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Ten strategies that decide **search visibility**

What the work actually is in 2026 — the fundamentals that hold, the ten moves that matter, and what AI search really asks of you. Every number has a source next to it.

~68%

of US Google searches ended without a click, January–April 2026

~0.3%

of search referrals come from AI chatbots — all of them together

200 ms

the interaction budget a page is judged on

0

special files or schema that AI search actually requires

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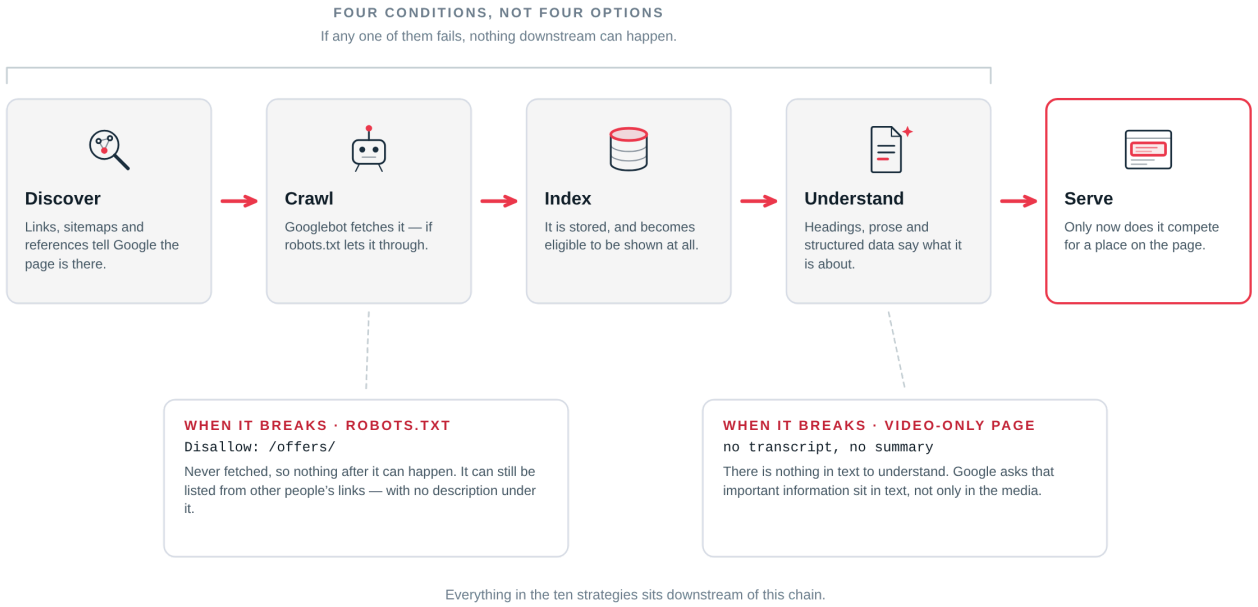
01 / FUNDAMENTALS

Eight things search still runs on

Search engines have to **discover, crawl, index and understand** a page before anything else can happen to it. Everything further on sits on top of these eight.



HOW A PAGE BECOMES A RESULT

The first four are conditions, not options. If any one of them fails, nothing downstream can happen — which is why two cheap mistakes, shown underneath, undo an entire content programme.

01

Discovery before everything

SEO helps search engines discover, crawl, index and understand your content. That is what creates the opportunity to attract relevant organic traffic in the first place — everything else is downstream of it.

02

Research comes first

Analyse the market, the competitors and the actual result pages. Understand search intent, then identify the keywords and topics that are relevant to the business and the people you want to reach.

03

Technical SEO is the floor

Crawlability, indexability, site architecture, mobile usability, page speed, Core Web Vitals, URL structure, XML sitemaps, robots.txt, canonical tags and appropriate structured data.

04

Content answers a real need

Useful explanations, original insight, reliable evidence and relevant expertise. E-E-A-T — Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness — is a quality framework for judging that work, rather than a single ranking factor.

05

On-page is still plumbing

Clear page titles, meta descriptions, headings, descriptive image alt text, internal links and well-organised content. These help both people and search engines understand what each page is for.

