

SSC Brain

The Small Business AI Visibility Playbook

What you can realistically do to get recommended by AI

45%

of consumers now use AI for local recommendations

1.2%

of local businesses are recommended by AI

527%

AI search traffic growth year on year

2-5x

higher conversion rate from AI referral traffic

24 March 2026

Prepared by SSC Brain

Version 1.0

The Problem

AI search engines are rapidly becoming the first place consumers look for local business recommendations. Unlike Google, which rewards whoever pays the most for ads, AI engines recommend businesses based on **reputation signals they can verify independently**.

This is both a threat and an opportunity. The threat: if AI does not know your business exists, it will never recommend you. The opportunity: because so few local businesses are doing anything about this yet, the bar for standing out is remarkably low.

This playbook gives you ten realistic, evidence-based actions you can take to increase your visibility to AI recommendation engines. No jargon. No expensive tools. Just practical steps, in priority order, that any small business owner can implement.

01 YouTube: Your Most Powerful AI Signal

***Why:** YouTube is the second largest search engine and a primary training source for every major AI model. Google owns it. OpenAI transcribes it. Perplexity indexes it. Claude learns from it. No other single platform gives you visibility across all four major AI engines simultaneously.*

What to do

- Create short (3-7 minute) videos answering the exact questions your customers ask you every week
- Speak naturally. Film on your phone. Professional production quality is irrelevant to AI indexing
- Title each video as the question itself: "How much do shutters cost in Edinburgh?" not "SSC Shutters Episode 14"
- Write full descriptions (150+ words) with your business name, location, and the question being answered
- Upload closed captions or let YouTube auto-generate them, then review for accuracy

Why it works

AI models weight video content heavily because it is expensive to produce, difficult to fake, and demonstrates genuine expertise. A business owner explaining their trade on camera sends stronger E-E-A-T signals (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness) than any written content. YouTube transcripts become part of the training data for every major AI model.

TIME INVESTMENT

2-4 hours per month (one video per week, batch-filmed)

EXPECTED IMPACT

High. YouTube content appears in AI responses within 2-4 weeks of indexing.

02 Google Business Profile: Your AI Identity Card

Why: Google Business Profile is the single most important source of structured local business data. It is the first place AI engines check to verify a business exists, where it operates, and what it does. An incomplete or inactive profile tells AI you are not a serious business.

What to do

- Complete every single field. Every one. Categories, services, products, attributes, description, opening hours
- Post weekly updates (Google Posts). They expire after 7 days. Consistency signals active business
- Upload new photos monthly. Geotagged photos from your actual premises and job sites
- Respond to every review within 48 hours, whether positive or negative
- Use the Q&A feature to pre-populate answers to common questions
- Add your products and services with descriptions and price ranges

Why it works

Google AI Overviews pull directly from Google Business Profile data. When someone asks "best shutter company in Edinburgh," Google checks verified business data first. The more complete and active your profile, the more confident AI becomes in recommending you. Review responses in particular demonstrate the "Experience" component of E-E-A-T.

TIME INVESTMENT

1-2 hours per week for maintenance; 4-6 hours initial setup if incomplete

EXPECTED IMPACT

Very high for Google AI Overviews. Moderate for ChatGPT and Perplexity.

03 Review Platform Diversification

Why: AI engines cross-reference reviews across multiple platforms to verify consistency. A business with 200 Google reviews but zero presence elsewhere looks suspicious. AI trusts businesses that are reviewed across independent platforms because it is harder to fake.

What to do

- Claim profiles on Trustpilot, Checkatrade/MyBuilder/Bark (trade), Facebook, and Yell
- Ask happy customers to review you on the platform they use most, not just Google
- Never incentivise reviews. AI models are increasingly able to detect incentivised review patterns
- Respond to reviews on all platforms, not just Google
- Aim for consistency: similar star ratings across platforms builds AI confidence

Why it works

ChatGPT and Perplexity both cross-reference review data. When a business has consistent 4.5+ star ratings across Google, Trustpilot, and trade platforms, AI models assign significantly higher confidence scores. This is the digital equivalent of word-of-mouth, which is what AI is trying to simulate.

TIME INVESTMENT

2-3 hours initial setup, then 30 minutes per week for responses

EXPECTED IMPACT

High. Cross-platform review consistency is one of the strongest trust signals.

04 Industry Body and Trade Association Presence

Why: AI models treat trade association membership as a strong credibility signal. Being listed on the BBSA, FMB, NFRC, or equivalent body's website is one of the few signals that AI treats as independently verified expertise. It is the digital equivalent of a professional qualification.

