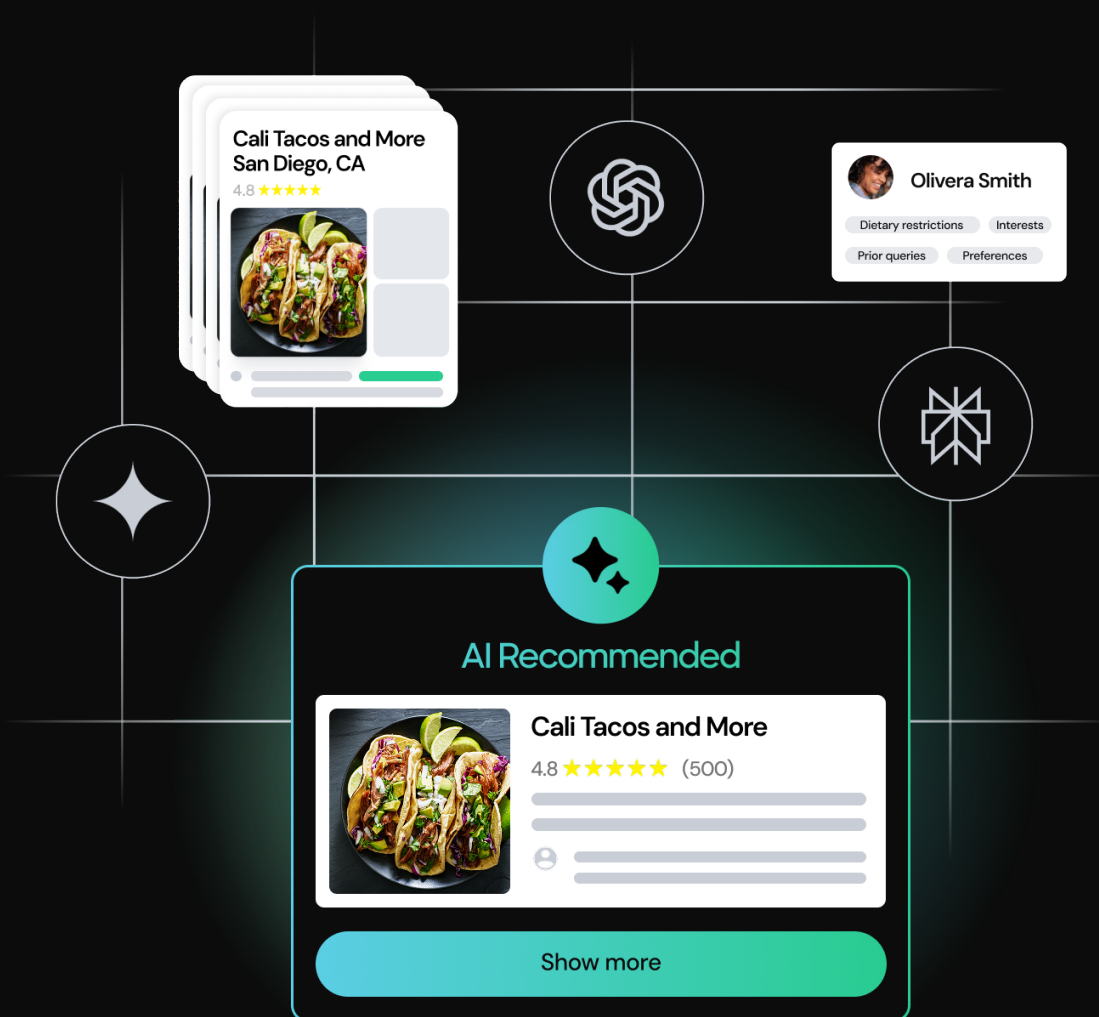




The Factors Driving AI Visibility





The AI Search Revolution

AI is redefining how consumers discover and choose local businesses. Unlike traditional search, AI results are no longer a list of links; they're single, synthesized answers that include recommendations and sometimes direct actions such as booking or calling. There's no "page two." You're either selected or invisible. Queries are now two to three times longer than in traditional search and are more conversational and specific, as consumers increasingly expect AI to manage the entire journey from research to purchase without leaving the chat.

There's no "page two." You're either selected or invisible.

