koozai
Digital Marketing

ORIGINAL RESEARCH 2026

# RESEARCH PAPER

## GEO, AEO OR AI SEARCH OPTIMISATION?

We surveyed 150 respondents to find out which AI Search terms they recognise, understand and actually use. The results reveal a striking gap between knowing what GEO means and choosing to call the work GEO.

### 69% KNOW WHAT GEO MEANS

Nearly seven in ten respondents correctly identified Generative Engine Optimisation. But recognition doesn't necessarily mean adoption.

### ONLY 19% WOULD CALL THE WORK GEO

AI Search Optimisation was the most popular preferred term, while only 13% mentioned GEO when describing what they'd search for when looking for an agency.

# Executive Summary

Koozai surveyed 160 respondents to understand how people recognise, interpret and use the terminology surrounding AI Search. The research found a clear gap between knowing what GEO means and actually choosing to use it. While 69% correctly identified Generative Engine Optimisation, only 19% said they would naturally call the work GEO, and just 13% mentioned GEO when describing what they would search for when looking for an agency.

## Key Findings

- 74% had heard of AI Search Optimisation, compared with 43% for GEO and 33% for AEO.
- 69% correctly identified what GEO stands for.
- 50% of respondents who said they had not heard of GEO still selected the correct definition.
- 32% chose AI Search Optimisation as their preferred term, compared with 19% for GEO.
- 37% used "AI search" wording in their proposed agency search, compared with 13% mentioning GEO.
- 68% said demonstrable results would increase trust in an agency discussing AI Search, while only 11% selected specialist terminology such as GEO or AEO.

| SEO recognition | Respondents |
|---|---|
| Correctly identify what GEO stands for | 69% |
| Would naturally call the work GEO | 19% |
| Mention GEO in their proposed agency search | 13% |

## What the research tells us

The strongest finding isn't that people don't understand GEO. Most respondents can identify it correctly.

The bigger gap is between recognition and adoption. Far fewer choose GEO as the term they'd naturally use, while AI Search Optimisation has stronger awareness and preference.

## Why it matters

For agencies and marketing teams, this is less about choosing the "right" acronym and more about communicating clearly. Results, case studies and plain-English explanations all build far more trust than simply using specialist terms such as GEO or AEO.

The takeaway? Lead with the outcome, not the acronym. Explain the terminology when it helps, rather than assuming customers already speak the same language.

# Which AI Search terms do people actually recognise?

**AI Search Optimisation**

Nearly three quarters of respondents (74%) had heard of AI Search Optimisation, making it the best-known of the newer terms we tested.

**GEO**

Despite its prominence in search industry conversations, only 43% of respondents said they had heard of GEO before taking the survey.

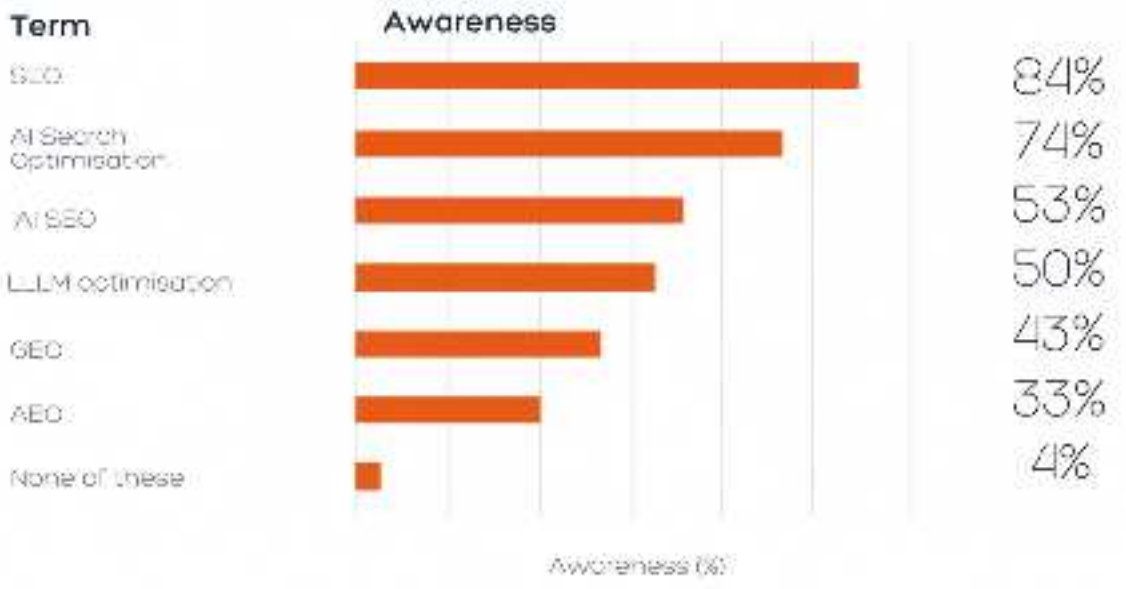
**AEO**

Awareness was lower again for AEO, with just 33% saying they had encountered the term before.