What to do

- Join your industry's trade association if you are not already a member
- Ensure your listing on their website is complete with description, services, and contact details
- Contribute to trade association content: articles, case studies, technical guides
- If your association has awards, enter them. Award mentions get indexed and cited by AI
- Attend and speak at industry events. Event speaker bios get indexed

Why it works

Trade association websites are high-authority domains that AI engines trust implicitly. A mention on [bbsa.org.uk](https://www.bbsa.org.uk) carries more weight than a hundred mentions on low-quality directories. AI models are specifically trained to look for third-party credibility signals, and trade body membership is among the strongest.

TIME INVESTMENT

2-4 hours initial setup, then 1-2 hours per month for engagement

EXPECTED IMPACT

High for credibility. AI models disproportionately weight trade body signals.

05 Local Directories (Your Wikipedia Equivalent)

Why: AI models build their understanding of a business by cross-referencing mentions across the web. Consistent NAP data (Name, Address, Phone) across trusted directories helps AI verify you are a real, established business. Think of directories as your Wikipedia entry: they are reference sources, not marketing channels.

What to do

- Ensure consistent NAP data across: Google, Bing Places, Apple Maps, Yell, Thomson Local, Scoot, 192.com, FreeIndex
- Check and correct any inconsistencies. Different phone numbers or addresses confuse AI
- Add your business to local authority and chamber of commerce directories
- List on niche directories relevant to your trade
- Remove duplicate listings, which damage AI confidence

Why it works

AI models treat directory consistency as a trust signal. When every directory agrees on who you are, where you are, and how to contact you, AI gains confidence in recommending you. This is foundational work that amplifies every other action in this playbook.

TIME INVESTMENT

4-6 hours one-off, then 1 hour quarterly to check for drift

EXPECTED IMPACT

Moderate individually, but multiplies the impact of every other action.

06 LinkedIn Content

Why: LinkedIn content gets indexed by all major AI engines and carries high authority because LinkedIn profiles are verified against real professional identities. For B2B businesses, LinkedIn is second only to YouTube in AI visibility impact. For B2C businesses, it builds the owner's personal authority signal.

What to do

- Complete your personal LinkedIn profile fully. AI indexes personal profiles, not just company pages
- Post 2-3 times per week. Share expertise, project stories, industry insights
- Write LinkedIn articles (long-form) on topics where you have genuine expertise
- Engage with industry conversations. Comments on others' posts get indexed too
- Connect your LinkedIn activity to your business by mentioning your company name naturally

Why it works

LinkedIn content is high-trust because profiles are tied to real identities and professional histories. When a business owner with a complete LinkedIn profile and consistent posting history shares industry expertise, AI models treat this as strong E-E-A-T evidence. LinkedIn articles in particular get indexed and cited.

TIME INVESTMENT

2-3 hours per week for consistent posting and engagement

EXPECTED IMPACT

High for B2B. Moderate for B2C but builds personal authority signal.

07 Local Press and Trade Publications

Why: Mentions in local newspapers, trade magazines, and online publications carry outsized weight in AI recommendations. These are editorially controlled sources. AI models trust them because a journalist or editor independently decided your business was worth writing about.

What to do

- Build relationships with local journalists. Offer yourself as an expert source for relevant stories
- Write guest columns or contribute expert commentary to trade publications
- Issue press releases for genuine news: awards, milestones, community involvement, unusual projects
- If you sponsor local events or charities, make sure it generates a press mention, not just a logo
- Keep a digital archive of press coverage on your website (with links to the original sources)

Why it works

Editorial mentions are the gold standard of AI trust signals. When the Edinburgh Evening News or the BBSA trade journal mentions your business, AI models treat this as independent verification of your credibility. This is the hardest signal to fake, which is precisely why AI trusts it most.

TIME INVESTMENT

Variable. 2-4 hours per month for relationship building and content creation

EXPECTED IMPACT

Very high per mention. Single press articles can shift AI recommendations.

08 Your Website: The Confirmation Layer

Why: Your website is not where AI discovers you. It is where AI goes to confirm what it has already learned about you from YouTube, reviews, directories, and press mentions. Think of your website as the confirmation layer, not the discovery layer. This changes how you should structure it.

Your website needs to be structured so that AI can easily extract and verify information. Here is what matters:

Answer Capsules

Write self-contained paragraphs that directly answer specific questions. AI engines extract these as answer snippets. Each answer capsule should make sense on its own without requiring the reader to read the rest of the page. Start with the answer, then provide supporting detail.

Statistics and Specific Claims

AI models prefer specific, verifiable claims over vague marketing language. "We have installed shutters in over 3,000 Scottish homes since 1987" is infinitely more useful to AI than "We are a leading provider of quality window solutions." Include numbers, dates, and specific facts wherever possible.

