



Scott Tischler

FOUNDER & CHAIRMAN · AIRECOMMEND.AI

TRENDS

The Future of Search, 2026–2030: Predictions for Business Owners

By Scott Tischler · July 28, 2026 · 8 min read

For twenty years I built marketing technology at American Express, MetLife, and UBS, and now I run Alrecommend.ai, where I watch the mechanics of AI search every single day. So let me be direct about the question every business owner is quietly asking: is the way people find my business about to change? Yes. It already has. The traditional results page is not disappearing overnight, but it is being demoted from the destination to a footnote.

What follows are my informed predictions, not prophecies. I frame them as the views of an operator who has lived through three platform shifts already - the move to search, the move to social, and the move to mobile. This is the fourth. The pattern rhymes, and the businesses that read the pattern early win.

The core prediction: the assistant becomes the front door

By 2030, an AI assistant will be the default first stop for most commercial questions, not a list of links. People will not "search" in the way we mean today. They will ask, and something will answer - ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, Perplexity, Alexa, Siri, or whatever the operating system ships by default. The answer will be synthesized, singular, and confident.

This is the single most important shift, because it collapses the customer journey. Today a buyer sees ten results, clicks three, compares, and decides. Tomorrow the assistant does the comparing and hands back a recommendation. The moment of discovery and the moment of decision merge into one sentence.

The practical consequence: **if you are not part of the answer, you do not exist in the consideration set.** There is no page two of an AI answer. There is the answer, and there is everything the model left out.

What changes between now and 2030

I expect the transition to move in overlapping waves rather than a clean cutover. Here is roughly how I see it landing.

Period	What dominates	What it means for you
2026–2027	Hybrid search: AI overviews on top, links below	Both channels matter; you optimize for the answer and the click
2027–2028	Assistant-first for research and comparison	Being cited in AI answers becomes a primary KPI
2028–2029	Agentic commerce goes mainstream	Assistants shortlist, book, and buy on the user's behalf
2029–2030	Ambient, multi-modal discovery	Voice, camera, and device-native assistants are default

None of these dates are guarantees. Adoption curves surprise everyone, and regulation, model economics, and consumer trust could speed things up or slow them down. But the direction of travel is not in serious doubt.

Agentic shopping and booking will reshape conversion

The biggest structural change is that **the buyer is no longer always the one browsing**. Increasingly, an agent acts on their behalf. You tell your assistant "book me a reliable HVAC company for Thursday under \$300" and it evaluates options, checks availability, reads reviews, and books.

That flips a lot of assumptions. A beautiful website matters less when the customer never sees it. What matters is whether your business is **machine-readable, well-reviewed, clearly priced, and easy to transact with programmatically**. The winners in agentic commerce will be the businesses that reduce friction for both humans and the agents shopping for them.

Three things become disproportionately valuable in this world:

- **Structured, unambiguous data** about what you sell, where, and for how much.
- **Strong third-party reputation signals**, because agents lean heavily on reviews and citations they did not have to trust blindly.
- **Transactional readiness** - real-time availability, clear policies, and the ability to complete a booking or purchase without a human phone call.

The decline of the traditional SERP - and what replaces it

The ten blue links have been the center of gravity of the internet economy for two decades. That center is moving. I do not think the SERP dies so much as it **shrinks in influence and shifts in purpose**. It becomes a verification layer - the place people go to confirm what the assistant told them - rather than the place they go to discover.

This has a hard commercial edge. Publishers and businesses that depend on search clicks for traffic are already seeing zero-click behavior rise. When the answer is delivered in the interface, the click never happens. I expect **click-through rates on informational queries to keep eroding through 2030**, while high-intent, transactional, and local queries retain more click value for longer.

The metric that replaces rank is what I call **share-of-model**: how often, and how favorably, an AI system surfaces your business when someone asks a question you should own. Rank was about position on a page. Share-of-model is about presence in an answer. It is harder to measure, but it is the number that will matter.

What stays exactly the same

Here is the part the hype cycle gets wrong. The technology changes; the fundamentals do not. Every platform shift I have lived through rewarded the same underlying things.

Trust compounds. Models are trained and grounded on the open web, and they inherit its consensus. A business with a decade of consistent, positive, verifiable reputation is more likely to be recommended than a newcomer with thin signals - not because the AI "likes" it, but because the evidence points that way.

Reputation is the moat. Reviews, citations, mentions in credible publications, and consistent information across the web are what AI systems use to decide who is legitimate. These are the same things that built authority in the search era. The mechanism updated; the substance did not.

Clarity wins. The businesses that describe what they do plainly, price transparently, and answer real customer questions directly have always done better. AI just raises the penalty for vagueness, because a model cannot recommend what it cannot understand.

