography. While all of these platforms are globally available, the way consumers interact with these search surfaces varies across the globe — which brings our attention to Claude, our fifth-most relevant platform, according to our survey.

When we break down the responses by region, we actually see Claude surfacing in third place in the United Kingdom, and tied for third in the Asia Pacific region. Claude was also No. 3 for two categories of organization sizes: Small (1-20 employees) and Medium (21-50 employees).

The least likely to say Claude was relevant to their audience? Enterprise organizations (501+ employees).



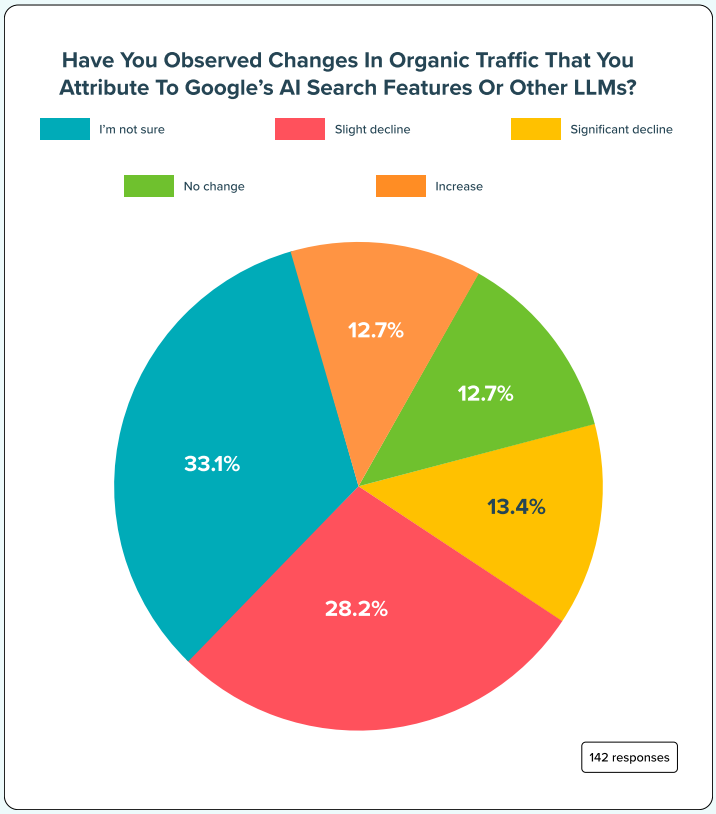
TRAFFIC IMPACT:

Is AI Search Stealing Your Visitors?

One of the loudest questions in the industry right now is, what will AI platforms do to our website traffic? We asked survey participants directly: "Have you observed changes in organic traffic that you attribute to Google's AI search features or other LLMs?"

Given the hype about traffic lost to AI tools, one might expect the No. 1 answer to be a resounding YES! But the reality is that, given the shaky state of measurement right now, the top answer was actually "I'm not sure."

Here's what real marketers are observing in their website traffic right now:



Interestingly, answers differed between job roles:

Have you observed changes in organic traffic that you attribute to Google's AI search features or other LLMs?	What is your primary job function?			
	CEO or Executive	Individual contributor	Marketing manager or director	Grand Total
I'm not sure	13	4	30	47
Slight decline	3	6	31	40
Significant decline	3	4	12	19
No change	2	4	12	18
Increase	4	3	11	18
Grand Total	**25**	**21**	**96**	**142**

The CEO/executive column is heavily weighted to the "I'm not sure" row, with 52% saying so. Maybe that's because these folks aren't in charge of keeping track of this information; that's what marketing managers & directors are for.

In the Marketing Manager or Director category, it's about even thirds between "I'm not sure", "Slight decline" and the other three categories, which themselves are about evenly split between "Significant decline," "No change" and "Increase".

The high amount of "I'm not sure" could certainly speak to measurement challenges in this growing space. Meanwhile, the "slight decline" feels like the current reality for many with what we can measure.

Finally, in the Individual Contributor column, we see the least variation between each answer. Perhaps this is because, like CEOs, individual contributors may not be in charge of tracking traffic trends.

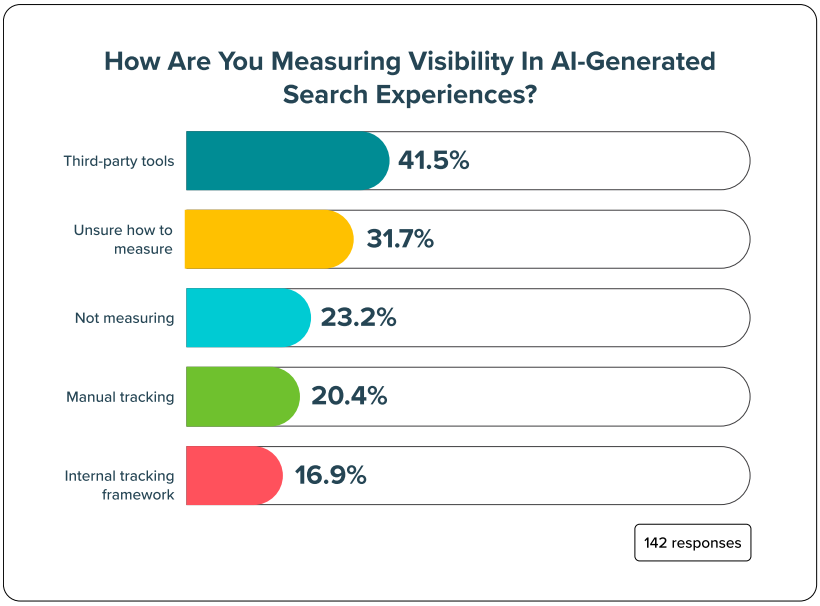
The truth of the matter is that GEO measurement has not matured as quickly as the availability and adoption of AI search tools. As a result, it really is challenging for many marketers to know the impact of AI search on their traffic trends.

Company size seemed to influence how survey participants responded here, too. Enterprise organizations were most likely to say "slight decline," while small and large businesses were more likely to say "I'm not sure." Could enterprise organizations have more resources at their disposal for learning and adopting newer technologies?

The folks who said they were "very familiar" with GEO may have the measurement aspect a little bit more figured out, too. They were most likely to say "slight decline" or "increase," while 68% of the "not at all" familiar respondents weren't sure about the traffic impact.

So, now we know the impacts marketers are (or aren't) seeing, but how did they come to those conclusions? If we have an idea of traffic fluctuations, it must have come from somewhere.

