

From Ranked to Recommended

GEO has changed the rules of search.

What does this mean for your brand?

The Great Search Shift

The hospitality industry is facing a fundamental shift in how guests discover destinations.

Google's long-standing search monopoly is being dismantled and the landscape is undergoing transformation. It is now fragmented across different platforms as people increase their use of AI for searches. However, on these LLMs the intent is different.

From Clicks to Conversations

Traditionally, search engines returned a list of results and left users to draw their own conclusions. AI changes that dynamic entirely. Natural language prompts allow for more specific, nuanced requests and the conversational format encourages guests to explore rather than just search. Discovery begins earlier, and with far greater intent.

The guest decides before they arrive

37% of holidaymakers use AI to plan trips

Many travelers are already starting their search with AI, not just browsing options they are building personalized itineraries and arriving at curated decisions all within the platform.

Brands are even using their own AI agents to help visitors plan directly from their site.

LLMs are doing the heavy lifting of price comparison and suggestions leading to a high level of trust in their responses. By the time a guest reaches your website, they arrive ready to book.

Guests who come from AI search convert at significantly higher numbers:

3-6x

Higher conversion rate from AI-referred traffic

GEO: Optimizing for the answer, not the algorithm

What?

Generative Engine Optimization, or GEO, is the practice of ensuring your brand is understood, trusted and recommended by AI systems when they are asked questions relevant to your product or service.

Why?

The aim is to make your content legible to the language models that construct an authoritative answer because they don't read pages in the same way that algorithms do.

How?

LLMs understand meaning and context, clustering similar concepts rather than matching keywords. An answer shaped by AI understands everything about your business and not just whether certain words appear on your website, making details and associations an important element in content.

How your product connects to the wider landscape it occupies is as important as what your website says about itself.

From Blue Links to AI Recommendations

SEO put your website in front of people searching. GEO places your brand in the answer they receive.

SEO

GEO

Visibility meant appearing on the first Google page



Visibility is being cited as the trusted answer inside an AI response

Backlinks and domain authority drove performance



Reputation, reviews, and description clarity determine who gets recommended

Content written to match search terms



Content must be written to directly answer questions and be easily extracted

SEO rank does not protect you in AI search

~90%

of ChatGPT citations
come from pages that
rank outside the top 20
on Google.

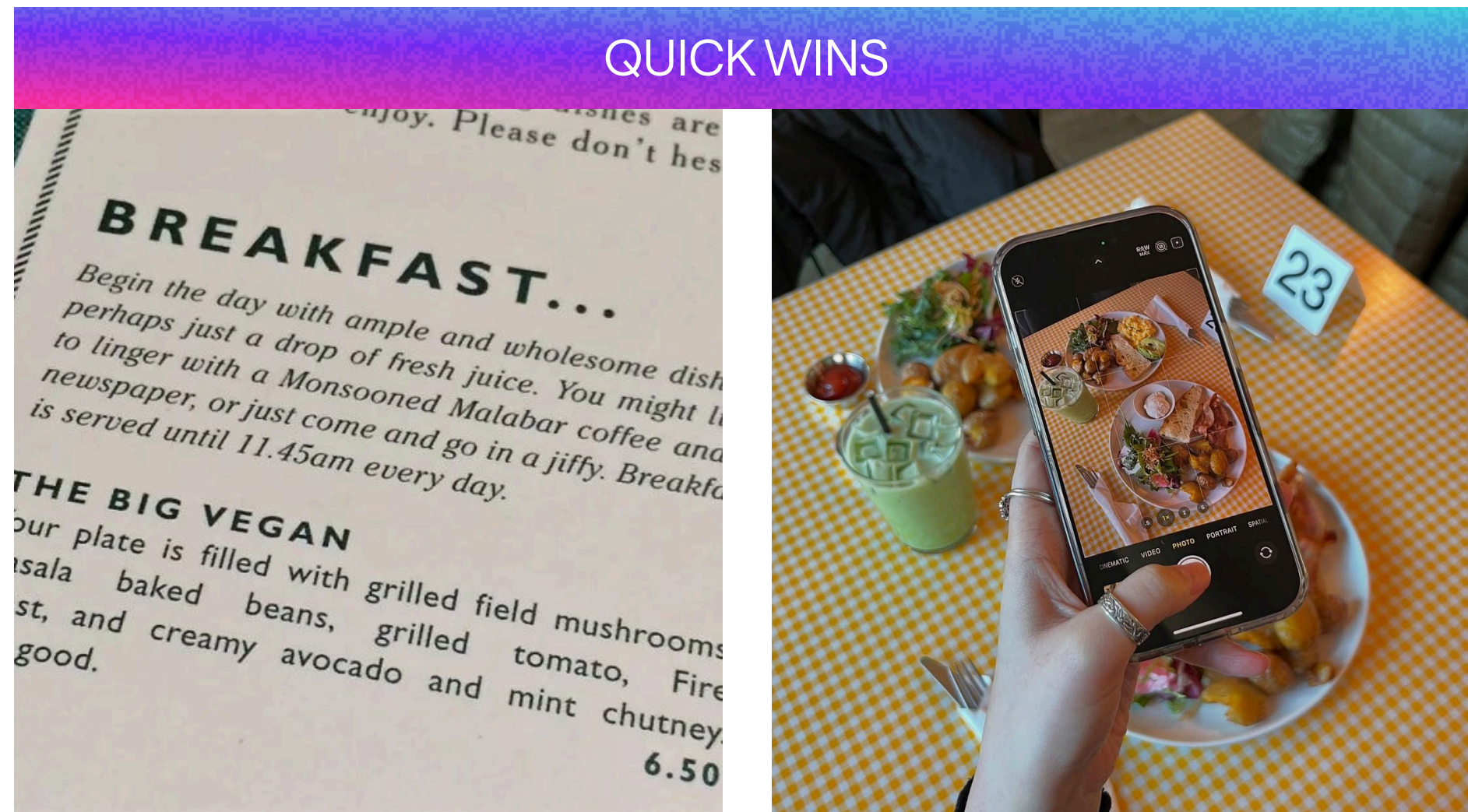
GEO and SEO are entirely different games and most brands are only playing in one.