53%

of U.S. consumers now use generative AI tools

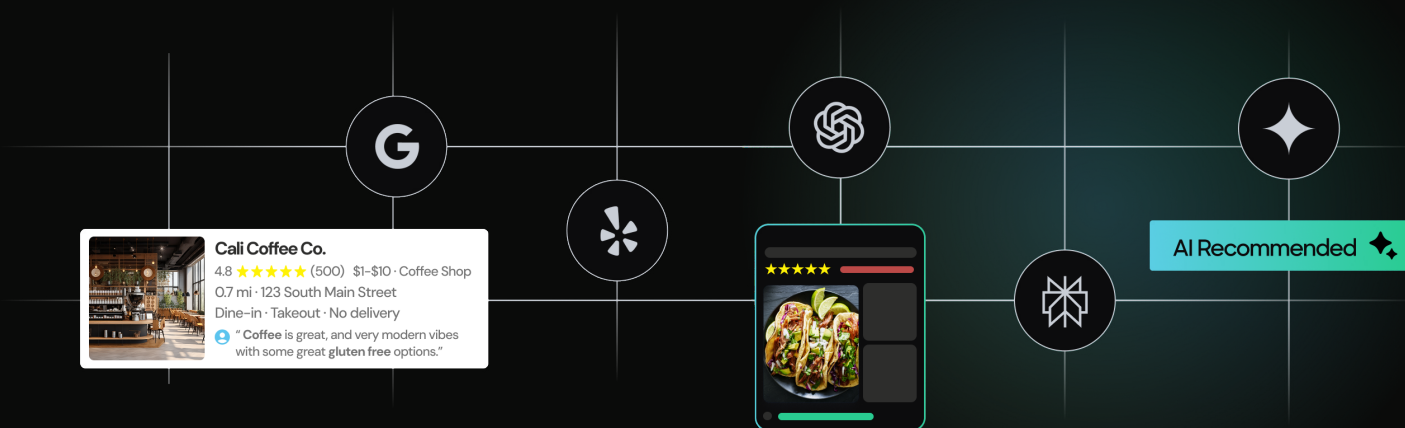
20%

use AI regularly, double the rate from 2024

The shift is accelerating at an unprecedented pace. **According to Semrush (July 2025), AI-driven search traffic is projected to overtake traditional organic search by early 2028, and possibly sooner.** Deloitte's September 2025 consumer study found that **53% of U.S. consumers now use generative AI tools, and 20% use them regularly, double the rate from just a year earlier.** Meanwhile, **Ahrefs reported in June 2025** that although Google remains the top referral source, **AI-driven channels have grown tenfold in the past year** and are already delivering the **highest conversion rates** across digital discovery. Together, these shifts point to a clear truth: visibility in AI-driven environments has become the new competitive battleground.



For multi-location brands, AI discovery now spans every corner of the digital ecosystem—search engines, maps, review sites, social networks, and AI assistants like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity. AI systems don't invent answers; they retrieve and synthesize information from trusted, authoritative sources. The accuracy of your listings, the strength of your reviews, and the quality of your local pages directly shape how AI represents your brand.



Marketers aren't powerless in this new landscape. They can **take charge of AI visibility** by strengthening the same signals that drive traditional search. Maintaining complete and accurate listings, responding to reviews, and publishing relevant local content not only improve rankings but also feed the data AI systems depend on to determine trust and relevance. Those who manage these inputs proactively will stand out as AI-driven discovery compounds their advantage.

Ultimately, visibility in the AI era is no longer about being found—it's about being **chosen**. Brands with stronger visibility signals across search, social, and reputation aren't just appearing more often—they're **growing faster**, as AI-driven discovery amplifies their ability to convert attention into action. Our AI study helps define what it now takes to achieve that visibility and turn it into measurable growth.



The Factors Driving Visibility on AI Platforms

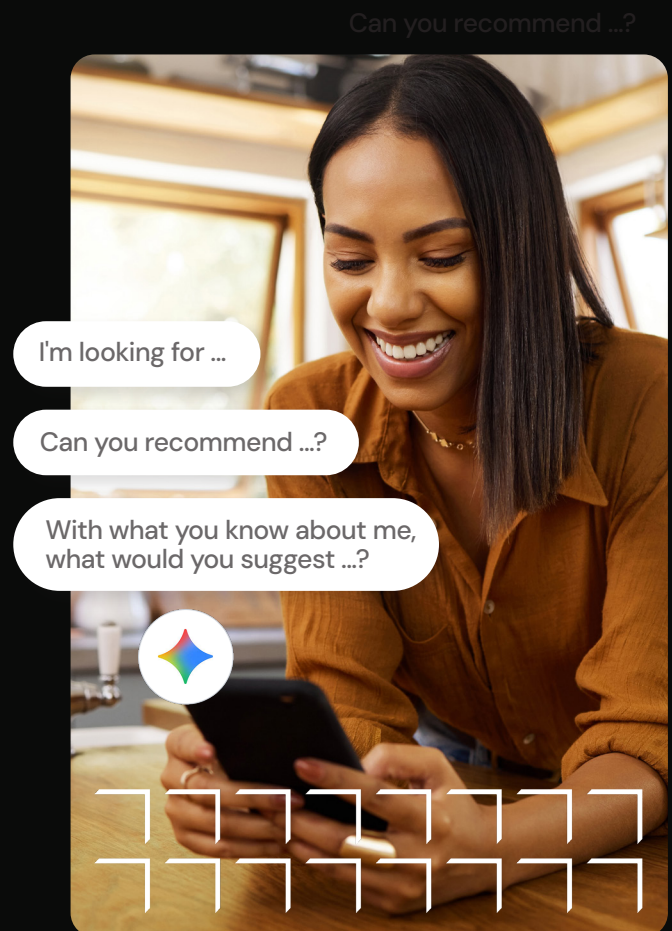
What We Studied

For our AI study, we analyzed a representative set of store and office locations for approximately 3,000 multi-location brands in the United States, comprising 350,000 locations in total. We performed 3.2M queries on ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity broken out into three categories, as outlined below.

AI PRESENCE:

We asked AI tools to recommend the 10 best businesses in the primary category and zip code of each business location, and tallied whether the target locations appeared and in what rank position. Though ranking itself is not a critical factor in AI search, we used rank as a proxy to determine if a brand location was likely to be recommended (rank 1-5), at risk of not being recommended (rank 6-10), or unlikely to be recommended (not found).

