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Is AI the Answer to Your Marketing Problems?

By Taylor Hill

If you're reading this article, then you likely work within a hearth or chimney business, which means that a customer has probably sent you something like this in the last six months: "Hey, AI just told me what's wrong with my chimney system and how to fix it. I'm sending this over so you'll know what needs to be done when you arrive."

You look through the advice and see several things that might not be the best course of action, especially since you haven't laid eyes on this particular setup since last year's service call. So you go out to the location, actually look at the situation, and talk with the customer, who insists that AI knows best.

But you don't just make the changes and go on your way. You walk the customer through what you're actually seeing, why it's different from what the AI reported, and what needs to happen instead. The customer gets the right fix because you didn't let a confident-sounding printout replace what your own eyes and experience told you.

Sound familiar? More companies are sending this same kind of "AI already told me the answer" message to their marketing partners, insisting that AI has it all figured out for SEO (Search Engine Optimization), AEO (Answer Engine Optimization), Google Ads optimization, and more.

Of course, it's not that AI can't be useful. Instead, it's the assumption that whatever it hands you is automatically current, accurate, and right for your particular business.

For this piece, let's zero in on just one of those: SEO.

Why AI's Default SEO Advice Is Built for Someone Else's Business

While you and I have spent years training on our particular subject matter and developing the skills to do our jobs well, AI has trained on written material from countless corners of the internet: books, opinions, and authors of every stripe. Go to any Facebook group built around home-service or retail installation work, and you'll see the same thing playing out in miniature. Everybody's got an opinion, and there's always at least one person insisting everyone else is doing it wrong. So if you don't already have years of hands-on experience to sort the good advice from the noise, how do you know who's actually right? And what does this have to do with AI?

Everything.

You see, AI absorbs whoever publishes the most content on a given subject, and when it comes to SEO, that's overwhelmingly content-marketing and e-commerce voices—because that's the segment of the industry that blogs and guest-posts at scale, chasing broad traffic. Local and multi-territory service businesses make up a huge share of the real economy, but a thin slice of the public conversation about SEO.

Here's the simplest way I know to put it: AI's "best practices" answer is essentially an average of that lopsided conversation. It reflects whoever talks the loudest online, not necessarily the person whose advice actually applies to your business. (And yes, I had AI help me explain how it learns and produces information, which, in its own way, proves the point.)

There's an irony buried in here too. The very complaint that generic SEO advice is a problem is itself evidence of how the cycle works: Generic content is what gets the most traffic and gets shared the most,

which means it's exactly the kind of material that ends up training the next model, which then produces more generic advice. It feeds itself.

On top of this is the timing problem. Most people don't ask the AI platform they're using, "When was your last training update?" AI knowledge comes with a cutoff date, and depending on the platform, that cutoff can be many months old, which matters because Google Business Profile features, local map-pack mechanics, and which schema markup actually gets recognized all change fairly often. Advice that was accurate for a local service business a while back can quietly go stale, and AI doesn't always know the difference.

You can see this same pattern in AI-written content itself. The flat, formulaic writing everybody's learned to spot at a glance isn't a separate problem: It's the same generic-advice problem, whether it's showing up in a blog post about chimneys or in your own marketing plan.

If AI is essentially giving advice and answers based on generic and average information that may or may not be about your type of business, what do you do with that?

Four Lenses: Know What Kind of Optimization You Need

Start by knowing exactly what kind of business you are because the fix for a company like yours looks nothing like the fix for the business next door, even if you're both getting your information from the same source.

Broadly, most hearth and home-service companies fall into one of four camps:

1. **A Local Company With a Single Location:** If customers come from a defined metro area or a handful of surrounding towns, your priority list starts with your Google Business Profile. Make sure your hours, categories, and service descriptions are accurate and complete. Plus, keep your name, address, and phone number consistent everywhere you're listed online. It also means

understanding that the map pack (the three-listing group that shows up with a mini map on a local search) is a completely different ranking system from the regular search results (organic) below it, and that a steady flow of new reviews matters more here than almost anything else.

2. Retail Without an E-Commerce Operation: You still need everything above, but you're also fighting for foot traffic and product visibility rather than service calls. That means paying attention to how your inventory shows up in Google's free product listings, and building content that gets people off the couch and into your showroom, not just onto your website.

3. Retail With E-Commerce: Now you've got a genuinely different set of problems: making sure each product page is marked up so Google understands what it's selling, keeping your category pages organized so customers and search engines can actually navigate your catalog, and avoiding the trap where filtering by size, color, or

finish accidentally creates hundreds of near-duplicate pages that confuse everyone. You also need to realize you are competing with sites like Amazon and Woodland Direct, which means every single page needs to be optimized to the max, along with a very smooth e-commerce experience.

