

SEO vs. AEO vs. GEO: What Startups Should Prioritize in Their First 90 Days

When you launch a startup, every day feels like a race against the clock. You need traffic, you need customers, and you need them fast. But the way people find information online is changing. Traditional search engines are still relevant, but voice assistants, chatbots, and generative AI models are reshaping how users ask questions and consume answers. This shift has given rise to a new discipline: generative engine optimization. Understanding where it fits alongside SEO and AEO is critical when you have only 90 days to make an impact.

The Landscape in 2025

Search is no longer a single funnel. A user might ask Siri a question, type a query into Google, or prompt ChatGPT to summarize options. Each channel behaves differently. SEO targets the Google index, AEO targets featured snippets and voice answers, and GEO targets generative AI models like ChatGPT, Claude, or Perplexity. Each requires different content strategies, and no startup has unlimited resources.

In your first three months, you need to decide where to invest writing time, technical fixes, and link building. The wrong choice can leave you invisible. The right one can put you in front of a steady stream of qualified leads.

What Each Optimization Actually Does

SEO (Search Engine Optimization)

SEO is the oldest and most established. It involves keyword research, on-page optimization, technical audits, and backlinks. When done well, it brings organic traffic from Google and Bing. The upside is massive: consistent, compounding returns. The downside is that it takes time. Most startups see meaningful results only after six to twelve months. If you have a 90-day runway, pure SEO might not deliver fast enough.

AEO (Answer Engine Optimization)

AEO focuses on getting your content selected for featured snippets, "People Also Ask" boxes, and voice assistant answers. It requires concise, direct answers structured in Q&A format. The payoff is high visibility for specific queries, but the traffic is often lower volume and less sticky. Users get your answer and leave. For a startup that needs to build an audience, AEO alone is rarely enough.

GEO (Generative Engine Optimization)

[Generative engine optimization](#) is the newest player. It aims to make your content the source that generative AI models cite when they produce answers. This means your brand gets mentioned inside AI-generated responses, which can drive referral traffic and build authority. The challenge is that generative models pull from a wide range of sources, and the rules are less transparent than Google's ranking factors. But early adopters can gain a significant advantage as the technology matures.

What Startups Should Do in Their First 30 Days

Day one to day thirty is about laying foundations. Do not try to do everything at once. Focus on three things: understanding your audience's questions, cleaning up your site's technical basics, and creating a small batch of high-quality content that answers core queries.

- **Audience research:** Spend a week reading forums, social media, and review sites where your potential customers hang out. Identify the top ten questions they ask about your space. These are your content seeds.
- **Technical basics:** Ensure your site loads fast, works on mobile, and has a clear information architecture. Fix broken links and set up Google Search Console. This takes a few days and pays off for every channel.
- **Pillar content:** Write one comprehensive guide that answers the most important question in depth. This piece can serve as the anchor for both SEO and generative engine optimization. Make it thorough, cite reputable sources, and include practical examples.

At this stage, do not worry about backlinks or featured snippets. Just build a solid base that search engines and AI models can understand.

Days 31 to 60: Testing and Iterating

Now you have some content and a bit of data. Look at how your first piece performed. Did it get any organic impressions? Did any AI tools mention it? You might not see traffic yet, but you can check for brand mentions or citations using simple monitoring tools.

This is the time to experiment with format. Write a short, direct answer piece for AEO targeting one specific question. Then write a longer, narrative-driven piece that tells a story or shares a case study. The short piece might get picked up by a voice assistant. The long piece might become a reference source for generative models. Track which format drives more engagement.

Generative engine optimization thrives on clarity and structure. Use clear headings, bullet points, and summaries. Models often pull from well-organized content. If you write a paragraph

that clearly states a problem and a solution, the model is more likely to quote it directly.

Days 61 to 90: Doubling Down

By now you should have a sense of what works. If your short answer pieces are getting featured, write more of them. If your long guides are being cited by AI, expand them. This is the time to double down, not to start something new.

Consider creating a resource page that aggregates your best content around a specific topic. This acts as a hub for both human readers and AI crawlers. Keep it updated. Freshness matters for both SEO and generative engine optimization. If you can, add a unique dataset or original research. Generative models love citing numbers and statistics because they add credibility to the answer.

Also, start building relationships. Share your content in relevant communities, answer questions on platforms like Quora or Reddit, and engage with journalists who cover your space. These actions can earn backlinks and increase the likelihood that your content becomes a reference source.

Trade-Offs You Can't Ignore

No startup has unlimited time. If you try to optimize for all three channels at once, you will spread yourself thin. Based on my experience working with early-stage companies, the smartest approach is to prioritize SEO for the long term while using GEO as a short-term booster. Here is why: SEO builds a durable asset that keeps paying off. GEO, at this point, is more volatile. The models change, the sources change, and the algorithms are still evolving. But ignoring it completely means missing out on a channel that could become dominant.

AEO sits somewhere in between. It is relatively easy to implement and can give you quick wins for specific queries. But it should not be your main strategy unless your product naturally fits a question-answer format, like a FAQ or a knowledge base.

Practical Tips for Generative Engine Optimization

If you decide to invest in GEO, here are a few tactics that have worked for startups I have advised:

1. Write in plain language. Avoid jargon and marketing fluff. Generative models are trained on clear, factual writing.
2. Include specific numbers, dates, and sources. Vague claims get ignored. "Our tool reduced costs by 23%" is better than "Our tool reduced costs significantly."

3. Structure your content with clear headings and subheadings. Use H2 and H3 tags to break up sections. This helps the model locate relevant parts quickly.
4. Link to authoritative external sources. This builds trust with both readers and the model, which may check your claims against other data.
5. Update your content regularly. Stale information hurts your credibility. If you wrote a piece six months ago, revisit it and refresh the data.

Generative engine optimization is not a magic wand. It will not replace the need for good content and genuine expertise. But if you treat it as one part of a balanced strategy, it can give your startup an edge in a crowded market.

Final Thoughts

The first 90 days are about survival and momentum. Do not chase every new tactic. Pick one or two channels, execute well, and measure the results. For most startups, the best path is to build a strong SEO foundation, sprinkle in AEO for quick wins, and experiment with generative engine optimization to stay ahead of the curve. The landscape will keep changing. The companies that adapt fastest are the ones that will thrive.