



Later

What should I bring to a picnic that isn't boring?



MARKETER'S GUIDE:

How to Win AI Search with Creators



What's a cozy cabin destination for a weekend trip?



The consumer journey has changed

You've typed your brand name into AI, compared what came back to a competitor, and closed the tab without a clear next step: check, worry, wait, repeat. Meanwhile, consumers aren't waiting. AI has already become their go-to research tool, well ahead of most brands having any plan for what to do about it.

86%

of marketers have already manually checked how AI describes their brand — yet most have no system for what to do next.

94%

of marketers say AI research is already part of the customer journey, broadly or in specific categories.

91%

of marketers agree consumers are using AI tools to research products before purchase.

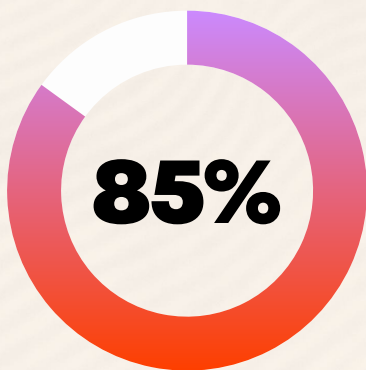
The answer?

AEO. Answer engine optimization, or AEO, is the process of optimizing your brand for AI search results.

AEO is already shaping up to be the next competitive divide.

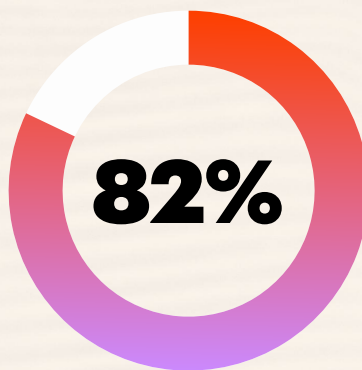
What marketers are actually afraid of

Ask marketers what worries them most about AI search, and the answer isn't being absent from the conversation. Marketers' biggest concern? Showing up inaccurately.



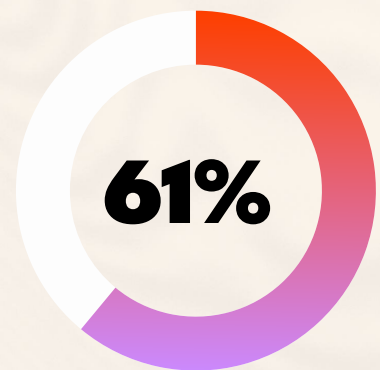
Worry about inaccurate or outdated info

AI gets the brand's facts, claims or timing wrong



Worry about loss of narrative control

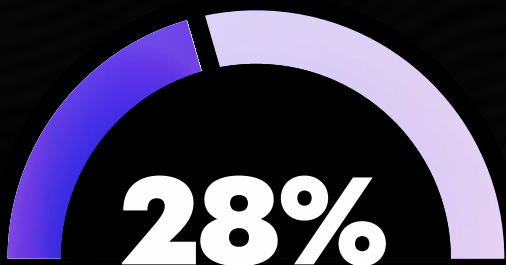
AI cites sources the brand can't control and reshapes its story



Worry about losing to competitors

Rivals get recommended, or the brand doesn't appear at all

Being described incorrectly is a trust problem, and trust is harder to win back once a wrong version of a brand's story starts getting repeated.



of senior marketers say AEO is already a near-term priority or an emerging opportunity they are monitoring. But things are moving fast. Brands need to move from passive monitoring to clear ownership, as early action can help shape AI visibility before competitors define the category.

The Four Pillars of AEO

While AEO and SEO have many similarities, AEO answers sit across a wide breadth of content that's distributed across the internet, not just concentrated on your owned website.

Here's what to take note of: less than 10% of what AI search says about a brand comes from brand-owned content, according to McKinsey.

