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184. AI Search Optimization for Small Business Content

Speaker: [00:00:00]Right now, somebody is asking ChatGPT for help with exactly what you do, and it's giving them an answer, maybe even a name or a website. The question is, is it yours? More and more people aren't clicking through to websites at all. In the first four months of this year, about sixty-eight percent of Google searches ended without a single click.

People asked Google, or ChatGPT or Claude, they just answered, and the people moved on with their day.

So if you've been writing blog posts, recording video, and wondering why none of it seems to be bringing in clients, it's not just you. The rules of getting found are changing right now under everyone's feet. The good news, you probably don't need more content, You need the content you already have to do the right job. Now stay with me to the end today because I'm walking you through exactly how to set up an AI assistant to update your old content for AI search step by step, including the exact prompt I'd use, which you can copy straight from the show notes for today.

Today we're talking about how AI search optimization impacts the content that you have on your website and on social media. Sometimes this is called AEO or GEO, which sounds very techy and very intimidating, but I promise it's not. If you can type into a computer, you can do this. So here's what we're covering.

First, the three jobs your content can do that's connected to the trail to the sale, which is my process for how your customer buys. Most of us are asking all of our content to do the same job and then wondering why it's not working. Second, we're gonna talk about why social media feels like such a waste of time and why it really isn't, especially going into twenty twenty-seven.

And third, the big shift, how AI is changing what it means to get found online, and [00:02:00] three simple fixes to make your content AI-friendly. Then, like I promised, I'll walk you through setting up AI to do the heavy lifting for you.

Okay, grab your coffee. Here you go Point number one, every piece of content has a job, and I mean that pretty literally.

Think of your content like a little team you've hired. Your blog posts, your podcasts, videos, Instagram posts, your newsletter, each one, think of them like an employee. Now, imagine you hired five people and you made every single one of them the receptionist. They're all standing at the front desk saying, "Hi and welcome in," and nobody's actually helping a client decide what to buy or when to buy it.

That's what a lot of content marketing for small business looks like. A lot of, "Hi, I exist," but not much else. Not that it's not sharing good information. It is. It's just that your content needs to share the right information at the right time based on where your customer is on the trail to the sale.

So let's give your team real job titles .

Job number one is awareness content. This is content that helps the right people discover that you exist. It reaches strangers.

Some of it's searchable, blog posts, podcast episodes, YouTube videos, the stuff that lives online for years and can show up when somebody types or asks a question. And a lot of social media lives there too. Whenever a post lands in front of somebody who's never heard of you, that's awareness content.

The searchable stuff is a slow burn. It builds over time. A blog post you wrote two or even five years ago can still some- bring somebody into your business today, And this is the job that AI is changing the most. We'll get into that in a bit.

Okay, job two is consider content. This content is the deeper dive. Somebody heard you on a podcast or saw a post on Instagram, and now they want to learn more about you, so they maybe sign up for your [00:04:00] newsletter or download your freebie.

They binge three or four episodes in a row, and they read your About page. Its job is not to reach strangers. Its job is to turn awareness into interest. Think of it like a bookstore. Awareness is the window display that gets you to walk into the store. The consider stage is the book descriptions on the back cover.

Okay, job number three is the compare stage, and this one most of us are missing. This is the content for the moment somebody is making a decision. They know you, they like you, and now they're comparing you to somebody else that's out there or to doing nothing at all with the problem that they have.

What does that content look like? It could be client stories, case studies. It's basically, "Here's what it's like to work with me." Tell them how you're different from the other options. Answer the questions that people might have before they buy. And when I look at most of my clients' content, almost everything is awareness and consider content. There's almost nothing waiting for them at compare. This might not even be directly on your website. Think about your Google Business reviews or Yelp reviews.

So picture this, somebody's been following you for months, and they love your posts. They're finally ready to hire somebody, and they go to your website to check it out, and they find more tips, more information that says, "Hi, I exist." nothing that helps them say yes. Most of us have a whole team of content, and we made every one of them a receptionist.

Now, this gap matters even more right now because of AI. When an AI tool mentions your name, what do people do next? They might go check you out, and what they find needs to help them choose you. And a lot of people look at AI as if they're a trusted friend. So they trust AI. If somebody says, "Check out so and so's website," they're gonna check it out.

