

A Publisher’s Quick Guide to SEO & AEO

Modern search habits have changed. Now, readers, educators, and buyers discover publishers through a variety of sources from traditional search engines to AI-powered assistants. When publishers optimize for today’s search habits, they capture the biggest audience. We can help.



SEO: Search Engine Optimization

SEO practices improve your website so it ranks higher in search engine results, AI features, and AI tools.



Why It Matters for Publishers

When an educator searches for “best introductory biology textbook” or a student looks up “affordable nursing study guide,” you want your titles appearing on page one. Over 90% of clicks go to first-page results. If your e-commerce site isn’t optimized, you’re invisible to organic search traffic even if your content is exactly what they need.

The Key Components of Modern SEO

Technical SEO

Site speed, mobile responsiveness, crawlability, and indexing are functions of technical SEO. This is the foundation—if search engines can’t efficiently read your site, nothing else matters.



On-Page SEO

Title tags, meta descriptions, header structure, and content quality on each page matters. Even the location of your copy matters now. As a publisher, every title in your catalog should have a well-optimized product page for users.



Keyword Strategy

Deep research uncovers what your target audience actually searches and aligns your content to those terms. We find the ways that academic search behavior is different from consumer search and uncover actionable strategies.



Content & Authority

Blog posts, subject guides, author spotlights, and resource pages establish your site as an authority in your discipline areas. This drives backlinks and builds domain strength.



The honest truth about SEO

It takes time. Most publishers see meaningful ranking improvements in 3–6 months, with compounding returns over time. That’s why we also recommend paid digital advertising to drive immediate visibility while your organic presence builds.



What is AEO? AI Engine Optimization

Winning modern SEO includes AI Engine Optimization so that AI assistants (ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, Perplexity, Claude, etc.) reference and recommend your titles when users ask questions.



Why It’s the Next Frontier for Publishers

A growing number of students and educators are bypassing Google entirely. They’re asking AI tools: “What’s the best textbook for introductory chemistry?” or “Recommend a nursing ethics resource.” If your webpages aren’t structured in a way these tools can identify and cite, you won’t be in the answer—even if you’re the best option.

How AEO and SEO Work Together

	SEO	AEO
 Audience Habit	Search engine crawlers give results to users (Googlebot)	Large language models give results to users (GPT, Gemini)
 Goal	Rank on search results pages	Be cited in AI-generated answers
 Method	Keywords, backlinks, technical structure, careful content placement	Structured data, authority signals, citation patterns, careful content placement
 Output	Blue links the user clicks	Direct recommendations in conversational answers

What AEO Looks Like in Practice

Structured data (schema markup) that helps AI models identify your titles, authors, subjects, and editions



Authority content that establishes your publishing brand as a credible source in your discipline areas



Citation optimization so your titles appear in the sources AI tools reference when formulating recommendations



Entity and knowledge graph presence that ensures your publisher brand and key titles are recognized by AI systems as authoritative



The Bottom Line: You Need Both

SEO captures the traffic searching today. AEO positions you for how people will discover content tomorrow. Paid digital ads bridge the gap while both build momentum. The publishers who invest in all three will have the strongest, most resilient visibility.

Start with a Free Audit

As a VitalSource publisher partner, you’re eligible for a complimentary high-level SEO and AEO audit from Partner in Publishing. We’ll assess your current digital visibility, identify quick wins, and outline the biggest opportunities for your catalog.

No commitment. No sales pitch. Just a clear picture of where you stand.

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