Brands need to evaluate, prioritize, and invest across these four pillars to effectively impact how they show up in AI search:

01

Brand-owned content

Web pages, blog posts, product pages, email newsletters, help-center articles

02

Creator and UGC

Creator posts (sponsored or organic), long-form YouTube videos

03

Earned media and editorial coverage

Press coverage, news articles, analyst reports, industry publication write-ups

04

Forum and community mentions

Organic, unprompted discussion across niche forums

<10%

of what AI search says about a brand comes from brand-owned content, according to McKinsey.

Why focus on creator AEO?

The consumer journey in 2026 is heavily influenced by two key areas: recommendations from LLMs and recommendations from trusted creators. Dollar for dollar, you're going to get the most return investing in creators for your AEO strategy.

Why? Because you're tackling two of the most impactful parts of the consumer journey with a single strategy.

1 in 3 AI answers cite creator content

and it's one of many sources that shape how AI describes a brand, alongside owned content and earned media.

Later campaign findings, 2026



You could start to think of an LLM as its own form of an influencer in the purchase journey, and you can't ignore it. You have to spend time there. Otherwise, you're ceding to your competitive set who will probably start to take share of model away from you.

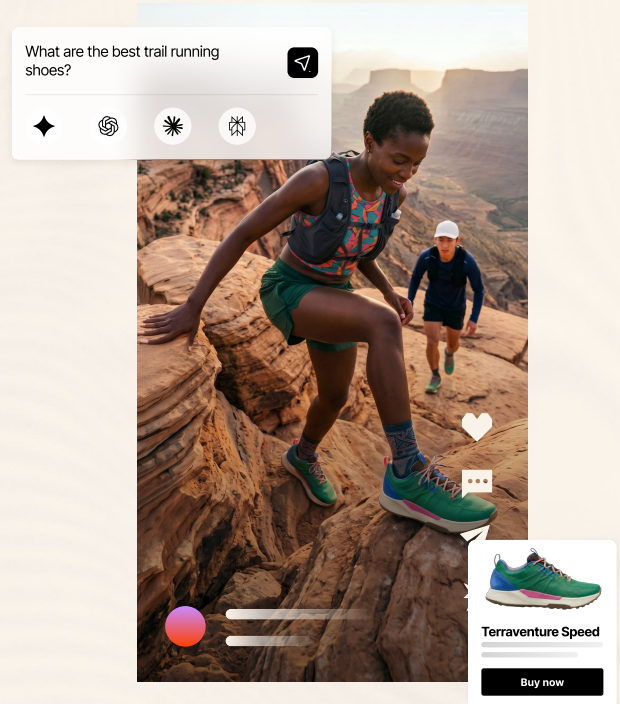
Lyle Stevens

CO-FOUNDER AND CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER AT LATER

A playbook built from real campaigns

We work with leading brands across CPG, fashion, auto, and retail as AI search evolves in real time, and we've been among the first to up-level traditional creator marketing campaigns specifically for AI search visibility.

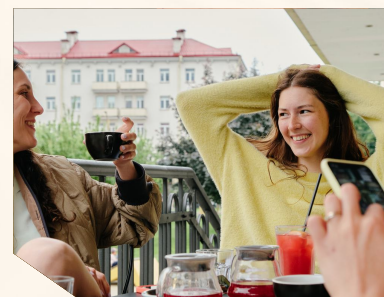
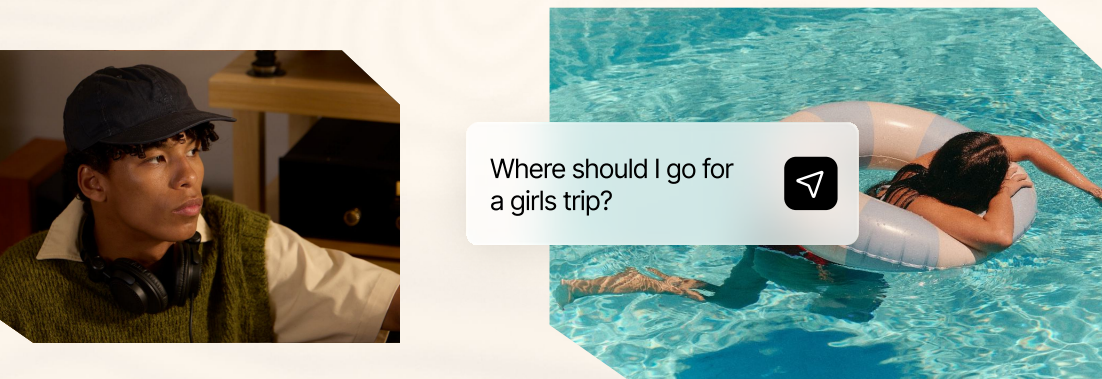
Most brands already know this is a problem; they're just missing the internal infrastructure and alignment to act on it. Our team helps bridge that disconnect.