For most, the answer is third-party tools.



At Brafton, we've tested out several to see how they compare. Some of our favorites?

1. **Google Search Console's new Generative AI features.**
2. **Semrush's AI Visibility toolkit.**
3. **Ahrefs' Brand Radar.**
4. **Google Analytics 4 referral traffic reporting.**

These are all fine for reference, but the reality is that these tools are still in their early stages. Google Search Console's features are still unavailable to many marketers, and comparing results from tools such as Semrush, Ahrefs and Moz often paints very different pictures.

It's wise to become accustomed to these emerging third-party tracking capabilities, but it's also important to know that the numbers displayed on the screen are, at best, guesses based on imperfect algorithms.

That brings us to the second- and third-place answers:

- 31.69% said they're "unsure how to measure."
- 23.24% said they're "not measuring."

Being unsure how to measure was the top answer among:

- Small companies (42%).
- Those who were "a little bit familiar" with GEO (57.14%).
- Those who view GEO as "very different" from SEO (37.50%).

Meanwhile, simply not measuring was the top answer among:

- Those "not at all" familiar with GEO (56.25%).
- Those who view GEO as "not at all" different from SEO (53.85%).

Manual tracking and internal tracking frameworks were the least-common selections, but they're worth considering. These take work to set up, but they can be powerful tools for monitoring your own results in meaningful ways that tie to business value.



For example, manual tracking might include:

Manually prompting AI search surfaces and visually scanning for your brand name.

Accuracy

Low, because AI search can generate wholly different results each time it's prompted, even for the same query and user.

Web traffic analysis to identify AI-driven site traffic.

Accuracy

Medium, because AI search often results in zero-click interactions, leaving unclicked mentions out of your measurement scope.

Server log analysis to quantify bot activity on your site.

Accuracy

Medium, because your servers do see whether bots accessed your content, but being *accessible* to AI and *cited* by it aren't the same.

Interestingly, manual tracking was the third-place response from two groups:

- Senior contributors: 23.26% of respondents with 11+ years of experience.
- Entry-level contributors: 27.27% of respondents with 2 or fewer years of experience.

One-quarter of enterprise organizations, 26.67% of Marketing, Advertising & SEO/GEO companies, and 30.77% of "very familiar" respondents also said they're using manual tracking methods.

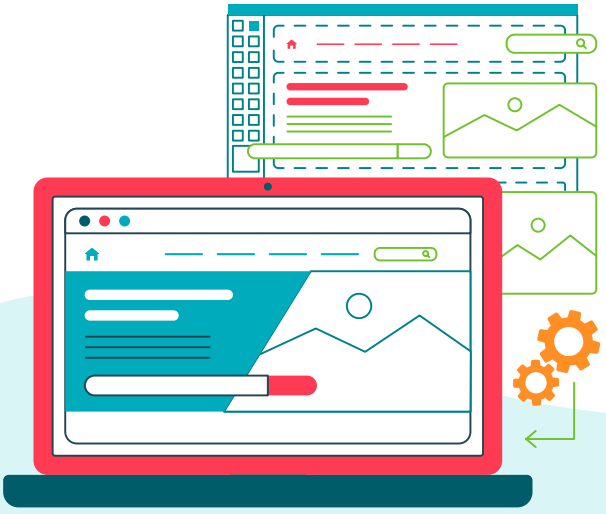
Manual tracking may refer to one-off checks or simple, structured reviews. Some advanced marketers are taking these strategies one step further to create internal tracking frameworks, which often include a combination of:

- Manual tracking strategies.
- Third-party tracking tools.
- Integrated dashboards that connect various data sources.

Those who indicated they were already working with internal tracking frameworks were primarily those who:

- Were "very familiar" (4 out of 13) or "fairly familiar" (14 out of 71).
- Also used third-party tools (14 out of 59).

Now we know that marketers are noticing an impact on their site traffic, and generally how they're monitoring these changes. But what are they doing about it? And what specific metrics are they keeping their eyes on?

