

The 2026 Local Visibility Index

From Google to Generative: Competing for Visibility in the Age of AI

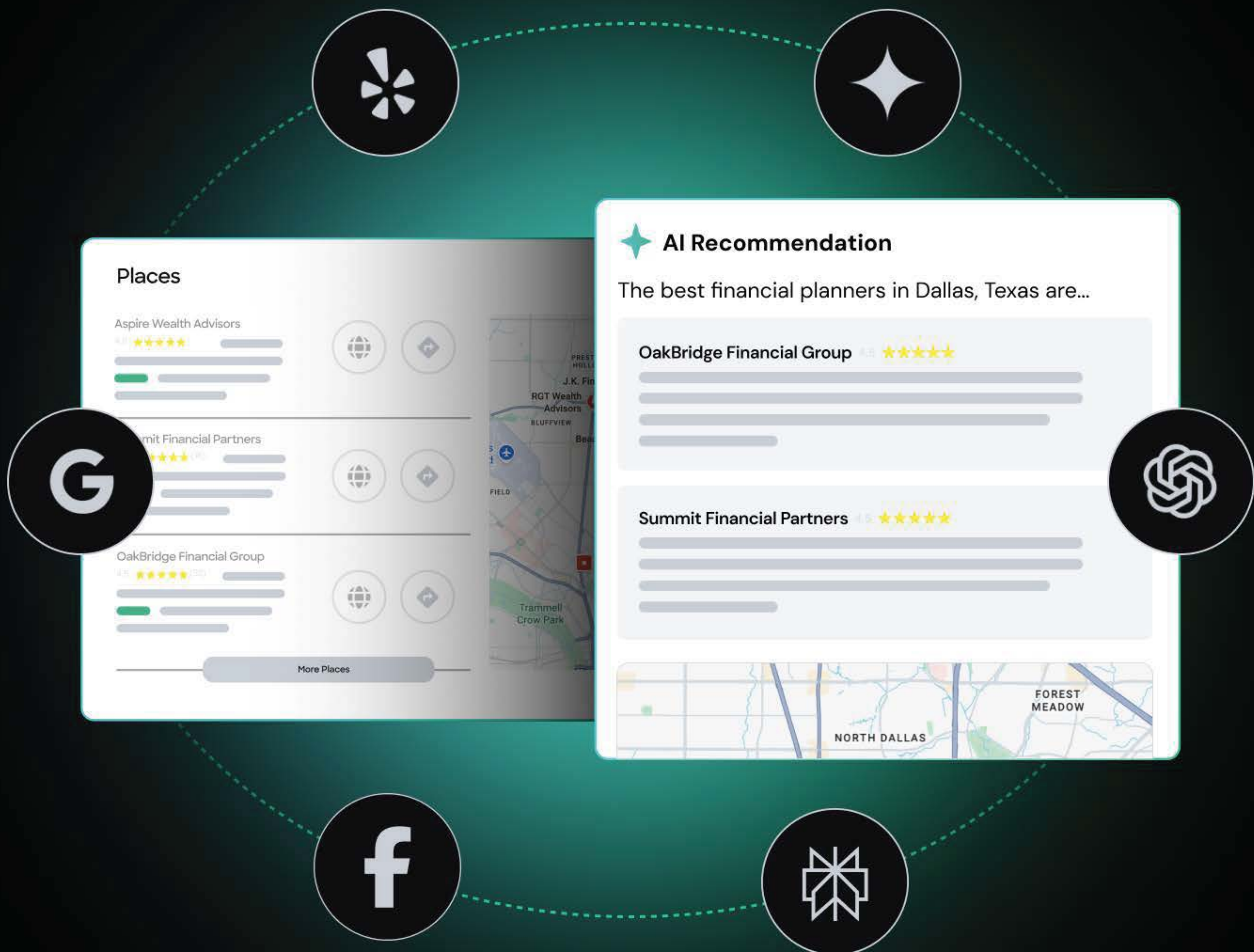




TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Executive Overview
- Key Takeaways
- The Shift: AI Rewrites the Rules of Local Visibility
- The Gap: Why Traditional Leaders Are Not Guaranteed AI Visibility
- The Context: Why Results Vary Dramatically by Industry
- The Benchmarks: What "Good" Looks Like Now
- The Playbook: What the Most Visible Brands Do Differently
- In Summary





Executive Overview

Local visibility has entered a new era.

For more than a decade, brands competed for attention by ranking higher in search results, earning more reviews, and maintaining consistent local listings. In 2026, that model is no longer sufficient.

AI-powered discovery has fundamentally changed how consumers find and choose local businesses. Instead of scrolling through pages of results, consumers increasingly receive a small set of personalized recommendations ... or even just a single answer. Whether through Google's AI experiences (AI Mode or AI Overviews), ChatGPT, Gemini, or Perplexity, AI now acts as an intermediary that decides which brands are even considered.

This shift has compressed brand visibility.

In AI-driven local discovery, there is no page two. A brand location is either recommended or invisible.

The 2026 Local Visibility Index (LVI) captures this transition in real terms. For the first time, the LVI measures not only a brand's visibility in traditional local search, reputation, and social media sites, but also AI local visibility, revealing how often enterprise brand locations are surfaced, cited, and recommended overall.

The results are clear and consequential.

Strong performance in traditional local search does not guarantee visibility in AI-powered recommendations. Brands that appear dominant in Google rankings are frequently absent from AI results, while others with more consistent, trusted signals rise to the top.

Local visibility is no longer just about optimization.

It is about earning selection in a far more selective multi-signal system.



Key Takeaways

1. AI has collapsed local visibility from rankings to recommendations.

AI-driven discovery dramatically narrows the field. While traditional local search surfaces dozens of results, AI platforms showcase only a handful. Most brand locations are never shown at all. According to SOCi's research, visibility in ChatGPT local recommendations is 30X harder to achieve than ranking highly in traditional local search results on Google.

2. Traditional local search leadership does not guarantee AI visibility.

Across industries, fewer than half of the brands that lead in traditional local search also appear among the top AI local recommendations. In the retail industry, only 45% of the top 20 most visible traditional local search brands also ranked among the top 20 most visible brands in AI recommendations, with rankings varying significantly between the two lists. This gap confirms that AI platforms apply a fundamentally different weighting of visibility signals.

3. AI rewards the same fundamentals, but applies them more selectively.

Accurate listings, strong reputation signals, and active local engagement still matter, but AI platforms are far more selective in how they are applied. For this reason, incomplete data, uneven platform coverage, or weak sentiment can remove a location from consideration entirely.



Key Takeaways (continued)

4. AI speeds up discovery, but introduces new risks.

AI delivers faster answers, but often fails at a critical point: location data accuracy. By pulling from fragmented sources, AI platforms frequently cite incorrect addresses, operating hours, and local contact information.

These errors don't just frustrate consumers. They break the path to conversion.

5. Visibility outcomes vary dramatically by industry.

Competitive intensity plays a major role in overall brand visibility. Industries like Restaurants and Retail face steeper competition and higher thresholds for inclusion. Financial Services, by contrast, presents a greenfield opportunity, where brands that invest in local fundamentals can outpace less active competitors more quickly.

6. The most visible brands win by managing local signals holistically, not individually.

The brands that lead in 2026 are not chasing AI as a standalone tactic. They actively manage their local presence and visibility across search, reputation, social, and owned content, ensuring consistency, credibility, and differentiation wherever consumers or AI may be searching for answers.

The Shift: AI Rewrites the Rules of Local Visibility

For years, local visibility followed a predictable path. Consumers searched. Platforms ranked results. Brands competed to appear as high as possible on the page.