This guide focuses on the creator piece of AEO, because it's the lever most brands are already investing in to drive awareness, consideration, and purchases.

A creator AEO campaign still delivers the same solid influencer content your brand would have run anyway.

The unlock is that same content can also earn AI citations most brands aren't currently in the running for.



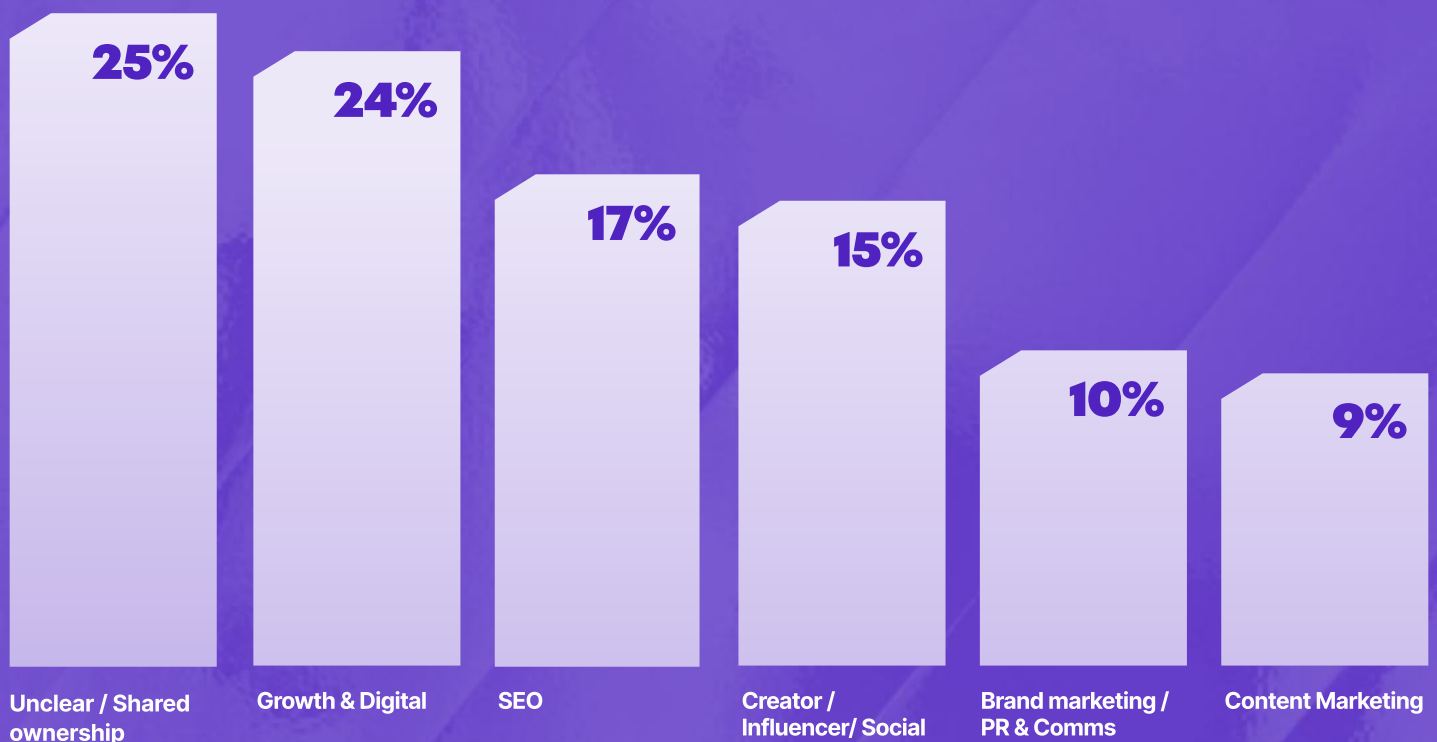
Fixing internal team alignment

Where AEO sits across marketing teams today

AEO ownership splits across six general functions, but 25% of marketers can't name a clear owner. Even where ownership exists, it's marketing-owned as one of many responsibilities instead of a dedicated function.

Alignment starts with shared prompts across 2 core teams:

SEO owns the technical side of visibility while Creator teams own the relationships and the content AI is actually citing.



What each team brings, and what's missing

SEO teams tend to treat AEO as a technical infrastructure problem: schema markup, structured data, and owned-content optimization. Creator teams run campaigns built for impressions and engagement. Both are doing their jobs well — but neither has a mandate to optimize specifically for AI citation.



