



2026 TRI-CITIES AI SEARCH VISIBILITY STUDY

Home Services Edition

HVAC · Plumbing · Electrical · Roofing · Tree Service

405 Total query executions	68 Audited Tri-Cities businesses	39 Named by ChatGPT or Perplexity
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270 ChatGPT and Perplexity executions + 135 Google searches

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Executive Summary

About this edition. This revision corrects how AI mentions were matched to the businesses in our audit. The June 2026 release matched a name only when the AI response spelled it the same way as our audit, so some businesses named under a slightly different form were missed. Matching name variants consistently, 39 of the 68 businesses were named at least once, not 34, and 23 were named on both platforms, not 20. Every figure that depends on those counts has been recalculated. The AI responses themselves are unchanged. Corrections are listed at the end of the methodology.

In May and June 2026 we tested how AI search tools answer local contractor searches in Johnson City, Kingsport and Bristol, Tennessee. We wrote 45 standardized queries covering HVAC, plumbing, electrical, roofing and tree service across the three cities and ran each three times on ChatGPT (with web search), Perplexity and Google Search: 270 executions on ChatGPT and Perplexity combined, plus 135 Google searches, for 405 in total.

We matched the businesses named in the AI answers against the 68 businesses in our companion 2026 Tri-Cities Home Services Digital Visibility Study, which audited their websites and Google Business Profiles (GBP).

39 of the 68 businesses (57%) were named at least once by ChatGPT or Perplexity, and 23 were named on both. The other 29 were not named in any response we collected. Google showed no AI Overviews in any of the 135 searches.

Businesses with more Google reviews were named more often. Among businesses with 100 or more reviews, 21 of 27 (78%) were named, compared with 2 of 9 (22%) with fewer than 20. Named businesses averaged 352 Google reviews; businesses not named averaged 73. Named businesses also had higher GBP scores, while website scores and schema showed little difference. These are associations in one sample, not proof of cause.

Key Findings

1. No AI Overviews appeared in the Google searches we tested

Across 135 Google searches in an incognito browser session, we saw zero AI Overviews. Results showed Local Services Ads, the map pack or organic listings instead. For these queries, traditional local search remained the route to visibility. Google AI Mode was not tested.

2. 57% of the businesses were named by at least one AI tool

39 of 68 businesses were named at least once by ChatGPT or Perplexity: 23 by both, 7 by ChatGPT only and 9 by Perplexity only. The remaining 29 were not named in any response. Going unnamed in this sample does not mean a business is invisible to AI tools everywhere.

3. Businesses with more reviews were named more often

Google review count	Businesses named	Named / total
200+	77%	10 / 13
100–199	79%	11 / 14
50–99	58%	7 / 12
20–49	50%	8 / 16
Fewer than 20	22%	2 / 9

Named means mentioned at least once in the ChatGPT or Perplexity responses we collected. These are business-level proportions, not the chance of appearing in any one answer. The table covers 64 businesses with usable review-count data, 38 of them named. Four businesses had no review count in our audit data; one of them, Rowan Tree Care, was named.

The 100 to 199 band had the highest proportion (79%), and the rate fell steadily below 100 reviews, from 58% to 50% to 22%. This is an association, not a guaranteed review threshold.

4. Named businesses had higher GBP scores

Named businesses averaged 86.5 on our GBP Health Score, versus 77.0 for businesses not named. Website Health Scores were close: 65.9 versus 64.3. These differences do not show cause, and they do not tell us where AI tools get their information. The scoring rubrics are in the companion study.

5. Schema showed no clear link to being named

Businesses with LocalBusiness schema were named 57% of the time (20 of 35), versus 58% without it (19 of 33). The two groups also differed in reviews, averaging 357 and 104, so this comparison cannot isolate schema's own effect.

6. Mention rates varied by industry

Industry	Named / total	Share named	Avg reviews: named	Avg reviews: not named
HVAC	10 / 14	71%	658	26
Plumbing	8 / 12	67%	472	147
Roofing	8 / 15	53%	117	30
Electrical	6 / 12	50%	279	64
Tree Service	7 / 15	47%	64	95

HVAC had the highest share of businesses named (71%) and tree service the lowest (47%). Tree service also ran against the overall pattern: named tree service businesses averaged fewer reviews (64) than those not named (95). Industry averages alone do not explain why the rates differ. Businesses in more than one trade are counted once, under the industry listed in the methodology.

7. Perplexity named local businesses more often

Across all responses, Perplexity named the audited businesses 188 times and ChatGPT 135 times. In our review, Perplexity more often cited the businesses' websites, profiles and directory listings, while ChatGPT's answers varied more between runs. We did not measure citation behavior numerically.

Businesses Named on Both Platforms

23 of the audited businesses were named by both ChatGPT and Perplexity. Counts combine every spelling of a business's name found in the responses. Under our scoring formula each of these businesses scores 55 out of 100, because the formula rewards appearing on a platform rather than how often, so the counts show differences the score does not.

