greenPROFIT

Tech Connection

3/31/2026

AI Slop vs. AI Support

Katie Elzer-Peters

It's April. Like you need something else to do. However, with a few tweaks, you can get more juice from the squeeze with your marketing tech. Let's talk using AI tools and tech in a doable, beneficial way.

Slop Bowls: The AI Trap

I'm probably TOO online, but there's lots of chatter about "slop bowls" and salads being $18 to $20. This seems connected to return-to-office directives for corporate workers trying to buy lunch out and finding very mid (as the youth say) offerings available for exorbitant prices. Sure, it's easier to buy a so-called poke bowl than to pack a lunch, but is it better?

The retail AI equivalent of slop bowls are emails constructed of nothing but fully AI-generated cartoony images and content punctuated with 17 different emojis. The pictorial and written content are each overstimulating and underwhelming at the same time. That's a problem because our brains can only process so much information. Making people exert effort to decode emojis and text without the emojis adding much value sucks up their already scarce attention.



Why is all this in a column about AI? Because that sort of content is exactly what LLMs (Large Language Models) like ChatGPT and Gemini spit out.

Worse, currently most wholly AI-generated images are weirdly flat or strangely wrong. Like these kids that have man hands and arms. I asked Canva to generate this picture with this (admittedly mid) prompt: “Realistic photo of kids planting seeds in pots at a garden center. Use bright colors.”

Without the “realistic photo” words added to the prompt, it gave me a cartoon monstrosity without actual real seed-starting items. What is that thing in the lower left corner of the picture? A flashlight? Full of soil?



We have spent our entire lives encouraging people to come in, visit, touch, see, smell the plants because of the sensory delight of being in a garden center and we’re going to continue to try to get them to come in by serving them up sub-par AI slop?
No.

Additionally, if you use entirely AI-generated images on your website and marketing materials there’s no leg to stand on if you’re irritated that customers keep bringing in “pictures” of fake, AI-generated plants. Pot. Kettle.

Support: The AI Boost

STOP sending images of six-fingered children planting flowers with soil flashlights and START using AI appropriately. Here are some simple use cases and pointers, current as of April 2026:

Use AI tools to edit photos: Add an insect, disease or problem to a photo.

Use AI to tweak and edit actual photos to illustrate specific points. Maybe you have a great photo of phlox and you want to show that butterflies love it. You just don’t have a good photo of a butterfly on the phlox. Add one. Maybe you need the photo to be bigger or have some blurry space for text. Use AI tools to add on to existing photos. This is great for adding on more lawn or more meadow or other somewhat random patterns.

Optimize your marketing emails for AI scanning and processing: Google is letting Gemini (its AI agent) into your readers’ inboxes. That will impact how people interact with your emails.

Here’s how Google says that currently works: “AI Inbox is like having a personalized briefing, highlighting to-dos and catching you up on what matters. It helps you prioritize, identifying your VIPs based on signals like people you email frequently, those in your contacts list and relationships it can infer from message content ... This lets high-stakes items—like a bill due tomorrow or a dentist reminder—rise to the top.”

Rather than using AI to generate all of the content in your email, make sure AI tools can READ your emails, summarize and SURFACE your emails to the top of the inbox.

Here are some tips for creating emails that AI can interpret:

- Use text and images. It’s tempting to design every speck of an email so it looks just the way you want,

but AI doesn't "read" images well.

- Add alt text for images. If your big offer, topic or info is mostly represented in an image, re-state it in alt text and in body text under the images.
- Write short, snappy calls to action for email subject lines and buttons. For buttons: Learn more, Buy now, Save now, Save more. For subject lines: Registration Ends Tomorrow! Limited quantities available. Fresh Delivery: Claim Yours Now! If your email appears to require action, it's more likely to get surfaced to the top of the inbox.

Optimize your website for AI scanning: This is how you show up in the AI search summaries.

Do NOT prohibit AI crawlers from accessing your website. Are they going to scrape your content to train their models? Yes. That's already happening. Make sure they can scan your info so that when someone searches for "A garden center near YOUR TOWN" you show up.

Use clear headings and precise, useful language. This is best-practice for SEO, anyway. The hierarchy for organizing your content is: Title, H1 (big headings), H2 (subheadings) and body copy. Readers should be able to easily understand key points from skimming titles and headings, and the body copy (paragraphs) should have factual, actionable information that expands upon the headings.

Keep hours, address and "what to expect" information current. Increasingly, AI agents allow for more conversational search, so someone could look for a "plant shop with coffee and couches." If you offer that, are those words on your website? Do you have pictures? Do those pictures have alt text describing the pictures?

Your superpower as retailers is that you have a real, physical location for people to experience. Don't undermine that with AI slop. Elevate it with AI strategy. **GP**

Katie Elzer-Peters is the owner of The Garden of Words, LLC, a green-industry digital marketing agency. Contact her at Katie@thegardenofwords.com.