

PR and GEO: How **Earned Media** Fuels Brand Visibility in the AI Search Era



Introduction

AI Search has fundamentally changed the relationship between SEO and PR. Traditional SEO once shaped visibility through keywords, backlinks, and technical optimization. PR worked in a different lane, shaping reputation and influencing audiences through trusted third-party voices.

Generative search has merged these two disciplines. Today, AI answer engines decide whether your brand appears in synthesized answers based not just on how well you optimize your own website and owned digital presence but on how often and how credibly others talk about you. This shift has moved PR from a supporting role to the lead position in the search visibility equation.

Why **Earned Media** Matters More Than Ever

Earned media, such as news coverage, reviews, analyst mentions, and community chatter on social media and among influencers, have always been strong trust signals. In the GEO era, it has also become a ranking signal. Generative engines favor authoritative third-party sources when deciding which brands to surface. Owned content still plays a role, but it is no longer the primary driver.

A single credible mention in a respected publication can now outweigh hundreds of lines of optimized blog copy. It is not about who publishes the most content. It is about who receives the most credible validation.

This change places PR closer to the core of discoverability, not just reputation building. Creating content is not enough anymore. Someone else also needs to say it for you.



How Generative Engines Actually Assemble Answers

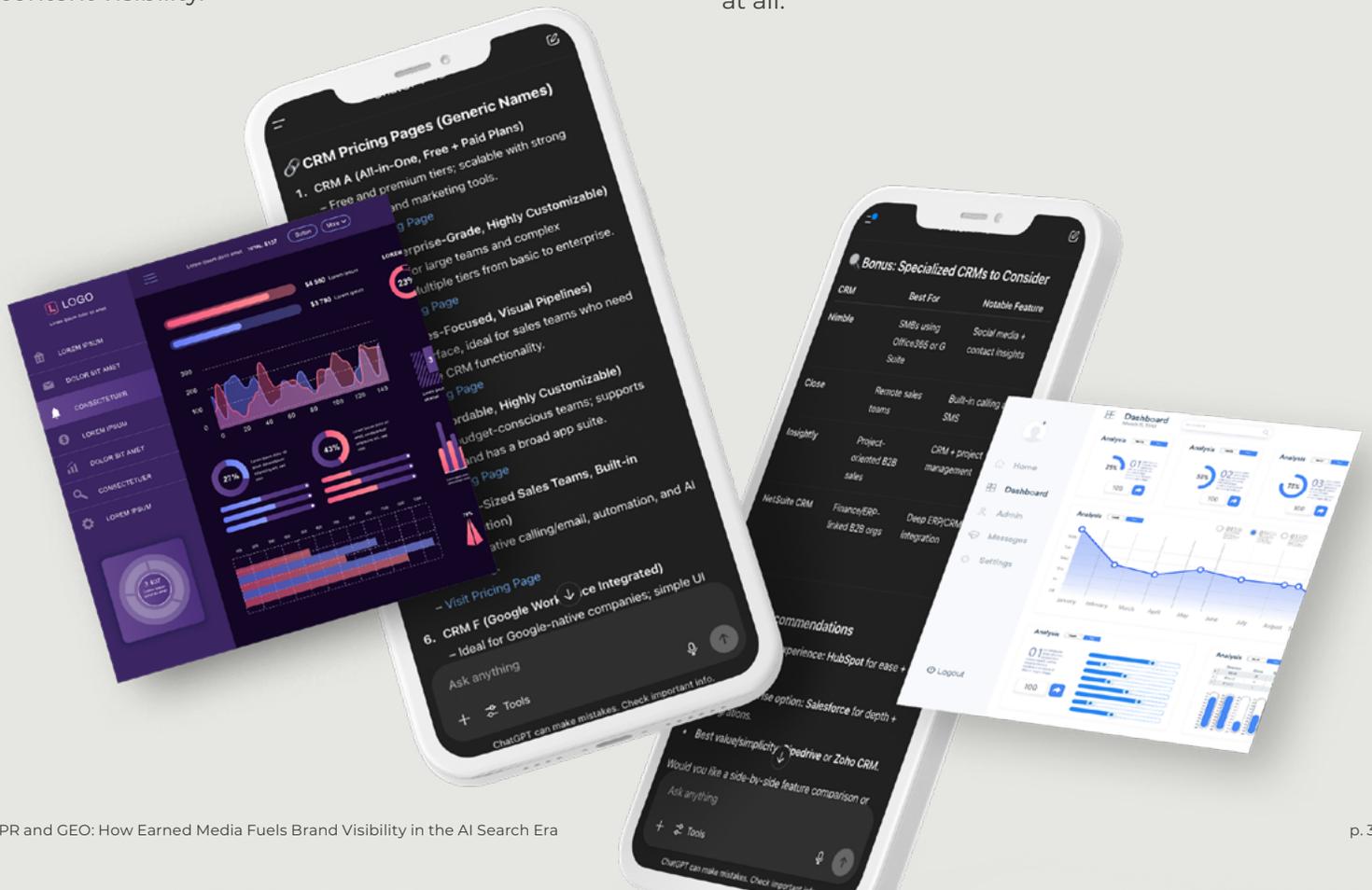
When a user prompts a generative engine, it pulls from a large ecosystem of digital content, including publisher content, forums, review platforms, structured datasets, Wikipedia, Reddit threads, and community discussions. It then synthesizes what is consistent, credible, and repeated across multiple independent sources.

