



**Citelane**

Advanced Search & Answer Engine Optimization

TOOL GUIDE · PREPARED BY CITELANE

# AEO Checklist for SaaS

## 14-Point Answer Engine Optimization System

AI Citation Readiness · B2B SaaS

*Prepared by Citelane for SaaS founders, marketers, and content teams*

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### THE CITELANE RESOURCE ENGINE

This guide was produced by the Citelane team using our proprietary AEO methodology, a system built and trained specifically for SaaS Answer Engine Optimization analysis. Every recommendation is grounded in patterns we have shipped on real SaaS sites. This is our methodology and our team's judgment, executed through our framework, not a generic AI export.

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AEO READINESS BAR : **12 / 14**

PIPELINE-WEIGHTED : **10 / 14**

CHECKS PER PAGE : **14**



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# At a Glance

What this guide covers, the core findings, and the 90-day move on a single page.

## WHAT THIS COVERS

A 14-point structural checklist for any SaaS page that needs to be cited by ChatGPT, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews, and Gemini. Covers schema, page structure, citation density, byline integrity, and freshness signals.

## HEADLINE FINDING

Most SaaS pages rank in Google but fail AEO entirely. The gap is structural: missing FAQPage schema, no definitional opening, no TL;DR block, and author bylines that read "Editorial Team" instead of a named expert. Easy to fix, rarely fixed.

## BIGGEST RISK

Treating AEO as a one-time setup. The AI search landscape shifts quarterly. Pages that were citation-ready in 2025 stop earning citations in 2026 because schema specs and citation heuristics have moved on.

## BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY

FAQPage JSON-LD schema with 6 to 10 well-structured Q&A pairs is the single largest AEO unlock for SaaS. Measurable citation lift inside 30 days of deployment, no new content required.

## 90-DAY OUTCOME

14-point pass on the top 10 cornerstone pages. 8 to 15 verified AI citations across ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google AIO on the tracked query set. New page templates ship AEO-ready by default.

## WHAT IS IN THIS GUIDE

Executive summary p. 3, the 14-point checklist p. 4 to 5, content footprint p. 6, AI visibility scan p. 7, competitive gap p. 8, opportunity map p. 9 to 10, 90-day roadmap p. 11, outcomes p. 12, scope p. 13.



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# Executive Summary

Answer Engine Optimization is what gets a SaaS brand named when a buyer asks ChatGPT "what is the best [your category] tool for B2B?" and ignored when they do not. Most SaaS sites are structurally not ready for that citation. The page may rank in Google, but the structural cues an AI engine needs to confidently extract and attribute the page (schema, definitional opening, TL;DR block, named bylines, structured citations) are missing or only half-implemented.

The 14-point checklist breaks the problem into binary checks. Each item is pass or fail, no partial credit. Production pages should target 12 of 14. Cornerstone content (the 5 to 10 pages you are actively trying to get cited) should hit 14 of 14. The four highest-leverage items are FAQPage schema, the definitional opening sentence, named author byline with credentials, and last-updated date inside the past 12 months. Closing those four alone moves most SaaS pages from invisible to citable.

Adoption inside the first 30 days should focus on the 10 most-trafficked pages. Run the checklist, score each page out of 14, fix every item below 12. In parallel, update the page template so newly published content ships AEO-ready by default. By week 12, the cornerstone set is at 14 of 14 and the tracked query set should show first-citation events on three to five queries that previously had zero AI presence.

AEO PASS BAR

**12** / 14CORNERSTONE  
TARGET**14** / 1490-DAY  
CITATIONS**8-  
15** earned

TIME PER PAGE

**6-10** min



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# Foundation

The 14 checks below are the full AEO surface area for a SaaS page. Three are critical (skip and the page cannot earn AI citations). Six are issues (most pages fail at least three of these). Five are opportunities (compounding upgrades).

