



The 2026 AEO & Content Marketing Trends Guide

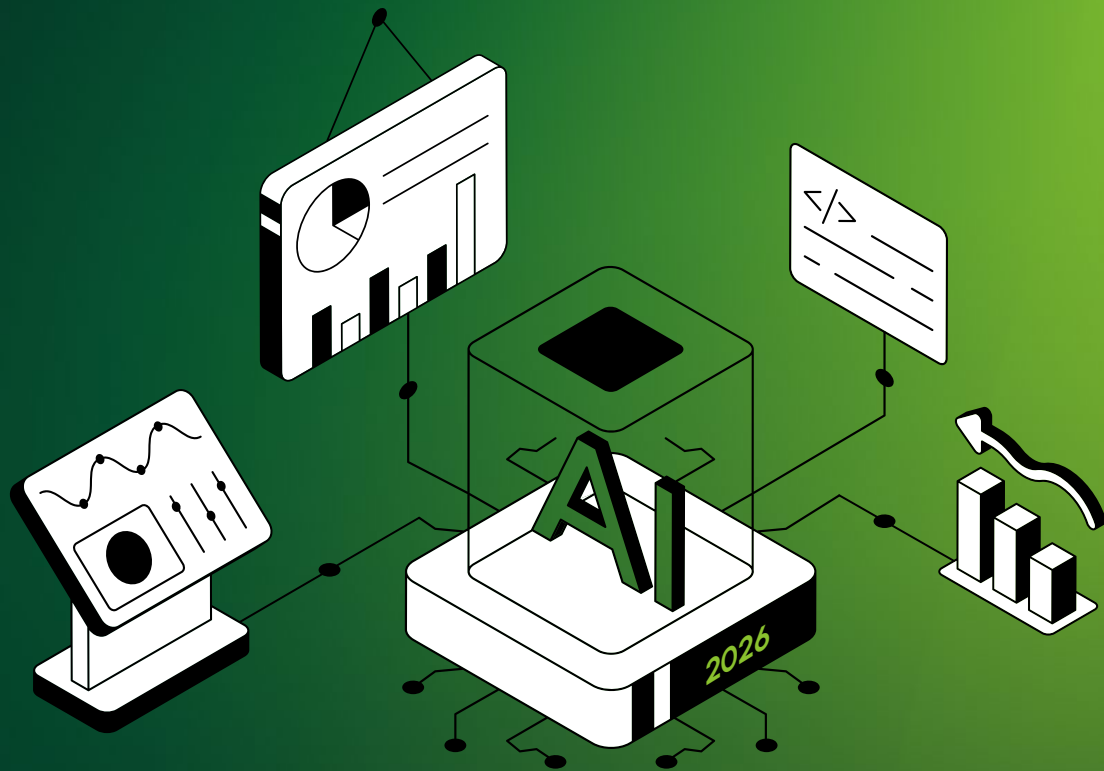


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What is the future of AEO and content marketing in 2026?

Search didn't just evolve over the last year; it splintered, changing more in the past year than at any point since the rise of search engines. Users are now researching in ChatGPT, validating sources in Perplexity, discovering topics on Claude, and comparing products in Gemini, often receiving answers directly from AI instead of clicking through to websites.

This shift is turning brand websites into an information layer for AI, where visibility depends not just on whether your content appears, but how AI systems interpret and describe your brand.

In this guide, we break down the biggest AEO and content trends shaping 2026—what to prioritize, what to ignore, and how to build a strategy that ensures your brand stays visible across both traditional search engines and emerging answer engines.

Has AEO replaced SEO?

Short answer: No. It's important to focus on both. Despite the growth of AI search, [Google still processes roughly 99,000](#) searches per second, totalling around 8.5 billion per day in 2025 (with [some estimates](#) pushing that even higher to 16.4B daily searches).

"AEO and SEO are two completely separate channels that have similar tactics and similar ideals. While traditional search is about rankings, traffic, and domain authority, AI is really about brand authority, visibility, market share, and it's also social listening, where people really care about what people are saying about their brand and how the brand is perceived."