In constructing this part of the study, we recognized that consumers using AI tools may ask a broad range of highly nuanced and personalized questions. Our goal was not to capture every one of these potential nuances, but rather to use the “best X in Y” model as a means of capturing the fundamental “recommendability” of a brand.



KEY QUESTION:

Which brands are most likely to be recommended by AI platforms?



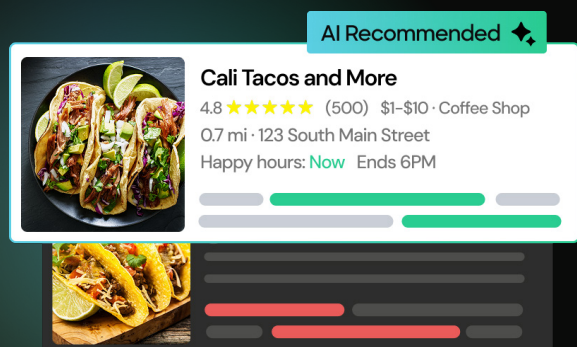
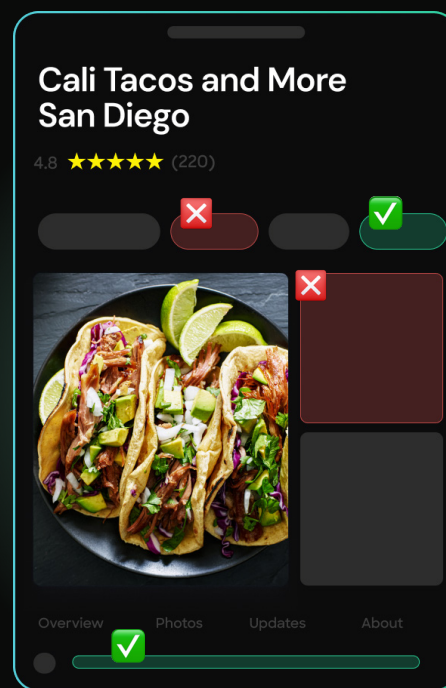
AI ACCURACY:

We asked AI tools to provide complete business profiles for each location, including business name, address, phone number, hours of operation, business website, ratings, and review count. We assessed the completeness and accuracy of each profile.

In constructing this set of queries, our goal was to determine whether consumers are likely to be able to transact business with a given brand using the information AI tools make available. We were conscious that accuracy of information is a factor in AI responses, with hallucinations sometimes being substituted for authoritative data. We also suspected that brands whose data in source platforms like Google and Yelp was faulty might show poorer performance in our AI Accuracy measurements.

KEY QUESTION:

How does the accuracy of AI information impact brand visibility?



AI SENTIMENT:

As mentioned, we asked AI tools to provide ratings and review counts for every location. These results often differed from other published sources. We suspected (1) that consumer sentiment might be a driving factor in determining whether a brand is recommended by AI, and (2) that ratings reported by AI tools would influence a consumer's decision to do business with that brand or not.

KEY QUESTION:

Which brands exhibit the strongest signs of positive sentiment in AI recommendations?



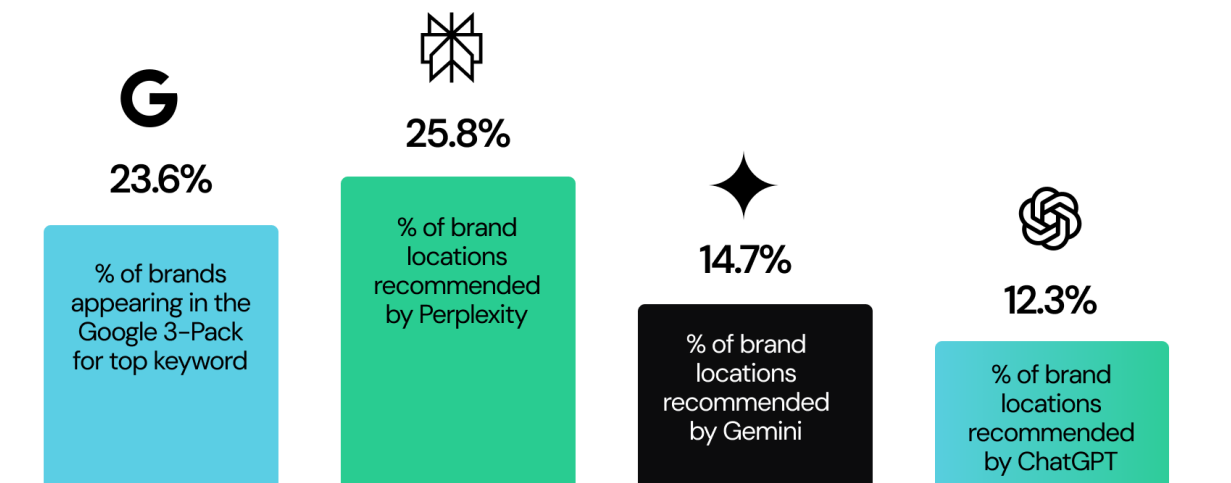
What We Found

AI PRESENCE

With what we know about the conversational, nuanced, and personalized nature of AI recommendations, it is not surprising to discover that brands face a greater challenge simply to win placement in AI recommendations than was the case with traditional search. Our findings indicate that simply being present in AI recommendations is a highly competitive proposition.

