

FREE GUIDE · 2026 EDITION · 10 MINUTE READ

The AI Search Playbook

How to get your business recommended
by ChatGPT, Gemini and Google AI

Search has quietly had its biggest change since Google was born. Your customers now ask AI assistants who to trust, and the assistants answer with two or three names. This guide explains what changed, how the machines choose their winners, the five-move plan to become one, a 12-point self-scoring checklist, and the five traps that keep businesses invisible.

Inside: the 2026 numbers · how AI picks winners · the 4 signals in depth · the 5-move plan · score-yourself checklist · 5 traps to avoid

PART ONE · WHAT CHANGED

The numbers behind the shift

For twenty years, being found meant ranking on Google. That game still matters, but a second one has appeared beside it, growing at a speed the industry has never seen. Four numbers tell the story:

45%

of consumers asked AI tools like ChatGPT for local business recommendations this year, **up from 6% a year earlier**. A sevenfold jump in twelve months. Nothing in search history has moved this fast.



68%

of Google searches now end **without a single click**. The answer shown on the page, increasingly AI-generated, takes everything. Position one below the answer is the new page two.



#3

AI assistants are already the **third most-used source** for local recommendations, behind only Google and Facebook, and ahead of every directory, newspaper and review site that took decades to build that trust.

42%

of consumers trust an AI recommendation **as much as a written review**. The answers aren't just seen, they're believed, and belief is what turns a mention into a booking.



Why this is an opportunity, not a threat

Every AI answer names two or three businesses, and everyone else is invisible. That sounds brutal, and it is, but here's the part that should excite you: **almost nobody is competing for those slots yet**. Your rivals are still fighting yesterday's war over Google rankings while the new answers get decided quietly, right now.

Defaults are sticky. The business an AI learns to recommend first tends to keep getting recommended, because the signals that put it there keep compounding. Early movers aren't just winning today's customers, they're setting the answer for years.

The four signals, in depth

When someone asks "who's the best plumber near me?", the AI doesn't guess and it doesn't take bribes. It weighs evidence it can verify across the web. Master these four signals and you become recommendable:

★ Reviews · HEAVIEST SIGNAL

AI models treat reviews as compressed public opinion: volume (how many), rating (how good) and recency (how current) all matter, across Google first but also Trustpilot, Facebook and industry sites. **What good looks like:** 50+ reviews, 4.6+, several new ones each month. **Quick win:** text every happy customer a review link the same day you finish the job, same-day asks convert five times better than week-later ones.

⚙️ Structured, consistent data · TRUST FILTER

Models cross-check your name, address, phone and services everywhere they appear. Mismatches read as risk, and risky businesses never get recommended. Schema markup on your site tells machines exactly what you are in their native language. **What good looks like:** identical details on your site, Google Business Profile and every directory, plus LocalBusiness schema. **Quick win:** Google your own business name plus each town you serve, and fix every listing that differs by even a comma.

“ Citations & mentions · AUTHORITY

Being mentioned by sites the AI already trusts (established directories, local press, industry bodies) transfers their credibility to you. It's the machine version of word-of-mouth. **What good looks like:** listed on the major UK directories, plus a few genuine local or trade mentions. **Quick win:** claim the free tier of every serious directory in your industry this week, most businesses never bother.

📌 Quotable content · THE ANSWER SOURCE

AI assistants assemble answers from content that answers clearly. Pages that state plain facts ("emergency call-outs cost £X to £Y", "the process takes three weeks") get lifted, credited and recommended. Vague brochure-speak gets ignored. **What good looks like:** an FAQ answering your customers' real questions in honest, specific language. **Quick win:** write down the ten questions every customer asks you on the phone, and publish the answers word-for-word as you'd say them.