Pat Reinhart, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

Despite what some search doomsdayers think about the future of SEO, many of the core SEO principles that have always mattered are even more important in the age of AI search, like:

- Building authority around a topic
- Publishing unique, high-quality content
- Structuring information clearly
- Maintaining a strong technical foundation

If any of these are lacking, both traditional search engines and AI models become less likely to crawl, understand, and reference (or rank) your content.

"I don't think anything has really changed. **SEO is still very important.** In fact, over the last year, we've seen the shortcut and black-hat AEO tactics folks are experimenting with, like overinvesting in listicle content, have created years of cleanup work with traditional SEO tactics."



Pat Reinhart, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

[Google recently penalized websites](#) that were experimenting with creating promotional listicle content. Some SaaS brands saw as much as a 30-50% drop in visibility thanks to review-style content that ranked their own brand at number 1.

For brands, it's a reminder that AEO is like SEO; shortcuts might work for a bit, but their impact rarely lasts and will likely be detrimental to your visibility.

Top AEO trends & predictions for 2026

1. Google will remain the world's leader in search

Despite the surge in AI and the shift in how people search, Google's not going anywhere. Even as [generative AI](#) adoption grows, Google still has roughly [5 billion daily active users](#) worldwide compared to just over [ChatGPT's 900 million weekly active users](#).

"It's going to take a long time—if it ever happens—for something like ChatGPT or Gemini to surpass the number of people going through Google every day."



Pat Reinhart, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

Google remains the most popular way to search worldwide, and it's rapidly integrating AI directly into its own ecosystem with Gemini, [AI Overviews](#), [AI Mode](#), and new experimental search experiences.

"Google is still seeing more searches than answer engines every year. **Yes, websites are getting less organic traffic, but that doesn't mean that people are searching any less.** Plus, [ChatGPT is already losing monthly active users](#) as Google starts to creep in."



Pat Reinhart, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

The brands that succeed will be those that don't focus on a single search engine or experience. Success in the AI search era is about ensuring content is discoverable in traditional search results while also being structured and authoritative enough to be cited in AI-generated answers.

2. Agentic AI will revolutionize the customer journey

All eyes will be on **agentic AI** in 2026 as systems move beyond answering questions to actively completing tasks. Instead of helping users research options and compare results, these systems will start carrying out all stages of the customer journey on a user's behalf.

"Agentic AI is absolutely going to revolutionize the buyer's journey, and it's probably going to be a good thing because I think it'll make it easier for people to find what they're looking for and find your brand with less iteration."



Pat Reinhart, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

What will this mean for brand discoverability as AI agents become the primary audience and consumer of digital content?

Website traffic will continue to decline. Agents will complete purchases on behalf of users via UCP integrations in answer engines, which means no traffic is captured. However, website traffic won't disappear overnight as user adoption has yet to be proven for agentic commerce. The traffic that brands do receive will be higher-quality and ready to convert.

For brands, the rise of agentic AI reinforces the importance (and urgency) of ensuring your content, brand, and products show up in the curated list of recommendations within AI answers. If you don't, you essentially become invisible in the new AI customer journey. Which means visibility is up for grabs.

"The playing field is a lot more even than many people think. If you're competing with a large enterprise brand, you can still make your mark in AI and agentic search. The key for businesses, especially small- and medium-sized businesses, is to hone in on user intent and ensure their positioning and messaging in AI really aligns with that intent so they meet their audience where they are."



Pat Reinhart, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

That means brands must optimize and create content for AI agents and humans (at least for now). It's like SEO in that way: the easier it is for search engine bots to discover and crawl your content, the better the chances are of that content having strong visibility and getting surfaced when it matters most.

3. Brands need to completely rewrite their AEO ROI framework to reflect the new customer journey

When answers are generated directly within an AI answer engine, users often get the information they need without ever visiting a website. With AI agents, users will no longer need to visit a website to complete a purchase. The customer journey is different, which means your ROI framework—specifically the reliance on traffic as a primary KPI—has to change, too.

“The ROI on AI is most directly tied to visibility, but visibility doesn’t have the concrete certainty of a metric like traffic. **Traffic’s not going to be the go-to metric for AI search like it was in traditional search.** It’s about visibility. While visibility and AI performance are nebulous metrics to nail down, it’s going to haunt the industry if folks continue to follow old metrics.”



