FIELD GUIDE · 48 CHECKS

The SEO *Checklist.*

2026 edition

48 checks to get your site crawled, indexed, ranked and clicked on Google, with the same foundations Google says its AI Overviews and AI Mode rely on.



0

separate indexes for Google's AI features. AI Overviews and AI Mode draw on core Search.

GOOGLE SEARCH CENTRAL, MAY 2026

< 2s

the load time I build every client site to. Slow pages lose visitors before they read a word.

MARC FRIEDMAN BUILD STANDARD

June '26

Search Console started reporting impressions inside AI Overviews and AI Mode.

GOOGLE, JUNE 2026

PREFACE · HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Start at the top. *Work down.*

Most sites I audit lose traffic to the same dozen problems: pages Google can't reach, titles that say nothing, slow mobile loads, and content written for a keyword instead of a person.

This checklist is the order I work through on every client site. Start with chapter 01. If Google can't crawl and index a page, nothing further down the list matters.

In May 2026 Google published its first guide to optimizing for AI Overviews and AI Mode. Its message was that those features run on the same ranking and quality systems as regular Search. So this list is also the base layer for everything in the AEO and GEO checklists.

i.

Tick what's done

Print it or open it in any PDF app. Every check has a box and a quick way to verify it.

ii.

Fix the red tags first

They block everything else. Quick wins come next, then the ongoing habits.

iii.

Score yourself

Count your ticks at the end and see where your site stands.

KEY FIX FIRST Blocks results QUICK WIN Under a day ONGOING Monthly habit

CHAPTER 01 · CRAWL & INDEX

01 Can Google *find you?*

- [ ] 01 Search Console is verified for the domain property (covers http, https, www and non-www). FIX FIRST
  ↳ Search Console > Settings > Ownership
- [ ] 02 robots.txt does not block pages, CSS or JavaScript you want ranked. FIX FIRST
  ↳ Open yoursite.com/robots.txt and read every Disallow line
- [ ] 03 No important page carries a noindex tag by mistake (common after a staging site goes live). FIX FIRST
  ↳ Search Console > Pages > Excluded by noindex
- [ ] 04 An XML sitemap lists only live, canonical, 200-status URLs and is submitted in Search Console. FIX FIRST
  ↳ Search Console > Sitemaps
- [ ] 05 Every page has a self-referencing canonical tag, and duplicates point to one preferred URL. QUICK WIN
  ↳ View source, search for rel="canonical"
- [ ] 06 http, www and trailing-slash variants 301 redirect to one version of each URL. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Type each variant into the browser and watch the address bar
- [ ] 07 No redirect chains longer than one hop and no redirect loops. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Crawl with Screaming Frog or Semrush Site Audit
- [ ] 08 Broken internal links (404s) are fixed or redirected to the closest relevant page. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Site audit crawl > 4xx report
- [ ] 09 Search Console's Pages report is reviewed monthly for new 'Crawled, not indexed' URLs. ONGOING
  ↳ Search Console > Pages

9 checks in this chapter

Done: _____ / 9

CHAPTER 02 · SPEED & EXPERIENCE

02 Fast pages *keep visitors.*

- [ ] 10 Largest Contentful Paint is under 2.5 seconds on mobile. FIX FIRST
  ↳ PageSpeed Insights, field data first
- [ ] 11 Interaction to Next Paint is under 200 ms. FIX FIRST
  ↳ PageSpeed Insights > INP
- [ ] 12 Cumulative Layout Shift is under 0.1 (images and embeds have set dimensions). FIX FIRST
  ↳ PageSpeed Insights > CLS
- [ ] 13 Images are served as WebP or AVIF, sized to their display width, and lazy-loaded below the fold. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Lighthouse > Opportunities
- [ ] 14 Unused JavaScript, chat widgets and tracking scripts are removed or deferred. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Chrome DevTools > Coverage
- [ ] 15 The site works on a phone with no horizontal scrolling and tap targets at least 48 px. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Test on a real phone, not only the emulator
- [ ] 16 HTTPS everywhere, with no mixed-content warnings. ONGOING
  ↳ Browser padlock and DevTools console

7 checks in this chapter

Done: _____ / 7

NOTES · WHAT TO FIX ON MY SITE

CHAPTER 03 · ON-PAGE

03 Tell Google what *each page is for.*

- [ ] 17 Each page targets one main search intent, and no two pages compete for the same query. FIX FIRST
  ↳ Search Console > Performance > filter by query, check for multiple URLs
- [ ] 18 Title tags are unique, under about 60 characters, and lead with the main topic. FIX FIRST
  ↳ Site audit > duplicate and long titles
- [ ] 19 Meta descriptions are unique, specific, and give a reason to click (about 150 characters). QUICK WIN
  ↳ Site audit > meta descriptions
- [ ] 20 One H1 per page that matches the title's promise. FIX FIRST
  ↳ View source or a SEO browser extension
- [ ] 21 H2 and H3 headings describe the sections under them, so a skimmer gets the outline. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Read only the headings. Does the page still make sense?
- [ ] 22 URLs are short, lowercase, hyphenated and readable. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Example: /services/roof-coating/
- [ ] 23 Every meaningful image has descriptive alt text. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Site audit > missing alt
- [ ] 24 Internal links use descriptive anchor text and point from strong pages to pages you want ranked. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Site audit > internal links
- [ ] 25 No orphan pages: every page you want ranked has at least one internal link to it. ONGOING
  ↳ Compare sitemap URLs to crawled URLs