We've entered a new era I've never seen before, where SEO teams and creator teams are now working together. These are two ends of marketing that never had to collaborate before. What we love to do is partner with the SEO team leading on-site content creation, so the creator content ladders into what the brand is already saying on its owned channels. The biggest mistake we're seeing is brands copying and pasting their SEO strategy, focusing on their own content over third-party content.

Cameron Miskho

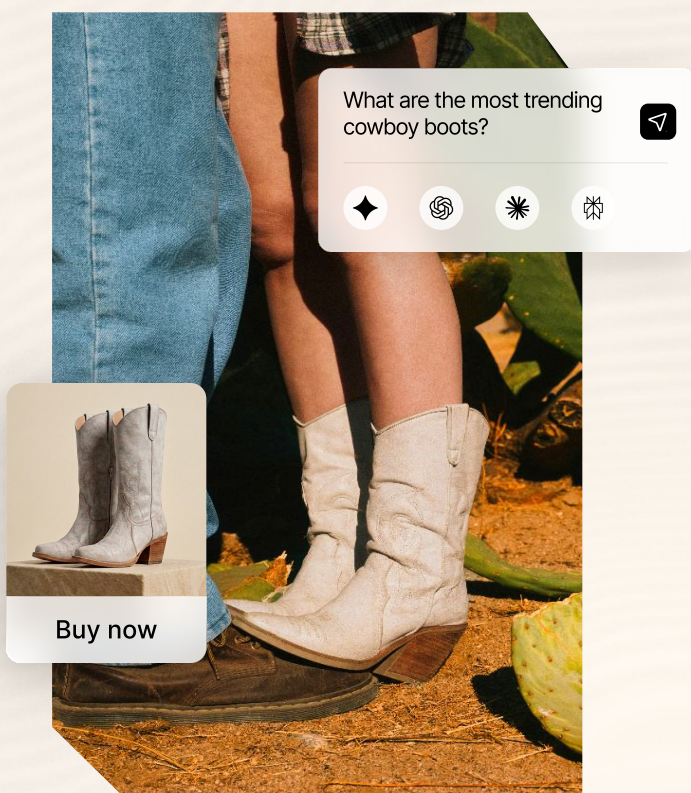
SR. DIRECTOR, STRATEGIC CONSULTING AT LATER

If SEO owns the technical side of search visibility and creator teams own the relationships and the content AI is actually citing, the alignment begins with shared prompts. Start with a shared list of prompts to target, built by pairing your brand's existing SEO keyword data with the questions its customers are actually typing into AI tools. That means thinking less like a search strategist and more like an everyday person talking to an LLM.

Because LLMs are trained on historical data, when they don't have your information in their training set, they essentially do a Google search. SEO is still important in this case, but if you're not in that initial training set, you're at an inherent disadvantage to your competition. This is where search prompts come in.

