

THE 2026 FIELD MANUAL FOR LAW FIRMS

GET CITED OR GET FORGOTTEN

Winning clients from Google, ChatGPT, and
every other robot that answers legal questions now

- How AI answers get made — and how your firm gets picked
- Drafting with AI without sounding like a robot
- The DIY AI-visibility audit, with free tools
- Every stat verified. Every source cited. Some jokes included.

WRITTEN BY

Darin Swayne



AdvantageAttorney®

2026 Edition · advantageattorneymarketing.com

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Get Cited or Get Forgotten

Winning clients from Google, ChatGPT, and every other robot that answers legal questions now

Darin Swayne

Advantage Attorney Marketing

Get Cited or Get Forgotten: The 2026 Field Manual for Law Firms

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Every statistic in this book is drawn from a named, dated source — platform announcements, academic studies, and original research from major SEO software companies. You'll find the full list in the bibliography. Where the ground is still moving (and in AI search, the ground is basically a treadmill), the text says so plainly. Research window: April–July 2026, with a handful of clearly dated foundational studies. If you're reading this in 2028: hello from the past. Check the numbers before you quote them at a partner meeting.

Disclaimer: This book provides marketing education and general business information. It does not provide legal advice, create an attorney-client relationship, or guarantee any particular result — and the attorneys reading it will recognize those as the correct sentences to include. The information is provided "as is," current as of July 2026, and subject to change as platforms evolve; neither the author nor the publisher assumes liability for actions taken in reliance on it.

How to Use This Book

This is a field manual, not a novel. Nobody expects you to read it beach-chair style, cover to cover, though I've done my best to make that a surprisingly pleasant option. It's organized so that different people can raid it for different things.

If you own or run a law firm: read Part I (three chapters, plenty of charts) and Chapter 13 (the 90-day playbook). That's the full strategic picture in about forty minutes. You'll understand what changed, why your traffic reports look weird, and exactly what to tell your marketing person to do. The rest of the book is the "how," and you can delegate the how.

If you write content or run marketing for law firms: the whole thing is for you, but Part II is your new job description. Chapters 4 through 9 cover what to write, how to write it with AI assistance that doesn't smell like AI, and the technical and off-site work that turns good writing into citations. Keep Chapter 10's audit and the appendix worksheets within arm's reach.

If you're an SEO who wants receipts: every number has a named, dated source in the bibliography, and the chapters flag where the 2025 conventional wisdom broke. Start with Chapters 4 and 7 — several things you were told last year are measurably no longer true, and I'd rather you hear it from a chart than from a client.

SIDEBAR: WHAT THE BOXES MEAN

You'll meet five recurring boxes in this book. **Sidebar** boxes (like this one) add context. **Exhibit** boxes present evidence — data, examples, before-and-afters. **Objection!** boxes tackle the pushback you're already forming in your head. **Held** boxes state the ruling: the bottom line when the details are argued out. And **Hint** boxes are free billable advice. Every chapter closes with a **Do This Now** list, because reading about exercise has never once produced a six-pack.

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PART ONE

1

The New Map

Search didn't die. It multiplied. Before you write a single word, you need to know who's answering legal questions now, how they decide whom to mention, and why the numbers on your traffic report stopped making sense. Three chapters, heavy on charts, light on mercy.

01 The Great Unbundling of Search

02 How an AI Answer Gets Made

03 Meet the Machines

The Great Unbundling of Search

In which Google stops handing out clicks, nine different robots start answering legal questions, and your traffic report becomes a crime scene.

For about twenty-five years, the deal was simple. Somebody typed "do I lose my house if I file Chapter 7" into Google, Google showed them ten blue links, and if your firm had done its SEO homework, one of those links was yours. The click came to your website, your website did the selling, and the phone rang. Everyone understood the arrangement. It was the closest thing marketing ever had to a vending machine.

That deal is over. Not "evolving." Not "shifting." Over — in the specific sense that the click, the fundamental currency of the old arrangement, is being quietly removed from circulation. As of early 2026, **68% of U.S. Google searches end without a single click to the open web.** Two out of three searches now start and finish on Google's own property, the search-engine equivalent of a restaurant where two-thirds of the customers read the menu, feel satisfied, and leave. In 2024 that number was 60%. A decade ago it was around 45%. The trend line only bends one direction, and it is not the direction your analytics dashboard was hoping for.

The click famine: U.S. Google searches ending without a click

Share of searches that end with zero clicks to the open web

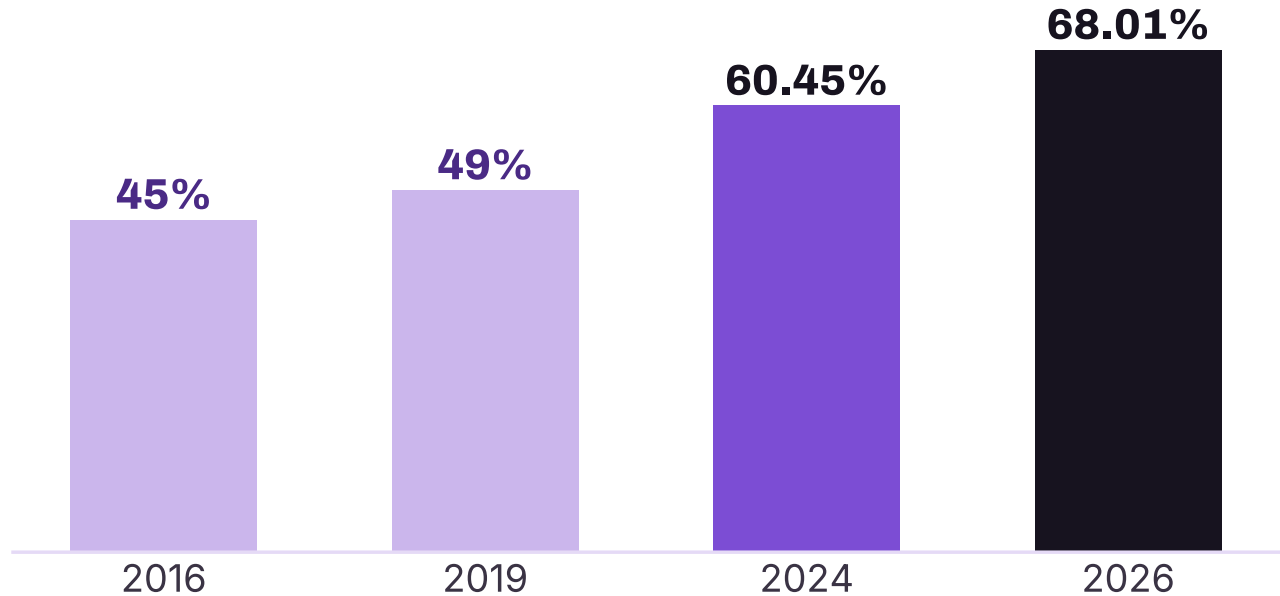


FIGURE 1.1 — The slow strangulation of the click. Share of U.S. Google searches ending with no click to any website.

Sources: Jumpshot data (2016, 2019); Datas (2024); Similarweb panel via SparkToro (Jan–Apr 2026). Different panels; treat the decade arc as directional.

Where did the clicks go? Google started answering the questions itself. When an AI Overview — that machine-written summary that now squats at the top of the results page — shows up for a query, the page ranking #1 underneath it loses **58% of its clicks**. Not a typo. Fifty-eight. And here's the part that should make you put down your coffee: fourteen months earlier, that same measurement was a 34.5% loss. The hole isn't just there; it's getting deeper at a pace that would alarm a structural engineer.

How many clicks the #1 ranking loses when an AI Overview shows up

Click loss for position 1 with an AI Overview present · Ahrefs, 300K keywords

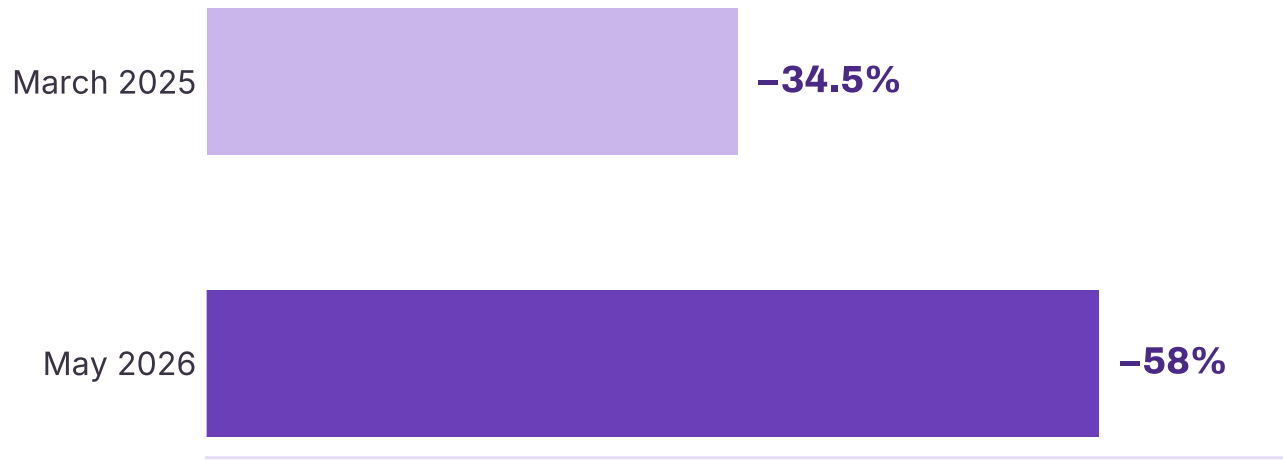


FIGURE 1.2 — What an AI Overview does to the poor soul ranking #1. The same study, run twice, fourteen months apart. Sources: Ahrefs (March 2025); Ahrefs via Business Wire, 300,000-keyword study (May 18, 2026).

If you prefer your evidence with a control group — and as a lawyer, you should — a randomized field experiment by researchers at the Indian School of Business and Carnegie Mellon settled the causation question in early 2026. Same users, same queries, AI Overviews switched on for some and off for others. Result: AI Overviews caused a **38% drop in organic clicks**, and users were exactly as satisfied either way. The clicks didn't move somewhere else. They simply stopped existing. The court finds for the plaintiff, and the plaintiff is not your website.

Meanwhile, Nine New Referees Showed Up

If the story ended with "Google keeps the clicks now," this would be a short, depressing book about a shrinking pie. It doesn't, because while Google was learning to answer questions, several hundred million people developed an entirely new habit: skipping the search box altogether and asking a chatbot.

The scale here is the thing nobody has properly metabolized. ChatGPT reached **900 million weekly users** by February 2026, and OpenAI announced it had passed **a billion active users** across its products in July. Google's AI Mode — the full chatbot experience bolted onto Google Search — passed **a billion monthly users** of its own. The Gemini app sits at 950 million. Meta's assistant claims a billion across its apps. AI Overviews reach two billion people a month. These aren't early-adopter numbers. This is everybody. Your clients, your referral sources, your mother-in-law, and — this is the important one — the person lying awake at 2 a.m. wondering whether the wage garnishment notice on the kitchen counter means they should file for bankruptcy.

Nobody is 'early' anymore: monthly users per AI answer surface

Most recently disclosed platform figures, mid-2026 (ChatGPT shown as weekly actives)

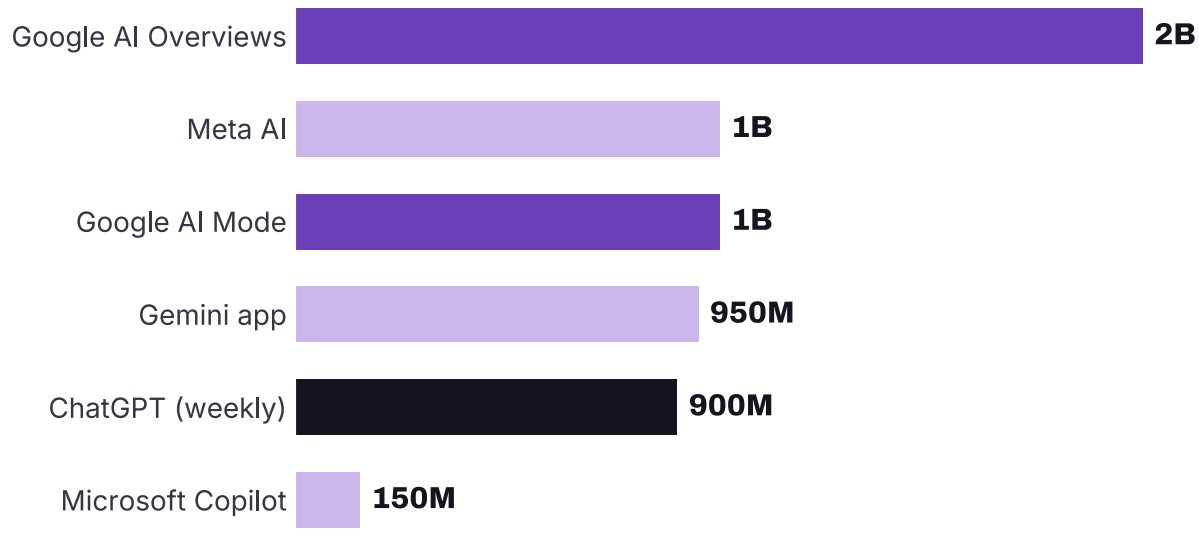


FIGURE 1.3 — The audience, counted. Every major AI answer surface now measures its users in the hundreds of millions to billions.

Sources: Alphabet Q2 2026 earnings (Jul 22, 2026); TechCrunch (Feb 27, 2026; Jan 29, 2026; May 29, 2025); OpenAI via Bloomberg (Jul 31, 2026).

That 2 a.m. person used to type "chapter 7 vs chapter 13" into Google and click something. Now there's a decent chance they open ChatGPT and type three unbroken paragraphs about the garnishment, the divorce, the truck loan, and the thing with their brother-in-law, and the machine writes back a calm, organized answer — sometimes with sources, sometimes with named law firms, always with confidence. Whether your firm exists in that answer is the new marketing question. Not "do we rank." *Do we get mentioned when the machine explains the thing we do for a living?*

EXHIBIT A: THE QUESTION CHANGED SHAPE

Google, 2019: *"bankruptcy attorney fresno"* — three words, typed with one thumb.

ChatGPT, 2026: *"I'm a nurse in Fresno making \$74k, I'm behind on two credit cards and a car loan, my checks are about to be garnished, and my husband doesn't know yet. Would Chapter 13 let me keep the car? How does this even work?"*

Same human. Same legal need. Completely different retrieval system deciding who gets to answer — and the second version contains enough facts for a conflicts check. Content built for the three-word query does not automatically win the three-paragraph one. That's most of what this book is about.

The Fine Print on the Robot Gold Rush

Now, before you fire your SEO and buy a llama farm, let's read the defense's exhibits, because the AI-traffic story comes with real fine print. Measured honestly, AI platforms still send websites **less than 1% of referral traffic**. Google search remains the largest single source of visitors to law firm websites by a preposterous margin — in early 2025 it sent roughly 345 times more traffic than ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Gemini combined, and while that multiple has shrunk, it has not shrunk to "ignore Google" territory. Anyone who tells you SEO is dead is either selling something or hasn't looked at an analytics account since the pandemic.

But three facts turn that "less than 1%" from a punchline into a business case. First, the growth rate: ChatGPT's outbound referrals grew **206% in a single year**, and the number of websites receiving ChatGPT traffic more than doubled in sixteen months. Channels that grow triple digits annually have a way of becoming line items you care about. Second, the quality: the first large-scale 2026 conversion study (of e-commerce sites) found ChatGPT-referred visitors convert **31% better than non-branded organic search visitors**, and Semrush's research values the average AI-referred visitor at **4.4 times** a traditional organic visitor. These people arrive pre-sold. The machine already explained their options, narrowed their choices, and — if you've done the work in this book — mentioned your firm as the answer. By the time they land on your site, they're not researching. They're picking.



FIGURE 1.4 — The AI referral channel in three numbers: small, sprinting, and unusually valuable per visitor.
Sources: BrightEdge (Mar 2026); Semrush clickstream study (Apr 7, 2026); Semrush via MarTech (4.4x visitor value).

Third — and this is the one I'd tattoo on every managing partner's forearm if the bar allowed it — **the mention is now worth something even when nobody clicks**. When ChatGPT tells our 2 a.m. nurse that "firms like [somebody's firm] handle Chapter 13 cases in the Central Valley," that's not a referral you'll see in analytics. It's a referral that shows up three days later as a direct visit, a branded search, or a phone call that starts with "the AI thing said you handle this." The click was always a proxy for influence anyway. The influence moved; the proxy broke.

OBJECTION! "MY CLIENTS ARE NOT ASKING ROBOTS ABOUT BANKRUPTCY"

Overruled, and I have the survey data. Pew found **49% of U.S. adults now use AI chatbots**, and their single most common use is looking things up. Clio's industry research found more than half of legal consumers have used or would use AI for a legal question — and here's the kicker — **28% of those people were told by the AI to go talk to a lawyer**. The robot is not your competitor for legal work. It's the world's highest-volume referral service, and right now it's handing out referrals based on whose content it read. The only question is whether it read yours.

The Market Fragmented While You Were in Depositions

Here's the plot twist that makes 2026 different from 2025, and the reason this book covers nine platforms instead of one: the AI answer market stopped being a ChatGPT monarchy. In June 2025, ChatGPT held about 76% of all generative-AI web traffic. Eleven months later: 53%. Gemini tripled its share of AI referrals in five months and became the #2 source of AI traffic to websites — bigger than Perplexity, Claude, Meta AI, and Grok combined. Claude's slice of AI referrals more than tripled over the same stretch. The pie is growing fast, and it's simultaneously being cut into more slices.

The AI market fragmented while you were in depositions

Share of all generative-AI web traffic · Similarweb

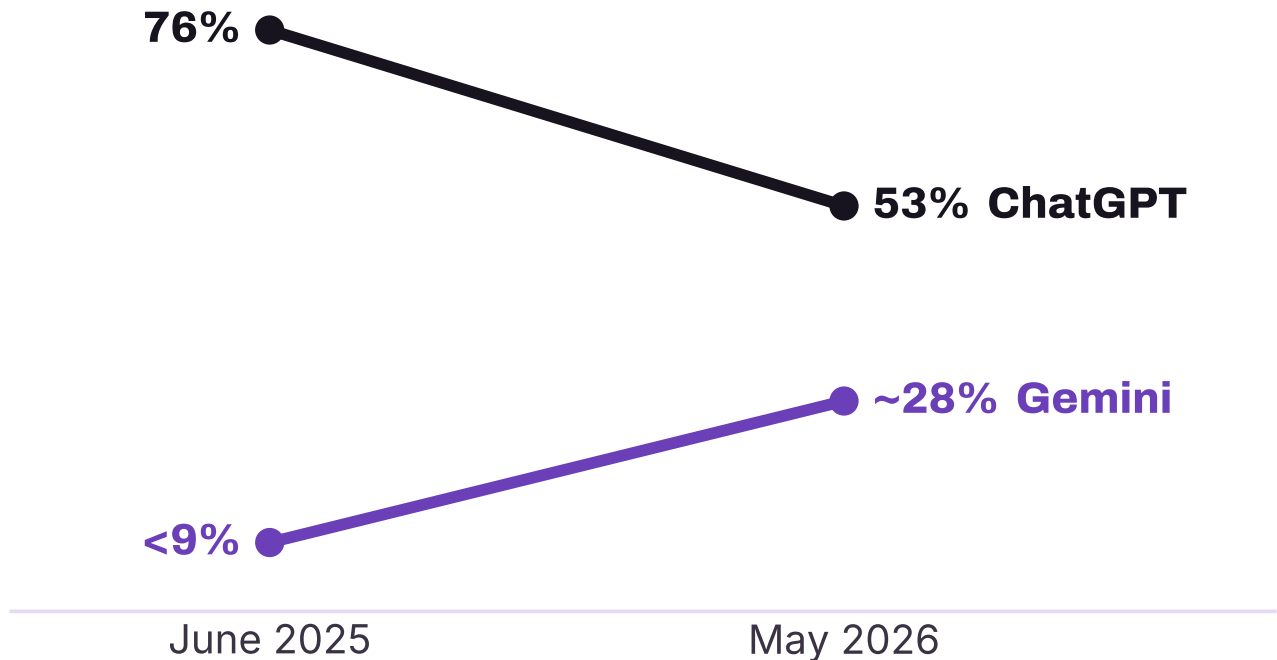


FIGURE 1.5 — Eleven months of market share. The pie grew 70% while ChatGPT's slice of it shrank by a third.

Source: Similarweb, "AI Search Stats in 2026" (Jul 29, 2026).

Why should a law firm care about market-share drama between tech giants? Because each of these systems picks its sources differently — Chapter 3 profiles them one by one, and they have genuinely different taste — and a strategy tuned only for ChatGPT is a strategy with a 53%-and-falling ceiling. The good news, which will become a theme: the work that wins one platform mostly wins the others. You don't need nine strategies. You need one strategy with nine scorecards.

