

5 Key Takeaways to Improve Generative Search Performance

A practical GEO checklist for admissions + marketing teams as AI answer engines reshape the admissions funnel.



- 1) **Treat AI answer engines as the new front door for admissions:** Prospects are asking ChatGPT/Gemini/Copilot questions that shape shortlists before they even visit your site, and you are often excluded from conversations you are not even aware are happening.

Do this:

- Make a list of the top 50 prospect questions (cost/ROI, program strength, safety, campus life, outcomes, "schools like X, etc.).
- For each question, ask it to multiple AI answer engines each week, and track how your school is described, whether you are recommended, who you are compared against, and what sources the engines use.

- 2) **Win the comparison set: visibility + sentiment beats "awareness."** In AI answer engines, you are often judged in a list ("schools like Drexel," "best co-op programs," "best value in region"), not on your admission page. Having visibility is great, but visibility with negative sentiment drops you out of consideration before a prospective student visits your website.

Do this:

- Pick 3 signature themes you want AI to associate with your institution (e.g., co-op/outcomes, experiential learning, career placement, specific programs).
- Build (or refine) comparison-ready proof points for each theme: outcomes, employer relationships, rankings/recognition, student success metrics, facilities/labs, etc.
- Ensure the points appear consistently across your site and in third-party sources that AI agents consider high authority.

- 3) **Optimize the source ecosystem (not just your website):** AI answers use a "hierarchy of authorities" when forming their opinions. More than 75% of these are non-owned sources, which are often invisible to the university but significantly influence how answer engines include or exclude universities from recommended lists.



Do this:

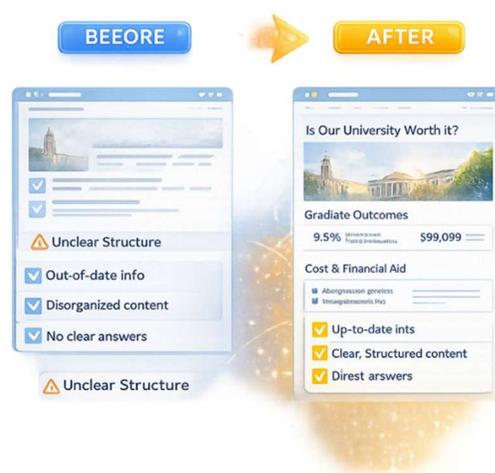
- Identify the top external sources influencing answers about your school (rankings, news, reference pages, review sites, program directories, forums).
- Fix the basics: ensure core facts are accurate and up to date across all sources.
- Proactively seed better sources: publish credible, linkable assets (outcomes reports, program pages, faculty expertise, partnerships) that others cite.

4) **Make owned media "AI-readable" and conversion-ready:**

Even when AI references your pages, unclear structure and scattered messaging reduce what gets pulled into answers.

Do this:

- Create 5-10 AI-ready "answer pages" (short, structured pages that directly answer high-intent questions).
Examples: "Is [School] worth it?", "Outcomes and ROI", "What makes [Program] different?", "Cost & aid explained", "Campus safety and support". Align this effort with the most-asked questions.
- Add FAQ blocks with plain-English answers (the exact questions prospects ask).
- Tighten credibility signals: dates, sources, outcomes, accreditations, employer partners, and student support.
- Update robots.txt to allow your key "answer pages" and block low-value/duplicate URLs so AI engines pull from the right content.



5) **GEO is not SEO, it's a cross-functional challenge:** Why it matters: AI "opinions" are influenced by more than just marketing content. Tuition, student experience, campus safety, policy issues, employee sentiment, and other reputational signals can all shape visibility and sentiment.

Do this:

- Assign a single GEO champion with a monthly cadence of review meetings with key stakeholders (admission, marketing, PR, safety, etc.).
- Create a working group: Admissions/Enrollment + Marketing + Comms/PR + Web/Digital (and HR/legal, as needed) to address gaps in GEO performance actively.
- Track changes over time and tie shifts to events: PR cycles, policy changes, site updates, major announcements, crises, and rankings releases.



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