Pat Reinhart, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

Because of this shift, new measurement frameworks are beginning to emerge around **AI visibility**. While the industry is still developing standardized benchmarks, many teams are starting to track indicators such as:

- **Share of AI citations:** How often your brand appears in AI-generated answers
- **Sentiment in AI responses:** How models describe your brand, products, or expertise
- **Prompt-level visibility:** Whether your brand appears across different prompt variations
- **Competitive model share:** How frequently your brand appears compared to competitors
- **AI-influenced conversions:** Conversions influenced by AI discovery paths

This ultimately means that brands need to get more comfortable with the fact that AI search is more of a brand awareness channel in that it doesn’t have the 1:1 metric to ROI like other channels. Instead, brands need to focus on measuring their overall AI visibility through multiple metrics to get a more complete picture. Then, they can use these signals to understand and influence the way AI views their brand as a whole and the impact increased AI visibility has on down-funnel metrics like conversions and revenue generation.

4. Data quality is the differentiator in the shift to agentic AEO workflows

Similar to how agentic AI is transforming the front-end search experience, agentic AEO is disrupting enterprise workflows rapidly. Companies have started to leverage specialized AI agents to automate large portions of their AEO operations, which will gain widespread adoption in 2026.

“The key to success here is knowing how to exist at the intersection of automation and human-led activities. **Automating content without a human in the loop to guide the way will lead to low-quality and worse visibility.**”



Pat Reinhart, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

But the goal isn't automation for automation's sake; it's to find opportunities for intelligent continuous optimization.

Instead of manually monitoring AI search performance and discovering technical issues weeks or months afterwards, organizations will implement technical and AEO agents that continuously analyze their brand reputation and visibility across answer engines at scale.

Having an agent monitor your website and fix technical issues as they happen will allow for more time spent on high-value strategic activities. There is no easy button in any of this, and typically, the ones who only seek to press it are the ones who get left behind.”



Pat Reinhart, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

But the companies that succeed with agentic AEO will be determined by data quality, because ultimately, AI agents are only as effective as the data they have access to.

When that data is accurate and well-structured, agents provide reliable insights and meaningful optimization recommendations. When the data is incomplete, poorly structured, outdated, or biased, agents generate incorrect insights or even hallucinate explanations or metrics that aren't grounded in reality.

In other words, the brands that invest in building or leveraging agents powered by high-quality search data APIs will be the ones dominating agentic AEO in the next 12 months.


5. Ads are coming to (some) answer engines near you

Where users go, advertising tends to follow.

As AI-powered search experiences continue to grow, it's only a matter of time before advertising becomes a core part of these platforms, with Google in particular expected to move aggressively towards ads within its AI-powered search experiences.

"The interesting thing about ads coming to AI search is that, with Netflix or streaming services, you can pay extra to not see ads, so I think there may be more acceptance of ads in the free versions of these AI tools."



 **Pat Reinhart**, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor


OpenAI has already announced that they're [testing ads in ChatGPT](#) for users on ChatGPT's Free and Go tiers, while Plus, Pro, and Enterprise subscriptions will remain ad-free. Meanwhile, ChatGPT competitors, [Perplexity](#) and [Claude](#), have both announced they won't be pursuing ads in their models, so ads won't be coming to every answer engine.

The impact for digital teams and marketers comes down to how effective these ads will be and what analytics will be available. ChatGPT has stated that it won't sell user data or expose conversations with ChatGPT to advertisers, instead letting advertisers see aggregate ad performance metrics, like how many times an ad was shown in ChatGPT or how many users clicked on it. But will that reporting be enough to warrant throwing money at ads instead of investing those resources in optimizing their sites for AI search?

"For brands, it will come back to reporting. If a brand is paying a company something, **they have to give some kind of valuable data back.**

There has to be some kind of citation or repression data, or else what is the brand paying to advertise for?"



 **Pat Reinhart**, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

For brands that rely heavily on paid campaigns for search visibility, this could provide a short-term gain as they'll have a new avenue to collect AI search user data, but ultimately, with ads not being present across AI search experiences, it's unlikely that this data will represent the true user experience or provide any real insight to improve organic visibility.