The Best Bad News in This Book

Let me close the chapter with the statistic that should make you weirdly optimistic. Similarweb tracks how often ChatGPT's answers mention any brand at all, industry by industry. Travel and hospitality: brands show up in about 23% of answers. The all-industry average: 6.8%. Professional services — the category containing every law firm in America — comes in dead last at **under 4%**.

Share of ChatGPT answers that name any brand, by industry

May 2026 · Similarweb · lowest rate of any tracked industry = most open field

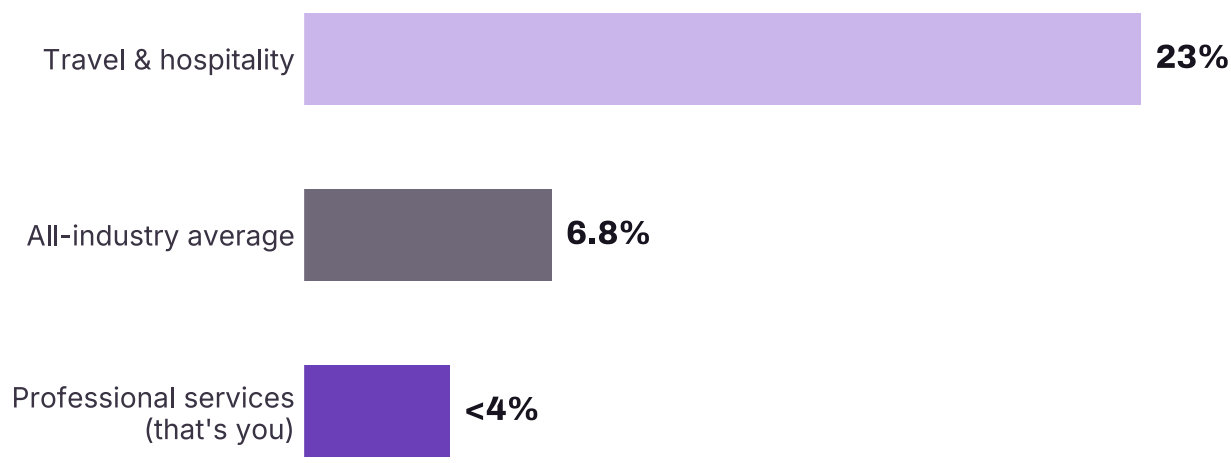


FIGURE 1.6 — Last place, best opportunity. Share of ChatGPT answers that mention any brand, by industry.

Source: Similarweb (May 2026 data, published Jul 29, 2026).

Read that as a market report, not an insult. When the machine answers bankruptcy questions, 24 times out of 25 it names *nobody*. Nobody has claimed the shelf space. In travel, the shelf is stocked, the shelf is fought over, and the shelf has private-equity money on it. In legal, the shelf is nearly empty because most firms are still running the 2019 playbook and calling it a day. Every chapter after this one is, in effect, instructions for putting your firm on an empty shelf before your competitors learn the shelf exists.

"The click was always a proxy for influence. The influence moved. The proxy broke."

HELD

Traditional search still pays today's bills; AI answers decide tomorrow's. Two-thirds of Google searches now end without a click, AI Overviews take half the clicks from the #1 result, and a billion people ask chatbots things they used to ask Google. AI referrals are under 1% of traffic but growing triple digits and converting like referrals, not like traffic. And in your industry, the citation shelf is still almost empty. You are not late. You are, for roughly one more year, early.

►► DO THIS NOW

1. **Open ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity** and ask each one: "Who are the best [your practice area] attorneys in [your city]?" and "What should I do about [the problem your best clients have]?" Screenshot everything. That's your baseline.
2. **Note whether your firm appears** — named, linked, or not at all — and which competitors do. (If a competitor shows up, resist the urge to bill them for the emotional damage.)
3. **Pull 12 months of traffic** and check referrals from chatgpt.com, perplexity.ai, gemini.google.com, and copilot.microsoft.com. Small numbers are fine. You're establishing the "before" picture.
4. **Ask your intake team** to start logging one question: "How did you hear about us?" with "an AI tool" as an explicit option. AI-influenced clients routinely get logged as "internet."
5. **Send Part I of this book** to whoever writes your content, with the subject line: "The shelf is empty."

How an AI Answer Gets Made

A machine-free explanation of what happens in the four seconds between "can they garnish my wages?" and an answer that names somebody's law firm. No engineering degree required. Mild sausage-making imagery ahead.

Here's a thing that will save you from a thousand LinkedIn hot takes: an AI chatbot answering a legal question is not "thinking." It's doing something much more familiar to you. It's preparing for trial the night before, with a very fast paralegal and a very large filing cabinet.

Once you understand the actual procedure — and it is a procedure, with steps — every recommendation in the rest of this book stops being mysterious advice from the SEO priesthood and starts being obvious. So let's walk through what happens when our nurse from Chapter 1 asks a chatbot whether Chapter 13 will save her car.

The Two Brains Problem

Every modern AI assistant has two ways of knowing things, and telling them apart is the single most useful piece of technical knowledge in this book.

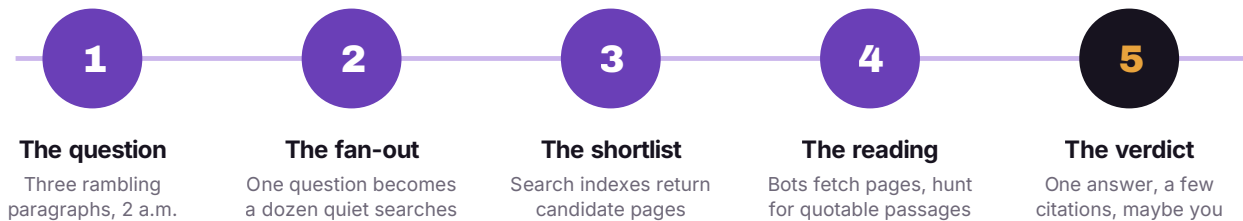
Brain one is training memory. The model read an enormous snapshot of the internet — books, articles, forum threads, and yes, law firm websites — and compressed it into a kind of intuition. This is the closed-book exam brain. It's fluent, it's fast, and it's frozen in time. It also can't tell you where it learned anything, which is why it can describe Chapter 13 cramdowns beautifully and simultaneously invent a case citation that has never existed in any reporter. (Chapter 12 covers the lawyers who found that out the expensive way.)

Brain two is live retrieval. When the question needs current or specific information — and legal questions usually do — the assistant puts down the closed-book exam and runs to the library. It searches the web, reads what it finds, and builds the answer from those sources, with citations. The industry calls this retrieval-augmented generation. You can call it "the open-book exam," because that's what it is: the model gets to look things up, and the things it looks up are pages like yours.

HELD

You can't edit the training memory, but you can absolutely stock the library. Brain one was baked months ago in a data center. Brain two goes shopping on the live web every single time — and it shops from search indexes, mostly Google's and Bing's. Everything in this book that looks like "SEO advice" is really "get stocked in the stores where the robot shops" advice.

The Assembly Line, Step by Step



Total elapsed time: about as long as it took you to read this caption

FIGURE 2.1 — The assembly line. Every major AI answer engine runs some version of these five steps.

Step one: the question arrives, wearing pajamas. Real AI queries don't look like search queries. Semrush's clickstream research found 65–85% of ChatGPT prompts don't match traditional keyword language at all. People write the way they talk, they include the whole backstory, and they ask compound questions Google's search box never heard in its life. This matters because the machine's first job is translation.

Step two: the fan-out. The assistant rewrites that messy human question into a batch of tidy search queries and runs them all at once. Google calls this "query fan-out," and their search VP described it with disarming honesty: the system thinks up a bunch of related questions "and it'll start Googling, basically." For our nurse, the fan-out might be: *chapter 13 keep vehicle · car loan cramdown requirements · wage garnishment stop bankruptcy filing · chapter 13 eligibility income limits California*. A dozen searches for the price of one, run in the time it takes to blink. Google's deeper research modes run *dozens to hundreds*.

SIDEBAR: WHY FAN-OUT CHANGES YOUR JOB DESCRIPTION

Under the old rules, a page competed for one query. Under fan-out, your page gets pulled into the answer if it matches *any* of the invisible sub-questions. The best measured predictor of getting cited by ChatGPT — from an Ahrefs study of 1.4 million prompts — is semantic similarity between your page title and those machine-generated sub-queries. In practice: a page titled "Can I Keep My Car in a Chapter 13 Bankruptcy?" is built to be found by a fan-out. A page titled "Vehicular Asset Considerations in Consumer Reorganization" is built to be found by no one, including humans.

Step three: the shortlist. Those sub-queries hit a search index — Google's for Google surfaces and Gemini, Bing's for ChatGPT and Copilot, Perplexity's own for Perplexity. This is the step that should permanently end the "SEO is dead" argument at your next partner retreat. The robot's shortlist *is* a search result. If your site isn't indexed, isn't crawlable, or ranks on page nine for everything, you're not on the shortlist, and nothing downstream can save you. SEO didn't die; it got a promotion. It used to win you a click. Now it wins you an audition.

Step four: the reading. The assistant's bots fetch the shortlisted pages and read them — quickly, shallowly, and with strong opinions. They're hunting for passages that directly answer a sub-question: a clean forty-word explanation, a statistic with a source, a table, a quote from someone with credentials. What they cannot do, with the notable exception of Google's own systems, is execute JavaScript. If your beautiful website renders its content in the visitor's browser, most AI crawlers see a blank stage with the curtain down. (Chapter 7 deals with this, and yes, there's a fix.)

Step five: the verdict. The model composes one answer from the passages it liked and attaches citations to some of them. How many varies wildly by platform — ChatGPT averages about fifteen sources per answer, Gemini a famously stingy three. Whoever gets cited gets the link, the credibility, and the shot at the client. Everyone else gets to have contributed anonymously to the robot's education, which is the digital equivalent of doing the work while someone else signs the brief.

Citations, Mentions, Referrals: The Three Prizes

People use "AI visibility" to mean three different prizes, and they're won in three different ways, so let's get the vocabulary straight before someone sells you a dashboard.

A citation is the machine linking to your page as a source — your URL in the footnotes of the robot's answer. Citations come from steps three and four: being indexed, being fetchable, and having the most quotable passage on the shortlist.

A mention is the machine saying your firm's *name* — "firms such as Rocket Legal handle Chapter 13 cases in Fresno" — whether or not it links to you. Mentions come from a different place entirely: the model's accumulated sense, across the whole web, that your name belongs next to that topic. Reviews, directories, news coverage, Reddit threads, YouTube — the places other people talk about you. Semrush's 2026 index found the overlap between brands mentioned and domains cited in an answer can run as low as 30%. Read that twice: **the mention game and the citation game are two different sports played on the same field.** You want to be good at both. Most firms are good at neither, which — as Chapter 1's empty shelf chart showed — is exactly why you should be cheerful about all this.

A referral is the human actually clicking through to your site — the only one of the three prizes your analytics can see. It's also the rarest, which is why Chapter 11 teaches you to measure the other two instead of staring at a referral number and concluding nothing is happening.

EXHIBIT B: THE UNCREDITED CO-AUTHOR

Ahrefs' 1.4-million-prompt study caught ChatGPT doing something delightfully human: it reads Reddit constantly and almost never cites it. The machine learns from the community discussion, then attributes the answer to tidier sources. Law firm lesson: the conversations about your practice area — in forums, reviews, and Q&A threads — shape answers even when they never appear in the footnotes. What people say about you where you're not in the room now has a word count. Chapter 9 is about getting into those rooms properly.

What This Means for a Law Firm, in One Sentence Each

Everything from here forward hangs on the assembly line, so here's the whole book in preview form. Be in the indexes, because the shortlist is a search result (Chapters 4 and 7). Write pages whose titles and headings match the questions inside the fan-out, because that's the strongest measured citation predictor (Chapter 5). Make every important page readable without JavaScript, because most robot readers can't press buttons (Chapter 7). Stock your pages with the things the reading step is hungry for — direct answers, statistics, sources, credentialed quotes — because those measurably multiply citations (Chapter 4). And build your name into the places the models trust — reviews, Reddit, YouTube, directories — because mentions are won off-site (Chapters 8 and 9).

"SEO didn't die. It got a promotion. It used to win you a click. Now it wins you an audition."

►► DO THIS NOW

1. **Run one question through the assembly line by hand.** Take your most valuable client question, ask it in ChatGPT and Google's AI Mode, and read the citations. For each cited page ask: what did this page have that mine doesn't? (Usually: a title that matches the question and an answer in the first two sentences.)
2. **Write down the fan-out for your top practice area.** Ten to fifteen sub-questions a machine would generate for "should I file bankruptcy in [your city]." That list is your content plan for the next quarter, and you'll use it in Chapter 5.
3. **Check whether the robots can read you at all:** turn off JavaScript in your browser (or use a text-only view) and load your top three pages. If the content disappears, flag Chapter 7 for your web person today.
4. **Start a "mentions" file.** Search your firm's name in ChatGPT and Perplexity. What the machines currently believe about you — including the wrong parts — is the baseline you're fixing.

Meet the Machines

Nine answer engines, one scorecard apiece: who runs it, how it picks its sources, what it plays favorites with, and exactly what a law firm has to do to show up in it.

Here's the good news up front, because this chapter contains nine profiles and you're a busy person: you do not need nine strategies. The platforms share one skeleton — the assembly line from Chapter 2 — and roughly 80% of the work that wins one wins them all. But each machine has its own taste in sources, its own search index, and its own quirks, the way every judge in your district technically applies the same rules of procedure and somehow runs a completely different courtroom.

So treat these scorecards the way you'd treat local counsel's notes on each judge: skim them all once, then study the three that matter most for your market. For nearly every consumer law firm, those three are Google's AI surfaces, ChatGPT, and Perplexity — with Gemini rising fast enough that it's effectively a fourth.

Every AI has a favorite restaurant

Most-cited source type and its approximate share of top citations, per platform · 2025–2026 studies

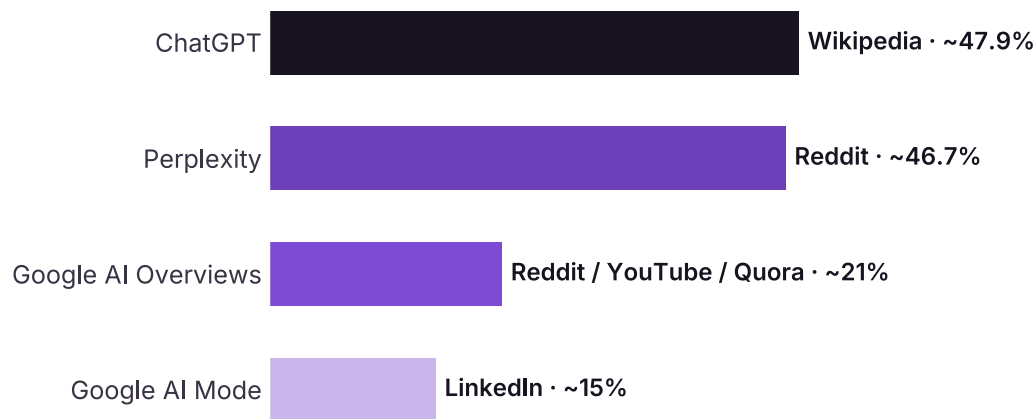


FIGURE 3.1 — Every AI has a favorite restaurant. The most-cited source per platform, from studies of hundreds of millions of citations.

Sources: Profound, 680M citations (Jun 2025); Semrush 13-week citation study (Jul–Oct 2025); Semrush 2026 AI Visibility Index (Jun 26, 2026).

Google AI Overviews

The incumbent's ambush

SCALE

2 billion monthly users; appears on 15–20%+ of U.S. searches and expanding beyond informational queries into commercial ones — the kind that end in retainers.

HOW IT PICKS SOURCES

Query fan-out against Google's own index. No special files, no special schema — Google's docs are explicit: if you're indexed and snippet-eligible, you're eligible. But eligible ≠ chosen: only 38% of its citations now come from the organic top 10, and nearly a third come from beyond position 100.

PLAYS FAVORITES WITH

Reddit (21% of its top-source mix), YouTube (18.8% — and its fastest-growing citation class), Quora (14.3%). It likes people talking to people.

HOW A FIRM SHOWS UP

- Rank respectably for the topic cluster — top-10 pages remain heavily overrepresented among citations, even if ranking is no longer the whole game.
- Build pages that answer fan-out sub-questions, one clean answer per heading.
- Have a YouTube presence; it's climbing into these answers fast.

Google AI Mode

The chatbot wearing Google's badge

SCALE

Passed 1 billion monthly users after going global in late 2025 — though only 0.34% of U.S. searches actually switch into the tab so far. A billion-user product that's still a rounding error of search behavior: welcome to 2026, where both facts are true at once.

HOW IT PICKS SOURCES

Same machinery as AI Overviews, with deeper fan-out ("dozens to hundreds" of background queries in research modes) and a full conversational interface. Agentic features — booking, calling local businesses — arrived in 2026, which is worth a long stare from anyone whose business is local services.

PLAYS FAVORITES WITH

LinkedIn (~15% of citations, remarkably stable), YouTube, Reddit, Google properties. Wikipedia barely registers (~2%) — a totally different diet from ChatGPT's.

HOW A FIRM SHOWS UP

- Everything from the AI Overviews card, plus:
- Attorney LinkedIn profiles that actually say what you do, for whom, where — AI Mode reads them.
- A Google Business Profile in fighting shape (Chapter 8) for the local and agentic queries.

Gemini (the app)

The fast riser with three footnotes

SCALE

950 million monthly users, daily actives tripling year over year, and now the #2 sender of AI referral traffic — bigger than Perplexity, Claude, Meta AI, and Grok combined. The one that grew while everyone was watching ChatGPT.

HOW IT PICKS SOURCES

Grounds its answers in Google Search, and — uniquely among the chatbots — its crawling infrastructure renders JavaScript, because it borrows Google's. Cites a miserly ~3 sources per answer, so each citation slot is a knife fight.

PLAYS FAVORITES WITH

Wikipedia, Reddit, YouTube. Mention-vs-citation overlap runs as low as 30% here — Gemini will talk about brands it never links.

HOW A FIRM SHOWS UP

- Win Google SEO; Gemini inherits it.
- With only ~3 citations per answer, aim to be *the* reference for narrow questions, not one of ten pretty-goods on broad ones.
- Feed the mention engine: reviews, coverage, community presence (Chapter 9).

ChatGPT

Still the main event

SCALE

900 million weekly users; over a billion actives across OpenAI products; still ~80% of all AI referral traffic to websites, though the share is eroding. Runs live web search on about a third of prompts — the rest is answered from training memory, where your only lever is reputation.

HOW IT PICKS SOURCES

Searches via third-party indexes ("such as Bing," per OpenAI) plus its own OAI-SearchBot. The strongest measured predictor of citation: semantic match between your page title and its internal sub-queries. Pages with plain-language URL slugs get cited at 89.8% vs 81.1% without. Averages ~15 sources per answer — plenty of seats at this table.

PLAYS FAVORITES WITH

Wikipedia (nearly half its top-source mix), established media, Forbes — an encyclopedia-and-newspapers diet. Reads Reddit constantly; credits it almost never.

HOW A FIRM SHOWS UP

- Be indexed in **Bing** — Bing Webmaster Tools plus IndexNow. Skipping Bing in 2026 is skipping ChatGPT.
- Allow OAI-SearchBot and ChatGPT-User in robots.txt (Chapter 7 has the copy-paste).
- Titles and headings phrased as the questions clients ask, answered immediately below.

Perplexity

The one that shows its work

SCALE

Hundreds of millions of queries monthly; a modest and lately shrinking slice of AI referrals (~4%), but punches far above its weight with journalists, researchers, and the kind of person who reads footnotes. Every answer arrives with numbered citations.

HOW IT PICKS SOURCES

Its own crawler (PerplexityBot) and index, tuned hard toward freshness and community discussion. Newer content gets cited *first* in its reference lists.

PLAYS FAVORITES WITH

Reddit, overwhelmingly — 46.7% of its top-source mix. Then YouTube, LinkedIn, Wikipedia. It wants first-hand discussion, not brochures.

HOW A FIRM SHOWS UP

- Keep content visibly fresh — real updates with real dates, not sneaky timestamp edits.
- Allow PerplexityBot; it respects robots.txt and can't cite what it can't fetch.
- Maintain a legitimate Reddit presence in your practice area (Chapter 9 — and yes, there are ethics rails).

Microsoft Copilot

The enterprise sleeper

SCALE

~150 million monthly users, heavily weighted toward people sitting inside Windows, Office, and Edge at work — which describes a lot of HR directors, small-business owners, and in-house counsel deciding which firm to call.

HOW IT PICKS SOURCES

Grounded entirely in the Bing index: Copilot distills your question into a search query, sends it to Bing, and summarizes what comes back with citations. Microsoft is also the only platform on this list that has confirmed, on the record, that its AI systems use schema markup to understand content.

PLAYS FAVORITES WITH

Whatever Bing ranks, structured clearly: headings, tables, FAQ sections, claims backed with data and sources — that's Microsoft's own published checklist.