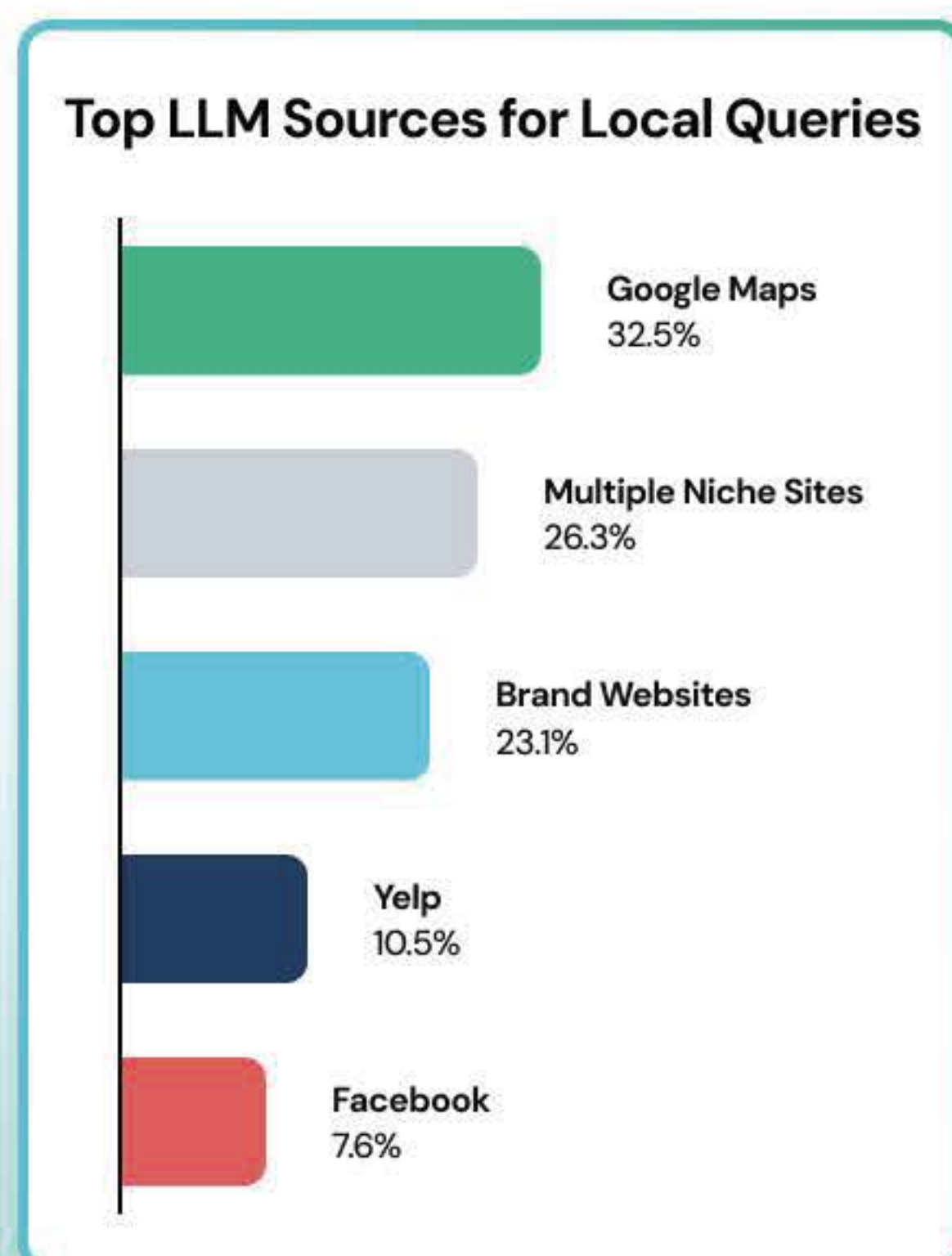
AI has broken that model.

Instead of presenting consumers with dozens of options to evaluate, AI systems synthesize information from multiple sources and deliver a small set of recommendations designed to answer the user's specific intent. In many cases, only one or two businesses are highlighted.

This shift fundamentally changes how visibility is earned.

AI May Present Results Differently, But It Relies on the Same Core Sources

AI systems may deliver local recommendations in a very different format than traditional search, but the underlying sources powering those recommendations have not fundamentally changed.



SOCi's research shows that when AI platforms such as ChatGPT and Gemini generate local recommendations, they rely on many of the same trusted inputs that have long shaped traditional local search visibility. The most frequently cited sources include a brand's own website, Google Maps, Google Business Profile data, and high-traffic consumer platforms such as Yelp and Facebook.

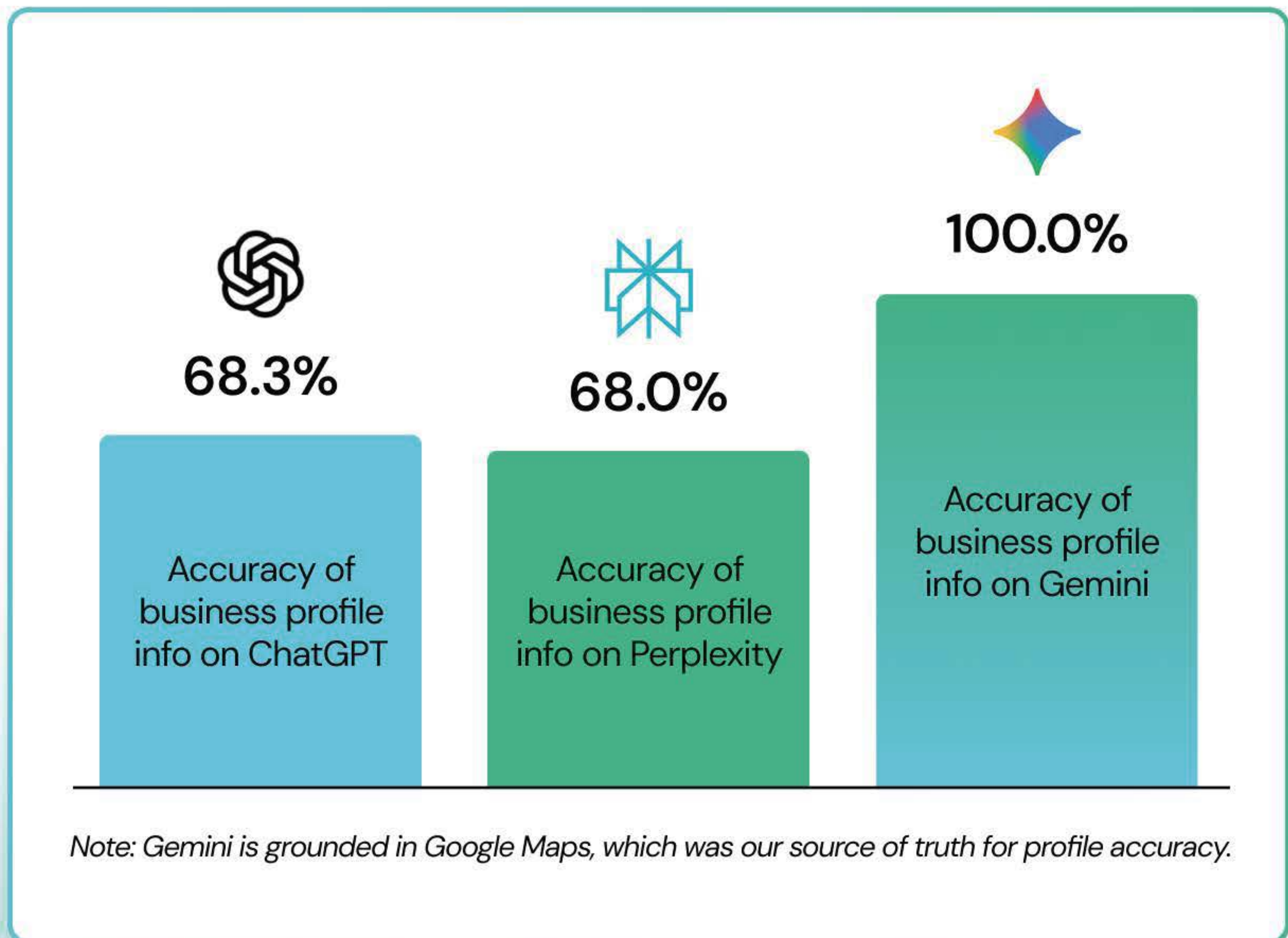
This should not be surprising. AI systems are designed to synthesize information from the sources consumers already trust the most. What has changed is not where visibility is earned, but how selectively those sources are interpreted and combined to produce a final recommendation.



The New Data Accuracy Risk

There's a downside, however, to the way AI platforms synthesize data from multiple sources. Our research shows that data accuracy is a major problem in local results on AI platforms, in particular ChatGPT and Perplexity. Both of these platforms lack a centralized source for local information, and their effort to derive results from multiple first and third party sources is imperfect, with numerous instances in our results of missing or incorrect information. In fact, business contact information on ChatGPT and Perplexity is only about 68% accurate. Google's Gemini, grounded in Google Maps data, fares far better in local data accuracy and completeness.

To ensure that accurate, actionable information about every location is available on AI platforms, brand marketers must resolve data discrepancies on the sources those platforms reference.





AI Raises the Bar on Sentiment and Relevance

AI has not replaced the fundamentals of local marketing. It has reinterpreted how those signals are used and how high the bar is set.

Ratings and reviews, for example, have long influenced traditional local search rankings. In that environment, strong sentiment helps improve position, but businesses with average ratings can still appear prominently. AI platforms operate differently. Reviews and ratings function less as a ranking factor and more as a filter for inclusion.

SOCI's research shows that AI recommendations consistently favor businesses with stronger-than-average sentiment. Recommended locations on ChatGPT average 4.3 stars, compared to 3.9 stars on Gemini and 4.1 stars on Perplexity. In practice, this means that businesses with merely "good" ratings may still rank in traditional search but are less likely to be surfaced by AI systems that aim to minimize risk and maximize user confidence.