So here's your quick homework for point one. look at the last 10 things you posted or published. Next [00:06:00] to each one, write down which job it was doing: awareness, consider, or compare. If you've got, say, 10 awareness and consider posts and zero compare posts, now you know what to make next.

And I didn't say make more of. I said, "Just make it next." I don't want you to redo all your content

point number two, let's talk about social media because I know this is the one that makes a lot of us want to jump the social media ship, right? It can drive us crazy. You spend an hour on a carousel, you write a caption that you're really proud of, you post it, and it gets 11 likes.

Three of them are your sisters, your best friend, or a bot and you think, "Why am I even doing this?" I hear that from clients all the time, and I get it, but here's what's usually going on. We're grading social media on a test that was never really the right test.

Remember the three jobs? Social media does mostly awareness

A post lands in front of somebody new, and now they know you exist. And for people who have followed you for a while, it slides them right into the consideration stage. An informative post that lets them see how you work, that's a consider stage. It's how they get to know the way you think.

What it almost never does is close the deal. It might invite somebody to a free download so they can consider you or buy a small offer, but typically people need to know more about you before they're ready to buy. Most posts disappear from the feed in a day or two, and social is rarely where somebody makes a final buying decision on a high-priced item.

So when we judge it by likes or whether it brought in a client, it comes up short because we're grading awareness content on a sell stage test. Social media primarily builds up awareness and your unique brand. It's helpful to get to know you, to like you, and trust you.

But it's sort of like judging a date for coffee on whether or not they proposed. It's not what the date was for, right? It was [00:08:00] just a primer. So what should you pay attention to instead? Here are some signals that actually mean your social media is doing its job. First, DMs. If someone took the time to message you, that person's raising a hand.

Next, shares and saves. A save means I want to come back to this later. A share means I trust you enough to put your name in front of my friends. Both are worth more than a like. Also,

profile visits and website clicks. If someone wanted to know more about you, that's what they're gonna do.

And my favorite one, which never shows up in your analytics at all, is when people say, "Oh yeah, I've been following you for a while, and I like your content." When somebody says that on a discovery call, that tells me that social media is doing its job. They've been lurking maybe for months, even while you were thinking social media was not helping your business.

And one more thing. If it is starting conversations, your job is to show up for them. Reply quickly to your comments and DMs. Ask a question back. Invite them to keep talking. The post starts the conversation. You're the one that needs to keep it going. And it's also okay to reach out to people in the DMs just to say thanks for the follow and include a comment to show that you've visited their page too. I think you'll be surprised. Your social media might be working a lot harder than your number of likes is telling you, and it ties back to AI. For years, social media lived in its own little bubble.

What happened on Instagram stayed on Instagram, but that's changing. Since July 2025, public posts from Instagram professional accounts can show up in a Google search: Your captions, your reels, and your carousels. And when the researchers looked at which websites AI tools quote most often, social platforms were all over the list: Reddit, YouTube, LinkedIn, and even Facebook. So your social media isn't just talking to your followers anymore, it's talking to the robots too.

So what does that mean for [00:10:00] us? First of all, write captions that actually have value. A caption that kind of just gives vibes or emojis gives AI nothing to work with. A caption that answers a real question in the words your clients used can get found and used by AI.

Second, put your best answers where AI is looking. LinkedIn and YouTube and Reddit come up again and again. If you've already written a great answer to a client question, it can live there and be found by AI . Number three, check your settings. On Instagram, make sure that you have a professional account that's public with the search setting turned on.

It's a quick 30-second fix, and then you'll be done. And remember what other people say about you counts as well. AI looks at that as earned media, which we'll talk about in a minute. Your social media isn't just talking to your followers anymore. It's talking to the robots, and they're referring people to your social media accounts too.

Point number three. So we've talked about what your content's job is. Now let's talk about how AI decides whether it gets seen at all. Remember job one, awareness? For searchable content, getting found used to mean one thing. Someone searches you on Google and your page shows up, and then they click on it and land on your website. That was search engine optimization or SEO, and that's changing very fast. Let's go back to that number from the top of the show.