Picking those prompts is the hardest part of AEO, often harder than traditional SEO keyword strategy, because creator budgets are finite in a way SEO investment often isn't. A brand can't cover the whole funnel the way it might with organic search, so teams have to choose between top-of-funnel, educational prompts, and commercial-intent ones.

In practice, that means building a working list of 10 to 20 prompts across four categories:



1

Buying intent

"What's the best [product category] for [use case]?"

2

Competitor comparisons

"[Brand] vs. [Competitor]: which is better for [use case]?"

3

Features and specs

"Does [product] have [specific feature]?"

4

Broad category questions

"What are the top [category] brands right now?"

That list becomes the shared brief both teams build from. SEO informs which prompts matter, while creator teams inform who and what earns citation against them.

By using this target list as a continuous monitoring framework, both teams can track real-time AI responses to spot and fix brand misrepresentations quickly, ensuring accuracy stays at the core of your AEO strategy.

Measurement both teams can agree on

Measurement should also tie back to what marketers already care about, not just technical metrics, including:

What matters most to marketers in AI search

Nearly all want more AI visibility. Beyond that, success splits three ways*.

Brand accuracy and control

71%

Business impact on sales and traffic

58%

Competitive positioning

45%

*multi-select question

Alignment only holds if both creator and SEO teams are measuring the same thing. Share of model is that shared metric.

Share of Model

how often and how accurately a brand shows up across its highest-priority prompts.

This measurement breaks down into three layers:

1. How often

the brand shows up at all across AI search results

2. How accurately

the brand shows up against a specific prompt

3. Source or mention

whether the intended link appears, or it's just a passing reference

Our team has found a healthy share of model starts around 30% (Later campaign findings, 2026) for top-priority prompts, giving both teams a shared metric to work toward.



Rethinking your creator mix

AI models weigh authority, specificity, and crawlability over reach, and they weigh third-party content over brand-owned content by a wide margin. Picking the right creator mix starts with addressing what marketers think shapes an AI answer, and what actually does.



Perception versus reality of what influences AI

Roughly a third of marketers believe their brand website carries the most weight in shaping how AI describes them. Independent research tells a different story. If owned content isn't doing the heavy lifting, the creators talking about your brand are.

1 in 3

marketers believe their brand website is the most influential source for AEO.