Whereas in SOCI's most recent Local Visibility Index benchmarks, brand locations were found to appear in the traditional Google 3-Pack 23.6% of the time, in the LLMs we studied, brand locations were only recommended at an average rate of 17.6%. We also noted what appears to be a slight bias in LLM recommendations toward SMBs over chains and franchises, suggesting that the challenge of AI presence is even greater for multi-location brands.

Fewer business are recommended...



Complex, specific queries mean fewer chances to appear in LLM results



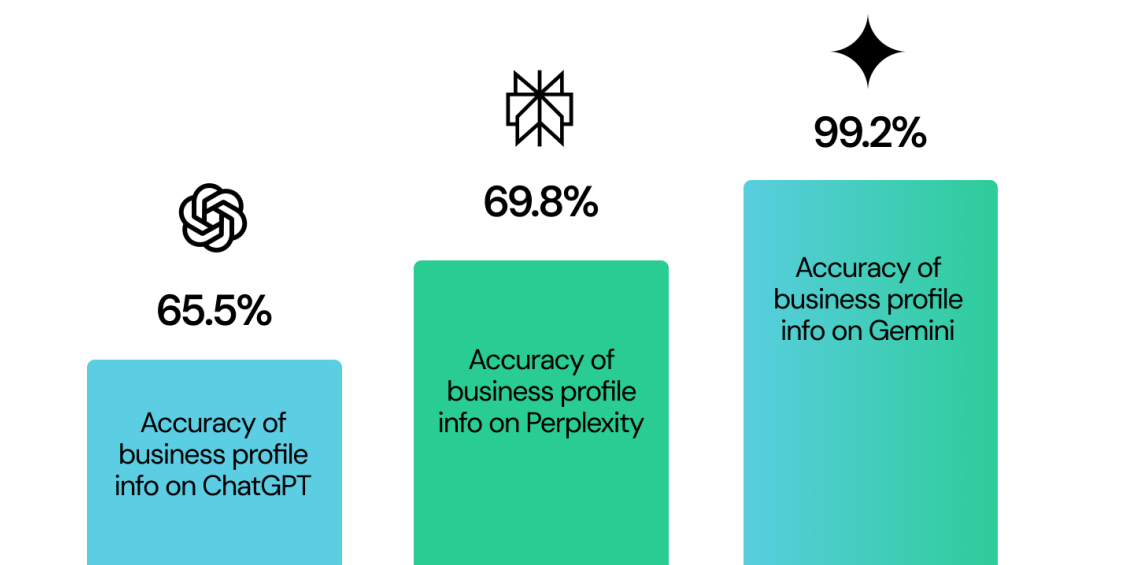
AI ACCURACY

Whereas traditional search has had many years to build up a comprehensive dataset on local businesses, LLMs are still comparatively new and local search has not been a use case they've emphasized as much as others. The local data ecosystem is, by its nature, fragmented, with many more popular and authoritative platforms like Google Maps and Yelp augmented by smaller directories and industry-specific sites, some of which get little consumer traffic today but are still available online.

Thus we find that LLMs — in particular ChatGPT and Perplexity, who do not have Google Maps at their core like Gemini does — are having a hard time sourcing accurate data for local businesses. In fact, ChatGPT location data is only 65.5% accurate and Perplexity only achieves an accuracy rate of 69.8%. This is compared to 99.2% accuracy for Gemini results.

Brands must ensure underlying data sources are correct and consistent in order to train LLMs to report accurately on their locations. Appearing in recommendations is only part of the story; consumers won't be able to visit or transact with businesses whose phone number, address, or hours of operation are faulty.