06

Off-page is earned, not bought

Relevant backlinks and reputation built through digital PR, partnerships and content worth referencing. Prioritise credible coverage and useful relationships over buying links or chasing link volume.

07

AI-assisted search runs on the same rails

AEO and GEO name the effort to appear in generated answers. For Google's AI Overviews and AI Mode, established SEO principles still apply: no special AI schema and no separate optimisation are required, and inclusion is never guaranteed.

08

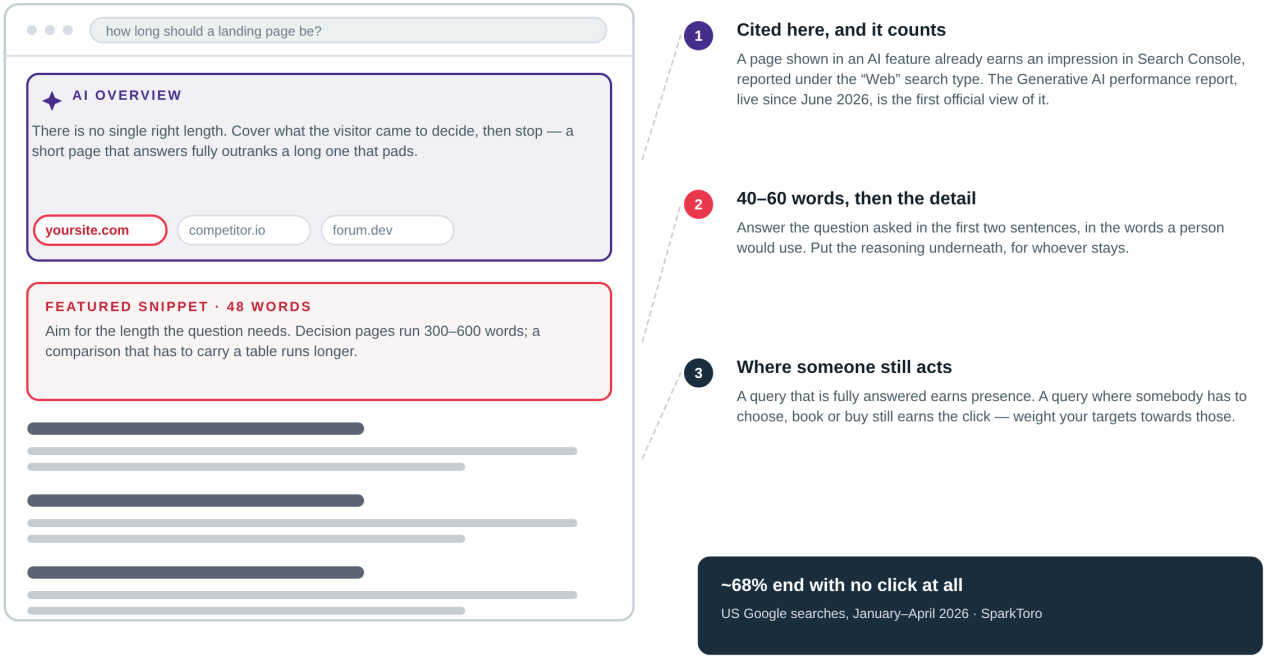
Measure outcomes, not vibes

Impressions, clicks, CTR, relevant organic traffic, qualified leads, purchases and revenue. Use Google Search Console and GA4 together, so search performance connects to what people actually do on the site.

02 / THE WORK

Ten strategies, and what to ignore in each

Each one has the same shape: what the work actually is, and the part of the common advice you can drop. Ordered by how much of your week they deserve.



WHAT A RESULT PAGE LOOKS LIKE NOW

The answer arrives before the links. A page cited inside an AI feature already earns an impression in Search Console, reported under the “Web” search type — so presence is measurable even when the click never happens.

01 AI-assisted content

Use the models for the parts that are mechanical, and keep a human on the parts that carry judgement. The line is not where most teams put it.

Good use	Research synthesis, clustering a keyword set, first drafts of structure, spotting gaps against competitors, rewriting for clarity.
Keep human	First-hand experience, opinion with a name behind it, anything a reader could check, and the decision to publish.
The actual risk	Not “AI content” as such — it is scale. Pages produced in bulk to move rankings fall under Google’s scaled content abuse policy, whoever or whatever wrote them.

