FREE GUIDE · SEO IN THE AI ERA

SEO Doesn't Work Anymore... Unless You Do These 5 Things

A practical checklist to get found on Google *and* in AI answers (ChatGPT, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews), with code you can copy.

5	₹0	1 day
Fixes, in priority order	All free tools	To finish the basics

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Why "old SEO" stopped working

Search has changed. People now ask ChatGPT, Perplexity and Google's AI Overviews, and get an answer before they click any link. Ranking with keywords alone isn't enough. Google *and* AI tools need to clearly understand who you are, trust you, and be able to read your site.

Old SEO	SEO now (Google + AI)
Stuff keywords into pages	Answer real questions clearly and directly
Many random blog posts	Organised topic clusters that show expertise
Hope Google figures you out	Tell it exactly who you are with schema
Buy cheap links	Earn links from trusted websites
Never look at robots.txt	Make sure search and AI crawlers can reach you

What's inside

1. **Schema**: tell Google & AI who you are
2. **FAQs**: direct answers AI can quote
3. **Topic clusters**: prove you're the expert
4. **Backlinks**: borrow trust from big sites
5. **robots.txt**: don't lock the door on crawlers

> **How to use this guide**
>
> Do the steps in order. #5 takes 5 minutes, so if you're short on time, check it first: one wrong line there can hide your whole site.

THING 1

Schema: tell Google & AI exactly who you are

Time: 20–30 min | Difficulty: Easy (copy-paste)

Schema (structured data) is a small piece of code in your page that labels facts for machines: *this is a business, this is its name, logo, address, phone, social profiles.* Search engines and AI systems use it to understand your site without guessing.

Which schema to add first

Type	Put it on	Use for
Organization or **LocalBusiness**	Home page	Name, logo, contact, social profiles, address
Person	About page	Creators, consultants, doctors, CAs: you as the expert
Article / **Product**	Blog posts / product pages	Author & date / price & reviews

Copy-paste example (LocalBusiness)

```
<!-- Paste inside <head> of your home page. Replace the values. -->
<script type="application/ld+json">
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org",
  "@type": "LocalBusiness",
  "name": "Sharma & Co. Chartered Accountants",
  "url": "https://www.yourwebsite.com",
  "logo": "https://www.yourwebsite.com/logo.png",
  "telephone": "+91-98XXXXXXXX",
  "address": { "@type": "PostalAddress", "streetAddress": "…",
     "addressLocality": "Pune", "addressRegion": "MH", "postalCode": "411001",
"addressCountry": "IN" },
  "sameAs": ["https://www.instagram.com/yourhandle",
"https://www.linkedin.com/company/yourco"]
}
</script>
```

1. **WordPress?** Use a plugin like Rank Math or Yoast. Fill in the "Local SEO / Knowledge Graph" settings and it writes this code for you.
2. **Shopify / Wix / custom?** Paste the code into the theme's <head> or the site-wide custom code box.
3. **Test it** at **validator.schema.org** and Google's **Rich Results Test**. Fix any red errors. Make sure your name, address and phone match your Google Business Profile exactly.

THING 2

FAQs: direct answers AI can quote

Time: 1 hour | Difficulty: Easy

People type full questions into Google and ChatGPT: *"GST registration ke liye kaunse documents chahiye?"*. AI tools look for pages that answer the question **directly, in 2–3 sentences**. A good FAQ section gives them exactly that.

How to write FAQs that get picked up

1. **Collect real questions.** Check your WhatsApp/DMs, sales calls, Google's "People also ask" box, and AnswerThePublic. Pick the 5–8 most common per page.
2. **Write the question as people say it.** "How much does a website cost in India?" beats "Pricing information".
3. **Answer in the first sentence.** Give the direct answer first (40–60 words), then add detail. No fluff before the answer.
4. **Put FAQs on the relevant page** (service pages, product pages, blog posts), not just one giant FAQ page.
5. **Use proper headings.** Each question as an H2/H3 so machines can see the Q→A structure.

× Weak

"We offer many services at competitive prices. Contact us to know more about our offerings."

✓ Strong

"A basic 5-page business website in India costs ₹15,000–₹40,000. E-commerce sites usually start at ₹50,000, depending on the number of products and payment features."

Important 2026 update

Google stopped showing FAQ "rich results" (the expandable Q&A dropdowns under a search listing) in May 2026. FAQ *content* still matters: it's what AI answers and featured snippets quote. You can keep existing FAQPage schema (Google says it causes no harm), but write FAQs for humans and AI, not for the dropdowns.

THING 3

Topic clusters: prove you're the expert

Time: plan in 1 hour, build over weeks | Difficulty: Medium

Instead of random blog posts, build **one main "pillar" page** on a big topic and **many smaller pages** on each sub-topic, all linked to each other. This shows Google and AI that you cover the subject in depth, so they trust you as the go-to source.

