

What South African marketers should do about zero-click search

South African businesses are being seen more in Google and clicked less. The typical business went from **4.8** to **3.0** clicks per 100 appearances in a year, AI Overviews show on **70%** of non-branded page-one searches, and even branded searches, which bring in 75% of the typical business's clicks, lost **16%** of their clicks per appearance.

Paid media

What it means: organic clicks are falling on the searches you also pay for, and Search Console can't show where they went.

- **Re-test bidding on your own name.** You may now be paying for branded visits you used to get free. Switch brand ads off in some regions for a few weeks (a holdout test) and measure what you lose.
- **Cover comparison searches.** "Best", "vs" and review searches lost the most organic clicks per appearance, 34%. Your ads can show above or below the AI Overview on them.
- **Get ready for ads inside AI Overviews.** Google already runs them in 12 countries, including Kenya and Nigeria, but not South Africa yet (October 2026). They'll come from your existing Search, Shopping and Performance Max campaigns, and you can't opt out.
- **Redo the budget maths.** Model organic with fewer clicks per appearance and track blended cost per acquisition, so a fall in free clicks doesn't become a paid budget increase nobody planned.

Organic as a system

What it means: you can be quoted by Google's AI, named by ChatGPT or found on TikTok without anyone visiting your website, so organic has to be planned and measured as one system.

- **Put it in one plan with one owner.** Plan SEO, AEO, GEO and social search together, because the same content and authority work feeds all of them.
- **Report visibility next to traffic.** Put appearances, clicks, AI Overview citations and AI engine mentions side by side, because traffic on its own hides a rise in visibility.

AEO and GEO

What it means: AEO gets you quoted in Google's AI Overviews, and GEO gets you recommended when someone asks ChatGPT, Gemini or Perplexity.

- **Find out where you stand.** Check which of your 50 most valuable searches show an AI Overview and whether you're quoted. Then ask the AI engines your customers' questions and note who gets named.
- **Write so a machine can quote you.** Answer the question in the first 2 lines, keep prices, specs and locations in text rather than images, add structured data, and keep your facts the same on every site that lists you.
- **Earn mentions on other websites.** AI engines recommend the businesses the web talks about, so get into the reviews, press, comparison articles and directories they cite for your category.

Traditional SEO

What it means: traditional search delivered 67.3 million clicks to the websites in this study over 16 months, and Google's AI Overviews are built from the same index, so it's still the foundation.

- **Fix the technical basics first.** A page Google can't crawl or index can't rank or be quoted. Some security settings now block AI crawlers by default, so check yours.
- **Put effort into pages that earn the click.** People still click for prices and stock, products, tools and calculators, local detail and original data.
- **Compare like with like.** Use the same weeks a year apart, read mobile on its own, and allow for the 3 breaks in Search Console's data since July 2025, described in section 05 of the report.

Where to start this quarter

- 1 **Reporting:** put appearances next to clicks in the monthly report, split into branded and non-branded.
- 2 **SEO:** run the AI Overview and AI engine check on your 50 most valuable searches.
- 3 **Paid media:** run the brand holdout test and review comparison search coverage.
- 4 **CMO:** put SEO, AEO, GEO and social search into one plan with one owner.
- 5 **Content:** rebrief toward pages that earn the click and answers a machine can quote.