The same dynamic applies to content and relevance.

Traditional local search often returns generic results based on proximity and category. AI platforms, by contrast, respond to highly specific, conversational queries that reflect real-world needs:

- *"Which shoe store near me has good options for running shoes for people with narrow feet and high arches?"*
- *"Which bank branch nearby has helpful staff and caters to small businesses?"*

To answer these questions, AI looks for differentiating signals. Generic profiles, thin local landing pages, and vague service descriptions limit a brand's ability to match nuanced intent. Even well-known brands can be filtered out if AI cannot confidently determine why a particular location is a good fit for a specific need.

This is where owned and enriched content plays a decisive role. Detailed local landing pages, structured descriptions of services and amenities, clear brand attributes, and highly relevant social content give AI the depth it needs to personalize recommendations. These signals help AI understand why a specific brand location should be recommended in a specific context.

In AI-driven discovery, familiar signals still matter. But they are applied with greater selectivity, higher thresholds, and deeper expectations. Brands that treat ratings, reviews, and content as baseline requirements rather than differentiators will struggle to compete for visibility in AI recommendations.

The Gap: Why Traditional Leaders Are Not Guaranteed AI Visibility

At first glance, it would be reasonable to assume that brands leading in traditional local search would also dominate AI-powered local recommendations. After all, AI systems rely on many of the same foundational data sources that power traditional search.

Our research shows that assumption is wrong.

Across industries, fewer than half of the brands that lead in traditional local search also appear among the most visible brands in AI local recommendations.

To complete this analysis, we ranked brands by Search Score and by AI Score, each on a scale of 0 to 100. Scores are based on weighted metrics in each category such as profile completeness, profile accuracy, consumer sentiment, and ranking, as described in the benchmarks section of this report.

A note on ranking methodology: We recognize that local visibility in AI-powered search is inherently more nuanced than traditional search, as results can vary significantly based on how detailed or conversational a consumer's prompt may be. For the purposes of this research, we standardized on a consistent scenario designed to surface the businesses most likely to come top of mind for an AI platform when asked about a primary category.

For traditional search, rankings were derived using queries for a brand's primary category in markets where the brand operates. A typical example would be "*sporting goods in Fresno, CA.*" For AI platforms, we asked each system to recommend 10 local businesses in a given market that matched the same primary category. A business location was considered likely to be recommended if it appeared within the first five results. This approach allowed us to establish a consistent baseline for comparing traditional local search leadership with AI-driven local visibility.



Retail Industry Example: Where Traditional and AI Visibility Diverge

In the retail industry, for example, the most visible enterprise brands in our traditional local search category look quite different from the most visible brands in local AI recommendations, with only 45% overlap between the two groups. In fact, many brands shift rank positions between the two lists. For instance, Batteries Plus Bulbs and Target rank lower in local AI visibility than in traditional local search, whereas Sam's Club and Aldi rank higher.

Local Search Rank (Retail Enterprise)	Brand	Search Visibility Score	Local AI Rank (Retail Enterprise)	Brand	AI Visibility Score
1	Batteries Plus Bulbs	87.1	1	Sam's Club	70.7
2	Sam's Club	83.5	2	Publix	69.2
3	Petco	82.6	3	Costco	64.6
4	Ulta Beauty	82.0	4	Hobby Lobby	64.1
5	Dick's Sporting Goods	81.9	5	Aldi	64.0
6	Men's Wearhouse	80.6	6	Barnes and Noble	62.5
7	Michael's	80.5	7	H-E-B	62.3
8	Kay Jewelers	80.0	8	Mattress Firm	61.0
9	Target	79.6	9	HomeGoods	60.6
10	Petsmart	79.6	10	Michael's	60.3
11	O'Reilly Auto Parts	79.4	11	Petsmart	60.0
12	DSW (Designer Shoe Warehouse)	79.2	12	Harbor Freight Tools	59.2
13	Jos. A. Bank	79.2	13	Marshalls	56.9
14	Kohl's	78.9	14	Target	56.6
15	Aldi	78.7	15	Kohl's	56.3
16	Kroger	78.6	16	Batteries Plus Bulbs	56.2
17	Mattress Firm	78.3	17	Kwik Trip	55.6
18	Sherwin-Williams	78.0	18	Love's Travel Stops	55.4
19	JCPenney	77.2	19	Carpet One Floor & Home	55.2
20	AutoZone	76.9	20	AutoZone	54.8

This example illustrates some broader truths. Traditional local search, particularly Google, operates as a relatively closed ecosystem. Brands compete within a well-understood framework of ranking factors, where strong optimization within that system can compensate for weaknesses elsewhere.

A brand with excellent Google Business Profile optimization, strong proximity signals, and sufficient review volume can perform well even if its visibility on other platforms is uneven. Success is often driven by mastering one dominant channel.

AI platforms do not work this way.

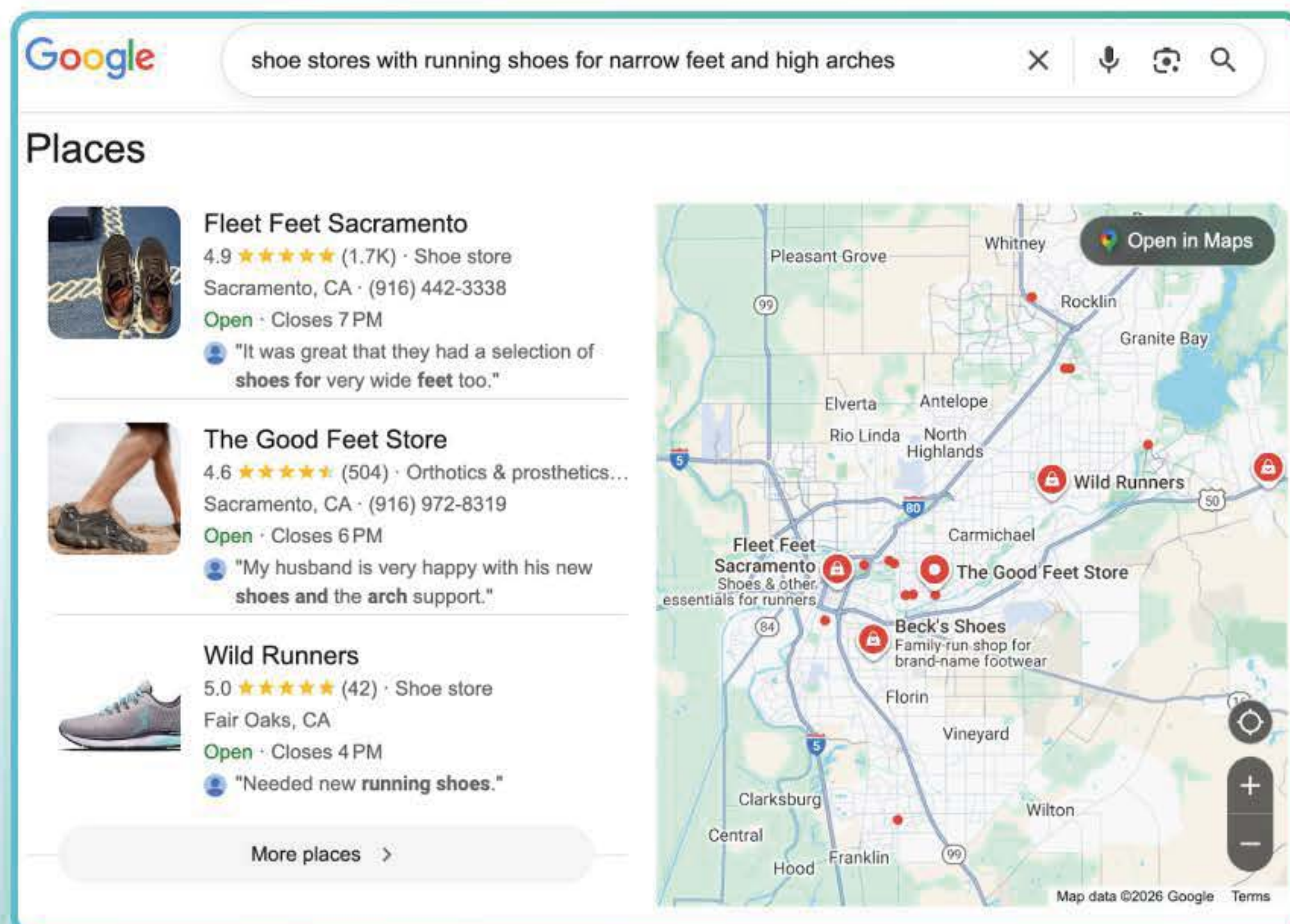
AI platforms such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity evaluate businesses across multiple sources simultaneously. Rather than ranking within a single platform, AI systems look for confidence across an ecosystem.