Business	Industry	ChatGPT	Perplexity	Total
Steve Huff Plumbing, Heating & Air	Plumbing / HVAC	7	20	27
Stateline Services	Multi-trade	11	10	21
Austin's Plumbing LLC	Plumbing	8	11	19
Rowan Tree Care	Tree Service	4	12	16
ATC Cooling & Heating	HVAC	8	8	16
Tennessee Plumbing	Plumbing	6	8	14
Johnny's Electrical & HVAC	Electrical	2	11	13
Quality Heat & Aire	HVAC	7	6	13
Hometown Plumbing, Electrical & HVAC	Multi-trade	2	10	12
Vanderpool Roofing LLC	Roofing	6	6	12
Pink Duck Plumbing	Plumbing	7	5	12
Tri-City Air Conditioning Co.	HVAC	8	4	12
Thompson Electrical Service	Electrical	3	8	11
TriCities Electric	Electrical	2	8	10
Precision Electrical Company	Electrical	2	7	9
McClain Roofing and Siding	Roofing	3	5	8
Wommacks Mechanical	HVAC	5	3	8
Palisade Roofing	Roofing	7	1	8
Smoky Peaks Plumbing	Plumbing	4	3	7
Mountain Air Inc.	HVAC	5	2	7
Bartlett Tree Experts - Johnson City	Tree Service	4	2	6
Redline Tree Service LLC	Tree Service	1	4	5
East Appalachian Electric	Electrical	2	1	3

Sorted by total mentions. Mention counts are the totals recorded by our name extraction across all runs.

What Local Businesses Can Learn

Keep a steady process for earning honest reviews

Businesses in higher review-count bands were named more often in this sample. That makes reviews a useful part of a broader local visibility plan, not a guaranteed threshold or a replacement for fixing technical problems. Ask every customer for an honest review, without filtering by expected sentiment or offering incentives, and respond to feedback professionally. We did not measure how quickly businesses earn reviews, so we can't say whether earning them faster helps.

Keep your Google Business Profile accurate and useful

Keep hours, contact details, website link, services and primary category current. Named businesses had higher GBP scores, which is a reason to review profile quality, but it does not prove profiles cause AI mentions. Choose the category that most accurately describes your main business.

Keep doing the local SEO fundamentals

For the Google searches we tested, visibility came from regular search results, not AI Overviews. Useful website content, accurate business information, crawlability and local relevance all still matter. AI Overviews and AI Mode are separate Google features, and our results do not predict how either will change, so keep checking real searches over time.

These findings can guide priorities. They cannot guarantee that a particular review count, profile change or schema implementation will produce an AI recommendation.

Methodology

Study design

We queried AI platforms with standardized local home service searches and recorded which businesses, if any, each platform named. The study covered five industries (HVAC, plumbing, electrical, roofing and tree service) across Johnson City, Kingsport and Bristol, Tennessee.

Query design

We used three query templates for each industry and city: a "best of" query ("Who are the best [industry] companies in [city], Tennessee?"), a direct recommendation query ("I need a [industry] in [city] Tennessee, who do you recommend?") and a top-rated query ("What is the top-rated [industry] contractor in [city] TN?"). That produced 45 unique queries (3 templates × 5 industries × 3 cities), each run three times per platform: 270 executions on ChatGPT and Perplexity and 135 on Google.

Platforms

ChatGPT (GPT-4o with web search enabled, at chatgpt.com), Perplexity (default model with live web search) and Google Search (incognito Chrome browser, Johnson City geolocation) for AI Overviews. All queries were run within a two-week window in May and June 2026. Google AI Mode was not evaluated.

Matching names to the audit

We extracted business names from each response with automated pattern matching followed by manual review, then matched them to the 68 businesses in the companion study. A name was matched when it clearly referred to the same business, including spelling and suffix variants such as "Tennessee Plumbing Inc." and "Tennessee Plumbing Inc", or "Quality Heat & Aire" and "Quality Heat & Air". Sentence fragments, street names, directory labels and businesses outside the audit were not matched. One ambiguous name, "Expert Tree Service", was not matched to A-1 Expert Tree Service.

Industry assignment

Businesses in more than one trade are counted once. For industry comparisons, Stateline Services, Steve Huff Plumbing, Heating & Air, A Breath of Fresh Air and Appalachian Mechanical Services are counted under HVAC, and Hometown Plumbing, Electrical & HVAC and IDM Heating, Cooling, Plumbing under plumbing.

Scoring

AI Visibility Score (0 to 100): ChatGPT mention 20 points, Perplexity mention 20, Google AI Overview mention 30, and a 15-point bonus for appearing on two or more platforms. Because no AI Overviews appeared, the highest attainable score was 55.

Corrections in this edition

- Name variants are now matched consistently. That adds 5 businesses named by at least one platform (Adams Roofing & Construction LLC, Environmental Drain and Plumbing, IDM Heating, Cooling, Plumbing, Redemption Roofing and Construction, Residence Roofing and Construction) and raises the number named on both platforms from 20 to 23.
- Businesses named: 39 of 68 (57%), not 34 (50%). Businesses not named: 29, not 34.
- The review-count, GBP, schema and industry figures were recalculated on that basis. Tree service, not roofing, now has the lowest share named.
- The table of businesses named on both platforms now lists all 23, with counts combined across name variants. The earlier table listed ten, using single-spelling counts.
- The query count is stated as 405 executions: 270 on ChatGPT and Perplexity, and 135 on Google.
- Findings are described as associations in this sample rather than predictors or causes.

Limitations

Point in time. AI responses change as models update and as local business data changes. These results may not reflect current AI behavior.

Response variance. AI platforms do not return the same answer every time. Three runs per query captured some variance but not the full range of possible responses.

Correlation only. The relationships between review count, GBP scores and being named are correlations. The study does not establish cause.

Name extraction and matching. Automated extraction can miss or miscount names, and matching variants involves judgment. Some "Bristol" responses described Bristol, England; those businesses were outside the audit and not matched.

Market scope. The study covers the Tri-Cities market only. The findings should not be generalized to other markets without independent research.

About 1-FIND SERVICES

1-FIND SERVICES is a digital marketing agency based in Johnson City, Tennessee, serving home service and professional services businesses across the Tri-Cities region. The agency specializes in local SEO, web design, Google Business Profile optimization and business automation. It operates as a sole practitioner: clients work directly with the owner, with no work outsourced.

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