Example: a CA firm in Pune

Pillar page	Cluster pages (each links back to the pillar)
Complete Guide to GST for Small Businesses	GST registration documents · GST return due dates · GST for freelancers · Composition scheme explained · GST late fee calculator · GST on Instagram sellers

How to build one

1. **Pick 1–3 core topics** that match what you sell. Don't try to cover everything.
2. **List 8–15 sub-topics** per core topic, using real questions from your FAQs (Thing 2) and "People also ask".
3. **Write the pillar page** (1,500–3,000 words): an overview that briefly covers every sub-topic.
4. **Write one cluster page per sub-topic**, going deep on one question each.
5. **Interlink everything.** The pillar links to every cluster page, and every cluster page links back to the pillar (and to 1–2 related cluster pages). Use descriptive anchor text, not "click here".
6. **Publish 1–2 cluster pages a week.** Consistency beats a one-time burst.

Content shortcut

Turn each Reel into a cluster page: the script becomes the outline, and the comments become new FAQ questions.

THING 4

Backlinks: borrow trust from big websites

Time: ongoing Difficulty: Medium

A backlink is a link from another website to yours. Google treats links from trusted sites as votes of confidence, and AI tools lean on the same trusted sources when deciding whom to cite.

Free ways to start this week

Method	How
Business profiles	Google Business Profile, ProvenExpert, Justdial, IndiaMART, Clutch (for agencies). Complete every field and add your website.
Platform pages	Bookshop.org affiliate page, Thread Reader App unrolls. See my Free Backlink Hack guides.
Founder/expert quotes	Answer journalist requests (e.g. on Qwoted or Featured) and get quoted with a link.
Partners & clients	Ask suppliers, clients and event organisers to list you on their partners/testimonials page.
Guest posts	Write one genuinely useful article for an industry blog your customers read.

Avoid

"1,000 backlinks for ₹999" packages, link farms and spammy directories. They can hurt more than help. One link from a real, relevant site beats hundreds of junk links.

Check your progress

Google Search Console → **Links** shows who links to you. Ahrefs Webmaster Tools (free) shows more detail.

THING 5

robots.txt: don't lock the door on crawlers

Time: 5 minutes | Difficulty: Easy, but critical

robots.txt is a small text file at `yourwebsite.com/robots.txt` that tells crawlers (Google, Bing, AI search bots) which parts of your site they may visit. One wrong line can make your whole site invisible.

× Danger: blocks everything

```
User-agent: *
Disallow: /
```

Often left behind after a website launch by developers. Check yours today.

✓ Healthy starting point

```
User-agent: *
Disallow: /wp-admin/
Disallow: /cart/
Allow: /wp-admin/admin-ajax.php

Sitemap:
https://www.yourwebsite.com/sitemap.xml
```

Decide on AI crawlers

User-agent	What it does	Recommendation
`Googlebot`, `Bingbot`	Regular search indexing	**Always allow**
`OAI-SearchBot`	Lets your pages appear and be cited in ChatGPT search	**Allow** if you want AI visibility
`PerplexityBot`	Indexes for Perplexity answers	**Allow** for AI visibility
`GPTBot`, `Google-Extended`	Use content to train AI models (not search ranking)	Your choice. Blocking won't affect Google rankings

1. Open `yourwebsite.com/robots.txt` in a browser and look for `Disallow: /`.
2. In Google Search Console, open **Settings → robots.txt** to see what Google reads and any errors.
3. Make sure your sitemap URL is listed, and submit it in Search Console → **Sitemaps**.

YOUR ACTION PLAN

The 5-thing checklist

#	Task	Time	Done
5	Check robots.txt for `Disallow: /`, add sitemap line, submit sitemap in Search Console	5 min	☐
1	Add Organization / LocalBusiness schema to home page and test it	30 min	☐
1	Make NAP (name, address, phone) identical on site, schema and Google Business Profile	15 min	☐
2	Collect 20 real customer questions; add 5–8 direct-answer FAQs to top pages	1 hr	☐
3	Choose 1 core topic; list 10 sub-topics; plan pillar + cluster pages	1 hr	☐
3	Publish 1–2 cluster pages per week, each linking to the pillar	Weekly	☐
4	Create 3 free profile backlinks (Google Business Profile, ProvenExpert, Bookshop.org)	45 min	☐
4	Ask 3 partners/clients to link to you	30 min	☐

Free tools used in this guide

- **Google Search Console**: indexing, robots.txt, sitemaps, links
- **validator.schema.org** & **Google Rich Results Test**: check schema
- **Ahrefs Webmaster Tools** (free): backlinks and site audit
- **AnswerThePublic** / Google "People also ask": FAQ ideas

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