HOW A FIRM SHOWS UP

- Bing Webmaster Tools + IndexNow: table stakes, and they also feed ChatGPT.
- Implement the schema set from Chapter 7 — here it's confirmed to matter.
- Check the free AI Performance report in Bing Webmaster Tools (Chapter 11) — actual citation counts, from an actual platform.

Claude

The professionals' favorite

SCALE

Anthropic doesn't publish user counts, but the trend lines are loud: Claude's share of generative-AI web traffic grew from ~2% to ~9% in a year, and its slice of AI referrals more than tripled. Notably popular with attorneys themselves — which means it's shaping how your peers, and your referral sources, see the market.

HOW IT PICKS SOURCES

Live web search with citations, via two bots you should know: Claude-SearchBot (indexing for search quality) and Claude-User (fetching when a user asks). Anthropic's docs are plain that blocking them reduces your visibility in Claude's answers.

PLAYS FAVORITES WITH

Clear, well-sourced professional content. (No large public citation-mix study yet — Anthropic keeps its cards closer than most.)

HOW A FIRM SHOWS UP

- Allow Claude-SearchBot and Claude-User in robots.txt.
- The same citable-page fundamentals as everywhere else: direct answers, data, credentials.
- Don't IP-block Anthropic's cloud ranges — it breaks their ability to even read your robots.txt, per their own docs.

Grok (xAI)

The loud cousin

SCALE

No reliable public user figure; its website referrals remain marginal — Gemini alone out-refers Grok and every other small player combined. Its distribution advantage is being bolted onto X.

HOW IT PICKS SOURCES

"Live Search" over the web *and X posts* — it's the only engine here that treats a social feed as a first-class source. No documented crawler to allow or block for consumer search.

PLAYS FAVORITES WITH

X activity, then the open web. If your market skews heavy on X — some plaintiff-side and political-adjacent practices do — it's worth attention. Otherwise, monitor quarterly and move on.

HOW A FIRM SHOWS UP

- An active, professional X presence for the firm and lead attorneys.
- The same web fundamentals; Grok reads the same internet.

Meta AI

A billion users, nobody's referral source

SCALE

A billion monthly users across Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Messenger — and almost none of it behaves like search-and-click-out. It's an in-app assistant, not a doorway to the web.

HOW IT PICKS SOURCES

Meta documents its crawlers (Meta-ExternalAgent for training/indexing, Meta-ExternalFetcher for user-requested fetches) but publishes little about source selection. Treat visibility here as: allow the bot, be broadly authoritative, wait for Meta to show its hand.

PLAYS FAVORITES WITH

Unknown — the least transparent major platform on citation behavior.

HOW A FIRM SHOWS UP

- Allow Meta-ExternalAgent in robots.txt (unless firm policy says otherwise on training).
- Keep Facebook/Instagram business profiles accurate — they're the entity data Meta certainly has.
- Don't build a "Meta AI strategy." Not yet. Spend the hours on Google and ChatGPT.

One Strategy, Nine Scorecards

Look back across the nine cards and the pattern practically waves at you. Every machine shops from a search index, so classic SEO — Google *and* Bing — is the entry fee. Every machine rewards pages that answer specific questions directly, so Chapter 5's writing system pays everywhere at once. Most machines can't read JavaScript, so Chapter 7's rendering fix is universal. And every machine forms its opinion of your firm partly from places you don't own — Reddit, YouTube, LinkedIn, reviews — so Chapters 8 and 9 are where mentions get made. The platform-specific work is a thin layer on top: allow the right bots, mind Gemini's three-citation stinginess, keep Perplexity fed with fresh dates, give Copilot its schema.

HINT: THE 80/15/5 RULE

Budget your AI-visibility effort like this: 80% on the universal fundamentals (indexable site, citable pages, fresh content, real reviews), 15% on the big-three specifics (Google surfaces, ChatGPT/Bing, Perplexity), 5% on everything else. If anyone proposes inverting that pyramid — say, a four-figure monthly retainer for "Grok optimization" — smile, decline, and send them a copy of this page.

►► DO THIS NOW

1. **Verify your site in Bing Webmaster Tools** this week. It takes twenty minutes, it's free, and it is the platform-specific move with the biggest payoff per minute on this list — one index feeds both ChatGPT and Copilot.
2. **Check robots.txt** for blocks on OAI-SearchBot, ChatGPT-User, PerplexityBot, Claude-SearchBot, Claude-User, or Meta-ExternalAgent. Security plugins and CDNs sometimes block these without asking you. (Full walkthrough: Chapter 10.)
3. **Pick your big three** — for most firms: Google's AI surfaces, ChatGPT, Perplexity — and put a monthly fifteen-minute check of each on somebody's calendar.
4. **Update the lead attorneys' LinkedIn profiles** so the headline states practice area and city in plain words. AI Mode cites LinkedIn ~15% of the time; make what it finds accurate.
5. **File the 80/15/5 rule** somewhere you'll see it the next time a vendor pitch mentions a platform from the bottom of this chapter.

PART TWO

2

Getting Chosen

You know how the machines work. Now we make them work for you: what measurably earns citations, how to write pages both humans and robots want to quote, how to draft with AI without publishing robot soup, and the technical and off-site moves that turn good content into mentions. This is the longest part of the book because it's the part that pays.

04 The Citation Economy

05 Write Once, Win Twice

06 Drafting With AI (Without Sounding Like a Robot)

07 The Technical Layer

08 Local: Getting Recommended, Not Just Ranked

09 Beyond Your Website

The Citation Economy

The measurable stuff: what provably raises your odds of being quoted by a machine, what provably backfires, and why the biggest rule of 2025 quietly collapsed while nobody was watching.

Marketing has always had a fact problem. Ask ten consultants what works and you get eleven opinions, a webinar invitation, and a discount code. So before we spend three chapters on *how* to produce content, let's spend one on *what the evidence says gets cited* — because for AI visibility, unusually, the evidence exists. Researchers and SEO-software companies have now analyzed hundreds of millions of real AI citations. The results are specific enough to build a system on, which is exactly what we're going to do.

First, a Funeral: The 76% Rule (2025–2026)

The previous edition of this guide — and every reputable source in 2025, mine included — was built around one load-bearing statistic: 76% of Google AI Overview citations came from pages already ranking in the organic top 10. The strategy wrote itself. Rank first, get cited second. Get ranked, get cited. It was clean, it was true, and it fit on a slide.

Then somebody re-ran the study. In early 2026, Ahrefs analyzed four million AI Overview citations across 863,000 keywords and found the overlap had fallen to **38%**. Roughly a third of citations now come from pages ranked 11–100, and — sit down — **31% come from pages that don't crack the top 100 at all**. BrightEdge's own measurement runs even lower, at about 17% overlap. The change comes from Google's expanding query fan-out: since the machine quietly runs a dozen sub-queries, it can surface a page that ranks #3 for one narrow sub-question even though it ranks #94 for the big head term you obsess over.

The side door opened: AI Overview citations from the top 10

Share of AI Overview citations that also rank in Google's organic top 10 · Ahrefs

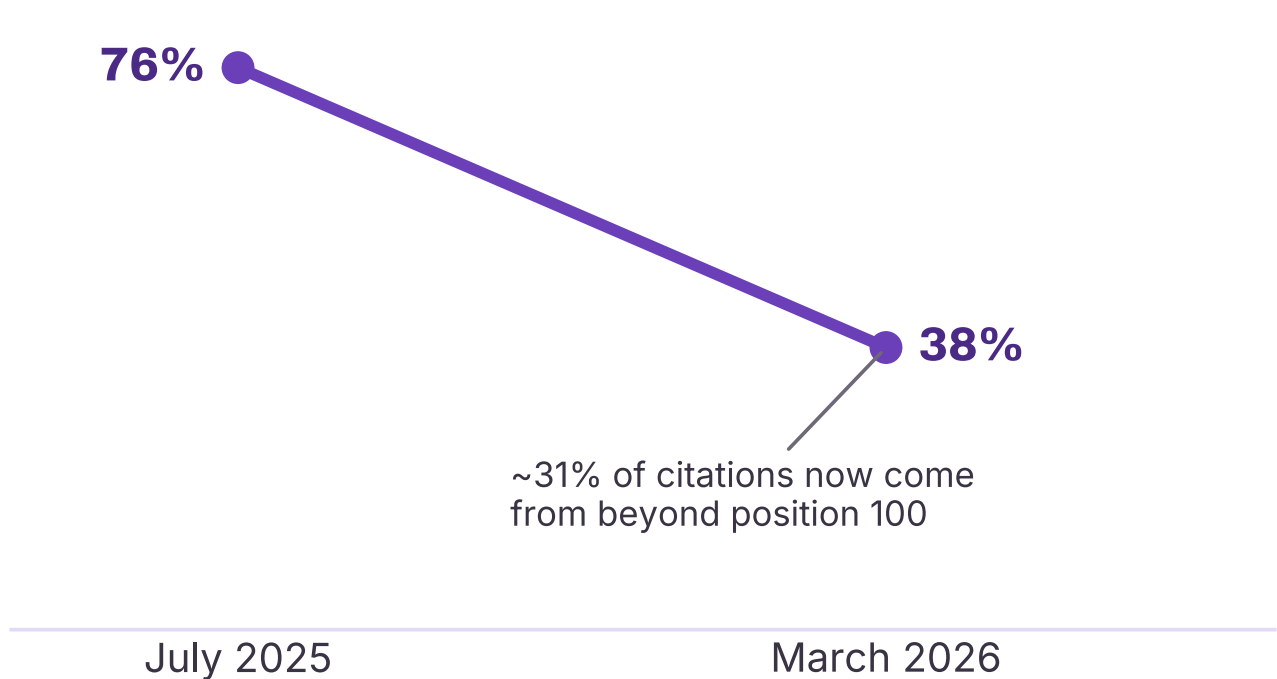


FIGURE 4.1 — The load-bearing stat of 2025, collapsing in real time. Share of AI Overview citations that also rank in the organic top 10.

Sources: Ahrefs, 1.9M citations (Jul 21, 2025); Ahrefs 4M-URL follow-up via Search Engine Journal (Mar 2, 2026).

Hold the two takeaways in tension, because both are true. Ranking still helps enormously — top-10 pages are wildly overrepresented relative to the trillions of pages that exist, and Chapter 1's referral math still runs through Google. But ranking is no longer the bouncer at the citation club. A small firm with the single best answer to "can I keep my 401(k) in Chapter 7" can now get cited over a mega-firm that outranks it everywhere else. The front door got a side entrance, the side entrance has no line, and the rest of this chapter is the dress code.

GEO is an underdog's game

Visibility change when lower-ranked sites added cited sources · Princeton GEO study

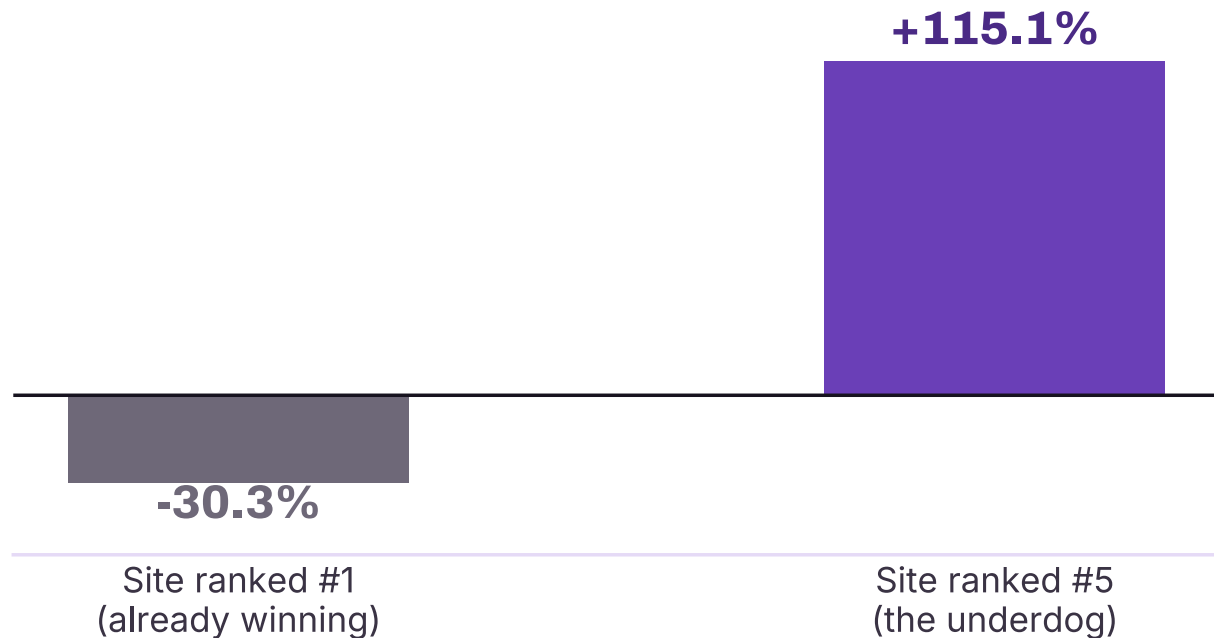


FIGURE 4.2 — The Princeton researchers found optimization helped lower-ranked sites most — the #5 site gained 115% visibility while the #1 site actually lost ground. The machines grade on substance, not seniority.

Source: Aggarwal et al., "GEO: Generative Engine Optimization," KDD 2024 (arXiv:2311.09735).

The Menu of Moves That Measurably Work

The foundational experiment in this field came out of Princeton: researchers took real pages, applied one content change at a time, and measured how much more visible each version became in generative-engine answers. Think of it as A/B testing where the audience is a robot. The scoreboard:

What actually moves AI visibility (and what backfires)

Change in generative-engine visibility by content intervention · Princeton GEO study

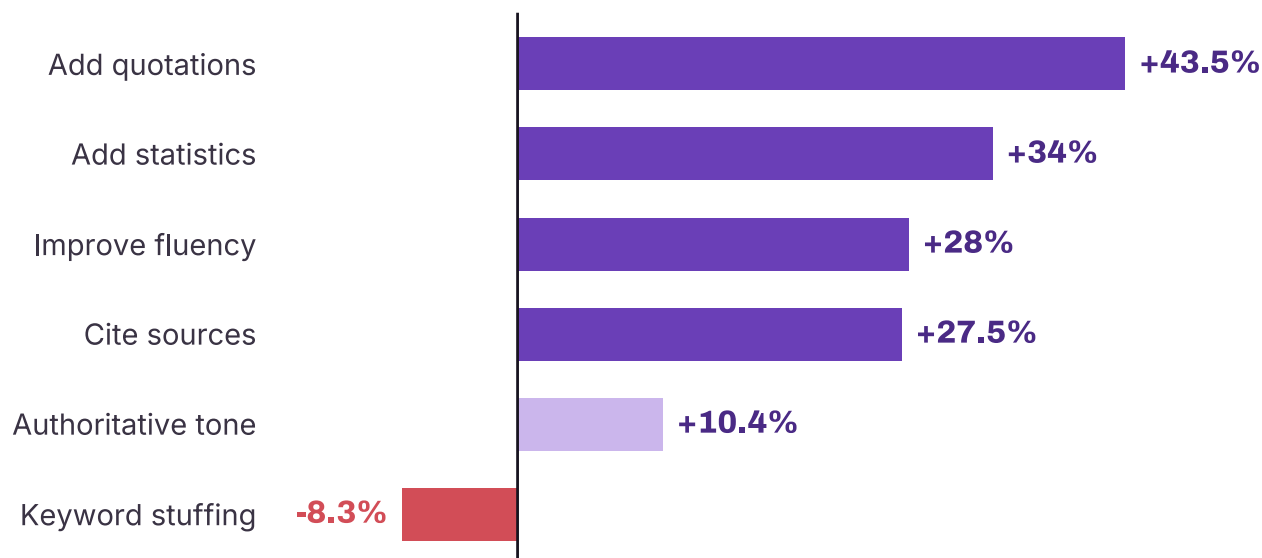


FIGURE 4.3 — The interventions, ranked. Quotations, statistics, and cited sources move visibility 27–43%. The one classic SEO reflex on the list — stuffing keywords — moves it backward.

Source: Aggarwal et al., Princeton GEO study, KDD 2024. Directions replicate across platforms; treat exact magnitudes as approximate.

Quotations came first (+43.5%). A machine building an answer wants attributable human authority — "according to bankruptcy attorney Maria Reyes, the biggest filing mistake is waiting until after the repossession" is a sentence a model can lift whole, with the credibility pre-installed. And here's the beautiful part for law firms: *you are the quotable authority*. Quote yourself, by name and title, saying the sharp version of the point. It isn't vanity; it's citation engineering with a bar number.

Statistics came second (+34%). Numbers are catnip to AI systems — a line from the first edition of this guide that the research keeps re-confirming. "Most Chapter 7 cases take four to six months from filing to discharge" beats "the process is relatively quick" in every measurable way: it answers the actual question, it's checkable, and it's the kind of sentence machines quote verbatim. Settlement ranges, timelines, fee structures, court statistics — with sources named, always.

Citing sources came third (+27.5%). Linking your claims to statutes, court websites, and government data makes your page look like what it hopefully is: the work of someone who checks things. The machines were trained on the internet; they have well-earned trust issues. Receipts help.

And the one that went the wrong way deserves a plaque: **keyword stuffing reduced visibility by 8.3%.** The single most instinctive move in old-school legal SEO — "our Fresno bankruptcy lawyers help Fresno residents file bankruptcy in Fresno" — is now measurably worse than doing nothing. Somewhere, a 2014 SEO consultant just felt a cold wind and doesn't know why.

HINT: THE SELF-QUOTE TWO-STEP

Take the strongest sentence in any article you've already published. Rewrite it as an attributed quote: "[The sharp version of the point]," says [Attorney Name], [title] at [Firm], who has handled more than [number] of these cases. You've just added a quotation (+43.5%), a credential (E-E-A-T), and a statistic (+34%) in one edit that takes four minutes. This is the highest ROI-per-keystroke move in the entire book, and you can do it to fifty existing pages before you ever write a new one.

Freshness: The Robots Check the Date

Ahrefs analyzed 17 million citations across seven platforms and found AI assistants cite content that's on average **25.7% fresher** than what Google's classic organic results rank. ChatGPT's cited pages average about 958 days old; Google organic's average 1,432. Perplexity and ChatGPT even sort their reference lists with newer content first, like a produce manager rotating stock.

AI cites younger pages than Google ranks

Average age of cited/ranked content, days since publication · Ahrefs, 16.9M citations

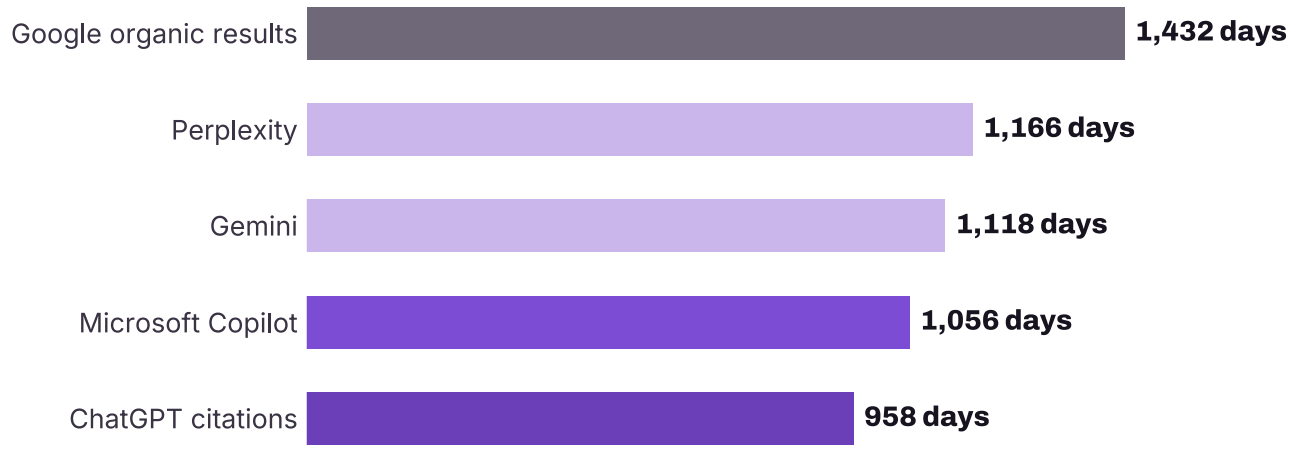


FIGURE 4.4 — Average age of cited content by platform. The machines like their sources the way clients like their case law: recent.

Source: Ahrefs, "Do AI Assistants Prefer to Cite Fresh Content?" — 16.9M citations (Jul 28, 2025).

The implication is a schedule, not a vibe: your cornerstone pages need real periodic updates — current exemption amounts, this year's median income figures for the means test, new local filing procedures — with an honest visible date. Note the phrase *real updates*. Changing the timestamp while changing nothing else is the content equivalent of backdating a document, the machines are increasingly good at noticing, and you, of all professions, should feel a little queasy doing it anyway. Microsoft, for its part, officially recommends pinging IndexNow the moment you publish or update — their engineers say fresh content acts as "a reference check" against the model's aging training data. Chapter 7 shows you the ten-minute setup.