WHAT GOOGLE SAYS

Write non-commodity content from your own knowledge rather than recycling what is already out there. Commodity listicles add little insight.

02 E-E-A-T, correctly understood

Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness. It is a framework for describing quality — not a dial in the ranking system.

Experience	Did the author do the thing? Show the work: photographs, numbers, what went wrong.
Expertise and authority	Named authors with real credentials, and recognition from sources that have something to lose by being wrong.
Trust carries the most weight	Transparency about who you are, what you sell and how you were paid. Current information. Working contact details.

DROP THIS

Any “E-E-A-T score” a tool offers you. There is nothing to score — the framework describes an assessment, not a metric.

03 Zero-click and snippets

Most searches now end on the results page. That is a planning fact, not an emergency — but it changes which keywords are worth chasing.

Paragraph snippets	40–60 words, placed in the first screenful, answering a “what is” or “how does” question in plain language.
List and table snippets	Ordered steps, rankings, comparisons and prices — in real list and table markup, not pictures of tables.
Shift the mix	If a query is answered completely on the results page, it earns brand presence, not sessions. Weight your targets towards queries where someone still has to act.

THE NUMBERS, WITH SOURCES

About 68% of US Google searches ended without a click, January–April 2026 (SparkToro), up 7.56 points on 2024. Split by query type: 83% zero-click where an AI Overview appears, 60% where it does not (SparkToro/Datos). Ahrefs measured a 58% CTR drop on position one in February 2026. Pew Research Center, watching real browsing, found clicks on 8% of visits with an AI summary against 15% without. Semrush, tracking the same keywords, found no uniform loss — so treat any single figure with care.

04 Generative engine visibility

The one everybody sells as a new discipline. Google's own guide dismantles most of what is on offer.

Two eligibility gates, no more	The page must be indexed and eligible to appear in Search with a snippet. The site must be included in "Search generative AI features" in Search Console. That is it.
Keep the door open	Crawlable in robots.txt and at the CDN. Important information in text, not baked into images. Internal links to the pages that matter.
Control what you expose	nosnippet, data-nosnippet, max-snippet and noindex limit what is shown. Google-Extended governs training and grounding in Google's other systems.

VERBATIM

"Optimizing for generative AI search is optimizing for the search experience, and thus still SEO." Also: "Indexing and serving aren't guaranteed."

05 Local and hyperlocal

The least glamorous chapter and, for anyone with an address, the one that pays first.

Business Profile, kept current	Precise categories, real photographs, opening hours that are true on a bank holiday. Google explicitly asks for Business Profile and Merchant Center data to be up to date.
Reviews, answered	A steady flow and a reply to each. Reviews are the part of your reputation that models and people both read.
Geography with substance	One honest page per place you actually serve, with local detail only someone who works there would know. Not a template with the city name swapped.

06 Agents and agentic commerce

New, genuinely moving, and mostly relevant if you sell things. Google treats it as optional, not as a ranking requirement.

UCP — Universal Commerce Protocol	Open standard launched by Google in January 2026 at NRF, built with Shopify, Etsy, Wayfair, Target and Walmart, endorsed by more than 20 payment and technology companies including Visa, Mastercard, Stripe and Adyen.
How it grew through 2026	January: single-item guest checkout. March: carts and catalogue access, onboarding through Merchant Center. May: Universal Cart with Google Pay at large retailers. REST transport, with MCP bindings as an alternative; interoperable with A2A and AP2.
What to do now	If you sell: get Merchant Center data clean, then watch the rollout — eligible US merchants first, other markets announced through 2026. If you don't sell: nothing yet.

07 Core Web Vitals

The thresholds are on the next page; what matters here is where the numbers come from.

Field data, not lab data	Assessment runs on real users, from the Chrome User Experience Report, at the 75th percentile, over a rolling 28-day window. A green Lighthouse run on your laptop proves nothing about that.
INP is the one people fail	Because it counts every interaction, not the first. Long tasks on the main thread, heavy third-party scripts and oversized hydration are the usual causes.
Keep it in proportion	Page experience is one input among many. Fast and unhelpful still loses to slow and useful. Fix it because people feel it.