When signals are inconsistent, incomplete, or contradictory, AI confidence drops. Locations with strong Google rankings but weaker presence on Yelp, Facebook, or their own websites frequently lose visibility in AI recommendations. Conversely, brands with slightly lower traditional rankings but more consistent, trusted signals across platforms are often elevated. This explains why brands can rank highly in traditional local search yet fall behind in AI-driven discovery.

What Consumers Actually See: Traditional Search vs. AI Search

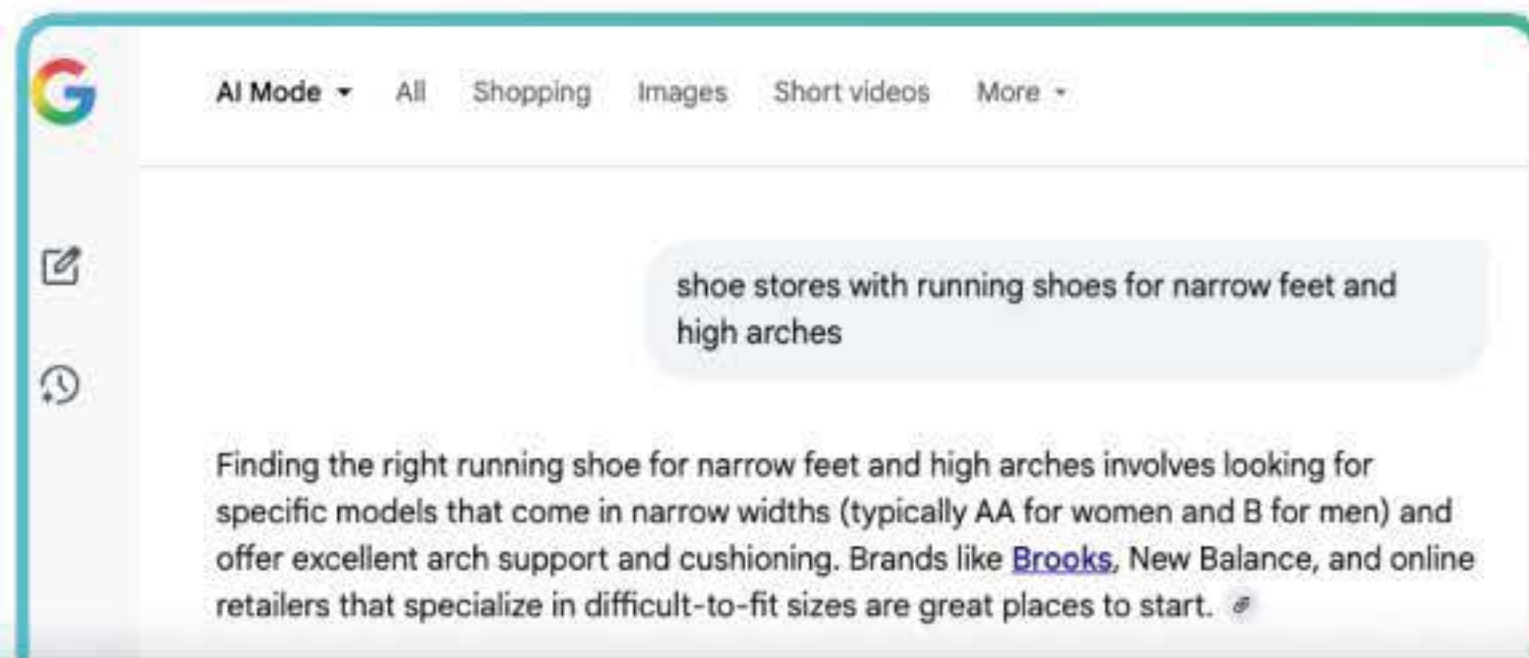
“Which shoe store near me has good options for running shoes for people with narrow feet and high arches?”

Google Traditional Local Search Results



Traditional Google 3-Pack result offers three options with scant detail about each, leaving it up to the user to select the right business.

Google AI Mode Results (Powered by Gemini)

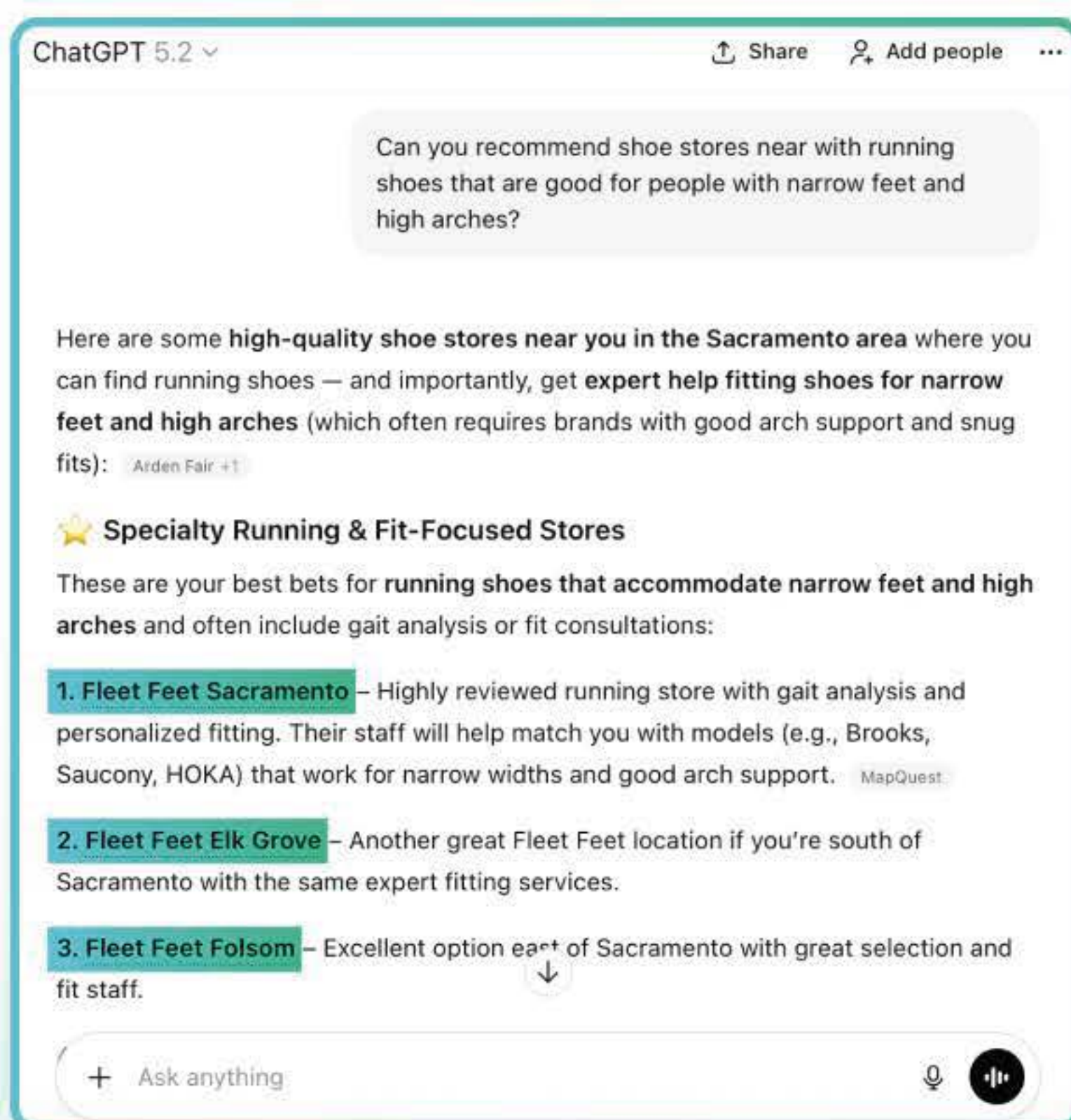


For expert fitting services and to try on shoes in person in your area, specialty running stores such as [Fleet Feet Folsom](#) can perform personalized gait analysis and fitting to ensure proper support.



Google's AI Mode recommendation, by contrast, focuses on a single business (a different Fleet Feet location that happens to be closer to the user) and explains why it meets the highly specific needs outlined in the query, while also offering product recommendations.

ChatGPT Results



ChatGPT, like Google's AI Mode, offers only a single brand option but in this case lists three different locations. No other brand is mentioned. Clearly Fleet Feet has shown their authority and expertise to ChatGPT when it comes to serving customers with high arches and narrow feet.

The Context: Why Results Vary Dramatically by Industry

Local visibility performance varies widely by industry because the competitive baseline is fundamentally different. In highly competitive categories, brands are already investing heavily across search, reputation, social, and data accuracy. As a result, further optimization efforts often produce only incremental gains. In less mature categories, however, relatively small improvements can unlock outsized improvements in visibility.