Comparison Tables

Create honest comparison content. AI loves structured data that helps users make decisions. A genuine comparison table (e.g., "Shutters vs Blinds: Which is right for your home?") gives AI exactly the kind of content it wants to cite in recommendations.

FAQ Sections

Add FAQ sections to your key pages using proper HTML heading tags (not accordions that hide content). AI cannot click "expand." If the answer is hidden behind JavaScript, AI cannot read it. Write your FAQs as visible, crawlable text with question headings and answer paragraphs.

Content Freshness

Update key pages at least quarterly. AI engines check last-modified dates and penalise stale content. You do not need to rewrite everything. Update statistics, add recent project examples, and revise anything that has become outdated.

E-E-A-T Signals on Every Page

Include author information, business credentials, years of experience, and professional qualifications on every key page. Not in a footer. Prominently, as part of the content. AI models look for these signals to assess trustworthiness.

Schema Markup

Implement LocalBusiness, FAQPage, and Review schema markup. This is structured data that tells AI engines exactly what your business does, where it operates, and what customers think. Schema markup is the single most direct way to communicate with AI engines. If you do nothing else on your website, do this.

TIME INVESTMENT

8-16 hours initial restructuring, then 2-4 hours per month for updates

EXPECTED IMPACT

Moderate as a standalone action, but essential for confirming signals from other channels.

09 Brand Search Volume (The Long Game)

Why: When people search for your business by name, it tells AI that you are a known brand. Brand search volume is one of the strongest signals of business authority. If nobody searches for you by name, AI concludes you are not well known enough to recommend.

What to do

- Use your business name consistently everywhere. Same name, same spelling, every time
- Make your business name memorable and distinct. If you can, make it the kind of name people naturally search for
- Run offline marketing (van livery, signage, local sponsorship) that drives brand name recognition
- Encourage customers to find you by searching your name, not by clicking a link
- Track your brand search volume in Google Search Console. If it is growing, your AI visibility will follow

Why it works

Google AI Overviews explicitly factors brand search volume into its recommendations. If 500 people per month search for "Scottish Shutter Company Edinburgh," Google's AI knows this is a recognised brand. ChatGPT and Perplexity use similar signals. Brand search volume is hard to fake, which is why AI trusts it.

TIME INVESTMENT

This is a byproduct of all other marketing. No additional time required

EXPECTED IMPACT

Very high, but slow. Brand search volume builds over months and years.

10 Monitor What AI Says About You

Why: *You cannot improve what you do not measure. Most businesses have never once asked an AI engine about themselves. Start monitoring now so you have a baseline, can spot inaccuracies, and can measure the impact of your actions.*

What to do

- Monthly, ask each AI engine: "What do you know about [Your Business Name]?" and "Can you recommend a [your trade] in [your area]?"
- Screenshot and date each response. This is your baseline
- If AI gives incorrect information about your business, check which source it might be pulling from and correct the source
- Track whether your business appears in competitive recommendation queries over time
- Note which competitors AI recommends and examine what they are doing that you are not

Why it works

AI recommendations change as new data is indexed. By monitoring monthly, you can see the direct impact of your actions and adjust your strategy. You will also catch and correct misinformation before it becomes established in AI training data.

TIME INVESTMENT

30 minutes per month

EXPECTED IMPACT

Essential for measuring progress. No direct visibility impact.

What Does NOT Work

The internet is full of advice on "AI SEO." Most of it is wrong, untested, or designed to sell you a tool. Here is what the evidence actually shows does not work:

ACTION	REALITY	EVIDENCE
lms.txt files	A proposed standard for telling AI how to read your site. No major AI engine currently supports it. Implementing it is harmless but useless.	None of the four major AI engines (ChatGPT, Perplexity, Google AI, Claude) have confirmed support for lms.txt as a ranking signal.
Backlink campaigns	Traditional SEO backlink building has minimal impact on AI recommendations. AI does not count links. It assesses source authority independently.	BrightEdge 2025 study found zero correlation between backlink volume and AI citation frequency for local businesses.
Keyword stuffing	AI understands natural language. Repeating "best shutters Edinburgh" fourteen times makes you look less credible, not more.	AI models process semantic meaning, not keyword density. Stuffed content actively reduces trust scores.
Chasing a single AI platform	Optimising exclusively for ChatGPT or Perplexity is a losing strategy. Each AI engine uses different data sources and weights them differently.	Businesses that rank highly in one AI engine but not others see volatile, unreliable referral traffic.
Artificial content refreshing	Changing the date on a page without meaningfully updating the content does not fool AI. It checks whether content has actually changed.	Google's freshness algorithms compare content snapshots. Date-only changes are ignored.
Hidden FAQ accordions	FAQ content hidden behind JavaScript click-to-expand cannot be read by AI crawlers. If AI cannot see it, it does not exist.	Perplexity and ChatGPT do not execute JavaScript. Google renders JavaScript but deprioritises hidden content.
Client-side rendered content	Single-page applications (React, Vue, Angular without SSR) are partially invisible to AI crawlers. Server-side rendering is essential.	AI crawlers have limited JavaScript execution capability. Critical content must be in the initial HTML response.