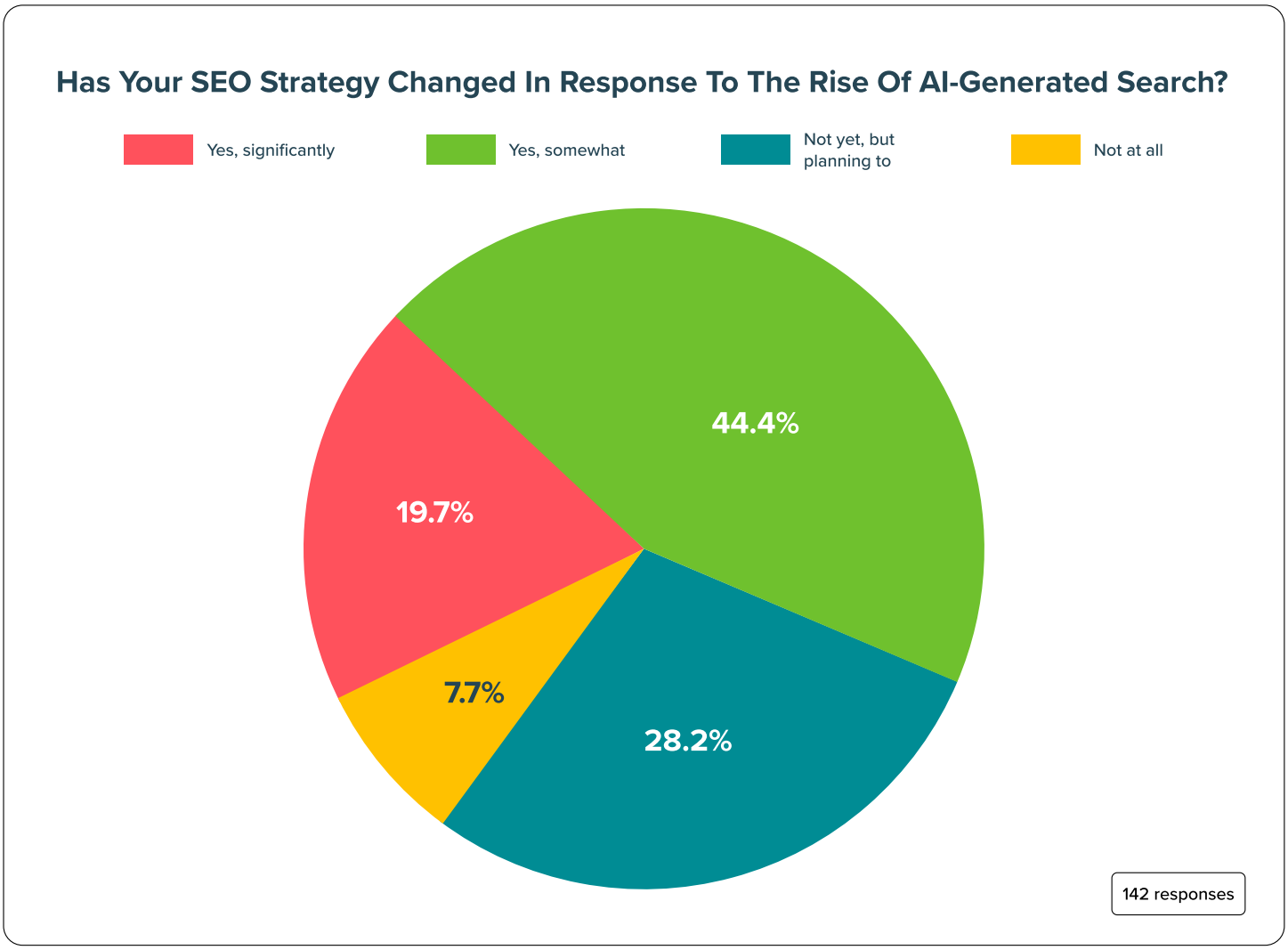


SHIFTING STRATEGIES:

Supercharged SEO or Something Else?

When traffic tanks, the pressure to address the problem is real. But when lost traffic is not due to faulty website structure or poor content practices, and instead changes in the broader search ecosystem, it's hard to know what to do next.

When asked whether their SEO strategy has changed in response to AI search, the vast majority either said yes, or that they are planning to:



Understanding traffic patterns likely influences whether a marketer will prioritize an SEO strategy shift. If nothing is wrong, why change anything?

From the "Yes, somewhat" camp, one-third said their traffic had slightly declined because of AI search. Meanwhile, 55% of the "not yet" respondents also weren't sure whether their traffic had changed.

And what about those who haven't changed their strategies at all? Only 11 people chose this answer, and 73% of them aren't sure if AI search has impacted their website traffic.

SEO strategies are multi-faceted. As you might expect, so are GEO strategies. So, when marketers say their strategies have changed "significantly" or "slightly," we could be talking about any number of tactics.

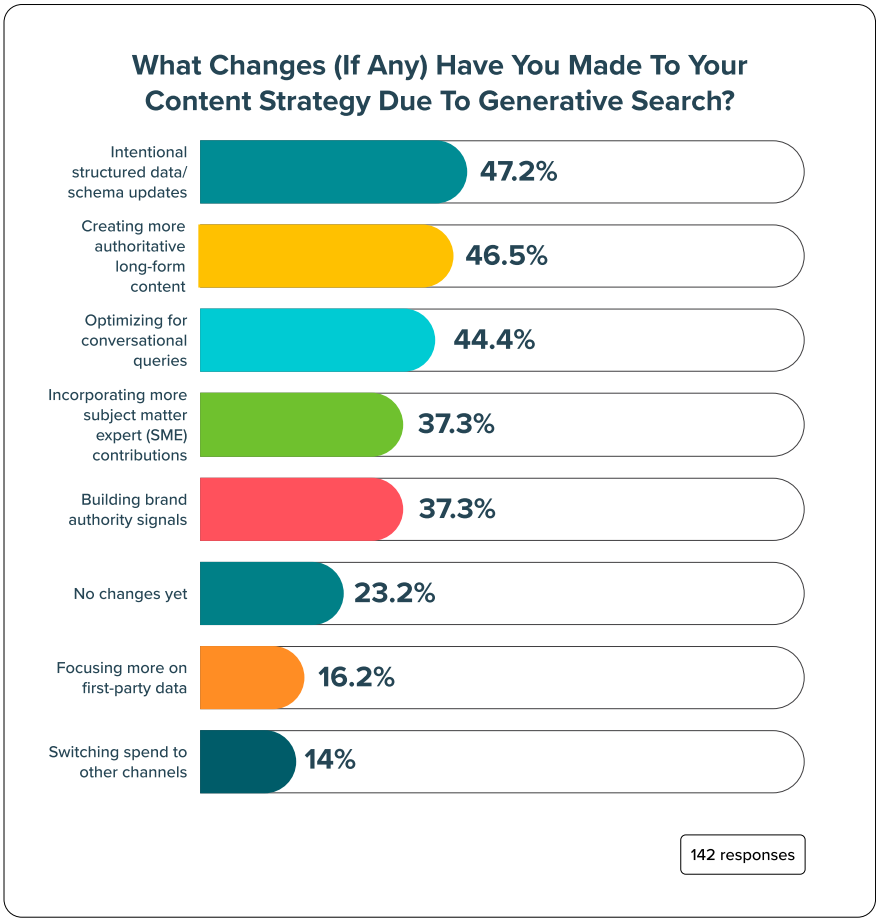
Let's look at what those changes really entail.

The top 3 changes marketers are making include:

- Intentional structured data/schema updates: 67 respondents (47.18%).
- Creating more authoritative long-form content: 66 respondents (46.48%).
- Optimizing for conversational queries: 63 respondents (44.37%).

These are all top-tier tactics that we often recommend to our clients at Brafton. Ultimately, to be cited in AI search, AI search crawlers need to access your content; that's where structured data and Schema come into play.

Once you have the technical setup squared away, it's all about feeding those systems high-quality content their algorithms choose to cite. That's where authoritative long-form content and content created for conversational queries really shine. Having ample content to draw from is essential — but the caveat, of course, is that only *good* content has a chance at success. Empty, flat, redundant or — worse yet — incorrect or misleading content will always fail.



But there's more to the story than just these three approaches. Once you have solid schema and great content, there are the questions of:

- Leveraging the experience and expertise within your organization.
- Maintaining a reliable content creation and publishing schedule.
- Managing off-site signals from directories and social media.
- Pairing organic tactics (traditional and AI search) with other channels, like paid search and social, or email marketing.

Let's look at who is engaging in these important but less utilized tactics:

Incorporating more subject matter expert (SME) contributions:

45.45% of Large businesses (20 out of 44 respondents).

64.29% of Healthcare & Life Sciences organizations (9 out of 14 respondents).

44.44% of Education & Ed Tech organizations (8 out of 18 respondents).