The retrofit that doesn't work

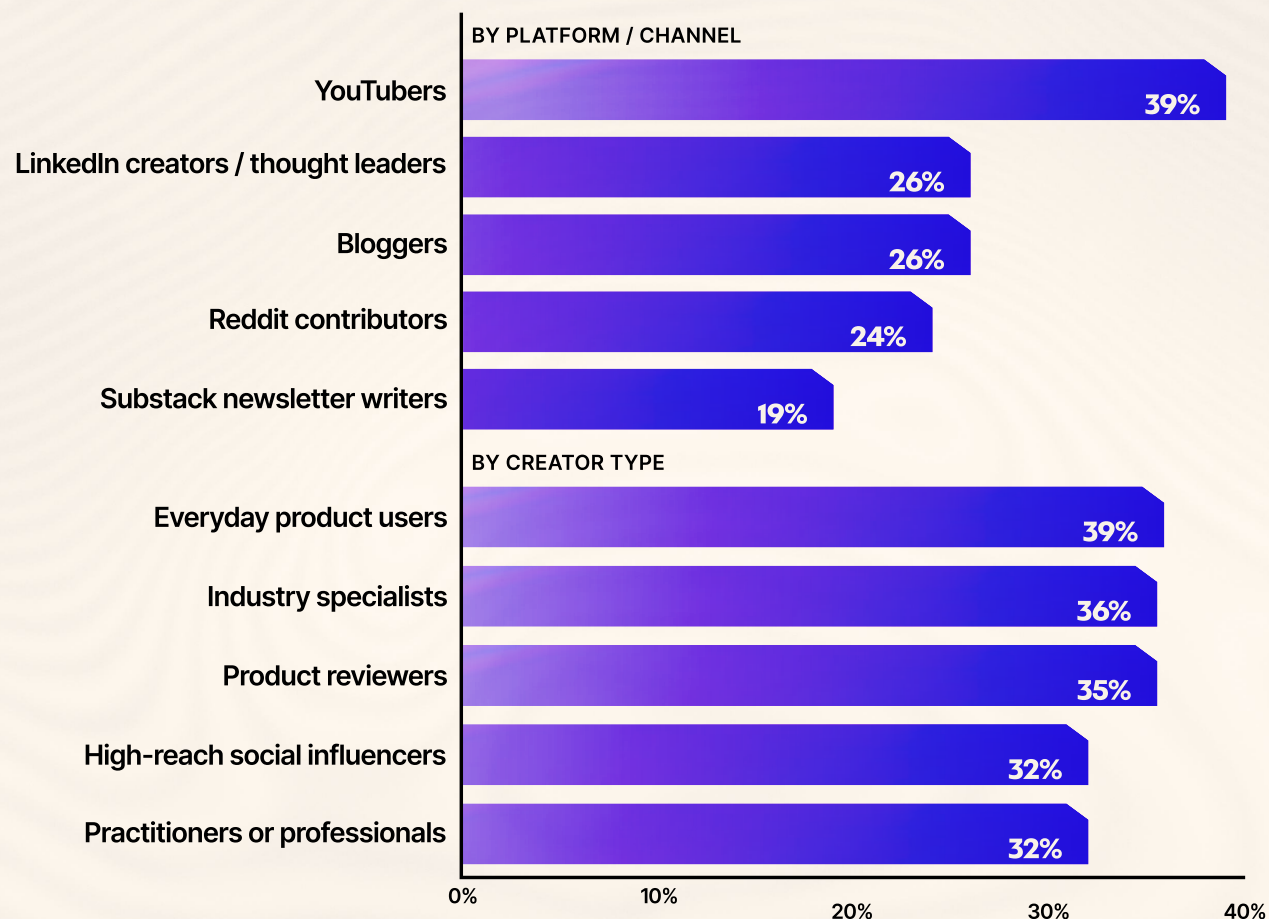
Brands often assume their existing influencer roster can simply be retrofitted for AEO. But it can't on its own. AEO calls for creators with topic-specific authority, and that's a different casting bar than reach or engagement alone. Existing relationships still matter, and they're a good place to start conversations, but they're not a substitute for AEO-first picks.

Marketers already have a decent read on which creator types matter most for AI search visibility, even without a formal framework for why.

Types of creators marketers believe are the most valuable for AI search:

Channels and creator types both matter

YouTube, LinkedIn, and Reddit stand out as the platforms worth prioritizing*





Micro influencers and smaller creators, at scale, can also have an incredible impact. That was a game changer for us, thinking about LLMs looking for trust signals, meaning repetition and consistency. With one of our brands, whenever we searched anything related to it, one specific dermatologist kept coming up again and again, and she wasn't even someone we were working with. Her narrative was shaping what our brand showed up as in AI search.

Carly Baron

CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER AT ADVANTICE HEALTH

Three creator types for your strategy

A strong AEO-ready creator mix has three parts, each doing different work.

Attention

Entertainment

Authority

Thought Leadership

Answers

Technical Depth

PILLAR	PLATFORMS	EXAMPLE FORMATS
Attention	  	short-form explainers • infotainment • professional video guides
Authority	  	expert POV posts • long-form articles • in-depth guides
Answers	 	reviews & comparisons • community Q&As • real world use cases

Follower count doesn't predict citation

Brands are used to sorting their creator roster by follower count, but that number has almost no bearing on whether a creator's content gets picked up by an LLM.

57%

of the YouTube videos
AI cites come from
channels with fewer
than 100K followers

Later campaign data, 2026

Nano and micro creators, activated at scale around the same topic, can build the repetition and consensus a LLM is looking for. This is good news for creator marketing budgets, as activating smaller creators at scale means your dollars go further.

