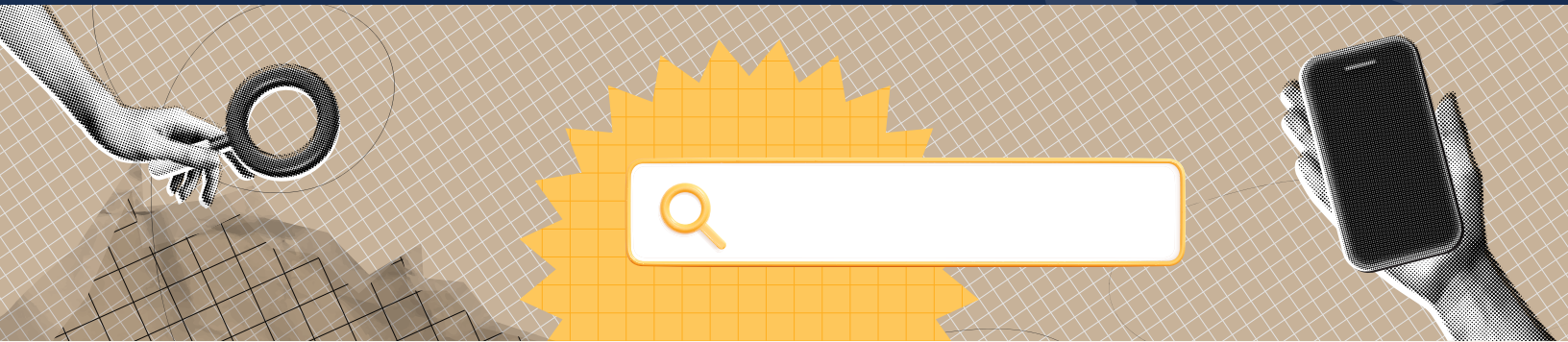


Beyond Search

The New Three-Layer Buyer Journey



The Shift in Buyer Behavior

The buyer journey no longer stops at search. Today it flows through three distinct layers:

SEARCH



ANSWER



SYNTHESIS

The implication: you don't control your narrative anymore unless you show up in all three.

B2B buyers no longer 'search and click.' They search, get answers from AI, and increasingly rely on generative tools to synthesize their decisions. If your firm is not present across all three layers (SEO, AEO, and GEO), you are invisible in parts of the decision journey. If competitors become the cited source in AI outputs, they effectively become the default recommendation. AI will compress vendor consideration sets - if you're not in the model, you're not in the deal.

The Three Layers of Modern Visibility

Each layer serves a specific function in the buyer's journey:

1

SEO

(Search Engine Optimization)

Discovery Layer:
Helps buyers find you.

2

AEO

(Answer Engine Optimization)

Decision Layer:
Answers key questions directly.

3

GEO

(Generative Engine Optimization)

Authority Layer:
Gets you cited by AI.

In short: SEO gets you seen. AEO gets you considered. GEO gets you chosen (even when you're not clicked).

If you're ready to build a **coordinated SEO, AEO, and GEO strategy** that **positions your firm as the default recommendation** in all three layers, contact Matt Cummings at matt@jandlcomms.com

The Window Is Closing

Right now, AI models are still training on a broad set of sources. Only firms with citation-ready research and transparent POVs will appear in AI summaries. The window to build GEO content while attention is still fragmented is now.

Your competitors are likely asking themselves the same question: 'Are we showing up everywhere?' Some are already moving. The firms that act now will define the baseline recommendation for years to come.

This requires coordination across three content strategies - each with different formats, audiences, and success metrics. It's a change that most firms need help architecting and executing.

Accounting and Advisory

The Risk

When a mid-market CFO evaluates CFO services or M&A advisory, they rely on both search and AI summaries. If your firm isn't visible in Google results or cited in ChatGPT's comparison of 'accounting firm alternatives to Big 4,' you're competing with a limited consideration set.

SEO

Search Engine Optimization



Top accounting firms for middle market companies

Search Results

- *Rankings of INSIDE Public Accounting's Top 500 CPA Firms [Inside Public Acctg]*
- *Top 25 Accounting Firms – [Vault]*
- *Meet the 2024 Best Midsized and Large Firms [Accounting Today]*
- *Top Accounting Firms for Midmarket in the United States [Clutch.co]*

SEO = Building high-intent service + industry + geography pages with verifiable case study proof and conversion CTAs

How it Works

- Publish deep pages
- Incorporate verifiable client case studies.
- Use conversion-focused CTAs.

How to Rank Higher

- Focus on niche service + industry keywords; secure case studies from clients.

What to Measure

- Rankings
- Organic Traffic
- Conversions

Types of Pages Needed

- Core Service Pages
- Case Study Pages*

* Case study pages support SEO, AEO, and GEO

AEO

Answer Engine Optimization



What does an advisory firm do?

AI Overview

An advisory firm provides specialized expertise, strategic guidance, and consulting services to businesses, executives, or investors to improve performance, manage risk, and navigate complex challenges. Unlike consulting, which often fixes defined problems, advisory firms build long-term relationships to address ambiguous, ongoing issues such as mergers and acquisitions, digital transformation, regulatory compliance, and financial restructuring.

AEO = Building comprehensive FAQ clusters to answer complex buyer advisory questions and objections

How it Works

- Provide detailed, direct answers to key questions.

Examples

- How do I vet a business valuation firm?
- What's the expected timeline for a fractional CFO engagement?

How to Rank Higher

- Answer objections directly and provide data ranges.

What to Measure

- Featured snippets
- AI overview inclusion
- Zero-click impressions

Types of Pages Needed:

- FAQ Pages
- Objection Hub Pages

GEO

Generative Engine Optimization

ChatGPT 5.4



Best accounting firm alternative to big 4

Response

Strong alternatives to the Big Four accounting firms for companies seeking high-quality audit, tax, and advisory services include leading mid-tier and global network firms such as BDO, RSM, Grant Thornton, and Crowe, all of which offer deep expertise with a more hands-on, cost-effective approach for middle-market clients; additional reputable options include Baker Tilly, Mazars, PKF International, and Moore Global, which provide strong international coverage and personalized service, while regional firms like CohnReznick, CLA (CliftonLarsonAllen), and EisnerAmper are known for industry specialization and flexibility, making them especially attractive to companies that want senior-level attention, tailored solutions, and competitive pricing without sacrificing technical capability.

GEO = Becoming the definitive, citable source of proprietary frameworks, position papers, and proof points for AI reuse and attribution

How it Works

- Publish high-value 'original points-of-view' with deep analysis.
- Embed verifiable data proof points.
- Create detailed, reusable advisory frameworks.

Examples

- 'The 5-Step Fractional CFO Framework'

How to Rank Higher

- Develop industry-first research reports and proprietary methodologies that AI will cite
- Publish authoritative content such as LinkedIn posts, press releases, and trade publication media hits.

What to Measure

- AI outputs
- Branded query lift
- Content reuse signals

Types of Pages Needed

- Research Pages
- POV Pages
- Framework Pages