Competitive Industries: High Standards, Incremental Gains

Retail and Restaurants

Retail and restaurant brands operate in the most saturated of local marketing environments. Most locations (as seen on the next page) already maintain claimed and largely complete profiles, generate high review volumes, and participate actively across Google, Yelp, and social platforms. This maturity leads to higher average LVI scores, but it also means:

- Competition is intense, with many brands pursuing similar optimization strategies.
- Visibility gains are marginal, especially in AI results that surface only a narrow set of recommendations.
- AI amplifies the winner-take-most dynamic, favoring brands with exceptional ratings, data accuracy, and engagement rather than incremental improvements.

In these industries, optimization is largely about defending position and outperforming peers at the margins, not rapid visibility expansion.

Top performers in the retail category have parlayed high visibility in traditional channels into better than average AI presence. Batteries Plus Bulbs, for example, achieves 92.3% presence in the Google 3-Pack, and a correspondingly high 38.4% likelihood of being recommended in Gemini results, about 20 points higher than the average retailer. Providing strong signals to Google Maps helps with AI visibility in Gemini, which is grounded in Google's local data. But successful brands also put in the work to ensure repeat business and future success. As a case in point, Batteries Plus Bulbs responds to 98.3% of reviews on Google with a fast response time averaging just 0.6 days.

Search Benchmarks: Batteries Plus Bulbs			
Platform	Metric	Batteries Plus Bulbs	Retail Benchmark
Google	% Claimed	99.1%	92.4%
	% Profile Completeness	99.1%	86.4%
	% in 3-Pack	92.3%	49.5%
	Local Pages % on Page 1	70.3%	22.6%
Yelp	% Found (Compared to Google)	100.0%	66.7%
	% Profile Completeness	99.2%	79.6%
	% on Page 1	42.6%	47.8%
Facebook	% Found (Compared to Google)	95.8%	54.9%
	% Profile Completeness	98.2%	85.7%
AI Benchmarks: Batteries Plus Bulbs			
Platform	Metric	Batteries Plus Bulbs	Retail Benchmark
ChatGPT	% Recommended	3.4%	10.2%
	% Profile Completeness	100.0%	98.8%
	% Profiles Accurate	58.1%	68.6%
	Rating	4.6	4.3
Gemini	% Recommended	38.4%	18.3%
	% Profile Completeness	99.1%	96.8%
	% Profiles Accurate	100.0%	100.0%
	Rating	4.5	4.0
Perplexity	% Recommended	27.8%	16.2%
	% Profile Completeness	76.0%	76.8%
	% Profiles Accurate	66.7%	68.3%
	Rating	4.0	4.1

Other retailers are still in the developing stages of local digital marketing. Jewellery brand Pandora, for example, has a much lower visibility in traditional search, appearing in the Google 3-Pack for just 19.4% of searches, and in Gemini recommendations only 1.9% of the time. As root causes of this lower visibility, Pandora has lower rates of Google locations claimed and profile completeness, lower star ratings and review volumes, and other signals both directly and indirectly controllable by the brand.



Our Local Visibility Quadrant charts plot brands according to their overall local optimization (y axis) and their performance in local results (x axis).

LEADERS:

Brands in this quadrant exhibit strong evidence of following best practices in local marketing, and as a consequence they enjoy excellent performance across search, reputation, social, and AI platforms.

CHALLENGERS:

These brands are generally following local marketing best practices, such as profile optimization, review response, and social posting, but earn lower marks on performance indicators like rankings, AI recommendation rates, and star ratings. They may have updated their local strategies recently, may be in highly competitive industries, or may be missing key strategic components.

OPPORTUNISTS:

We call brands Opportunists who have achieved relatively strong performance as measured by rankings, recommendation rates, and ratings without having solidified and extended their initial success by following best practices such as optimizing online profiles, responding to reviews, and building local audiences on social platforms.

LAGGARDS:

This group of brands is at the earlier stages of their local marketing journey. They have not yet created robust online profiles or launched comprehensive reputation and social strategies, and their local visibility in search, social, and AI platforms has not yet reached a competitive level.

Similarly, top performers in the restaurant category like Culver's are characterized by strong visibility in traditional search as well as AI. Culver's achieved 57.7% visibility in the Google 3-Pack and an impressive 30.0% recommended rate on ChatGPT, significantly outpacing industry benchmarks. The brand achieved these results by creating robust profiles on Google, Yelp, and Facebook and garnering strong positive feedback from local customers. For example, Google profiles for Culver's locations have 99.9% profile completeness and an average rating of 4.4 stars. Such strong traditional signals translate, for Culver's, into comparatively high recommendation rates on AI platforms of 30.0% on ChatGPT, 45.8% on Gemini, and 26.5% on Perplexity.

Papa John's, by contrast, struggles to appear prominently in search with no locations appearing in the Google 3-Pack; similarly, no locations were found to be recommended by ChatGPT, Gemini, or Perplexity. Aside from lower star ratings and other signals, one notable issue is a low profile accuracy rate for Papa John's of 67.4%, indicating core issues in underlying data.

Search Benchmarks: Culver's			
Platform	Metric	Culver's	Restaurants Benchmark
Google	% Claimed	100.0%	96.5%
	% Profile Completeness	100.0%	94.2%
	% in 3-Pack	57.7%	24.3%
	Local Pages % on Page 1	0.0%	7.8%
Yelp	% Found (Compared to Google)	98.4%	92.2%
	% Profile Completeness	99.1%	90.9%
	% on Page 1	86.7%	36.0%
Facebook	% Found (Compared to Google)	97.2%	66.7%
	% Profile Completeness	99.8%	90.2%
AI Benchmarks: Culver's			
Platform	Metric	Culver's	Restaurants Benchmark
ChatGPT	% Recommended	30.0%	5.3%
	% Profile Completeness	100.0%	99.3%
	% Profiles Accurate	72.2%	69.0%
	Rating	4.4	4.2
Gemini	% Recommended	45.8%	7.1%
	% Profile Completeness	98.5%	97.5%
	% Profiles Accurate	100.0%	100.0%
	Rating	4.4	4.1
Perplexity	% Recommended	26.5%	7.6%
	% Profile Completeness	92.5%	86.6%
	% Profiles Accurate	85.3%	76.1%
	Rating	4.2	4.0





Under-Optimized Industries: Lower Entry Point, Disproportionate Upside

Financial Services

Financial services tells a very different story. Compared to retail and restaurants, financial services brands show significantly lower investment in local marketing fundamentals: fewer claimed profiles, weaker social presence, lower review volumes, and slower response rates. This creates a wide performance gap between leaders and the long tail.

Because baseline competition is lower:

- Foundational improvements drive meaningful gains
- Brands that invest in profile coverage, reputation management, and data accuracy can rapidly outpace competitors
- AI platforms surface these leaders more readily due to the scarcity of competition

Liberty Tax illustrates this dynamic with high performance in the financial services category, with a strong 4.6 star rating on Google and robust profiles for a majority of locations on all platforms, including 84.0% coverage on Facebook. Strong cross-platform performance helps Liberty Tax achieve better visibility in traditional search than the average financial services company, with strong Google 3-Pack visibility at 68.3%, and on all AI platforms, including recommendation rates of 3.2% on ChatGPT, 19.2% on Gemini, and 26.9% on Perplexity.

Search Benchmarks: Liberty Tax			
Platform	Metric	Liberty Tax	Financial Services Benchmark
Google	% Claimed	98.7%	88.7%
	% Profile Completeness	89.8%	81.4%
	% in 3-Pack	68.3%	44.0%
	Local Pages % on Page 1	0.0%	6.7%
Yelp	% Found (Compared to Google)	77.2%	50.4%
	% Profile Completeness	60.7%	72.6%
	% on Page 1	33.6%	42.3%
Facebook	% Found (Compared to Google)	84.0%	29.3%
	% Profile Completeness	97.0%	79.0%

AI Benchmarks: Liberty Tax			
Platform	Metric	Liberty Tax	Financial Services Benchmark
ChatGPT	% Recommended	3.2%	3.1%
	% Profile Completeness	99.7%	98.4%
	% Profiles Accurate	60.8%	70.1%
	Rating	4.6	4.3
Gemini	% Recommended	19.2%	16.4%
	% Profile Completeness	96.4%	95.2%
	% Profiles Accurate	100.0%	100.0%
Perplexity	Rating	4.5	3.2
	% Recommended	26.9%	9.9%
	% Profile Completeness	73.9%	72.1%
	% Profiles Accurate	56.6%	63.3%
	Rating	4.2	4.2

Insurance provider Transamerica, on the other hand, shows the need for significant improvement in digital marketing, with only 66.2% of agents having a claimed Google profile and only 25.1% present on Facebook. The brand's average Google rating of 3.4 stars isn't helped by a review response rate of just 4.8%. Such weak signals translate to a low 3.6% visibility in the Google 3-Pack and, by extension, close to zero appearances in AI recommendations, illustrating the larger truth that low performance in traditional search leads to invisibility in AI platforms.