That's why the better play for forward-thinking brands is to focus your efforts and resources on organic AEO efforts to build brand reputation and authority, rather than trying to buy visibility through ads. The winners in AI search will be those who earn it.

6. Search will become multimodal by default

Traditional and AI search engines allow users to input photos, videos, voice notes, and even live camera feeds directly into their questions to better find the information they need.


Instead of typing a question like “What kind of plant has large red petals and thorny stems?”, users can now just take a picture of it and get an answer back.

It’s just a more natural and logical way for many folks to search, and as these capabilities become more widely integrated into search experiences, multimodal interaction will become the default rather than the exception.

For brands, this expands the definition of what search content looks like. Text-based content is still going to be critical for your brand, but you’ll need to increasingly complement it with visual and interactive formats that help AI systems understand and present information across different media.

“This is going to happen at some point, especially with everyone building all these different agents. People are going to continue to search everywhere, not just with Google, and search has to shift to reflect that and the different ways people will search.”



 **Pat Reinhart**, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

AEO trends to ignore

Now let's shift gears to the AEO trends that you can ignore—or at least put on the back burner for now.

1. SEO doesn't matter anymore

Google still processes billions of searches every day and remains the primary way many users navigate the web. Even as AI search grows, a significant portion of search will continue to happen through traditional search engines.

There's also a practical reality: many AI systems rely on the open web—and, more specifically, Google's index—to surface and validate information. If your content isn't visible in traditional search, it's far less likely that AI models will discover, trust, or reference it.

SEO isn't dead or dying. It's just evolving to become part of the broader AI search ecosystem.

2. AI referral traffic as your primary performance metric

Initially, it made sense that marketers would try to replace organic traffic with AI referral traffic as their priority AI search metric. But AI search doesn't always end in clicks and traffic, so [AI referral traffic](#) doesn't provide the ROI metric marketers have come to expect.

Think about the times that you've used an AI search experience. How often have you clicked the links cited in a response? Likely not very often because you got the answer you needed from the generated response. So, even if you are cited by AI, there's much less of a chance a user will visit your site than in traditional search.

Despite this common user experience, there remains a disconnect with how other marketing professionals are thinking about measurement. Nearly 41% of content teams reported relying on overall traffic, across organic and AI referral, as their primary AEO success metric, according to Clutch's [State of Content Report](#).

"AI search isn't a traffic play—it's an awareness play. Think of it like a billboard. You can't always trace exactly what conversions came from seeing that billboard, but it's getting your brand in front of people."



Pat Reinhart, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

For brands, treating AI referral traffic as the primary goal misses the bigger opportunity: building brand authority in the systems that increasingly shape how people find answers.

3. Creating markdown content specifically for LLMs... yet

As brands look for ways to optimize content for AI systems, many of them are creating markdown versions of pages specifically designed for LLMs to ingest.

That approach is in a bit of a gray area, AEO/SEO-wise. In SEO, this practice was called cloaking, and it violates

[Google's helpful content policies](#).

"There's just no reason to create markdown pages right now. AI can read HTML, and when it reads a markdown page, it actually will compare it to an HTML page, just to make sure it's right. So, basically, you're just doubling your crawl load."



Pat Reinhart, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

As agentic search evolves, structured feeds or specialized protocols may become a more common way for AI systems to access information, but today, there's little evidence that duplicating large portions of your site in markdown will improve AI visibility.

"Creating markdown pages isn't a hard no, it's more of a not right now. If you want to experiment, do it on a handful of pages. Just don't roll it out across your whole site."



Pat Reinhart, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

For now, the best approach remains the simplest one: create clear, well-structured HTML content that answers user questions. AI systems can already read it, and more importantly, it's the same content your human audience actually sees.

Top content marketing predictions for 2026

1. Brand reputation in AI search is a top content priority

Nearly 41% of content experts listed managing brand reputation as their primary content goal in 2026 as it relates to AI search, according to Clutch's [2026 State of Content Report](#).