61.54% of "Very Familiar" respondents (8 out of 13 respondents).

Building brand authority signals:

57.14% of Medium businesses (16 out of 28 respondents).

44.44% of mid-level seniority (6-10 years of experience) respondents (8 out of 18).

Our two least-chosen answers were "focusing more on first-party data" and "switching spend to other channels," selected by just 16.20% and 14.08% of survey takers, respectively.

And of course, there's always the option to do nothing. 33 people (23.24%) said they haven't made any changes yet. These were most likely to:

Be CEOs or executives

11 out of 25 (44%).

Work at small companies

13 out of 38 (34.21%).

Have less familiarity with GEO

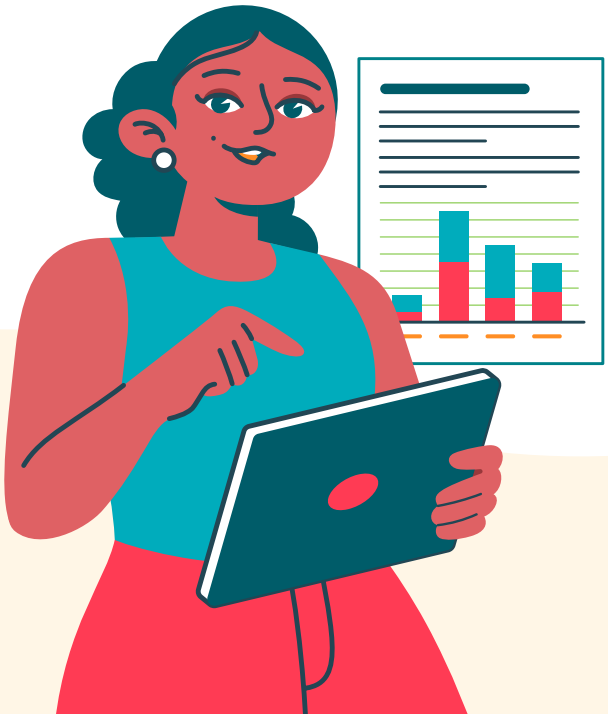
11 out of 16 (68.75%) "not at all" familiar and 17 out of 42 (40.48%) "a little bit" familiar.

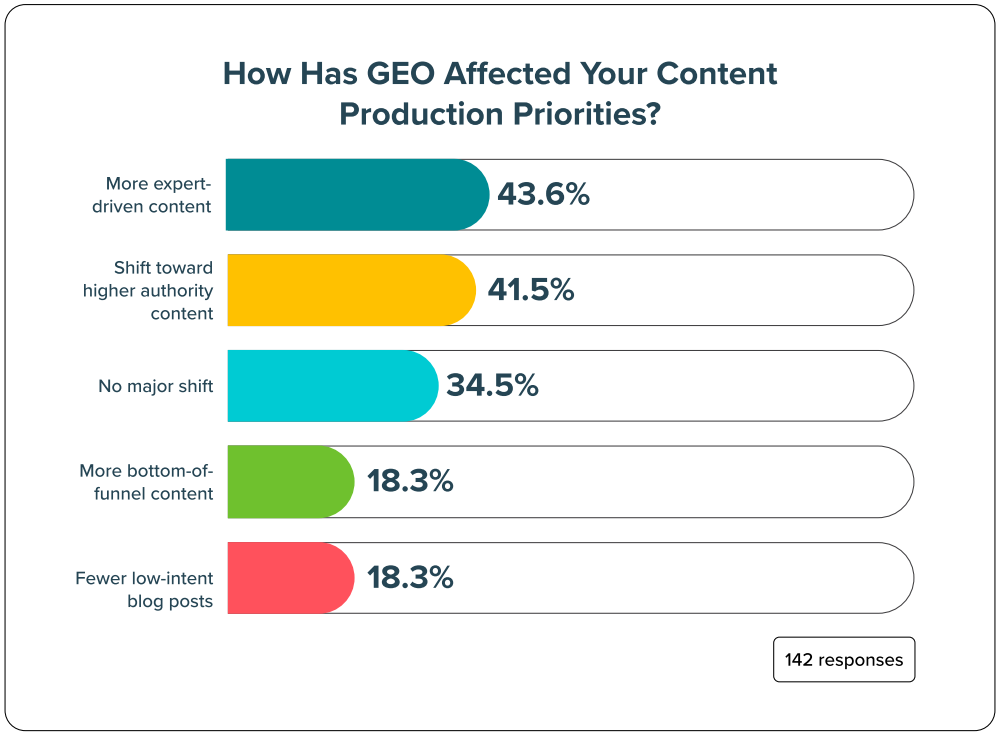
View GEO as the same as SEO

6 out of 13 respondents.

And yes, every single "very familiar" respondent has made at least some changes to their SEO strategies. Follow their lead, folks.

Marketers aren't just changing their content creation tactics; two-thirds of our respondents are adjusting their content creation priorities in response to AI search, too. For most, that means focusing on the expertise living within their own organization.





Expert-driven and high-authority content are smart ways to target AI Overviews and other LLM systems. Some of the most practical ways marketers can gather and leverage internal expertise include:

Interview your subject matter experts

Schedule 20-minute conversations with your experts to pick their brains about a relevant topic. Gather their insights, craft them into a blog post, and email it to your audience.

Survey your customers

Create a short questionnaire asking your customers about why they love your brand. Use their responses to fuel blog posts, social media content or new landing pages.

Publish regular reports using public data

Aggregate publicly available data relevant to your industry, and provide an analysis of it through the lens of your brand and target audience. This turns generic data anyone can access into unique insights that can only come from your company.

Create more case studies

Real stories about actual customers are great for converting prospects who are on the fence, but they're also excellent for getting your best stories into generated AI responses.