08 Video and visual search

Video is where most of the attention went, and where most of the indexable text is still missing.

Transcripts, on the page	The single highest-value thing you can add. It makes the content accessible, searchable, quotable and translatable in one move.
Structure around the player	A written summary, chapters, and a page that still makes sense with the video blocked. Google asks that text carry the important information.
Images that describe themselves	Real filenames, honest alt text, and enough resolution for Lens to work with. Visual search rewards the boring discipline.

09 Answer-shaped content

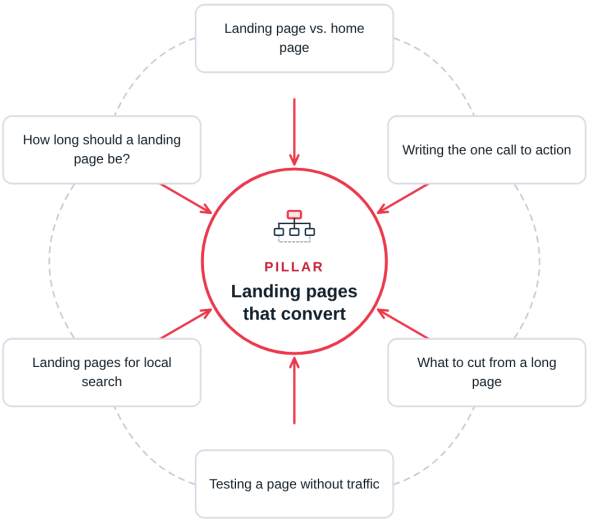
Writing so a question has an answer near it. Useful for people first, and for every answer engine as a side effect.

Questions as headings	Phrase the heading the way someone would ask it, then answer it in the first two sentences underneath. Everything else is elaboration.
FAQ markup that matches	Use FAQPage only for questions and answers that are visibly on the page. Structured data must match the visible text — a mismatch is a quality problem, not a shortcut.
Cover the follow-up	The second question someone asks is usually the one with commercial intent. Answer it on the same page.

10 Structure: schema and clusters

The part that compounds. Also the part most often oversold as an AI lever.

Schema for what it is for	Article, FAQPage, HowTo, Product, Review — to earn rich results and to make entities legible. Not required for generative AI features, and there is no AI-specific type.
Internal links as architecture	Pillar pages with supporting articles linking back in context. It tells machines what you are about, and it tells readers where to go next.
Clusters beat scattered posts	Depth on a few topics outperforms thin coverage of many. This is also the cheapest defence against the scaled-content trap.



1 **One page owns the topic**

The pillar answers the whole question, at the length the question needs. Everything else exists to go deeper on one part of it.

2 **Supporting pages link back in context**

Inside the prose, where the sentence is already about it — not in a block of related links at the foot of the page.

3 **Siblings link sideways when it helps**

Dotted here because it is optional. Two articles that answer the follow-up to each other should say so; the rest should not be forced.

A PILLAR IS NOT A MENU

If the pillar page has nothing to say on its own — only links out to the six around it — you have built a category page, and it will be treated as one.

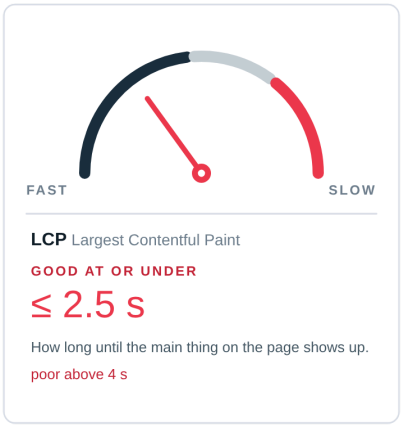
ONE PILLAR, SIX ARTICLES, LINKS THAT RUN INWARDS

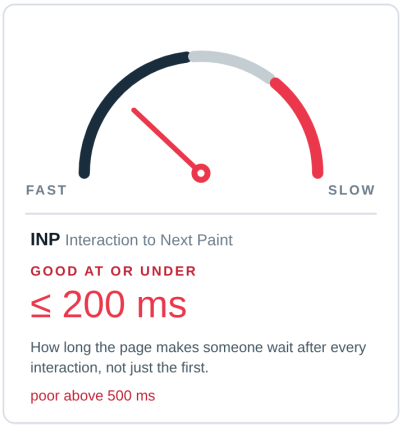
The sibling links are dotted because they are optional; forcing them is how a cluster turns into a link farm. A pillar with nothing of its own to say is a category page, and will be read as one.