The Celebrity Photo Question

You may have heard that adding photos of recognisable locations, landmarks, or even celebrities to your website helps AI visibility. The logic is that AI image recognition will associate your business with well-known entities. This is completely false. AI text models and AI image recognition are separate systems. Google's text-based AI does not "see" the images on your website. It reads alt text and surrounding context. A photo of Edinburgh Castle on your homepage does nothing for your AI visibility unless the alt text and surrounding content already mention Edinburgh meaningfully.

How the Four AI Engines Decide

Each AI engine has different data sources and trust signals. Understanding these differences helps you prioritise your efforts:

AI ENGINE	WHAT IT TRUSTS	YOUR ACTION
ChatGPT	Bing search index, web crawling via GPTBot, review aggregation across platforms, brand mentions in editorially controlled content, Wikipedia and reference sources	Ensure Bing Places profile is complete. Diversify reviews across platforms. Get press mentions. Maintain an active, crawlable website with clear structured data
Perplexity	Real-time web search, fresh content weighted heavily, review platforms, YouTube transcripts, Reddit and forum discussions, direct website content	Publish regular fresh content. Maintain active YouTube channel. Monitor and engage on Reddit and forums relevant to your trade. Ensure website loads fast and is crawlable
Google AI Overviews	Google Business Profile, Google Reviews, Google Search index, YouTube (owned by Google), brand search volume, website E-E-A-T signals, local pack data	Prioritise Google Business Profile completeness. Build review volume on Google. Create YouTube content. Optimise for brand name search volume. Implement schema markup
Claude	High-quality web content from training data, trade association and professional body mentions, press coverage, educational content that demonstrates genuine expertise, published credentials	Focus on creating genuinely expert content. Get listed on trade body websites. Seek press coverage. Publish detailed, well-structured educational content on your website

The Timeline

AI visibility does not happen overnight. Here is a realistic timeline for a small business starting from scratch:

Month 1

- Complete Google Business Profile
- Claim and complete directory listings
- Set up review collection process
- Film and upload first 2-4 YouTube videos
- Baseline: ask all four AI engines about your business and screenshot the results

Months 2-3

- Continue weekly YouTube uploads
- Begin LinkedIn posting
- Restructure website for AI readability
- Implement schema markup
- First monthly AI monitoring check

Months 3-6

- Seek trade press coverage
- Engage with trade associations
- Build review volume across platforms
- Expect to start appearing in some AI responses

Months 6-12

- Brand search volume should be measurably growing
- AI recommendations should be appearing consistently
- Refine strategy based on monitoring data
- Double down on what is working

Measuring Progress

METRIC	HOW TO TRACK	TARGET
AI mention rate	Monthly checks across all four AI engines using standardised queries	Mentioned in at least 2 of 4 engines within 6 months
Brand search volume	Google Search Console, monthly trend tracking	20% increase in brand searches within 6 months
Review diversity	Count reviews across Google, Trustpilot, trade platforms	Active reviews on 3+ platforms with consistent ratings
YouTube content library	Count of published videos, view counts, search impressions	20+ videos covering core customer questions within 6 months
Website AI readability	Schema markup validation, FAQ visibility, content freshness dates	All key pages updated quarterly with valid schema markup
Press mentions	Count of editorial mentions in local and trade press (online)	2-4 press mentions per quarter
AI referral traffic	Google Analytics referral sources from AI platforms	Measurable and growing AI referral traffic within 12 months

The Bottom Line

- ✓ AI recommendations are becoming a significant source of customer discovery for local businesses
- ✓ The window of opportunity is now. Only 1.2% of local businesses are currently visible to AI
- ✓ Visibility comes from genuine authority signals, not technical tricks or paid shortcuts
- ✓ The businesses that start building these signals now will have an insurmountable advantage within 12 months
- ✓ Every action in this playbook is something you can do yourself, without specialised tools or technical knowledge

Research sources: BrightEdge 2025 AI Search Study, SparkToro 2025 Zero-Click Search Report, Rand Fishkin analysis (March 2025), Google Search Central documentation, OpenAI GPTBot documentation, Perplexity AI indexing guidelines, Anthropic Claude documentation, BBSA industry data. All statistics verified as of March 2026.

SSC Brain

A division of Rocknowe Interiors Ltd, SC489276
sscbrain.co.uk