"I think **brand reputation and sentiment are going to become even more important** than they were in 2025. Last year, folks were trying to figure out how to measure AEO performance, and whether they were cited, but 2026 will be much more focused on identifying the sentiment of citations in LLMs at scale and working to improve it."



Shannon Vize, Senior Content Marketing Manager at Conductor

Marketers are quickly learning that sentiment is just as important as whether they appear in AI answers.

"AEO is all about brand authority, visibility, and market share, **but it's also about social listening** and really paying attention to what people are saying about your brand and how your brand is perceived in AI."



Pat Reinhart, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

It's not enough for your brand to appear in AI-generated responses; how your brand is described can shape user perception and influence purchasing decisions. Those mentions build familiarity and credibility over time, often influencing decisions later in the buying journey.

2. Agentic workflows will power the majority of content creation

Agentic workflows aren't just going to change the way brands approach AEO; it's also going to upend the way content gets created. **75% of marketers have expanded the use of AI-powered tools** across their standard content process, according to Clutch's 2026 State of Content Report.

Over the next 12 months, those use cases will expand as adoption of fully agentic content workflows becomes a top priority for enterprise brands increasing investments in content and looking to boost efficiency.

"We're already seeing so many agentic developments, like [Claude Cowork](#), [Conductor's ChatGPT app](#), and other innovative tools that help automate content tasks with agentic workflows. In 2026, I expect **enterprise leaders will be looking at ways to implement content agents or an agentic CMS**, where AI is generating the content, a human is reviewing it, and then the agent migrates the content to your CMS and formats it for you until it's ready to publish."




 **Shannon Vize**, Senior Content Marketing Manager at Conductor

Instead of using AI for one-off tasks like creating content briefs or pulling quotes from a video transcript, agentic AI will be responsible for nearly the entire content lifecycle. But that doesn't mean your old content process is dead. Notice the header of this section wasn't that AI will replace your content teams?

"Agentic workflows should be powering your content lifecycle as long as you're being responsible with it. **You need to learn how to use AI like a tool. It's supposed to make you more productive.** It's another tool in your toolbelt, it's not meant to make you worried you'll be out of a job."



 **Pat Reinhart**, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

That's why [human-in-the-loop](#) workflows are becoming the standard for responsible [AI-driven content creation](#), so teams can ensure content is accurate, properly sourced, and aligns with brand voice before publishing.

That oversight is critical for any brand concerned with maintaining its reputation in AI search, but it's even more important for brands in highly regulated or compliance-heavy industries, where legal concerns and brand risks can arise.

The brands that succeed will be the ones that combine the power of agentic AI with human expertise to ensure content is efficient to produce, but trustworthy and risk-free, too.

3. Proprietary research will be a primary citation driver

Thanks to AI, content has never been easier to produce. But it's also leading to a lot of generic content that sounds the same and doesn't build brand reputation or authority in AEO.

AI systems and users are increasingly looking for unique, accurate, and fresh information. That means, to ensure your brand gets found, you need to create content that can't be replicated without citing you. That's where proprietary research comes in.

"First-party research is so powerful because it's not simply informational content. You're not defining terms or creating content that anyone can write. **It's providing real and unique value for humans that LLMs seek out.**"




 **Shannon Vize**, Senior Content Marketing Manager at Conductor

For example, Salesforce releases an annual [State of Sales Report](#) that provides expert insights and exclusive data on the latest B2B sales trends.

This is a great way for Salesforce to not only gain visibility around the state of sales—it owns the top organic ranking on Google and was cited by Gemini for queries around "the state of sales"—but to also drive further citations from [external sources](#) and [social media traction](#).

"I think for B2B brands specifically, we'll see proprietary research reports become a #1 content priority in 2026 because it's a great way for brands to provide **exclusive data and insight that LLMs and other publications love to cite.**"



 **Shannon Vize**, Senior Content Marketing Manager at Conductor

Brands that prioritize first-party research reports will see growth in earned media coverage, backlinks, AI citations, and brand mentions, all reinforcing your domain and entity authority over time.

4. LLMs and agents are the new priority content audience

More than 77% of content marketers are already creating content primarily intended for LLMs to detect, reference, or surface in their responses, according to [Clutch's 2026 State of Content Report](#).