03 / THRESHOLDS

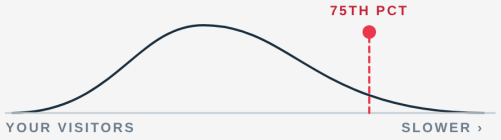
Core Web Vitals, with the current numbers

Three metrics. Measured on **real users** from the Chrome User Experience Report, at the **75th percentile**, over a rolling **28-day window**. Not in a lab.









Judged on real visits, not on your laptop

Assessment runs on field data from the Chrome User Experience Report, at the 75th percentile, over a rolling 28-day window. Three quarters of your visitors have to be inside the threshold — so the slow quarter is the one you are actually fixing. A green lab score on your own machine proves nothing.

THE THRESHOLDS, AND WHERE THEY ARE JUDGED

Three quarters of real visitors have to fall inside the threshold — so the slow quarter is the one you are actually fixing. A green score on your own machine proves nothing.

METRIC	WHAT IT MEASURES	GOOD	POOR ABOVE
LCP Largest Contentful Paint	How long until the main thing on the page appears.	**≤ 2.5 s**	4 s
INP Interaction to Next Paint	How long someone waits after every interaction, not just the first.	**≤ 200 ms**	500 ms
CLS Cumulative Layout Shift	How much the layout jumps around while loading.	**≤ 0.1**	0.25

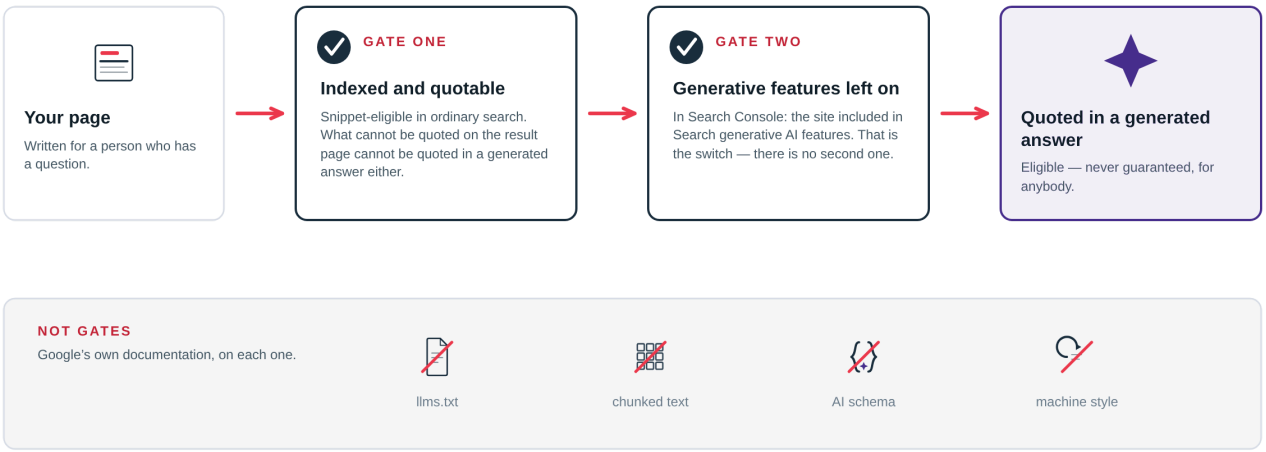
WHERE TO CHECK THESE

Thresholds move only when Google moves them, and web.dev is where they are published. Where another source quotes different numbers, that is the page to check against.

04 / NO, REALLY

Six things AI search does not require

Each of these is sold as necessary for visibility in generated answers. Google’s own documentation says otherwise, in its own words.



