SHORELINE
DIGITAL MARKETING

DIGITAL VISIBILITY INSIGHTS

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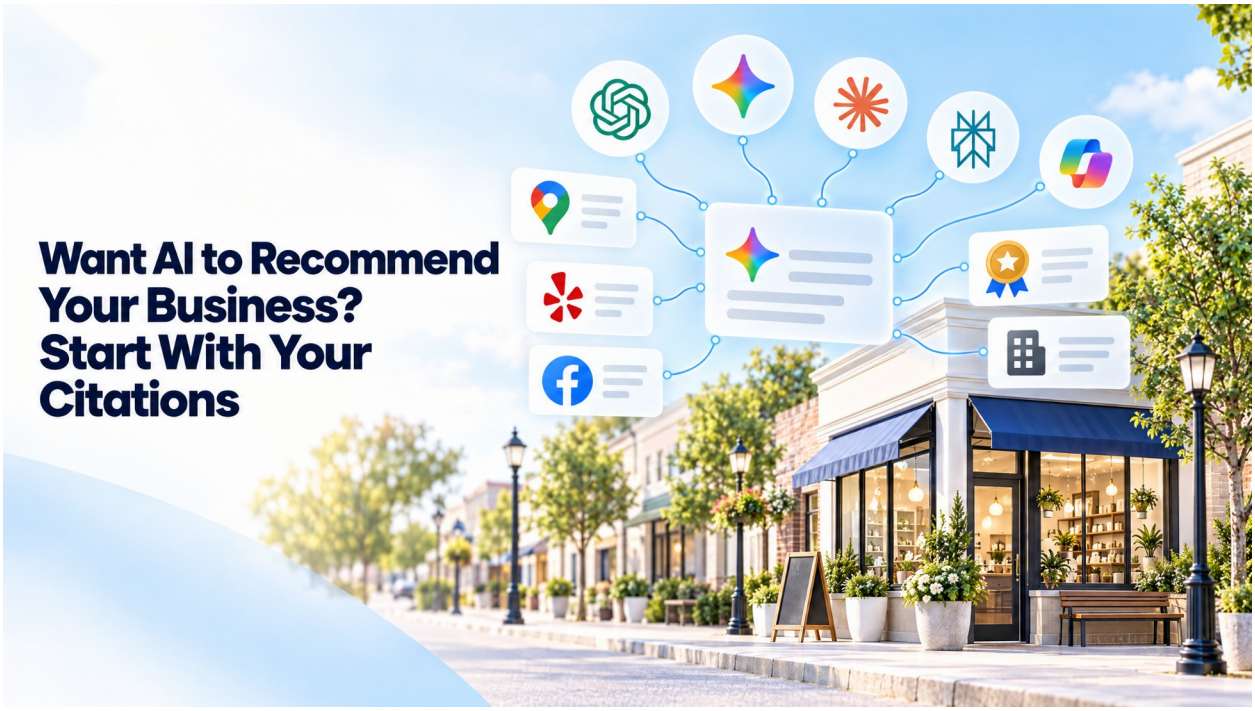
01 AI recommendations and business citations

02 What 9 million AI answers reveal

03 Google preferred-source follower counts

04 Visual ChatGPT ads for local businesses

1 Want AI to Recommend Your Business? Start With Your Citations



Your customers are asking ChatGPT and Google's AI who to hire. Here is how to make sure your name comes up.

TL;DR

- **What a citation is:** any online mention of your business details, on a directory listing or anywhere else on the web.
- **Why it matters now:** AI tools build local answers from these mentions. Citation-related factors fill much of the top 20 in Whitespark's expert survey on AI visibility.
- **Where AI looks:** Google Business Profile, Yelp, Facebook, industry directories, "best of" lists, and your own website.
- **What to do:** check what AI says about you, get listed where AI looks, keep every detail accurate, and repeat a few times a year.

Citations are back, and AI is the reason

For years, business listings felt like a box you ticked once and forgot. That has changed. When someone asks an AI tool "who is the best plumber near me?", the answer is pulled together from places that mention your business: directories, review sites, local articles, and your website.

Whitespark asked leading local search experts which factors they believe matter most for showing up in AI answers. Citation sources dominate the top 20. Being on expert-curated "best of" lists came in at #1, and prominence on industry-relevant sites came in at #3

Two types of citations you need

Type	What it is	Examples
Structured	A formal business listing with your name, address, phone, hours, and website	Google Business Profile, Yelp, Facebook, YP.com, TripAdvisor, FindLaw, Zocdoc
Unstructured	A mention of your business anywhere that is not a formal listing	"Best of" lists, local news stories, blog posts, sponsorship pages, community sites

You need both. Structured listings give AI the facts. Unstructured mentions give it reasons to recommend you.