THE MEASUREMENT PROBLEM:

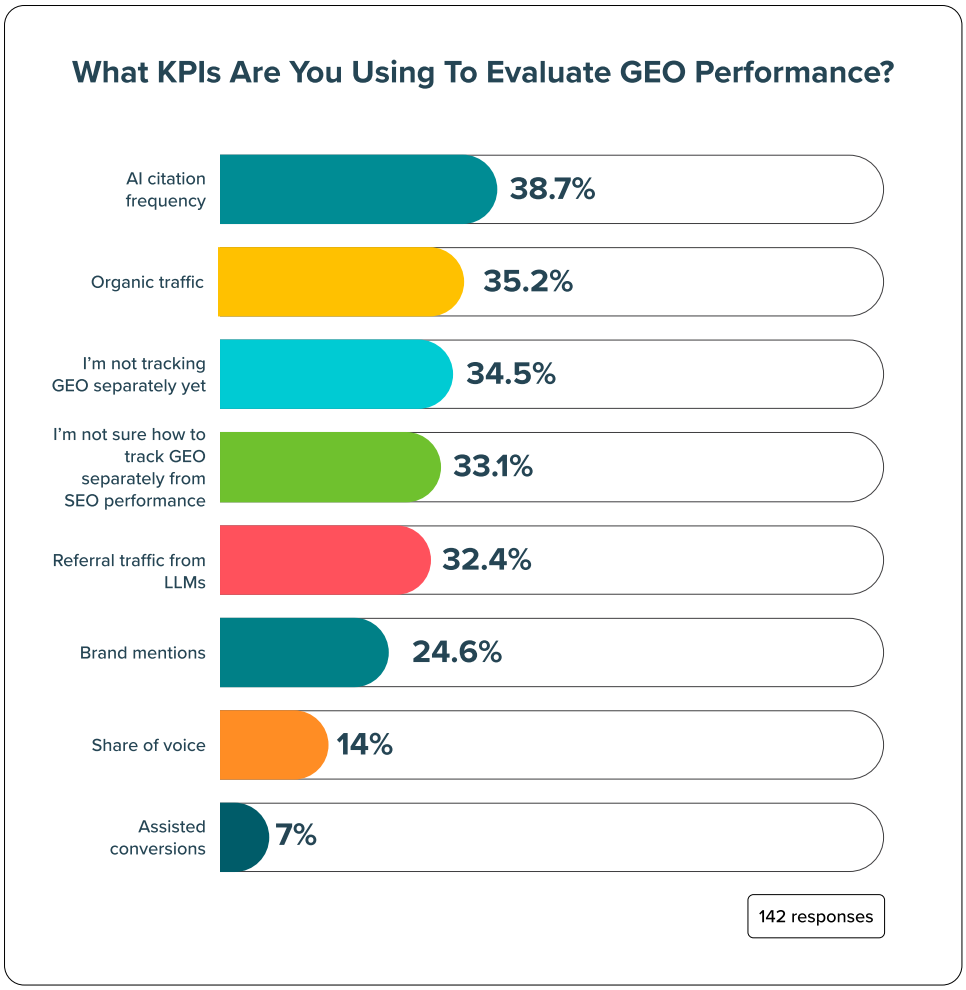
How Does It All Work?

As marketers, we need to be able to measure the impact of our work. The proof in the pudding is what puts the dollars in the budgets.

But when the very nature of our work is transforming as thoroughly as a butterfly from its chrysalis, it's nearly impossible to keep up.

When looking at marketers' top concerns regarding generative search, measurement and attribution came up in 26 out of 139 answers, making it the No. 2 concern after the knowledge/skills gap.

For most people — 38.73% of our survey participants — AI citations are the main KPI they're measuring related to GEO.



It's an intuitive metric: If AI search success = being cited, then the way to measure success would be to track citations.

The problem is that we're at the mercy of the accuracy of third-party tracking platforms. And those companies are still getting the hang of consistent citation tracking. As noted above, comparing data from Semrush's, Ahrefs' and Moz's comparable AI tracking platforms will certainly give you a contradictory story.

Share of Voice and brand mentions are two more metrics that come from third-party tracking tools. They're good for pulse-checks, but like AI citation frequency, the accuracy of these indicators is still somewhat imprecise.

Organic traffic is the next-most selected answer, and also the next-most intuitive metric to track. We're all accustomed to tracking organic traffic already, and AI search can be a form of organic search, after all.

Where this logic falls apart is when we consider zero-click search. Generative AI platforms give users complete answers, effectively eliminating the need to click through to a website unless they *really* have a reason to.

The lesson isn't to stop tracking organic traffic; it's to reframe how you interpret it. The lack of traffic no longer indicates content failure, because there's always the chance that your brand was cited — or even mentioned — in an answer that a reader engaged with. If you were, you still made an impression on that user; maybe even a good one.

Referral traffic can help close the gap, since web analytics platforms can identify some instances of AI-driven traffic. You can even set up views in Google Analytics or Looker Studio to visualize these patterns.

The key with marketing measurement is to critically think about the value of any given statistic. We have the ability to measure so many factors that it can be easy to fall into metric mania.

Some KPIs are more important than others; what you need to ask yourself is, "Does this information relate to my actual business goals?" or better yet: "Does this information give me insight into how my company can achieve more success?" If the answer is "no" or even "maybe but we're not sure exactly how," then the metric is probably a vanity metric, not a value metric.

Which brings us to conversions: *Do you know how many customers or sales-qualified leads you won thanks to AI search?*

If your answer is "no," you're not alone; only 10 of our survey-takers — just 7% — indicated that they're tracking AI-assisted conversions already. But this really is the ultimate value metric related to AI search that you can be tracking. Best of all, it comes directly from your own data and CRM management, not third-party tracking tools with wishy-washy, black-box algorithms.

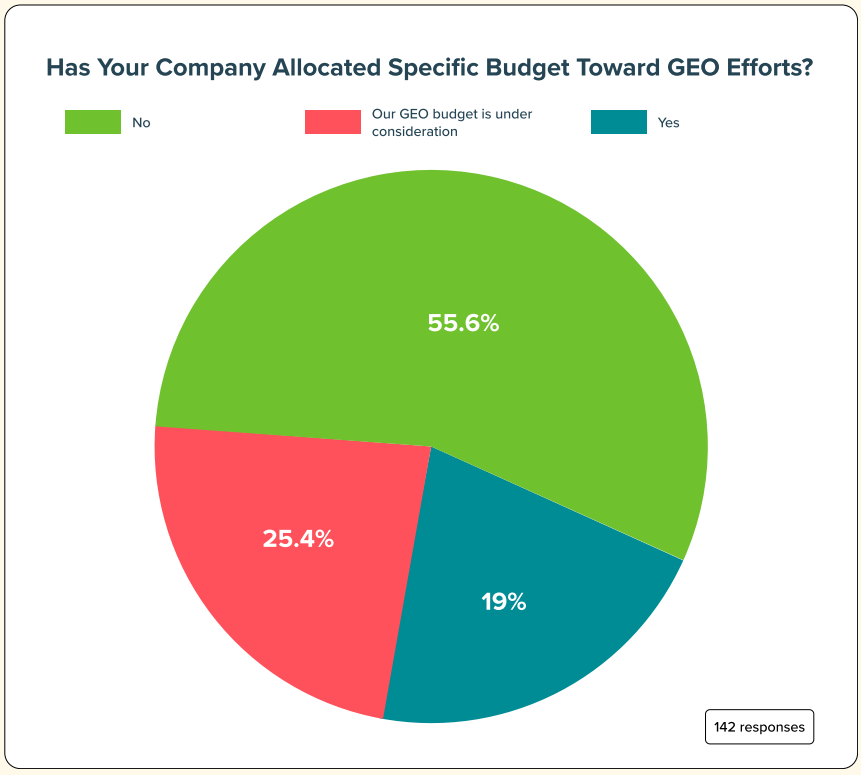
GEO Budget? What GEO Budget?