Structure: Write for the Excerpt

Remember from Chapter 2 that the machines cite *passages*, not pages. The measured winners all share a shape:

Titles that match the hidden sub-questions. The strongest single predictor of ChatGPT citation, per the 1.4-million-prompt study: semantic similarity between your page title and the fan-out queries. Title pages the way questions are asked, not the way law schools name courses.

Question heading, direct answer, then depth. The first edition's most-repeated rule survives 2026 fully intact: an H2 phrased as the question, a 40–60 word direct answer in the first two sentences, then the explanation, the exceptions, and the example. The machine can excerpt the top cleanly; the human keeps reading; everyone leaves happy. Sections of roughly 100–150 words per heading remain the extraction sweet spot.

Descriptive URLs. Pages with plain-language slugs get cited by ChatGPT at 89.8% vs 81.1% for cryptic ones. `/can-i-keep-my-car-chapter-13` beats `/blog/post-4482`. An eight-point visibility difference for something your web person controls in a dropdown.

Tables, lists, and FAQ blocks. Microsoft's official guidance for earning Copilot citations reads like a formatting memo: clear headings, tables, FAQ sections, claims supported with data and sources. When a platform tells you the dress code, wear it.

The Mention Economy: The Other Half of the Game

Everything above wins *citations* — links to your pages. But recall the second prize from Chapter 2: *mentions*, where the machine names your firm without necessarily linking. In late 2025, Ahrefs ran correlations across 75,000 brands to find what predicts AI visibility. The winner wasn't backlinks — the currency two decades of SEO taught you to hoard. Unlinked brand mentions across the web correlated with AI visibility around 0.66–0.71. Backlinks: roughly 0.20. Being *talked about* outpredicts being *linked to* by about three to one. And the single strongest signal of all, at ~0.74? YouTube mentions. The robots, it turns out, watch a lot of YouTube.

Being talked about beats being linked to — by about 3 to 1

Correlation with AI visibility, avg across ChatGPT / AI Mode / AI Overviews · Ahrefs, 75,000 brands

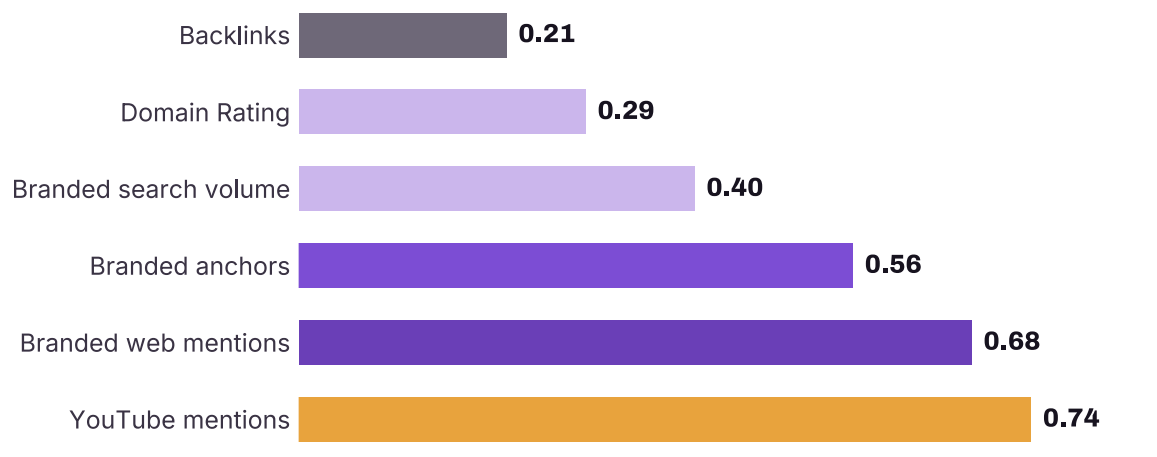


FIGURE 4.5 — What correlates with showing up in AI answers. The old currency (backlinks) sits at the bottom; conversation about your brand sits at the top.

Source: Ahrefs correlation study of 75,000 brands (Dec 12, 2025; release May 26, 2026). Correlation, not causation — but consistent across all three platforms tested.

Correlation isn't causation, and nobody should torch their link-building program on one study. But the pattern matches how these systems work: a model deciding which bankruptcy firm to name in Fresno draws on everything it has read — reviews, news stories, directory listings, Reddit threads, video transcripts — not just a link graph. Chapters 8 and 9 turn this into a to-do list. For now, just update your mental model: **your AI reputation is the sum of every place your name appears, weighted by trust, and most of those places are not your website.**

OBJECTION! "THESE STUDIES WILL BE STALE IN A YEAR"

Sustained — partially. The specific numbers will drift; the 76%-to-38% funeral earlier in this chapter is proof, and it's why every figure here carries a date and a source. But look at *what kind of things* keep winning across every study, on every platform, in both 2025 and 2026: direct answers, verifiable data, named authorities, fresh dates, clean structure, real reputation. That list is suspiciously identical to "what makes content trustworthy to a careful human." The tactics wobble; the direction doesn't. Build for the direction, check the numbers annually, and you'll never be the firm running a 2019 playbook in 2026.

HELD

Citations are earned by evidence-shaped content; mentions are earned by reputation-shaped presence. Quotes, statistics, and sources lift visibility 27–43%. Fresh beats stale by a quarter. Titles that match real questions beat clever ones. Keyword stuffing now actively hurts. And the web-wide conversation about your firm predicts AI visibility three times better than your backlink count. None of this is guesswork anymore — which means "we don't know what works" is no longer an available excuse.

►► DO THIS NOW

1. **Run the self-quote two-step** on your five most-trafficked pages this week: one attributed attorney quote, one sourced statistic, per page.
2. **Audit your ten most important URLs.** Any slug a human can't read aloud gets a descriptive rewrite (with a proper redirect — don't create 404s in pursuit of citations).
3. **Put a freshness rotation on the calendar:** every cornerstone page gets a substantive update at least twice a year — new figures, new law, new FAQ — with the revision date shown.
4. **Hunt down keyword stuffing** in your old content — the "[city] [practice] lawyer" chant — and rewrite it as normal English. It's now a negative, not a neutral.
5. **Count your mentions:** search your firm name (in quotes) on Google and note how many results are pages you don't own. That number is your mention baseline for Chapter 9.

Write Once, Win Twice

The complete writing system: research that starts with humans instead of keyword tools, an architecture that machines can excerpt, and a page anatomy that works for Google, ChatGPT, and the exhausted person reading at 2 a.m. — all three of whom are grading you.

Every piece of content your firm publishes now performs for three audiences at once: a person in trouble, a search engine ranking pages, and an AI deciding what to quote. The lucky break of the decade is that all three want approximately the same thing — a clear, honest, well-organized answer from someone who plainly knows the territory. This chapter is the system for producing that on purpose, repeatedly, instead of occasionally by accident.

Step One: Research People, Not Keywords

Most content plans start in a keyword tool, chasing search volumes like a dog chasing a car. Wrong approach, wrong order, wrong results. Search volume tells you what people typed *into one particular box*, stripped of all context. Your actual raw material is richer and closer to home:

Mine your own intake. Every consultation call and intake form is a transcript of real demand. If three people in one week ask "will filing bankruptcy stop the foreclosure sale," that's not an anecdote, that's an assignment. Have intake staff log recurring questions; review the log monthly. Your clients have been writing your content calendar for years, free of charge, and most firms throw it away.

Lurk where people panic in public. Reddit's legal and personal-finance communities, Quora threads, Facebook groups — this is where you find the language people actually use, which is never the language of your practice-area page. Nobody in r/personalfinance has ever typed "consumer reorganization options." They type "I make too much for Chapter 7 but I'm drowning, is Chapter 13 a scam?" That sentence — fear, misconception, and search intent in one — is worth more than any keyword export you'll pull this year.

Interview your attorneys quarterly. Three questions: What do clients ask most? What do they most commonly get wrong? What do you wish they knew before the first meeting? Novel concept, I know — asking the lawyers. The misconceptions list is pure gold, because correcting a widespread wrong belief is exactly the kind of content machines love to quote and competitors rarely write.

Ask the machines about themselves. Prompt ChatGPT: "What are 20 detailed questions someone facing wage garnishment in California would ask a bankruptcy attorney?" Yes, you're using AI to learn how to get cited by AI. It remains beautifully meta, and it remains effective — you're sampling the same statistical soup the answers get cooked in.

Compile all of it into a **Content Compass** per practice area: the questions verbatim, the pain points, the misconceptions, the information gaps. *Then* open the keyword tool — Ahrefs, Semrush, or Google's free Keyword Planner — to check which compass entries also carry classic search demand, to find the long-tail question phrasings, and to gauge difficulty. The tool is the fact-checker of your plan, not the author of it.

SIDEBAR: ONE TOPIC, TWO COSTUMES

Every topic now wears two costumes, and your research sheet should track both. Traditional: *"chapter 7 income limit California"* — short, typed, measurable volume. Conversational: *"I make \$85k in Sacramento and my wife doesn't work, do we pass the means test with two kids?"* — long, spoken, zero measurable volume, and increasingly where the client actually is. Track them in columns: Topic · Traditional keyword · AI-style question · Intent · Content type · Priority. Same need, two retrieval systems, one page that must serve both.

Step Two: Architecture — The Pillar, the Clusters, and the Long Tail

Machines assign topical authority the way referral networks assign reputations: not from one great performance but from consistent depth across a subject. The structure that signals depth hasn't changed, and 2026's fan-out mechanics made it more valuable, not less:

The **pillar page** (3,000–5,000 words) is the comprehensive overview — "Filing Bankruptcy in California: The Complete Guide" — touching every major subtopic at survey depth and linking down. **Cluster pages** (1,500–2,500 words) each own one subtopic completely: the means test, the automatic stay, keeping your car, Chapter 13 repayment plans, what happens to your credit score. **Supporting pieces** (800–1,500 words) answer single specific questions. Everything interlinks: clusters up to the pillar, pillar down to clusters, siblings to siblings.

Here's why fan-out supercharged this old structure: when the machine explodes one question into a dozen sub-queries, a firm with a full cluster has a candidate page for *every* sub-query. You're not competing for one seat in the answer; you're fielding a roster. Build one pillar per practice area, 10–20 clusters per pillar, at a sustainable two to three pieces a month. Depth in one area beats a thin smear across five — the machine can tell the difference between a treatise and a pamphlet rack.

Step Three: The Brief — One Hour That Saves Three

Before drafting anything, write a one-page brief: What problem does this piece solve, for whom, in which emotional state? Which traditional keyword and which two or three AI-style questions does it target? What does the current competition look like — read the top five results and the AI answers, note their length, their structure, and above all their gaps? What's the goal (authority, consultations, both), and what will we say that nobody else is saying? An hour of this saves three hours of drafting and rescues you from the saddest genre on the legal internet: the 41st identical article about the automatic stay, published into the void, cited by no one.

The brief is also where you check the AI answers themselves: ask your target question in ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google's AI Mode, and study what gets cited. What did the winners have — a statistic? a cleaner definition? a fresher date? That's your bar. Clear it.

Step Four: The Anatomy of a Citable Page

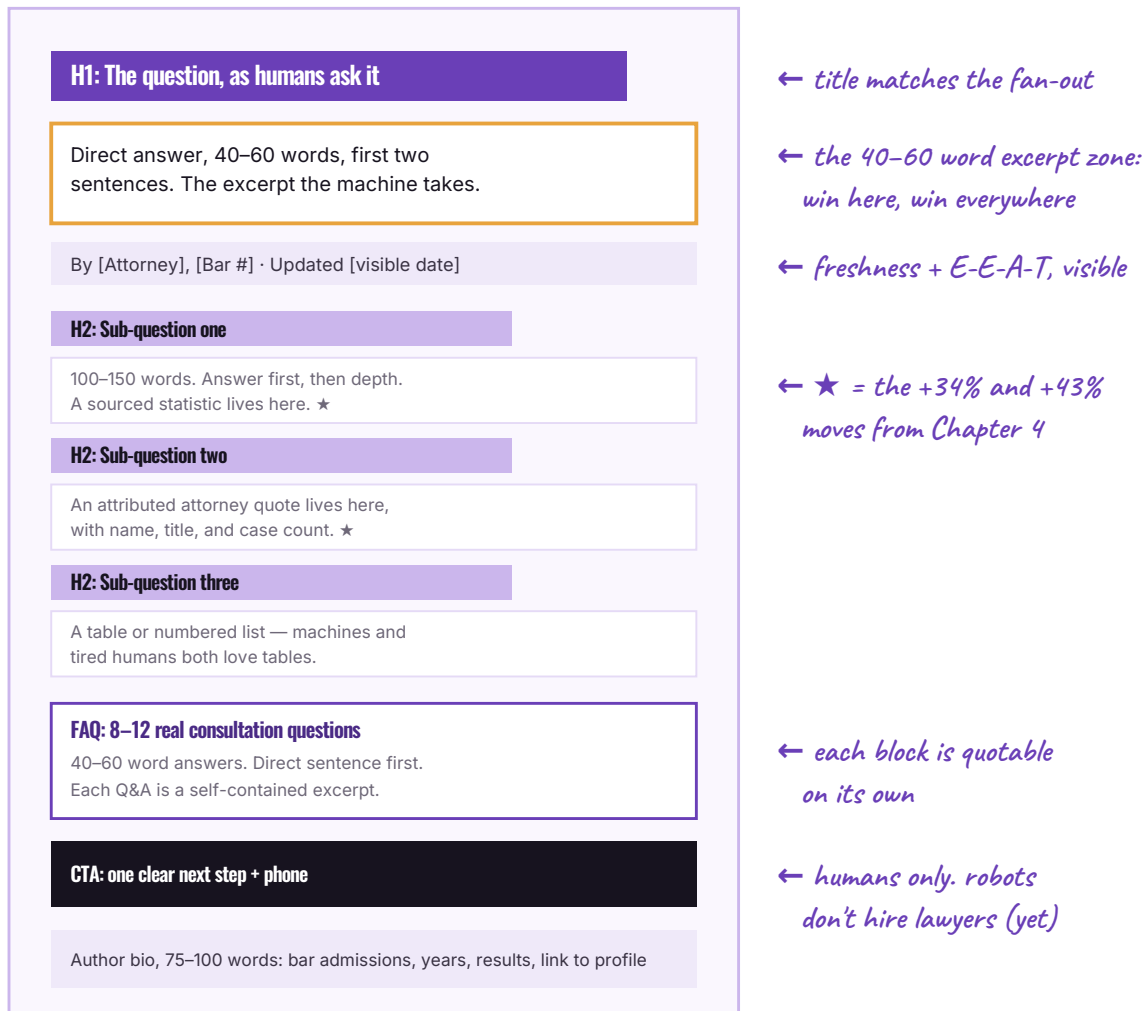


FIGURE 5.1 — The anatomy of a citable page. Every block is self-contained, because machines quote passages, not pages.

The master template, section by section. It should look familiar if you read the first edition; it's been battle-tested since, and updated where 2026 moved the targets.

The introduction (200–300 words) opens with the reader's situation, not yours. "If a creditor just froze your bank account, here's what you can still do — and how fast you need to do it" beats "Smith & Associates has proudly served the Central Valley since 1987" by every metric either of us could name. Make a concrete promise of what the page delivers, and plant the trust signals early: who wrote this, what they've handled, when it was last reviewed.

The body (10–15 H2 sections) runs on the Direct Answer Formula, the single most durable rule in this book's lineage: question-format H2 → direct 40–60 word answer → supporting depth → concrete example → transition. Keep sections around 100–150 words per heading — the extraction sweet spot — and let every section stand alone, because it will be read alone, by a robot, out of context, at retrieval speed.

EXHIBIT C: THE FORMULA, WORKED (BANKRUPTCY EDITION)

H2: Will Filing Chapter 7 Stop My Wage Garnishment?

Yes — usually the moment you file. The bankruptcy petition triggers an automatic stay under 11 U.S.C. § 362 that requires most garnishments to stop immediately, including those already in progress. Certain obligations, like child support, continue. Most clients see garnishment end within one to two pay cycles.

Then the depth: how employers get notified, what to do if a garnishment slips through, the domestic-support exception, and a real (anonymized) example with a number in it. The machine can lift the italic paragraph whole. The human, who has been getting garnished for three months, keeps reading. Both got what they came for.

The FAQ (8–12 questions) uses real consultation questions, not invented ones — you collected them in step one. One direct sentence, one explaining sentence, one practical next step: 40–60 words. FAQ sections remain pure optimization gold, with one 2026 update to your expectations: Google stopped showing FAQ rich-result dropdowns for law firms back in 2023, so the payoff isn't visual anymore — it's that each Q&A is a pre-packaged excerpt for AI extraction, and Microsoft's citation guidance asks for FAQ sections by name.

The close is a 100–150 word CTA with one clear action and a phone number, followed by a 75–100 word author bio with bar admissions, years, and specifics. The bio isn't decoration: legal content is YMYL — "Your Money or Your Life" territory — where Google's quality raters apply their strictest authorship standards, and where anonymous content goes to die.

Step Five: Voice — Write Like a Person Who's Done This Before

E-E-A-T — Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness — is not a checklist you append; it's a quality your writing either has or fakes badly. The test for each sentence is simple: *could only someone who's actually handled these cases have written this?* "The means test is complicated" fails; anyone can type that. "The means test trips up more filers on the vehicle-ownership deduction than on income — I've seen it three times this year" passes; that sentence has been to court. Specific anonymized case examples, real numbers with disclaimers, references to how things actually go at the 341 meeting — this is Experience, and it's the E that machines and humans both find hardest to counterfeit.

Keep the prose human: explain like you would to a smart friend who isn't a lawyer. Paragraphs of 60–100 words, sentences averaging 15–20 with rhythm breaks, reading level around Grade 6–8, active voice for at least 80% of it. "We secured a \$150,000 settlement" — not "a settlement was secured." And keep your entities consistent: pick "Eastern District of California Bankruptcy Court" and stick with it, rather than rotating through creative synonyms like a thesaurus with a nervous condition. Machines map entities; help them map you correctly.

Step Six: Titles and Descriptions — Your Sixty Characters of Glory

Your page title now does double duty: it's the classic ranking-and-click signal it always was, *and* — per Chapter 4 — its semantic match to fan-out sub-queries is the strongest measured predictor of ChatGPT citation. Same rules as ever, higher stakes: the primary question or keyword up front, location for local work, unique on every page — and don't fuss over character counts. The old 60-character "limit" is a myth (in the 187-factor local research it scored near the very bottom); just put the part that matters first, since displays truncate and Google rewrites a majority of titles anyway. Three formulas that keep working:

- **[Service] in [City]: [Outcome]** — "Bankruptcy Attorney in Fresno: Stop Garnishment This Week"
- **[Question], Answered** — "Can You Keep Your House in Chapter 7? California Rules, Explained"
- **[Keyword] | [City] | [Firm]** — the boring classic, still fine for service pages

Meta descriptions don't affect rankings directly and Google rewrites most of them, which is somehow even worse than the title situation. Write them anyway — hook, key facts, CTA, about 150 characters — because when yours does survive, it's your ad, and because the description is one more clean statement of what the page answers. Just never let "Welcome to Our Website | Home" happen. I wish I were making that example up. I see it monthly, in the wild, on firms paying five figures for marketing.

"Every section will be read alone, by a robot, out of context, at retrieval speed.
Write like it."

HELD

The system: humans → compass → clusters → brief → citable anatomy → honest voice → question-shaped titles. Research from your intake and the internet's panic rooms, not just keyword tools. Build depth in clusters so fan-out finds you everywhere. Brief before drafting. Structure every page so any block can be quoted alone, with the Direct Answer Formula doing the heavy lifting. Sound like someone who's been in the room. One page, written once, winning on three scoreboards.

►► DO THIS NOW

1. **Start the intake question log** today — a shared doc where staff drop every question a prospect asks. Review it at month's end; the top three uncovered questions become next month's content.
2. **Build one Content Compass** for your highest-value practice area: questions verbatim, pain points, misconceptions, gaps. Two hours, one afternoon.
3. **Map your existing content to a cluster diagram.** Most firms find they own random islands, not an archipelago. List the missing clusters; that's the publishing plan.
4. **Retrofit the Direct Answer Formula** onto your five most-visited pages: question-format H2s, 40–60 word answers up top, one section at a time.
5. **Rewrite your worst title tag.** You know the one. If it contains the word "Welcome," delete this footnote from your firm's history today.

Drafting With AI (Without Sounding Like a Robot)

The full workflow: how to use AI as the world's fastest first-draft associate, why you must never let it sign the final, the phrases that give machine writing away instantly, and the two law firms that paid five and six figures for skipping the review step.

Let's dispense with the two dumb positions first. Position one: "Real firms don't use AI to write." Please. Thomson Reuters' 2026 survey found 74% of professionals use AI tools several times a week, and the ones pretending otherwise are just using it with the door closed. Position two: "AI writes our content now, we fired the writer." Congratulations, you've automated the production of text nobody wanted at a scale nobody asked for. The firms winning in 2026 hold the boring middle: **AI drafts, humans decide**. This chapter is the complete operating manual for that middle — and it's more specific than "have a human review it," I promise.

