

The First 90 Days: Why AI Overviews Optimization Belongs in Your Startup's SEO Plan

When I started my last company, the first three months felt like running a marathon on no sleep. Every decision mattered. Should we chase backlinks? Build a TikTok presence? Write blog posts that answered every long-tail question under the sun? The options were endless, but the budget was not. That pressure to pick the right channels early is exactly why the current shift toward generative search feels so unsettling for founders.

In the old days, you could lean on a handful of high-ranking pages and a solid link profile to keep the leads coming. Google's search results were predictable. You optimized for a ten-link blue-link page, and if you did it well, you got traffic. Now the landscape has changed. Search engines show summaries, answer boxes, and AI-written overviews before they show any organic listing. The result is that a startup's content strategy must evolve faster than many founders expect.

I have spent the past year working with early-stage teams to figure out what actually works when your target customer asks a question and gets an instant AI-generated answer instead of clicking through to your site. The short answer is that you cannot ignore classic search engine optimization, but you also cannot rely on it alone. You need a balanced approach that includes something I call [AI Overviews optimization](#).

What AI Overviews Optimization Actually Means

AI Overviews optimization is the practice of structuring your content so that generative AI systems can confidently extract, summarize, and surface your information in response to user queries. Think of it as the intersection between traditional SEO and machine-readable clarity. When a large language model powers a search result, it does not rank pages the same way a conventional algorithm does. Instead, it looks for clear, authoritative, and well-structured answers that it can repackage into a paragraph or bulleted list.

For a startup with limited resources, this changes where you invest your writing time. You still need technical SEO basics like fast load times, clean URL structures, and proper meta tags. But you also need to present your expertise in a format that an AI can parse quickly. That means writing concise definitions, using structured data where it fits, and answering the core question on the page so directly that a machine can lift the answer without ambiguity.

I remember a session with a SaaS founder who was frustrated that his detailed guide on project management tools never appeared in Google's AI overviews. We looked at the page together. It started with a long story about his own productivity struggles, then meandered

through three tangential topics before finally addressing the question in paragraph twelve. The content was good, but the AI could not find the answer fast enough. When we rewrote the opening to state the answer in the first two sentences, the page started showing up in overviews within weeks.

How to Prioritize in the First 90 Days

The biggest mistake I see founders make is trying to do everything at once. They attempt to rank for dozens of keywords, build a social media presence, launch a podcast, and optimize for AI overviews all in the same month. That approach leads to burnout and mediocre results across the board. Instead, I recommend a three-phase plan.

Phase One: Foundation (Days 1-30)

Start with the technical basics. Make sure your site loads quickly, works on mobile, and has a clear information hierarchy. Without these, no amount of content tweaking will matter. Then identify three to five core questions that your ideal customer asks early in their buying journey. These should be questions that have a single, factual answer. For example, if you sell accounting software for freelancers, a core question might be "What is the best way to track deductible expenses?"

Write one focused page for each question. Keep the page tight. Answer the question in the first paragraph, then provide supporting details. Use a simple Q&A structure or a definition-style format. This is the low-hanging fruit for AI Overviews optimization because generative models love clear, direct answers.

Phase Two: Expand and Connect (Days 31-60)

Once the foundation pages are live and indexed, expand into clusters of related topics. If your core page covers deductible expenses, write supporting pages about receipt scanning apps, mileage tracking, and home office deductions. Link these pages to the core page and to each other. This builds topical authority, which both traditional search engines and AI models recognize.

During this phase, also add structured data like FAQ schema and HowTo schema where appropriate. Schema helps AI systems understand the relationship between your content and the question being asked. It is one of the most underused tactics in early-stage content marketing.

Phase Three: Monitor and Iterate (Days 61-90)

By the third month, you should have enough content to observe patterns. Use free tools or your own manual searches to see which of your pages appear in AI overviews. If a page shows up,

study what it did right. If it does not, consider whether the answer is too vague, too buried, or too similar to what competitors wrote.

At this stage, I also recommend reviewing your search console data for queries that trigger impressions but no clicks. Those queries are prime candidates for AI Overviews optimization. The user saw your page in the results but did not click because the AI summary already gave them the answer. If you can refine your content to earn a spot in that summary, you turn a zero-click query into brand visibility.

Practical Tactics That Work

Over the past year, I have tested several tactics with client sites. Some worked well. Others fell flat. Here are three that consistently improved visibility in AI-generated results.

- **Lead with the answer.** Do not bury your main point. If the page is about pricing for a project management tool, the first sentence should state the starting price or pricing model. The context and comparison can come after.
- **Use plain language.** AI models are trained on broad internet text. They handle jargon poorly. Write at a level that a general business reader can understand. Save the technical deep dives for separate white papers.
- **Include a brief summary section.** Near the top of the page, add two or three bullet points or a short paragraph that recaps the key takeaways. This gives the AI a clean block of text to extract.

One more thing: do not try to trick the system. Some people stuff their pages with hidden definitions or repeat the same phrase dozens of times. That might have worked in the early days of keyword optimization, but modern AI models are better at detecting spammy patterns. Focus on clarity and usefulness.

The Trade-Offs You Need to Accept

No strategy is perfect. AI Overviews optimization can reduce your click-through rate in the short term because users get answers without visiting your site. That trade-off is real. If your goal is immediate traffic, you might feel frustrated when a well-optimized page shows up in an overview but gets few clicks.

However, for a startup in its first 90 days, brand exposure and authority matter more than raw clicks. When a potential customer sees your company name in an AI-generated answer, they register your expertise. Later, when they are ready to buy, they are more likely to search specifically for your brand or to click through from a less competitive query. I have seen this pattern play out repeatedly with early-stage B2B companies.

The alternative is to ignore generative search entirely and hope that traditional SEO carries the day. That approach works for some industries, but the trend is clear. More and more queries are answered without a click. If you do not prepare for that reality, you risk becoming invisible to the very audience you are trying to reach.

Measuring What Matters

During the first three months, track two metrics above all others. The first is visibility: how often does your content appear in AI overviews for your target queries? You can check this manually or use a rank tracker that monitors generative results. The second is engagement: when users do click through, do they stay on the page and take the action you want? A high bounce rate suggests your content does not match the promise of the snippet.

Do not obsess over keyword rankings for terms that now trigger overviews. Those rankings are less meaningful when the answer is shown above the fold. Instead, focus on whether your content answers the question better than any other source. If it does, the clicks will follow, even if they come from a different entry point.

I was once skeptical about spending time on something as new as AI Overviews optimization. It felt like chasing a moving target. But after seeing how much it helped a struggling e-commerce brand gain visibility in a crowded niche, I changed my mind. The brand had no budget for ads and no existing domain authority. Within two months of rewriting their product guides to include clear, upfront answers, they started appearing in Google's overviews for several high-intent queries. That visibility led to partnership inquiries and organic traffic growth.

Final Thoughts

The first 90 days of a startup are about survival and signal. You need to show the market that you understand the problem and can solve it. AI Overviews optimization is one of the fastest ways to send that signal, because it forces you to articulate your value proposition with clarity and brevity. If you can explain your solution in a sentence or two, an AI can summarize it. And if an AI can summarize it, potential customers can find it.

Do not let the hype around generative search distract you from the fundamentals. Keep your site fast, your content honest, and your answers direct. That combination is hard to beat, no matter how search engines evolve.