# Publishers shift SEO strategies as Google’s AI Overviews reshape search traffic



In the year following the launch of Google’s generative AI search feature, AI Overviews, publishers are realigning their SEO strategies to navigate an evolving digital landscape. This transformation underscores a growing concern about the impact of AI on traditional search practices, revealing a nuanced understanding of audience engagement and content optimisation.

The mechanisms of SEO, which once thrived on the meticulous selection of high-performing keywords, are now facing dramatic shifts. Some publishers are moving away from targeting long-tail search queries in favour of optimising content for platforms like Google Discover. This strategy aims to preserve traffic in an environment where AI Overviews often yield disappointing click-through rates, as evidenced by recent data showing that sites appearing in AI Overviews face a decline in user engagement. For instance, a lifestyle publication noted a staggering 43.9% drop in click-through rate (CTR) on desktop and 32.5% on mobile when featured in AI Overviews, highlighting that even top rankings can yield diminished returns.

In response to these challenges, publishers are also turning their attention to breaking news and exclusive content, opting to prioritise urgency over timeless pieces. This pivot is partly driven by the algorithmic changes introduced by Google, which favour direct answers to user queries, thus limiting the traffic potential for in-depth articles. In an environment where answers to straightforward questions appear directly in search results, the need for readers to click through to original content diminishes significantly.

As the landscape changes, some publishers are determined to strengthen their direct relationships with audiences through subscriptions and newsletters, diversifying their revenue streams and reducing dependence on search referrals. This strategy appears vital as smaller publishers, especially independent blogs and recipe sites, face harsher realities. With AI Overviews generating concise answers to user queries, these sites often see reduced incentive for users to click through to their content. In fact, branded searches—those using specific company or event names—have emerged as more effective engagement tools, yielding higher CTRs whilst triggering AI Overviews at far lower rates.

The crux of the matter lies in the continued ambiguity around the measurement of AI Overviews' impact. Google’s lack of transparency regarding click-through rates related to AI Overviews poses significant challenges for publishers seeking to quantify their shifting traffic dynamics. Many rely on third-party tools such as Semrush for insights, but these metrics can often be inconsistent. Companies like Dotdash Meredith have acknowledged a substantial portion of their traffic stemming from Google, yet the growing apprehension about AI’s encroachment on traditional referral pathways is palpable.

News publishers, which traditionally weather the storm of algorithm changes more effectively, are not immune to these innovations. While breaking news queries currently avoid triggering AI Overviews, the upcoming Google AI Mode poses a potential threat. This experimental feature, designed to streamline search experiences, could further impinge on the traffic dynamics that publishers currently rely upon. Preliminary tests suggest that AI Mode can summarise breaking news content almost instantaneously, casting a shadow over the future of traditional news dissemination.

In summary, the aftermath of Google’s introduction of AI Overviews reveals a sector in flux, with different publishers innovating varying strategies to secure their relevance and audience engagement. As AI’s role in search continues to grow, the need for adaptive SEO strategies becomes increasingly critical. Those who embrace these shifts with nuance—by focusing on quality content, audience engagement, and understanding the evolving metrics—may find avenues for success amid an ever-changing landscape.

### Reference Map

1. [[1]](https://digiday.com/media/one-year-in-seo-lessons-from-publishers-after-googles-ai-overviews/)
2. [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/ebb6bbbde17ed29a5f7b630d9e5e285b)
3. [[3]](https://ejournalz.com/impact-of-ai-on-seo/)
4. [[4]](https://www.similarweb.com/blog/marketing/seo/ai-overviews/)
5. [[5]](https://www.andolasoft.com/blog/a-guide-to-how-googles-ai-overview-impacts-seo.html)
6. [[6]](https://explodingtopics.com/blog/ai-in-seo)
7. [[7]](https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesagencycouncil/2024/08/13/ai-overviews-and-seo-how-companies-need-to-adapt/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://digiday.com/media/one-year-in-seo-lessons-from-publishers-after-googles-ai-overviews/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/ebb6bbbde17ed29a5f7b630d9e5e285b> - In May 2024, Google introduced AI-enhanced search features that prioritize AI-generated responses over traditional website links for complex queries. This shift aims to expedite information retrieval but raises concerns about reduced web traffic for publishers. While Google assures that traditional links will remain for simpler searches, the move could impact digital advertising and website traffic, potentially leading to revenue losses for publishers dependent on search engine referrals. Legal issues may also arise regarding the use of copyrighted material, similar to ongoing litigations against services like OpenAI's ChatGPT.
3. <https://ejournalz.com/impact-of-ai-on-seo/> - AI Overviews are triggered by specific factors such as search intent, query length, and content format. They significantly impact SEO performance by reducing organic search visibility and click-through rates (CTR). For instance, organic CTR can drop by 8.9% when AI Overviews appear. While they provide quick answers, studies show mixed user reception. Being cited in AI Overviews offers a small traffic boost, with cited websites seeing CTR improvements from 0.74% to 1.02%. Structured data and schema markup can increase the likelihood of content being featured in AI Overviews.
4. <https://www.similarweb.com/blog/marketing/seo/ai-overviews/> - Google's AI Overviews impact SEO by increasing competition for visibility on search engine results pages (SERPs), as they occupy more space and push traditional listings down. This change can lead to lower click-through rates (CTRs) for organic results. However, appearing in AI Overviews can enhance brand credibility and user trust by providing quick, reliable answers. To adapt, businesses should update their keyword strategies, produce higher-quality content, and prioritize structured data and schema markup to improve the chances of being featured in AI Overviews.
5. <https://www.andolasoft.com/blog/a-guide-to-how-googles-ai-overview-impacts-seo.html> - The rise of AI Overviews has led to an increase in zero-click searches, where users obtain information directly from AI-generated snippets without visiting websites. This trend reduces organic traffic, especially for sites not featured in AI Overviews. However, websites cited in AI Overviews can experience increased visibility and higher CTRs. To adapt, SEO strategies must evolve to optimize content for potential inclusion in AI Overviews, focusing on high-quality, authoritative content that addresses user intent and incorporates structured data.
6. <https://explodingtopics.com/blog/ai-in-seo> - AI Overviews are transforming search engine results by providing AI-generated answers directly on the search results page, leading to fewer clicks for websites. Early studies indicate that organic CTRs can drop significantly when AI Overviews are present. To prepare for this shift, it's essential to optimize content for AI Overviews while maintaining traditional SEO practices. This includes focusing on high-quality content, understanding user intent, and adapting to the evolving search landscape to ensure continued visibility and engagement.
7. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesagencycouncil/2024/08/13/ai-overviews-and-seo-how-companies-need-to-adapt/> - To adapt to the rise of AI Overviews, companies should update their keyword strategies by focusing on longer key phrases that reflect natural conversation and speech patterns. Producing higher-quality, in-depth, and user-friendly content is crucial, as keyword stuffing is no longer effective. Additionally, aiming to appear in AI Overviews should be a new goal, necessitating content optimization accordingly. Prioritizing structured data and schema markup enhances the chances of content being featured in AI Overviews, improving visibility and engagement.