New technology, new strategies, new KPIs: All this change is making us marketers rewrite the rules and reconsider our day-to-day activities.

Change isn't free. It takes time to research, dissect, experiment and come to an understanding of how these systems work. And time is money, but do we have the financial support to back up the time spent on learning this new discipline?

For 19% of our survey respondents, the answer is yes: They do have a dedicated budget for their GEO efforts. Another quarter say they have a GEO budget that's currently under review.

But for 55% of marketers, they're making do with no additional or dedicated budget to put toward working this all out.



Building a GEO strategy with no budget is possible, but as with anything done for cheap, it won't be as robust as it could be if you had some spending power to support it.

So, let's take a look at the activities marketers are engaging with when they have a GEO budget vs. when they don't.

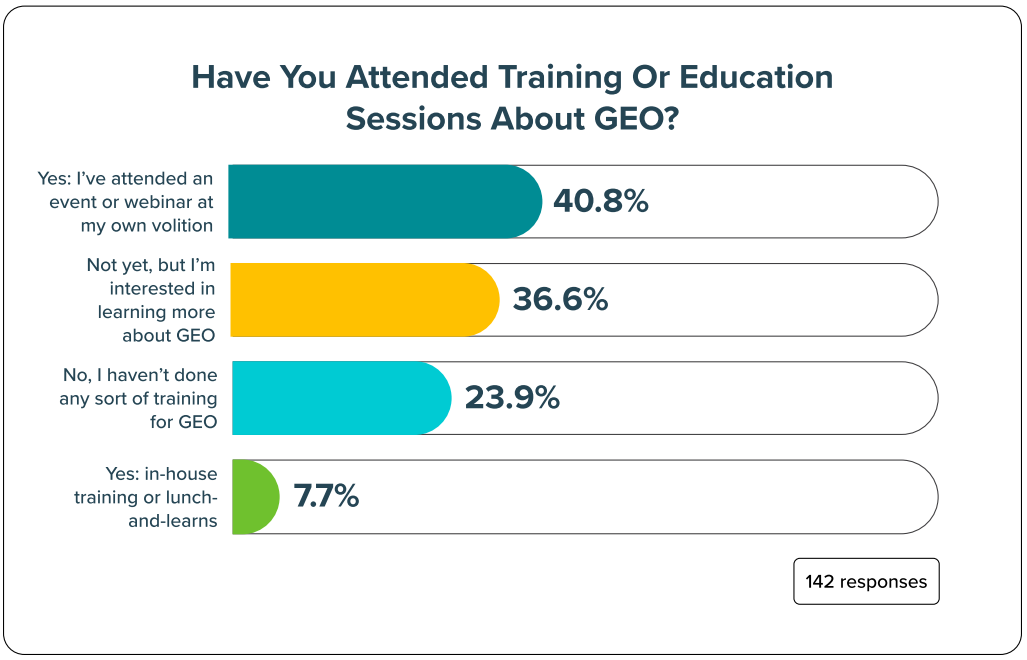
Yes, we have a GEO budget! (27 respondents)	No, we have no GEO budget (79 respondents)
Intentional structured data/schema updates: **77.78%.**	Creating more authoritative long-form content: **36.71%.**
Optimizing for conversational queries: **62.96%.**	Optimizing for conversational queries: **35.44%.**
Building brand authority signals: **62.96%.**	Intentional structured data/schema updates: **34.18%.**
Optimizing for conversational queries: **62.96%.**	No changes yet: **30.38%.**

We also see a difference in the measurement methods marketers use when factoring for budget. Most marketers who don't have one (34.18%) aren't measuring visibility in AI-generated search experiences. Meanwhile, 70.37% of marketers who noted they do have a budget said they're using third-party tools for this purpose.

Tools come with a price, and not just the monthly invoice they send you. The time it takes to learn a platform and train team members on how to use it is another cost. It's much easier to take the requisite time to dive into a new tool when there's a dedicated budget for it.

Another way companies can funnel funds into building up their GEO knowledge: Training and education.

Most of the learning about this emerging discipline so far has been individually led, according to the results of our survey. That is, just 7.75% of respondents said they had attended an in-house training or lunch & learn session on the topic of GEO.



If companies aren't investing in their own employees' upskilling and continuing education, who will? For many forward-looking marketers, they must take it upon themselves to keep up with changes in the industry. 40.85% of our survey-takers said they've "attended a webinar or event at [their] own volition."

The pioneering marketers seeking out GEO education on their own were primarily:

- Marketing managers or directors (46 out of 96 respondents in this category).
- Large companies (37 out of 76 respondents at companies with 51-500 or 501+ employees).
- Very familiar with GEO (10 out of 13 GEO Joes).
- Operating with a budget (13 out of 27 respondents who indicated they have a GEO budget).

Another 36.62% said they hadn't yet attended any educational events on GEO, but would be interested in doing so. Those interested in learning more tended to be:

- In leadership positions (11 out of 25 CEO/Execs).
- A "little bit familiar" with GEO (22 out of 42 respondents who've "heard of GEO but haven't explored it yet").
- Waiting on GEO budget approval (18 out of 36 respondents whose "GEO budget is under consideration").

These results are reminiscent of the data from our AI in Marketing Year 2 survey, when we learned that:

- 81% of respondents use AI in their marketing work.
- Only 42% had an AI policy that guides how they use it.
- 8.4% of respondents had a dedicated budget for AI tools; 60% had a small AI budget, and 33% noted they had no budget and only used free tools.

No matter which side of the technology you're looking at — whether it's for content creation or content discovery — the gap between adoption, education and budgets is large.