Instead of viewing LLMs and agents as a secondary audience to humans, content marketers are starting to prioritize LLMs as their primary content consumer. In some ways, this is accurate as some pages or content are being visited more often by LLMs and AI agents instead of humans.

But that doesn't mean content marketers should only be creating content with LLMs in mind. Like in SEO, the pages that perform the best will be high-quality, properly structured content that offers a unique POV and answers users' questions instead of thin content that attempts to gamify AEO, like self-promotional listicles.

"I think it really just highlights that we're still in the early stages of AEO, and a lot of folks are taking these black-hat approaches to content and trying to gamify their AI search presence. Self-promotional listicle content created solely to increase visibility within comparison prompts in LLMs has taken a hit, and I think with time **those types of efforts will no longer produce the results that folks were seeing initially.**"



 **Shannon Vize**, Senior Content Marketing Manager at Conductor

Many brands have also been experimenting with creating markdown pages of their content designed specifically for LLMs. In traditional search, this tactic could be considered [cloaking](#) and may trigger penalties for deceptive content.

AI models also [tend to visit pages sooner](#) and revisit them more often than traditional search engines, and they'll usually leverage Google's index when surfacing content. If Google has a low opinion of your site, it's likely that AI will too.

"Your focus shouldn't be on gamifying or short-term wins in AEO by targeting LLM audience loopholes.

Focus more on tried-and-true holistic efforts, like creating well-structured content that is easy for LLMs to discover, crawl, and cite, providing unique value, and sharing your wisdom with your human audience in a format that LLMs reward."



 **Shannon Vize**, Senior Content Marketing Manager at Conductor

The safest long-term strategy is still the same one that has always worked in search: create high-quality, trustworthy content that clearly answers real and related questions from your human audience.

5. Video content will become a strategic requirement

As search becomes more multimodal, video has moved from a nice-to-have to a core format in any successful enterprise content strategy.

When videos are cited or surfaced within AI answers, they tend to generate strong engagement because users can get the information quickly and visually rather than reading long-winded explanations.

That's why **52% of content marketers are increasing their investment in video** content more than any other format. But just having video content isn't enough. After all, anyone can create video content now with tools like Sora.

In a search landscape increasingly shaped by AI and multimodal experiences, brands that invest in creating and optimizing video for LLM discoverability will be far better positioned to meet users where they are and deliver answers in the formats they prefer.

"The key for content marketers is **ensuring your video content is readable for LLMs and AI bots**. It's about making sure your transcript is uploaded with your YouTube videos, making sure you're including detailed descriptions, schema, and other supplemental copy fields to ensure the content can get pulled into as many AI citations and mentions as possible."



 **Shannon Vize**, Senior Content Marketing Manager at Conductor

6. Brands that feel authentic and human will win

In a world full of AI-generated content, authenticity is now one of a brand's strongest differentiators. Users want more of a human touch with their content, instead of generic AI copy they're being bombarded with.

"Users are getting better at recognizing AI slop, and they are vocal about not liking it. **The brands that will succeed** moving forward will be the ones who are really differentiated in how they approach their tone and their voice to **prioritize authenticity over generic content output.**"




 **Shannon Vize**, Senior Content Marketing Manager at Conductor

Because users crave more authentic content experiences, answer engines are also prioritizing them. AI models dive into the broader web to understand how your brand is perceived holistically, pulling signals from places like Reddit, Quora, review sites, social media conversations, and other user-generated content.

"It's not just about the article on your website. **These models are looking at how people talk about you everywhere**—Reddit, Quora, social media—and trying to understand people's overall perception of your brand."



 **Pat Reinhart**, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

Instead of trying to just outproduce your competitors with more AI-generated content, successful brands are going to focus on what AI can't replicate, which are unique expertise, perspectives, and the authentic experiences of their customers.

Content marketing trends to ignore in 2026

Not all content trends are meant to be followed. Make sure not to put too much stock into these trends in 2026.

1. Content quantity < content quality

In 2025, the idea that simply producing large volumes of AI-generated content could increase visibility became a widespread strategy. But as search engines and AI systems continue to evolve, that approach is already showing diminishing returns.