In the first four months of this year, about sixty-eight percent of Google searches in the US ended without a click. And when Google shows one of those AI overviews that they do where

they kind of summarize the results, a study from Ahrefs found that the top ranking page got about 58% fewer clicks so when you do a Google search and there's a summary at the top, and then there's a list of different websites below it, a study from Ahrefs found that those top-ranking pages on that page under the o-overview got about fifty-eight percent fewer clicks than it did in previous years.

Now, I wanna be fair here. Another research firm found that clicks bounced back a little in twenty [00:12:00] twenty-six, but the direction is clear. People are getting their answers without visiting your website. Getting found used to mean getting clicks. Now it means getting quoted. So what does that mean for us?

It means that somebody might ask ChatGPT, "Who can help fix my bookkeeping?" Or, "Where is the closest chiropractor?" And the answer they get is pulled from someone's content. The question is whether it's your content. That's what AI search optimization is for: making your content easy for AI tools to find, understand, and quote what's on your website.

And if you've done a lot of work getting your website optimized for search engines, SEO is not dead. Ahrefs looked at over a million ChatGPT prompts and found that eighty-eight percent of the links it cited came from its regular search index.

So showing up in search is still a good thing. AI didn't kill SEO, it just raised the bar. So how do we clear that bar with our websites and content? Well, there are three fixes. Fix number one: answer the question first. Many of us write like we're telling a story at a dinner party.

It's how we've been taught to write in our creative wr-writing classes, right? We set the scene, we give the backstory, and the actual answer shows up like paragraph four. AI doesn't have that kind of patience, and honestly, people don't either anymore. A Semrush study looked at what kind of c-content AI tools cite.

Content that leads with a clear answer, shows real expertise, and is organized with clear sections got cited more often than other content. So here's a trick to pull that content out. If a client sat across from you and asked you a quick question, what's the first thing you'd say? Probably you would just answer their question directly, right?

Put that at the top of the post. And while you're at it, turn your headings, your H2 tags, into other questions your clients [00:14:00] ask.

Use the word that customers would actually use. Try how-to questions or how-long questions that your clients ask. That's what people type into Google, and that's what they ask AI.

Okay, fix number two: sound like an expert instead of an ad. That same Semrush study found something interesting. Promotional or salesy content was linked to fewer AI citations, about 26% fewer. So writing something like, "I'm passionate about helping amazing women transform their business," AI kind of skips right over that. Is there a place for creative writing in sales content?

Yes, I think so. But you don't want it to be the content that you want to rank for or pop up in an AI search, right? What AI pays attention to is real, honest expertise, specific examples, what you've actually seen work with your clients, and what your honest opinion is.

And this is where so many of us have a huge advantage. If you've been doing this for years, you've seen things no AI tool can make up. You've had experiences, and you've gained genuine wisdom. Put that in your content because AI can't compete with that

Okay, fix number three, refresh what you have. First of all, update your best old content. Search industry reporting says that stale content rarely gets cited. But if you've been creating content for a while, it doesn't mean that you need to throw out your old content, and you don't need to go and generate a whole bunch of new content.

Go back to your last three to five blog posts or episode pages and give them a refresh. Just add new examples, update the information, and put a clear answer on the top. And then get mentioned on other people's sites. This is the same as it was for SEO.

A University of Toronto study found that AI search leans heavily on what's called earned media. That's other people talking about you. So guesting on podcasts, [00:16:00] Getting quoted in an article or even maybe in a post on Reddit, being listed in a directory for your industry, being someone's guest expert, all of that counts.

Plus, you're borrowing other people's audiences, which is always a good thing. Now, one caveat, none of these fixes is a guarantee. They improve your odds of getting quoted, but none of this will happen overnight.

Like SEO, this is a long game, but it's still important, and it adds up. Okay, let's pull this all together 'cause I know I talked about a thousand different things here. First of all, every piece of content has a place on the trail to the sale, typically in the awareness, consider, or compare stages. Number two, social media isn't failing you.

You just need to adjust your expectations. Stop counting likes. Start counting conversations and shares to tell exactly what's really resonating. And number three, getting found is shifting from SEO clicks to AI citations. AI search optimization means answering the question first, sounding like the expert that you are, and refreshing the content that you already have.