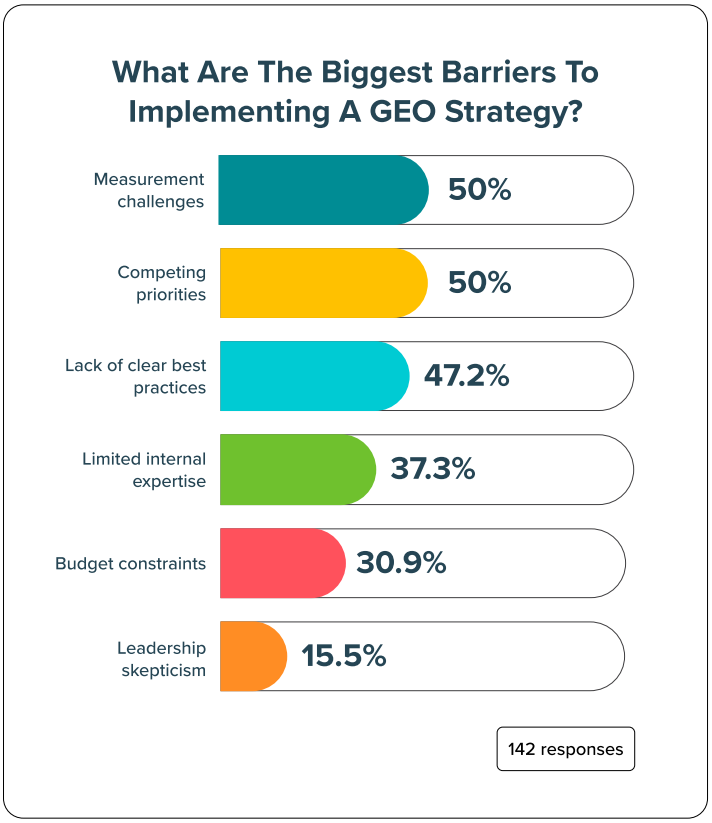
BARRIERS & BLOCKERS:

What's Holding Marketers Back?

For most marketers in our survey, GEO-related change has been somewhat slow. As a reminder, just 19.72% of respondents said their strategy has changed "significantly" in response to AI search. Meanwhile:

- 44.37% said it has "somewhat" changed.
- 28.17% said they're "planning to" implement some changes, but haven't yet.
- 7.75% haven't changed their strategy "at all."

To find out what's holding marketers back from implementing their own GEO strategy, we asked them directly. The answers reflect much of what we've learned so far: measurement is a mystery; there's too much to do already; and the whole field is so new, there's very little authoritative information out there to guide marketers along.



Another angle this question brought into the spotlight: leadership's impact on GEO adoption.

Earlier, we found that only 9.15% of our respondents view GEO and SEO as the same. It seems like a small proportion — but if that minority happens to be concentrated within the C-suite, budgets, priorities and objectives will follow suit.

Well, 16% of CEO/executives (4 out of 25) said they view them as the same thing with different names. Not one of the 25 was concerned with "Leadership skepticism," which makes sense; they're the leaders, after all.

Those whose leadership may be holding back their grand GEO plans were most commonly:

- **Planning to adjust their strategy for GEO, but haven't done so yet:** 25% (10 out of 40 respondents).
- **Working at medium-sized companies (21-50 employees):** 25% (7 out of 28 respondents).
- **Intermediate experienced marketers (3-5 years of experience):** 22.22% (6 out of 27 respondents).
- **Operating without a budget:** No respondents who said they had a GEO budget indicated they faced leadership skepticism.



Marketers whose bosses don't quite "get" the importance of GEO are facing compounded challenges. Having leaders who don't believe GEO is worth the time or budget doesn't change the fact that AI search is here, and it is impacting the way your audience finds information.

Converting skeptics into believers will take more than just headlines about the rise of AI search. Evidence of AI search's impact on your organization specifically is more likely to help them see the light.

The bad news is that "measurement challenges" are the biggest barrier our survey participants reported, a recurring theme throughout the results of our questionnaire.

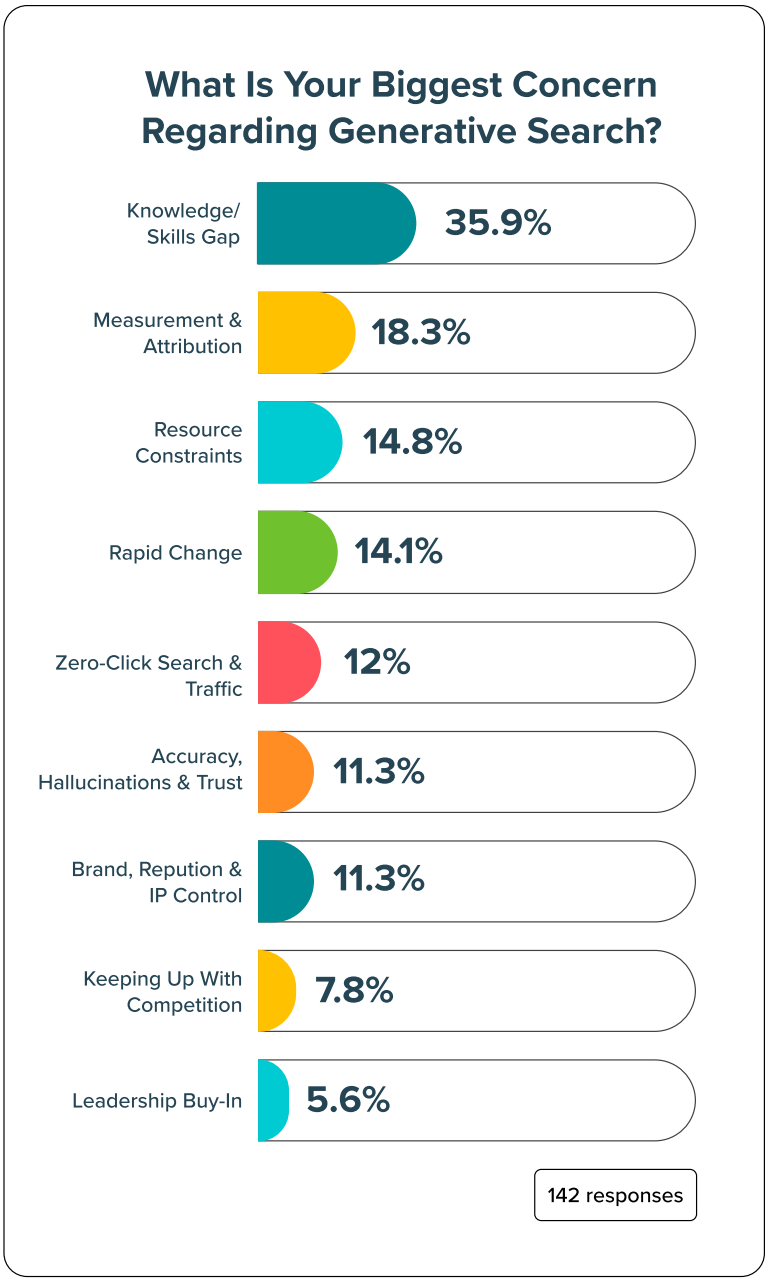
Given the range of obstacles getting in marketers' ways of launching their GEO strategies, let's peel back the curtain and take a look at our survey responders' biggest concerns regarding generative search.