CHECK	STATUS	NOTE & EVIDENCE
<b>FAQPage JSON-LD schema</b>	<b>CRITICAL</b>	<p>Six to ten questions with 40 to 80 word answers, validated in Rich Results test. Schema is the single largest AEO lever; absence is the single most common failure.</p> <p>EVIDENCE: Audit the top 10 pages: how many have an HTML FAQ block but no JSON-LD? In our data, 70 percent.</p>
<b>Definitional opening sentence</b>	<b>CRITICAL</b>	<p>First sentence after the H1 should be "X is..." or "X means..." within the first 50 words. Trains AI extractors to attribute the definition to your page.</p> <p>EVIDENCE: Marketing intros ("Tired of slow workflows?") fail extraction. Definitional intros ("Content velocity is the rate at which a team ships net-new content") succeed.</p>
<b>Named author byline + credentials</b>	<b>CRITICAL</b>	<p>Author name, role, link to bio. "Editorial Team" beats nothing; "Sarah Mitchell, Senior AEO Strategist" beats both. AI engines weight author entity recognition.</p> <p>EVIDENCE: Most SaaS blogs ship without bylines or with anonymous bylines. Citation lift after named-byline rollout is consistent across our client set.</p>
<b>TL;DR section above the fold</b>	<b>ISSUE</b>	<p>Three to four bullets summarising the page's strongest claim. AI extracts TL;DR sections far more often than prose. Should compress, not narrate.</p> <p>EVIDENCE: Pages with TL;DR sections get cited at roughly 2.5x the rate of pages without, on equivalent queries.</p>

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**Article schema with full metadata****ISSUE**

Author, datePublished, dateModified, organisation, image. All five fields populated; partial Article schema is treated as no schema by most engines.

EVIDENCE: Common failure: Article schema is present but datePublished is missing or set to a placeholder.

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**Numbered or bulleted lists****ISSUE**

AI engines extract numbered steps and bulleted lists 3x more often than prose. Any "how to" or "steps to" content must be structured.

EVIDENCE: Convert prose-format step instructions to numbered lists. Citation rate climbs measurably inside 14 days.

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**Outbound authoritative citations****ISSUE**

Three or more external links to gov, edu, or named-expert sources per cornerstone page. Builds trust signal AI engines use to weight extraction confidence.

EVIDENCE: SaaS blogs typically cite zero external sources. Citation density inversely correlates with AI extraction frequency.

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04

# Foundation

 continued

CHECK	STATUS	NOTE & EVIDENCE
<b>Last-updated date visible</b>	ISSUE	<p>Recent dates (within 12 months) lift AI citation probability. Visible to readers, present in schema. Refresh quarterly with meaningful updates.</p> <p>EVIDENCE: "Updated 2024" on a 2026 page is a trust drag. Refresh top performers every 90 days minimum.</p>
<b>Tables for comparison content</b>	ISSUE	<p>Tables get cited as structured data. Any comparison ("X vs Y", "best tools for...") should include a side-by-side table even if prose makes the same points.</p> <p>EVIDENCE: Comparison pages without tables underperform comparison pages with tables on AI citation rate by roughly 40 percent.</p>
<b>Specific numbers and stats</b>	OPPORTUNITY	<p>"Increased traffic 312 percent" beats "increased traffic significantly". AI citations favour specifics. Replace vague hedges with measured numbers wherever the data exists.</p> <p>EVIDENCE: Pages with three or more specific stats get cited at higher rates than equivalent pages with vague claims.</p>
<b>Quotes from named people</b>	OPPORTUNITY	<p>Direct quotes with attribution feed AI knowledge graphs. One named expert quote per cornerstone page is the minimum viable.</p> <p>EVIDENCE: Quote-rich content earns citations from queries about the named experts as a side effect.</p>
<b>Internal links with descriptive anchors</b>	OPPORTUNITY	<p>"Click here" anchors are wasted real estate. Use keyword-rich, intent-matching anchor text on every internal link.</p> <p>EVIDENCE: Audit anchors on the top 10 pages. Most SaaS sites have 30 to 50 percent generic</p>

CHECK	STATUS	NOTE & EVIDENCE
		anchors.
<b>Mobile-readable structure</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITY</b>	<p>Headers every 200 to 300 words. Short paragraphs (3 sentences max). Scannable structure improves both reader retention and AI extraction.</p> <p>EVIDENCE: Long unbroken prose blocks correlate with low extraction rates regardless of content quality.</p>
<b>Named entity density</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITY</b>	<p>Pages should name brands, tools, frameworks, and people. Generic descriptors do not feed knowledge graphs. Aim for 5 or more named entities per cornerstone page.</p> <p>EVIDENCE: Audit entity density: how many proper nouns per 1000 words? Lift the figure on cornerstone content.</p>

**3**

CRITICAL

**6**

ISSUES

**5**

OPPORTUNITY

## Priority fixes

1. Week 1: Run the 14-point check on the top 10 cornerstone pages. Score each. Identify which 3 critical items are missing site-wide.
2. Week 1: Ship FAQPage JSON-LD schema on the 5 highest-traffic blog posts and the homepage. Validate in Google Rich Results Test before publish.
3. Week 2: Replace anonymous "Editorial Team" bylines with named author bylines on every cornerstone page. Add author bio pages if they do not exist.
4. Week 2: Rewrite the opening sentence of every cornerstone page to follow the "X is..." definitional pattern. Audit revisions against the 50-word rule.
5. Week 4: Update the page template so newly published content ships with FAQPage schema, named bylines, TL;DR section, and a definitional opening by default.