The Benchmarks: What “Good” Looks Like Now

As AI reshapes how consumers discover local brands, the definition of “good” has fundamentally changed. Visibility is no longer about broad presence alone; it is about meeting a much higher bar across fewer, more selective outcomes. The 2026 benchmarks show that AI has not replaced traditional local marketing fundamentals — it has compressed them.

AI Visibility: Exception, Not Expectation

Across all industries, AI recommendations are extremely selective. Only:

- 1.2% of brand locations are recommended by ChatGPT
- 11.0% by Gemini
- 7.4% by Perplexity

By comparison, brands appear in the Google 3-Pack 35.9% of the time. In practical terms, **AI platforms are 3 to 30x more selective than traditional local search.** Being “good” in AI means being among a small group of trusted, well-differentiated locations.

AI Benchmarks

Platform	Metric	Overall
ChatGPT	% Recommended	1.2%
	% Profile Completeness	99.9%
	% Profiles Accurate	68.3%
	Rating	4.3
Gemini	% Recommended	11.0%
	% Profile Completeness	97.1%
	% Profiles Accurate	100.0%
	Rating	3.9
Perplexity	% Recommended	7.4%
	% Profile Completeness	78.1%
	% Profiles Accurate	68.0%
	Rating	4.2

What consistently separates those selected by AI:

- Accurate, complete data across Google Maps, Yelp, Facebook, and brand websites
- Strong reputation signals, with recommended businesses averaging 4.2–4.3 star ratings
- Differentiated local content, particularly on brand-owned local pages
- AI systems reward brands that reduce ambiguity and clearly signal quality, authority, and relevance

Note: To determine % Recommended for AI platforms, we asked each platform to recommend 10 businesses corresponding to each brand’s corresponding primary category, in markets where the brand has locations. If the target location appeared in the first 5 results, we considered that brand location likely to be recommended by AI.

Search: Table Stakes, Still Foundational

Search performance continues to anchor local visibility and heavily influences AI outcomes.

“Good” in search today means:

- Near 100% Google Business Profiles claimed (97.9%)
- High profile completeness (86.6%), though showing a slight decline from 2024 reflecting growing platform complexity
- Consistent ranking performance, with brands now appearing in the Google 3-Pack 35.9% of the time, up notably from prior years

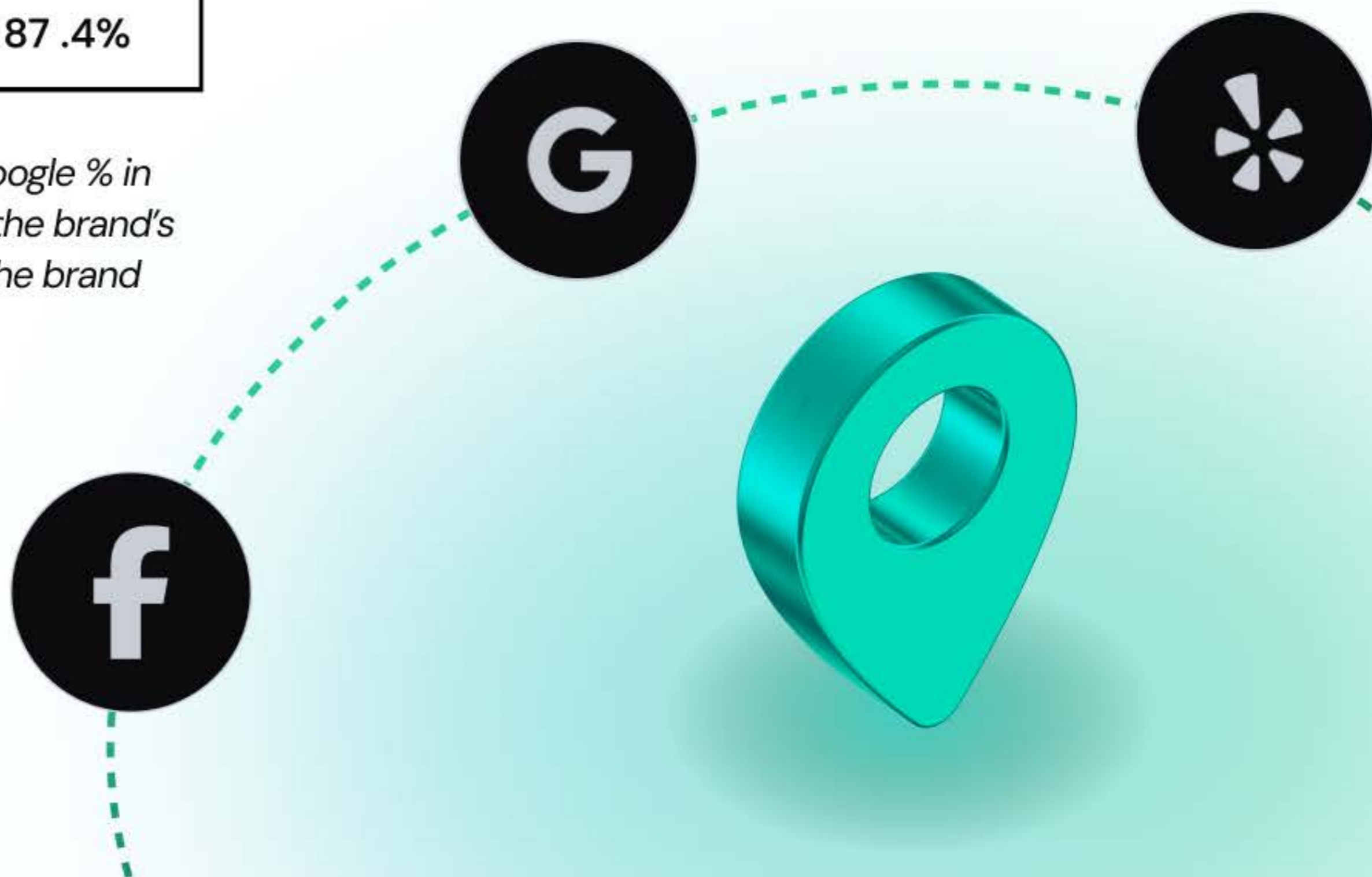
Search Benchmarks

Platform	Metric	Overall
Google	% Claimed	97.9%
	% Profile Completeness	86.6%
	% in 3-Pack	35.9%
	Local Pages % on Page 1	2.7%
Yelp	% Found (Compared to Google)	80.0%
	% Profile Completeness	81.3%
	% on Page 1	37.1%
Facebook	% Found (Compared to Google)	53.4%
	% Profile Completeness	87.4%

Search performance plays a central role in AI visibility because LLMs draw heavily from Google, Yelp, and business websites to assess authority and accuracy. Strengthening core search signals enhances performance in traditional rankings and increases the likelihood of appearing in generative search results.

Overall, the data points to a competitive environment in which consistent optimization generates measurable gains. Sustained visibility now requires complete profiles, accurate business information, and steady attention to the ranking factors that drive both consumer trust and AI selection.

Note: To derive ranking results like Google % in 3-Pack, we conducted searches for the brand's primary category in markets where the brand has locations.



Social: Fewer Signals, Higher Quality

Social benchmarks show contraction in activity but improvement in engagement:

- Posting frequency and follower counts are down
- However, engagement rates have nearly tripled; volume of content may have lessened but social posts are creating more meaningful interactions

Facebook's role has evolved. While it is less influential as a reputation platform than in prior years, it remains a critical data source for search and AI systems. With the largest user base of any social network, Facebook continues to serve as a reliable proxy for social presence in local discovery and is frequently referenced in AI-generated results.

At the same time, consumer discovery behavior is fragmenting. Younger audiences increasingly use Instagram and TikTok not just for inspiration, but for search and recommendations. SOCI's Consumer Behavior Index shows that 40% of consumers aged 18–24 now use social platforms for local search, expanding the definition of what social visibility means.

Social Benchmarks

Platform	Metric	Overall
Facebook	Follower Count	360.3
	Posts per Month	4.7
	Engagements per Post	5.0
	Engagement Rate	1.40%
	% Locations Waterfall Posting	26.8%
	% Waterfall Posts	23.3%
Google	Posts per Month	0.15
	% Locations with Social Links	43.0%

Note: Waterfall posting is the tactic of copying posts from the corporate parent page to local store pages on Facebook, where engagement is shared across all locations. The alternative tactic, localized posting, drives better engagement and is preferable.