LLM Data Sources Are Fragmented



Brands must submit complete, accurate local data to underlying sources



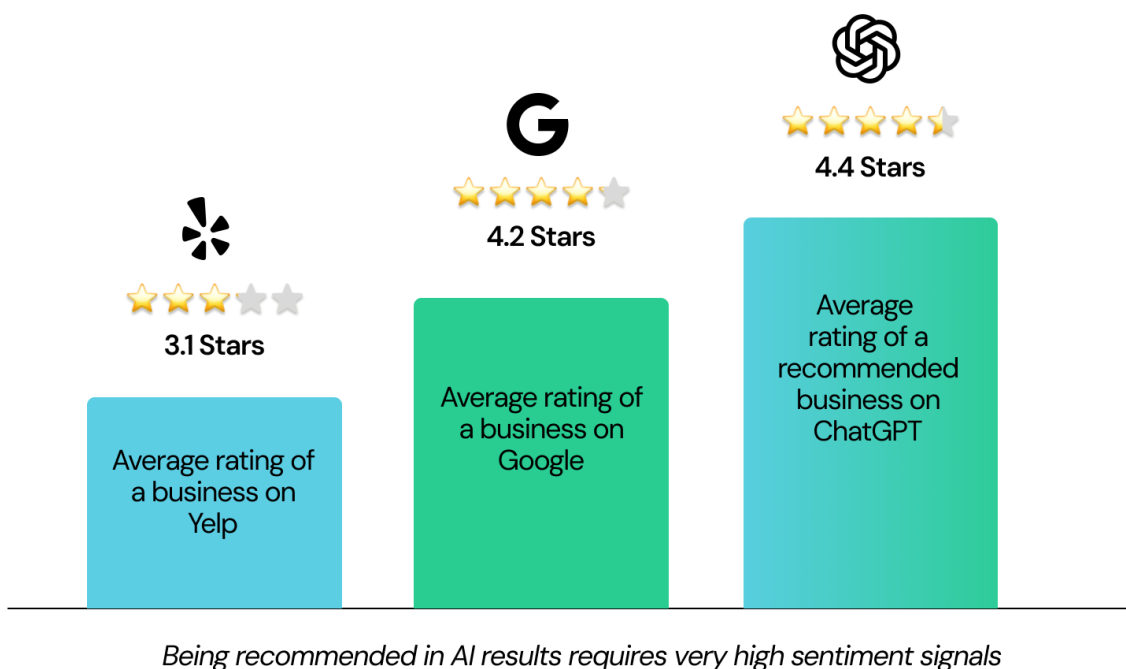
AI SENTIMENT

The wide availability of reviews for local businesses make them the most obvious way to gauge consumer sentiment about brand locations. Just as star ratings and review counts have long been considered core ranking factors in traditional search, so too do we find that local reviews help determine whether a brand is likely to appear in LLM recommendations.

Just as the bar is higher as measured by AI Presence, so too are LLMs choosier when it comes to ranking businesses by star rating. Whereas the average rating of a business is 3.1 stars on Yelp and 4.2 stars on Google, the average rating of a recommended business on Perplexity is 4.3 stars, and the average on ChatGPT is 4.4 stars. (Gemini, as before, follows Google.)

Businesses must compete for high ratings, fundamentally by providing excellent customer experiences, and secondarily by asking customers to review them and responding to reviews both positive and negative.

Reviews Matter More than Ever





Correlations Between AI Visibility and Local Marketing Signals

Our findings indicate that there is a measurable link between visibility in AI platform results and visibility in traditional search and social channels, though discrepancies also exist. Overall, we find there is a strong correlation ($r=0.72$) between local marketing performance in traditional channels, as measured by our Local Visibility Index, and AI visibility. This means that brands who have done the hard work to gain traction in digital channels at the local level, by building out robust online profiles, posting frequently on social platforms, building local audiences, and responding to local consumer feedback, are more likely to stand out prominently in AI recommendations for local stores and service providers.

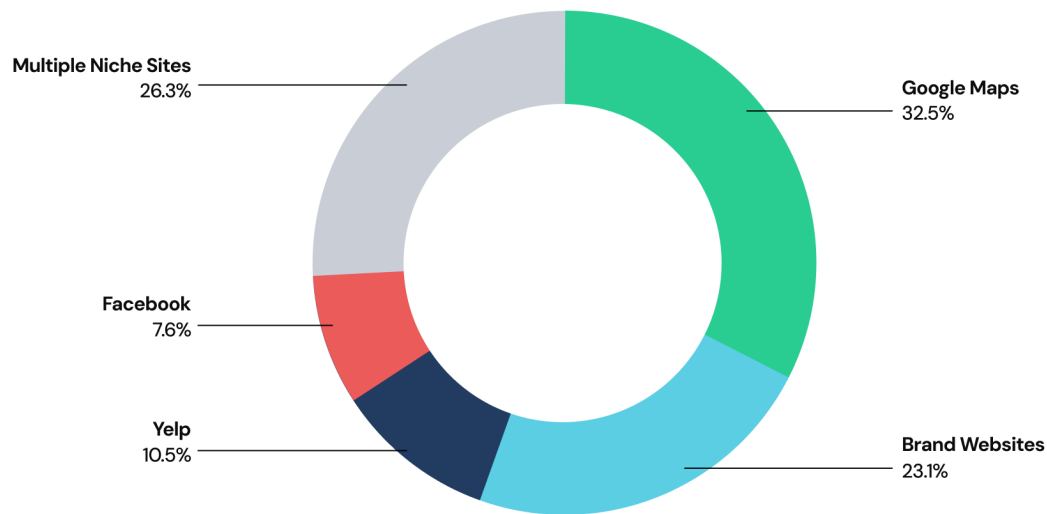
Sources Used to Power Local LLM Results

We examined 2 million source URLs to determine which sources LLMs use to provide local recommendations. This research is critical in illuminating for marketers what sites must be influenced in order to improve the chances of appearing prominently in LLM recommendations.

We found that the brand website appears in 23.1% of LLM recommendations, making websites and local landing pages an essential centerpoint of LLM optimization. Among the third party sources cited by LLMs, three stand out most prominently: Google Maps, which by itself makes up 32.5% of all local citations, along with Yelp and Facebook, comprising 10.5% and 7.6% of local citations respectively.