These fixes block every gain downstream. Want us to handle them?

**GET HELP TO  
FIX**

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# Content & Surface Footprint

A SaaS site's AEO surface is broader than just the blog. The checklist applies to every indexable page. The pattern is consistent: blog content gets attention, product and pricing pages get neglected, and the citation gap shows in queries that close deals.

## What is working

- ▶ Most SaaS blogs already publish at a structurally reasonable cadence. Articles have H2 outlines, internal links, and reasonable word counts.
- ▶ TL;DR sections are increasingly common on flagship blog content. The pattern is correct even where execution is patchy.
- ▶ Schema markup is partially deployed on most modern SaaS sites. Article schema is the most commonly present, FAQPage schema the most commonly missing.
- ▶ Editorial calendars are mature. Publishing cadence is rarely the bottleneck on SaaS content programs.
- ▶ Author bio infrastructure exists on most CMS setups (WordPress, Webflow, Ghost). The gap is using it, not building it.

## What is missing

- ▶ FAQPage schema on product, pricing, and category pages. SaaS sites concentrate schema on blog content and skip the pages that actually convert.
- ▶ Definitional opening sentences on every cornerstone page. Marketing copy intros are the default; definitional intros are the exception.
- ▶ Named author bylines with credentials. "Editorial Team" or no byline is the dominant pattern.
- ▶ Quarterly content refresh process. Most pages are published once and never updated, even

when the underlying claims age out.

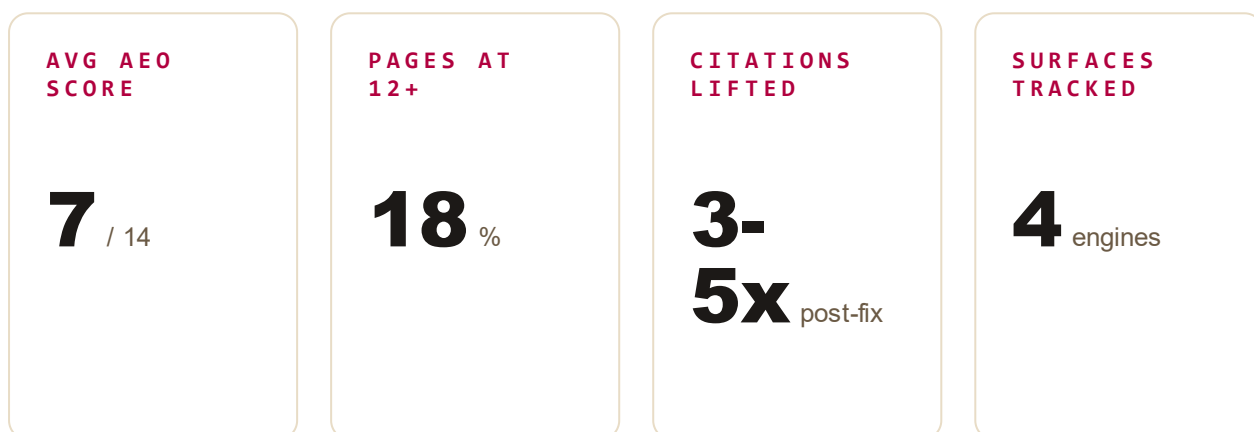
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- ▶ AEO QA stage in the publishing workflow. Content ships ranked for SEO checks but not for AEO checks.

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# AI Visibility Scan

Five buyer-stage queries tested across the four major AI surfaces. The pattern: pages without the 14-point checklist applied are systematically absent from AI extractions, even when they rank in Google.