4. A Service Company Covering a Large Territory: This is the trickiest lens, and probably the one a lot of you reading this actually live in. If you serve a dozen towns or several counties, you need a page for each service area that's genuinely useful, not just the same content with the town name swapped out, which search engines increasingly recognize and discount. You're also managing a different kind of Google Business Profile, one built for a service-area business rather than a storefront. This has its own rules for what shows up and where, and it can be quite deceiving at times because it doesn't show up with a pin on the map itself.

"Confidence isn't the same thing as being right for your business."

None of this is meant to be the whole playbook. Each of these could be—and probably should be—its own article at some point, but for this one, we are talking about using AI for marketing purposes, and there are some things where AI simply can't compete.

Where AI Genuinely Can't Compete: First-Hand Expertise and Stories

There's one more thing that AI can't fake, no matter how good the training data gets: actual, lived experience.

Google has been increasingly explicit that it rewards content that shows real first-hand expertise, not just correct information, but information that comes from someone who's actually done the work or had the

work done. And now that people are also getting answers directly from AI search instead of clicking through to a website, that same quality—being specific, credible, and clearly written by people who know what they're talking about, or who have lived the experience as customers—is what gets you cited and mentioned in those AI-generated answers, instead of getting quietly left out.

That's genuinely good news for this industry, even though it doesn't always feel that way. Techs who've seen every kind of creosote buildup and cracked flue liner under the sun and talked to hundreds of scared or confused homeowners have more real expertise sitting in their heads than almost any AI-generated article could ever fake. The problem is that expertise usually stays in that person's head, or

gets shared once, verbally, with one customer, instead of making it onto the page where it can help your SEO and reputation at the same time, the same way a five-star review sits on Google or Yelp but never makes it onto your own site.

This is exactly where AI's weakness turns into your strength if you use it right. AI can help you organize your thoughts, turn a rough voice memo into a clean paragraph, or draft an outline from bullet points you scribbled after a job. What it can't do is generate the story itself: the specific job, the specific customer, the specific thing you noticed that a less experienced tech would have missed. Content built from real jobs and real conversations will always read as more credible—to both a human reader and to whatever the search engines of the moment are trying to reward—than content generated from a prompt with no actual experience behind it.

So if there's one habit worth building out of all of this, it's capturing what you already know before you ever open an AI tool: the weird job, the surprising fix, the question three different customers asked this month. Then, you can use AI to help you shape it into something readable. That order matters. Reverse it, and you end up with generic content wearing your company's name.

So What Does This Mean for Using AI for SEO?

None of this means AI is useless for SEO work. It's worth using it for building customer personas, brainstorming keyword directions, or reviewing a draft from a reader's point of view. Those are genuinely good uses of AI, and I'd encourage you to keep doing them.

But here's the catch: Even those "safe" uses still depend on you feeding AI the right business context first. Ask it to build you a customer persona without telling it which lens you're working from, and you'll get something generic (a vague "homeowner interested in home services" that could apply to anybody). Tell it you're a single-location company, and it might describe someone comparing you to the guy down the street on price and reviews. Tell it you're a

large-territory service company, and the persona needs to reflect someone who's never heard of you because you don't have a storefront anywhere nearby. This is where trust and unfamiliarity become the whole ball game. Tell it you're retail with e-commerce, and now you're describing someone comparing spec sheets and price at 11pm on a phone, deciding whether to buy online or drive to a showroom.

Picture it this way: A persona for a homeowner who just smelled smoke and is calling around at 9pm, scared, is a completely different person than a retail shopper calmly comparing BTU output on two gas inserts. AI can help you flesh out either persona in real detail, but only after you've told it which one you're actually serving. Skip that step, and you're right back to the same problem: an overly confident answer that might sound good but also sounds like everybody else.

So the fix isn't to stop using AI for this kind of work. It's to stop asking open-ended questions and start giving it the same context you'd give a new hire on day one: who your customers actually are, what part of the hearth or chimney business you're in, and what problem you're actually trying to solve when they find you.

The Takeaway

So let's go back to that phone call at the start of this piece—the customer sending over an AI diagnosis and expecting you to just carry it out. You didn't do that. You looked at the actual situation, brought your years of experience to bear, and gave that customer the right fix, even when it meant saying something different from what the AI had promised.