How Do Marketers Feel About Generative Search?

AI search platforms are upending a lot of what we know about how consumers search for information, and about how technology delivers that information to them. We've seen the rifts it's already causing — like those between:

- GEO believers and SEO stalwarts.
- Marketers with resources like budgets, training and tools, and those who are left to figure it all out on their own.
- Organizations with plans for targeting LLMs and those who are keeping on as they've been doing for years.

So you can expect that when asked, "What is your biggest concern regarding generative search?", our 142 respondents gave very different answers. If there's one thing most marketers can agree on, though, it's that the knowledge/skills gap we're all in the middle of is, well, concerning.



Here are a few quotes from those most worried about their knowledge/skills gaps:

"My biggest concern right now regarding generative search is how quickly it evolves and how authoritative everyone wants to be in saying they have the best strategy. It is brand new and changes every single day in some way, shape or form; we have to work with that evolution of the search and can't claim any tool is the very best at this point in time."

"How much can we influence a probabilistic platform?"

"Being in the dark on the rules, the fluidity of how it operates and overall lack of control. Large amounts of time and budget can be spent on optimization, only for the algorithm to be changed overnight. Feels like an easy target for manipulation."

"There is so much information it's overwhelming and hard to know if what we're doing is the right thing to do - or if it will all change again 3 months down the line."

"Zero click is increasing but we are not sure how to implement GEO"

From the camp concerned about measurement and attribution:

"The lack of ability to trace how and where our content shows up in AI outputs."

"That there will not be a way to influence it nor will there be consistent responses/answers since LLMs are probabilistic and not algorithmic."

"Rapid evolution of LLM changes means constantly revising measurement frameworks and content strategies"

We've already seen the impact a budget can have on plans and strategies; but how about resource constraints have on how we view generative search?

"Companies without highly funded marketing departments are going to be left behind."

"My team may not have the resources — human or financial — to adequately support success in this area."

"Being able to scale content development in a way that preserves human voice and is true to our brand identity … also, the other biggest concern is how quickly GEO is changing. Feels like the goalposts move daily."

Goalposts that move daily? Sounds like rapid change is getting to some of our survey participants. Here's what some of these people are saying:

"It's changing too quickly to have any actual impact. The strategy I have today is not going to be relevant a week from now."

"The shifting landscape and the lack of proven approaches. It's difficult to separate internal factors from external factors when there are data peaks and valleys."

Data peaks and valleys call back to our measurement challenges, but one specific metric many marketers are concerned with is, of course, traffic. Zero-click search has haunted marketers since Google started experimenting with SERP features like Knowledge Graphs and Featured Snippets ages ago. But AI Mode and AI Overviews are renewing and amplifying these worries.

"It can generate more impressions, but it still remains a challenge to create more clicks/visitors, since AI does not necessarily drive clicks."

"My largest concern is that Google filed a patent to generate an AI website if you click on a link from AIO. If this is implemented, it will drastically change everything."

"We rely entirely on organic traffic — we don't do paid ads. Will our traffic ever be as high as it used to be, because of GEO?"

"Loss of visibility and brand recommendation within AI-generated search results if competitors build stronger AI citation authority, content relevance, and trust signals faster than our company."

Trust is paramount when trying to win attention and favor from your target audience. That's why leaving narratives in the algorithmic generations of LLMs worries many of our survey participants:

"[Our] core worry is not generative search itself, but the way generative AI can degrade scholarly quality and trust by producing convincing yet unreliable papers and reviews."

"Inaccuracy and hallucinations in the answers that are returned."

"My biggest concern about generative search is accuracy and trust. If AI gives confident but incorrect answers without clear sources, it can mislead users and reduce reliability."

"People relying 100% on AI content and not being the "human in the room" to fact-check AI outputs"

Keeping up with the competition was another oft-mentioned worry:

"Being so late to the party."

"Not getting on top of it in time. Getting left in the dust."

"That we will miss the opportunity to gain authority with the 'wait and see' attitude of leadership."

And there we find the impact of skeptical leadership — one of the less-cited concerns, but felt heavily by those who are trying to move against the current within their own organizations:

"Leadership skepticism (which of course impacts budget and implementation timetables)."

"That our leadership won't prioritize it."

And finally, the least-mentioned concern but still a notable one: maintaining control of your brand's intellectual property and/or reputation in an environment where LLMs are designed to only output the next-most-likely word in a given sentence:

"Managing reputation in smaller, less important channels because that is what some GEO searches are returning at the brand (not local) level."

"Privacy and guarding company IP — designing for that."

Where Do We GEO From Here?

Generative engine optimization is one of the newest marketing strategies that teams are grappling with. It's not exactly in its infancy anymore, but definitely still in the awkward growth-spurt phases of adoption.

What this means for marketers is that we're battling with the pressure to adopt and master GEO tactics at the same time as they're still being developed. Meanwhile, measuring the impact of marketing activities remains elusive and uncertain.

It's tempting to say that we're all in the same boat, but that's not exactly true. We're all experiencing the same sea change, but some marketers have luxuries like GEO-aware leadership, or budgets for tools and training. Meanwhile, others are just trying to stay afloat with what little information is available.

What we can all agree on is that Search is not the same beast as it was just a few years ago. We will continue to see changes in how these systems work, how brands tailor their strategies to these new realities, and — in time — how the platforms that help us research, track and manage it all will catch up.

In the meantime, some of the best advice marketers can act on hasn't actually changed much at all: Keep creating content that your audience likes, engages with and finds useful. At the end of the day, that's our job as marketers: to help our audience find the solutions they need.