## Plain English has the edge

AI Search Optimisation was considerably better known than either GEO or AEO. AI SEO (53%) and LLM optimisation (50%) also ranked above both acronyms. The results suggest the language gaining traction within the search industry isn't necessarily the terminology with the widest recognition.

## Which terms had respondents heard of?



# 69% of respondents correctly identified GEO as Generative Engine Optimisation.

**At first glance, that looks like strong evidence that GEO is well understood. Only 5% said they didn't know what the acronym meant.**

But there's an interesting mismatch. Just 43% had previously told us they'd heard of GEO before taking the survey.

That prompted us to look more closely at who was getting the definition right.

Among the 92 respondents who said they hadn't heard of GEO, 46 still selected the correct definition – exactly 50%.

That matters because prompted recognition isn't necessarily the same as genuine familiarity. "Generative Engine Optimisation" may simply be reasonably easy to identify when several possible definitions are sitting in front of you.

So while 69% could correctly identify GEO, we shouldn't automatically interpret that as 69% already knowing and using the term.

## Recognition isn't the same as familiarity

Multiple-choice questions measure whether someone can identify an answer when prompted. They don't tell us whether that person would have known it unaided, uses the term themselves or would think to search for it.

That's a distinction worth keeping in mind when assessing how established GEO really is.

## GEO at a glance

**Correct definition**

**69%**

Selected Generative Engine Optimisation.

**Heard of GEO**

**43%**

Had encountered the term before the survey.

**Hadn't heard of GEO**

**58%**

92 of the 160 respondents.

**Correct despite no awareness**

**50%**

Of those who hadn't heard of GEO.

**Heard GEO + correct**

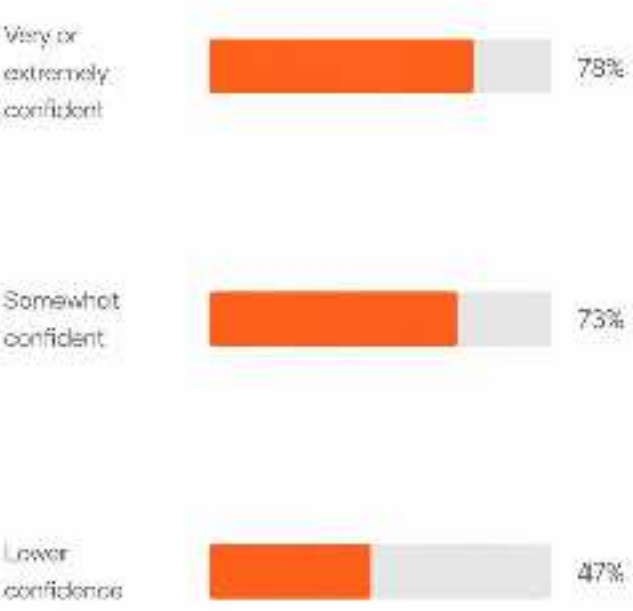
**94%**

64 of 68 correctly identified it.

**Don't know**

**5%**

Couldn't identify what GEO stood for.



# Knowing GEO doesn't mean choosing GEO

We then moved away from definitions and asked respondents what they would most naturally call the work designed to improve how often an organisation appears within ChatGPT, Google's AI features and other AI-generated answers.
AI Search Optimisation came first at 32%. GEO was chosen by 19%, almost level with AI SEO at 18%.
The bigger finding? No single term attracted even a third of respondents.

## What would people naturally call the work?

**32%**

Even the most popular term was chosen by fewer than one in three respondents.

# AI Search doesn't have an agreed name yet

## There isn't a runaway winner

AI Search Optimisation leads our preferred terminology question, but 32% is hardly a landslide. GEO and AI SEO are almost level behind it, while the remaining responses are spread across AI visibility, AEO, SEO and other descriptions. Rather than showing that one term has won, the results point to a market where the language is still settling.

**32%**

Prefer AI Search Optimisation

**19%**

Prefer GEO

## Recognition and preference are different things

GEO is a particularly good example. While 69% can correctly identify what it stands for, only 19% choose it as the name they would naturally give the work. Knowing an acronym and adopting it as your own language are not the same thing.