Sure, publishing more content is great, but more isn't always better; sometimes more is just more. Who cares how much content you have if AI and users view it as low-quality and unhelpful?

"It's not quantity or quality. It's both. The tools are there to help you create more content, but you still have to use them responsibly."



Pat Reinhart, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

AI can definitely help scale your content production, but the key is using it as a tool to boost productivity, not a shortcut to flooding your site with generic content.

In fact, publishing dozens of thin or repetitive pieces of content simply to appear in more prompts will make AI less likely to crawl, trust, and cite your content in future responses.

"The thinking in 2025 for a lot of brands was that increasing your content output would mean a surge in citations and mentions. Ultimately, what we saw was **it's more helpful to build a foundation of high-quality, high-value content** that really aligns to your target audience and their intent to help your brand build authority on a topic."



Shannon Vize, Senior Content Marketing Manager at Conductor

In 2026 and beyond, the brands that win won't be the ones publishing the most content. They'll be the ones producing the most useful, authoritative, and differentiated content at scale.

2. AI as a replacement for human content teams

While AI is transforming the content lifecycle, it's not a replacement for human content teams.

"A lot of brands thought that they could replace their content teams with AI and just keep an editor or two. But I think they realized that that's not the best way forward. **Brands still need a comprehensive content team; they need that human in the loop**, that human expertise to ensure content quality, authority, and brand reputation."




 **Shannon Vize**, Senior Content Marketing Manager at Conductor

Most out-of-the-box AI models draw from similar training data, which tends to lead to generic, templated responses. Without human expertise, AI content starts to blend in with all the similar articles across the web.

The most successful content teams in 2026 will combine AI automation to accelerate workflows while relying on experts' insights to add a unique perspective and ensure the final content is accurate, distinctive, and trustworthy.

"AI represents more of **an evolution of the content team** rather than signaling the replacement of the content team with AI."



 **Shannon Vize**, Senior Content Marketing Manager at Conductor

Even though agentic workflows and AI-powered CMS platforms will make it easier to generate and publish content at scale, a human-in-the-loop approach is still critical to ensure your content is unique and free from [hallucinations](#).


3. Gamifying AEO through thin and self-promotional content

No matter what era of search we're in or what acronym folks are using, there will always be brands trying to game the system.

As we've discussed, the AEO era recently saw this with many brands publishing "best of" style listicles that rank their own product or solution at the top. The goal was to appear for AI queries like: "What is the best task management software?"

"I think what we're seeing now is that people are trying more experiments and doing some black-hat tactics, like the recent issue around listicle content, where sites were collapsing in both AI and traditional search because they created so many thin, promotional listicles."



 **Pat Reinhart**, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

In the short term, this helped brands gain some visibility for those queries. In the long term, however, it worked until it didn't.

We're already seeing early signs of that shift. Research from SEO expert Lily Ray found that some sites relying heavily on thin, promotional listicles **lost 30–50% of their traffic after Google stopped ranking that content**. In many cases, these articles fail to meet Google's helpful content standards because their insights are biased and lack unique insight.

"Trying to game the system isn't going to fly. It'll work about as well as it did in SEO, maybe even worse, because **AI can catch thin content and cloaking faster than traditional search.**"



 **Pat Reinhart**, VP of Services & Thought Leadership at Conductor

In the end, the same principle applies to AEO as it always has to SEO: shortcuts rarely create lasting visibility.

Brands that focus on genuinely helpful, authoritative content will have more staying power than those trying to game the system with thin promotional tactics.

What's ahead for AEO and content marketing in 2026

The brands that succeed in 2026's search landscape will prioritize visibility, brand reputation, and strategic AI adoption.

As AI answers, multimodal search, and agent-driven discovery reshape how people research brands and buy products, success will depend on creating authoritative content, building authentic brand trust across the web, and using AI to scale workflows without sacrificing human expertise.

The next evolution of search isn't replacing SEO; it's expanding it. For brands willing to adapt, the shift toward AI-driven discovery represents a powerful opportunity to lead the next era of search visibility.

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