What Google Actually Thinks About AI Content

Get the policy question settled first, because half the industry still has it wrong in both directions. Google's official guidance — unchanged in substance since February 2023 — is that it rewards "high-quality content, however it is produced." There is no AI-content penalty. There is no AI-content detector demoting your blog. Production method is not a ranking factor. Full stop.

What Google does hunt, with increasing enthusiasm, is **scaled content abuse** — its spam policy (last revised May 2026) explicitly names "using generative AI tools... to generate many pages without adding value for users" as a violation. Translation for law firms: the classic sin of generating four hundred near-identical "[Practice Area] Lawyer in [Suburb]" pages, which used to be merely tacky, is now formally spam. The line Google draws is the same line this book draws: AI-assisted pages with real attorney knowledge, real local detail, and real usefulness are fine — machine-extruded filler is a target. The tool was never the crime. The laziness is the crime.

OBJECTION! "CAN'T READERS TELL IT WAS WRITTEN WITH AI?"

They can't tell what *drafted* it. They can absolutely tell when nobody *edited* it. What readers (and increasingly, machines trained on human preference) detect isn't AI — it's the absence of a human: no specific cases, no local texture, no opinions, no risk, prose so balanced it says nothing. The fix isn't hiding the tool. The fix is the workflow below, which ends with a page only your firm could have published. If your published content is distinguishable from every other firm's only by the logo, that was a problem before AI, too. AI just made it cheaper to have.

The Five-Stage Workflow

Here is the system, stage by stage. It tracks how both OpenAI's and Anthropic's own documentation say to get good long-form output — grounding, structured prompts, chained steps — plus the verification layer that keeps you out of Chapter 12's case reports.

Stage 1: Feed it the file (grounding)

The single biggest quality lever isn't the prompt — it's what you attach to it. Both OpenAI's and Anthropic's docs say the same thing: supplying reference material to work from is the strongest defense against fabrication and the fastest route to specificity. Before drafting anything, assemble a **grounding pack**: your content brief from Chapter 5, the relevant statute text (actual text, not your memory of it), your attorney's bullet-point answers from a ten-minute interview, two or three anonymized case examples, your firm's credentials block, and your voice sheet (below). The machine drafting *from your materials* is a paralegal with sources. The machine drafting from nothing is an improv performer with a confident voice. You are legally responsible for both, so hire the first one.

Stage 2: Prompt like you're briefing an associate

"Write a blog post about Chapter 7 bankruptcy" gets you the median of the internet, which is precisely the content that never gets cited. Instead, write the prompt the way you'd brief a talented new associate: identity, audience, task, structure, constraints, and materials — clearly separated. Anthropic's docs specifically endorse breaking the work into a **chain** — outline first, then sections, then revision — rather than one mega-prompt, and it makes a startling difference on 2,000-word pieces. A condensed version of the drafting prompt (the full library is in Appendix B):

PROMPT — SECTION DRAFT (CONDENSED; FULL VERSION IN APPENDIX B)

You are drafting website content for a consumer bankruptcy law firm in [city]. Audience: a stressed non-lawyer who may lose their car; write at an 8th-grade reading level, warm but direct, no legalese without translation.

Draft ONLY the section "[H2 question]" (150 words max): a direct 40-60 word answer in the first two sentences, then explanation, then one concrete example drawn from the attorney notes below.

Rules: Use ONLY the facts in the materials below. If a fact isn't in the materials, write [VERIFY] instead of guessing. No invented statistics, cases, or deadlines. Do not promise outcomes.

MATERIALS: [statute excerpts · attorney interview notes · brief]

That **[VERIFY] instruction** is the cheapest insurance in this book: it converts the machine's most dangerous habit — filling gaps confidently — into a visible to-do list.

Stage 3: The fact pass (non-delegable)

Every statute number, deadline, dollar figure, exemption amount, case name, and percentage gets checked against a primary source, by a human, before publication. Not because I'm cautious — because federal judges are now billing for the lesson. In December 2025, an Oregon federal judge hit two lawyers with roughly **\$110,000** in penalties for briefs containing fifteen citations to cases that don't exist. In early 2025, three attorneys — including one from Morgan & Morgan, a firm that spends more on marketing than most firms gross — were fined over a motion citing eight fabricated cases from their in-house AI tool. Those were court filings, but the duty transfers intact to marketing: your website's claims about the law are still your claims, made publicly, under advertising rules. A fabricated "the average Chapter 7 costs \$800 in [city]" on your blog is a bar complaint doing push-ups. Chapter 12 covers the full ethics stack; for now, the rule is: **the machine proposes, a licensed human verifies.**

Stage 4: The voice pass — exterminating the AI-isms

AI first drafts share a dialect. Readers have learned to smell it, and nothing torches trust like content that smells like nobody. The voice pass is a real editing pass, sentence by sentence, hunting the tells:

The tell	The tell, in the wild	The fix
The throat-clearing opener	"In today's rapidly evolving legal landscape..."	Delete the sentence. Start with the reader's problem.
The empty intensifier	"It's crucial to understand that..."	Just say the thing. If it matters, the content shows it.
The tour-guide transition	"Moreover... Furthermore... Additionally..."	Real people say "And," "Also," "Here's the other problem."
The both-sides shuffle	"While bankruptcy has advantages, it also has drawbacks."	Have a position. You're the one they're hiring for judgment.
The corporate verb parade	"We help clients navigate complex challenges and unlock solutions."	"We stop garnishments and keep people in their houses."
The suspiciously tidy triplet	"Fast, fair, and focused on you."	One concrete claim beats three abstract ones.
The summary nobody ordered	"In conclusion, bankruptcy is a complex topic."	End with what to do next, not a book report.

Then do the additive half, which matters more: put in what the machine cannot know. The thing your paralegal tells every panicked caller. The local judge's scheduling quirk. The misconception you correct weekly. The sentence with a little attitude in it. A page passes the voice test when a longtime client could read it and say, "yes, that's them." A useful trick: read one paragraph aloud. If you wouldn't say it across a conference table to a human being in trouble, it doesn't ship.

HINT: BUILD A VOICE SHEET ONCE, REUSE IT FOREVER

Spend thirty minutes writing a one-page voice sheet: ten sentences you'd actually say, ten phrases you'd never say, three sample paragraphs from your best-performing page, your stance on the questions clients ask most. Attach it to every drafting prompt as part of the grounding pack. The machine is an excellent mimic with nothing to mimic; give it something. Firms that do this see draft quality jump immediately — and every writer on the team suddenly produces content in one recognizable voice instead of five.

Stage 5: The optimization pass

Last, run the Chapter 4–5 scorecard against the finished piece: question-format headings that match real queries, the 40–60 word direct answer under each, at least one sourced statistic and one attributed attorney quote, descriptive URL, honest date, author bio with bar number, schema queued for Chapter 7's implementation. Ten minutes with the checklist in Appendix C. This is also the stage where AI is at its safest and most useful — ask it to *critique* the draft against the checklist rather than write anything: "List every claim in this draft that lacks a source. List every heading that isn't phrased as a question a client would ask." The machine is a genuinely gifted critic of its own species.

Where AI Helps Most (and Least)

Two years of doing this across many firms produces a fairly stable map. **High value:** first drafts from a solid grounding pack; turning an attorney's rambling voice memo into structured sections; generating the FAQ candidates from an intake-question list; rewriting one page for a different practice area's *structure* (never its facts); tightening for reading level; brainstorming thirty title options; critiquing drafts against your checklist. **Low value, high risk:** legal facts from memory; anything with numbers in it; "write me 50 city pages"; client stories (it will invent them, cheerfully, with names); and final copy of any kind. Notice the pattern: AI compresses the distance from blank page to reviewable draft — the part writers hate — and has no business anywhere near the parts that require a license or a conscience.

"The machine drafting from your materials is a paralegal with sources. The machine drafting from nothing is an improv performer with a confident voice."

HELD

AI is your fastest first-draft associate and your worst final editor. Google doesn't care that you used AI; it cares whether the page helps anyone, and it now formally prosecutes scaled machine filler. Ground every draft in your own materials, brief like you'd brief an associate, verify every fact against primary sources, edit until it sounds like your firm, then optimize. Cost of the workflow: maybe ninety minutes per piece. Cost of skipping stage three, per the District of Oregon: about \$110,000.

►► DO THIS NOW

1. **Write your voice sheet** — the thirty-minute version. It pays back on the first draft you run with it.
2. **Build one grounding pack** for your next planned piece: brief, statute text, ten minutes of attorney notes, two anonymized examples, credentials block.
3. **Adopt the [VERIFY] rule** in every drafting prompt, and make "zero [VERIFY] tags remaining" a publication gate.
4. **Print the AI-isms table** and tape it wherever content gets edited. Fine the team a dollar per "in today's fast-paced world." Donate proceeds to the coffee fund.
5. **Put a named human on the fact pass** — one person whose sign-off means every number and citation was checked against a primary source. If no one owns it, no one did it.

The Technical Layer

The plumbing chapter: which robots to let in, why your JavaScript is probably hiding your content from most of them, the schema that's worth the effort, and the fashionable file that no platform actually reads.

Nothing in this chapter will make anyone fall in love with your firm. That's Part II's other chapters. This chapter has a humbler job: making sure the machines can get in the building. It's the least glamorous work in the book and the most common point of total failure — one analysis found roughly **73% of websites have technical barriers blocking AI crawler access**. Seventy-three percent of the internet is running a restaurant with the door locked, wondering why the robots never come in. Let's check your locks.

The Guest List: Know Your Robots

Every AI platform sends crawlers to your site, and — here's the part everyone misses — most platforms send *more than one*, with different jobs. Blocking the wrong one is like barring the process server but also the client. The roster that matters:

Bot	Who sends it	What it does	If you block it
OAI-SearchBot	OpenAI	Builds ChatGPT's search index	You vanish from ChatGPT search answers
ChatGPT-User	OpenAI	Fetches pages when a user asks	Live lookups of your site fail
GPTBot	OpenAI	Collects training data	Excluded from future training only — search unaffected
Claude-SearchBot / Claude-User	Anthropic	Claude's search index / user fetches	Reduced visibility in Claude answers
ClaudeBot	Anthropic	Training data	Training only — search unaffected
PerplexityBot / Perplexity-User	Perplexity	Perplexity's index / user fetches	Not cited in Perplexity (the User bot, per Perplexity's own docs, "generally ignores" robots.txt anyway)
Googlebot	Google	Everything: Search, AI Overviews, AI Mode	You have larger problems than this book
Google-Extended	Google	Controls Gemini training/grounding use	No effect on Search inclusion or rankings, per Google (AI Overviews eligibility rides on normal Googlebot indexing)
Bingbot	Microsoft	Bing index → Copilot <i>and</i> ChatGPT search	Two platforms for the price of one mistake
Meta-ExternalAgent	Meta	Training + product indexing	Out of Meta AI's world

Sources: OpenAI, Anthropic, Perplexity, Google, and Meta crawler documentation, current as of July 2026. All respect robots.txt except where noted.

The clean policy for a firm that wants citations: **allow every search and user bot; treat the training bots as a separate business decision.** Blocking GPTBot or ClaudeBot keeps your content out of future model training without touching your search visibility — a defensible intellectual-property stance. Blocking OAI-SearchBot or Claude-SearchBot, on the other hand, is opting out of being cited, which for a marketing operation is a strange hill to die on. Here's the copy-paste for the common case (also in Appendix B):

ROBOTS.TXT — THE "CITE ME, PLEASE" CONFIGURATION

```
User-agent: OAI-SearchBot
Allow: /
User-agent: ChatGPT-User
Allow: /
User-agent: Claude-SearchBot
Allow: /
User-agent: Claude-User
Allow: /
User-agent: PerplexityBot
Allow: /
User-agent: Meta-ExternalAgent
Allow: /

# Optional: opt out of model TRAINING without affecting citations
# User-agent: GPTBot
# Disallow: /
# User-agent: ClaudeBot
# Disallow: /
# User-agent: Google-Extended
# Disallow: /
```

OBJECTION! "I NEVER BLOCKED ANYBODY"

You probably didn't — your tools did. Security plugins, CDNs, and firewalls (Cloudflare in particular has one-click AI-bot blocking, and some hosts enabled versions of it by default during the 2024–25 scraper panic) routinely block AI crawlers without a word to you. This is the "73% of sites" problem, and it's why Chapter 10's audit checks your bot access with logs and live tests instead of taking robots.txt's word for it. Also, a plea from Anthropic's own docs: don't block by IP address — the bots come from cloud ranges, and IP-blocking can even stop them from reading the robots.txt where you politely said yes.

JavaScript: The Invisible-Ink Problem

Now the finding that should make every firm with a fancy modern website sit forward. Vercel and MERJ studied AI crawler behavior across billions of fetches and confirmed: **GPTBot, ClaudeBot, PerplexityBot, and Meta's crawler do not execute JavaScript.** They download your scripts and never run them. Of the major AI systems, only Google's machinery (and thus Gemini) renders JS, because it borrows Google Search's infrastructure.

Why this matters: many law firm sites built on modern frameworks — or assembled from page-builder widgets — ship as a nearly empty HTML shell plus scripts that paint the content into the visitor's browser. A human sees a beautiful page. A robot that can't run scripts sees the architectural equivalent of an empty courtroom: the furniture's listed on a clipboard somewhere, but nobody set it up. Your attorney bios, practice-area copy, FAQs — invisible ink. The fix is **server-side rendering** (or static generation): the server sends finished HTML with the content already in it, and scripts merely decorate. Every modern framework supports this; your developer knows the toggle. The two-minute self-test is in this chapter's Do This Now, and it's the highest-stakes two minutes in the book for design-forward firms.

Schema: Useful, Oversold, and Occasionally Confirmed

Structured data — the machine-readable labeling layer on your pages — occupies a funny position in 2026. Google says, in writing, that there's no special schema for AI features; it treats structured data as a comprehension aid that must match your visible content. Meanwhile Microsoft is the one major platform that has confirmed, on the record, that its LLMs use schema to understand content — and Bing feeds both Copilot and ChatGPT. So the honest statement is: **schema won't flip a citation switch, it helps machines understand who and what you are, one platform confirms using it, and it still powers classic rich results.** That's plenty to justify an afternoon. The law-firm set worth implementing (templates in Appendix B):

- **LegalService / Attorney** (LocalBusiness subtype) on your office and location pages — name, address, phone, geo, hours, and `sameAs` links to your profiles. This is your entity's ID card.
- **Person** on every attorney bio — job title, bar memberships, `alumniOf`, `knowsAbout`, `sameAs` to the state bar listing and LinkedIn. This welds the human authority to the content, which is the E-E-A-T story machines can actually parse.
- **Article / BlogPosting** with `author`, `datePublished`, and `dateModified` on content — that `dateModified` field speaks directly to the freshness preference from Chapter 4.
- **FAQPage** on FAQ sections — with expectations managed: Google stopped showing FAQ rich-result dropdowns for ordinary businesses in 2023. You're doing it for machine comprehension (Microsoft's checklist explicitly wants FAQ sections), not for the accordion in the search results.

The llms.txt Interlude, or: The File That Does Nothing

Somewhere in 2025, the idea spread that a magic file called `llms.txt` — a curated sitemap for AI systems — was the new secret handshake, and agencies started selling its installation. Here is the complete, sourced, 2026 status report: **no major AI platform reads it**. Google's documentation says flatly that you don't need any new AI text files. Google's John Mueller, in June 2026: "it's purely speculative for now" — noting the file has existed for years, "yet none of the AI systems use it." Nothing from OpenAI, Anthropic, Perplexity, Microsoft, Meta, or xAI documents any production use. The file is harmless — like leaving a welcome basket for guests who arrive through the plumbing — but if anyone invoices you for "llms.txt optimization," you are legally permitted (I checked with no one) to laugh. Access is governed by the unglamorous trio it was always governed by: `robots.txt`, indexability, and server-side rendering.

Freshness Plumbing: IndexNow and the Sitemap

Chapter 4 established that machines favor fresh content; this is the pipe that tells them you have some. **IndexNow** is a free, open protocol that pings participating engines — Bing among them, and thus the index behind Copilot and ChatGPT search — the moment a page is published or updated. Microsoft's Bing team recommends it by name for AI visibility, describing fresh content as a "reference check" against the model's aging training data. Most SEO plugins (Yoast, Rank Math, AIOSEO) enable it with a checkbox; setup is ten minutes with your web person. Google doesn't use IndexNow — for Google, keep the XML sitemap accurate and let Search Console see it. Ten minutes, once, and your updates start announcing themselves.

HINT: THE SNIPPET CONTROLS CUT BOTH WAYS

Google's preview controls — `nosnippet`, `data-nosnippet`, `max-snippet` — now govern what can appear in AI Overviews and AI Mode, per Google's own documentation. That's the official lever if there's a page you'd rather not have summarized. But know the trade: snippet-blocked content also can't be quoted in the answer box where clients are. For marketing content, the right setting is almost always "quote me as much as you like, and spell the name right."

HELD

Technical AI-readiness is four unglamorous jobs: let the search bots in (and check what your security stack did behind your back), serve real HTML that doesn't require JavaScript to read, label your entities with the standard schema set, and ping IndexNow when things change. No magic files, no secret handshakes — `llms.txt` included. An afternoon of plumbing, and every content chapter in this book starts actually reaching the machines it was written for.

►► DO THIS NOW

1. **The two-minute invisibility test:** disable JavaScript in your browser and load your homepage, a practice-area page, and an attorney bio. If content vanishes, forward this chapter to your developer with the subject line "SSR, please."
2. **Read your robots.txt** (`yourfirm.com/robots.txt`) and check it against the guest list above. Then check your CDN/firewall dashboard for AI-bot blocking you never turned on.
3. **Decide your training-bot policy** — cite-and-train, or cite-only — on purpose, in writing, so nobody "fixes" it randomly next year.
4. **Ship the schema set:** LegalService, Person bios, Article dates, FAQPage. Validate with Google's Rich Results Test and Schema.org's validator (both free).
5. **Turn on IndexNow** via your SEO plugin and confirm your XML sitemap is current in Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools.

Local: Getting Recommended, Not Just Ranked

Where AI answers meet the map pack: what feeds the machines when someone asks "who's the best bankruptcy lawyer near me," why your reviews just became source material, and the July 2026 deal that made your Yelp profile a ChatGPT input.

Full disclosure: local search is a big enough animal that I wrote it its own book — *Get Found. Get Chosen.* covers all four local battlegrounds, field by field, in 43 pages. This chapter won't re-plow that ground. Instead it does the job that belongs in *this* book: showing exactly where local signals feed the AI answer machines, what changed in the months since that guide shipped, and which local moves pay double because they win the map today and the machines tomorrow.

The Question Changed From "Who's Closest" to "Who Should I Trust"

Local intent didn't shrink — nearly half of Google searches carry it — but the surface answering it multiplied. AI Overviews now appear on 68% of local searches, concentrated exactly where law firms live: informational and hybrid queries ("do I need a lawyer to file Chapter 7 or can I do it myself in Fresno") trigger them over 90% of the time, while bare "near me" searches mostly still get the classic pack. Google's AI Mode passed a billion users with queries running three times the length of a typed search, "where should I" language growing fast — and, as of Google's 2026 announcements, agentic features that can book appointments and even *place phone calls to local businesses* on the user's behalf. The machines aren't just describing local businesses anymore. They're starting to do the errands.

What do they draw on when they recommend a firm? Business profile data, star ratings, review volume and recency, and — the part most firms miss — **the actual text of your reviews**. Google's AI local results show summaries generated from review sentiment. ChatGPT and Perplexity, asked about a specific firm, synthesize customer-review information from profiles, review platforms, directories, news, and forums. The sloppy Google review from last March calling you "responsive and honest about fees" isn't just social proof anymore. It's a sentence a machine may paraphrase to the next hundred prospects.

EXHIBIT D: THE YELP-CHATGPT DEAL (JULY 2026)

On July 23, 2026 — weeks after the local guide went to print, which is how this industry treats authors — OpenAI and Yelp announced a partnership: ChatGPT now pulls Yelp's reviews, ratings, photos, and business details into local answers, complete with Yelp's Request-a-Quote flow so users can contact providers without leaving the chat. Translation for law firms: the Yelp profile you've been ignoring since 2019 is now a direct data feed into the most-used AI assistant in America. ChatGPT doesn't read your Google Business Profile — Google keeps that walled — so licensed sources like Yelp, plus Bing-crawled web content and forums, are its local eyes. Claim the Yelp profile, complete it, and fold it into your review rotation. Not because Yelp came back. Because ChatGPT arrived.