TWO GATES, AND A LONG LIST OF THINGS THAT ARE NOT GATES

There are two conditions, and they are both ordinary search conditions. Everything in the strip along the bottom has been sold into this market as a third — and each one is refused in Google's own documentation.

llms.txt

You don't need new machine-readable files, AI text files, markup or Markdown to appear in Google Search. Making them for other services "will neither harm nor help" you there.

Chunking content

"There's no requirement to break your content into tiny pieces for AI to better understand it." Write for a reader; the structure follows from that.

Special AI schema

"There's no special schema.org markup you need to add." Structured data still earns rich results, but it "isn't required for generative AI search".

Rewriting for machines

You don't need to write in a particular style purely for generative search. Clear headings, sections and honest prose do the job.

Manufactured mentions

Chasing inauthentic mentions across the web "isn't as helpful as it might seem". Earned coverage from sources with a reputation to protect is a different thing.

Perfect code

Semantic HTML helps, but Google says not to "worry about perfect code". Crawlable, fast and readable is the bar.

05 / MEASUREMENT

What to watch, and where it actually lives

Search Console and GA4 answer different questions. Used together, they connect what happened in search to what happened on the site.



SOURCE 1

Search Console

Impressions, clicks, CTR, average position — including the impressions a page earns inside AI features, reported under the “Web” search type.

SOURCE 2

GA4

What the visit did next: relevant organic sessions, engaged sessions, and the events you count as qualified.

SOURCE 3

Your own books

Revenue, and the cost of the work that produced it. The only number that settles an argument about budget.

Expect fewer, better clicks — Google’s position is that clicks from pages carrying an AI Overview are higher quality.

WHAT TO REPORT, AND WHICH TOOL SEES WHICH PART

Rank was a proxy for this loop, and stopped describing it. The loop is what a client is actually buying.

✓ AI impressions are already in your data

Pages shown in AI features count towards overall search traffic, reported in the Performance report under the “Web” search type.

✓ The Generative AI performance report

Launched June 2026, rolling out to a subset of properties first. If yours doesn’t have it yet, standard Search Console and Analytics data is the fallback.

✓ Business outcomes, not rank

Impressions, clicks, CTR, relevant organic traffic, qualified leads, purchases, revenue. Rank on its own stopped describing much.

✓ Expect fewer, better clicks

Google’s position is that clicks from pages carrying an AI Overview are “higher quality”. Watch conversion rate per session, not just session count.

Don’t optimise for one chatbot

Of 680 million AI citations analysed in early 2026, only 11% of domains were cited by both ChatGPT and Perplexity. Coverage differs per platform.

Keep the scale honest

All AI chatbots together: roughly 0.29% of search referrals, May 2026 (Cloudflare Radar), against about 87.6% from Google. Growing fast, small in absolute terms.

— / SOURCES

Where every claim in this guide comes from

Primary sources first. Where studies disagree, this guide says so rather than picking the most dramatic number.

Google Search Central	Optimizing your website for generative AI features on Google Search — the source for every “Google says” in this guide. developers.google.com/search/docs/fundamentals/ai-optimization-guide
Google Search Central	AI features and your website — eligibility, controls, and how impressions are reported. developers.google.com/search/docs/appearance/ai-features
web.dev	Interaction to Next Paint, and Web Vitals — metric definitions and thresholds. web.dev/articles/inp · web.dev/articles/vitals
SparkToro	Zero-click share of US Google searches, January–April 2026; AI Overview split with Datos. sparktoro.com
Seer Interactive	CTR study across 3,119 queries and 25.1 million impressions over 15 months. seerinteractive.com
Ahrefs · Sistrix	Position-one CTR measurements, February 2026, and German-market data. ahrefs.com · sistrix.com
Pew Research Center	Observed browsing behaviour with and without AI summaries. pewresearch.org
Cloudflare Radar · StatCounter · SE Ranking	Share of referrals from AI chatbots, May–August 2026. radar.cloudflare.com

Google · Shopify	Universal Commerce Protocol launch, scope and 2026 rollout. developers.googleblog.com · shopify.engineering/UCP

Do the fundamentals. **Measure the outcomes.**

The full page, with every source linked, and the slide deck of this guide: aisuperpowers.eu

Tell us what you are trying to rank, and for whom: contact@ebig.biz · ebig.biz/contact