**18%**

Prefer AI SEO

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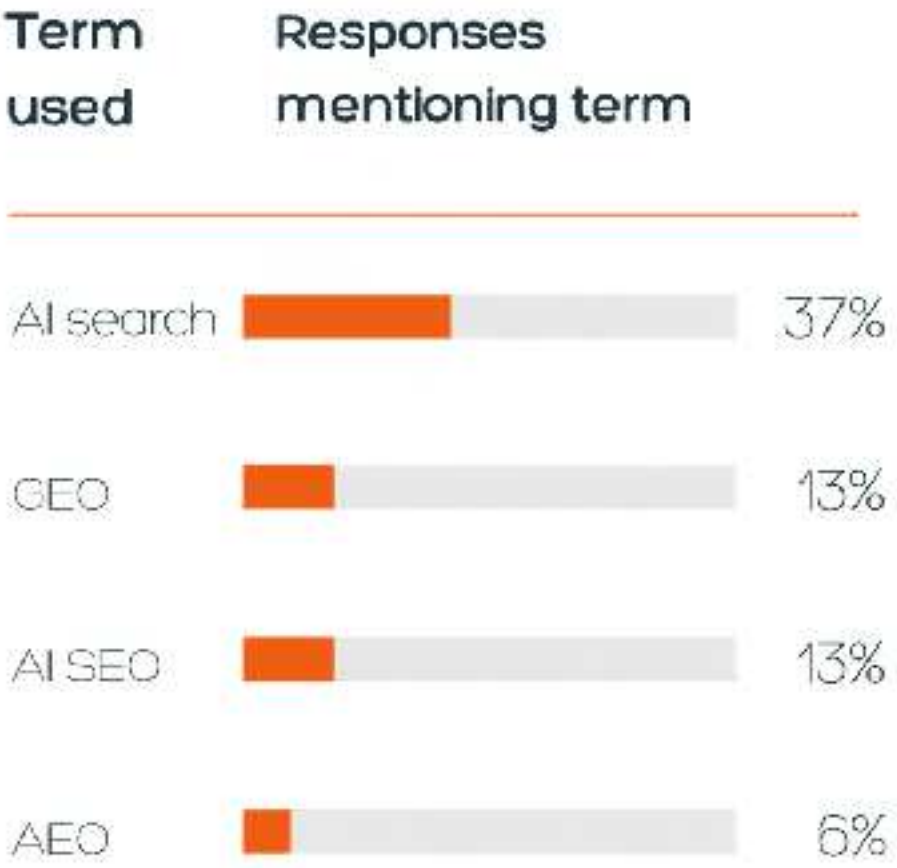
# No term is preferred by even a third of respondents

# What would people actually search for when looking for an agency?

What people say they prefer is useful. What they say they'd search for when looking for help takes us a little closer to commercial behaviour.
We asked respondents what they would search for if they wanted an agency to help their organisation appear more prominently within ChatGPT and other AI Search experiences.




**37%** used "AI search" wording - almost three times the proportion mentioning GEO.

Respondents had already encountered AI Search terminology earlier in the survey. These answers therefore represent post-exposure search phrasing, rather than completely unaided terminology. Individual responses could also appear in more than one coded category.

# The recognition-to-adoption gap

**69%**

Correctly identify what GEO stands for

↓

**19%**

Would naturally call the work GEO

↓

**13%**

Mention GEO when searching for an agency

GEO is recognised far more than it is actually used.

The pattern suggests GEO may have less of an understanding problem than an adoption problem. Respondents can recognise the term, but far fewer choose it or use it when describing the help they're looking for.

# Are GEO and AEO actually helpful?

## It's more nuanced than "jargon is bad"

More respondents find GEO and AEO helpful than confusing, so the data doesn't support simply dismissing them as jargon.
The more interesting point is that terminology can be understood and even considered useful without becoming the language people naturally use themselves.

| Response | Respondents |
|---|---|
| Somewhat helpful | 33% |
| Very helpful | 9% |
| **Total helpful** | **42%** |
| Somewhat confusing | 23% |
| Very confusing | 8% |
| **Total confusing** | **31%** |
| Neither helpful nor confusing | 14% |
| Haven't encountered the terms | 13% |