The Double-Pay Moves

The local research behind *Get Found. Get Chosen.* scored 187 ranking factors across every surface, including — for the first time — AI visibility. The punchline of that scoring: the map and the machines reward overlapping but differently weighted lists. Citations and web mentions carry roughly **three times more weight for AI answers than for the map**. Best-of lists are the single strongest AI visibility factor. And your website's practice-area pages rank #2 for AI while sitting mid-pack for the map. Which means a smart firm sequences its local work by what pays twice:

Move	Map pack payoff	AI answer payoff
Review machine (steady asks, 2-day responses)	~20% of map weight; #1-2 conversion factors	Ratings + review text feed AI summaries and recommendations
Review diversification (Avvo, Justia, FindLaw, Yelp, BBB)	Minor	Major — review-site authority is a top-5 AI factor; Yelp now feeds ChatGPT directly
One real page per practice area	Top-25 map factor	#2 AI visibility factor
Citations + legal directories, consistent NAP	Modest (~6%)	The backbone — ~16% of AI weight, more than any surface
Best-of lists & editorial mentions	Indirect (branded searches)	#1, #4, and #7 AI factors
Complete, honest GBP (category, hours, photos)	Dominant — ~a third of map weight	Feeds Google's AI surfaces; hours and ratings appear in AI local units

Weights from the 2026 47-practitioner, 187-factor study detailed in *Get Found. Get Chosen.* (Advantage Attorney, 2026).

Read the table bottom-up and you get the map playbook you already know. Read it top-down and you get this book's headline: **the humble directory listing, declared dead at approximately fourteen SEO conferences, has been resurrected by machines that decide whom to recommend by reading what the entire web says about you.** Ten to fifty quality citations — the core platforms plus the legal stack, each opening with the magic sentence ("[Firm] is a [practice area] law firm in [city] that [what you actually do]") — remains the working range. Consistency matters more than count: the machines are cross-referencing, and a firm whose address disagrees with itself across five directories reads as a firm that can't be trusted to know where it is.

Reviews: Now With a Machine Audience

Everything the local guide says about the review machine stands — automate the ask after every closed matter, time it to the moment of relief, ask a question so the answer contains practice-area words, respond to everything within two business days, never buy, never gate, never blitz. What the AI era adds is a second audience reading over your shoulder. When a client writes "they stopped the garnishment in two days and explained every step," a machine ingests: practice area, outcome, speed, communication quality. When you respond like a person, the machine ingests that too. And when your newest review is eight months old, the freshness preference from Chapter 4 applies to your reputation the same way it applies to your content.

One ethics note that belongs in both books: check your state bar's position on review solicitation before automating anything, and never let a review response confirm someone was a client or discuss their matter. Confidentiality outranks all marketing advice, including mine.

HINT: RUN THE LOCAL RECONNAISSANCE PROMPT

Monthly, ask each major platform: "Who are the best [practice area] attorneys in [city]?" and "I need help with [specific problem] in [city] — who should I call?" Log two things: who gets named, and *which sources the answer cites*. Those cited sources — a legal directory, a local news "best of" list, a bar association page — are the actual doors into AI recommendations in your market. Getting listed on the exact pages the machines already trust beats guessing every time. Fifteen minutes a month, and it doubles as your measurement baseline for Chapter 11.

What Not to Do, 2026 Local Edition

The negative factors from the local research apply with extra force once machines are reading. AI-generated photos on your business profile: flagged risk, and increasingly detectable. Keyword-stuffed business names and descriptions: negative signal on the map, credibility acid for a machine deciding whether you're citable. Fake or virtual addresses: the #1 suspension risk, and a lie that AI cross-referencing makes easier to catch than ever. The pattern across every surface, human and machine, is monotonous by design: **the algorithms have been taught to want what clients want**. Real office, real hours, real photos, real reviews, real pages about the work you really do. The firms that find this boring are the firms the machines will skip.

HELD

Local AI visibility is your local reputation, machine-read. The map still runs on your profile; AI recommendations run on the wider record — citations, directories, best-of lists, review text on authoritative platforms, and practice-area pages. Prioritize the moves that pay both surfaces, claim the Yelp feed into ChatGPT, keep the reviews flowing and answered, and let the reconnaissance prompt tell you which doors to knock on next. For the complete field-by-field profile work, the companion guide has you covered — this chapter is the bridge between the two books.

►► DO THIS NOW

1. **Claim and complete your Yelp profile** this week — photos, practice areas, hours, the magic sentence — and add Yelp to your review-ask rotation. It's a ChatGPT input now.
2. **Run the reconnaissance prompts** in ChatGPT, Gemini, and AI Mode for your top two practice areas; log who's named and which sources get cited. Calendar it monthly.
3. **Audit your legal-stack citations** — Avvo, Justia, FindLaw, Lawyers.com, state bar directory — for NAP consistency and the magic sentence. Fix before you build.
4. **Check your review vitals:** rating 4.0+, newest review under 30 days, every review answered within two business days. Any miss becomes this month's priority.
5. **Pull up your practice-area pages** and ask: would a machine reading only this page know exactly what we do, where, for whom, and why we're credible? If not, Chapter 5 has the anatomy.

Beyond Your Website

The mention economy in practice: Reddit's licensed pipeline into the machines, why the robots watch YouTube, the LinkedIn surprise, and how to earn your way onto the lists the AIs already trust — without astroturfing your way into a bar complaint.

Chapter 4 dropped the statistic that reorders most firms' marketing budgets: unlinked brand mentions predict AI visibility about three times better than backlinks, and the strongest single signal is YouTube. Chapter 8 showed the same pattern locally — best-of lists, editorial mentions, and review-site authority topping the AI factor list. This chapter is the how: the five off-site venues that actually move machine opinion, in rough order of payoff, with the compliance rails bolted on. Because the mention economy has one iron law your website never had: **you don't control what gets said, only what you've earned.**

Venue One: Reddit — The Licensed Pipeline

Reddit isn't just a place the machines happen to read. It's a place two of them *pay to read*. Google signed a licensing deal in early 2024 — reported at roughly \$60 million a year — for structured, real-time access to Reddit content, for both display and model training. OpenAI signed its own deal months later. The results show up in every citation study in this book: Reddit is Perplexity's #1 source by a mile (46.7% of its top-source mix), a top citation on Google's AI surfaces, one of only 36 brands with consistent top-100 AI visibility across every platform every month — and ChatGPT's favorite uncredited read. When a machine explains what it's like to file Chapter 7 in your state, there is a real chance it learned the texture of that answer from a thread where a scared stranger asked and people answered.

I wrote a full companion volume on this — *The Attorney's Guide to Reddit* — and every rule in it survives contact with the AI era, mostly because the AI era raised the stakes on the same behavior. The doctrine, compressed: **value first, always** — nine helpful contributions for every one that benefits you, and even that one had better teach something. **Lurk before you post**: thirty days observing, then comments, then content. **Real name, real credentials** for attorney accounts, with a bio that says who you are. **Never give specific legal advice** — general education only, "talk to a lawyer in your state" always. **r/legaladvice is observe-only**; it bans solicitation, and the mods have seen every clever workaround twice. **No sockpuppets, no vote games, no deleting posts that drew criticism**. Reddit's own spam rules cap self-promotion around the long-standing ~10% guideline, and the community's fraud radar predates AI by two decades.

OBJECTION! "SO I'LL JUST HAVE MY TEAM POST 'CLIENTS LOVE US' IN A FEW THREADS"

Denied, with prejudice. Astroturfed recommendations violate Reddit's rules, evaporate under the community's scrutiny, and — for a lawyer — walk straight into the truthfulness requirements of the advertising rules (the Model Rule 7.1 family). The play is slower and better: be visibly, patiently useful in the communities where your future clients panic, and let genuine mentions accumulate. When a machine reads a two-year-old thread where "u/AttorneyReyes" calmly explained the means test to a stranger at midnight, cited the actual statute, and told them what to ask any lawyer they hire — that's the mention that compounds. It can't be bought, which is precisely why it's worth something.

Venue Two: YouTube — The Robots Are Watching

The single strongest correlate of AI visibility across 75,000 brands — stronger than web mentions, much stronger than links — is YouTube presence (~0.74). It's also the fastest-growing citation class inside Google's AI Overviews, and a top source on AI Mode and Gemini. The machines transcribe, parse, and quote video content, which means a ten-minute video titled "Can You Keep Your House in a California Chapter 7?" is simultaneously: a YouTube search asset, a transcript the machines can mine, a mention-generator every time someone references it, and — per Google's own AI-search guidance, which recommends multimodal content by name — exactly what the biggest platform says it wants.

You do not need production values. You need the Content Compass from Chapter 5, a decent microphone, and an attorney willing to answer one real question per video in plain English. Title videos the way questions are asked (the fan-out logic applies here too), put the direct answer in the first thirty seconds, and post the cleaned-up transcript on the matching page of your website — one effort, two surfaces, and the page inherits the video's E-E-A-T. A monthly cadence of two honest videos beats a launch-week burst of eight followed by silence, for the same reason steady reviews beat a blitz: the machines read consistency as legitimacy.

Venue Three: LinkedIn — The AI Mode Favorite

The quiet surprise in the citation studies: Google's AI Mode cites LinkedIn at roughly 15% — consistently, month after month, more than any other single domain — and Wikipedia at barely 2%. For professional-services queries, the machine behind a billion-user product treats LinkedIn as a primary reference. Most attorney LinkedIn profiles, meanwhile, read like a bar application from 2014.

The fix costs an afternoon per attorney: a headline that states practice area and city in the words clients use ("Consumer bankruptcy attorney in Fresno — Chapter 7 & 13" — not "Partner, Reyes & Associates LLP"); an About section written in first person with actual specifics; posts — even monthly — that answer real client questions. Firm page, same treatment. This is the cheapest top-cited real estate in the book, and it compounds with everything else because LinkedIn profiles also feed the entity picture every machine builds of your attorneys.

Venue Four: Directories, Best-Of Lists, and the Pages Machines Already Trust

Here's the efficient way to think about directories in 2026: stop asking "does this listing send traffic" and start asking "do the machines cite this page." The local research scored presence on best-of lists as the **#1 AI visibility factor**, with prominence on key legal-industry sites at #3 — and your monthly reconnaissance prompts from Chapter 8 tell you exactly which lists and directories the machines in *your* market actually cite. The playbook: complete the legal stack (Avvo, Justia, FindLaw, Lawyers.com, your state bar's public directory) with consistent NAP and the magic sentence; then chase the specific best-of pages your reconnaissance surfaced — some are editorial and petitionable, some accept payment and say so (make your peace, or don't, but know which is which); and keep reviews flowing on the platforms with authority, because review-site strength is a top-5 AI factor and — post-Yelp-deal — a direct ChatGPT input.

Venue Five: Editorial Mentions — PR Is Citation Work Now

Quality and quantity of editorial mentions rank #4 and #7 among AI visibility factors, and ChatGPT's non-Wikipedia diet leans hard on established media. Every local-news quote, community-paper op-ed, podcast appearance, and bar-journal article is a trusted-domain mention with your name spelled correctly — an op-ed in the community paper is a link wearing a byline. The accessible version of this for a consumer firm isn't a publicist; it's being findable and quotable when journalists need a fast, clear explanation of a legal story ("what does the new exemption change mean for homeowners?"), plus one genuinely useful community thing a year worth covering. A single well-covered scholarship or clinic generates more machine-legible mentions than a year of self-published press releases, which the machines weigh approximately the way you weigh a party's own press releases in discovery.

HINT: ONE STORY, FIVE VENUES

The efficient firms run mention work as a pipeline, not five projects. One real thing — say, your attorney's plain-English breakdown of a new bankruptcy exemption — becomes: a website article (Chapter 5 anatomy), a ten-minute YouTube video, a LinkedIn post, a helpful comment where the topic came up on Reddit, and a pitch note to the local legal reporter. Five venues, one afternoon of derivative work, and every version cross-references the others. The machines see the same credentialed attorney explaining the same thing across five trusted surfaces — which is what an entity with authority looks like from the inside of a language model.

"Your AI reputation is everything the internet says about you, weighted by trust — and most of it gets said off your website."

HELD

Mentions are earned in five venues, and the currency is usefulness. Reddit is a licensed pipeline into the machines — be patiently, genuinely helpful there or stay out. YouTube is the strongest single visibility signal; answer real questions on camera. LinkedIn is AI Mode's favorite source; stop neglecting it. Directories and best-of lists are the pages machines already cite; complete them and earn your way on. Editorial mentions are PR with a new scoreboard. None of it can be faked at acceptable risk, all of it compounds, and the reconnaissance prompt tells you where to start.

►► DO THIS NOW

1. **Assign Reddit duty:** one attorney or senior staffer, real name, thirty days of lurking in two practice-area communities, then helpful-comments-only for sixty. Calendar the 90-day check-in. (The companion Reddit guide has the full program.)
2. **Record one video:** your most-asked consultation question, answered in ten minutes of plain English. Post it with a question-format title; put the transcript on the matching site page.
3. **Rewrite one LinkedIn headline** per attorney to practice-area-plus-city language, and schedule one monthly post answering a client question.
4. **From last chapter's reconnaissance log,** list the three non-firm pages the machines cite most in your market. Get accurately listed on all three, or start the outreach that earns it.
5. **Pick your one story this quarter** and run the five-venue pipeline on it. Repeat quarterly, forever.

PART THREE

3

Proof & Practice

Strategy without measurement is astrology with a budget. This part gives you the DIY audit that shows where you stand, the dashboards that show whether it's working, the ethics rails that keep the whole operation out of the disciplinary reporter, and a 90-day plan that turns thirteen chapters into a calendar.

10 The DIY AI Optimization Audit

11 Measuring What Matters

12 Ethics, Compliance, and Not Becoming a Cautionary Tale

13 The 90-Day Playbook

The DIY AI Optimization Audit

An eight-step audit you can run with free tools and one long afternoon — plus the chapter-opening public service announcement about why asking ChatGPT to "audit my website" is a séance, not a site crawl.

Somewhere this week, a marketer will paste a law firm's homepage URL into a chatbot, type "audit this website for SEO and AI visibility," receive eleven confident paragraphs, and forward them to a managing partner as deliverables. This chapter exists so that nobody in your building is on either end of that email. First we'll establish exactly why that "audit" is theater — with documentation, because Chapter 4 taught you to demand receipts — and then we'll do the real thing, step by step, mostly free.

Why "Hey ChatGPT, Audit My Site" Is a Séance

It feels like it should work. The chatbot answers questions about your website with total confidence, so surely it looked at your website. Here's what actually happens, per the platforms' own documentation and controlled testing — and it's worth understanding, because the failure is structural, not a bug they'll patch next quarter.

Problem one: the machine doesn't crawl. It snacks. A real audit tool visits every page on your site, methodically, following every link — that's what "crawl" means. No consumer AI assistant does this. OpenAI's own bot documentation says ChatGPT-User, the agent that fetches pages during your conversation, is "not used for crawling the web in an automatic fashion" — it grabs individual pages, on demand, one at a time. Perplexity's docs describe the same page-level behavior. Measured in practice, ChatGPT runs somewhere between two and ten rounds of search per answer, and pages its fan-out queries don't surface are simply *never fetched at all*. So when you ask for a site audit, the machine reads your homepage, maybe two or three other pages if you're lucky and they render without JavaScript — and then answers as if it read four hundred. Your beautiful practice-area cluster? Unvisited. The orphaned pages? Invisible. The redirect chains? What redirect chains? It's a home inspection where the inspector looks through the front window, nods, and starts writing.

Problem two: it physically can't hold your site. Language models have a fixed working memory — a context window — and the vendors document its limits precisely. A full mid-size law firm site's HTML, plus crawl data, plus your question, does not fit. Anything past the limit is rejected or sampled. The machine isn't being lazy; it's working from the three pages it could carry.

Problem three: it fills the gaps with confident fiction. This is the part that turns a harmless limitation into a dangerous deliverable. When testers at Search Engine Land ran AI audits in 2026, models retrieved only 30–40% of the URLs they were given, recommended a keyword with zero real-world search volume, and — my personal favorite — one model "couldn't actually read the article. It didn't admit that until I asked." That sentence should hang framed in every marketing department. The machine's failure mode is not "I don't know." Its failure mode is a well-organized report about a website it didn't read, delivered in the same confident voice it uses for things that are true. You already know this failure mode: it's the expert witness who never examined the patient but bills like he did.

HELD

An LLM is a brilliant analyst and a terrible surveyor. It cannot systematically visit your pages (no crawling), cannot hold your whole site (context limits), and papers over both gaps with confident invention (hallucination). The fix isn't avoiding AI in audits — it's reversing the order of operations: *real tools gather the facts, then the AI analyzes the facts you hand it.* Crawler first, chatbot second. Every step below follows that rule.

The Real Audit: Eight Steps, One Afternoon, Mostly Free

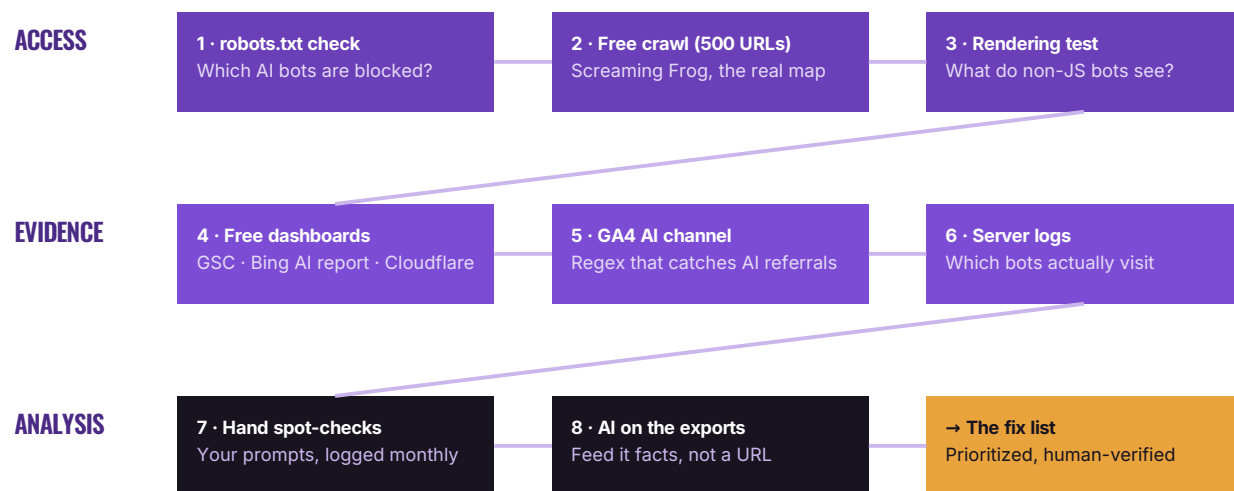


FIGURE 10.1 — The audit pipeline: establish access, gather evidence, then — and only then — let AI help analyze. The chatbot's seat is step 8, not step 1.

Step 1: Read your robots.txt (10 minutes, free)

Open `yourfirm.com/robots.txt` in a browser and compare against Chapter 7's guest list: OAI-SearchBot, ChatGPT-User, Claude-SearchBot, Claude-User, PerplexityBot, plus Googlebot and Bingbot unhindered. You're looking for blocks you didn't choose — the security-plugin specials. Remember OpenAI's plain warning: sites blocking OAI-SearchBot won't appear in ChatGPT search results. If anything's ambiguous, Screaming Frog's free online robots.txt tester validates the syntax. Write down every AI-bot directive you find; deliberate policy or not, it's finding number one.

Step 2: Crawl the site with Screaming Frog's free tier (45 minutes, free up to 500 URLs)

Screaming Frog's SEO Spider is the desktop crawler this industry runs on, and its free version handles 500 URLs — more than most consumer law firm sites have. Point it at your domain and let it do what the chatbot can't: visit *everything*, methodically. Out comes the real map: every broken link and 404 (AI bots hit lots of these — one study clocked roughly a third of ChatGPT's fetch attempts hitting dead ends), every redirect chain, every missing or duplicated title and meta description, every URL blocked by robots.txt *with the exact directive that blocked it*, thin pages, orphaned corners. This single free crawl gives you more true facts about your site than a hundred chatbot conversations. The paid license (£199/year, about one billable hour) adds the AI-era extras worth having: JavaScript rendering comparison, custom user-agents so you can crawl your site *as* GPTBot and see how your server treats it, structured-data validation, and AI-prompt integration. It's the one paid tool in this chapter I'd call a default yes.

Step 3: Check what a non-rendering bot actually sees (20 minutes, free)

Chapter 7's invisible-ink problem, now measured instead of assumed. Free route: Google Search Console's URL Inspection on your top pages, comparing the raw HTML against what renders — plus the browser trick of disabling JavaScript and reloading. With a Screaming Frog license, enable "Store HTML" and "Store Rendered HTML" and diff them side by side: anything that exists only in the rendered version is content most AI crawlers cannot read. Every important page that fails this test goes to the top of the fix list, because it fails for ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, and Meta simultaneously.

Step 4: Turn on the free dashboards (30 minutes, free)

Three switches, all free, all criminally under-flipped. **Google Search Console** now has a Generative AI performance report showing how often your links appear in AI Overviews and AI Mode — impressions only, no clicks, and it's rolling out gradually, so don't panic if your property doesn't have it yet; AI Mode clicks have been folded into the regular Web report since mid-2025 regardless. **Bing Webmaster Tools** shipped the best free AI report in the business in February 2026: actual citation counts in Copilot and Bing's AI answers, which URLs got cited, and — this is the gold — the *grounding queries* the AI used when it retrieved you, with intent and topic breakdowns added in June. It's the closest thing to seeing the machine's homework that any platform offers, and it's free. **Cloudflare's AI Crawl Control**, if your site runs through Cloudflare, shows every AI crawler hitting your site and whether they honor your robots.txt, on the free plan, zero configuration.

