Searchable

AEO EARNED VS OWNED DECISION TREE

Decide whether to build earned proof or improve owned content first.

> Earned creates trust. Owned compounds it.
>
> Most AEO cheat sheets fail because they give businesses tactics, not sequencing. Diagnose the gap before choosing tactics.

START

Run an AEO diagnostic

Ask category and buying-intent questions in AI search

ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, Claude, Google AI Overviews

THE ONLY QUESTION THAT MATTERS

What does AI currently do with your brand?

AI DOES THIS: Doesn't mention you

ASK

Are competitors mentioned?

- **No**
  - Category is not clear. Define it with owned explainers, FAQs, founder POVs, reports, podcasts, and community answers.
- **Yes: third-party sources**
  - Earned visibility gap. Get into trusted sources: reviews, listicles, partner pages, articles, YouTube, communities.
- **Yes: brand sites**
  - Owned clarity gap. Build clearer homepage, category pages, product pages, use cases, and comparisons.
- **Yes: mixed sources**
  - Combined proof layer. Pair owned explanation with earned validation: comparison pages plus reviews, category pages plus partner proof.

ASK

What asset do you already have?

- **Happy customers**
  - Start with reviews, quotes, and mini case studies.
- **Strong founder**
  - Start with POVs, video, teardowns, and podcasts.
- **Partners**
  - Start with partner pages, directories, and co-marketing.
- **Proprietary data**
  - Start with reports, benchmarks, and rankings.
- **Budget**
  - Start with PR, creators, analysts, and review campaigns.
- **Community access**
  - Start with forums, newsletters, Reddit, and expert answers.

AI DOES THIS: Mentions you, but doesn't recommend you

ASK

Is the mention positive, neutral, or negative?

- **Negative**
  - Reputation and trust gap. Fix reviews, address objections, and publish stronger proof.
- **Neutral**
  - Preference gap. AI knows you exist, but lacks a reason to choose you.
- **Positive**
  - Mention-to-recommendation gap. Make the use case, audience, and differentiation clearer.

ASK

Why does AI recommend someone else?

- **More reviews**
  - Build customer proof: reviews, testimonials, stories, before-and-after examples.
- **Clearer positioning**
  - Fix owned clarity: homepage, use-case pages, product pages, comparison pages.
- **More third-party validation**
  - Build market proof: articles, podcasts, partner pages, creators, roundups.
- **Stronger category association**
  - Build category proof: founder POVs, category explainers, reports, teardowns.
- **Better known competitor**
  - Build comparative proof: alternative pages, migration stories, comparison mentions.

AI DOES THIS: Recommends you, but gets details wrong

ASK

Where is the wrong information coming from?

- **Your own site**
  - Owned content is unclear or outdated. Fix homepage, product pages, pricing, docs, FAQs, about page.
- **Third-party sites**
  - External source quality problem. Clean up directories, partner pages, review profiles, and old articles.
- **AI blends competitors**
  - Positioning overlap problem. Clarify differentiation with comparison pages, POVs, use cases, proof.
- **Unclear**
  - Source discovery problem. Find repeated incorrect claims across models and sources.

ASK

What type of detail is wrong?

- **Product**
  - Rewrite product and feature pages.
- **Audience**
  - Create ICP, industry, and role pages.
- **Pricing**
  - Clarify pricing and packaging.
- **Market category**
  - Publish category definition and positioning content.
- **Proof**
  - Publish case studies, reviews, and trust pages.

AI DOES THIS: Recommends competitors instead

ASK

Why are competitors winning?

- **Better known**
  - Trust gap. Earn broader proof: PR, reviews, creators, partners, customer stories.
- **Cited more often**
  - Source footprint gap. Win sources AI already uses: listicles, review sites, roundups, YouTube, partner pages.
- **Clearer positioning**
  - Owned clarity gap. Improve product pages, use cases, comparisons, and category pages.
- **More proof**
  - Proof gap. Build reviews, case studies, testimonials, and third-party validation.
- **Own comparison queries**
  - Comparative content gap. Build alternative pages, versus pages, and migration stories.

ASK

What constraint matters most?

- **Low budget**
  - Use high-proximity proof: customers, founder, partners.
- **High budget**
  - Buy distribution: PR, creators, analysts, reviews.
- **Fast timeline**
  - Go where AI already looks.
- **Long-term build**
  - Build source footprint and an owned content system.

AI DOES THIS: Recommends you clearly

ASK

What is the next best opportunity?

- **More conversions**
  - Improve owned conversion: demo pages, pricing, landing pages, case studies, CTAs.
- **Defend against competitors**
  - Protect the recommendation: refresh comparisons, monitor sources, maintain review presence.
- **New use cases**
  - Broaden owned footprint: industry pages, role pages, use-case pages, guides.
- **More authority**
  - Compound earned proof: reports, benchmarks, PR, podcasts, partner validation.
- **Reduce risk**
  - Monitor model and source drift: recommendations, citations, sentiment, competitor movement.