

Building a Startup SEO Strategy That Works in Your First 90 Days

When you are launching a startup, every decision feels like it could make or break the company. You have limited time, limited money, and a thousand things competing for your attention. Among the loudest voices in the room are the people telling you to invest in SEO, or AEO, or GEO, or some other three-letter acronym that promises to put your brand in front of the right audience. The problem is that most of that advice comes from people who have never had to stretch a single dollar across product development, customer discovery, and marketing all at once.

I have been in that seat. I have watched founders pour thousands into content that nobody reads, obsess over backlinks before they had a product worth linking to, and chase algorithm updates like they were lottery tickets. What I have learned is that a smart startup SEO strategy does not start with keywords or link building. It starts with understanding what your customers actually need and how they look for it. And in the first 90 days, you have to be ruthless about where you put your energy.

The Reality Check: SEO Is Not a Shortcut

The first thing to accept is that traditional SEO is a medium-to-long-term play. If you are a pre-seed startup with no domain authority and no existing content, you are not going to rank for competitive terms in a month. That is not a failure of your [startup SEO strategy](#). It is physics. Google needs signals: content, links, user engagement, and time. You cannot compress that into a quarter.

But that does not mean you should ignore search entirely. It means you need to be smart about where you compete. Instead of trying to rank for "best project management software" on day one, you target long-tail queries that signal high intent but low competition. Phrases like "how to track remote team hours on a budget" or "simple task management for freelancers" are easier to win and more likely to convert because the person searching is looking for a specific solution, not just browsing.

Prioritizing SEO, AEO, or GEO in the First 90 Days

You have probably heard of AEO (Answer Engine Optimization) and GEO (Generative Engine Optimization) by now. These are ways to optimize your content so that AI assistants like ChatGPT, Perplexity, or Google's SGE surface your information when someone asks a question. They matter, especially for startups that want to be discovered through conversational queries. But they are not a replacement for a solid startup SEO strategy. They are an extension of it.

In the first 90 days, I recommend a split that looks something like this: 60 percent of your search optimization effort goes into traditional SEO groundwork (site structure, technical health, and targeted content), 25 percent goes into AEO (answering specific questions your audience asks), and 15 percent goes into GEO (optimizing for how generative models consume information). This split reflects the reality that SEO is still the most reliable channel for driving consistent, measurable traffic, while AEO and GEO are emerging channels that you should start building now so they pay off later.

Start With Technical Basics That Actually Matter

Before you write a single blog post, make sure your site can be crawled and indexed. This sounds obvious, but I have audited dozens of startup sites that had no sitemap, broken internal links, or pages that returned 404 errors for weeks. If Googlebot cannot reach your content, it does not matter how good that content is.

Here are the technical fundamentals that deserve your attention in the first month:

- Ensure your site loads in under three seconds on mobile. Use tools like PageSpeed Insights to find what is slowing it down.
- Submit a clean XML sitemap to Google Search Console and make sure all important pages are included.
- Fix any duplicate content issues, especially if you have multiple URLs serving the same page.
- Set up proper canonical tags and redirects so you do not lose link equity.
- Make sure your site is HTTPS and that all pages render correctly without broken assets.

None of this is glamorous. But it is the foundation that every other optimization sits on. If you skip it, you are building your startup SEO strategy on sand.

Content That Serves a Real Purpose

Once the technical side is stable, you need content. But not just any content. You need content that answers the questions your ideal customers are typing into search bars and voice assistants. This is where AEO thinking becomes useful. Instead of writing a generic blog post about "why your business needs automation," write a post that answers "how to automate invoice reminders for a small service business." The second one is specific, answerable, and likely to appear in a featured snippet or an AI response.

I have seen startups gain traction by publishing just ten to fifteen well-researched, focused pieces in the first quarter. They did not try to cover every topic. They picked the three or four

core questions their audience asked most and answered them thoroughly. That is enough to start building authority and earning backlinks naturally.

For GEO, the approach is slightly different. Generative models tend to favor content that is structured with clear headings, concise paragraphs, and direct answers. If you want your information to be cited by an AI assistant, write in a way that makes it easy for the model to extract a single, authoritative answer. Use bullet points or numbered steps when appropriate. But don't overdo it. The content should still read like it was written by a human, not a robot optimizing for robots.

When to Focus on Links

Links are still a strong ranking signal, but the way you acquire them matters more than the quantity. In the first 90 days, you should aim for a small number of high-quality, relevant links rather than a spray-and-pray approach. Reach out to other startup founders who write about complementary topics. Offer to contribute a guest post that is genuinely helpful, not just a thinly veiled ad for your product. If you have a unique data point or an interesting case study, share it with journalists who cover your space.

One tactic that worked well for a startup I advised was to create a free, simple tool that solved a common pain point in their industry. They built a calculator that helped freelancers estimate their taxes. It got picked up by a few small blogs, and within a month they had five natural backlinks from sites with real audiences. That is more valuable than fifty links from low-quality directories.

Measuring What Matters

In the early days, do not obsess over rankings for broad keywords you cannot win yet. Instead, track metrics that show progress: impressions for long-tail queries, click-through rates, time on page, and conversions from organic traffic. If you see that people are finding your content and staying to read it, you are on the right track. If you see bounce rates above 80 percent on your blog posts, revisit the content. Either the title promised something the post did not deliver, or the content was not what the searcher needed.

I also recommend setting up a simple feedback loop with your sales or customer success team. Ask them what questions prospects ask during calls. Those questions are pure gold for your startup SEO strategy. They tell you exactly what to write about next.

The Bottom Line for the First 90 Days

You do not need a massive budget or a dedicated SEO team to make progress. You need clarity on what your customers need, a technically sound site, and a focused content plan that

balances SEO, AEO, and GEO. The startups that succeed in search are not the ones with the most resources. They are the ones that start early, stay consistent, and refuse to chase every shiny tactic that comes along.

If you are sitting there wondering whether you should spend your last few hundred dollars on SEO tools or on building a better product, build the product. But do not ignore search entirely. Start small. Publish one genuinely helpful piece of content this week. Fix one technical issue. Write down the three questions your customers ask most often. That is the beginning of a real startup SEO strategy, one that will grow with your company.