That's the same instinct this whole article has been asking you to apply to your own marketing. AI can hand you a keyphrase list, a content outline, a customer persona, even a full article draft, all in about 10 seconds, and all of it can sound completely confident. But confidence isn't the same thing as being right for your business. Before you follow any of it, you still have to ask the question only you can

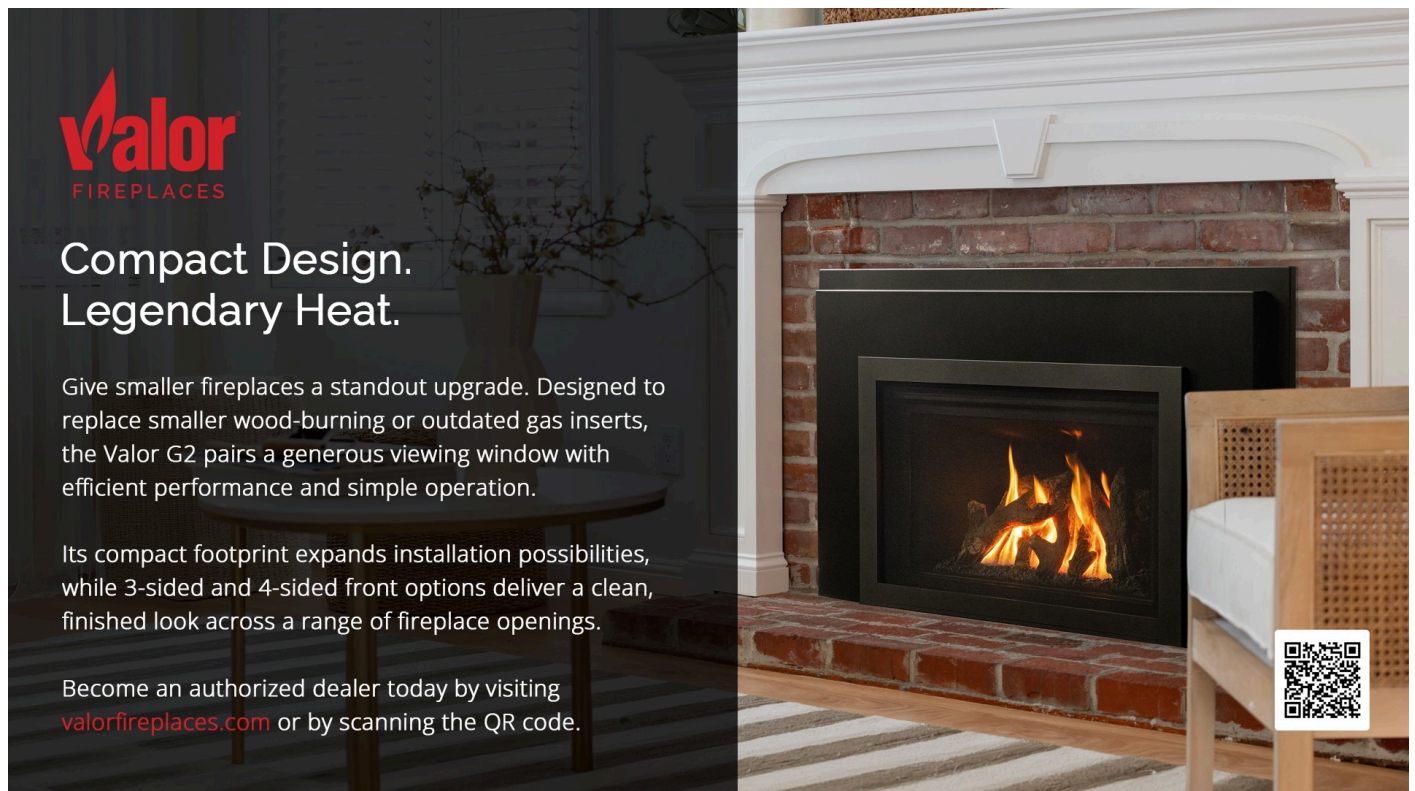
answer: "What kind of business am I, and does this advice actually fit that type of business?"

A single-location company, a retailer, an e-commerce operation, a service company covering half the state? Each type is looking for something a little different, even when you're reading the same AI-generated advice. Treat AI the way it deserves to be treated: as a genuinely useful tool that can save you time and help you think things through, not as the

expert who gets the final word. That word still belongs to you, or to whoever you trust to look at your actual situation and be able to explain it so good decisions will be made.

Remember, confidence isn't the same thing as being right. When you're making decisions for your company's marketing, getting it right matters far too much to rely on generalized answers.

This article is brought to you by Valor Fireplaces.



The advertisement is a horizontal banner. On the left, there is a dark, semi-transparent overlay containing the Valor Fireplaces logo (a red flame icon above the word "valor" in red, with "FIREPLACES" in smaller white text below it). Below the logo, the headline "Compact Design. Legendary Heat." is written in white. Underneath the headline, two paragraphs of white text describe the Valor G2 fireplace. At the bottom of the text block, it says "Become an authorized dealer today by visiting valorfireplaces.com or by scanning the QR code." To the right of the text overlay is a photograph of a Valor G2 fireplace installed in a brick fireplace opening. The fireplace has a black frame and a large viewing window showing a fire. A wooden chair with a cane back is partially visible on the right side of the fireplace. A QR code is located in the bottom right corner of the photograph.

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