Step 5: Build the GA4 AI channel (30 minutes, free)

GA4 added a native "AI Assistant" channel in May 2026 that auto-labels traffic from ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and friends — turn it on and enjoy, but know that it undercounts, because AI apps and embedded browsers mangle referrer data and spray visits across Referral and Unassigned. The fix is a custom channel group using a source regex that catches the whole family — chatgpt.com, perplexity, gemini.google.com, copilot.microsoft.com, claude.ai, grok.com, deepseek.com and the long tail — placed *above* Referral in channel priority. The full regex string is printed in Appendix B so nobody has to type it from a book. This becomes your monthly AI-traffic baseline, and it applies retroactively in reports, which feels like getting evidence admitted after the fact in a way judges never allow.

Step 6: Pull the server logs (quarterly, free)

Analytics shows humans; logs show robots. Export access logs from your host and drop them into Screaming Frog's Log File Analyser, which ships pre-configured to recognize GPTBot, OAI-SearchBot, ChatGPT-User, ClaudeBot, Claude-User, PerplexityBot, Perplexity-User, and CCBot, with IP verification so you're not fooled by pretenders. Now you know ground truth: which AI bots actually visit, how often, which pages they want, and — the quiet killer — what error codes you're serving them. A site that 404s or 403s half of ChatGPT's fetches is turning away citations at the door, and only the logs will tell you.

Step 7: Spot-check the answers by hand (15 minutes monthly, free)

The reconnaissance habit from Chapter 8, formalized: a fixed set of eight to twelve prompts — "best [practice area] attorney in [city]," "should I file Chapter 7 or 13 in [state]," your top consultation questions — run monthly in ChatGPT, Gemini or AI Mode, and Perplexity, logged in a spreadsheet: mentioned or not, cited or not, who else was named, which sources the answer leaned on. For a free second opinion, HubSpot's AEO Grader will score your brand's AI presence across three platforms in about two minutes, no account required — a fine "before" exhibit for the partners. Appendix C has the tracking worksheet.

Step 8: Now bring in the AI — on your exports (1 hour)

With the facts gathered, the chatbot becomes what it should have been all along: a tireless analyst working from evidence. Export the Screaming Frog crawl, the Bing citation report, the GSC data. Feed those files to the model with a structured checklist — Appendix B ships the full prompt — and ask it to find patterns, prioritize fixes, and draft the remediation plan. This is the documented right way: context you gathered, a method you specified, a human verifying the output. (Licensed Screaming Frog users can even wire the crawler directly into Claude via the v24 MCP integration and interrogate crawl data conversationally — the rare case where "ask the AI about my site" is legitimate, because the crawler is standing behind it holding the actual facts.)

HINT: THE AUDIT IS A RERUN, NOT A PREMIERE

Run the full eight steps once as your baseline, then put the cheap loop on repeat: prompts monthly (step 7), dashboards monthly (steps 4–5), logs and a fresh crawl quarterly (steps 2, 6), the full works annually or after any site redesign. The compounding value isn't any single audit — it's the trend line. "Bing citations doubled since we fixed the rendering" is the sentence that gets marketing budgets renewed.

"The chatbot's failure mode is not 'I don't know.' It's a well-organized report about a website it didn't read."

►► DO THIS NOW

1. **Block ninety minutes this week** for steps 1–3: robots.txt read, free Screaming Frog crawl, rendering check. Those three surface the majority of showstoppers.
2. **Flip the three free dashboards on:** GSC's generative AI report (if available on your property), Bing Webmaster Tools' AI Performance, Cloudflare AI Crawl Control if applicable.
3. **Set up the GA4 custom AI channel** with the Appendix B regex, priority above Referral.
4. **Create the prompt-tracking spreadsheet** and run month zero today — including one HubSpot AEO Grader report for the "before" file.
5. **Institute the house rule:** nobody asks a chatbot to "audit the site." The chatbot gets exports, a checklist, and adult supervision — or it gets nothing.

Measuring What Matters

The scoreboard chapter: four metrics that tell the truth, the attribution leak swallowing your AI-referred clients, why the machines started sending everyone to your homepage, and honest timelines for when the needle moves.

Here is the measurement problem in one sentence: the most valuable thing AI platforms do for your firm — recommending you inside an answer — happens where none of your analytics can see it. A managing partner staring at last month's traffic report is watching the scoreboard of a different game. So this chapter builds the right scoreboard: four layers, from what the machines say about you down to signed clients, with the free instrumentation from Chapter 10 doing the collecting.

The Four-Layer Scoreboard

Layer one: Presence — what the machines say. The monthly prompt log from Chapter 10, step 7. Metrics: how many of your fixed prompts mention the firm, how many cite your pages, who else gets named, and which sources the answers lean on. This is the earliest indicator you have — mentions move months before referral traffic does — and it's also the one executives understand instantly when you show them a screenshot of ChatGPT recommending a competitor. Nothing in this book funds a marketing initiative faster than that screenshot.

Layer two: Citations — what the machines used. Bing Webmaster Tools' AI Performance report gives you actual counts: how often your URLs were cited in Copilot and Bing AI answers, which pages, against which grounding queries, and — since the June 2026 update — your citation share versus the field. Google's generative AI report adds AI Overview and AI Mode impressions as the rollout reaches you. These are the machine's own receipts, and they turn "we think the content is working" into "citations of the exemptions guide tripled after the March rewrite."

Layer three: Referrals — who clicked through. Your GA4 AI channel from Chapter 10, step 5. Expect small numbers and rising slopes — under 1% of traffic, growing triple digits, converting like referrals (Chapter 1's math). Watch the trend and the assisted behavior, not the raw count. And note a 2026 wrinkle that rearranged everyone's dashboards: after a mid-2026 interface change, roughly **60%+ of ChatGPT's outbound clicks now land on homepages** rather than deep pages — up from about a quarter. The machine increasingly says "here's the firm," not "here's the article." Which means your homepage is now an AI landing page (does it pass the three-second test — who you are, where, for what?) and your deep-page referral counts understate the channel. Read them accordingly.

Layer four: Clients — who actually hired you. The layer that pays for the other three, and the one with the leak.

The Attribution Leak (and the \$0 Fix)

Picture the path your actual clients walk: someone asks ChatGPT about wage garnishment at 2 a.m., gets an answer where your firm is named, thinks about it for two days, Googles your name, clicks your ad or your organic listing, and calls. Every analytics package on earth logs that as "paid search" or "branded organic." The AI's fingerprints are nowhere. Clio's industry research says **28% of consumers who took a legal question to an AI were told to go talk to a lawyer** — that referral pipeline is real, it's growing, and it is structurally invisible to your dashboards.

The fix costs nothing and outperforms every tracking pixel you own: **ask.** Make "How did you hear about us?" a required intake field with "an AI tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, etc.)" as an explicit listed option — unprompted, people say "the internet," and your team logs it as Google. Train intake to ask the one follow-up: "Did you happen to ask ChatGPT or an AI about your situation before calling?" Two questions, zero dollars, and within a quarter you'll have the only number the partners actually care about: signed clients the machines sent.

EXHIBIT E: WATCH THE COUPLE, NOT JUST THE INDIVIDUAL

Two indirect gauges corroborate the intake data. **Branded search volume:** AI mentions convert into people Googling your name — a rising branded-query line in Search Console alongside flat spend is the classic AI-influence signature (and branded search is itself a top-25 local ranking factor, so the loop feeds itself). **Direct traffic to key pages:** people copy firm names out of AI answers and type them in. Neither proves causation alone; moving together with layer-one mentions, they're a preponderance of the evidence — the standard this audience is comfortable with.

Honest Timelines (Manage the Partners)

The fastest way to lose support for AI-visibility work is promising search-ads timelines for reputation-shaped work. The honest clocks, drawn from the timelines in this book's research and the local study: technical fixes (robots.txt, rendering, schema) register in **days to weeks** — crawlers revisit quickly. Content changes — the Chapter 4–5 retrofits — start showing in citations and AI answers in **one to three months**, as indexes refresh and fan-outs find the new passages. Mentions, best-of lists, reviews, Reddit and YouTube presence compound over **one to three quarters**. And model retraining — the deep memory that makes a machine "know" your firm without searching — moves on a **many-month lag** you cannot schedule. Which is exactly why the layers matter: presence moves first, citations second, referrals third, clients last. A scoreboard with only layer four tells you in September whether February worked. The full stack tells you in March.

OBJECTION! "THIS IS A LOT OF DASHBOARDS FOR UNDER 1% OF TRAFFIC"

The setup is one afternoon, the maintenance is under an hour a month, and every tool in the stack is free — that's the whole objection priced out. What you're buying isn't this quarter's referral count; it's the trend data that tells you where next year's clients are forming habits, while your competitors wait for the channel to show up in the only report they read. The firms that instrumented organic search in 2005 owned page one for a decade. Same movie, new theater, and the projector costs nothing.

HELD

Measure in four layers — presence, citations, referrals, clients — and plug the attribution leak at intake. The prompt log leads, Bing's citation report corroborates, the GA4 AI channel trends, and two intake questions catch what the dashboards structurally can't. Report all four monthly on one page, with dates, next to the branded-search line. When someone asks "is the AI stuff working," the answer should be a chart, not a shrug.

►► DO THIS NOW

1. **Add the intake option today:** "an AI tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, etc.)" in your how-did-you-hear field, plus the trained follow-up question. This is the single highest-value item in the chapter.
2. **Build the one-page monthly scorecard:** prompts mentioning us · Bing citations · GA4 AI sessions · AI-attributed consults · branded search volume. Five lines, dated, trended.
3. **Give your homepage the three-second test** — a majority of ChatGPT clicks land there now. Who you are, where you practice, what to do next, above the fold.
4. **Screenshot everything in the monthly prompt run.** AI answers aren't archived anywhere; your screenshots are the only historical record — and the best slide in next quarter's partner meeting.
5. **Calendar the review rhythm:** scorecard monthly, logs and crawl quarterly, full audit annually. Consistency is the strategy; the tools are just the pens.

Ethics, Compliance, and Not Becoming a Cautionary Tale

The rules layer: what the ABA and the state bars actually require when AI touches your marketing, the sanctions cases every partner meeting should hear about once, and a compliance checklist that takes less time than reading one disciplinary opinion.

Every chapter so far has been about getting the machines to talk about you. This one is about making sure that when they do — and when you use them to produce the content that gets you there — nothing in the operation ends up in front of a grievance committee. The good news: the rules are knowable, the workflow from Chapter 6 already satisfies most of them, and the firms that get in trouble keep getting in trouble the same two ways. Let's make sure neither is yours.

The Rulebook, as It Stands in Mid-2026

The national baseline is ABA Formal Opinion 512 (July 2024), the profession's first comprehensive word on generative AI, and still the reference point — no superseding ABA opinion has arrived since. Its skeleton maps to rules you already know. Competence (Rule 1.1): you must understand the benefits and risks of the AI tools you use — "the intern did it" has never been a defense, and the intern being software doesn't change that. Confidentiality (Rule 1.6): client information doesn't go into consumer AI tools without informed consent — which for marketing means the case study you feed a chatbot gets anonymized *before* it enters the prompt, not after. Communication (Rule 1.4) and fees (Rule 1.5) round it out: disclose AI use where it matters to the client, and bill for the work, not for teaching yourself the tool.

The states are building on it, and 2026 is the year it accelerated. California moved first to write AI into the conduct rules themselves — proposed amendments approved for public comment in March 2026 touch six rules, requiring lawyers to "independently review, verify, and exercise professional judgment" over AI-generated content, disclose significant AI use to clients, and — notably for firms — establish AI governance policies and staff training under the supervision rules. Texas Opinion 705 (2025) warns in plain language about hallucination. And Florida's Opinion 24-1 is the one every marketer should read twice, because it ties AI directly to **advertising rules**: AI-generated marketing content is still lawyer advertising, the lawyer remains responsible for its truthfulness regardless of what drafted it, and AI intake chatbots must not mislead prospects into thinking they're chatting with a lawyer. Check your own state's latest — this area is moving quarterly — but notice the through-line: *no state has created an AI loophole. Every state has confirmed the old duties apply to the new tools.*

The Cautionary Tales (Tell Them Once at a Partner Meeting)

Chapter 6 mentioned them; here's the fuller record, because these two cases have done more for AI-verification budgets than any CLE. In *Wadsworth v. Walmart* (D. Wyo., early 2025), a motion cited nine cases — eight of them fabricated by the firm's in-house AI tool. Three plaintiff-side attorneys were fined, one lost his pro hac vice admission and his seat on the case, and the firm involved was Morgan & Morgan — one of the largest personal-injury advertisers in America, which is roughly the legal marketing equivalent of the safety video starring the airline's own pilot. Then December 2025, District of Oregon: two lawyers, fifteen nonexistent cases and eight fabricated quotations across their briefs, one attempted quiet refile after being caught — **roughly \$110,000 in combined penalties** and the case dismissed with prejudice. The judge called it "a notorious outlier in both degree and volume," which is judicial for *we will be teaching this one for years*. And the trend line beneath the headlines: courts are increasingly sanctioning the *supervising and co-counsel* who signed without checking, not just the drafter. Verification is becoming formally non-delegable.

Marketing content faces the same physics with a different referee. A hallucinated statistic on your website — an invented "average settlement," a fabricated success rate, a confident misstatement of the new exemption amounts — is a false or misleading communication under Rule 7.1 the moment it publishes, and unlike a brief, it advertises the error to the entire internet, around the clock, in the machines' training data. The Chapter 6 rule carries the whole load here: **every fact a machine drafts gets verified by a licensed human against a primary source before it ships.**

The Marketing-Specific Rails

Truthfulness scales with volume. AI makes producing claims cheap; Rule 7.1 makes every claim yours. Guarantees of outcomes, unverifiable comparisons ("the best bankruptcy firm in the Valley"), invented specifics — all the classic advertising sins get easier to commit at scale when a fluent machine drafts. Your review gate from Chapter 6 is also your compliance gate.

Reviews and testimonials keep their old rules. Automating the ask is fine in most states (check yours — a few regulate solicitation); paying for reviews, gating, or drafting "client" testimonials with AI is deception with a paper trail. And responses to reviews never confirm someone was a client. Confidentiality doesn't have a marketing exception, no matter how unfair the one-star review was.

Chatbots must introduce themselves. If your website runs an AI intake assistant, Florida 24-1's logic is the national common sense: prospects must not be misled into believing they're chatting with a lawyer, and the bot must not dispense legal advice or form accidental attorney-client relationships. A one-line disclosure and tight guardrails on what the bot may say cost you nothing and close the trap.

Community engagement is advertising's cousin. The Reddit and forum work from Chapter 9 lives under the same truthfulness rules plus Rule 8.4(c)'s honesty catch-all: no sockpuppets, no fake recommendations, no anonymous self-praise. The companion Reddit guide's doctrine — real names, education not advice, disclaimers, patience — was written as marketing advice, but you'll notice it doubles as an ethics compliance program. That's not a coincidence; on the modern internet, the deceptive shortcut and the ineffective shortcut are the same shortcut.

OBJECTION! "DO I HAVE TO DISCLOSE THAT AI HELPED WRITE MY WEBSITE?"

Under current guidance: no blanket duty exists to label marketing content as AI-assisted — Google recommends transparency where readers would expect it, and no bar opinion requires a disclosure badge on your blog. What *is* required is that the content be true, competent, and yours in responsibility — the same standard as if a freelance writer drafted it. Client-facing legal work is a different analysis (see FO 512 on communication), and your state may move further; California's proposals show the direction. Practical counsel: skip the performative "written with AI" badges, keep the human review documented, and revisit your state's guidance twice a year. The disclosure question is evolving; the verification duty is not.

HINT: THE ONE-PAGE AI POLICY

California's proposed rules point where supervision duties are heading: firms should have an AI governance policy. Yours fits on a page: (1) approved tools and what client data may never enter them; (2) the five-stage drafting workflow from Chapter 6, with the fact pass named to a person; (3) verification against primary sources before anything publishes; (4) chatbot disclosure language; (5) who owns quarterly review of state guidance. Write it now, while it's cheap. Policies written after an incident cost more and read worse.

HELD

There is no AI exception to any rule you already practice under — and no rule against using AI well. FO 512 and the state opinions all land the same way: use the tools, understand them, protect confidences, verify everything, stay truthful, supervise like it's your license — because it is. The firms in the case reports didn't lose because they used AI. They lost because they published what a machine guessed. You have a workflow for that now, and it fits on one page.

►► DO THIS NOW

1. **Adopt the one-page AI policy** using the Hint box outline; circulate it to everyone who touches marketing, intake, or drafting.
2. **Read your state's current AI guidance** (and Florida 24-1 regardless, for the advertising analysis) — thirty minutes, then calendar a re-check every six months.
3. **Audit your website for unverifiable claims:** guarantees, superlatives, statistics without sources. Fix or cite every one — machines repeat your claims, including the indefensible ones.
4. **Add the chatbot disclosure** if you run AI intake: "You're chatting with an automated assistant, not an attorney," plus hard limits on advice-shaped answers.
5. **Tell the two sanctions stories** at your next all-hands — five minutes, names and numbers included. Culture beats policy, and nothing builds verification culture like \$110,000.

The 90-Day Playbook

Thirteen chapters, one calendar. What to do in what order, who does it, how long it takes, and what "working" looks like at each checkpoint — because a strategy that doesn't survive contact with a Tuesday isn't a strategy.

Everything in this book compresses into one operating principle: **be the most trustworthy, most quotable, most talked-about answer to the questions your future clients ask — everywhere the machines look.** The next ninety days turn that from a sentence into a system. The sequence matters: measurement first (so you can prove anything worked), plumbing second (so the machines can get in), content third (so there's something worth quoting), reputation continuously (because it compounds slowest and pays longest).

Days 1–30: Baseline and Plumbing

Week 1 — Take the "before" photo. Run the full prompt spot-check (Chapter 10, step 7) and screenshot everything. Set up the tracking scorecard: GA4 AI channel, Bing Webmaster Tools with the AI Performance report, GSC, the intake question with the AI option. One afternoon, and February-you will thank January-you at every reporting meeting for the rest of the year.

Weeks 2–3 — Open the doors. The Chapter 10 audit, steps 1–3: robots.txt against the guest list, the free 500-URL crawl, the JavaScript rendering test. Fix what they surface in priority order: bot blocks (minutes to fix, instant payoff), rendering failures on key pages (your web person's problem now), broken links and redirect chains, missing titles and descriptions. Ship the Chapter 7 schema set and turn on IndexNow.

Week 4 — Draft the map. Build the Content Compass for your highest-value practice area (Chapter 5), write the fan-out list for its top question, and diagram your existing content against the cluster architecture. The gaps become your publishing calendar. Meanwhile: claim and complete the Yelp profile, and confirm the review machine is actually running — steady asks, two-day responses.

HINT: THE 30-DAY SCOREBOARD

End of month one, you should be able to say: baseline documented (screenshots filed), every AI search bot allowed, key pages readable without JavaScript, schema live, dashboards on, one practice area mapped. Zero new content yet — and that's correct. You don't invite critics to a restaurant with a locked front door.

Days 31–60: The Content Engine Starts

Retrofit before you write. Your fastest wins are pages that already rank: run the Chapter 4 upgrades on your top ten — the self-quote two-step (one attributed attorney quote, one sourced statistic per page), question-format H2s with 40–60 word direct answers, descriptive slugs, honest fresh dates, an FAQ block from real intake questions. This is days of work, not months, and it upgrades pages the machines already know about — the shortest path from this book to a citation.

Then produce, on the five-stage line. Two to three new pieces from the compass gaps, drafted with the Chapter 6 workflow: grounding pack, briefed prompts, the [VERIFY] rule, named human on the fact pass, voice pass against the AI-isms table, optimization checklist. First candidates: the cluster page for your most-asked consultation question, and one piece correcting your practice area's most expensive misconception — the content type machines love to quote and competitors never write.

Start one mention engine. Pick a single Chapter 9 venue based on honest capacity: an attorney records two plain-English videos, or the Reddit lurk-then-help program begins, or every LinkedIn headline gets the practice-area-and-city rewrite. One venue, done consistently, beats four abandoned by Labor Day.

Days 61–90: Reputation and Rhythm

Work the trusted pages. From your reconnaissance logs, you now know which directories and best-of lists the machines in your market actually cite. Complete the legal stack with consistent NAP and the magic sentence, pursue the two or three lists that matter, and run your first five-venue story pipeline (Chapter 9's Hint) on something real the firm did.

Re-measure and report. Day 90: rerun the full prompt check side-by-side with the baseline, pull the four-layer scorecard (Chapter 11), and write the one-page report. Expected honest results at ninety days: technical items resolved, retrofitted pages picking up citations in Bing's report, the GA4 AI line visibly sloping, possibly your first prompt mentions — and the intake log starting to catch what the dashboards can't. The big reputation payoffs are still compounding; that's the design, not a disappointment.