Reputation: The Strongest Differentiator

Reputation has emerged as the most decisive signal across search and AI:

- Review volumes are rising
- Response times are improving
- But most consumer feedback still goes unanswered (+50%)

Google remains the primary reputation driver, but Yelp plays an outsized role in AI, despite being operationally underprioritized by many brands. A sustained 4+ star rating, active response management, and growing review volume are now minimum requirements for competitive visibility.

Note: Yelp is the third most-cited platform in AI results (see chart on page 6), as well as a significant provider of local content not only to AI platforms like Perplexity but to traditional search apps like Apple Maps.

Reputation Benchmarks

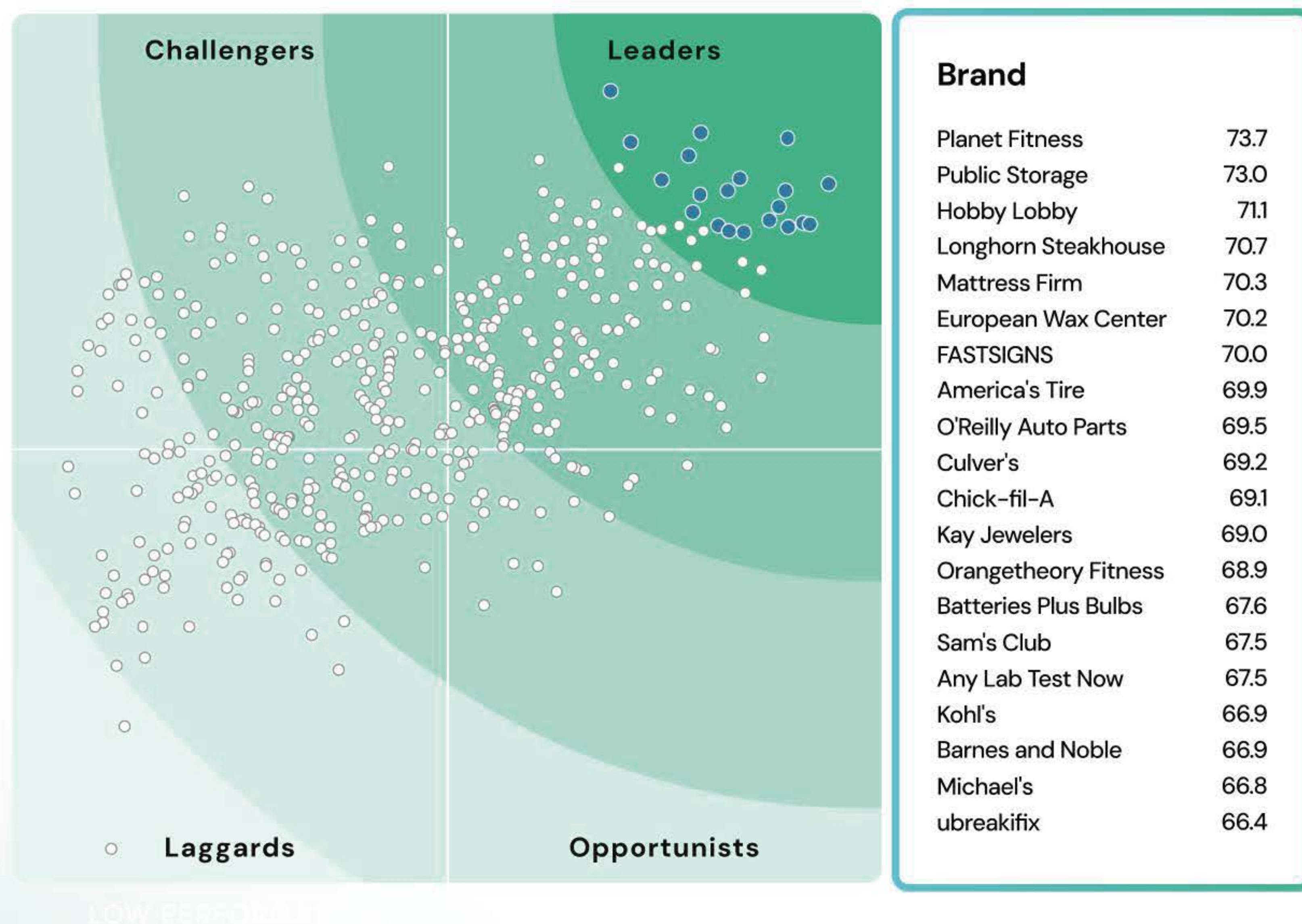
Platform	Metric	Overall
Google	Rating	4.2
	Review Count	137.1
	% Reviews with Responses	46.9%
	Response Time (Days)	4.3
Yelp	Rating	3.2
	Review Count	11.6
	% Reviews with Responses	3.1%
	Response Time (Days)	4.5
Facebook	% Recommended	83.6%
	Recommendation Count	1.3

The Playbook: What the Most Visible Brands Do Differently

Across industries, the brands that consistently earn the highest visibility across search, social, and AI do not rely on isolated tactics. They execute against a repeatable operating model that compounds performance across every discovery surface. When mapped across the LVI, these brands cluster clearly in the Leader quadrant.

Note: The enterprise brand results shown here represent a preview of the full SOCi 100 and SOCi AI 100 Most Visible Local Brand lists coming soon in February 2026!

The Most Visible Local Brands of 2026



For a fully interactive version of this chart, go to <https://www.soci.ai/insights/lvi/>.

Several Common Behaviors Distinguish the Leaders from the Laggards

1. They Treat Accuracy as a Strategic Asset

The most visible brands ensure their core business data is complete, accurate, and synchronized across the platforms with the most consumer traffic and trust — most notably Google Maps, Yelp, Facebook, and brand-owned local pages. This is no longer hygiene; it is the price of entry.

Brands with inconsistent or incomplete data may still appear in traditional search, but they are systematically excluded from AI recommendations, where confidence and clarity are required. Accuracy does not guarantee selection, but without it, selection is impossible.

What leaders do differently:

They operationalize data governance and treat location accuracy as foundational infrastructure, not a one-time cleanup.



2. They Go Beyond Presence to Differentiation

AI rewards specificity, not sameness.

Once accuracy is established, leading brands invest in detailed, differentiated content across local landing pages, profiles, and social channels. Unlike traditional search, AI systems are highly selective and seek to match nuanced consumer needs to the most relevant businesses.

Generic descriptions and templated content blend together. Clear articulation of services, amenities, specialties, and local relevance sets leaders apart.

What leaders do differently:

They use local content to answer why this location is right for this consumer, going beyond just asserting that the location exists.



3. They Win on Reputation, Not Just Reach

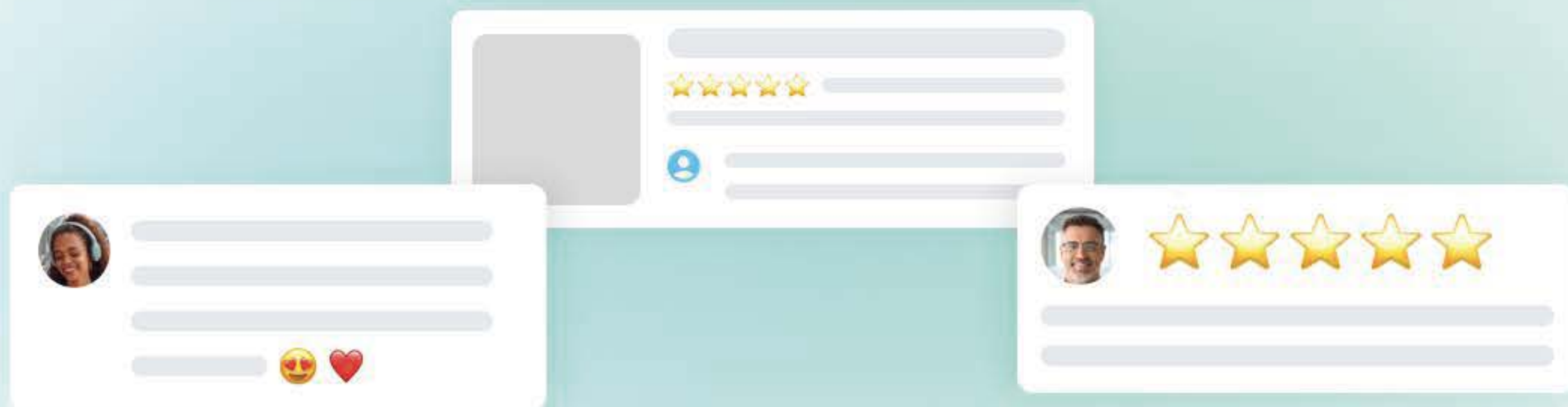
Reputation determines who gets chosen.

Among brands with comparable accuracy and content, consumer sentiment is the decisive factor. AI platforms rely heavily on ratings, review volume, and review freshness to infer authority and trustworthiness.