What business owners should do now

You do not need to predict 2030 perfectly to prepare for it. You need to do the durable things earlier than your competitors. Here is where I would spend energy this year.

Audit how AI describes you today. Ask ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, and Copilot the questions your customers ask. Note whether you appear, whether the facts are right, and who shows up instead. That is your baseline share-of-model.

Make your business machine-readable. Consistent name, address, and offering across every platform. Clear structured content that answers real questions. Schema where it helps. Assume a machine is reading before a human does.

Invest in genuine reputation, not tricks. Earn reviews, earn citations, get mentioned by sources the models already trust. There is no shortcut, and the shortcuts that exist today will be trained out tomorrow.

Answer questions publicly. Publish clear, direct answers to the questions in your category. This is the single most durable AEO move, because it feeds exactly what assistants are built to retrieve and synthesize.

Treat this as a channel, not a campaign. Answer Engine Optimization is not a one-time project. It is an ongoing discipline, the way SEO became one. The businesses that institutionalize it now will have a two-year head start when the shift is obvious to everyone.

The move from search to assistants is the fourth platform shift of my career. The early winners in each of the prior three were not the ones with the best predictions. They were the ones who acted on the durable fundamentals while everyone else waited for certainty. Do the same here.

Key takeaways

- ② By 2030, an AI assistant will be the default first stop for most commercial questions, replacing the traditional list of links as the front door to discovery.
- ② There is no page two of an AI answer - if you are not part of the synthesized response, you are effectively invisible in the consideration set.
- ② Agentic commerce means an agent, not the buyer, increasingly does the shopping, rewarding businesses that are machine-readable, well-reviewed, and transactionally ready.
- ② Rank is being replaced by share-of-model: how often and how favorably AI systems surface your business when customers ask questions you should own.
- ② The technology changes but the fundamentals do not - trust, reputation, and clarity compound through every platform shift, and AI raises the penalty for vagueness.
- ② Business owners should audit how AI describes them today, make themselves machine-readable, invest in genuine reputation, and treat Answer Engine Optimization as an ongoing channel, not a one-time campaign.

Frequently asked questions

Will traditional search engines disappear by 2030?

No, but their role changes. The results page shifts from the primary place people discover businesses to a verification layer where they confirm what an AI assistant already told them. Search does not die; it is demoted from destination to footnote for most commercial questions.

What is share-of-model?

Share-of-model is how often, and how favorably, an AI system surfaces your business when someone asks a question in your category. It is the successor to search rank. Where rank measured position on a page, share-of-model measures presence and prominence inside a synthesized AI answer.

What is agentic commerce?

Agentic commerce is when an AI agent shops, compares, books, or buys on a customer's behalf rather than the person browsing themselves. The buyer states an intent - such as booking a service under a certain price - and the agent evaluates options and completes the transaction. It rewards businesses that are machine-readable and easy to transact with programmatically.

If customers never see my website, does design still matter?

Design matters less for discovery and more for conversion of the humans who still visit. In an agentic world, what matters most is whether your business is machine-readable, well-reviewed, clearly priced, and able to complete a transaction without friction. A beautiful site the agent never renders wins you nothing.

How do I know how AI currently describes my business?

Ask the major assistants - ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, and Copilot - the same questions your customers ask, and note whether you appear, whether the facts are accurate, and who shows up instead. That exercise gives you a baseline share-of-model and reveals where your reputation signals are thin.

Is Answer Engine Optimization just SEO with a new name?

They share fundamentals - trust, reputation, clarity, and consistent data - but the target is different. SEO optimizes for ranking on a results page; AEO optimizes for being cited and recommended inside AI-generated answers. The durable inputs overlap, but the metrics and tactics diverge as answers replace links.

What is the single most durable move I can make now?

Answer your customers' real questions publicly, in plain language. Assistants are built to retrieve and synthesize clear, direct answers, so publishing them feeds exactly what the models look for. It is durable because it builds genuine authority rather than exploiting a loophole that will be trained out.

Should I stop investing in traditional SEO?

No. Through roughly 2027 we are in a hybrid period where AI overviews sit above links that still drive meaningful traffic, especially for high-intent, local, and transactional queries. The smart move is to keep the SEO that works while building AEO capability in parallel, so you are ready as answers overtake links.

About the author. Scott Tischler is the Founder & Chairman of Alrecommend.ai and a practitioner-authority on AI search and Answer Engine Optimization. With 20+ years in marketing technology — including American Express, MetLife, and UBS — and executive study at Wharton, Harvard, Yale, and Oxford, he helps businesses become the ones AI recommends.