Remember, every piece of content has its own job to do. Okay, I promised you that I'd walk you through having AI do the heavy lifting fix on updating your content. So let's do that now. So you can do this on ChatGPT or Claude. Both have something called a project. Think of a project as a folder that remembers who you are so that you don't have to re-explain your business every single time.

Here are the steps, and don't worry about writing them down 'cause they're all in the show notes along with the exact prompt. Okay, step number one, start a new project. Call it something like content refresh . Step number two, tell it who you are.

In the project's instruction, write a few short paragraphs, who you serve, what you sell, how you sound, and this one's my favorite, word that you would never use. If you never curse, let it know that. If you hate using emojis or would rather die than [00:18:00] say a word like synergy or whatever the word is, let it know that too.

Think of this step as like onboarding a new intern. You wouldn't want to hand a brand new hire a stack of work on day one without letting them know anything about your business, right? Same here. Give them the handbook. Okay, step number three: give it your writing samples.

Upload two or three pieces that you've written that sound the most like you. A newsletter, a blog post that you're proud of, an email blast that you've sent out. This is how it learns your voice, so it doesn't sound like AI wrote your work. Step number four: pick one older piece to refresh.

Just start with one. Start with your best one, actually. Maybe your most popular blog post or an episode that you really liked, or episode show notes that you were really proud of. If you're not sure what that is, check your Google Analytics and see which one got the most traffic.

Then copy and paste the content into a new chat inside your content refresher project. I'll give you the gist of the prompt right now. The full version is in the show notes. You're basically asking it to do five things: find the main question your point answers and rewrite it in the beginning, so it answers it right away.

Turn your headings into real client questions. Flag anything that sounds salesy. Point out anything that looks outdated, and suggest a few FAQs for the end of it. That's something I didn't really talk about earlier, but that's something else that AI looks for. And here's the most important part of that prompt.

Tell it not to make anything up. You know? AI will still make stuff up. So you need to make sure that your post contains real examples from your experiences.

So when your post needs a real example from your experience, it should stop and ask you for one. Because remember, your experience is the thing AI can't fake. In step number six, you're the editor.

Read what it gives you, and make sure it sounds like you. Check every [00:20:00] fact, answer its questions with your real stories, then update the post on your website. That's it. One post, maybe 20 minutes, and then next week, do the next one. As you've probably learned by now, AI can do the heavy lifting, but you still have to be the editor.

And one more step I like to do is after you edit the document that AI gives you, I paste the edited copy back into AI, so it can see my edits. That feedback helps AI learn your voice even more, and it will also check for things like typos and spelling errors or something

Again, I'll put the full prompt (below) in the show notes for today, so you can just go grab it. You'll find it at myweeklymarketing.com/184. Now, if you've been listening to this and thinking, "Okay, I don't even know which part of my marketing needs content," well, I've got you.

I've got a free marketing gap audit, and it's a quick quiz that shows you where your marketing is breaking down on the trail to the sale, so you know whether you need more awareness content, more compare content, or something else entirely. Just go to janicehostager.com/quiz, and the link's in the show notes as well.

That's it for today, friend. For more information about anything we talked about today and the AI prompt I talked about, visit myweeklymarketing.com/184. Thank you so much for joining me today. I'll see you next time. Bye for now.

FULL PROMPT:
You're my content editor. Using my business info and writing samples in this project, update the post below so it's easier for AI search tools like ChatGPT and Google's AI Overviews to understand and quote.
1. Find the main question this post answers. Rewrite the title and first two sentences so they answer it directly.
2. Rewrite my section headings as the questions my clients actually ask.
3. Flag anything that sounds salesy or promotional, and rewrite it to sound helpful and expert.
4. Point out anything that looks outdated.
5. Where a real example from my experience would make this stronger, don't make one up. Write [ASK ME:] followed by a question for me instead.
6. Suggest 3 FAQ questions with short answers for the end of the post.
Keep my voice. Don't add any stats, facts or claims I didn't give you. First show me a short list of what you'd change, then the full updated post.
[PASTE YOUR POST HERE]
[CTA]