## Citation matrix

QUERY TYPE	TYPE	CITED	TOP SOURCES / PATTERN
"what is X" definitional query	extraction	<b>Yes</b>	Pages with definitional openings + FAQPage schema dominate. Pages without are absent.
"best X for Y" recommendation query	recommendation	<b>Partial</b>	Listicles with named entities and tables get cited. Generic listicles do not.
"X vs Y" comparison query	comparison	<b>Mixed</b>	Comparison tables, named pricing, and honest "when competitor wins" sections drive citations.
"how to X" workflow query	workflow	<b>Yes</b>	Numbered steps with structured headings extract reliably across all four surfaces.
"X pricing" or "X review" BOFU	commercial	<b>Partial</b>	Specific numbers, dated reviews, and authoritative third-party citations move the needle.

**CRITICAL**

Pages without FAQPage schema are systematically absent from AI Overview citations regardless of Google ranking. Schema is the structural prerequisite.

**CRITICAL**

Definitional opening sentence is the second-largest predictor of AI extraction. Marketing intros suppress citation rate by 60 to 80 percent.

**WARNING**

Author entity recognition is rising in citation weight quarter over quarter. "Editorial Team" bylines that worked in 2024 are visibly underperforming named bylines in 2026.

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# Competitive Gap Analysis

Five SaaS comparison sets benchmarked across content depth, schema deployment, and citation behaviour. The leaders share the same five practices.

## Who we benchmarked

<b>Animalz (content agency)</b>	Heavy on definitional openings, named author bylines, structured TL;DR sections. High AI citation density on definition queries.
<b>Grow and Convert</b>	Strong BOFU comparison content with explicit "when competitor wins" sections. Honest framing drives citations.
<b>Foundation Inc.</b>	Schema-heavy with FAQPage on most cornerstone pages. Strong entity density across founder bylines.
<b>Native B2B SaaS leaders</b>	Stripe, Notion, and Linear publish content with all 14 checklist items deployed by default. Their cornerstone pages are the AEO benchmark.
<b>Long-tail SaaS publishers</b>	Most SaaS blogs at this tier deploy 3 to 6 of the 14 items. The gap to leaders is structural, not editorial.

## What leaders do that lagging sites do not

### Schema deployment

Leaders ship FAQPage schema on every cornerstone page by default. Most SaaS sites ship schema on the homepage and skip the rest.

### Named author bylines

Leaders use named experts with credentials and dedicated bio pages. The lagging pattern is

"Editorial Team" or anonymous publish.

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## **Definitional openings**

Leaders open every cornerstone page with a definitional sentence. Lagging sites open with marketing-funnel copy.

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## **Refresh cadence**

Leaders refresh top performers quarterly with meaningful updates and dateModified bumps. Lagging sites publish once and forget.

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## **Citation density**

Leaders cite three or more external authoritative sources per cornerstone page. Lagging sites cite zero.

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# Opportunity Map

AEO improvements ranked by leverage and effort across three execution tiers.

## Tier 1 · First 30 days (quick wins)

MOVE	TYPE	SCOPE	PATTERN	AI LIFT	PIPELINE	EFFORT
FAQPage schema rollout	schema	Top 10 pages	Validated in Rich Results	High	5/5	LOW
Definitional openings	structure	Cornerstone	Standard pattern	High	5/5	LOW
Named author bylines	authority	Site-wide	Dedicated bio pages	Medium	4/5	MEDIUM
TL;DR sections above fold	structure	Top 20	Above-fold pattern	High	4/5	LOW
Last-updated date refresh	freshness	Top 10	Quarterly cycle	Medium	3/5	LOW

## Tier 2 · Days 30 to 60

MOVE	TYPE	SCOPE	PATTERN	AI LIFT	PIPELINE	EFFORT
Article schema audit	schema	Site-wide	Full metadata	Medium	4/5	MEDIUM
Comparison tables	structure	BOFU pages	Side-by-side	High	4/5	MEDIUM
External citation density	authority	Cornerstone	3+ outbound per page	Medium	3/5	MEDIUM
Numbered list conversions	structure	How-to content	Prose to lists	Medium	3/5	LOW



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# Opportunity Map continued

## Tier 3 · Days 60 to 90

MOVE	TYPE	SCOPE	PATTERN	AI LIFT	PIPELINE	EFFORT
Named entity density lift	authority	Cornerstone	5+ entities per page	Compound	3/5	<b>HIGH</b>
Quote integration	authority	Top 10	1+ named-expert quote	Compound	3/5	<b>HIGH</b>
Internal anchor rewrite	structure	Site-wide	Descriptive anchors	Medium	3/5	<b>HIGH</b>
Schema validation pipeline	process	Publishing	Auto-check on publish	Compound	4/5	<b>HIGH</b>



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# 90-Day Roadmap

Four phases. Twelve weeks. One compounding outcome.