What the data says

BrightLocal studied about 1.9 million sources that Google AI Overviews, Google AI Mode, and ChatGPT cited for local searches across 1,355 business locations. Three findings stand out:

- **Google Business Profile is the single biggest source**, at more than a quarter of everything cited.
- **Yelp appeared in 80% of ChatGPT's local answers.** If you have ignored your Yelp page, now is the time to fix it.
- **Your own website counts.** Around 93% of the individual sites cited were business websites.

The study also found that AI leans on industry-specific directories, so the right list for a dentist looks different from the right list for a roofer.

Your 5-step playbook

1. **Google yourself.** Search your business name, your name plus your city, and your main services. Note which directories and sites show up for you and for your top competitors.
2. **Ask the AI tools.** Try ChatGPT and Google AI Mode with questions a customer would ask: "Who is the best [service] in [city]?" or "Is [your business] good with [specific need]?" See who gets named and which sources are quoted.
3. **Fill the gaps.** Get listed on every relevant platform you found, especially the ones that mention your competitors but not you.
4. **Make every detail match.** Name, address, phone, hours, and services should be identical everywhere. Conflicting details confuse customers and AI alike.
5. **Keep it current.** Update listings the moment anything changes, and rerun steps 1 to 3 a few times a year. The sources AI trusts keep shifting.

One more tip: nail your brand facts

Wherever you appear, say the same clear things: who you are, what you do, who you help, the problems you solve, and what you specialize in. The clearer and more consistent your story, the easier it is for AI to match you with the right customer.

An honest note: experts still debate how much new citations directly change AI recommendations versus what these tools already know. What is not in question is that accurate, widespread business information helps customers, search engines, and AI find and trust you.

Want this done for you?
We find the citation sources that matter for your industry and city, build and clean up your listings, keep your details consistent everywhere, and track how you show up in AI search. Get in touch to get started.

Sources: Whitespark, "2026 Playbook: How to Optimize Citations for AI Visibility" (Sept 2026) and Local Search Ranking Factors survey; BrightLocal, "Top sources and directories for local AI search" (Aug 2026).

2 What 9 Million AI Answers Tell Us About Getting Found Locally



New data shows how ChatGPT, Google and other AI tools decide which businesses to mention, and what you can do about it.

TL;DR

- **The study:** A study analyzed 9 million AI answers across nine platforms (ChatGPT, Google AI Overviews, AI Mode, Gemini, Perplexity, Copilot, Grok, Claude and Meta AI) covering 400+ brands.
- **Plain pages win:** 64% of AI citations come from ordinary, well-written pages, not special formats.
- **Others speak for you:** on buying-intent questions, 82% of citations go to third-party sites and only 3% to a brand's own pages.
- **Your site still pays off:** when your own page is cited, AI visibility jumps 5x and the citation lasts 3 to 9 times longer.
- **Customers are already there:** 45% of US consumers used AI tools for local business recommendations, up from 6% a year earlier (BrightLocal, 2026).
- **What to do:** answer real customer questions on your site, keep listings accurate, earn mentions on trusted sites, and post video.

Why this matters to you

Your customers have started asking AI the questions they used to type into Google: "Who is the best plumber near me?" or "Which dentist is good with kids?" BrightLocal's 2026 survey of 1,002 US consumers found AI is now the third most used tool for local recommendations, behind only Google and Facebook, and ahead of Yelp.

AI tools do not show ten blue links. They give a short answer and name a few businesses. You are either in that answer or you are not.

45%	82%	5x
of US consumers used AI for local business recommendations	of citations on buying questions go to third-party sites	visibility lift when your own page gets cited

What the data found

The finding	What it means for you
1. You do not need fancy content. Nearly two thirds (64%) of the pages AI cited were normal, thorough pages. No tricks, no special templates.	Clear service pages that explain what you do, where, and for how much are exactly what AI looks for.
2. AI trusts what others say about you. On buying questions, 82% of the sources AI cites are third-party sites. Only 3% are the business's own pages.	Directories, review sites, local news and "best of" lists carry real weight.
3. Your own website is still your strongest asset. When it is cited, visibility jumps 5x. Those citations last 3 to 9 times longer, while up to 58% of all citations never reappear.	Your site is the one source you fully control. Keep it detailed and current.
4. Video counts. Among third-party sources, YouTube gave the biggest visibility lift (2.8x), ahead of LinkedIn (2.7x) and Reddit (2.4x).	Short videos answering common customer questions, with your business name in the title and description, can help you get picked up.
5. Being cited is not the same as being named. Up to 75% of AI answers that cite a brand's page never say the brand's name.	Use your business name and location clearly and consistently on every page.
6. Good reviews alone will not get you cited. Positive sentiment did not lead to more citations.	Reviews still matter: 97% of AI users at least sometimes double-check AI recommendations against real reviews (BrightLocal).