**42%**

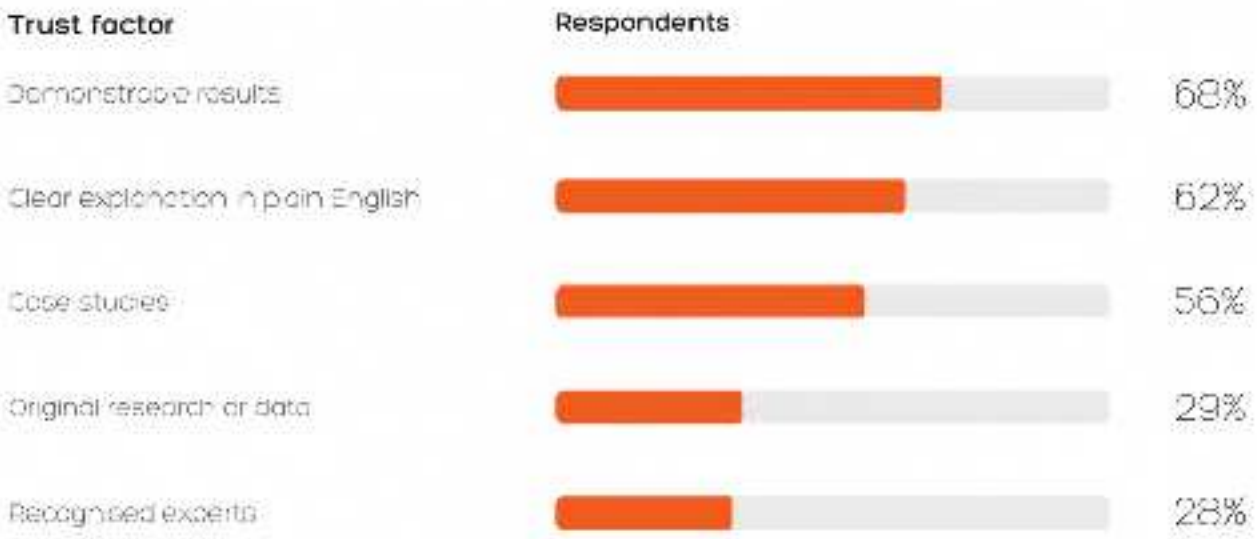
find GEO/AEO terminology helpful

**31%**

find it confusing

# What actually makes an AI Search agency credible?

We asked what would make respondents trust an agency more when discussing AI Search.
The strongest answers had very little to do with specialist terminology. Demonstrable results, plain-English explanations and case studies came comfortably ahead.




**68% value demonstrable results. Just 11% value specialist terminology.**

Respondents could select multiple factors. Percentages therefore do not total 100%

## Proof beats acronyms

**68%**

### Demonstrable results

The strongest trust signal was simple: show that the work delivers.
Case studies were also selected by 56%, reinforcing the importance of evidence over terminology.

**62%**

### Plain English

Clear explanation was the second strongest trust factor.
Specialist terminology such as GEO or AEO was selected by just 11%.

The lesson isn't "don't use GEO". It's "don't expect GEO to do the selling for you".

## What should marketers actually do with all this?

### 01 - Lead with the outcome

Talk about improving visibility across ChatGPT, Google's AI features and other AI-generated answers before worrying about which acronym describes it.

### 02 - Don't assume recognition equals adoption

Someone may know perfectly well what GEO means without ever describing the work that way themselves.

### 03 - Use the customer's language too

AI Search Optimisation currently provides a useful bridge between specialist terminology and language respondents recognise and say they would use.

Our view

There is no need to pick a side in an acronym war. Use GEO, AEO and AI SEO where they're useful, but make sure the meaning is clear without them.

# Recognition is not adoption

## The search industry may be settling on terminology faster than everyone else is adopting it.

GEO is not unknown. Most respondents can correctly identify its meaning, and people who have previously encountered the term are particularly likely to get the definition right.
But recognition falls away when we ask what people themselves would call the work.

AI Search Optimisation currently has wider awareness and greater stated preference, while broader "AI search" language appears considerably more often in proposed agency searches.
The takeaway isn't that one term has won. It's that the language is still evolving.

Explain what you're doing.
Explain why it matters.
Show the evidence.
Then worry about the acronym.

# About the research

Koozai surveyed 160 respondents during August and September 2026 about their awareness, understanding and use of terminology relating to AI Search. Responses were collected through Prolific and SurveyMonkey.

The research covered awareness of SEO and AI Search terminology, confidence explaining those terms, recognition of GEO, preferred terminology, proposed agency-search language, attitudes towards GEO and AEO, and factors influencing trust in agencies discussing AI Search.

Questions allowing multiple selections are reported as the percentage selecting each answer, so totals may exceed 100%.

Free-text agency-search responses were coded according to terminology appearing in each answer. Individual responses could therefore appear in more than one category.

The agency-search question followed earlier terminology questions and should therefore be interpreted as post-exposure search phrasing, rather than completely unaided terminology.

Figures are rounded.

# About Koozai

Koozai is a UK digital marketing agency specialising in SEO, AI Search, Digital PR, Content Marketing, Paid Search and Paid Social.

We help businesses improve their visibility, strengthen their authority and turn digital marketing into measurable commercial results.

That positioning is consistent with Koozai's current public-facing content around commercially focused digital marketing and AI Search.

## Want to talk AI Search?

Whether you call it GEO, AEO, AI SEO or AI Search Optimisation, we can help you work out where your brand is visible, where it isn't and what to do about it.

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