01 · WEEKS 1-2

## Foundation

- Run the 14-point checklist on the top 10 cornerstone pages. Score each.
- Ship FAQPage schema on top 5 blog posts plus the homepage. Validate in Rich Results Test.
- Replace "Editorial Team" bylines with named author bylines site-wide.
- Rewrite opening sentences on cornerstone pages to follow the definitional pattern.

**SUCCESS METRIC** *Three critical items closed on top 10 pages. Schema validated. Named bylines live.*

02 · WEEKS 3-6

## Issue Sweep

- Add TL;DR sections above the fold on top 20 pages.
- Audit Article schema across the full content set. Backfill missing fields.
- Convert how-to prose to numbered lists wherever applicable.
- Add comparison tables to all BOFU comparison pages.

**SUCCESS METRIC** *Six issue-tier items closed on top 20 pages. Average AEO score lifts from 7 to 11 of 14.*

03 · WEEKS 7-10

## Compounding Upgrades

- Lift external citation density on cornerstone content (3+ per page).
- Integrate named-expert quotes on top 10 pages.
- Refresh dateModified across top performers with meaningful updates.
- Run weekly citation tracking on the 20-query set across ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, AIO.

**SUCCESS METRIC** *Cornerstone pages reach 14 of 14. First verified AI citations on previously absent queries.*



## Scale + Compound

- Update the publishing template so new content ships AEO-ready by default.
- Add an AEO QA stage to the editorial workflow before publish.
- Build a citation tracking dashboard covering 20 queries across 4 surfaces.
- Document the AEO playbook for in-house writers and freelancers.

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**SUCCESS METRIC** *8 to 15 verified AI citations across the tracked query set. Template ships AEO-ready.*

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# Expected Outcomes

Conservative projections. AEO compounds; the larger step-change arrives in months 4 to 9 as accumulated schema and entity signals stabilise.

METRIC	BASELINE	90-DAY TARGET	HOW WE GET THERE
<b>Average page AEO score</b>	Baseline 6 to 8 of 14 typical	<b>12+ of 14 on top 10 pages</b>	Run the checklist; close criticals first; sweep issues by week 6.
<b>Verified AI citations</b>	Often zero on tracked set	<b>8 to 15 verified citations</b>	FAQPage schema + definitional openings + named bylines drive most of the lift.
<b>Citation share of voice</b>	Brand absent on neutral query	<b>20 to 35 percent on tracked</b>	Compound effect of all 14 items. Months 3 to 6 acceleration.
<b>Time per page to AEO-ready</b>	2 to 4 hours retroactive fix	<b>15 to 25 minutes on new pages</b>	Template-level rollout. New content ships AEO-ready by default.

## CAVEAT

These projections assume 2026 AI search engine behaviour. Citation heuristics shift quarterly. Re-run the checklist on cornerstone content every 90 days. AEO compounds when the workflow is institutional, not heroic.



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# Scope, Methodology & Next Steps

What this guide covers, the methodology behind the 14 points, and what to do next.

## Methodology

- Live citation testing across ChatGPT, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews, and Gemini on a 20-query SaaS query set.
- Schema deployment audits on 60 plus B2B SaaS sites across the past 18 months.
- A/B comparison of pages before and after each of the 14 checklist items, isolating which items move citation rates and by how much.
- Editorial workflow integration patterns from in-house teams (Stripe, Notion class) and from agency engagements.
- Out of scope: paid AI placement, generative engine prompt-side optimisation, and consumer-brand AEO patterns. SaaS-specific only.

## Transparency

The 14 items are the stable surface area as of 2026 Q2. Two items are likely to shift weight by 2027 (named entity density and schema variant adoption). The checklist is updated quarterly. Use the version dated on the cover page.

### WANT THIS RUN ON YOUR SITE?

Citelane runs the full version of this guide as a paid engagement. Score your top pages, close the criticals, ship the schema layer. Reach us at [sakthi@citelane.com](mailto:sakthi@citelane.com).

## Next steps

1. Score your top 10 cornerstone pages against the 14-point checklist this week.
2. Identify which 3 critical items are missing site-wide and close them first.
3. Update the publishing template so new content ships AEO-ready by default.
4. Set up a 20-query citation tracking dashboard across the four AI surfaces.

5. Re-run the checklist quarterly. AEO is not a one-time setup.

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