One honest caveat: this study tracked large enterprise brands, not local shops. For location-based searches, a separate Yext analysis of 6.8 million AI citations adds useful detail: 44% came from business websites and 42% from listings, with reviews and social at 8%. The lesson is the same either way. AI builds its answer from your website plus the places across the web that describe you.

5 things to do this month

1. **Answer real questions on your site.** Add pricing ranges, service areas, FAQs and specifics only you know.
2. **Fix your listings.** Make sure your name, address, phone and hours match everywhere, starting with your Google Business Profile.
3. **Get mentioned elsewhere.** Aim for local directories, industry sites, community pages and "best in [city]" roundups.
4. **Post simple videos.** One question, one answer, your business name in the title.
5. **Check where you stand.** Ask ChatGPT and Google's AI for a business like yours in your city, and see who gets named.

How we can help

We help local businesses get found and recommended on the top AI platforms, including ChatGPT, Google AI Overviews, AI Mode, Gemini, Perplexity and Claude. That covers tracking where you appear today, improving your website content, cleaning up your listings and building the third-party mentions AI relies on.

Want to know if AI is recommending you or your competitors? Reply to this email and we will run an AI visibility check for your business.

Sources: Search Engine Land, "What 9 million AI answers reveal about search visibility" (Nikki Lam, NP Digital, Sept 30, 2026); BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2026; Yext AI citations research (Oct 2025).

3 Google Is Now Emailing Site Owners Their Preferred Source Follower Counts



TL;DR

- **What happened:** In early October 2026, Google began emailing some website owners the number of people who picked their site as a "preferred source."
- **Why it matters:** Google says people are 2X more likely to click through to a site after marking it as a preferred source.
- **Where it shows:** Preferred sources appear more often in Top Stories, AI Overviews, and AI Mode.
- **What to do:** Check your Search Console inbox, add Google's free "preferred source" button to your site, and ask loyal customers to tap it.

What is a preferred source?

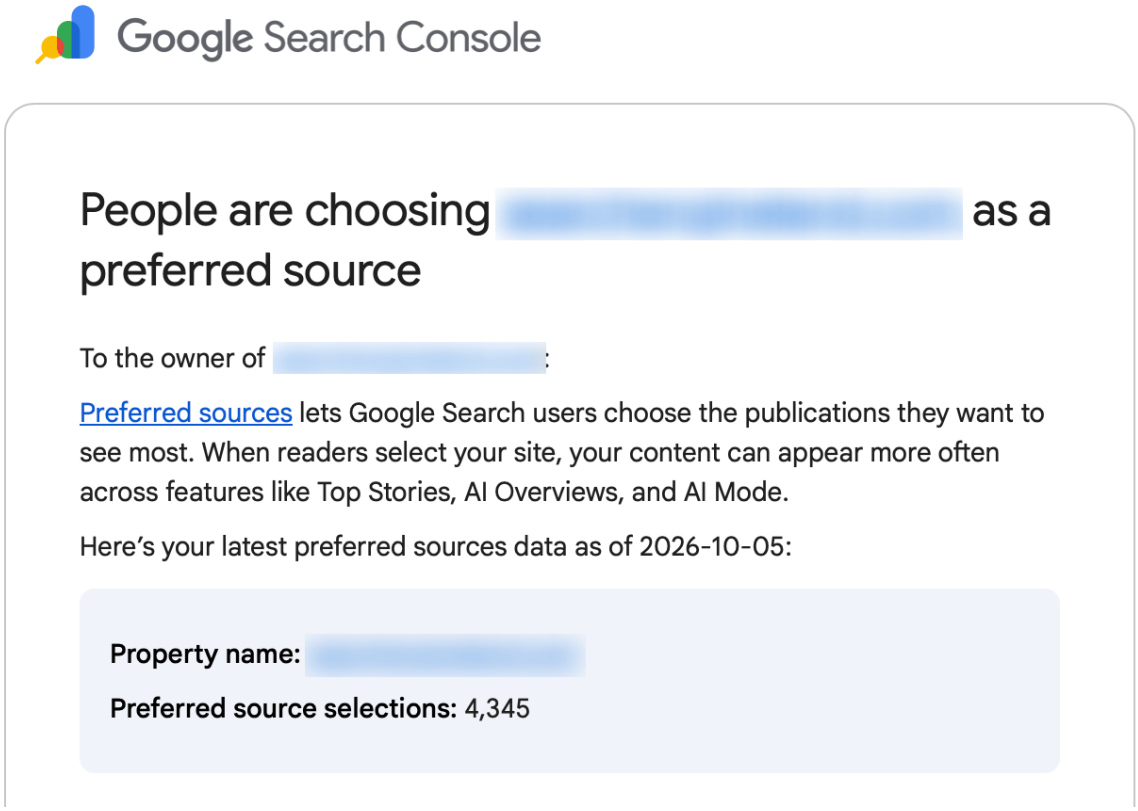
Think of it as a "follow" button for Google Search. A person picks the websites they trust, and Google shows content from those sites more often in that person's results. Your content gets a small "preferred" label too.