When evaluating creators, teams should look past follower count and instead look at:

- ✔ If they consistently cover the exact topic your prompts target
- ✔ If activating several creators together can build the repetition an LLM reads as consensus
- ✔ If their content lives somewhere crawlable (more on this in Chapter 3)
- ✔ If they already carry authority on the topic independent of their following

Case study: Putting creator AEO into practice

Here's how Later helped a major CPG fabric care brand reclaim the conversation in AI search.

Challenge

AI results were giving consumers inaccurate information about one of the brand's products.

Solution

In partnership with the brand developing owned content to combat the false narrative, Later executed a creator AEO strategy by activating five expert creators to produce content backed by research and science, addressing the incorrect information and mirroring similar language to the brand.

Results

Within one month, all the Later creator content was ranking in Google AI Overviews. That's the power of combining brand-owned content with creator content. It's not just about showing up when AI gets it right, it's about being able to correct the narrative when AI gets it wrong. The strategy drove measurable lift in brand mentions and citations. This helped improve brand perception and signified authority to the LLMs.

The activation playbook for creator AEO

Most brands don't need to start from zero when it comes to AEO. The new playbook is to take creator content already in motion, optimize it so AI can actually find it, then measure whether it's working.

1: Optimize existing content first

Video assets have to be transcribed and hosted somewhere AI can actually read them. YouTube is the most effective bridge between creator marketing and AI visibility, but only when it's optimized with citation in mind.

Content on Instagram Reels and TikTok can often sit behind login walls that block AI crawlers, so a great piece of content can rack up views and still never reach the models forming answers about a brand.

The fix

Pull the content transcript, upload it to YouTube, and build a landing page that links out to the original post so the content becomes discoverable on both ends.



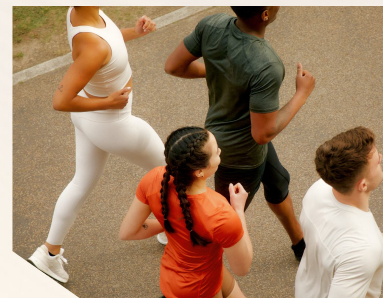
The uncomfortable part of AEO is that the signals AI trusts most are the ones furthest from brand control, so the fastest way in is through human experts who already have credibility and authority on your topic. Find the creators being cited in your category's AI answers today, partner with them on original, expert-led content, and measure performance on AI citation pickup rather than impressions.

Kaleigh Moore

AEO STRATEGIST + B2B CREATOR

AEO short-form video checklist

What	Why it matters
Prescriptive on-screen text	Include the question and answer into text overlays so models reading frames see the connection
Full captions & transcripts	Upload complete, accurate captions so AI can parse the whole video
Geo + query metadata	Write the title, description, and tags with the exact prompt the video answers



2: Build AEO into the campaign from the start

Once you've optimized existing creator content, start building creator AEO objectives into future campaigns. AEO should be a standard consideration alongside reach and engagement, rather than a separate work stream run after the fact.

That means briefing creators with target prompts in mind from day one, and treating transcription, captioning, and cross-platform distribution as a normal part of the production process. AEO is another layer influencer campaigns can be built to achieve.

3: Track share of model over time

Measuring share of model involves regularly checking how often your brand shows up, how it's mentioned, and whether that mention comes with a citation, against the exact prompts both teams agreed matter most.

- 1. Run each priority prompt through major AI tools**
- 2. Document where your brand appears, where a competitor appears instead, and whether the mention includes a citation**
- 3. Review citable authority content to make sure it's still live and indexable**
- 4. If share of model has dropped, assess whether a platform's crawling behavior has changed or if competitor's presence is growing**
- 5. Adjust your prompt list and creator roster as needed**

Your next AI citation starts here

The teams that get cited in AI search will be the ones who follow the three-step AEO playbook:

01

Align SEO and creator teams around one shared prompt list

02

Build a creator mix around authority and specificity

03

Activate and measure that content so it keeps earning citations over time

Later's creator AEO strategists have spent the past year in the room with top enterprise brands working through exactly this, building the prompt strategies and creator mixes that turn creator campaigns into proven AEO systems. We can help your brand find its starting point too.

Ready to see where you stand?

[Book a session with Later's creator AEO team](#) →