Unlike SEO, keyword stuffing or ad spend cannot influence this process. Generative engines reward what has already earned trust. As a result, narrative visibility has become more important than simple content visibility.

Branded vs. Unbranded Prompts

When someone types your brand name directly into a prompt, the LLM weighs the breadth and credibility of third-party mentions to determine whether your narrative holds up.

Most prompts, however, are unbranded. Queries such as “best cybersecurity platforms,” “top analytics tools,” or “eco-friendly shoe brands” are highly competitive. In those situations, you are competing against the collective narrative of an entire market. Brands mentioned in trusted editorial roundups, analyst reports, and review sites have a significant advantage. We’re seeing that brands that rely only on their own content and ads often do not appear at all.



Real-World Illustrations

Imagine a small ice cream shop in Las Vegas that earns mentions in the local paper, appears in travel blogs, and is discussed in community forums. When someone asks an LLM “What are the best ice cream shops in Las Vegas?” those references push the shop into the AI-generated answer.

Another shop that has no third-party mentions remains invisible.

The same principle applies to B2B companies. A fintech startup featured in a trade like FinTech Times, a business publication like the Wall Street Journal, reviewed on G2, and cited by analysts, surfaces for “best finance apps.” A competitor that only publishes owned content does not.



Why PR Is GEO's Power Center

For many years, PR was seen as a complement to digital marketing. It shaped reputation but was considered secondary to SEO regarding discoverability. That is no longer true. Generative engines reward the same attributes PR delivers best: credible and consistent narratives shared through trusted third parties.

PR brings narrative discipline. Strong GEO performance requires that your story be told the same way across many environments. It affects how your name is written, how your positioning is described, what proof points are repeated, and who delivers those messages. A cohesive PR strategy creates that consistency of on-message and positive coverage, which builds momentum over time.

Another advantage of PR in GEO is its speed and adaptability. AI models are constantly absorbing new information. If a competitor gains ground in generative answers or misinformation starts to appear, PR can respond more quickly than technical SEO. A well-placed expert comment, a bylined article, or a timely rapid response campaign can shift what AI engines recognize and surface.

PR also gives your brand a human face. Generative systems do not just pull from corporate boilerplate. They elevate the reputations of real people. A founder quoted in a respected outlet, a CTO included in an analyst report, or a researcher featured in a Q&A all strengthen credibility and improve the chance of appearing in generative results.

Beyond Traditional Media

Modern earned channels extend well beyond traditional news outlets. Wikipedia pages, review platforms such as TrustRadius, Reddit threads, niche forums, influencer videos and mentions, and analyst reports all feed directly into the datasets that shape AI-generated answers.

This means brands must think more strategically about where their narrative lives. A credible Wikipedia page, positive peer reviews, or active community participation can have the same impact as a mention in a major media publication.

Common Misconceptions

Many marketers treat GEO as a black box. In reality, its mechanics can be observed and analyzed. You can test prompts, review citations, and track patterns.

Some believe that domain authority or owned content alone will be enough. These factors can help, but do not lead. What matters most is consistent and trusted third-party validation, which is the core of strong PR.

The GEO and PR Playbook

GEO and PR work best when they operate together. Instead of separating technical optimization and reputation building, brands should integrate them. Securing earned media, ensuring consistent messaging, and engaging in review and community ecosystems create lasting visibility. Regular testing of AI-generated answers provides valuable intelligence. These insights can guide future outreach, thought leadership campaigns, and reputation management strategies.

Navigating the Future of GEO

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GEO does not weaken the role of PR. It makes it stronger.

The future of AI-driven search belongs to brands that bridge the gap between PR and digital strategy. Visibility is no longer just about technical optimization. It depends on credible stories, told by trusted third parties, and amplified through every digital touchpoint. This requires close collaboration between PR teams who shape the narrative and digital teams who structure, monitor, and scale it.

At Merritt Group, we have already seen this model work in the real world. A cybersecurity client that integrated media relations with GEO testing achieved a measurable increase in brand visibility within generative search results. Strategic

press outreach, combined with technical content structuring and ongoing prompt monitoring, allowed them to appear alongside established market leaders in unbranded AI queries.

PR builds trust. GEO amplifies it. Together, they create a visibility engine that is more powerful than either discipline alone.

If your organization is ready to bring PR and digital closer together to build a stronger presence in AI-driven discovery, [connect with us](#) to learn how we can help.

Connect With Us!

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