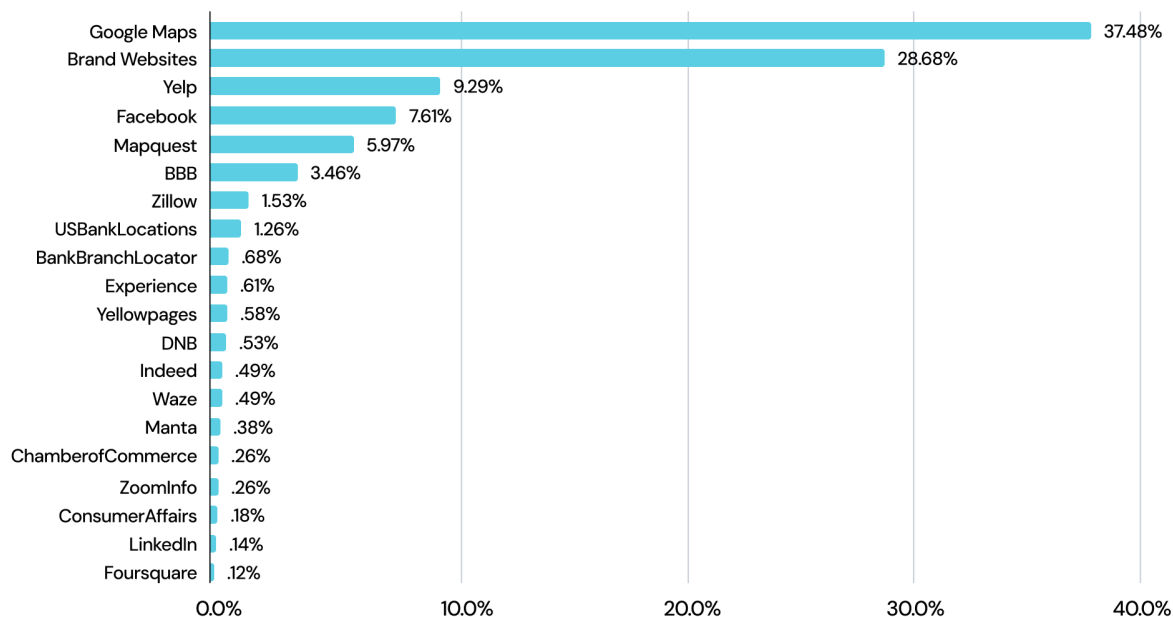


Top LLM Sources Overall



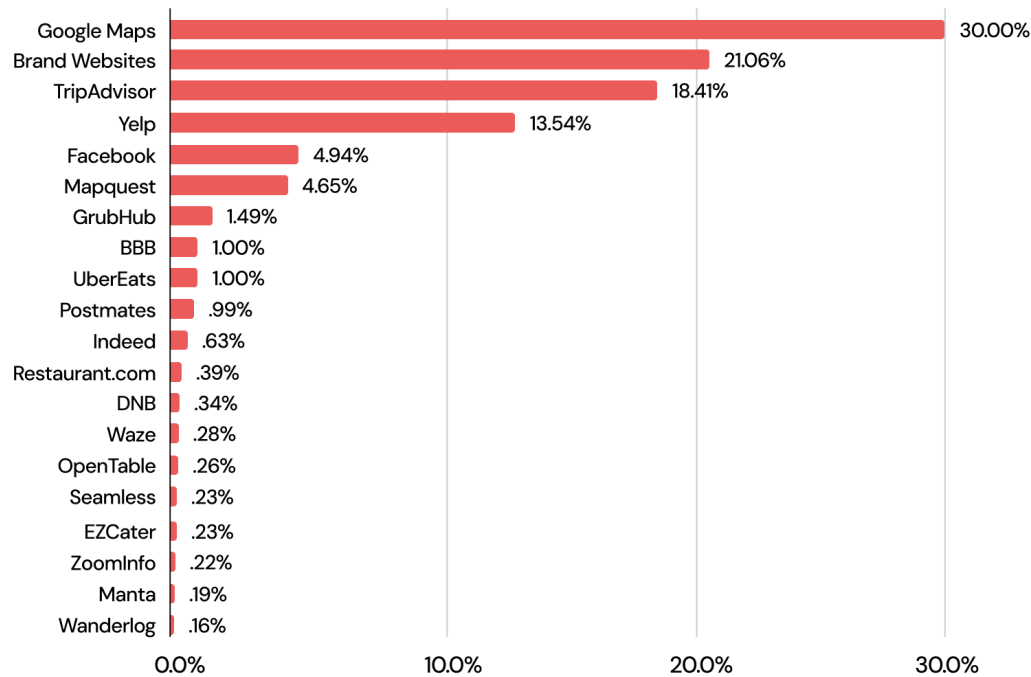
Among the other top domains, we see a strong emphasis on industry specificity, from TripAdvisor, Booking.com, and Expedia for hotels to Apartments.com, Zillow, and Realtor for homes and GrubHub, UberEats, and Postmates for restaurant information. Brand marketers will want to target the top sites relevant to their industries and ensure their profile information is accurate and as richly detailed as possible. Google, Yelp, Facebook, and brand websites should be prioritized more highly than niche sites.