The Early Mover Advantage

In the travel and hospitality sector, discovery often begins with an open-ended question. Your brand must be ready to answer it. While the industry remains focused on traditional Google SEO, the AI landscape remains largely untapped. This creates a rare window of opportunity to move beyond visibility and become the trusted authority that AI recommends by name.

Hospitality's Upper Hand

Hospitality has a structural advantage in GEO that other sectors do not. The assets that define a great hotel or restaurant, for example, the signature dish, the room with the view or the sommelier's recommendation are precisely the kind of specific, named, sensory details that AI systems cite with confidence. **Specificity is a superpower.**

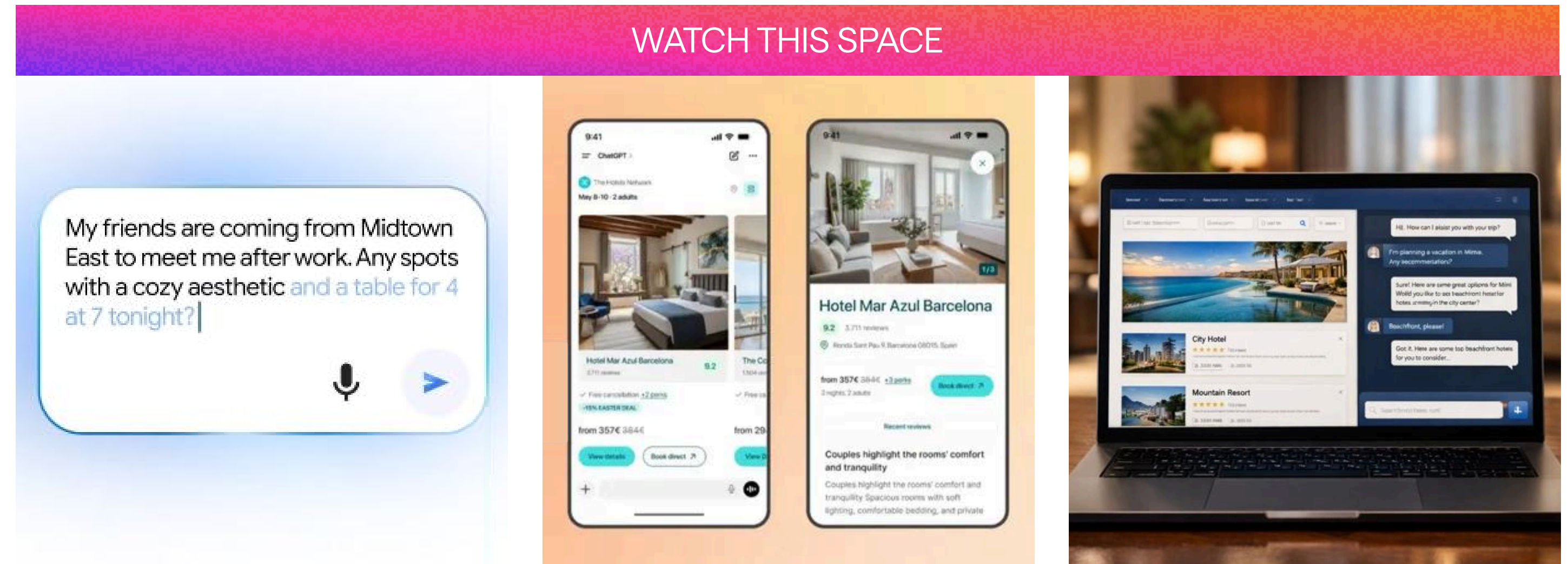


Your Menu is a GEO Asset

Every menu change, new dish or seasonal update is a proof of newness which AI platforms prioritize. Treat each menu item as a product listing with descriptive names, key ingredients, and images. Content-rich, structured, menus in machine-readable formats are more easily recommended by AI.

Instagrammable = Searchable

Visual search is evolving fast. A dish or hotel interiors that look genuinely distinct can be identified by AI and linked directly to a booking engine. Prioritize aesthetic distinction in photography and consistency in product presentation.



Your Listing Is Now a Local Guide

Google Maps has just become a recommendation engine. The new "Ask Maps" feature (powered by Gemini) responds to natural, conversational questions, acting as a personalized local guide that delivers suggestions based on specific guest requests.

The First Direct Booking App For Hotels Launches in Chat GPT

The sales channel landscape is expanding, and AI platforms are now part of it. The Hotels Network by Lighthouse became the first booking application to launch directly inside ChatGPT, allowing hotels to serve commission-free booking links within an AI conversation.

When You Build the AI, You Own the Answer

The most strategic brands are not waiting to be recommended, they're building the tool doing the recommending to become the ultimate brand advocate. Hilton's AI Planner (recently launched in beta) keeps travelers inside their own ecosystem from inspiration through to booking.

How AI chooses who to trust

Not all AI platforms are equal and they don't read the same sources. Understanding what each platform prioritizes is the difference between being cited and being invisible. Google AI Overviews pull from ranked results but platforms like ChatGPT and Perplexity actively select and recommend. Both require GEO, but for different reasons.

We asked 5 AI platforms what kind of sources they prioritize when offering trusted recommendations for hospitality-related queries. Here's what they said.