The five-move **playbook**

Knowing the signals is half the job; sequencing them is the other half. Here is the exact order we run for clients, arranged so each move feeds the next:

1

Measure your AI visibility first

Ask ChatGPT, Gemini and Perplexity the questions your customers ask: "best [your trade] in [your town]"; "who should I call for [problem]". Note who gets named and what reasons the AI gives, those reasons ARE the signals it weighed. Most businesses score zero, which means the ground floor is still wide open in your area.

2

Fix your machine-readability

Before chasing anything new, make what exists consistent: one exact business name, address and phone everywhere; a complete, active Google Business Profile; schema markup on your site. This is unglamorous plumbing, and it gates everything else, models must verify you before they'll ever recommend you.

3

Build review momentum, systematically

Not a one-off begging campaign: a system. Every happy customer gets a friendly text with a direct review link, automatically, at the moment of peak goodwill. Ten fresh reviews a month beats two hundred stale ones, recency signals a business that's still excellent, not one that used to be.

4

Publish answers worth quoting

Take those ten phone-call questions from page three and answer them publicly: honest prices, real timelines, what can go wrong, how you fix it. Add comparisons ("X vs Y: which do you need?"). This is the content AI lifts verbatim, and it converts humans just as hard, because nobody else in your market is being this straight.

5

Track monthly, reinforce winners

AI answers shift as models retrain. Re-run your step-one questions every month, log who's named, and note movement. Gained ground? Do more of what preceded it. Lost some? A competitor started playing, accelerate. Visibility compounds for whoever watches it closest.

Score yourself: the 12-point check

Tick everything that's true of your business today. Be honest, the machines will be.

- ☐ 1. I've actually asked ChatGPT about my trade in my area and know what it says
- ☐ 2. My business name, address and phone are identical everywhere online
- ☐ 3. My Google Business Profile is complete: services, photos, hours, posts
- ☐ 4. My website has schema markup (ask your developer, or ask us)
- ☐ 5. I have 50+ Google reviews at 4.5 stars or better
- ☐ 6. I gained at least 5 new reviews in the last 30 days
- ☐ 7. Every happy customer gets asked for a review automatically
- ☐ 8. I'm listed on the major directories for my industry
- ☐ 9. My website answers my customers' ten most-asked questions, with real specifics
- ☐ 10. My site loads in under 2 seconds on a phone
- ☐ 11. Missed calls to my business get an automatic text back
- ☐ 12. I check my AI visibility at least monthly

0-4 ticks

Invisible to AI. The good news: so are your competitors, and the fixes are known.

5-8 ticks

Foundations exist. The compounding moves (3, 4, 5) will separate you fast.

9-12 ticks

Genuinely rare. Defend the lead: track monthly and keep publishing.

Five traps that keep you invisible



Buying fake reviews

Models and platforms both detect the patterns, and one purge can erase years of real reputation with the fakes. Slow and genuine wins this game permanently.



Keyword-stuffed robot content

"Best plumber Manchester plumber services Manchester plumbing" convinces no model and repels every human. Write like you talk; specificity beats repetition.



Ignoring the one bad review

An unanswered complaint reads as guilt to humans and machines alike. A calm, generous public reply often impresses readers more than the five-star reviews do.



Set-and-forget syndrome

A profile perfected once in 2023 is a signal you've stopped trying. Recency runs through everything: reviews, posts, content. Little and often beats one big push.



Waiting for it to "settle down"

The answers being formed now are the sticky defaults of the next few years. Waiting hands your slot to whichever competitor read a guide like this one first.

Jargon, translated

AEO

Answer Engine Optimisation: winning featured snippets, voice results and Google's AI Overviews.

GEO / LLM SEO

Two names, one thing: getting recommended inside AI chat answers on ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity.

AI Overviews

Google's own AI answer box, now appearing above everything on most searches.

Want it all done for you?

This playbook works if you work it. If you'd rather run your business while someone runs this, that's exactly what Buzzozo does: fully managed, no long-term contract, from £99/month. **Start free:** we'll run your AI Visibility Score and send a video of what the machines say about you, within 48 hours, no card.

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