Top 20 LLM Sources: Financial Services

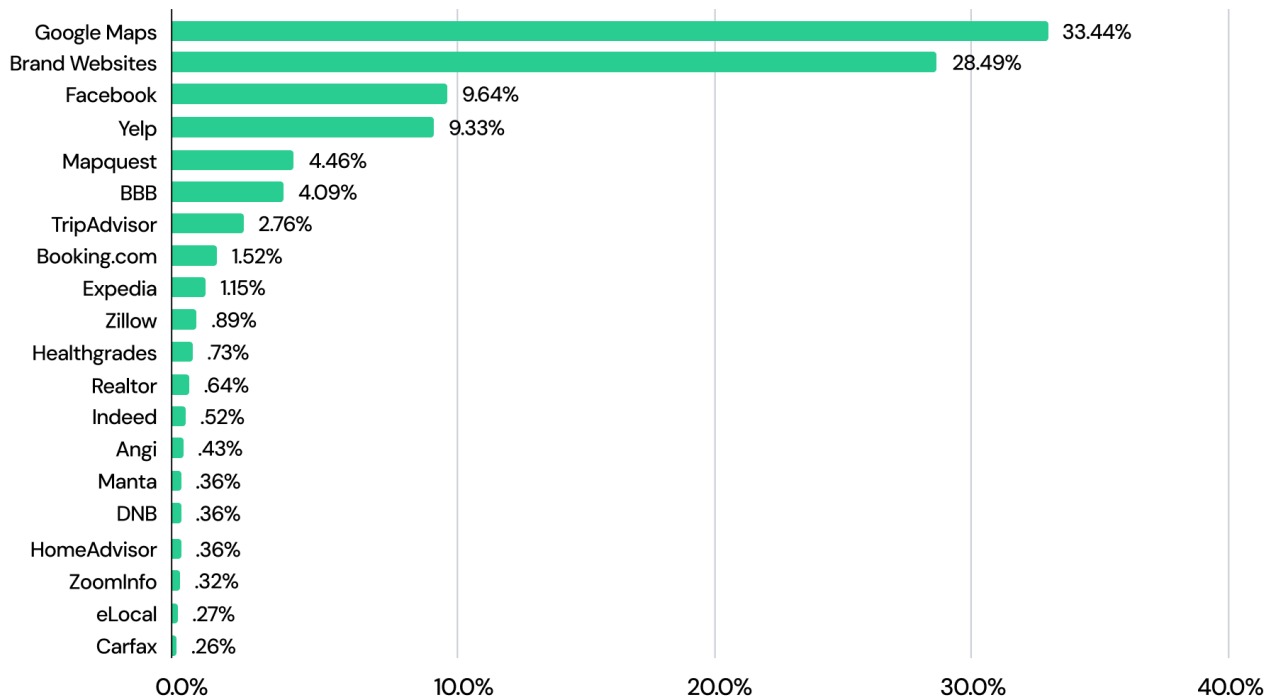




Top 20 LLM Sources: Food & Beverage

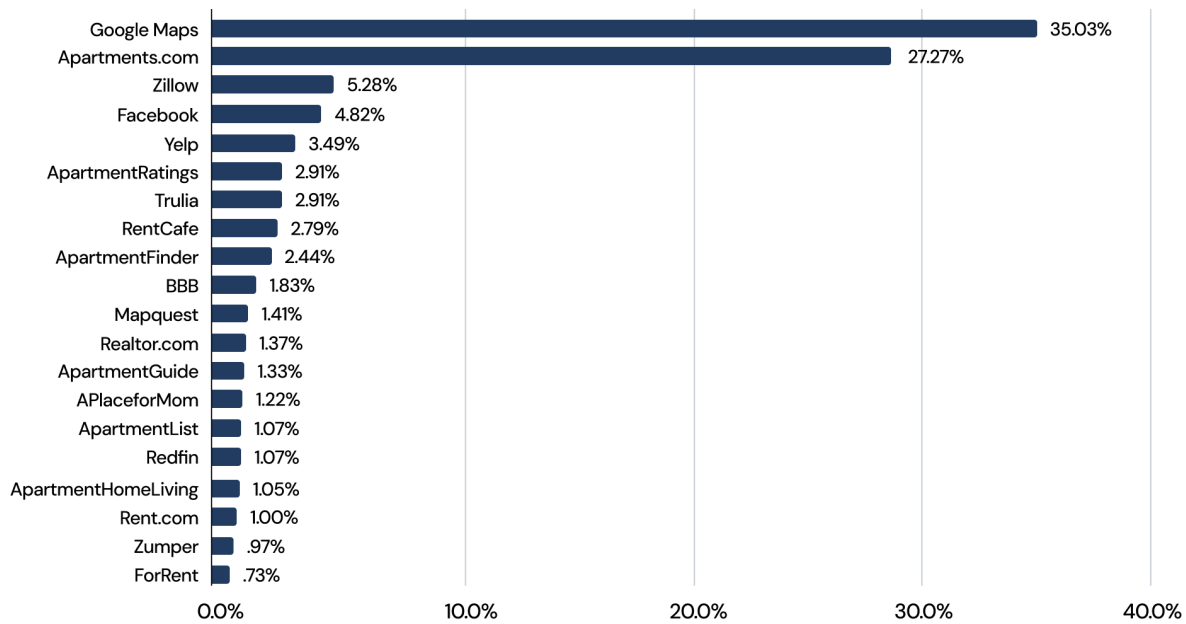


Top 20 LLM Sources: Local Services

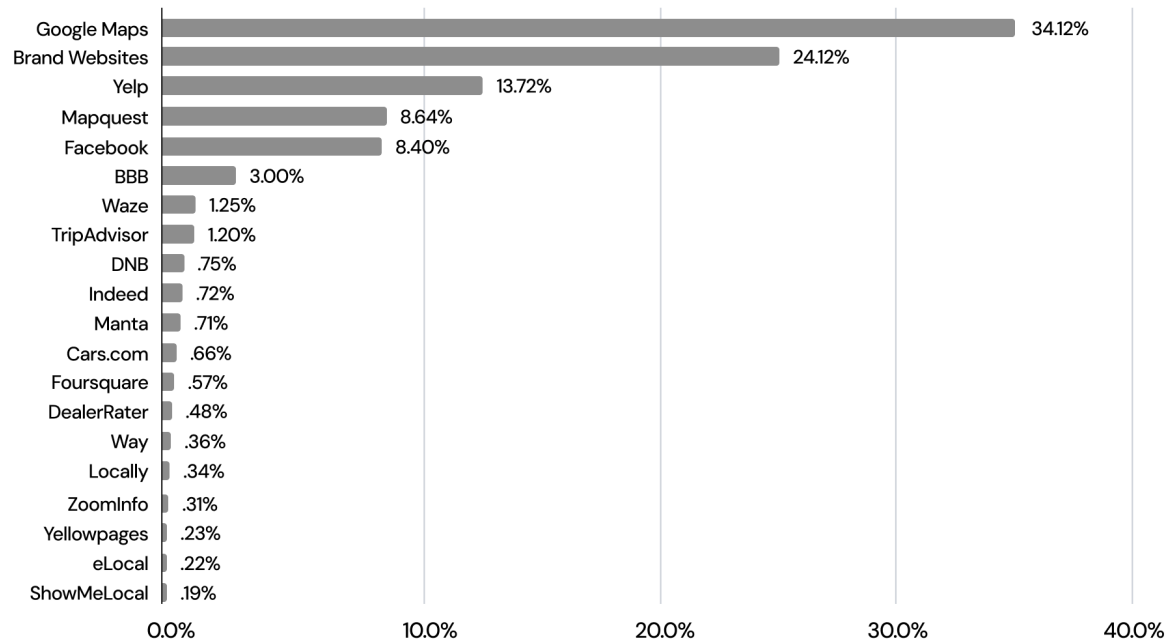




Top 20 LLM Sources: Property Management



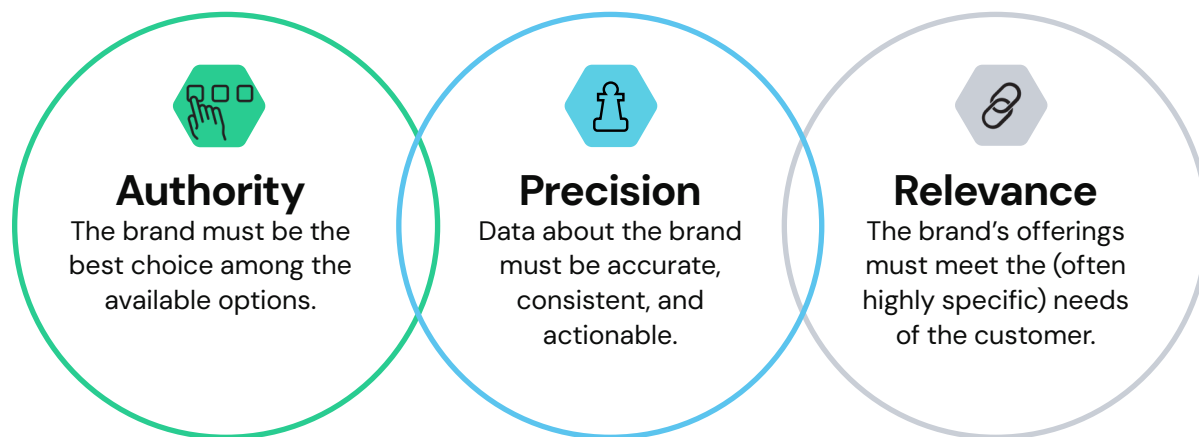
Top 20 LLM Sources: Retail





What We Can Learn from Brands that Dominate AI Results

The brands that perform well in AI results are those that have the strongest combination of three factors.



It follows that brands who want to increase their AI visibility should focus their local marketing efforts on optimizing for these factors. For efficiency's sake, it's fortunate that doing so will likely have benefits in traditional search as well as AI platforms.

Three linked activities can be combined to form the foundation of an AI visibility strategy.

1. AUDIT YOUR AI VISIBILITY.

Analyze how your brand's locations appear in AI results on core platforms like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity. Conduct a range of queries asking LLMs to recommend businesses in your industry and in markets where you have locations. Whether your brand appears favorably, unfavorably, or not at all, note the cited sources.

2. OPTIMIZE SOURCE SITES.

Ensure your listings are claimed, updated, and consistent on the major platforms cited by LLMs for the searches that matter for your brand. You'll likely need to pay special attention to the source sites where your brand appears unfavorably and the sites linked to recommendations for which you currently don't appear.

3. CREATE TARGETED CONTENT.

Align your content strategy with the buyer personas of your highest priority customers. Ensure the content in your online profiles, social media posts, corporate site, and local landing pages includes details that will answer the most likely questions your ideal customers will have about your brand. LLMs will use this content to decide which businesses to recommend.



Get in Touch with SOCi

Concerned about AI visibility for your brand? SOCi can help!



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