The bar is high. Businesses recommended by AI consistently maintain ratings above 4 stars, with strong review velocity and active response management. Importantly, leaders treat review responses as a brand signal, not a support task.

What leaders do differently:

They systematize review generation and respond quickly and personally, reinforcing trust at scale.



4. They Optimize Traditional and AI Channels Together

AI amplifies fundamentals; it does not replace them.

The most visible brands do not separate “AI strategy” from local marketing. They recognize that search, reputation, and social performance feed AI outcomes, and they optimize these channels in concert.

Consumers still rely heavily on native platforms like Google Maps, Yelp, and Facebook to discover and transact. Strong performance there improves both human and AI-mediated discovery.

What leaders do differently:

They invest where consumers already are and allow AI visibility to compound from that strength.



5. They Treat Search and Social as One System

Discovery is now cross-platform by default.

Search and social are no longer distinct ecosystems. Consumers increasingly use social platforms to search for recommendations, while search engines and AI systems index social profiles and content as signals of relevance and authenticity.

Leaders design their strategies for cross-pollination, ensuring profiles are connected, content is indexable, and signals reinforce one another.

What leaders do differently:

They manage social not just for engagement, but as a credibility signal that strengthens search and AI visibility.

In Summary

The 2026 Local Visibility Index makes one reality unmistakably clear:

Local visibility is no longer something brands control by ranking well in a single channel. Visibility is something they earn by proving relevance, trust, and consistency across an increasingly selective ecosystem.

AI has not replaced the fundamentals of local marketing, but it has compressed the opportunity set. Where traditional search rewarded optimization within a dominant platform, AI-driven discovery rewards confidence across many signals at once. Locations are no longer compared against dozens of alternatives; they are filtered, validated, and either selected — or excluded.

This has several implications for enterprise brands:

- **Visibility is binary in AI environments. A location is recommended or else effectively invisible.**
- **Leadership in traditional search is no longer a proxy for future performance. Brands that appear dominant on Google can still lose ground in AI if their signals are uneven elsewhere.**
- **Consistency now outweighs scale. Brands that manage accuracy, reputation, content, and engagement as an integrated system outperform those that optimize channels in isolation.**

The brands that rise to the top of the LVI — and cluster in the Leader quadrant — share a common approach. They do not chase AI as a new channel. They strengthen the signals AI depends on: trusted data, differentiated local content, strong consumer sentiment, and cross-platform reinforcement.

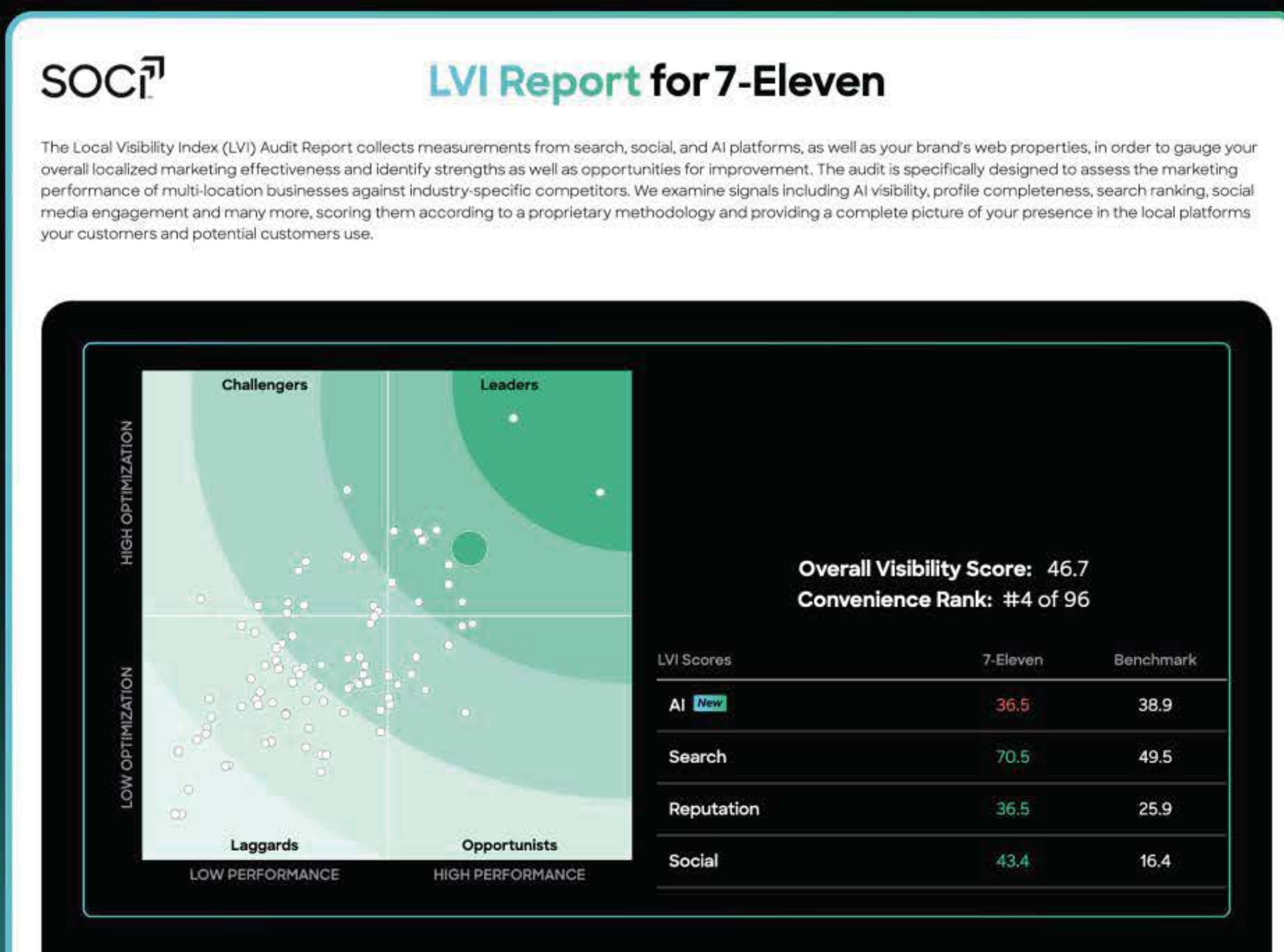
Just as importantly, this report shows that not all industries face the same path forward. In highly competitive categories, visibility gains are incremental and earned through exceptional execution. In less mature categories, foundational improvements can unlock disproportionate upside. In both cases, clarity about current performance is the starting point.

The next phase of local visibility will not be won by experimentation alone. It will be won by brands that understand where they stand, which signals matter most, and how far they are from the bar AI now enforces.

That is the purpose of the Local Visibility Index — and the opportunity it reveals.

Request a Brand Audit

The most important action item you can take today to improve your brand's visibility in AI and traditional search and social platforms is to request an LVI audit. Sign up today to learn how your brand performs on key metrics in comparison to others in your industry and to identify areas of improvement that will help you dominate AI-powered local recommendations in 2026 and beyond. **To request an audit, visit <https://www.soci.ai/audit>.**



Methodology

To produce the 2026 Local Visibility Index, SOCi analyzed performance signals for 2,751 multi-location brands across the United States. The dataset covers the majority of brands with 50 or more store or office locations, as well as property management companies with at least 10 properties under management. The analysis spans five major industries—retail, food and beverage, local services, financial services, and property management—and 42 subcategories ranging from coffee shops to mortgage brokers.

For each brand, SOCi gathered a statistically valid sample of locations, totaling approximately 350,000 business locations nationwide. Each location was matched, where applicable, with a business website or local landing page, along with active profiles on Google, Yelp, and Facebook. Ranking data was collected for both Google landing pages and Google Business Profiles. New for 2026, the study also included AI visibility testing through a series of structured queries on ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity, reflecting how consumers are now discovering local businesses through AI assistants.

To measure recommendation rates on AI platforms, our method was to request a longer list of businesses than most consumers would likely ask for. We asked each AI platform to recommend 10 businesses for each industry and geographical area represented in the study; if our target location appeared in the first 5 results, we considered it likely to be recommended by that AI platform.

Across all platforms and sources, the research captured more than 120 performance metrics. These included long-standing LVI measures such as profile completeness, review response rate, and social post frequency, as well as new AI-specific metrics assessing visibility in competitive searches, profile accuracy, and sentiment. Weighted averages were calculated across brands and industries to create updated LVI benchmarks for 2026.

Together, these metrics provide a comprehensive view of how brands perform across both traditional discovery channels and emerging AI platforms. By identifying the signals that most influence visibility and conversion, the LVI helps marketers understand where to focus effort and investment—so they can take charge of their brand's presence and turn stronger visibility into measurable growth.





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Local Marketing at SOCi.ai**