The feature launched in Top Stories in August 2025, went global in December 2025, and expanded into AI Overviews and AI Mode in 2026. During early testing, Google said people had already picked nearly 90,000 different sources, ranging from local blogs to global news outlets.

What is new this month?

Until now, you had no way to know if anyone had chosen your site. That changed around October 6, 2026, when site owners started getting emails from Google Search Console saying people are choosing their domain as a preferred source, with a count of selections as of October 5.



A few things to know:

- **Not everyone got one.** Google has not said how it picks recipients.
- **The number lives in the email only.** There is no report inside Search Console yet. The email includes a short survey asking if you want one.
- **The count is loosely defined.** Google has not said if it reflects unique people, or a snapshot versus a running total.

Why should a local business care?

Each selection is a person telling Google, "show me more from this business." That is rare, first-hand loyalty data, and it carries into AI answers, where more of your customers now start their search.

One honest caveat: this feature rewards sites that publish fresh content. If your website is five static pages, it will not move the needle. If you post local guides, seasonal tips, project spotlights, or community news, you have something worth following.

Your 4-step action plan

1. **Search your inbox.** Look for a Search Console email mentioning "preferred source." No email? You can still do steps 2 to 4.
2. **Add the button.** Google offers a free "Add as a preferred source" button that takes two lines of code. Ask your web team or agency to place it on your blog and homepage.
3. **Share your direct link.** Use this format and swap in your domain: google.com/preferences/source?q=yourdomain.com. Drop it into your email newsletter, social posts, and review follow-up messages.
4. **Publish on a schedule.** Even one helpful, local post a month gives people a reason to follow and gives Google something fresh to show.

Note: only full domains and subdomains qualify (yourdomain.com or blog.yourdomain.com). A subfolder such as yourdomain.com/blog cannot be selected on its own.

The bottom line

Google just gave you a new scoreboard: how many people have asked to see more of you. Your existing customers already trust you, so asking them to tap one button is a low-cost way to show up more often in the searches and AI answers that matter. Want help setting up the button or a content plan? Reply to this email and we will get it done.

Sources: Google Search Central (Preferred Sources guide), Search Engine Land, Search Engine Roundtable.