9 checks in this chapter

Done: _____ / 9

CHAPTER 04 · CONTENT

04 Write for the *person searching.*

- [ ] 26 Each page answers the searcher's actual question better than the current top three results. FIX FIRST
  ↳ Search the query yourself and compare honestly
- [ ] 27 Content shows first-hand experience: real projects, photos, numbers, named people. FIX FIRST
  ↳ Would a competitor be able to copy this page word for word?
- [ ] 28 Author or company credentials are visible, with an About page that explains who is behind the site. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Check the byline and the About page
- [ ] 29 Thin pages (under about 300 useful words with no unique value) are merged, improved or noindexed. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Site audit > low word count
- [ ] 30 Service and location pages are written individually, not spun from one template. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Read two location pages side by side
- [ ] 31 Key pages are reviewed and updated at least twice a year, with a visible 'last updated' date. ONGOING
  ↳ Calendar reminder
- [ ] 32 A content plan covers the questions customers ask on sales calls. ONGOING
  ↳ Keep a running list from calls and emails

7 checks in this chapter

Done: _____ / 7

NOTES · WHAT TO FIX ON MY SITE

CHAPTER 05 · STRUCTURED DATA

05 Help machines *read the page.*

- [ ] 33 Organization (or LocalBusiness) schema on the homepage with name, logo, URL and sameAs profiles. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Rich Results Test
- [ ] 34 Article, Product, Service or Review schema on the matching page types. QUICK WIN
  ↳ schema.org type matches the page
- [ ] 35 BreadcrumbList schema on deeper pages. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Rich Results Test
- [ ] 36 Schema only describes content that is visible on the page. FIX FIRST
  ↳ Compare JSON-LD to the rendered page
- [ ] 37 No errors or warnings in Search Console's Enhancements reports. ONGOING
  ↳ Search Console > Enhancements

5 checks in this chapter

Done: _____ / 5

NOTES · WHAT TO FIX ON MY SITE

CHAPTER 06 · AUTHORITY

06 Earn trust *from other sites.*

- [ ] 38 Google Business Profile (if you serve local customers) is claimed, verified and fully filled out. QUICK WIN
  ↳ business.google.com
- [ ] 39 Business name, address and phone are identical everywhere they appear online. QUICK WIN
  ↳ Search your phone number in quotes
- [ ] 40 A steady flow of genuine reviews on Google and one industry platform. ONGOING
  ↳ Ask every happy client, every time
- [ ] 41 Links come from relevant sites through real work: partners, suppliers, press, guest expertise. ONGOING
  ↳ Semrush or Ahrefs > referring domains
- [ ] 42 No paid link schemes or link networks. ONGOING
  ↳ If you'd hide it from Google, don't do it
- [ ] 43 Unlinked brand mentions are found and politely turned into links. ONGOING
  ↳ Google alerts for your brand name

6 checks in this chapter

Done: _____ / 6

NOTES · WHAT TO FIX ON MY SITE

CHAPTER 07 · MEASUREMENT

07 Track what *pays the bills.*

- [ ] 44 GA4 is installed and conversions (calls, forms, bookings) are tracked as key events. FIX FIRST
  ↳ GA4 > Admin > Key events
- [ ] 45 Search Console is linked to GA4. QUICK WIN
  ↳ GA4 > Admin > Product links
- [ ] 46 Rankings are tracked for 20 to 50 money keywords, not hundreds of vanity terms. ONGOING
  ↳ Semrush Position Tracking or similar
- [ ] 47 Search Console's generative AI performance report is reviewed alongside regular clicks. ONGOING
  ↳ Search Console > Performance
- [ ] 48 A monthly report ties organic traffic to leads and revenue. ONGOING
  ↳ One page, five numbers

5 checks in this chapter Done: ____ / 5

NOTES · WHAT TO FIX ON MY SITE

APPENDIX · WHAT TO IGNORE

Three things *to stop doing.*

Skip it

~~Keyword density targets~~

Google stopped rewarding repetition years ago. Write naturally and cover the topic fully.

Skip it

~~Publishing every day~~

Ten pages that answer real questions beat a hundred thin posts.

Skip it

~~Meta keywords tag~~

Google has ignored it for well over a decade.

SCORECARD · TOTAL TICKS OUT OF 48

0 – 19	**Foundations missing**	Start with every red tag. Most of your effort elsewhere is leaking away until these are fixed.
20 – 34	**Building**	The basics work. Clear the quick wins and you'll see movement within a few weeks.
35 – 43	**Competitive**	You're ahead of most sites in your space. Consistency on the ongoing checks decides the rest.
44 – 48	**Leading**	Keep measuring. At this level the gains come from original data and earned mentions.

SOURCES

1. Google Search Central, "Optimizing your website for generative AI features on Google Search" (May 15, 2026) developers.google.com/search
2. Google Search Console generative AI performance reports announcement (June 2026) search.google.com/search-console
3. Google Core Web Vitals thresholds web.dev/vitals

COLOPHON · DONE-FOR-YOU

Rather I run this *for you?*

I'm Marc. I design, build and optimize sites for B2B and service businesses in the US, Europe and Africa, and I work through this list on every one. Book 30 minutes and I'll audit your site live on the call and show you which checks are costing you leads.

BOOK A CALL

Free 30-minute live audit

marcfriedmanportfolio.com/contact

FREE TOOL

See how AI engines see your brand

marcfriedmanportfolio.com/free-geo-audit

5.0★	50+	98	< 2s
25 reviews on Google, Clutch and LinkedIn	Projects shipped across three continents	Lighthouse score on recent builds	Load time standard on every site

"Marc was able to execute the vision perfectly. He dedicates his time to the client, ensuring the client is completely satisfied at each step of the process."

OMAR TURNER · CEO, BINNS MEDIA GROUP

Also in this series: The AEO Checklist · The GEO Checklist

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