Then shift to the standing rhythm: weekly — review asks and responses, one content action; monthly — prompt check, scorecard, two-to-three pieces published or refreshed, one mention-venue action; quarterly — fresh crawl, server logs, citation spot-check, state-bar guidance check, and a re-read of your fan-out lists against what clients are actually asking now. The rhythm *is* the strategy. Everything else is just what fills the slots.

When	What moves	Where you'll see it
Days–weeks	Bot access, rendering, schema, indexing fixes	Crawl reports; bots in server logs; GSC/Bing coverage
Weeks 4–8	Review momentum; retrofitted pages re-crawled	Profile stats; first Bing citation upticks
Months 2–3	New content entering answers; AI referral slope	Bing citations; GA4 AI channel; early prompt mentions
Months 3–9	Mentions, lists, reviews, videos compounding	Prompt log; branded search; intake attributions
Months 6+	Deep model familiarity with the firm	Unprompted mentions across platforms — the moat

OBJECTION! "WE DON'T HAVE THE PEOPLE FOR THIS"

The 90-day plan assumes roughly one focused day a week for a marketer, an hour a week from one attorney, and web-developer time in weeks two and three. If that's still rich for your firm: do the measurement and the plumbing anyway (they're near-free and one-time), retrofit five pages instead of ten, and run one venue instead of three. A small firm executing 60% of this plan will lap a big firm executing 0% of it — and per Chapter 4's underdog data, the machines grade on substance, not headcount. And if you read this far and thought "this is exactly right, and I would rather practice law" — that is a reasonable conclusion, and the final page of this book knows a company that would love to hear from you.

"The shelf is still nearly empty. Ninety days of boring, verified, consistent work puts your firm on it. That's the whole secret, and now it's yours."

►► DO THIS NOW (THE WHOLE BOOK, FIVE LINES)

1. **Measure first:** prompt baseline, dashboards, intake question — this week.
2. **Open the doors:** bots allowed, JavaScript fixed, schema live, IndexNow on.
3. **Make quotable things:** retrofit the top ten, then publish from the compass on the five-stage line — with the fact pass, always.
4. **Get talked about:** reviews flowing, one mention venue on rhythm, the trusted lists claimed.
5. **Repeat monthly, report honestly, and be patient like it's a contingency case** — because it is: the fee arrives after the work, and it's worth the wait.

The Toolbox: Trackers, Crawlers & Freebies

Everything referenced in this book, organized by what it does and what it costs — free tools first, because most firms should exhaust the free tier before writing a check.

Free: The Core Stack (Start Here)

Tool	What it does for you	Where it appears
Google Search Console	Indexing, queries, and the new Generative AI performance report (AI Overview/AI Mode impressions; gradual rollout). Also URL Inspection for rendering checks.	Ch. 10–11
Bing Webmaster Tools	The best free AI report in the business: citation counts in Copilot/Bing AI answers, cited URLs, grounding queries, citation share. Also your gateway into the index behind ChatGPT search. Non-negotiable.	Ch. 3, 10–11
Google Analytics 4	Native "AI Assistant" channel plus the custom AI-referral channel (regex in Appendix B) for your AI traffic baseline.	Ch. 10–11
Screaming Frog SEO Spider (free tier)	Real site crawling up to 500 URLs: broken links, redirects, titles/metats, robots.txt-blocked URLs with the matched directive. The audit's workhorse.	Ch. 10
Screaming Frog robots.txt tester	Free online syntax validation for your bot directives.	Ch. 7, 10
Cloudflare AI Crawl Control	If your site uses Cloudflare: free per-crawler visibility and control over AI bots, including robots.txt compliance tracking.	Ch. 10
IndexNow	Free instant-update pings to Bing's index (feeds Copilot and ChatGPT search). One checkbox in most SEO plugins.	Ch. 7
HubSpot AEO Grader	Free, no-account brand check scoring your AI presence across ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Gemini in ~2 minutes. Great "before" exhibit.	Ch. 10
Google Rich Results Test + Schema.org validator	Free validation for the Chapter 7 schema set.	Ch. 7
The chatbots themselves	ChatGPT, Gemini/AI Mode, Perplexity, Claude, Copilot — your free monthly reconnaissance instruments and query-research assistants.	Ch. 5, 8, 10
Google Keyword Planner	Free keyword volume data for the traditional half of topic research.	Ch. 5
Hemingway Editor	Free readability scoring against the Grade 6–8 target.	Ch. 5

Worth the Money: First Paid Upgrades

Tool	What the money buys	Ballpark (mid-2026)
Screaming Frog license	Unlimited crawls, JS rendering comparison, custom user-agents (crawl as GPTBot), structured-data validation, AI-prompt integration, the Claude/MCP hookup, plus the Log File Analyser workflow for AI-bot monitoring. The default first purchase.	£199/yr
Ahrefs or Semrush (core)	Keyword research, rank tracking, competitor gap analysis, backlink diagnosis — the traditional-SEO half of the game.	~\$100–140/mo
Geo-grid rank tracker	Local map rankings measured from dozens of points across your market (never trust your own browser). Several vendors; pick any reputable one.	~\$20–50/mo

AI Visibility Trackers (When You Outgrow the Spreadsheet)

The monthly prompt log is free and fine for most firms. Graduate to a dedicated tracker when you're monitoring multiple practice areas, markets, or competitors. Published pricing as of mid-2026 — expect drift:

Tool	Coverage	Published pricing
Otterly.AI	Prompt tracking and brand/link monitoring across ChatGPT, AI Overviews, Perplexity, Copilot; Claude/Gemini/AI Mode add-ons	\$29–\$489/mo by prompt volume
Semrush AI Visibility Toolkit	AI visibility reports, prompt tracking, AI-readiness audit; ChatGPT, Google AI, Gemini, Perplexity	\$99/mo per domain
Profound	Answer-engine share of voice plus agent analytics (AI bot traffic)	\$99–\$399/mo; enterprise custom
Ahrefs Brand Radar	Mentions/citations/share-of-voice across a ~400M-prompt corpus; strongest for competitive benchmarking	~\$199–\$699/mo by platform coverage
Peec AI	Team-oriented AI brand analytics, Looker Studio integration	Tiered; pricing on request

HINT: THE BUDGET LADDER

Solo/small firm: the free stack plus a Screaming Frog license — under \$300/year, covers 90% of this book. Growing firm: add one core SEO platform and a geo-grid tracker (~\$150–200/mo). Multi-market firm: add one AI visibility tracker once the spreadsheet hurts (~\$100–400/mo more). Anyone proposing to start at the bottom of this ladder before the top is selling you a dessert cart before the entrée.

Templates: Prompts, Outlines & Schema

Copy, adapt, ship. Everything here assumes the Chapter 6 rules: grounding packs attached, [VERIFY] tags honored, and a licensed human on the fact pass.

B.1 — The Drafting Prompt Library

PROMPT 1 · OUTLINE BUILDER

You are planning a webpage for a [practice area] law firm in [city]. Audience: [who, in what emotional state]. Target question: "[the question, as clients ask it]".

Using ONLY the attached brief and materials, produce an outline: an H1 phrased as the question; 10-15 H2 sections, each phrased as a sub-question a client or an AI fan-out would ask; 2-4 H3s where needed; a note under each heading of what fact, example, statistic, or quote belongs there (mark anything not in the materials as [VERIFY]); an 8-12 question FAQ list drawn from the intake-question log.

MATERIALS: [content brief · fan-out list · attorney notes]

PROMPT 2 · SECTION DRAFTER (RUN PER H2, CHAINED)

Draft ONLY the section "[H2 question]" for the outlined page. 100-150 words. Structure: direct 40-60 word answer in the first two sentences, then explanation, then one concrete example from the attorney notes. 8th-grade reading level, warm but direct, active voice, no legalese without translation.

Rules: Use ONLY facts from the materials. Write [VERIFY] for anything missing. No invented statistics, cases, deadlines, or outcomes. No promises. Do not use the phrases on the banned list.

BANNED LIST: "in today's [anything]", "it's crucial/important to note", "moreover", "furthermore", "landscape", "unlock", "seamless", "robust", "delve", "comprehensive guide", "look no further".

MATERIALS: [statute text · attorney notes · brief · voice sheet]

PROMPT 3 · VOICE-PASS CRITIC

Review the attached draft against the attached voice sheet. List: (1) every sentence that sounds like generic AI writing, with a rewrite in the firm's voice; (2) every claim lacking a source or [VERIFY] tag; (3) every heading not phrased as a question a client would actually ask; (4) anywhere the direct answer doesn't appear in the first two sentences of its section. Do not rewrite the whole draft. Output as a numbered fix list.

PROMPT 4 · FAN-OUT GENERATOR (RESEARCH)

A potential client in [city] is dealing with [situation]. List 20 distinct questions they might ask an AI assistant about it, in their own words – include versions with personal context, misconceptions, cost worries, and "what happens next" worries. Then group them into 4-6 themes I could build pages around.

PROMPT 5 · AUDIT ANALYST (CHAPTER 10, STEP 8)

You are analyzing website audit data for a law firm. Attached: a Screaming Frog crawl export, a Bing Webmaster AI Performance export, and GSC data. Using ONLY these files:

1. List technical issues blocking AI visibility, ranked by impact: bot access, response errors, redirect chains, missing/duplicate titles, thin pages.
2. Identify the 10 pages with the strongest citation potential (traffic or citations already, fixable gaps).
3. For each, list specific fixes per this checklist: question-format title · direct answer up top · statistic with source · attributed quote · descriptive slug · fresh date · schema.
4. Flag anything in the data you cannot verify from the files alone as [NEEDS HUMAN CHECK].

Output: a prioritized fix list with effort estimates. Do not invent data not present in the files.

B.2 — The Citable Page Outline (Skeleton)

STRUCTURE · FROM CHAPTER 5

H1 – The question, as humans ask it
Direct answer (40-60 words, first two sentences)
Byline: [Attorney], [Bar #] · Updated [date]
H2 × 10-15 – Sub-questions (fan-out list), each:
· answer first (40-60 words) → depth → example
· 100-150 words per heading block
· ≥1 sourced statistic and ≥1 attributed quote per page
FAQ – 8-12 real intake questions, 40-60 word answers
CTA – one next step + phone (100-150 words)
BIO – 75-100 words: bar admissions, years, results, profile link
URL – /plain-language-question-slug

B.3 — Schema Starters

LEGALSERVICE (OFFICE/LOCATION PAGES)

```
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org",
  "@type": "LegalService",
  "name": "[Firm Name]",
  "url": "https://www.yourfirm.com",
  "telephone": "+1-[phone]",
  "address": { "@type": "PostalAddress",
    "streetAddress": "[street]", "addressLocality": "[city]",
    "addressRegion": "[ST]", "postalCode": "[zip]" },
  "geo": { "@type": "GeoCoordinates", "latitude": 0.0, "longitude": 0.0 },
  "openingHours": "Mo-Fr 08:00-18:00",
  "areaServed": "[city/region]",
  "sameAs": ["https://www.linkedin.com/company/...",
    "https://www.avvo.com/...", "https://www.yelp.com/biz/..."]
}
```

PERSON (ATTORNEY BIO PAGES)

```
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org",
  "@type": "Person",
  "name": "[Attorney Name]",
  "jobTitle": "[Title], [Firm]",
  "worksFor": { "@type": "LegalService", "name": "[Firm]" },
  "alumniOf": "[Law School]",
  "memberOf": { "@type": "Organization", "name": "[State] Bar Association" },
  "knowsAbout": ["Chapter 7 bankruptcy", "Chapter 13 bankruptcy", "[etc.]"],
  "sameAs": ["[state bar profile URL]", "[LinkedIn URL]"]
}
```

ARTICLE (CONTENT PAGES — MIND THE DATES)

```
{
  "@context": "https://schema.org",
  "@type": "Article",
  "headline": "[The question-format title]",
  "author": { "@type": "Person", "name": "[Attorney]", "url": "[bio URL]" },
  "datePublished": "2026-05-01",
  "dateModified": "2026-07-15",
  "publisher": { "@type": "LegalService", "name": "[Firm]" }
}
```

B.4 — robots.txt: The "Cite Me, Please" Block

CHAPTER 7'S CONFIGURATION, READY TO PASTE

```
User-agent: OAI-SearchBot
Allow: /
User-agent: ChatGPT-User
Allow: /
User-agent: Claude-SearchBot
Allow: /
User-agent: Claude-User
Allow: /
User-agent: PerplexityBot
Allow: /
User-agent: Meta-ExternalAgent
Allow: /

# Optional training opt-out (does NOT affect citations):
# User-agent: GPTBot
# Disallow: /
# User-agent: ClaudeBot
# Disallow: /
# User-agent: Google-Extended
# Disallow: /
```

B.5 — The GA4 AI-Referral Regex

Admin → Data display → Channel groups → create group → add channel "AI" → condition *Source matches regex* → paste below → drag the AI channel **above** Referral and Organic in priority.

SOURCE REGEX (SEARCH ENGINE JOURNAL, JULY 2026)

```
.*(^|[/.:@?&=])(chatgpt\.com|chat-gpt\.org|openai\.com|perplexity|gemini\.google\.com|
copilot\.microsoft\.com|edgepilot|edgeservices|claude\.ai|deepseek\.com|grok\.com|you\.com|
nimble\.ai|iask\.ai|aitastic\.app|bnnngpt\.com|writesonic\.com|copy\.ai)([/.:@?&#=#]|$).*
```

B.6 — The Voice Sheet Template

ONE PAGE, THIRTY MINUTES, REUSED FOREVER

WHO WE SOUND LIKE: [e.g., "a calm, sharp friend who happens to be a bankruptcy attorney – direct about bad news, allergic to jargon, occasionally funny, never flip about someone's crisis"]

10 SENTENCES WE'D ACTUALLY SAY: [pull from your best pages/emails]

10 PHRASES WE'D NEVER SAY: [start with the Ch. 6 AI-isms table]

3 SAMPLE PARAGRAPHS: [paste from your best-performing content]

OUR POSITIONS: [the questions clients ask most, and the firm's honest take on each – e.g., "we tell people when they DON'T need to file"]

ALWAYS: answer first • cite sources • translate legalese • one CTA

NEVER: guarantees • invented numbers • "in today's world" • fluff

Worksheets: Audit & Monthly Scorecard

Print these. A checklist on a screen is a suggestion; a checklist with pen marks on it is a system.

C.1 — The AI Optimization Audit (Chapter 10, condensed)

- ☐ **robots.txt reviewed** — OAI-SearchBot, ChatGPT-User, Claude-SearchBot, Claude-User, PerplexityBot all allowed; training-bot policy decided deliberately; CDN/firewall AI-blocking checked. *Date:* ____
- ☐ **Free crawl completed** (Screaming Frog, ≤500 URLs) — broken links: ____ · redirect chains: ____ · missing/duplicate titles: ____ · robots-blocked URLs: ____
- ☐ **Rendering test passed** — homepage, top practice-area page, and lead attorney bio all readable with JavaScript disabled. Failures listed for developer: ____
- ☐ **Dashboards on** — GSC generative AI report (if rolled out) · Bing Webmaster AI Performance · Cloudflare AI Crawl Control (if applicable)
- ☐ **GA4 AI channel built** — native channel confirmed + Appendix B regex channel, priority above Referral
- ☐ **Server logs pulled** — AI bots seen: _____ · pages they hit most: _____ · error rate served to bots: ____%
- ☐ **Prompt spot-check run** — [see C.2] — screenshots filed in: _____
- ☐ **AI analysis on exports** — Appendix B Prompt 5 run on crawl + citation data; every recommendation human-verified before action
- ☐ **Schema live and valid** — LegalService · Person (each attorney) · Article dates · FAQPage — validator clean
- ☐ **IndexNow enabled** — plugin confirmed pinging on publish/update

C.2 — The Monthly Prompt Log (one row per prompt, per platform)

Prompt	Platform	Firm mentioned?	Page cited?	Competitors named	Sources the answer cited
"best [practice] attorney in [city]"	ChatGPT	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N		
"best [practice] attorney in [city]"	Gemini / AI Mode	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N		
"best [practice] attorney in [city]"	Perplexity	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N		
"should I [top consultation question]"	ChatGPT	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N		
"should I [top consultation question]"	Gemini / AI Mode	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N		
"[situation] in [city] — who should I call?"	Perplexity	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N		
"what does [firm name] do? are they good?"	All three	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N		

Rules: same prompts every month · fresh chats, no history · screenshot everything · note the answer's cited sources — those are your Chapter 9 target list.

C.3 — The One-Page Monthly Scorecard

Layer	Metric	Last mo.	This mo.	Trend
Presence	Prompts mentioning the firm (of ____ tracked)			
Presence	Prompts citing our pages			
Citations	Bing AI citations (count / unique pages)			
Citations	GSC generative AI impressions			
Referrals	GA4 AI-channel sessions			
Influence	Branded search impressions (GSC)			
Clients	Intake: "heard via AI tool" (consults / signed)			
Output	Pages published / retrofitted this month			
Reputation	New reviews (Google / other platforms)			
Reputation	Mention-venue actions completed (Ch. 9)			

C.4 — The Pre-Publication Gate (every piece, every time)

- ☐ Title is a question clients actually ask (fan-out match), key words up front — no hard length limit
- ☐ Direct 40–60 word answer in the first two sentences under H1 and every H2
- ☐ ≥1 statistic with named source · ≥1 attributed attorney quote
- ☐ Zero [VERIFY] tags remaining — every fact checked against a primary source by: _____
- ☐ Voice pass done — no banned-list phrases, reads aloud like a human, firm-specific detail present
- ☐ No guarantees, superlatives, or unverifiable claims (Rule 7.1 sweep)
- ☐ Descriptive URL slug · author bio with bar number · visible date · schema present
- ☐ FAQ block from real intake questions (8–12 for cornerstone pages)
- ☐ Internal links to pillar/cluster siblings · IndexNow fires on publish

HINT

Laminate C.4. Seriously. It's nine lines, it enforces four chapters, and it's the difference between a content operation and a content lottery.

Glossary: The Alphabet Soup, Decoded

Every term this book uses, in plain English, suitable for reading aloud at a partner meeting without anyone pretending to take a call.

AI Overviews

Google's machine-written summary at the top of many search results, with source links. Two billion monthly users; appears on 15–20%+ of U.S. searches.

AI Mode

Google's full chatbot tab inside Search — conversational answers built on query fan-out. A billion users; still a small share of total search behavior.

AEO (Answer Engine Optimization)

The craft of earning mentions and citations in AI-generated answers. Sibling of GEO; cousin of SEO; the family reunion is this book.

Citation

An AI answer linking to your page as a source. The footnote is the trophy.

Context window

A language model's working memory. Finite, documented, and the reason a chatbot cannot "read your whole website" no matter how confidently it claims otherwise.

E-E-A-T

Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness — Google's quality lens, applied strictest to YMYL topics like law. Not a score; a standard your content demonstrates or doesn't.

Fan-out (query fan-out)

The machine's habit of exploding one question into many hidden sub-searches, then building one answer from the combined results. The reason topic clusters win.

GEO (Generative Engine Optimization)

The research-backed discipline of increasing visibility in AI-generated answers; named by the Princeton study that measured what works.

Grounding

Feeding an AI real reference material so it answers from facts instead of vibes. What separates a drafting workflow from a liability generator.

Hallucination

A model stating invented information with full confidence — fake cases, fake statistics, fake quotes. Not lying (it has no idea), but expensive anyway. See: \$110,000.

IndexNow

A free protocol that instantly notifies Bing (and thus Copilot/ChatGPT search) when you publish or update a page.

llms.txt

A proposed AI-instructions file that, as of mid-2026, no major platform reads. Harmless; not a strategy; occasionally an invoice line item, which is the problem.

LLM (Large Language Model)

The text engine behind the chatbots — a pattern-completion system trained on much of the internet, including, if you've done this book right, quite a lot of you.

Mention

An AI answer naming your firm, linked or not. Won off-site, through reputation. Correlates with visibility ~3x more strongly than backlinks.

NAP

Name, Address, Phone — the identity triplet that must match everywhere machines cross-reference you.

RAG (Retrieval-Augmented Generation)

The open-book-exam architecture: search first, read the results, then write the answer with citations. Where all your citation opportunities live.

Rendering (server-side vs. client-side)

Whether your page's content arrives as finished HTML (readable by all bots) or gets assembled by JavaScript in the browser (invisible to most AI crawlers). The invisible-ink problem.

Schema / structured data

Machine-readable labels (LegalService, Person, Article) that tell systems exactly who and what your pages are about. Confirmed used by Microsoft's LLMs; a comprehension aid everywhere else.

YMYL (Your Money or Your Life)

Google's category for content affecting health, finances, or legal standing — held to the highest quality bar. All legal content lives here. Dress accordingly.

Zero-click search

A search that ends without a visit to any website. Sixty-eight percent of U.S. Google searches, as of early 2026, and climbing.

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Every statistic in this book traces to one of these sources. Research window: April–July 2026, plus clearly dated foundational studies. If a number matters to a decision, check it against the source before you rely on it — the ground here moves quarterly.

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