4 ChatGPT Ads Are Getting Visual: What It Means for Your Local Business



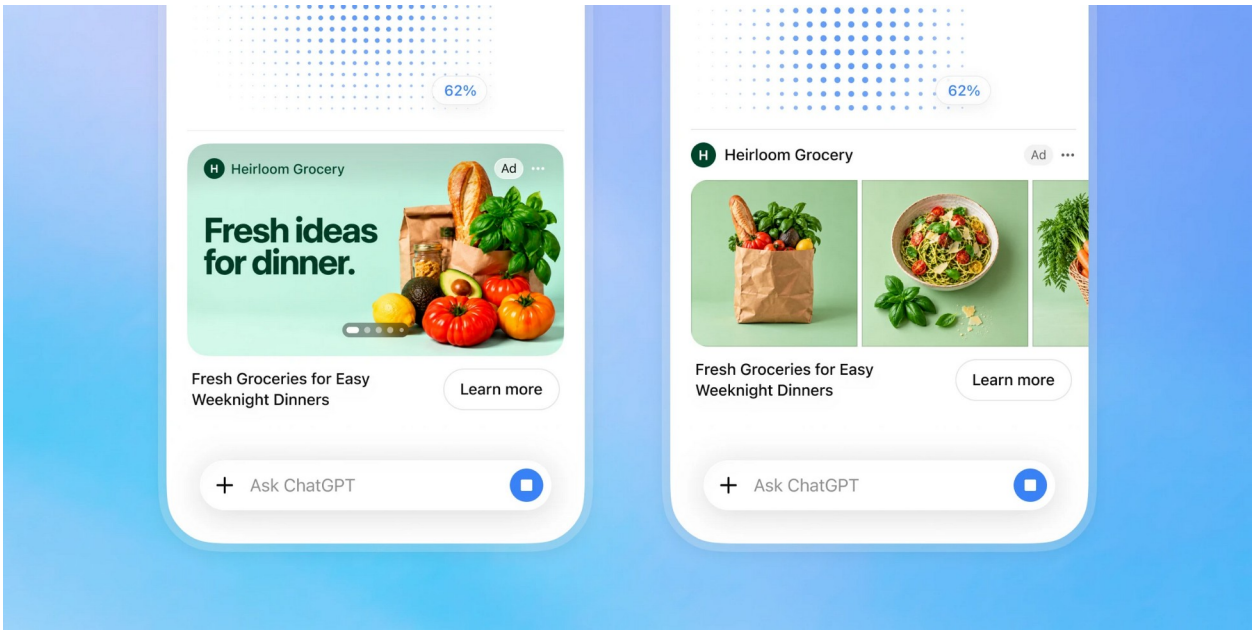
TL;DR

- On October 5, 2026, OpenAI announced a new visual ad format for ChatGPT. Testing starts later this month with a small group of US advertisers.
- The ads show up while someone is generating an image. They are clearly labeled and kept separate from the image itself.
- Only Free and Go plan users see ads. OpenAI says ads do not influence ChatGPT's answers and conversations stay private.
- OpenAI also added third-party measurement and brand safety tools, so advertisers can check whether ads bring in real, new customers.
- For local businesses: no need to rush in. Get your online presence in shape now and test small when the time is right.

What changed

Until now, ads in ChatGPT were small text-led placements below a conversation. The new format adds imagery. When a user creates an image in ChatGPT, a brand can show a visual ad alongside it, featuring product inspiration, a product in use, or the experience it makes possible.

Picture a homeowner asking ChatGPT to visualize a new backyard patio. That is the kind of moment where a relevant visual ad could appear.



ChatGPT now reaches 1.2 billion people every week, according to OpenAI. That is a lot of people researching, comparing, and deciding in one place.

Why a local business owner should care

- **Your customers are already there.** People use ChatGPT to plan projects and shortlist providers before they ever pick up the phone.
- **The door is open to small advertisers.** OpenAI opened its self-serve Ads Manager to US businesses of all sizes in May 2026. Accounts are verified before ads run, and reported starting bids sit around $3 to $5 per click.
- **You can now measure results.** New integrations with tools like Triple Whale, Northbeam, and LiveRamp help advertisers connect ad spend to actual sales and leads.
- **You get more control.** A new "Negative Phrases" feature lets qualifying advertisers keep ads away from topics they want to avoid.

What the early numbers say

- **WeightWatchers:** cost per acquisition 15.3% below its paid search benchmark.
- **Dose:** 67% of incremental purchases came from new customers.
- **Portland Leather:** 93% of visitors from ChatGPT Ads were new to the brand.

A fair caveat: these are partner-reported results from national brands, not platform-wide benchmarks. Local results may look different.

What to do right now

1. **Don't panic-buy ads.** Visual ads are in limited testing. Watch how they perform first.
2. **Fix the free stuff first.** Accurate business listings, fresh reviews, and clear service pages help AI tools recommend you without paying for a click.
3. **Build a photo library.** Real before-and-after shots and finished work will matter more as ads turn visual.
4. **Test small if you are ready.** If you already run Google Ads profitably, a small ChatGPT test budget is a reasonable experiment.
5. **Track every lead.** Ask "how did you hear about us?" and tag your links so you know what is working.

The bottom line

AI chat is becoming a place where buying decisions happen, and ads are following. The businesses that win will be the ones that are easy to find, easy to trust, and ready to show their work visually.

Sources: OpenAI | Search Engine Land | Marketing-Interactive | PPC Land | WebFX