Gemini

Prioritizes high-authority review aggregators, official brand websites, and real-time travel databases. Accuracy and current guest sentiment carry the most weight.



ChatGPT

Prioritizes up-to-date, high-authority sources balanced with real user reviews. Trusted aggregators, verified listings, and recent customer feedback are the most reliable inputs.



Claude

Prioritizes clarity, factual accuracy, and well-structured content from editorially reviewed sources. Consistent reviews, specific descriptions, and recency are the strongest signals.



Perplexity

Prioritizes major review and booking platforms alongside official tourism sites, cross-checked against reputable travel journalism. Breadth of recent real-guest data matters most.



CoPilot

Prioritizes fresh, reputable travel data from official tourism boards and established review platforms. Bing-indexed content and authoritative local sources carry the most weight.

How we made a Manhattan Hotel, the trusted answer cited by AI



72

Cited mentions
across AI platforms

37

AI SERP feature
placements

86

Unbranded keywords
in the top 10

The Challenge

No hotel in Midtown Manhattan was building content designed to be cited by AI platforms. As travelers increasingly use tools like ChatGPT and Google's AI Overviews to plan trips, the gap between traditional SEO performance and AI visibility was wide open and largely ignored.

Our Approach

We identified that neighborhood-level, unbranded queries represented the highest-value opportunity. These are the questions travelers ask before they have chosen a hotel. We built a content and structured data strategy to make Grayson the authoritative local voice for Midtown, and the natural answer before the booking decision was made.

What We Did

- Comprehensive Midtown neighborhood guide written through the lens of a Grayson guest
- GEO-first content structure with clear headings and extractable facts optimized for how LLMs cite sources
- Schema markup defining the hotel's relationship to the neighborhood and its attractions
- Brand positioning built around location strength rather than branded terms alone
- Unbranded keyword strategy targeting the research phase before a booking decision is made
- Ongoing performance tracking showing consistent month-on-month growth in traffic arriving directly through AI search features

Does AI Know You Exist?

You cannot optimize for what you cannot see.

First, you must understand where you stand. You need to understand what AI knows about your business, where the gaps are and what it's costing you.

Our GEO Audit maps your current AI visibility across platforms, identifies what is missing, and produces a prioritized action plan built specifically for your business. Speak to our team to find out more.

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